Digital Libraries in Africa: Evolution, Status, and Challenges

Stella E. Igun, Delta State University, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses evolution, status, and problems/challenges of digital libraries in Africa. Different definitions and concepts of digital library were given. Benchmarks/standards developed by recognized leaders in the movement towards digital libraries and plans that identify appropriate time frames to strategize have been noted. Characteristics and benefits of digital libraries were enumerated. Global digital library initiatives for Africa and digital library projects in Africa are still minimal. Prospects for digital libraries for Africa and their users were also highlighted. Problems/challenges of digital libraries in Africa were discussed. Recommendations for establishment of digital libraries in Africa and conclusion were made.

Keywords: Africa, Connectivity, Digital Libraries, Evolution, Network

INTRODUCTION

Digital libraries are libraries with collections of documents in electronic, organised form. These documents are usually available on the internet or on CD-ROM (Compact-disk read-only memory) disks. Phrases such as “virtual library,” “electronic library,” “Library without walls,” and then “digital library are being used interchangeably to mean the same concept. There is a global increase in the development of digital libraries following the extensive application of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) development. The digital libraries are becoming the gathering center and producer base of various information resources, a point for communicating among experts, libraries and readers, the navigator to discover, search and capture information and perfect for high level information service. The emergence of digital libraries is making the traditional libraries to be renovated and developed into new technological libraries and the traditional librarians into ICT based librarians (Zhou, 2005).

BENCHMARKS FOR DIGITAL LIBRARIES, EVOLUTION, AND STATUS

The digital library Federation under the leadership of Carnegie Mellon (a recognized leader in the movement towards digital library) developed a plan that identifies appropriate time frames, strategises and attendant costs for migrating to predominantly digital library. The strategic planning cycle of the Digital Library, Federation (DLF) comprised about 25 libraries in the United States. These libraries stated that the “future of libraries is digital” (Raitt, 1999). The University administration in United State...
endorsed this concept and started providing additional funding for the purchase of digital resources while they also recognized the correct deficiencies in existing print collection following a developmental plan that was drawn up for achieving a digital future since 1998. Digital Library Federation states that libraries should be “predominantly digital” measured into standard in the following:

i. 99% of interlibrary loan request submitted electronically
ii. 95% of all use of library-provided indices is digital (75% is used remotely)
iii. 65% of reference desk questions are answered with digital resources
iv. 50% of journals have some digital components
v. 31% of interlibrary loan photocopies arrive digitally
vi. 10% of the materials budget is expended on digital resources
vii. 5% of all resources are digital full text.

The university libraries made the commercial vendors to implement national standards that effectively assessed the use and impact of digital libraries on education, broad data about growth/use of the web as an academic resource. The goal of academic libraries generally is to meet the teaching, learning, scholarly research and other information needs of their faculties, students and affiliations and to do this effectively and efficiently. It was in order to meet this standard and goal that the digital library Federation provided the above benchmark/standards as guide for all libraries and especially for the academic libraries and other institutions. Similarly, Nikisch et al. (2005) stated that Poland, established consortia of regional libraries for the purpose of networking the traditional libraries into digital libraries and that the university libraries are to ensure network access to digitalized resources. The academic libraries of Poland have an initiative that developed network of regional digital libraries, as they reported. Developed countries have responded to major changes brought about by the ICT age in the library world. The libraries abroad can be said to have moved into reliance on digital technology systems. From this literature, it can be said also that digital database and vendor connections directly impact the academic libraries collections decisions especially.

Miller (2000) also noted in a library survey, which found more digital resources in more than 99% of all academic libraries in United Kingdom. The libraries generally are experiencing a weak library economy, a new digital information system and pervasion which has resulted into digital information system that must be managed. Most libraries of the developed countries have responded to major changes brought about by new technology age in the library world (Miller, 2000). The United Kingdom university libraries have been enjoying the full benefits of digitalized libraries and network connectivity. The infrastructure installed were planned for maximum benefits and an effective national policy was put in place for digital library and information networking. The policy makers in United Kingdom at all level recognized the national economic and cultural imperatives of investing in network technologies (UKOLN, 2004). It was essential for the United Kingdom to invest in network technologies since they did not want to lose out internationally in terms of industrial competitiveness, scientific research, education, library and scholarship. Fund is very vital resource for the establishment of network technologies and digital libraries, other important factors include clear vision, expertise, good management that have been reported as priorities in United Kingdom for libraries and Information Centres (UKOLN, 2004). The United Kingdom also has a single highly effective and reliable nationally funded nationwide academic and digital research network in Joint Academic Network (JANET) which has been upgraded to Super JANET. This is a network of mainly digital academic libraries in United Kingdom which provide powerful high capacity network capable of supporting voice, video and data communication.

A digital library is described as a distributed system that has the capability to share and use
Related Content

Dynamic Metadata Management System for Digital Archives: Design and Construction
[www.igi-global.com/chapter/dynamic-metadata-management-system-digital/8132?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/chapter/dynamic-metadata-management-system-digital/8132?camid=4v1a)

Evolving Tool Support for Digital Librarians
[www.igi-global.com/chapter/evolving-tool-support-digital-librarians/8138?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/chapter/evolving-tool-support-digital-librarians/8138?camid=4v1a)

Patent and Trade Secret in Digital Libraries
[www.igi-global.com/chapter/patent-trade-secret-digital-libraries/19896?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/chapter/patent-trade-secret-digital-libraries/19896?camid=4v1a)