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Summer 11-12-2019

## The Digital Librarian in the Community: Linking the Micro with the Macro

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Majekodunmi, Ajimadeke Dr.; Miracle, Njeze Eka; and Adebayo, Babafemi Richard, "The Digital Librarian in the Community: Linking the Micro with the Macro" (2019). *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)*. 4544.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/4544>

The Digital Librarian in the Community: Linking the Micro with the Macro

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## Abstract

*Digital librarianship is no longer an emerging concept as considered some years back; it has grown to become a force to reckon with, since it bridges the gap between traditional and digital library by preserving information in an electronic format for quick access and retrieval by library patrons. Digital librarian ensure regular subscription of electronic content of the library, act as an intermediary manager between resources and patrons, a voyeur of current information, organizer of digital resources such as e-books/journals, library's repository, e-preservation and social media. The digital librarian in the micro community is prone to challenges such as low funds, inadequate power, low capacity building, inadequate service provider for internet use and lack of relevant Information and Communication Technology skills. Digital librarian is not just an information expert but a collaborator, researcher, facilitator, mediator and publisher of information and all these transformations would be further treasured in the community if patrons have access to uninterrupted internet service thus linking the micro to the macro.*

**Words:** 165

**Keywords:** Digital librarian, ICT, digital library, Open Educational Resources (OER), Open Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) and varying roles

## **Introduction**

Libraries have been known to be the essential thread with which the fabric of education is woven. The introduction of information technology, global access to information and the use of personal computers have positioned the library as a vibrant learning platform considering the trend in technology. It was believed some years back, that librarians may be replaced and become irrelevant with advancement in information technology but with appropriate steps taken by librarians have not been able relegated to the background, but have been able to develop capacity in line with current technological trends.

Some libraries in Nigeria and librarians have been vibrant, upgraded and advanced with highly technological demands in this digital age in terms of service delivery to users, as was the mandate for librarians in the conventional library, so it is for the digital librarian of the present but greater impact on library patrons due to dissemination of information using several social media platforms. There are few professions in the society that have universal approval to manage educational and informational services as do librarians because they have a way of satisfying information needs of their users, but the digital librarian is referred to as a mediator and carrier of current information and a spur to be reckoned with; and an ‘expert in the field of information’ creation, organization, retrieval and dissemination, instead of being consigned, the digital librarian has emerged as an expert and a collaborator, a crucial link in the chain of information between researchers, publishers and the consumer (Omoskejimi, 2015; Majekodunmi, 2012) The digital librarian is an organizer in the grid of information glut, a force to be associated with in the ICT age and community, linking the micro to the macro.

## **The Digital Librarian**

The digital librarian bridges the gap between traditional and digital library by preserving huge volume of information in an electronic form for quick access and retrieval by patrons, this has

further enhanced access to library automation by the use of library catalogue like Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) and online databases, multi-media contents including text, pictures, audio and video. The digital librarian is an expert who possesses information management skills such that information resources are accessed, conserved, retrieved, organized, secured and disseminated with the aid of information technology (IT) by linking library users to information resources via the internet. The digital librarian ensures that license is purchased for the digital content of the library and collaboration is initiated with Information Technology staff (IT) in organizing library's technical infrastructure through regular subscription and renewal of online database for library use (LeFurgy, 2011; Ibrahim, 2015). Digital librarian is an individual who is digitally learned and have acquired extensive array of fundamental ICT, networking skills and has capacity to connect digitally to the general populace through social networks with observance to behavioral procedures, of finding, capturing, evaluating information and recognizing communal challenges ahead of time and providing solutions (Gui & Argentin, 2011).

### **Features of the Digital Library**

Digital libraries is presently a crucial resource in all communities of practice in education, legislature, judiciary, health and economics. A library without online access to resources or at least a portal through which library patrons access other institutional databases is considered to be highly limited in its reach and effectiveness, while information from databases must be accurate, accessible for user's needs. The following are some vital features of a digital library: The digital library should be capable of preserving large information with limited space, has global access to information, and has digital resources which can be accessed simultaneously by different users, patron's use of search terms like title, author, subject or ISBN to search for information. The digital library is an organized set of electronic resources, services and infrastructure which support constant learning, investigation, scholarly communication and preservation of the resources (Trivedi, 2010; Rajkumar, 2011; Uzuegbu, 2012).

DelRosso and Lampert (2013) pointed that digital library hosts the electronic information of every university by enhancing communication and interactions amongst users in a learning environment. A worthy example of digitization of resources is the Open Educational Resource (OER).

OER is a form of digital library with free online resources for lecturers, students and the general public, it is a platform for enhancing knowledge on different subject areas without hidden charges or licenses attached. OER comprises multimedia resources such as course materials, textbooks, audio lectures, streaming video and other educational resources etc. which can be accessed whenever there is availability of internet, and access to the users is provided with the privilege of adapting and re-using information without seeking permission from copyright holders, thus exposing users to the rich content of resources that may not be available in text books. The advantage of OER is its ability to generate resources of libraries of secondary schools, polytechnics, universities, government organization using their institutional repositories as posited by Educause, (2010).

Institutions, globally are encouraged to share their intellectual property under an open license taking a cue from UNESCO with the initiative from the first global OER Conference held in (EPRSLibrary, 2013), this initiative have been adopted by others, for instance Open Course Ware (OCW), Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC), and recently by the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) where student's course materials are uploaded online for public use. This new feat has enhanced the quality of teaching and learning in NOUN and with the introduction of a feedback platform, users post their various learning challenges for appropriate action to be taken, thus making NOUN course writers and developers more experienced and better equipped and informed in handling and satisfying students queries thus increasing NOUN institutional repository.

OER has transformed the educational sector by refining educational curriculum for teaching, learning and research for users, it has also extended access for adult learners and students with very tight work schedule who ordinarily could not attend formal institution of learning, but are fortunate to have access for independent study. Additionally, learning resources such OER is adapted and reused to promote collaboration and participation which are vital tools of web 2.0 advancement in teaching and learning as noted in (Educause, 2010; Butcher, 2011).

### **Responsibility of the Digital Librarian**

The digital librarian is responsible for the creation and organization of ICT operations within the library by ensuring that digital resources are available and accessible thus assisting patrons to

navigate challenging situations via the internet. Library patrons are always in need of current information hence the regular use of the digital library and as a result, it is vital for digital librarians to keep abreast with current trends in ICT and develop skills that will enhance patron's information needs (Henderson, 2017). The digital librarians must ensure the following:

- † Regular access and use of digital information.
- † Cataloguing and classification of resources for easy retrieval and dissemination.
- † Bridges the gap between information explosion and patrons access to what is needed per time using Information Technology (IT) search skills.
- † Helps patrons with quality information by educating on citation of sources.
- † Regular backup of information for effective use and storage.

### **Effective Librarian's operation in the Digital Library**

- † University management must provide libraries with operational technology.
- † University librarians must spend money in the acquisition of laptops/ personal computers for library use.
- † Grant affiliations and permissions must not be given to academic librarians until they can keep basic library standards.
- † Constant accessibility of information technology facilities like internet must be compulsory for all librarians.
- † Regular training and awareness of e-resources programs must be encouraged.
- † Regular access and subscription of electronic resources.
- † Librarians must be encouraged to adapt to current trends.
- † Enough funds must be available to librarians for personal development and effective service delivery.
- † Library management must engage collaboration with foreign donors who can assist in offering scholarship programs for research activities.
- † Adequate arrangement ought to be provided for alternative power supply especially in library to manage IT facilities.

- † Library patrons should be educated in the use of computer application for surfing the net, information retrieval, storage, and information technology applications.
- † Adequate work stations should be deployed to permit patrons access to the internet.
- † University management must collaborate with librarians to make available funds for building and increasing institutional repositories.
- † Functional digital resource management course must be incorporated in library & information science syllabus to enable future library professional's access to some practical knowledge in managing digital resources.
- † Associations such as Nigeria Library Association (NLA), Librarians Registered Council of Nigeria (LRCN) etc must create awareness through seminars, workshops amid librarians on current trends in ICT.
- † Global collaboration is compulsory in the library profession else libraries will be far behind from the current services.
- † Digital librarians must be proactive in making decisions on digital resources.
- † Academic libraries should to create a collection development policy for her digital resources.

**Source:** Sexena (2014)

### **Maintenance of Digital Resources**

The digital librarian ensures that library resources are adequately maintained and stored for current and future use by patrons. These resources include: electronic journals/books, institutional repository and social media.

Electronic journals commonly referred to as 'e-journals' are accessed on the internet and information in this journal has been organized by librarians and publishers in such a way that access through the journal can be through the title, author, date of publication or International Standard Serial Number (ISSN). An example is (online databases or OPAC). E-journals convey current research works which individuals or institutions can subscribe to for a fee and access to these the journals is achieved with the help of username and password. Managing electronic

journals and books are expensive because it requires constant subscription for renewal as noted by DelRosso, (2013).

Electronic books are commonly called (e-books) which can be accessed via the internet. Ebooks comprise text and images and can be used with desktop computers, laptops, tablets, or smartphones. Information in an electron book is organized such that it is accessed through the title of the book, author, date of publication and International Standard Book Number (ISBN).

E-books can easily be downloaded, cut, pasted, retrieved and stored by library patrons at will.

Digital collections and repository is the capacity of patrons to access content, use, retrieve and store information via the web with the support of a server. Digital collection and repository include digital books, journals, scholarly output of researcher's works that are created, organized, preserved and accessed by patrons.

Regular preservation and accessibility of resources is mandatory for libraries and digital librarians; therefore policies in archiving and duplication of resources are undertaken with utmost care, in the event of any disaster or system crash. Librarians must acknowledge the fact that library resources cannot last forever; therefore efforts should be employed in protecting the resources for future use. It is essential that some key factors are put in consideration when preserving digitized resources to ensure care, ability for continuous use, sustainability and high integrity, especially information of historical documents. These information if it is on paper, it can be scanned or microfilmed for future use (Njeze, 2012).

Digital library catalogue involves electronic operations within the library which are preserved using a server. Preservation practices in a digital environment is highly technical and costly, and needs the services of a librarian with ICT skills to effective backup digital records created for both on-site or off-site.

Digital librarians use social media sites to communicate with library patrons by creating and disseminating library information with great speed and reaching a lot of people at same time on Twitter, Facebook and Whatsapp and other platforms. Past research shows that library patrons were not interested in librarians invading the social media space, but Gagliardi, (2011) has shown that there is a change in the attitude of library patrons, because twitter handle have

scrawled into conference/workshop emblems and identity cards, and hashtags have advanced into conference logo. Presently, digital librarian use social networking tools like Linked-in to collaborate and communicate with colleagues and intending employers by displaying their curriculum vitae for job openings for friends and library patrons using mobile app device on smartphones.

Mobile Application commonly termed “Mobile App” is application software projected to run on mobile device such as smartphones, tablet and iPhone. Most young adults in the 21<sup>st</sup> century use mobile app to access a lot of information from their mobile phones such as emails, listen to live streaming music, films and lectures on you-tube. The digital librarian can use mobile app in smartphones to bridge the digital divide by creating some handles on mobile phones by searching for trending information, include library related issues and posting information to library patrons (Hood, 2011; Smith, 2011).

### **Varying roles of the Digital Librarian**

Technology has been advancing from one level to another, it is therefore essential for librarians to accept champions of this change. Digital librarians have embraced several social networking skills in performing daily operations, to remain impactful in the digital space. They are versatile, friendly, possess relevant ICT skills, ability to access, use, organize, retrieve, and disseminate information on library patrons via social networking, instant messaging, searching and a host of other activities. A digital librarian must function using electronic devices such as desktop (personal computer), laptops, tablets iPhone and smartphones/wrist watch provided there is provision for internet to reach out to patrons. Librarians are not only advantaged, but have the responsibility to discover their hub and the way to sustain the task of using knowledge to understand the past, present, and create an ideal future.

In recent times, the digital librarian has transformed into an information consultant, collaborator, researcher/facilitator, mediator and publisher, they organize the virtual space for communities of practice, and they are educators/ directors in the new age where information literacy is a prerequisite for information access (Lankes, 2011; Wikipedia, 2015). The digital librarian have transformed into the following:

- † **Collaborative Agent:** Scholars are of the opinion that library and information professionals make significant contributions to knowledge via collaboration with lecturers in the university environment in different subject as opined by (Hancks, 2011; Kranick, 2011; these collaborations provide library professional's great exploit in new area of practice and confer them with management responsibilities. Moreover, services rendered by the digital librarian's enhance their visibility and confers recognition in the society in places like government, commerce, education and in the field of Arts and Science etc.
  
- † **Information Manager:** The digital librarian as a manager skilled at connecting patrons with relevant information which can enhance their information needs (Kolvitz, 2017). Omoisejimi, (2015) averred that the function of an information manager involves recognition and enquiry of vital and existing data in preparation and organization of exploits by increasing knowledge in order to accomplish managerial goals. Institutions globally, recognize the benefits of requesting library professionals in the knowledge manager scheme because librarians can successfully contribute in the development of knowledge formation which includes methods for data capture, utilization and security the library. The formation of a knowledge center in an organization requires inputs from three categories such as users, knowledge professionals and technology experts and as information manger the digital librarian should be able to disseminate information to everybody.
  
- † **Researcher:** Digital librarians are greatly experienced in research processes and have an exceptional understanding of organization of information resources in various subject titles. Librarians contribute to research by providing access to vital information through searching the internet, acquiring, organizing, classifying and disseminating information to patrons and the function of the digital librarian is to sieve, scrutinize and navigate through massive assignment on internet which is a prominent role as noted by Omoisejimi (2015).

- ‡ **Mediator:** Digital librarians are becoming more of the central personality of linking professionals in different communities of practice, and also perform a mediating role. The process of producing requires negotiations among stakeholders and connotes an understanding of the subject matter, the ability to sift and filter through the resources and the technical skills for sorting/classification of information.
  
- ‡ **Publisher:** The digital librarian functions as a publisher by making information resources available online for use library patrons. Libraries are pertinent in the publishing process through communications by improving knowledge sharing and content organization, management and delivery policies (Kolvitz, 2017). Examples include several universities in the macro community like – Stanford University’s High Wire Press, John Hopkins University’s Project MUSE and California Electronic Library’s eScholarship schedule, where librarians act in the capacity of distributors, incubators, and are engaged directly in the process of publishing.

### **Digital Librarian in the Micro Community**

Digital librarians are skillful and develop ability to present information in a digital manner, such that they can function as intermediary between digital libraries where huge information can be accessed through internet and library patrons. In same vein, the digital library is no longer recognized to a structure on campus where information is kept by librarians but it is now a digital platform where information is accessed directly by patrons at their convenience via the internet through GOOGLE, OPAC or online databases with the use of username and password as the case may be. For librarians in university libraries in Nigeria to remain relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century they must possess current knowledge and skills to impact positively on their numerous patrons, but some of the challenges observed from past literature indicate some hindrances to digital librarians in the micro community.

A number of librarians are not technology driven and do not possess ICT skills to suitably fit into the digital space hence the need for several trainings to acquire current ICT skills (Ugwu & Ekere; 2010 and Ojedukun & Okafor 2011). Digital librarians should continuously

enhance their knowledge through personal development for enhanced efficiency at work, competing with fellow colleagues which result in increased productivity (Nwaeke, 2017). Low information literacy skills and inability of some library patrons to access internet has contributed to some the hindrances, although internet service exist in some Nigeria university libraries, but access to the internet is limited. Inadequate telecommunication infrastructure by service provider and insufficient band width. Poor electricity supply, inadequate funds by the government to function appropriately, lack of electronic resources and inadequate library staff as opined Abdulsalami (2012; Gui and Argentin, 2011)

Past literature illustrates that digital literacy among youths in Nigeria is high, but the skills to critically assess content via the internet is low all these have contributed to some of the hindrances of digital librarian in the micro community.

## **Conclusion**

Digital librarian has evolved into a challenging force in all community of practice, especially in the area of learning and research where librarians have developed from being a supervisor of academic products to a member in the academic communiqué practice. The digital librarian is no longer just an information expert but also a collaborator, researcher, facilitator, mediator, and publisher linking the micro community to the macro. The implications of these modern roles in the prospect of the digital library and the manager of electronic resources is presently beyond speculation. The digital librarian in the micro community have been able to meet up with its counterparts globally, but there is need for government to introduce policies and strategies that will enable libraries in Nigeria achieve the purpose of digital libraries and make efforts at providing adequate funds, adequate telecommunication infrastructure by service providers, provision of constant power, sufficient library staff, provide enabling working environment and appropriate staff training and development for librarians.

Library scholars and policy makers are expected to formulate guidelines and regulations that would safeguard efficacy and maintain high ethical structural and administrative principles in the digital space. Therefore, in line with Lankes, (2011), the aim of the digital librarian is to enhance the general public with knowledge creation in their community; thus linking the micro to the macro.

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