Chapter 23
Libraries and Artificial Intelligence:
The Power of Enhancing Data Ethics

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ABSTRACT

Libraries are increasingly entering the digital age, and demands on them to offer more digital services are widening, with user expectations of "remote or distant access," "distant learning," and the use of other modern internet technologies. To this end, libraries must accelerate their use of technologies like AI, "data mining," "machine-readable data," "machine-generated classification," "semantic ontologies," and internet accessible catalogs and content because their aim should always be user benefit, user convenience, and user satisfaction. In this chapter, the author examines ways in which technologies and libraries are trying to fulfill their modern role and expectations of the modern user. Additionally, the author will examine how to strengthen data ethics in those particular fields of library use that most endanger the user's intellectual freedom on one side and his right to privacy on the other. One of the essential roles of modern libraries, in their new "informational" identity, will be as "guardians of data ethics and intellectual freedom."

INTRODUCTION

Libraries have always served their societies and their historical epochs. Their purpose was to store written materials and to supply and maintain an "organization of knowledge" of that time, for any nation or culture, or wider geographical region. Libraries have also responded to changes in society and are an excellent indicator of the social situation. We are currently facing radical social change and we need to find a way for libraries to work with society with more ethical impact.

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Today, we live in an epoch of mature and widespread Internet and digital technologies, when at the same time, computer and Internet access is ubiquitous. Most of the "knowledge", was stored only in libraries, public and private ones, has already been transferred "online", at least in some sort or form, e.g., as PDF documents or at least as reference information. Libraries themselves, as well as universities and other institutions, have begun to offer "online public collections and repositories of knowledge". And a new set of computing skills and resources are needed for libraries to store, organize, and offer all these new "digital materials". To cope with all those new tasks, in the last few years "artificial intelligence" was introduced in our activities, and in libraries as well.

With all this in mind, we are also on a brink of a new epoch – of a complete "digital transformation" of our societies, work, industry, and with them, also our libraries. The convergence of enumerated computer and Internet trends and technologies alone requires this transformation, business leaders and technological trend-setters talk about it for some years now – but this trend greatly accelerated in the last year 2020, also the year of "Covid-19". This new "digital transformation" will encompass most of our daily activities, professional, social and private, and most of our industries, economic branches, and social affairs. The same, of course, holds for libraries that will have to offer even more materials "online" and in many cases even interact with their users in the same way, "online". Many have already done that, because of the "Covid-crisis", when a digital book or material lending took precedence over classical "in a paper" book lending. And since libraries will have to put make available even more material "online", the demand for their use of "artificial intelligence" (AI) to catalog, categorize and classify all this material, will further increase.

Some scholars have already described this coming "digital transformation" with the following words: "AI will become as much a part of everyday life as the Internet or social media did in the past. In doing so, AI will not only impact our personal lives but also fundamentally transform how firms make decisions and interact with their external stakeholders (e.g. employees, customers)." (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2019a, p. 9).

As with entering every new age and transformation, there are some considerable dangers and risks that exist – primarily the ethical ones. The omnipresence of digital technologies presents the danger of increased surveillance and control, by government and business entities, and even threatens to rob us of some self-evident everyday decisions to be instead performed by someone else, or by some "artificial intelligence" on our behalf.

All those are great concerns and will be discussed firstly in the context of society as a whole, where some leading contemporary intellectuals have warned about those risks of "artificial intelligence" (AI). But the main topic of this chapter will of course be the question: what are the dimensions of "artificial intelligence" and widespread use of "digital technologies" in the field of modern libraries, where also a number of those concerns arise?

Some governmental institutions, like European Union, have already addressed those concerns and introduced their detailed AI strategy, focused on protecting citizens and civil society from abuses of new digital technologies. For this purpose, European Union has created an independent High-Level Expert Group on AI (AI HLEG), a multi-stakeholder group composed of fifty-two experts and tasked with the definition of "Ethics Guidelines", as well as with the formulation of "Policy and Investment Recommendations".

According to some authors, those policies will adequately address main concerns regarding AI use: "With the advice of the AI HLEG, the European Commission put forward ethical guidelines for