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## **VIRTUAL LIBRARY: A REVOLUTION IN INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY ERA**

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# Virtual Library: A Revolution in Information Technology ERA

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**Abstract – Libraries provided services to their users from the traditional time, but now new web generation biased towards internet and web technologies. So to reach their users or patrons libraries need to extend the range of their resources and services and try to satisfy their needs at their comfort place and in their convenient form. Virtual library is also comes under that particular reformation of libraries. In 1983 F. W. Lancaster talked about the ‘paperless society’ and that dream is now comes true at present virtual environment, where all information or resources available in electronic form and users can access those resources from anywhere with internet access. It is so important for library and information science professionals to work in virtual environment and adopt all new technologies to keep their identity in new web world. Virtual libraries are new vision of libraries for new web generation that connects lots of peoples with vast collection of resources where they can reach their desired information as soon as possible. It also provides many web services to assist their users. This paper provides an overview of Virtual library, its definitions, features, demerits, functions and their development.**

## INTRODUCTION

Virtual library is an organized collection of digital information that provides links to access various information tools such as database, electronic resources, and web services for alerting users. Through virtual library users can access distributed information at one point from elsewhere. According to Sweeney "... A Virtual Library is a collection of resources available on one or more computer systems, where a single interface or entry point to the collection is provided. The key point being that the user need not know where particular resources are located—location is virtual". According to Mahendra Kumar "... A Virtual library is also known as digital library or an electronic library may be defined as online facility provided by a conventional library to read books and access other facilities or it means a website which offer links to various sites with a large store of information in a catalogued or archived form. The term is more often used to refer in a collective manner to the entire number of online books and other library material related to any subject available on the internet". So the above definitions cleared that virtual library not limited to the particular collection of any library, but it provides links to all electronic resources from any library and users have a wide range of choices for qualitative information.

## ORIGIN OF VIRTUAL LIBRARY

The concept of virtual library emerged simultaneously with digital and electronic library. Electronic library,

digital library, on-line library etc have been used to describe the library as it exist in networked environment, which is quite virtual (practical), without physical existence of books or journals on the shelves. Digital library and virtual library are not the same. Digital library can exist without a virtual library but virtual library cannot exist without digital library. The door of virtual library opened formally for the public in april 1995 at public library of Chariotted and Meeklenburg county (PLCMC), north Carolina.

## DEFINITIONS

According to Powell in 1994- "It is a library with little or no physical presence of books, periodicals, reading space and supporting staff, but that disseminates selective information directly to distributed library customers, usually electronically". (Berman, 2004)

According to Sherwell in 1997- "The characteristics of a true virtual library are that, there is no corresponding physical collection, documents will be available in electronic format, documents are not stored in any one location, documents can be accessed from any workstation, documents are retrieved and delivered as and when required and effective search and brows facilities are available" (Berman, 2004).

## DIFFERENCE BETWEEN DIGITAL AND VIRTUAL LIBRARY

Sr. No.	Digital Library	Virtual Library
1	Un limited information	More unlimited Information
2	Information is in digital form	Information is in digital form
3	Can be updated easily	Can be updated more frequently
4	Provide quick distribution	Provide immediate access to a range of resources
5	World level market	Global market
6	Digital library can exist without virtual library	Virtual library cannot exist without digital library.
7	It consist of digital services and material that are stored, processed and transferred via digital (binary) device and networks	It consists of the digital or electronic library existing virtually.

## FEATURES OF VIRTUAL LIBRARY

Virtual library contains scientifically managed collection of information resources and various services that can be accessed electronically through the internet at any moment. Following are the features of a virtual library:-

- It provides speedy and wide access to updated information globally.
- It has changed the traditional library system of cataloguing only book materials.
- Cataloguing of non-book materials includes not only databases but also websites.
- Importance to the access not collection
- Time saving

## BASIC REQUIREMENTS FOR VIRTUAL LIBRARY

Virtual library environment means, virtual teams; virtual communication, electronic environment, etc. the basic requirements of a virtual library are given below.

### Internet Connection

Virtual library requires connectivity. If there is no internet, the virtual library is inaccessible.

### Digitalization

Digitalization involves the process of making non-digitally, created materials available in digital format. The digitalization process includes selection/ material: - scanning, creating mark up and index, creating metadata, quality control by subject specialties.

### Skilled Professionals

Virtual library still requires skilled professionals to organize, maintain and help users to reap the benefits of this virtual learning environment. The power of

internet resources remains blank to those without the skills to use them.

### Communication

Clients are unable to visit the library to preview resources, collect materials or access resources such as database. All communication must be conducted through e-mail, phone or fax.

### Knowledge of current Technical development

There is an increased dependence on information technology to access information. So library user often expects technical support from librarians and queries regarding network and access problems increasingly common. It means librarian must be kept update of current information about technical development and know when and where to refer the client.

### Interaction with Clients

The virtual library needs to maintain a 'human presence' by balancing both telephone and e-mail contact. By using the e-mail we can exclusively change the user's service style that users are accustomed to and increases the likelihood of length correspondence.

### Continued visibility

Virtual library has to maintain an everyday presence in the virtual environment by activities including: - Posting news items on internet home page. Writing feature articles for the newsletter etc and inviting the people into the libraries.

### Policies and Agreement

Users are often unsure of the services boundaries in the virtual environment. Highly visible policies outlining the virtual library roles and responsibilities.

## FEATURES OF VIRTUAL LIBRARY

The virtual library has changed the traditional focus of librarians on the selection, cataloguing and management of information resources such as books and periodicals- following are the advantages of the virtual libraries:-

### ➤ Quick Access

Virtual library provides immediate access to a range of resources not available in physical collection.

### ➤ Global Access

Physical libraries operate with designated hours, VL's are available anytime, anywhere where there is an internet connection.

➤ **Useful to distance learner**

VL offers opportunities for learning that are not possible in their physical counterparts. It provided in distance education and course offered online.

➤ **Updated Information**

VL often contains more up to date information than physical collections. These sources can be searched more efficiently than those in physical libraries and the information provided more updated and more frequently.

- Well-designed VL collections are organised and managed to increase productivity and efficiencies of the user.
- VL empowers the user and promotes informal learning.
- VL breaks down the physical barriers between the user and the information sources. They can make these (required reading materials) resources available in their homes.

It saves and reduces the space requirements.

- It often adds enhanced searching capabilities in a digital format.
- VL provides the user with the capability to download and maintain text.
- VL eliminates the problem of book being missing or off the shelf
- It is less labour intensive.

**BARRIERS FOR VIRTUAL LIBRARY**

Virtual libraries have no location, no opening hours, no closing hours, no boundaries, but with the benefits there are lots of barriers for virtual libraries which are given below:-

1. Each and every product has its own distinct user interface.
2. Users need to remember different passwords for different products.
3. The scope of coverage and available archives is often limited.
4. Users sometimes have to face the difficulties with downloading or printing.

5. Often there is no cost saving, especially where both the virtual and print products are maintained.
6. Everything is not available in digital format.
7. There are restrictions which vary from vendor to vendor, on how the product can be used.
8. It allows for the inclusion of materials only available on the internet or in digital format.
9. It requires internet facility.
10. User cannot spread everything out in front of them and use it all at once.
11. Users are most comfortable using books.

**PRINCIPLES OF VIRTUAL LIBRARY**

Six principles have been identified that drive the development of a virtual collection-

**Priority of utility**

Usefulness is the ultimate reason behind all collection decisions.

**Local imperative**

Local collections are built to support local needs and expenditure of local resources must have a demonstrable local benefit.

**Preference for Novelty**

Although historical collections are essential for research, only limited resources can be devoted to the collection and maintenance of older material.

**Implication of Intertextuality**

To add an item to a collection is to create a relationship between the new item and other items. Building a collection always creates new textual relationship.

**Scarcity of Resources**

All collection development decisions have to balance scarce resources-funding staff time, document size, user time and attention.

**Commitment to the Transition**

More and more information will become available in digital form. Libraries are responsible for promoting this transaction and assisting users to adjust to it.

## VIRTUAL LIBRARIES

Some of the major virtual libraries are:-

Livingweb Virtual Library (<http://www.livingweb.com/library/0273.htm>)

WWW Virtual Library <http://www.vlib.org>

BUBL LINK Virtual Library (<http://www.buble.ac.uk>)

INFOMINE

(<http://lib-www.unc.edu>)

Librarians Index to Internet (<http://lii.org>)

Internet Public Library (<http://www.ipl.org>)

Michigan. E-Library (<http://mel.org>)

## CONCLUSION

Virtual libraries are the new vision of the libraries of the future. There is an urgent need of the 'Virtual library of India'. India is home for rich diverse cultural, educational and R& D institutions, associations, societies and scholars and so on. Virtual libraries are facing big challenges in efforts to build a foundation for sustainable, ongoing efforts.

To develop a successful virtual library system several component such as, library based, digital or electronic format of material. Librarians are professionals, trained in the acquisition, organisation, retrieval and dissemination of information. So the practice of librarianship will not be very difficult from that in the Traditional print-based library.

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