

Equipping Myself

From the Old Normal to the “New Normal”

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In 2020, without warning, COVID-19 made us stand still within a lockdown. Until that point, I thought global disasters happened only in movies. Having been born and raised in a relatively peaceful country, South Korea, I never thought I would witness a complete lockdown due to a disastrous pandemic, not only in the city where I live, but throughout the world. During the first lockdown, I could not count how many times I said to myself, “this isn’t real,” and questioned, “is this a dream?” or “am I on a film set?” I found it extremely difficult to accept that the pandemic was happening in real life, and that people I knew were seriously ill or dying. Fresh fruit, sanitizers, and toilet paper rolls were rationed. We were at war but with something we could not tangibly see and touch. I felt as if everything was out of control. It was a bleak period for me personally.

At work, as a lone, part-time librarian working in a small theological college of about 200 people in Oxford, England, my time had

always been stretched. I was continuously pressing on so as not to lose momentum. However, with the advent of the pandemic and the complete lockdown, suddenly everything had to stop. We were given an order to “stay at home” by the UK government on March 23, 2020 (Institute for Government 2022) and suddenly I had to rush to pack my belongings to carry them home. There was a limit on how many books I could transport to my home. I brought my laptop and a few folders. Unlike some professionals such as receptionists, shopkeepers, and cooks, I was lucky enough to carry on working remotely. However, as the Library was physically closed and there was no way to access the print collections by me or our users, I felt helpless.

At first, regardless of how I felt, I was extremely busy dealing with many panicked emails from library users who were confused due to this sudden disruption. Everything was a mess for staff and patrons with the sudden closure of the physical library. Despite the chaos, I had to quickly find ways to provide library service and support users in navigating a quickly changing digital landscape. I urgently bought a large amount of e-books for the Library. I rapidly realigned book collections, services, provisions, and operations to work better online.

Despite many librarians around me being furloughed and most libraries closing for months, numerous publishers and resource providers responded to a collective call by professional organizations such as the Research Library UK (RLUK), Association of Colleges, The British Library, and Jisc, as well as procurement bodies including Southern Universities Purchasing Consortium, Society of College, National and University Libraries, Universities UK, and UK’s Copyright Negotiating and Advisory Committee (RLUK 2020, “RLUK and Partners”). More and more free e-resources were made available temporarily to cope with the pandemic. These materials and special offers were greatly welcomed by academics, researchers, librarians, and students.

After the first lockdown, unlike most staff at my institution, I was allowed in the Library as I was the only one who worked in the building and easily maintained social distancing mandates. This arrangement enabled me to offer a “click and collect” service, where residential students who still lived in the College at that period could request books. Requested library books were left outside of the Library door for students to pick up. However, I was still isolated and mostly worked online. The College was closed for another year or so,

only offering e-teaching as many staff and students were bound to their homes.

During this isolated period as a sole librarian, I reached out to other librarians like me in my network. The Association of British Theological and Philosophical Libraries (ABTAPL) acted as my lifesaver. ABTAPL is “an organisation formed to help those working in libraries containing theological, philosophical and related materials by sharing information and experience” (ABTAPL, n.d.). It has over 80 institutional members and 30 individual members (Riley 2021). Under the leadership of chairperson Sally Gibbs, ABTAPL recognized that its members were under great pressure facing unexpected challenges and risks in many ways. To support its members, ABTAPL quickly adapted its practice and continuously provided services. As its members were often isolated and remote in their small theological seminaries, they focused on sharing resources and information across the membership. For example, they started monthly Zoom meetings where librarians could share experiences and information to help cope with the difficult times. To fulfill the demand of members’ training needs to learn how to adjust to a new working pattern, two emergency online sessions were delivered. Also, ABTAPL invested in an e-book library to enhance members’ development in their roles, and 37 titles related to librarianship and management were made available to members beginning in September 2020 (Gibbs and Riley 2021). ABTAPL was not the only association responding to their members’ needs.

According to *RLUK’s Responses to the Covid-19 Crisis*, published by RLUK in 2020, many libraries experienced something similar:

The last three months have seen the onset and spread of Covid-19, which has caused major disruption to all institutions, including RLUK member libraries. March 2020 saw the physical closure of all of RLUK’s 37 member libraries and the movement of their operations online. RLUK also readjusted its operations and moved quickly to support members navigate a fast-changing landscape. (n.p.)

When things were more settled, and after I went through a long list of not-so-urgent administrative work, my solitude offered me time to pause and to think. The unexpected and unimaginable pandemic shifted my perspective of life and shook my core. Although I adapted quickly and effectively to the unprecedented circumstances by making Library content available electronically, identifying accessible

e-resources for research, uploading digitized materials for reading lists, providing online chat services, and rolling out new applications and systems for remote operations and communications, this rapid realignment highlighted many challenges and difficulties.

I started to re-examine the role of the Library and how it was perceived within its parent institution as this COVID period highlighted the importance of making the Library's voice heard. This thought process eventually made me come to a realization that I had spent far too much attention on readers, services, the operation, and provision of the Library with a particular emphasis. I had forgotten about myself. Instead of looking outward to learn what the readers' needs were, what their research behavior looked like, what their information literacy competency was, and what new trends were pending in the information and library sector, I started to look inward, focusing on myself and examining who I was as a librarian, the library services I provided, the way I reached out to users, and the future of my career. I objectively assessed what I was capable of in order to succeed in performing what I was called to do in this new digital era.

Challenges

After the huge adjustment to digital library provision, I realized that the biggest challenge was to change my mindset. My attitude toward digital skills was rather passive and patchy. Of course, even before the pandemic, I knew digital technology and development had been moving at a substantial pace, bringing about changes in the world of life and work. I was preaching digital literacy to library users, but I confess that I only acquired enough digital skills to get by in my day-to-day job. I did not fully embrace them to rise above the status quo. I blamed my age and complained of time constraints which limited my investment and effort in learning. However, COVID turned my thoughts upside down. Initially I persevered, thinking this time would be short and temporary but a slow recovery from COVID dictated my next steps. Providing an online service was not merely an extra add-on to my job; it became the only provision of library operations. The shift towards using more technology was drastically accelerated in the transition to remote working in the "new normal." I could not sit back and embrace technology only as required anymore; taking time for leisurely implementation was gone. Hesitantly,

I had to face the reality that I had been sitting in my comfort zone, and I needed an objective tool to assess my technological ability.

Digital Capability

Jisc is a not-for-profit UK digital, data, and technology agency focused on tertiary education, research, and innovation by providing hardware, software, and networking solutions (Jisc, n.d., “About”). They devised a discovery tool “to support individuals and managers in a range of roles by helping them to identify and reflect on their current digital capability and make plans to improve their capability through a set of recommended actions and resources” (Jisc 2017). Digital capability is a term used by Jisc to describe “the skills and attitudes that individuals and organisations need if they are to thrive in today’s world” (Jisc n.d., “Digital”). Six elements are defined in building digital capabilities:

ICT proficiency (functional skills): information, data and media literacies (critical use); digital creation (creative production); digital communication, collaboration and participation (participation); digital learning and development (development); digital identity and wellbeing (self-actualising). (Jisc 2017, 1-3)

This framework considered all the elements of digital ability comprehensively even including digital identity and well-being. Jisc has updated these elements since 2022, and they created role profiles. One of these roles was devised to address the capabilities of library and information staff working in higher and further education (Jisc 2017).

The Jisc digital capability discovery tool was an excellent toolkit to help me analyze my digital skills. This self-assessment tool consisted of creative reflection questions which were designed to help users reflect on their digital capabilities and identify current strengths and areas for development. The framework and toolkit gave me objective insight into my digital capabilities and helped me to identify gaps. It gave me motivation and helped me set goals to develop my skills. By knowing my weaknesses and strengths, I started to read more about related topics. Thankfully there were numerous reports and papers coming out during that period to support librarians and the higher

education community. One of the most influential documents was *A Manifesto for the Digital Shift in Research Libraries* by RLUK (Research Libraries UK). In May 2020, RLUK held a webinar to officially launch this manifesto (Greenhall 2020).

The Digital Shift

A Manifesto for the Digital Shift in Research Libraries, published just before the onset of the COVID pandemic, was timely. A dedicated working group of colleagues representing RLUK's member networks created this manifesto to provide a ten-year vision for the digital shift already occurring in research libraries in line with radical technology development and innovation. They recognized that the digital shift in this era is not a simple transition from analog to digital; it is more holistic than that. They defined digital shift as “an umbrella term for the analogue-digital transition of many library services, operations, collections, and audience interactions” (RLUK n.d.). This ongoing transformation of the digital shift is discussed in multidimensions to enable the library and information specialists to be aware of what is on the way and for them to prepare to adapt with “a mindset of digital curiosity and experimentation” (RLUK 2020, “A Manifesto”).

In this document RLUK illustrated library roles in the coming future where digital technologies profoundly affect our society, higher education, and the workplace:

In 2023, UK research libraries will be an integral part of the local and global knowledge environment. We will offer environmentally sustainable, inclusive services that enable a diverse set of users to identify and use trusted knowledge resources from all over the world. Our open research and digital scholarship services will enable seamless and persistent sharing and reuse of research outputs. Library staff will be increasingly recognised experts in (digital) research methods and valued partners in the research process, even leading in some fields. Print collections will be as easy to discover as our digital ones, and we will provide digital and physical spaces that meet researchers' needs. Libraries will have mastered the use of artificial intelligence technologies, integrated into technology platforms that are open and

transparent, built on sustainable and ethical principles. (RLUK 2020, “A Manifesto”)

To achieve the digital shift, four themes were underpinned: skills and leadership, spaces, stakeholders and advocacy, and scholarship and collections (RLUK 2020, “A Manifesto”). According to RLUK, to be recognized as an expert and partner in digital research and its methodologies, it is critical for library and information specialists to obtain digital skills and be equipped with these skill sets. With this newly acquired ability, they can play an important role in leading some research projects in areas like data science, artificial intelligence, and textual analysis with new software and applications.

The manifesto also acknowledged that use and design of library spaces will continuously transform, driven by the changing behaviors and expectations of library users (RLUK 2020, “A Manifesto”). This evolution is due to the diversification of library audiences and, most importantly after witnessing the mass closure of library buildings, the shifting role of the library on campus. Even after lockdown restrictions were lifted, user perceptions of the library’s physical spaces were still unclear. One thing is certain: the pandemic will continue to have a long-term impact on how the physical library looks, is arranged, and functions, and libraries will need to keep a close eye on the use of their space.

Furthermore, in order to navigate and influence the digital shift, “research libraries need to continue to work with stakeholders across a wide range of communities within the higher education, information, and commercial sectors” (RLUK 2020, “A Manifesto”). In line with a rapid renovation in the business environment and models accelerated by COVID, librarians also need to develop new relationships with stakeholders. Relating to scholarship and collections, with no access to physical collections, particularly in archives and special collections, libraries had to move quickly to offer online services to their users. The closures experienced through the pandemic demonstrated the importance of e-content and the shift to e-resources had to be instant. E-book collections were added quickly to library collections and copyright terms were relaxed as a response to outcries from academic and educational communities. Collaborative digital collections between libraries offered enhanced opportunities to a wider audience for broader discovery and high-quality research outcomes.

Moreover, I witnessed the rise of a new type of e-book provision that became an overnight success. So-called e-textbook streaming services such as Perlego, Kortext, and Bibliu emerged in the mainstream. The most noticeable service provider among this new type of digital e-resource providers was Perlego. It caught the attention of many academics, students, and librarians by offering free subscriptions to academic institutions during the critical period of the pandemic when students were stuck at home with library closures and many libraries were struggling to provide extensive e-textbook coverage given limited resources and funding.

Perlego

Perlego is a commercial digital textbook library founded in 2016 and launched by two Cambridge graduates, Gauthier van Malderen and Matthew Davis, to offer “all-you-can-read” subscriptions to consumers (Watts 2022). This library is often referred to as “Netflix for textbooks” (Gooding 2018) or “Spotify textbooks” (Tobin 2022), as they adopted an individual subscription model over the internet like these streaming service providers. Therefore, their initial target marketing audience was individuals—the same model Spotify and Netflix use—and students, specifically. They focused on selling private subscriptions to students directly by working in partnership with various commercial companies and education-related organizations such as Barclays Bank, Vodafone (Naik 2020), Talis (an educational technology company)¹ and Universities and Colleges Admissions Service.² For example, Barclays Bank student account holders were offered one year’s free subscription to Perlego (Ingham 2020) as an opening reward while Vodafone, a British multinational telecommunications company, gave their mobile phone users six weeks of free access to Perlego as part of their mobile package (Vodafone 2020).

Accelerated by COVID, Perlego saw more openness and willingness from publishers as well as an urgency and desperation from academic institutions to provide academic resources online swiftly to students. Perlego reached out to academic libraries in the United Kingdom (Naik 2020) and began making their monthly subscriptions freely available to students via their libraries (Young 2020). Their sales strategy moved from individuals to institutions and enabled universities to buy Perlego subscriptions on behalf of their students.

This change in strategy was a huge departure from their original business model.

From the inception of Perlego, UK librarians were not sure what to think about it, especially since their marketing focus was completely different from traditional publishers and e-resource providers. Bypassing libraries and institutions, they talked to students directly and this driving force was completely outside of librarians' opinion. All libraries could do was sit by uncomfortably and witness that some of their students started not to feel a need to visit institutional libraries, subscribing instead to Perlego. Subscribers felt this resource was sufficient enough to carry out their study successfully without libraries. One small theological seminary librarian, who remained anonymous, was even questioned about the value of her library by her senior management team.

During the pandemic, as Perlego changed its marketing strategy, representatives reached out to libraries offering an indirect subscription model. Soon, librarians purchased Perlego's bulk subscription license on behalf of their students. The librarian who was questioned about her value quickly became a project leader for her institution to work with Perlego e-books. Now, in addition to negotiating the license fees and monitoring usages, she facilitates the reading list creation and works closely with academics to collaborate on reading list management. Another librarian noted that Perlego allows faculty to engage with librarians much more easily through their reading list menu called "Workspace" (interview with Perlego subscriber, 2023). Subsequently, Perlego's indirect subscription model offered in partnership with universities and small seminaries pushed a huge increase in their sales (Naik 2020).

It would be a mistake to think that Perlego's success originated only from a lucky business opportunity due to the pandemic. Perlego offers affordability and accessibility, especially focusing on disability, ease of use, intuitiveness, a simple subscription model, great coverage of titles (with over one million titles), sleek design, reading list management and referencing options, and offline access for up to 30 downloads. Also, it is popular given the prominence of multidisciplinary research trends in academia. Hence, once academics and students experienced the benefits and convenience of Perlego's e-textbook subscription, there was no going back for libraries.

For small theological seminaries and colleges who lacked funds, purchasing a huge package from international vendors such as EBSCO and ProQuest was rather complicated and costly. However,

Perlego offers a more affordable option with its relatively straightforward purchasing model. Purchasing licenses is simple and it is easy to distribute these licenses to students as they are transferable to successive cohorts painlessly. Bulk buying functionality allows instant access to Perlego's e-collections. For example, a librarian emailed the ABTAPL group list to get some collective wisdom. He was looking for an e-book and said that this title was seemingly impossible to get as an institutional library. The suggested alternative was subscribing to Perlego for the duration of the module being taught. This was a cheap and cheerful solution that provided access to the text immediately.

Not only is the simplicity of the purchasing model attractive to librarians, but also it saves a lot of time and administrative work where the librarian no longer needs to look at different vendors to see availability or compare costs of different licensing and credit options. In addition, as it is easy to use, work with, and train staff, Perlego lowers the barrier for anyone to become involved in providing e-resources through the library. Therefore, Perlego allows a new way to engage with lecturers regarding course materials, helping them to create reading lists conveniently with less training. It has enhanced relationships between faculty and library staff (interview with Perlego subscriber, 2023). Perlego subscriptions became particularly popular in theological libraries and became a major means of providing e-resources in these institutions in the United Kingdom, reaching approximately 20 percent of ABTAPL members.

In addition to the benefits of using Perlego for students, there are also benefits to publishers who collaborate with Perlego. Often for small publishers who struggle with a lack of funding and technical infrastructure, supplying institutional-level e-books is difficult and complicated. Perlego saw this gap and offered a convenient alternative to these publishers. Publishers outsource their e-book distribution to Perlego and receive royalties according to usage. That is why Perlego has such strong coverage, particularly in theology and religion, as many publishers in these fields are small; they welcome this opportunity by seeing it as a way to publish e-books (Perlego Representative 2023). Some of the titles are not even available as e-books from other vendors; they are only available from Perlego.

Perlego, driven by the digital technology revolution, has compelled librarians, institutions, and publishers to rethink e-book provision in innovative ways, moving away from the traditional, complicated, and complex methods of licensing and credit models. Perlego

provides a convenient digital platform for individual libraries and institutions to meet their students' needs, and for authors to publish their work.

IFLA Trend Report 2021

The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) updated its trend report to present ideas shared by emerging library leaders from around the world expressed through a survey in June and July of 2021. The leaders reflected on the COVID-19 pandemic and published their conclusions as *IFLA Trend Report 2021 Update (2022)*. This report offers a comprehensive view of the evolving landscape of libraries. It highlighted twenty key trends in the library field with a particular emphasis on the influence of technology and its impact in the digital age. The swift and profound changes in new ways of working and living due to the unexpected crisis left libraries with no option but to adapt rapidly to new realities.

The complexity of the trends from this report, some of which complement one another while others appear to be in conflict, reflects the turbulent and rapid change libraries faced during the pandemic. The abrupt transition to remote working and the challenges of meeting users' growing demands, including a preference to access library services remotely (IFLA 2022, 9), raised questions about the value of physical library spaces and collections. On the contrary, the report pointed out that there was a growing appreciation for these spaces as a research hub for collaboration and discussions (10), and as an antidote for analog experiences, promoting mindfulness and mental balance away from social media (16) to "impatient users" who "will not tolerate slow or confusing process" (15), in particular young, digital natives.

In this digital shift, the rapidity of technological change outpaces existing equipment and services rapidly. Also, the need for equipment replacement, ongoing update costs, and increasing licensing fees threatens small libraries (IFLA 2022, 17) which deepens inequalities and widens divisions (27). These changes and challenges imply that continual training at a high level of education (24) becomes a necessity, hence investment in human resources is required to intensify lifelong learning (21).

The IFLA Trend Report provided some relief and confirmation of experiences to librarians. Its observations affirmed that librarians were not alone in navigating the challenging digital landscape. These trends represent the library's role in a world shaped by technology and underscore the importance of soft skills such as adaptability (11), sustainability (13), and data and information literacy (18, 25). It also pointed out that, although libraries advocate for the Open Access movement, "the rise of open could lead to a sense that there [is] no longer a need for institutions to play the traditional role of libraries in providing an opportunity for people to access works that would otherwise be inaccessible" (26).

This report stated the current trends and predicted trends to come, which will shape the role of library and information professionals in their workplaces. It suggested possible preparations for library and information professionals to navigate the future in order to thrive, not simply to survive. It became a beacon to me as a way to prepare for this new normal with a much clearer perspective.

RLUK Scoping Study

At the same time IFLA published its report, Research Libraries UK in partnership with the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) presented the results of their major evidence-based research project, *The Role of Academic and Research Libraries As Active Participants and Leaders in the Production of Scholarly Research* (RLUK 2021). It illustrated a detailed overview of the current role of academic and research libraries, explored their potential to step up as partners and leaders in the initiation, production, and dissemination of academic and scholarly research, highlighted barriers and challenges that might hinder this role, and it recommended what steps need to be taken to enhance collaborative research. The report has ten insightful findings and makes 13 practical recommendations for libraries, members of the academic community, parent organizations, RLUK, and the AHRC. The ten findings are:

1. A recognition of the wealth of expertise held by library personnel. As collaborators and leaders in research, library staff, with their pedagogical expertise, technical skills, and

- curatorial insight can provide data to researchers to make data-driven decisions (RLUK 2021, 6).
2. Collaboration as a default mode of operation. RLUK found that collaboration is in the nature of library staff, hence in order to foster multidisciplinary research and contribute partnerships, libraries can position themselves as a center of communication and a collaboration hub (6).
 3. Conceptions of the meaning of research. Library staff involvement and contributions to research activities are often overlooked due to the different definitions and understanding of what research entails between academic researchers and library staff. This can lead to the contributions of library staff as unrecognized (6).
 4. Complementarity of skills, knowledge, and expertise. Library staff skills in public engagement, curation, literature searches, systematic reviews, digital scholarship, technical skills, open access, bibliometrics, and research data management can complement research partners. Therefore collaborative work between libraries and academics benefits both parties equally (7).
 5. Understanding engagement as a spectrum. With their skill sets, library staff can be actively involved in research in a variety of different ways, such as a principal investigator or co-investigator. “Library staff add greatest value to research projects when they are involved throughout the research life-cycle, from project formation to the dissemination, and preservation, of outputs” (7).
 6. Recognizing the contribution of library staff. Since recognition of library staff as research partners is not always appreciated, initiatives that acknowledge all contributors to research are encouraged³ but it is still unknown how these efforts will affect library staff (7).
 7. Funding eligibility. Not only is it important to formalize library staff involvement in funded projects, but also granting eligibility to apply for UK Research and Innovation⁴ research council funding as a co-investigator or principal investigator should be welcome if they fulfill funding criteria (7).
 8. Perceptions are shifting. Perceptions of library staff are gradually progressing from service provider to active and equal research partners and leaders (7).

9. Challenges do exist. There are many barriers to expanding library staff roles as research partners and leaders. Everyone in the academic and research communities have to play their part to overcome these challenges in order to empower library staff to reach their potential (7).
10. Opportunities are available to be seized. The digital shift allows many exciting opportunities for libraries to further develop and enhance their role as partners in research (7).

In order to materialize the opportunities for libraries to act as research partners and leaders, RLUK recommended a joint action plan between RLUK and the AHRC as well as library staff themselves to shape and support implementations (RLUK 2021, 57-59). Key points include advocating for library staff, funding professional development programs (57), promoting diversity and recognizing library staff's representation in the research community (57), and encouraging library staff to leverage doctoral research programs to enhance their research capacity (58). It is important to note that advocating for library staff to be eligible for research funding will help them develop their digital capacity, research skills, and credibility (57). Additionally, recommendations included elements of advocacy (58) and collaboration between academic and library staff (59).

Digital Tools for the Digital Shift

Accelerated by COVID, the digital shift is here to stay and it will speed up even more with technological innovation. I believe that the focus of library and information professionals has moved from developing library collections to developing library staff. Digital technologies threaten the traditional role of librarians but at the same time, they open an opportunity for librarians to redefine their roles to meet new academic activities and research methodologies. The global pandemic forced me to accept the current state of the profession. The key to developing our skills is to make use of digital resources and tools. It is time for me to embrace technology as much as I can and to adjust to the digital future. To prepare myself to embrace this digital shift, I started to find out what digital applications were available for me to use during the pandemic.

I charged myself with a mission to equip myself with new technologies, and I mostly turned to freely available digital tools on the web. I wanted to use platforms that were fun and colorful so that my message would stand out effectively to the digital native generation. Given financial constraints, I was limited to learning free or affordable tools, especially ones that are highly popular so that I could teach myself by watching YouTube videos. Also, as I spoke of digital literacy to library users with great enthusiasm, I wanted to practice what I preached by using more digital tools. Following are some of the tools I used.

Zoom

As digital communication was the only way to connect to library users during lockdown, I searched for the most effective tool in order to reach out, and chose Zoom, which “is a communications platform that allows users to connect with video, audio, phone, and chat” (Zoom 2022). Before my parent institution officially offered Microsoft (MS) Teams, I used Zoom to communicate with students. This tool was an affordable and convenient solution to have a face-to-face talk and host group library meetings for training and orientations. It was a good alternative to keep in touch with library users in isolation and show that I was still there to support them by making myself available online regardless of where they were at that time. Furthermore, ABTAPL started a monthly Zoom lunchtime social for casual conversation in order to support one another and facilitate friendships during this difficult time. This gathering time was greatly appreciated by many members.

Kahoot!

An application I used to facilitate fun quizzes during library orientation was Kahoot!, “a game-based learning platform that makes it easy to create, share and play learning games or trivia quizzes in minutes” (Kahoot! n.d.). I launched a quiz after the orientation talk to see whether library users understood the information just presented. Kahoot! allows questions to be answered instantly through users’ mobile phones, and it is a great way of collecting feedback with immediate results to find out if there is any need to clarify

information. It helped students consolidate details of library processes and procedures, and students welcomed this digital quiz application and actively participated. As Kahoot! was widely used at schools in the United Kingdom, students were already familiar with the software. This game-based learning platform provides immediate feedback and it gives competitive excitement to learning, which was a big appeal to this digitally receptive generation.

Mentimeter

Mentimeter is a presentation-based tool that can be used to design quizzes, polls, and word clouds online (Mentimeter n.d.). This tool allows interaction with participants to occur in real time as they take a poll, participate in a quiz, and present their thoughts to create a group word cloud. It can be used via a web browser, making it simple to access from nearly any device. Participants can instantly join by simply entering a code or scanning a QR code with their mobile phones or tablets. I used this application during the library training for ABTAPL and Association of European Theological Libraries (BETH) members in order to gather their feedback instantly.

Prezi

Prezi is a digital presentation tool that offers some unique features, making it a good alternative to MS PowerPoint. This sleek software is web-based, running entirely through a web browser so it has fewer compatibility issues with devices. Unlike PowerPoint's slide-based approach, Prezi uses a campus-based style, meaning a presentation moves around, zooming in and out to view various frames on the campus. This different technique of presenting is very eye-catching and visually engaging, but the strongest selling point is that it is free.

The creator of Prezi also offers Prezi Design, which contains many beautiful templates to build on in order to design visually attractive content. I use it heavily to create library booklets, posters, and flyers. The first bulletin for BETH was designed using Prezi Design. You can download the PDF file of this bulletin from <https://bethbulletin.eu/>.

The other Prezi tool I used is Prezi Video. This new video creator allows you to be featured next to the content, a bit like a news broadcast. This function allows you to live stream or record your

presentation seamlessly via Zoom or Teams. The benefit of this tool is that the viewers will be able to see you while you are presenting text and images. This feature keeps viewers engaged.

MS Sway

MS Sway is “a new app from MS Office that makes it easy to create and share interactive reports, personal stories, presentations and more” (MS Sway n.d.). I used it for an interactive collection exhibition. Please see my showcase piece for ABTAPL e-book collections created by MS Sway here: <https://sway.office.com/LYW82u4C5fQaMcpM?ref=Link>

Its built-in design engine allows adding text and images into pre-designed templates, and it easily helps users create professional content that showcases information in an interactive way. It is simple to apply a new style and format so you can save a lot of time on editing. Also, it is straightforward to share with others on the web as it does not require signing in or downloading to view, and it is free to use with an MS account.

Trello

Trello is a web-based, list-making visual application for a team to manage a project, monitor workflows, and track tasks by adding files, checklists, and allocating responsibilities. It works as an electronic collaboration tool that organizes a project on a digital board with movable cards. This tool allows you to see quickly what work there is to do, who is working on it, and how far along it is in the process. I used it with my co-editor to allocate jobs, share files, monitor progress, and check the timelines for the first BETH Bulletin project, which has just been published.

ThingLink

ThingLink is a digital tool to create interactive annotated images in the cloud by adding icons or tags with detailed texts, links to website, vocals, and videos (ThingLink Team 2023). I used it for an interactive library floor plan and instructional guide. Library users simply hover over the floorplan and click on icons where they can get more

detailed information about that particular area. It is free to use and easy to share with others as no login is required to open the page. As an example, see my floor plan here: <https://www.thinglink.com/scene/1486723674131136513?buttonSource=viewLimits>

Powtoon

Powtoon is a cloud-based visual communication software for creating animated presentations and videos. It is very easy to create a short video as it comes with many features including moving avatars, images, video footage, and copyrighted music. It is also simple to share without needing to download, and it allows you to export it to various platforms and devices. It is free to create, use, and share. The presentation video I created using Powtoon can be found here: <https://www.powtoon.com/online-presentation/cQxrmIr6tZ6/5-fun-tips-to-use-self-circulation/>

Conclusion

I believe that the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the digital shift in research and scholarship in the humanities, including theology and religious studies. The digital shift promotes the emergence of digital scholarship at a rapid speed and this threatens the traditional role of librarians. Digital scholarship instigates a change in the support system traditionally provided by libraries to researchers. The library is no longer simply a place filled with quality collections or librarians who point users in the direction of the right resource. Libraries are required to take a more collaborative approach to the facilitation of digital scholarship. Librarians with digital skills can be the right partners to provide solutions to problems occurring through the lifecycle of a project by delivering pre-existing infrastructure, preserving research products after completion, and considering sustainability. For librarians to fulfill their potential and to equip themselves in areas where they can add value, I believe that the future is bright in the creation, archiving, curation, and preservation of tools for digital humanities research. This way we can confidently prepare users for new programs like the Master's in Digital Theology, which has been running successfully for the last few years at Spurgeon's

College in London (Spurgeon's College n.d.). We can also expect more publications in the field, such as *Digital Theology: A Computer Science Perspective* (Sutinen and Cooper 2021).

I updated my library's online guide with these visually attractive and interactive applications, which were well received by users, and I had the chance to present on these tools to ABTAPL in a training session in 2022, and to BETH members (ABTAPL's European counterparts) at their virtual conference in 2021, allowing me to share my practices with my colleagues across Europe. This experience gave me a boost of confidence in learning new skills and a positive perspective on this new way of living and working. Exploring these tools was my small first step to continuous, further progress. I am no longer afraid of the wave of new technology. I am actively seeking to learn what is ahead of us, and I am ready to equip myself with new tools in order to deliver and communicate the most appropriate and interesting library service to users in the "new normal."

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Notes

- 1 <https://talis.com/about-us/>
- 2 <https://www.ucas.com/about-us/who-we-are>
- 3 Please see The Hidden REF from <https://hidden-ref.org/> and Technician Commitment <https://www.techniciancommitment.org.uk/>
- 4 <https://www.ukri.org/>