Thinking about Middle Eastern Studies Librarianship in the digital age

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COVID and the digital shift

- Changing nature of research collections
- Workspaces
- Collecting policies & discoverability
- Institutional collaboration
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20th century history, African studies, agriculture, American
Digital Humanities and Librarianship: a luxury pet subject?

What do we know about:
- Meta-data?
- Mark-up language?
- Linked Open Data?
- Artificial Intelligence (AI)?
Openness

- Is Librarianship mirroring research in its move towards open scholarship?
- Are we gatekeepers or drivers?

Collaboration

Transparency

Ethics
Middle Eastern vernacular resources in focus: The digital divide

- e-Resource imbalance in “niche areas” (mainly print publication from the Middle East) - does it matter?

- The context of the global agenda of decolonization in higher education + ethical duty of equity, diversity and inclusion.

Photo by Dollar Gill on Unsplash
How might the digital divide affect decolonization efforts?

- Fewer ME vernacular materials available to purchase digitally resulting in inequality of access and discrepancy in functionality of materials

- Fewer ME vernacular materials purchased in print because of print institutional budget cuts and institutional funds being prioritised for e-materials
Collecting existing digital content in Middle Eastern languages

Digital divide - A lack of the digital or an issue of discoverability and access?
Obstacles & Challenges

- Lack of availability
- Lack of discoverability
- Commercialisation
- Licencing terms & conditions, piracy, copyright issues
- Digital preservation
Collecting freely available digital content

Do we Middle East Librarians have a role in collecting, preserving and aiding discoverability of freely available digital content (i.e. born-digital, digitisations, open access publications and data, blogs/websites/social media)?

If yes, how?

- LibGuides
- Addition of resources to catalogues/ILS
Views from the Academic and Professional Community

WHAT OUR READERS (FACULTY & STUDENTS) WANT

WHAT THE LIBRARIANS SAY

WHAT OUR VENDORS THINK
Q.1: How much did the temporary loss of access to the library’s physical collections in vernacular languages during lockdown impact your work?

Q.2: The library faces several obstacles to acquiring e-resources and e-books in vernacular languages. Would you wish to see the library collect more e-resources and e-books for vernacular languages in the future if this were possible?
Vendor and Library Survey Results

Countries Represented

Libraries (47 Responses)

Vendors (14 Responses)
E-Books - In the survey we asked Librarians:

Which of these statements is most applicable to your library/institution? (Choose all that apply)

- We don't have any/many e-books in ME languages but would like to be able to buy more if possible: 21 (44.7%)
- We subscribe to one or several e-book packages in ME languages: 17 (36.2%)
- We have bought individual e-book titles in ME languages: 15 (31.9%)
- We are not interested in buying e-books in ME languages: 7 (14.9%)

Multi answer: Percentage of respondents who selected each answer option (e.g. 100% would represent that all this question's respondents chose that option)
E-Books: Obstacles

What Libraries say:
Librarians - Have you faced any obstacles in acquiring ebooks in ME languages for your institution?
80% said YES, 20% said NO

What Vendors say:
Vendors - obstacles have you faced / would you face when selling ebooks to institutions?
E-Resources: Obstacles

What are Libraries say:

Librarians - Have you faced any barriers to acquiring e-resources in ME languages for your institution?

60% said YES, 40% said NO

What are Vendors say:

What are the biggest obstacles for selling e-resources in ME languages such as databases to institutions?

- Price negotiations: 7 (70%)
- Other: 5 (50%)
- Licencing agreements: 2 (20%)
Vendors:
Do you hope to see your company sell publications in electronic format in the future?

Libraries:
Do you think libraries/institutions should collect more resources in electronic format in ME languages in the future?

Future expectations

Vendors:
- Yes: 11 (78.6%)
- No: 0
- Maybe: 3 (21.4%)

Libraries:
- Yes - if possible libraries: 17 (30.9%) should prioritise collecting more electronic content in Middle Eastern languages
- Yes - we should be collecting more in electronic format but still prioritising the collection of print publications for preservation and other reasons: 35 (63.6%)
- No - collecting print is sufficient/most relevant for my institution: 3 (5.5%)
Key points

- The research community expects digital resources
- The DIGITAL evolves in an environment of collaboration, skills and openness
- Decolonisation initiatives and counteract digital divides
- Obstacles, commercialisation & infrastructure
- How do we keep the Library at the heart of academia?
Ways Forward

· Opening up – sharing knowledge
· Facilitating dialogue - acting as intermediaries
· Collaborating – Consortiums...etc.
· Representing Middle Eastern Librarianship at policy level
· Support and training for the digital shift within Middle Eastern Librarianship