Chapter 4

Myths and Challenges of Building an Effective Digital Library in Developing Nations: An African Perspective

Olajide Adebayo Afolabi
Bowen University Library, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

Building an effective digital library goes beyond just digitizing materials or providing access to electronic resources. There must be a proper understanding of what an effective digital library is. Most developing nations are facing challenges ranging from myths to infrastructural, technical skill and technology dearth, proper planning and implementation; licensing, copyrights and access; interoperability and metadata issues. Recommendations include: political will power, proper planning and management; collaboration and competence skill acquisition with positive attitude from librarians.

INTRODUCTION

Accessibility and availability of resources in the library has been highly influenced by the advent of information technology giving rise to e-resources and digital materials which can be accessed and used by many users with a single login or from multiple spots. It is the contribution of information communication technology and the impact of internet on information processing, storing, searching, dissemination and use that have made information become expeditious easy and user friendly (Chandel & Saikia 2012). The idea of a digital library has been on for some time now and it has been seen as an expensive and resource-intensive project anytime and anywhere not minding the development of the society or environment where it is to be built.

Creating an effective digital library will definitely pose some challenges for the present and future technologies and librarians. The idea of digital resources with the antecedent of its integration into the library is not going to be without some forms of constraint due to the following reasons: digital infor-
mation has a unique nature, unlike the conventional print and even microform materials that librarians are familiar with. Also they are less fixed- some digital resources appear today at a particular site and by tomorrow they are removed. Other reasons are digital materials are easily copied, so the question of copyright comes up as to how do practitioners in the field ensure copyright or licensing appropriately; remote accessibility by many users at the same time- libraries like to work with statistics of use and user and this may be a bit challenging in a digital environment as a resource is copied; you may never be able to tell how many users will have access to it.

Digital library in the work of Pandey and Misra (2014) has been described as one of “the newest methods of managing information resources in the new information age, whereby information technology has assisted in making information accessible to people even in their homes” (p. 136). Mutula and Ojedokun (2008) noted that it is a library that contains no conventional print information resources, but electronic books, journals and newspapers. They further observed that the digital library may not occupy a physical space, whereas users need to go and gain access to its electronic resources.

Li and Furht (2014) in their own work:

*Stated that digital libraries are systems that combine the machinery of digital computing storage and communication, in which the content, and software needed to reproduce, emulate and extend that services of collecting, cataloguing, finding and disseminating information offered by traditional libraries based on paper and other materials. “They also viewed digital libraries as systems providing a community of users with coherent access to a large, organized repository of information and knowledge.” The ability of the user to access, reorganize, and utilize this repository is enriched by the capability of digital technologies.*

Gani and Magoi (2014) stated that, “digital libraries are perceived as libraries in which all information resources are available in computer process through which acquisition, storage, preservation, retrieval and dissemination of resources are carried out using digital technologies”. Trivedi (2010) stressed that digital libraries possess unlimited storage space at a much lower cost, enhance information users with coherent sources to a very large, organized repository of information and knowledge. A digital library, according to the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, is “an online collection of digital objects, of assured quality” (IFLA, 2013).

The requirement for the building of an effective digital library is a little bit more easier in the developed nations as most of the public resources and infrastructures are available almost for free or low cost or subsidized. While in some developing country one will have to factor these infrastructure into the building of an effective digital library. Before embarking on such a project, it is important and pertinent to consider some basic principles underlying the whole process of building a digital library. The core basic principles underlying the actualization of such a project are the design, implementation, and maintenance of any digital library.

By building an effective digital library, the system must be construe in such a way that it will contain valuable content, such that the usefulness will be for both the current and future users. One of the cardinal point for a digital library is the preservation of the information materials and at the same time allowing users from multiples place to use them at the same time. Adhering to the principles and practices that evolves from the standards of building an effective digital library will place such a library in a much better position. Valuable contents to be digitized must be handled with care and rendered in the highest possible quality and should not disappear (Amollo, 2011).
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