

Compare the advantages and disadvantages of electronic and non-electronic resources conducting practical legal research.

This essay will be examining the advantages and disadvantages of electronic and non electronic resources, in regard to practical legal research by showing how they link together. This will be done by showing how accessibility and convenience of both types of resources link together, the concept of digital libraries and the benefits/ negatives associated with that.. The way in which costs around e-resources can be deceptively high, and finally sustainability.

To begin, one of the biggest advantages that electronic resources have at their disposal is accessibility and convenience, for the most part. An example of this is that in 2013 it was widely accepted that over half of all scholarly works had an e-book variety published, and it is obvious that commercial publishers would like to disseminate their works digitally as well (Walters, 2013). In 2013 e-books consisted of 5 percent of all US book sales, and in 2007 90 percent of academic libraries were subscribed to an e-book distributor. Following on from this, journals were able to make the transition even faster, as shown in this 2013 journal, they were able to quickly standardise through the PDF format style. Following on from this with several countries having an access rate of 95 percent to the internet, accessibility to e-resources is a rather notable boon. Next, what makes e-resources convenient for legal research? It is the simple action of being able to connect to the Internet and being able to quickly and simply search up and find whatever you want. However this is not all entirely positive there are some downsides. Such as the digital divide, while some people may have very good internet others may not. Lack of access to the internet negates the easy access to online resources, meaning they would have to use public wifi or go to a library. When it comes to physical resources such as books, newspapers and journals this is not an issue, when you own it you own it and can keep it at home or wherever necessary. This also links to convenience such as using public wifi or having to travel to a library for better internet access to a database which may not be as convenient as being able to conduct research at home. Of course both electronic and non-electronic resources have this issue in one way or another. Following on from this one of the biggest and most important aspects to accessibility in regard to legal research is annotations. (Hillesund, 2010) this is an invaluable aspect as it allows the user to conduct analysis and mark important information on the go. In specific relation to the legal aspect due to the fluctuation of laws and common law in the UK due to rulings, being able to annotate and make quick corrections is a must for a practising solicitor.

Moving on I will be looking at the concept of digital libraries in regard to legal research. Due to how the world is going it is not uncommon or strange that many academic libraries are incorporating more e-resources and forming digital libraries. Many of these academic libraries are making an effort in digitising books, papers, theses for the convenience of students and researchers. In regard to the legal sectors one of the biggest challenges is preparing cases, statutes, journals and evidence for claims and defences. With the use of digital platforms that can compile these into an easily accessible form, this issue could be considered simplified. (Theresa and Jerome, 2010) The access granted to the user by digital libraries is expected to be much vaster than standard libraries physical books. Some more of the benefits granted by this is the lack of physical access. By that I mean through digital libraries you can access a plethora of sources by way of databases such as lexisnexis and westlaw. This goes into the next positive which is the round the clock availability, unlike libraries the digital databases are available 24/7. The user also has the ability to use search engines to pinpoint specific words, tags, sentences and quotes to narrow info according to needs. Why is this useful for legal research? In terms of access whenever and wherever if you have an internet connection, for law students and busy solicitors or researchers this is incredibly useful. As it allows a greater flexibility of when you can begin research, no time limits also means you can take your time and won't need to rush if you were working late. In regards to the searching function, unlike with physical resources or books, you can pinpoint a very specific term, for example 'divorce' and find a plethora of information. With databases such as west law you can specifically search for divorce cases, and find annotated cases that give briefs and display what the judges have said in regard to the case.

On the other hand there are negatives associated with the digital library. The first is the necessary need for constant power. One source examined for this essay was focused upon the costs and used a Nigerian university as the case study. Within the study it was found that they lacked a credible power supply which ended up negatively affecting the digital library they were setting up. Unlike Nigeria the UK is not a third world country however this type of issue could still undoubtedly affect us. All you need to think about is emergency maintenance or other technical issues that typically arise. Following on from that train of thought is that to setup and maintain digital libraries it is necessary to have a skilled workforce, while again finding skilled labour for that type of work is not that difficult of an undertaking, the payment for their services is. Another issue that feeds off the positives is that with databases such as westlaw and lexisnexis they can provide too much information. By that I mean unless the end user is skilled and focused upon their goal using electronic sources it is all too easy to be misled and sidetracked away from the original question. With physical sources you will find a book an example would be The Family Court Practice 2023 book, if looking for a specific topic within, you use the appendix at the back then filter to the necessary section of the book. It is simple and

if you discover what you need is not there you either change the book or reconsider what you are searching for.

Whereas with online databases due to the abundance of information it can be difficult to single out what is needed. In regard to this another negative that becomes apparent through using digital resources is known as shallow reading (Hillesund, 2010) and power browsing. Shallow reading can be considered similar to scan reading, where the user quickly peruses writings and skips ahead. Power browsing on the other hand is when a user spends very little time on pages, typically less than 3 minutes then quickly moves on.

Moving on I will be looking at the costs and price differences. On the surface, typically one may believe that electronic non physical resources would be cheaper however research into this tells a different story. But first the positive aspects in regards to the costs are that they 'potentially' have a lower running cost than physical libraries, an example of this can be seen in the BIU Nigeria university where the reported cost of starting the digital library was 0.015% of the cost when compared to a traditional library. On the other hand, starting off light there are licensing issues which can affect the availability of ebooks across nation lines. An easy example of this could be that one ebook in America is not available in Canada. For legal research in the UK this typically won't affect us much at all unless we are studying broad subjects or international law. Moving on is also the nature of costs in regard to e-resources (Walters, 2013) previously when it comes to physical resources, many academic libraries would outright purchase the books and resources, which would be a one time fee. However when it comes to more recent e-resources it is not ownership anymore. The payments are leases now which means once the deal is over the resources are removed. An example of this from Trinity saint David can be applicable. In 2022 the database Westlaw was used as a source for students and lecturers, however it is no longer available to the students at the uni. Following on from this, as stated at the start of this section, the initial hope for electronic resources was that they would be a more cost effective solution for academic libraries that tend to have tight budgets. However the business models used by academic sources tend to be unfriendly in regard to libraries. There are other issues such as digital right, aggressive DRM and access models which make libraries less willing to pay for said content. Moving on a very interesting difference when it comes to cost is the pricing of said resources. According to this source when examining the mean price between physical university press and their digital counterpart, the e-resource price was double the physical (Rao, Tripathi and Kumar, 2016) A very odd anomaly within this is that in regard to the more commercial resources around 75% of their work had a digital copy available and their pricing schemes were closer with the binomial test showing that their physical copy was generally cheaper.

The final section of this essay will be focusing on sustainability. The topic of sustainability is very complicated when it comes to e-resources and physical. When it comes to sustainability, physical resources already have a negative effect on the environment, and now these impacts are also exacerbated with the move towards more electronic aspects. A good quote on this is 'Academic libraries face a paradox as they adopt new technologies while still being organized around traditional formats.' (Jankowska and Marcum, 2010) this could imply that university libraries were already struggling trying to make themselves more environmentally and economically viable. Now due to the explosive growth of the internet and e-books, they have had to integrate that into a system that was already unsustainable. Both environmentally and economically. In regards to digital one benefit is that unlike physical, it is not reliant on production like physical book resources. It is heavily reliant on costs upkeep and maintenance; however, all books need is a large space to hold them, and creation/ transport. The biggest challenge surrounding sustainability now, is just trying to find a way to develop physical and digital resources in a sustainable way. Libraries consume copious water, energy and paper which leads to deforestation. Growth in digital projects and networking functions increases energy costs and electronic waste. The academic paper suggests placing in ways to monitor environmental damage done by libraries.

In conclusion the advantages and disadvantages of electronic and non electronic resources in regard to practical legal research are intertwined. When it comes to accessibility and convenience it is up to the user as both forms of research can benefit anyone. Some users may prefer and find it easy to read a book and others prefer e-copies. Aspects such as e-databases reliance on the internet can be positive or negative dependent on the user and access to a stable internet connection. There is a public access to the internet if that is an issue however it is not as convenient. Other aspects such as annotations are wholly superior for physical resources due to how easy and useful it is. Digital libraries while they have their negatives, the merger between physical and digital within them is the best of both worlds. In regard to costs and prices physical is cheaper, however the convenience and breadth of sources gained from electronic is hard to disagree with. Finally when it comes to sustainability it is a hard challenge that has plagued academic libraries prior to digitals arrival.

Overall both electronic and physical sources have their place in regard to practical legal research. I believe that it is best to start with physical sources so that you know you are heading in the correct direction, and once you understand and are able to form ideas, then use the more broad digital sources.

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