One of the Academic Information Centres in the State of Kuwait

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The expansion of Internet use nowadays has caused this century to be known as the technology century. This essay explores the impact of electronic information via Internet technology and how it has affected the form of the services that are provided by an academic library, The Engineering & Petroleum Library, in the State of Kuwait. The essay starts with a general introduction to characteristic developments in recent technology, the appearance of the Internet as a communications method and its effect on the library's type of services and its daily service procedures, leading toward the conclusion of this essay, which is that Internet technology enforcement is continuously propagating new kinds of activities and the myriad formation of electronic information vessels.

Needless to say, "the Internet has become a vital information resource and the most extensively used communication tool"[1] for facilitating the retrieval of information, which makes the need for Internet technology an important resource and one of the essential tools for any library or information center in aiding all types of users or researchers to gain knowledge from a wide and opening window on the world of literature and science. The Internet has become a recent necessity because this technology has offered many solutions for providing successful methods of electronic communications between Internet users, such as e-mail, for transmitting text contents and file attachments, allowing one-to-one communication by using different soft wares for voice transmission, and even recently providing different forms of communications by using video conferencing technology through a service called (IP-Telephony) for transmitting text messages, video images, and voice conversations via Internet Protocol (IP) technology[2]. Moreover, all of these characteristics and particularities that are related to the Internet have caused massive alterations in many different sectors and fields. These alterations have affected all work phases, whether for services or activities, in most organizations or corporations in their daily transaction procedures. Furthermore, because the technology offers the various formations and tools of technical and electrical facilities, such as computers or any other forms of technology generated by mankind, the term now used, especially in the educational field, is Information Communication Technology (ICT).

(ICT) "…is concerned with storage, retrieval, manipulation, transmission or receipt of digital data; it is also concerned with the way these different uses can work with each other"[3].

As has been mentioned above, all areas of life have been affected by the appearance of Internet technology and the use of it. One of life's most important fields is education. ICT has affected all of the education sectors by providing huge amounts of information in rapid form, using the Internet's electronic resources, or by obtaining this information from electronic storages, which are known as databases. In order for people to complete all of their educational phases in a successful manner, the role of libraries is essential and integral. Libraries are considered as information centers that commonly comprise all forms of information, whether electronic resources or not, to aid all types of users, who are

eager for information in all educational stages, primary, secondary, undergraduate or postgraduate, whether for pupils, students, teachers, or faculty members.

There are different types of libraries: school libraries, academic libraries, public libraries and specialized libraries. Every library takes its category from its location, the type of services that the library offers and the form and the collection of information it provides to its users. For instance, if the library or the information center is located in a college or a university and the users are students, whether undergraduate or postgraduate, and with teachers or lecturers, it will be an academic library.

The example that is going to be examined and explored in this essay is one of the academic libraries, called The Engineering & Petroleum Library, which is supervised by the Kuwait University Libraries Administration (KULA), in the State of Kuwait.
"In recent years, changes in the library environment have led to increased emphasis on improving or restructuring the organizational structures of academic libraries"[4].
 Most academic libraries always insist on the important basic needs, which are keeping up to date and providing the latest devices from recent technology. This aids the librarians to provide its services to the users in a rapid and accurate form, and thereby to ensure the best quality of service. Most users of academic libraries are seeking very specialized information in a certain area, and meeting that need means facilitating the search process, as well as communicating with other information centers, whether locally or internationally. This is done via one or more of the networking communications technologies, thereby facilitating data or information transmission between libraries or information centers, to gain a variety of information resources, whether electronically or not. These networking communications are [5]:
LAN: Local Area Network.
MAN: Metropolitan Area Network
WAN: Wide Area Network.

Since the appearance of the Internet during the 1970's and the rise of the digital age via technology development, the general concept of libraries has changed and a letter "e" has been added before the word library, due to the fact that most of the library services can be in electronic form. This has introduced, recently, a very popular term, "e-Library". It is described as: "an organized and managed collection of information in a variety of media (text, still image, moving image, sound, or combinations thereof), but in digital form"[6]. Although The Engineering & Petroleum Library is considered to be a specialized academic library, it is also considered to be an e-academic library. That is because it provides most of its services to its users electronically. And this is clearly obvious from the mission statement of The Engineering & Petroleum Library. Nahed Al-Abdul Mohsen, the head of Librarians in The Engineering & Petroleum Library, mentioned at the Head Librarian's Message in the Newsletter of the library that "It is our mission to provide our users with the latest information and sources by

introducing them to our services, which includes the IEL Online search, the Current Awareness service, the full-text e-journals and the IEEE Electronic Library Online"[7].

From the mission statement above it appears that The Engineering & Petroleum Library depends upon recent technology, especially on the Internet, to provide its services and to promote the image of the library. There are not only the library e-services, but also there are other services that the Engineering & Petroleum Library offers to its users. The e-services for the library via Internet technology, whether they are mentioned in the mission statement or not, are as follows:

- Online Search:

The Engineering & Petroleum Library provides faculty members with sophisticated online search facilities via a direct link with DIALOG to offer different types of information from all branches of knowledge. This service offers to the engineering & petroleum faculty members' bibliographic citations for journals articles, studies and books, in addition to access to abstracts or full-text copies.

- Internet Services:

This service allows the user to gain access to a variety of electronic resources such as bibliographic databases through Kuwait University Library's (KUL) Online Public ACCESS Catalog (OPAC). OPAC is an automated system that opens the door to a faster, easier, and more reliable method for accessing KUL's catalog through the use of menu driven and command driven searching. Users are able to search through OPAC via titles, subjects, authors, and keywords by the use of Boolean Logic or Search. Unfortunately, until now this service has only been connected, via (LAN), to the university nodes and workstations, thereby, preventing the KUL bibliographic resource from being shared. Now on-line public access "has become an economic and information provision necessity"[8] for transmitting the cataloging data to other information centers. This service allows users to access online 222 titles from the library journals collection as e-journals, which are accessible as full text from the following URL: http://www.libri.ch

The Internet service allows The Engineering & Petroleum Library users to access many specialized online databases and search engines to complete the available e-resources contained in the library to ensure a variety of different information resources. For instance, ACSE's Civil Engineering Database (CEDB) is designed to provide bibliographic access to all ASCE Publications. And it is available at this URL: http://www.pubs.asce.org/cedbdesc.html

- CD-ROM's:

CD-ROM bibliographic databases at The Engineering & Petroleum Library provide the researcher with a vast amount of information in the form of bibliographic citations, abstract or full-text articles. The following CD-ROMs are the available bibliographic databases at The Engineering & Petroleum Library:

    A. Architectural Publication Index.
    B. EBSCO Academic Search.
    C. Engineering Index (EI) Compindex.
    D. Environment Abstracts.
    E. ICONDA.
    F. IEL Online.
    G. NTIS.
    H. SPE-society of Petroleum Engineers.

The Engineering & Petroleum Library adheres to upgrading its CD-ROM collection by updating them continuously, and adding new CD-ROMs to accomplish a set of databases in order to support its user's information needs. For instance, recently The Engineering & Petroleum Library added a new CD-ROM database called Pollution Abstracts "which is a leading electronic resource for environmental engineers and scientists"[7]. All the CD-ROM Databases above are available for the users and the researchers on the web interface prepared by the IT Department of KULA, and the web site address is:
http://www.139.141.180.124/slingshot/applist.exe?file=mdi_db1.html

- Interlibrary Loan:

Access to materials not available at The Engineering & Petroleum Library can be provided by interlibrary loan or document delivery through cooperation with local libraries such as The National Scientific and Technical Information Center (NISTIC) or The Public Authority for Applied Education & Training (PAEET), the libraries of The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), or the British Library Document Supply Center. In addition, the cooperation for this service, between The Engineering & Petroleum Library and the local or the (GCC) libraries is fulfilled via Internet technology by using the e-mail facility. Whereas, ordering from the British Library Loan (BLL) for The Engineering & Petroleum Library is also via the Internet, but by using the Artel or Telnet process.

- Current Awareness:

The Engineering & Petroleum Library offers this service for faculty members. The aim of this service is to keep staff up to date with new library materials through the compilation of monthly and quarterly bibliographies of current books, periodicals, and audio-visual materials, in addition to distributing the tables of contents of various periodicals, which may be of interest to faculty members.

- The Engineering & Petroleum Library Homepage:

The homepage of the Engineering & Petroleum Library offers for all the library users current information about library services, library information collections, duty hours, library activities, and librarians' personal information, such as contact numbers and e-mails for inquires. The homepage for The Engineering & Petroleum Library can be accessed by users at the following web address: http://www.kuc01.kuniv.edu.kw/~libeng

Although, the services above cost the (KULA) a great deal, yet the fundamental aim of (KULA) is to promote and raise in all the Kuwait University libraries an image of providing its services in very developed and advanced format, and this is due to the essential role of the libraries in supporting the education processes, because "the library works as the backbone of the total educational system"[9]. On the other hand, in order to reduce the cost of these services, (KULA) maintains specialized librarians in various and specific educational domains who have a great deal of experience in maintaining and administrating electronic information to its libraries, in order to control the cost of using these services through their ability to provide these services in a precise form.

To conclude, with the services above, The Engineering & Petroleum Library uses Internet technology in its daily service procedures to provide for its users a variety of electronic information resources, which ensures a very high standard of quality library services in a very rapid and useful form. This especially occurs at The Engineering & Petroleum Library, because it endeavors to cover all the engineering and petroleum domains by providing all the latest information resources as well as by using the Internet as a flat surface to transmit all available information in the library to all its users and without any obstacles. Likewise, the Engineering & Petroleum Library utilizes the Internet to "enhance collections, expand services, and improve operations"[10], as well as to communicate with faculty members in answering any inquiries or offering any library service as a selective dissemination of information in a rapid form and promoting the communications facility between the library and other libraries, whether in the Middle Eastern area or internationally. Through this communication facility The Engineering & Petroleum Library opens information lines between different libraries to offer many different types of information resources, whether electronically or not, to its users by sharing its knowledge with other libraries in different countries, and to gain a better quality of information resources for its own library and to be updated in the engineering and petroleum domains.

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