

Chapter 84

The Future of Library Services in the Digital Economy: A Case Study of the Copperbelt University Library

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ABSTRACT

Libraries may be on the verge of a revolutionary phase of integrating technology in all their services in order for them to become effective information providers in the digital economy. In much of the literature on the potential of ICTs in academic libraries, it is argued that advancements in ICTs are changing the way people are accessing and using information. Hence, integration of ICTs in library services is necessary if libraries are to effectively provide information at anytime and anywhere. This chapter seeks to address this issue with a focus on the Copperbelt University library in Kitwe, Zambia. The chapter reviews various similar sources that looked at technology and its impact on library services. Additionally, in the African context, there has been massive adoption of Internet-enabled technologies. For example many people have smart phones such as Blackberries, Samsung, Nokia and Apple iPhones, which enable them access Internet ubiquitously. The emergence of these technologies and their abilities to provide tailor made applications for pervasive access to information resources entails that even library content may now be provided on electronic platforms. Whereas the rest of the world has done a substantial amount towards electronic library systems, not much has been done in Africa. Despite such challenges, libraries are taking steps in modernizing their services in an effort to fully satisfy the ever-changing needs of their information users. Additionally, recommendations on what libraries ought to do in order for them to bridge the widening gap in terms of how people are accessing and using information are given.

INTRODUCTION

Academic libraries have for long played a central role in the lives of universities, in supporting learning, teaching and research (Research

Information Network, 2010). Since universities themselves differ significantly in the nature and scale of operations, academic libraries have equally existed in different forms and scale of operations. However, the emergence of the digital economy is

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creating, a new environment where there is rapid diffusion of Internet-based applications in almost every aspect of human life. We are now living in a society where the availability and management of information in digital formats has opened up varied means of fast and portable 24/7 access, encouraged new research routes, refreshed the information consumer-base and redefined the public domain, among other benefits (Finch, 2012).

The developments in technology have also increased availability of computers and computer handheld devices like smart phone, tablets and kindles. These computers and computer devices can easily be connected to the Internet and hence are having a profound impact on how people access and use information. Additionally, because of improvement in technology, various types of social media have emerged which are creating a platform for collaborative information sharing through Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, MySpace and YouTube. Living in such a modern environment, the new generations of university students are embracing these technologies and quickly adapting to new ways of accessing and using information by interacting with technology.

Therefore, academic libraries have found themselves facing the prospects of integrating technology in providing library services in order for them to create better ways of providing information to suit these new consumption patterns. It can be argued that digitalising library services is rapidly becoming a practical necessity and reality if libraries are to still exist as disseminators and providers of information as required, at anytime; anywhere and at any place (Eke, 2011).

In view of the above, the major objective of this chapter would be to explore the future of library services with specific reference to the Copperbelt University. More especially, the objectives of the chapter are: 1. Defining the major terms in the topic under discussion. 2. To look at advancements in ICTs and the opportunities and challenges of integrating them in library services. 3. Looking at efforts the Copperbelt University have put in

place to integrate ICT in their library services. 4. To make recommendations based on his observations and lastly give the conclusions of the paper.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

The term digital economy can be defined in so many ways. According to Digecon Research (2011) definitions for digital economy can similarly be described as one in which the means of production, distribution and exchange have been transformed by the application of information and communication technologies – from the telegraph, to the telephone, the Internet and broadband IP enabled networks. Furthermore, Mutula (2010) points out that the digital economy is characterized by numerous phenomena in the global business environment, which include but are not limited to globalization, digitization, virtualization, and disintermediation. The digital economy has information and knowledge as the main commodities for production and consumption. Hence sound and information and knowledge management are critical for organizations wishing to improve their performance.

ADVANCEMENTS IN ICT AND ITS EFFECTS ON LIBRARIES

There have been growing amount of literature published on ICTs and its impact on the provision of library services. Therefore, the writer's analysis would be built on the findings of several previous but similar investigations that examined issues pertaining to library services in the digital economy.

Advancements in electronic publishing and content digitalization have increased the use of the Internet, for example, as a major tool for accessing electronic information either for research or academic purposes. Using various ICTs, it has become possible for one to access information

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