Digital Reading: Educational Gaps and Documentary Preservation

José Antonio Cordón-García, E-Lectra group, Universidad de Salamanca, Salamanca, Spain
Raquel Gómez-Díaz, E-Lectra Group, Universidad de Salamanca, Salamanca, Spain
Julio Alonso-Arévalo, E-Lectra group, Universidad de Salamanca, Salamanca, Spain
Nora Kaplan, E-Lectra group, Universidad de Salamanca, Salamanca, Spain

ABSTRACT

Information and communications technology is bringing about significant changes not only in the amount of information and documents available but also in the agents that produce them and in the way they are organised, managed and consumed. The various Unesco programmes, the ministerial resolutions and the initiatives introduced by different countries reflect the need to and the difficulty of preserving documents in the digital environment, where it is necessary to achieve a balance between the need to preserve everything and the possibility of implementing the necessary safeguards.

Keywords: Document Preservation, Digital Environment, Digital Reading, Information Literacy, Unesco programmes

1. INTRODUCTION

According to J.L. Martin, information literacy is a fluid concept, shaped by the experiences and changes taking place in the information society (Martin, 2013). The amount of available information on the Internet is now so vast that searching for and finding the best ways to do research and access digital publications has become an overwhelming task if it is accomplished without the help of someone who works developing these kind of skills in a reliable way. It is in this context that the teaching environment has the responsibility of keeping up to date on the latest technological (and media) developments.

In their report “Riding the waves or caught in the tide/¿Surcando las olas o atrapados en la marea?” (IFLA, 2013), the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) discusses the five trends that will change our information environment. The first trend has to do with the fact that the ever-expanding digital universe will give more value to information literacy skills like basic reading and competence with digital tools, warning that people who lack these skills will face barriers to their inclusion in an increasing range of areas. The second trend considers

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that the rapid global expansion of information and online education resources will make learning opportunities more abundant, as they become cheaper and more accessible, and will also grant more recognition to non-formal and informal learning (Hernández Martín, 2013). The fifth trend shows that the proliferation of hyper-connected mobile devices will transform the global information economy. The existing business models across different industries will experiment changes generated by devices that will help people remain economically active later in their lives, from any location. This means that three out of the five trends are concerned with digital information and learning, which will definitely become unavoidable trends in the near future.

It seems obvious that digital reading requires new competences that are specific to a technologically-mediated system, in which reading devices, and the new ways of reading, demand behaviours and attitudes from the users that need to be known and promoted by those who work in different educational environments. In this context, instruction is necessary for both the use of information technologies in general and of devices and specific reading applications, illustrating the entertainment and educational possibilities these afford. Literacy instruction becomes essential, by means of activities that show the use of devices and applications and teach how to be efficient when searching for information. This instruction-facilitation-uses triad is the pivot around which the educational action in transversal competencies in the university context revolves.

The socialization of the reading experience involves a technological component that should not be a barrier but an opportunity to create new horizons in users, in keeping with the Web 2.0 philosophy, where the university ensures that the implicit digital gap transforms itself into assimilated, shared and enjoyed knowledge. In this endeavor, the work carried out by teachers together with information centers and libraries is crucial.

2. THE DIGITALISATION OF THE READING EXPERIENCE

The Pew Research Center’s report on how Americans value public libraries shows that this population strongly values the role of these institutions in their communities, both for providing access to material and resources and for promoting literacy and improving their overall quality of life. Most Americans say that they have only had positive experiences. (Zickuhr, K., L, Rainie, et al., 2013).

As to digital information services, if we take as a reference what is happening in the United States, according to the data of the “Library Journal” report, 9 out of 10 American public libraries offer electronic books to their users. Electronic book circulation in American public libraries doubled from 2010 to 2011 and quadrupled from 2011 to 2012 with 72 million of e-book loans in USA. This shows a highly digital future in which educational instruction is a priority. In Spain, university libraries have been offering electronic resources for more than a decade. The electronic book, which forms part of the so-called third digital revolution, has gradually been introduced as part of our services, though it would be more appropriate to speak of a broader concept, that of digital reading. This implies the introduction of a disruptive technology that has been changing the practices and norms of all the elements in the publishing chain, from those forms of writing interfered by an immediacy concept, and more direct messages typical of the digital culture, to the publishing, marketing, distribution, consumption and learning processes.

All this has led to new experiences that have been incorporated with previous ones in the analogical context, something not at all incompatible, as it has often and inadequately been presented, confronting printed to digital material as if they were two completely irreconcilable horizons. Almost all studies carried out in recent years show that the digital reader is precisely an intensive reader, who frequently and without any complexes shifts from the analogical to the digital and vice versa.
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