Is electronic always the right choice?

Dr. Octavia-Luciana Porumbeanu
Lecturer
Library and Information Science Department,
Faculty of Letters, University of Bucharest,
Romania
Outline

- Large electronic collections in most academic libraries
- Romanian medical libraries
- Results of the researches at the level of the Romanian medical academic libraries
Electronic resources in medical libraries

- The development of major electronic collections in medical libraries
- Electronic resources are preferred by medical students
- The situation in Romania (researches from 2003 and 2008 investigating the implications of access to electronic information resources for the users of large academic medical libraries)
- Users’ opinion about the resources they consult and prefer
Romania
Romanian medical libraries

- No National Library of Medicine
- Information, education and research in the field supported by medical academic libraries (ten medical academic libraries)
- More and more diversified and personalized information needs from different categories of users
- Discrepancy between Romanian medical higher education libraries and their European counterparts
- Very good collaboration among Romanian medical academic libraries
- Promotion of online electronic resources for users
- Courses for information specialists in medical academic libraries
- Emphasis on enabling medical librarians to support the information, education and research needs of the medical community.
Romanian medical libraries

- The last decades have meant major transformations in all aspects of Romanian libraries
- The transformation from traditional to modern libraries is based on the NICT
- A transition to a mixed collection, providing access to both paper and electronic information resources.
- The ten academic medical libraries in Romania try to meet the information needs of users and adapt to the requirements of the information society aligning themselves with international standards.
Romanian medical libraries

In this context we considered it necessary to:
- investigate the way in which the changes implemented in medical libraries are efficient, support the information and research needs of users
- identify the measures that need to be taken in the future and
- analyze usage patterns of document collections in Romanian medical libraries.

Medical librarians in many countries assert that electronic resources are preferred by medical students.

Could we say the same about Romanian medical students?
Previous Research

- In three medical academic libraries (Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca, Iaşi) - the largest and the most representative in Romania

- A small number of users of the three libraries surveyed use and prefer electronic information resources.

- Despite the fact that access to electronic information resources has been available since the 1990s and that the number of resources has increased, there are no significant changes in user behaviour and practice.
The present study

- Research to investigate in greater detail:
  - the main reasons for this low usage of electronic resources,
  - The lack of user education,
  - if anything had changed during the last year, however minor, and
  - to find out which might be the best way for libraries to promote the use of electronic resources.

- The Central Library of the “Carol Davila” University of Medicine and Pharmacy – Bucharest
The “Carol Davila” University of Medicine and Pharmacy – Bucharest
The Central Library of the “Carol Davila” University of Medicine and Pharmacy – Bucharest

- The largest and the oldest medical library in Romania
- Established in 1857 simultaneously with the National School of Medicine and Pharmacy
- The Library serves the users from the whole University:
  - the Faculty of General Medicine
  - the Faculty of Dental Medicine
  - the Faculty of Pharmacy
  - the Faculty of Medical Assistance and Midwives
- 97 branch libraries at the level of university departments, chairs and clinics
The Central Library of the “Carol Davila” University of Medicine and Pharmacy – Bucharest

- The main library has now 366,546 book titles, 5,531 periodical titles in more than 700,000 copies
- 27,000 documents in open access
- More than 10,000 users (7,567 students, 1496 teaching staff and 957 physicians)
- The staff of the library: 47 persons, 41 being specialists
- Automated since 1999
- Access to electronic information resources since 1999
- 10 computers with access to the Internet and to data bases for the users
- Electronic resources: HINARI, ProQuest, EMBASE, Ovid, ScienceDirect. In the past access also to OMS, EBSCO
- Every trimester the Library offers training sessions for the users
Context of the research

- User preference for printed or electronic resources
- The reasons for their preference
- The analysis of the answers received through a questionnaire completed by the users of the library
Objectives of the research

The research had 5 main aspects:

- identification of user preference for traditional information resources and/or for electronic information resources
- identification of the information resources which they use most frequently
- identification of the basis for the users’ preference for traditional or printed information resources
- evaluation of the need for user training about use of electronic information resources
- identification of the best way to promote the use of electronic information resources among users
Methods of data collection

- The study was undertaken in September-October 2008.

- 100 questionnaires were distributed at random via the library staff to users.

- There was a satisfactory reply rate of 77%.
The stature of the respondents

- Students: 86%
- Physicians: 6%
- Teaching staff: 5%
- Others: 3%
Frequency of the usage of the services provided by the library

- Weekly: 54%
- Monthly: 16%
- Daily: 12%
- 1-3 per year: 18%
No significant changes in user behaviour and practice
Printed vs. Electronic Information

- Paper information sources: 62%
- Electronic information sources: 29%
- Both: 9%
The reasons for which they *prefer* the paper information resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is easier to access and use them, and to learn using them</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better information</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You don’t get so tired using them as happens with the electronic ones</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The routine</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quick access to current information</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No reply</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The reasons for which they **prefer** the electronic information resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quick access to information</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quantity of information</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current information</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They are practical</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better information</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No reply</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The reasons for which they don’t prefer the paper information resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Difficult access to the necessary information</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The information is not current</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I get tired after using them</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t find them</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No reply</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The reasons for which they **don’t prefer** the electronic information resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I get tired after using them</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficult access and utilization, more difficult to learn using them</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They can offer erroneous data</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can get the same information from the paper resources</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Few articles in Romanian</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t have access to them</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They are not up to date</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am not familiar with them</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No reply</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Difficulties in using electronic information resources

- Yes: 70%
- No: 23%
- No reply: 7%
Difficulties in using electronic information resources

Among the difficulties mentioned there were:

- Lack of experience 7%
- Limited access 5%
- Problems with computers 4%
- Too much information 1%
The electronic information resources consulted the most frequently

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Medical articles</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Databases</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronic books</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medline</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ProQuest</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PubMed</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ScienceDirect</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wikipedia</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thompson ISI</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical Dictionaries</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emedicine</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ovid</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How and from where the participants in the study found out about medical electronic information resources
The way the users learned to consult electronic information resources

- 62% alone
- 16% at the first visit to the Library
- 8% they read the instructions
- 8% they were helped
- 8% the Librarian helped them
Have you ever participated in a training course organized by the library concerning the use of the electronic information resources?

Yes: 83%
No: 14%
No reply: 3%
User suggestions

- A better information: 5%
- Better computers: 3%
- An electronic network: 1%
- Databases/sites: 1%
For what purpose users need the information they get at the library

- 54% For professional development
- 18% For keeping up to date with the latest news in the field
- 16% For studying and preparing different exams
- 12% For writing different papers
- 12% For other purposes
Are you satisfied with the possibilities of access to medical information offered by the "Carol Davila" University of Medicine and Pharmacy Library?

- Yes: 80%
- No: 18%
- No reply: 2%
On the results of this research

- A much greater percentage of users preferring electronic information resources would have been expected.
- The printed document is preferred.
- No real reasons for the rejection of the electronic resources.
- Users don’t really know these resources, what they are, their content and the advantages they offer.
On the results of this research

- The lack of user education is another element at the heart of the limited usage of electronic information resources.
- The medical education system in Romania or more accurately, the way in which the teaching-learning-examination process takes place is another reason for this limited use.
- The major reason for Romanian medical students preferring paper resources is the lack of promotional activities for electronic resources.
Conclusions

- A rather small number of users prefer and consult electronic information resources.
- The main reason for this limited use is the lack of promotion of these resources.
- A higher visibility of electronic resources is necessary.
- Some possible solutions:
  - much better promotion by the library of their electronic resources
  - an intensification of user education with more frequent training sessions designed for different categories of users,
  - the introduction of some compulsory classes for the students taught by the librarians,
  - better collaboration with teaching staff and
  - an information campaign on electronic resources.
Conclusions

- The library must continue to provide important paper collections alongside access to electronic resources.

- More training sessions are needed that could publicize the advantages of those resources for users throughout the information, learning and research process.

- Future investigations of the users’ information behaviour should also include the library branches which could bring more interesting findings to light.
Conclusions

- There are obvious variations depending on the specifics of the community of users served by the library and this paper is in no way a plea for paper resources against electronic resources. What it wants to achieve is to draw attention to the fact that in Romania some categories of user may still prefer paper resources whilst their counterparts overseas may prefer electronic resources.
Comments and Questions

octavialuciana@yahoo.com

Library and Information Science Department,
Faculty of Letters,
University of Bucharest
Dr. Octavia-Luciana Porumbeanu
Lecturer
5-7 Edgar Quinet Street
Bucharest, Romania