

# The essence of being a librarian in disruptive times

Evgenios Vlachos, Anne Faber Hansen and Jakob Povl Holck

## **I**ntroduction

Today, librarians are faced with speedy developments in robotics, artificial intelligence (AI) and similar disruptive technologies. Some (often larger) libraries have already embraced the new trends and implemented robot assisted patron guidance, virtual frequently asked questions management, pick-and-place-machinery or automated material handling operations, not to mention educational initiatives for students (e.g., information literacy training).

## **B**ackground

The transformation of libraries into technological playgrounds where patrons, especially students and young people, have a chance to interact directly with robots is a part of the new trends. One can imagine that many librarians are afraid of the new possibilities.

## **P**urpose

The purpose of this poster is to draw attention to and discuss the current trends – and ponder the interfaces between the librarian's core competencies and the new technologies. For what makes a great librarian? Are the machines and the online features truly going to replace the human librarians eventually? What should the libraries do in these disruptive times? Never before has the role of the librarian been more critical.



## **R**esults

**I.** Librarians are democratizers of data access and providers of equal access to technology, information, actionable intelligence, and continuing education (by offering courses and educating the public on the future balance of the human and the digital, along with the ethical implications that follow).

**II.** Librarians are mediators between diverse communities and reliable, understanding, empathetic guides. As long as humans continue to visit libraries, these traits will always be essential in interpersonal communication. Fortunately, these traits still lie within the bounds of the human realm.

**III.** Even though machines offer a great variety of possibilities and superior information literacy, a human librarian will always be needed in the loop to clarify the input, ensure copyright clearance and licensing, and filter the output of the AI system.

## **M**ethod

To address these issues, we performed a literature search in four databases: IEEE, LISTA, Scopus, and Web of Science. Studies were included if they used the components robot (the intervention) and library (the context); if they were published in 2016, 2017 or 2018; and if they were in English. After the removal of duplicates and screening on title and abstract level, 51 publications remained. Reading through the filtered corpus, we ended up with three major, equally important aspects, which may describe the essence of today's librarianship.

## **P**erspectives

We point out where libraries should shift their focus to stop harboring fears about being replaced by technology.

sdu.dk



University Library of Southern Denmark,  
Campusvej 55, 5230 Odense, Denmark

([evl;annefaber;holck@bib.sdu.dk](mailto:evl;annefaber;holck@bib.sdu.dk))