

The changes in the role of the academic library and the librarian as a case study to the transformation from the analog society to the digital society

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Abstract

Background: We are living in a world where the ability of end users to reach others sources of information in addition to the library is growing rapidly: The availability and accessibility of search engines like Google or Yahoo, the ability of end users to access online databases from their home, projects like Google Books, the Gutenberg Project, and the Ben-Yhoda Project. Information is coming to end users and makes it unnecessary for them to come to library in order to access it.

Purpose: The purpose of this research was to understand how academic libraries in Israel are perceived in light of the growing movement towards digital information since the early nineties, and in light of the growing knowledge of end users in using the digitized information. We also wanted to know, whether these changes are matching other changes in society that came about because of the digitization. Digitization and its influence on libraries' environment is discussed in our literature review.

Methodology: Our research method was Sequential Explanatory Design. We started with quantitative research based upon the results we continued with qualitative research. The research sample contained 120 students, sixty information science students and sixty law students. The students received our questionnaire which was constructed according the OCLC questionnaire "perceptions of libraries and information resources". In our quantitative research we tested seven hypotheses that emerged from our literature review. The hypotheses checked students' perceptions of



libraries and librarians, the level of usage, familiarity and satisfaction students have in using library electronic resources, comparisons between the level of usage, familiarity and satisfaction the students have in using the library analog resources. Distinction was made by gender and by department. Our hypothesis also checked what the preliminary information sources are.

In light of our quantitative research finding, we interviewed five percent of our research sample to better understand the findings and subjects that emerged in the interviews themselves.

Results: In our quantitative research we have partially established four of our hypotheses and fully established three of them. We have found that there are significant differences between the level of usage, familiarity and satisfaction the students have in using the library electronic resources, compared to the level of usage, familiarity and satisfaction the students have in the use of library analog resources by department. However, there weren't any significant differences by gender in those three hypotheses. The hypothesis that checked student perceptions of library function as an information source was also partially established. We hypothesize that there will be differences by department in the perception of the roles of the librarians and libraries, and in fact, we have found significant differences between perceptions by department. Information science students have perceived the roles of the library and librarian more positively than law students. Our hypotheses that the library and librarians are not the student's preliminary information sources and that search engines are the preliminary information source were fully established.

In the students' interviews we saw that most of the students perceived the library primarily as a source of information resources that will help them in their studies.

Most of the law students perceived the library as a meeting and learning place. In regards to the future functions of the library in a world where all information will be



available in a digital format, the students perceived the library as a guiding and reference center for those who lack the skills in the use of the information resources. However, the student didn't perceive the library as the main supplier of information data bases and knowledge. We also found that the law students don't expect the library to preserve all knowledge; they expect it to preserve just the materials that will help them in their studies. The students don't recognize some of the library services they received as library services and their trust in the librarian's expertise is dropping. They will prefer to ask a knowledgeable friend than ask the librarian. To them, the librarian is there only to give them technical help, and to direct them to the physical place of the information in the library. The information science students expect the librarian to help the students both in reference and in building search strategies in the information data bases. However, they also said that they prefer to get their references form knowledgeable friend and not from the librarian. The information science students perceive the librarian role as lesser than the information specialist's role in matters of responsibility and expertise.

Conclusions: We have found several events that mark the changes in the library and librarians' roles in the movement from an analog society to a digital one: the rise to power of end users, the lowering esteem of librarians, the reduction in the perception of role of the library in the eyes of end users, the accessibility and availability of the search engines, free online data bases in the world wide web, the ability to access information data bases form the end users' homes. All these factors exemplify the lowering of the library from the main source of knowledge and information, to just another source, even if it's still an important one.

We concluded our research with several recommendations for future studies in the subject and with recommendations of actions that should be taken in order to stabilize and improve the perceptions of the library and librarians.