Chapter 17

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ABSTRACT

The advent of digital libraries has revolutionized dissemination and utilization of information in this modern age. However, intellectual property constitutes a major barrier to the development of digital libraries. This chapter examines the roles of digital librarians in the management of intellectual property, especially copyright, in digital libraries. Digital librarians are expected to safeguard intellectual property in digital libraries by controlling the utilisation of copyrighted information resources and educating their user communities on the copyright status of information resources. The need for digital librarians to increase their digital collections through digitization and partnership with other digital libraries is also discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Libraries are compendiums of knowledge obtainable in the past and present times of human societies. Throughout the course of human history, libraries have served as dependable repositories of human knowledge and intellect in diverse fields of human endeavour. These treasures of human knowledge are enshrined in information resources such as books, serials, microfilms, theses and audiovisual materials which are properly organised and made available for the consultation of library users. With the aid of these information resources, libraries provide accurate information to their patrons, educate them and offer a variety of specialised services which are vital to the satisfying their information needs. How-

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ever, in this information age, the conventional library setting which is restricted to physical structures stocked with books and other information resources is increasingly being replaced by digital libraries. This transition of libraries from conventional scenes to digital platforms becomes expedient due to the need for libraries to continuously offer improved services to their users’ communities.

According to Oseghale (2008), library services must create a balance between specific research and information needs and a usable collection of information materials to meet the needs of the institution’s academic programmes. Budd (2004) also observed that a library is no longer a passive information repository; it is now a locus of the social phenomena that contribute to knowledge. The overall consensus is that libraries need to become more “digital” and offer ubiquitous and seamless access to its resources by users anywhere and anytime (Papazoglou et al, 2007). The advent of digital libraries has a significant impact on the information industry affecting the generation and dissemination activities of information providers such as libraries, archives, publishers, academic institutions and the eventual usage of such information by users. Digital libraries have been the prerogative of the developed world, and due to the advancements and affordability in computer and communication technology, they are, though slowly, getting importance in other countries (Vijayakumar and Jeevan, 2002). Digital libraries came into existence with their own unique characteristics which must be properly managed by digital librarians in order to meet the rising information needs of their users’ communities.

The Concept of Digital Libraries

Brief Historical Background of Digital Libraries

Digital libraries are electronic forms of the conventional book-keeping libraries. The concept of digital library came into existence due to the development of the Internet and other Information and Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure which serve as the building blocks for this type of libraries. The establishment of digital libraries became evident due to the pressing need to share information as means of bridging the increasing gap between information users and the available information in different disciplines. The ultimate goal of using innovative technologies in ensuring knowledge sharing as a fundamental step for societal progress set the stage for the development of digital libraries. According to Candela, Castelli and Pagano (2011), digital libraries are a relatively young, highly multidisciplinary scientific field with its roots resting in the last two decades of research and practice. The move towards an increasing digital library development started in the 1970s and accelerated considerably in the 1990s with research programmes such as eLib in the United Kingdom and the Digital Libraries Programme in the United States (Secker, 2008).

Digital libraries projects started in the early 1990s with the Vatican Library Accessible Worldwide; Alexandria Digital Library (ADL) – a project of the University of California, Santa Barbara; and the Virginia Tech – Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University setting the pace in digital libraries development. After these early projects, a lot has happened in the area of digital libraries thus transforming them into focal points of information dissemination in this modern age. Digital libraries are now used in a wide variety of ways to support a multitude of needs across different domains such as academic, clinical and business (Adams and Blandford, 2006). Digital libraries now constitute an integral part of academic institutions used in promoting learning, teaching and research activities.