Chapter 35
Libraries and Innovative Thinking in the Digital Age

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ABSTRACT

Librarianship, as is quite obvious, is changing very fast with the high rate of technological infusion in every aspect of the profession. Books and other information resources that are managed by libraries and information professionals are being transformed to electronic platforms. Also, the information users are becoming more technology savvy as well as sophisticated in their information needs and the quest to satisfy these needs. Users are vast in the use of search engines, and it is like they do not need libraries and the services of librarians anymore. All these and many more developments have put great strains on libraries and librarians. This chapter therefore discusses how librarians can provide services for 21st century users through innovative thinking.

INTRODUCTION

The days are long gone when a library can, passively, assume that it will be recognized as an asset without having to defend that proposition and prove its worth (Lubbe, 2016). This is the Information Age, which, according to Wikipedia is a historical period in the Twenty-First (21st) century characterized by the rapid shift from traditional industry that resulted from Industrial Revolution through industrialization to an economy based on Information and Communications Technology (ICTs). The period is also referred to as Computer Age, Digital Age or New Media Age. This is a period when information is expected to be delivered at the doorsteps of every human since all decisions and actions are information driven (Nwalo, 2018).

Libraries are facing many challenges and threats due to Internet and digital revolution and globalization (Oketunji, 2018). Today, library resources are being made available in a variety of digital formats and media, thus filtering and choosing the right information at the right time from the ocean of raw

information is a major challenge even to users. The speed and time demand from information users is another issue; information is now readily at the fingertip of everyone (both present and potential library users, young and old, etc.) so libraries and librarians must be able to meet up with this challenge.

Revolutionary change, the challenges of new technologies, a paradigm shift; these are words used to bring one's attention to the need for adaptation and innovation by libraries. (Allen, 2011). Disruptive technologies that have driven the transition from manual to electronic library require new service models that challenge established organizations and the interests and expertise of the individuals within them. These changes are occurring in an environment of decreasing resources (human and financial) and increasing demands of users.

Librarianship is evolving very fast with the high rate of technological infusion in every aspect of the profession. Combined with social changes these developments have put great strains on libraries (of all types) and information professionals including librarians. Consequently, there has to be innovation in libraries and in the profession generally. There is an urgent necessity for librarianship to change with the times, embrace the new technologies and integrate them into its engagements with communities. The profession (and professionals) has to be strengthened and made more and more relevant in contemporary world.

Sweeney (2005), posited that in contemporary world, changing user expectations are more important than other trends that affect libraries, such as technology, organizational constraints, librarian expectations, library board expectations, building limitations, and traditional library services. Innovative technologies are extremely important and indeed support most of the new products, services, and improvements that are introduced in libraries. In the future, all organizations will have to meet these demands in order to sustain their own existence; libraries can, and certainly must, remain relevant to every new generation and its knowledge needs.

Purpose of the Library

Libraries have always been in the business of providing access to information. They are the hub of information and several activities dealing with the provision and rendering of related information services, hence, they provide essential support for development in all spheres: national, personal, economic, educational, and several others. To achieve this, libraries collect, process, organize and provide information sources in various formats (Emezie, 2018). More recently, libraries are creating an environment that accommodate present day needs. Kutu and Adesanya (2008) in Emezie (2018) declared that the library is one of the most important elements in a developing environment; it facilitates information acquisition, organization, storage and dissemination for effective decision making and development of socio economic progress in a nation.

Adopting the views of Chunli and Jinmin, (2011), the library has a long and notable tradition of providing rich and relevant services for users. The task of the library is to connect users with the information they are seeking. The incorporation of new information technologies has actually become the catalyst that changes the library into a more vital and critical intellectual center of life today. Libraries are about collections, but they are also about providing much more; this is a period of investigation for new services. Libraries must provide a user-focused suite of reference services. Also, Nwalo (2018), stated that the purpose of the library is the acquisition, organization, storage, preservation and dissemination of information to meet the broad and varying needs of individuals for their daily cultural activities; cover-

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