DIGITAL REFERENCE SERVICES: WHAT DO USERS EXPECT FROM LIBRARIANS?

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Outline

- **From Reference Services to Digital Reference Services**
- **Digital Reference Services**
- **DRS in Digital Environment**
- **Research Problem**
- **Methodology**
- **Findings**
- **Conclusions**

From Reference Services to Digital Reference Services

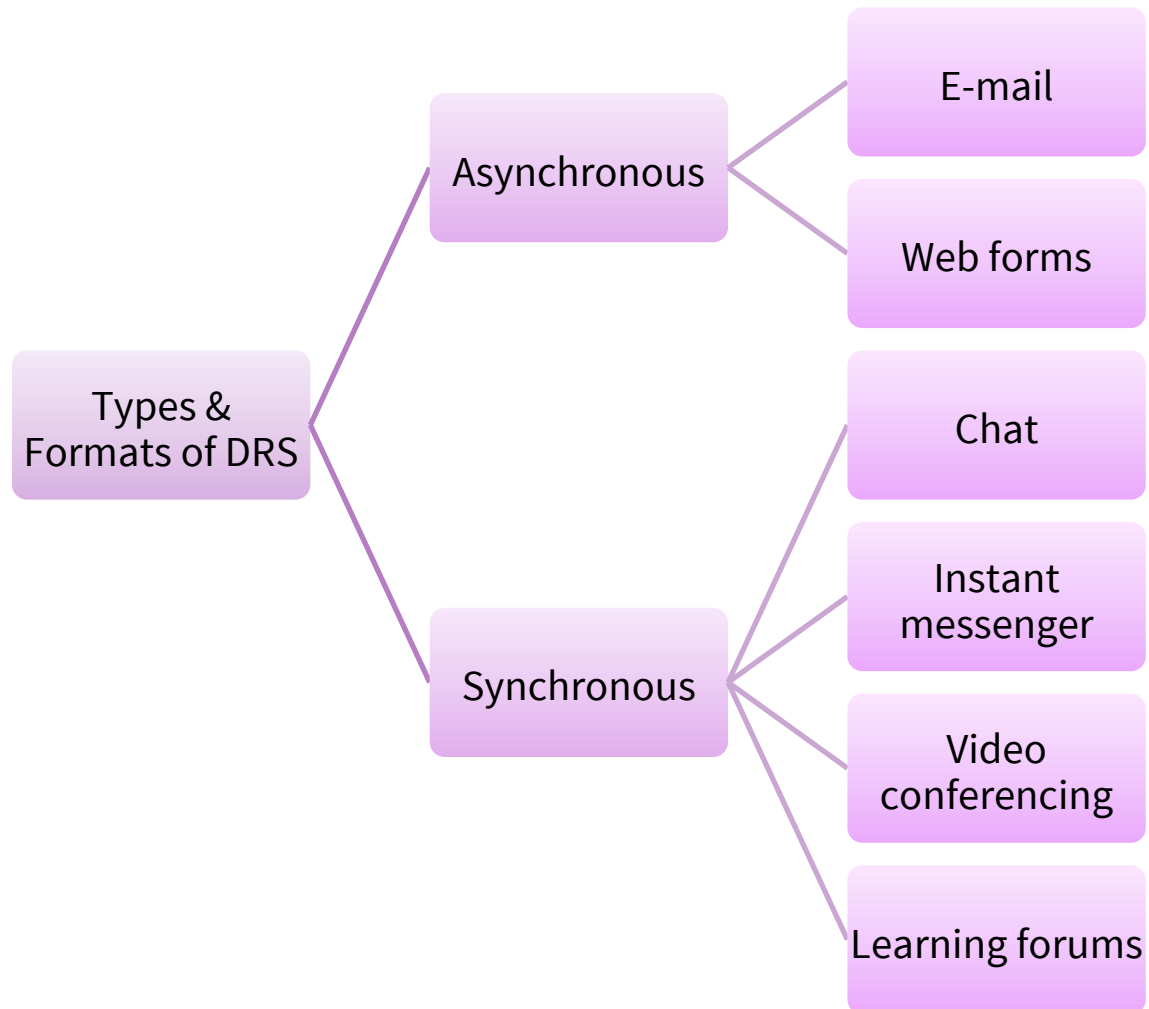The core service of traditional libraries is the Reference Service for clarifying the information needs of users.

The advent of new technologies was twofold beneficial for the libraries in order to evolve their services and be competitive with other providers.

Digital Reference Services

Digital Reference Services (DRS):

- are the transition of the Reference Services to digital environment exploiting the potentials of web technologies (Chowdhury and Margariti, 2004).
- Lankes (2004) refers to DRS as "a network of expertise, intermediation, and resources out at the disposal of a person seeking answers in an online environment".
- Reference and User Service Association (RUSA) focuses on users' convenience to contact with the library without the time and place restrictions (RUSA, 2010).

Digital Reference Services

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Types &
Formats of DRS
├── Asynchronous
│   ├── E-mail
│   └── Web forms
└── Synchronous
    ├── Chat
    ├── Instant messenger
    ├── Video conferencing
    └── Learning forums
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Digital Reference Services

Advantages of DRS:
- Availability for usage at anytime and anyplace
- Expanding the interactive learning of users
- Comprehensive answers from the staff
- Minimization of ambiguity through the written replies

Disadvantages of DRS:
- Absence of in person interaction, which in advanced inquiries may complicate the process requiring more details and delaying the process
- In asynchronous means, the immediate replies are not certain
- Costs
- Purchasing appropriate hardware and software (Dollah and Singh, 2009)

Digital Reference Services in Digital Environment

- Digital libraries are mainly defined by the spectrum of technical characteristics and not the services.

- Sloan early in 1998 examined various definitions and pointed out the lack of human factor in digital libraries.

- Choi (2006) said that "digital libraries has to be an information service center than being merely an information warehouse".

Research Problems

Research Gap: the lack of personalized services for supporting directly the users in digital libraries.

- R.Q.1: Which are the current relations between users and librarians for retrieving information?

- R.Q.2: Which communication way between DRS or in person communication would be considered more accurate by users?

- R.Q.3: Which are users' expectation from librarians in order DRS to operate effectively?

Methodology

- Qualitative methodology

- Research method: Case study
  - ESTIA, the Institutional Repository of Library and Information Center of Harokopio University

- Sample: Purposive and snowball

- Research technique: Interview

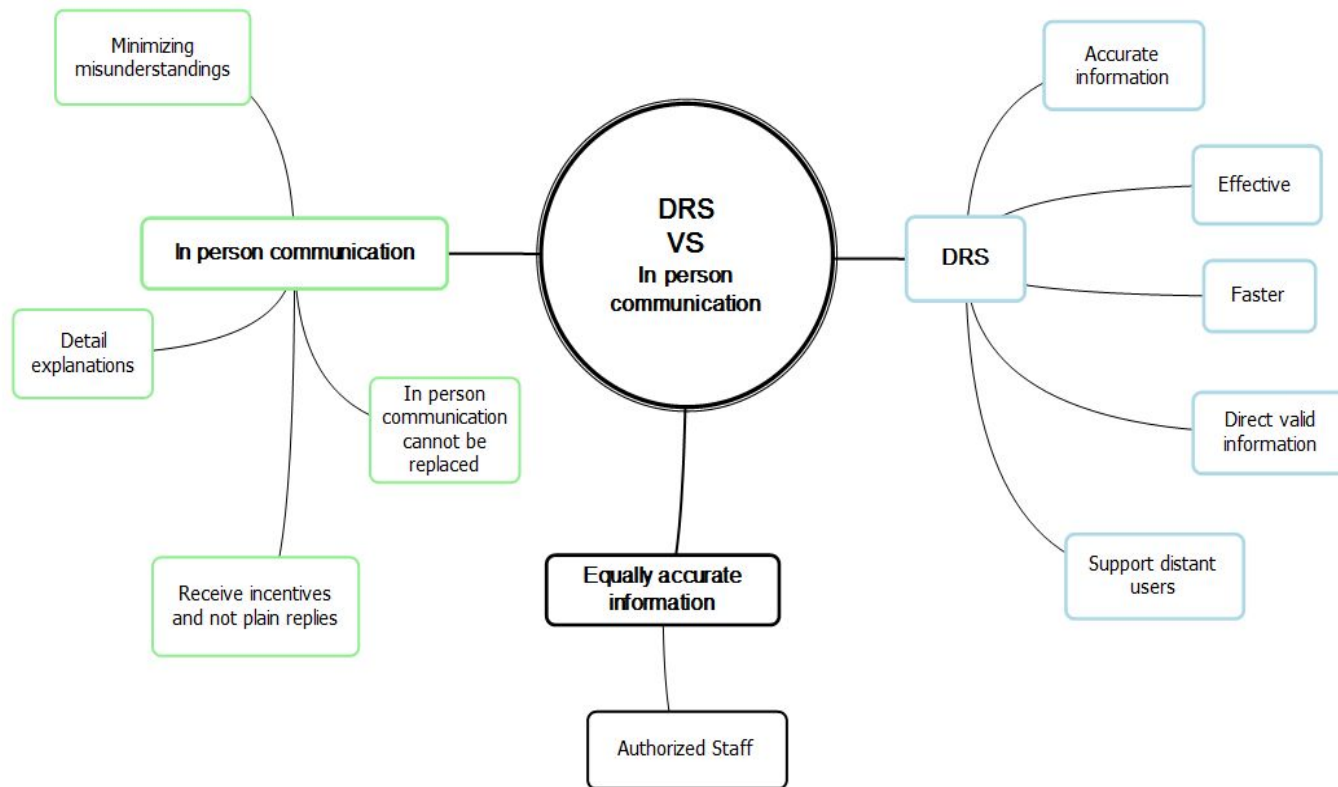- Data analysis: Constant comparative analysis

Findings

Interviewees' preferences to contacting with the staff of the library were detected in order their relation with the library to be investigated

- In person communication was the dominant

- Calling and sending e-mails was next

Findings

Comparing DRS with in person communication

Minimizing misunderstandings

In person communication

Detail explanations

In person communication cannot be replaced

Receive incentives and not plain replies

DRS VS In person communication

Equally accurate information

Authorized Staff

Accurate information

Effective

DRS

Faster

Direct valid information

Support distant users

Findings

Role of the library

- Evolving the promotion techniques
  - "Many students ignore the services of the Library saying "Do Google", [...] As the Library's services exist, they have to be promoted [...] Many of us pass through the Library thinking that the staff will suggest only 3-4 books and that's all. [...] I didn't know that a Library has these provisions."

- Librarians "are no longer gatekeepers of information" (Butler and Byrd, 2015) as information is easily accessible online. Their role has modified from providing plain answers, to stimulating the critical thought and guiding the researches (Butler and Byrd, 2015)

Findings

Expectations from the staff

- Collaboration with the professors to distribute the DRS to students
- Characteristics of librarians: willingness, skillfulness, supportiveness and familiarity with new technologies
- Dedicated staff for managing the requests through the DRS and provide apt replies
- Detailed job description with the precise duties of staff who will deal with the DRS

Conclusions

- The human factor is omitted while a digital library is built.

- Librarians, through DRS in digital libraries:

  - will provide a personalized support to distant users

  - will continue to literate users

  - will be able to stimulate their thoughts

- The competitive advantage of digital libraries to other digital providers can be the human intermediation

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Digital Reference Services: what do users expect from librarians?

"people may well begin to believe that, as physical barriers to access to information are reduced through technological means, the services of the librarian are no longer as necessary"

(Sloan, 1998)

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Thank you!