

Chapter 2

Digital Libraries and the Role of Digital Librarians

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents a holistic view of digital libraries and the role of digital librarians. Technological changes and the use of electronic storage and retrieval information systems have changed the way students and researchers are able to access, retrieve and use information. Key topics presented in the chapter include the concept of digitization, reasons for digitization, definitions of digital library, features of digital library, characteristics of digital libraries, advantages and disadvantages of digital library, collection development and content creation, digital librarianship, role of librarians in digital libraries, issues of concern to digital librarians, process of digitization of library resources, digital library components, and digital rights management.

INTRODUCTION

The world is going through an information technology revolution and the evolution of Information and Communication Technologies has put itself in the midpoint of socio-economic innovations. ICT has a diffuse concept which is being manifested in different forms. This concept has revolutionized the way many organizations perform their functionalities and service deliveries, and its evolution has also influenced the way many libraries operates.

The success achieved in the digital library can be attributed to the widespread use of information communication technologies (ICTs) in the business of information creation, organization, storage and dissemination. ICT has now made it possible for individuals in their homes to have access to full-text journal articles, conference papers, research reports, technical documents, statistical information, data sets, and much more.

Alhaji (2009) asserted that the needs for digital libraries become significant when we look for improved information sharing, improved and wider access of library materials, and improved preservation of the same. Hawkins (2002) pointed out that when the number of library users increases with no or little

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-8051-6.ch002

increased library resources such as reading areas, library materials and librarians the basic purpose of having a library become weakened.

According to Ogunsola and Okusaga (2008), libraries are now extending their traditional roles of facilitating self-education and individual enrichment by providing low-cost or free computer access to online resources. For libraries to provide access to online and electronic services they cannot operate as a single entity, they require technological links of many collections.

It is often said that digital information is transforming the way we learn, the way we communicate even the way we think. It is also changing the way that libraries and archives not only work, but more fundamentally, the very work that they do (Kannndppanavar, Rajanikanta, & Tandur, 2010).

The digital age has brought about many changes to libraries, some of these changes having been taking place before the introduction of the Internet in the mid 1990s. The 1980s and early 1990 saw much discussion in libraries on issues such as print versus electronic; “access versus ownership”, “mediated versus unlimited online searching” and professional concerns not gradually widened to include electronic licensing and consortia collection development. Today, the digital age has brought many aspects of library services. The card catalog has been replaced with OPAC in many libraries, users now search for information from their desktop; users download e-books on to their PDAs, full text retrieval of information sources is becoming common place and services are increasingly becoming personalized and pay as use.

Libraries are saddled with the primary responsibilities of generation, acquisition, processing, storage, refining and dissemination of data, information and knowledge to people in various walks of life. Libraries are expected to “add value” to the products and services. Adding value to information is part of the core and expertise of libraries. This can be achieved by facilitating access through indexing and bibliographic description, and through the creation of systems, which make information more logically organized and easier to find. Also, these values can be added by assisting users to navigate the universe of information through content development, instructions, search services, and reference assistance.

The potential of what can be achieved in information generation, acquisition, collection, processing, display and dissemination with the use of ICT was very exhilarating and resulted in futuristic dreams. Digital libraries provide some of these same services, but they tend to be more focused on content, particularly in digital form, as opposed to a location, although most physical libraries offer increasing amounts of digital library services (Humphreys, 2000). Digital age has reshaped the structure as well as the form of libraries.

The emergence of network society or information society has given birth to different user needs. Digital library, which is an organizational response to different user needs, is a concept of great social and economic significance (Bawden & Rowlands, 1999). Librarians have to acquire not only the skills for librarianship, but also the skills of IT for the adequate provision of services to users. Demands for digital information service delivery are increasing as a result of innovations in technologies, in order for libraries to meet up with these demands, they need to embrace digitization.

Digitization as defined by Business Dictionary (2016) is the conversion of analog information in any form (text, photographs, voice, etc.) to digital form with suitable electronic devices (such as a scanner or specialized computer chips) so that the information can be processed, stored, and transmitted through digital circuits, equipment, and networks. It is all these technological developments which gradually give birth to what is now known as digital library.

It would be impossible to define digital library outside traditional library coupled with people, technology and information resources, thus, digital Libraries can be defined as the collection of information

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