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Information Needs Survey Paper
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The Internet vs. the Library: The Battle for Reliable Information

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The internet has replaced libraries as the major source of information. I was ten when I first read a novel in English in the Philippines where I spent my childhood. Young adult pocketbooks were expensive and not always available in our public and school libraries. As a teenager I used to take long rides through dusty streets of my town to get to a rental bookstore. It was similar to the United State's Blockbuster Videos for books where you could rent a book to take home for a week. It was too good to be true when I moved to the United States in 1993 and found out that libraries here were brimming with free books. I was a regular at our local library, and apart from my parents, they became my primary source for information.

This began to change with the advent of the internet. Like so many people, I began to rely heavily on-line for information and communication. Many of us have become so busy to pay the library a visit and much rather spend hours surfing the web.

The LIS informal library use survey assignment forced me to ponder the importance of libraries in the contemporary lives of Americans. I was particularly interested in people who grew up mainly in the cyber age and those who didn't. On this assignment I surveyed people with ages ranging from 18 to 85. I was particularly careful to include people working full time and students. Of the nine respondents, five were students and four held full time jobs.

My first respondents were Georgia and Patty, my younger sisters who grew up in Fremont, California. They have little recollection of the Philippines and thought that renting books was pretty strange. "Where do you go first when you need information?" I asked them. Georgia, a twenty-four year old and a full time social worker, quickly replied, "the Internet." Whereas Patty who is six years younger was more thoughtful and told me that it depends on the type of information. She uses books to gather information, but thought that on-line is faster. Georgia's and Patty's answers were representative of all the people I interviewed. Most of them including my 62 year old mother rely on the internet for information. Only my 85 year old grandmother uses friends and family to get fast information.

The survey indicates that regardless of how busy the respondents were they still took time to read. The average time reading weekly was approximately five hours. The use of the internet also corresponded to the pace of their lives. The web provided those with internet access a twenty four hour access to quick information that didn't require any travel time.

Although this is a small sample, it is easy to assume that the library has lost its importance as a primary source of information. However, most respondents recognize that the internet is not reliable and contains a lot of misinformation. Generally, the student respondents use the library more often than those who work full time. They use it to gather information for school research as well as for pleasure. The full time employees would much rather go to their favorite bookstores to purchase books they need. However, one respondent used to go to the library to borrow books when she was unemployed. The library also became a source of hope as she browsed the career section.

As expected, students utilized academic libraries more and could not count the number of times they were in the library because they used it so much. In contrast, those with full time jobs

go to public libraries, but have been in the library from zero to twenty four times per year. They complained of lack of time to do anything else besides work and library hours that conflicted with their schedules. Additionally, one admitted that they have no use for the library since they have the internet at home. Library use however increased for those who do not have internet access at home. Some also used the library for the copy machine and to pick up tax forms.

Although most respondents would like to visit the library more, they cited lack of time and inconvenient library hours as reasons for not going. A few mentioned that they have no need to go to the library when the internet is working at home. When I asked them what would make them want to go to the library. They replied: Less work hours so they'll have more time to go to the library, not have money to buy a book, better transportation to the library, searching for job leads and a career change.

I am part of the new generation that extensively uses the World Wide Web for all questions imaginable. However, like many of the respondents I still believe that libraries are still an integral part of the community. Libraries not only house information, but provide a safe haven for students looking for a quiet space to study, guidance to job seekers looking for a new direction, and a place for community members to interact. Although this research needs to be expanded to include more respondents from diverse backgrounds, it provided a snapshot of information seekers. Clearly the survey shows that the internet has indeed replaced the library as the primary source for *quick* information. However, the respondents still look to libraries for *reliable* information.