

*Full Length Research*

# Libraries Connect and Engage People with Their Culture in A Digital Society

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Accepted 20 February 2022

The library survived the doom predicted upon it with the advent of technology in the 1970s. The library has been relevant in all ages, irrespective of the in-road made by technology in information processing and management. It is the generational asset of the library that has made it to continue to render services even in the face of competitors, such as the Internet. This chapter looks at the relationship between the library, technology and cultural preservation and how they complement one another. The role of the librarian in 'midwifing' them was also discussed.

**Keywords:** Libraries, Librarian, Culture, Digital Society

**Cite This Article As:** Emenyonu, C.C., Unegbu, M.C., Iwuagwu, P.I., Madu-Malachy, V. (2022). Libraries Connect and Engage People with Their Culture in A Digital Society. *Inter. J. Acad. Lib. Info. Sci.* 10(2): 45-49

## INTRODUCTION

Libraries have always been more than books. They have continuously displayed an innate ability to adapt and change their resources and services to fit the evolving needs of their user communities and the society at large. As enablers of access to information, regardless of format, libraries have had to embrace the information and communication technological advances of the 21st century. They now strive to provide computers, Internet access, offline and online databases, scanners, mobile devices, MP3 players, e-resources (ALA, 2012). All of these are enabling libraries to evolve from mere buildings of collections to spaces offering new works of opportunities to the society by making connections between the users and information resources, knowledge, communities and platforms. Thus, technology has facilitated the expansion of library service.

According to Unagha (2021), libraries provide free or subsidized Internet access and computers for users to open and read e-mail, Skype, research information, do their assignments and connect to opportunities for economic purposes. This is of utmost importance as more resources and government services are being made available only online. The 21st century library, therefore, helps in building digitally inclusive communities as it bridges the digital gaps for those who cannot afford computers and Internet access at home. Many libraries provide services online through platforms such as Twitter, blogger and bookmarking sites and offer wireless Internet so that people can access, connect and engage their resources from outside the library walls. Some libraries have developed smart phones apps and scanned codes for access to library services and content (Osuigwe & Unagha, 2018). Social media used by libraries, especially academic libraries have great potential to enhance

provision of library and information service due to their relatively better access to ICT and well defined user groups. The advent of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) which morphed from correspondence courses, distance education and the Open University system programmes have opened new pathways of information services for libraries. Millions all over the world are engaged with these courses from the three prominent providers namely, Courera, Udacity and Edx. The interactions and evaluations are all done online on different platforms. Many participants all over the globe are turning to libraries for resources in their databases to read up their chosen programmes. It has also been observed that many of the participants use the public libraries to access the platforms for the courses (Wright, 2013).

### **Libraries Connect and Engage People with their Culture**

Libraries are incorporating innovative creativity and becoming spaces where people, especially the young, are given the chance to learn how to use tools and materials to develop and create art works, science projects amongst others known as Makerspaces. These spaces contain some or all of the following depending on the interest of the libraries and available funding-computers with Internet, software, 3D printers, electronics, craft and Do it yourself (DIY) tools. Makerspaces promote learning in informal environments that encourage youngsters to better understand science and technology (Kroski, 2013).

Indeed, the massive intrusion of technology into our profession has forced changes in the ways librarians do their jobs and interact with users and colleagues. The ability to quickly grasp new concepts that can improve information handling and delivery is important. As advances in technology development occur, librarians are integrating those advances into their systems of service and are able to apply those advances in improving user interactions. It is important to state here that libraries have willingly and openly accepted the technological changes and challenges as valuable to library profession and duties.

Technology has drastically changed the landscape of librarianship. It has had far-reaching effect on the profession. The idea of the library has been completely moved from a repository of resources with controlled access and defined rules to a gateway of information that can be accessed anywhere and at any time. The library is no longer defined by a physical space as the uninformed has termed it (Wilson, 2015). The advances in information and communication technology have radically changed the way libraries functioned. Hitherto, the library

collection, print, and non-print, had traditionally been used by one reader at a time. Once a book is with a reader, no other reader had access to that book at that particular time. Technology changed all that. When such a book is made available online or in digital form, it can be accessible by multiple subscribers, in multiple places and at multiple times. According to Khoo (2002), library without walls is described as existing in space free from the spatial and temporary constraints of bricks and mortar, a space in which patrons (provided they have computers, modems and other gadgets) can search library catalogues and access electronic files without having physically to walk through a library's doors.

Recognizing the cultural importance of sharing, Mahatma Gandhi said that, "no culture can live, if it attempts to be exclusive". The stimulus to share and reuse information and knowledge comes in many guises. Perhaps the most deep-rooted of our human instincts is the desire to preserve our culture for future generations. This is one of the most important functions of libraries. Libraries are rich repositories of historically and culturally significant collections, many of which are not available anywhere else in the world. Without an appropriate copyright exception, a library could not preserve or replace a damaged work while it is still covered by copyright. For example, it could not lawfully copy or digitize an old newspaper or a unique sound recording to preserve it. Without appropriate library exceptions, this cultural heritage would be lost to future generations.

Today, many works are only "born digital", such as websites or electronic journals, and are unavailable in print format. Without the legal means to preserve and replace works in a variety of media and formats-including format shifting and migrating electronic content from obsolete storage formats- many of these works will inevitably be lost to future generations of historians.

### **The Role of Libraries in the Preservation of Cultural Heritage**

For centuries-every generation has aimed at keeping records about its labor so that it could be revised and studied by succeeding generations. Libraries have been central in collecting and documenting these heritages through the following ways;

1. Provision of cultural materials for all sections of the host community; not only the largest or most powerful, hence the provision of cultural products from various ethnic minority groups.
2. Provision of space for cultural works for all both rich and poor.
3. Sustaining local cultural activities e.g. organizing and hosting story telling.

4. Presentation of lectures and seminars to disseminate information on political economic and cultural events in the society.
5. Ensuring that library collections and services help people to understand their local environment the homogeneity of the society or its diverse culture.
6. Take records of the cultural heritage of the community it serves. The recording should include valuable collections of the local history, tales; riddles, traditional technologies and traditional pharmacopoeia which can be used by the public in collective listening sessions.

### Librarians as Technology Savvy and Digital Natives

The use of technology has completely changed the roles of librarians. Librarians are becoming more and more technologically literate and digital natives and getting involved in the organization of information on electronic platforms. The use and application of technology in libraries have made librarians become digital natives. The expression, "digital native" has morphed to mean someone who is totally aware and understands technology. As digital natives, librarians act as a link between the digital information and the user in the following ways (Benson, 2001):

**a: *The Librarian as a Navigator:*** Navigating information is one of the traditional roles that librarians are already familiar with and it is one that has been carried forward and applied in a world of interconnected networks. Most of the information on the Internet are unstructured. This is in the sense that it is not part of a database, spreadsheet, or other system that organizes information. All of the various indexes, bibliographies, catalogues and databases that exist in the Internet are invisible. It is impossible for library patrons to know all of these resources. Approaches used for searching these tools and the languages used to conduct the searches differ. The librarian, who is educated in the art of search, helps the patron to find the best and fastest route to items on the Internet. Librarians are trained in the art of finding archived copies and original sources on the Internet.

**b: *The Librarian as an Intermediary:*** In certain situations, some activities are too complicated or too time-consuming to teach patrons. In those circumstances, the librarian steps in as an intermediary with experience to do the searching for patrons who have never searched online or learned to use a computer and are not interested in learning connecting to remote libraries or doing author, title, keyword or subject searches on a variety of automated systems. No matter how accurate an Internet search engine claims to be, there is no guarantee that the documents it finds are

actually relevant to the user's needs. Problems may result from poorly defined queries or the patron's unfamiliarity with the subject he is searching. Librarians can help in the sense of the individual pages of text by examining their content and in the case of hypertext document on the web by examining the context of the interlinked pages.

**c: *The Librarian as an Information Evaluator:*** When people publish information on the Internet, they are not always publishing with the same level of integrity, accuracy and artistic intent that reputable commercial publishers use. Whereas much of the information distributed by reputable commercial publishers go through a filtering process, the vast majority of information published on the internet is unfiltered. It is also difficult to tell at times what a document is, where it came from and who the author is. The librarian can help evaluate the information by questioning the authenticity of what they are reading by asking these questions:

- Who is the author? Is he/she qualified to write on the subject? Who the author is affiliated to.
- Is the information issued by a reliable organization?
- Has the information been evaluated by experts, reviewed by peers, or is it altered or quoted out of context?
- Date the document was created.
- Date the document was last updated
- What claim does the site make in terms of quality of its content? Is it based on research?
- Source of data -who created the site?

**d: *The Librarian as an Organizer:*** Prior to the existence of the Internet, librarians indexed only items that were owned and housed within the four walls of their libraries. With the advent of the World Wide Web (www), librarians began to index items owned and not owned by the library. The web enables librarians to provide access to chapters in electronic texts or paragraphs within hypertext documents. Librarians offer links to lecturers and students on their areas of study.

### Internet of Things (IoT) in Libraries

Internet of Things (IoT) refers to using intelligently connected devices and systems to obtain data gathered by embedded sensors, actuators in machines and other physical objects. IoT uses connecting media such as wireless sensors networks and physical objects to connect devices to each other and the Internet, with minimal direct human intervention to deliver service that meet the needs of wide range of academic libraries (Nag & Nikam, 2016). As per wikipcdia, Internet of Things is a network of physical objects or things embedded with

electronics, software, sensors, and network connectivity, enabling objects to be collected and exchange data. Objects can be sensed and remotely controlled across existing network infrastructure, creating opportunities for more direct integration between the physical world and computer-based systems, and resulting improved efficiency, accuracy, and economic benefit. Internet of Things (IoT) was coined by Kevin Aston of Procter and Gamble, later MIT's Auto ID centre in 1999. At that point he viewed RFID as essential to the IOT, which would allow computers to manage all things. The use of computers, smart phones, wifi, cameras, wireless sensors, videos, networks has made IoT the technology of the future.

Nowadays, the world is in the era of computing technology that is referred to as the Internet of Things (IoT). It is a new wave in the Internet development. The IoT has the capacity to improve services in the library organization. IoT is virtually applied to all aspects of life, both human and non-human. Though it is still emerging, it has revolutionized the way things are done and made life easier. Just imagine if one is on the road, and there is oil spillage on the road or some accident or traffic jam a few kilometres away, how wonderful it would be if the vehicle automatically senses it and signifies on the car's dashboard that there is some obstacle/danger ahead, and gives instructions to change the route and not only this, but provides the direction for the new route. Here, non-living objects (obstacles) are communicating with another non-living object (vehicle) and sharing information with each for human knowledge.

IoT is about extending the power of the Internet beyond computers and smart phones to a whole range of other things, processes and environment. The IoT is a system of interrelated computing devices, mechanical and digital machines, objects, animals or people that are provided with unique identifiers and the ability to transfer data over a network without requiring human-to-human or human-to-computer interaction (McClelland, 2020). According to Bansal & Furi (2018), the IoT is not only capable of influencing any of the tasks which would have been impossible automatically earlier but also has the potential to do it more efficiently, securely. So how libraries could be not affected by the power of IoT? At present, libraries have some technology-driven challenges. The IoT could help overcome not only these challenges but may give an important place in everyone's life.

### Application of Internet of Things in Libraries

A library is a growing organism and stays afloat, by incorporating technologies that make its operations easier and efficient. There are many areas that the library has applied IoT in its operations. According to Bansal &

Furi (2018), some of the areas of application of IoT in libraries include:

**a: Inventory Control:** With IoT, the movement of each information-bearing item in the library can be tracked. These are controlled by applying sensors on them. Though Radio frequency identification (RFID) already serves a bit of the same purpose, but IoT provides all the real time data on the mobile app of the librarian, and this makes inventory control possible and ultimately makes the library personnel require less work to do for stock verification.

**b: Circulation Services:** This service, as earlier discussed in this lecture involves activities such as user registration, charging and discharging of books and other library materials, maintaining records, creating and updating library cards, overdue reminders, etc. With IoT, online connection has been provided through mobile Apps to library users, which automate the rest of the circulation activities. Users are no longer required to queue in the circulation desk. They can check for book overdue time on their mobile devices. When a book is returned, an automated message is sent to the demanding user, in case the book is already issued out. In case of e-books, the IoT helps to issue the book, automatically. Additionally, if a user comes to the circulation desk and there is no staff present, the sensors at the desk can sense a library user who requires assistance. The computers can provide options for their preference/needs and take action accordingly.

**c: User Identification:** The sensors at the library gate can do face recognition of all visitors and will match the face with the available databases and then the gate will allow only the authorized users to enter. Otherwise, an electronic message will be sent to the librarian in-charge who can be anywhere and at anytime. The librarian can take action from a distance to open the door for the unknown face or not.

**d: Theft Management:** With tags on each item of the library inventory, a kind of tracking can be made all the time. To prevent theft, the library is enabled with high end sensors and transponders, which apart from signaling the authorities on their mobiles or by loud alarm, can also block the theft with taking automatic prompt action like shifting the door. A librarian at home remotely can see camera views of their office, send a warning when something is not going right or can approach the emergency service staff to take action.

**e: Book Tracking:** The IoT through mobile apps will allow library users to take a tour of the library on their mobile devices and keep track of the availability of

information materials on the shelves, despite the user's location. IoT helps librarians to track the library books wherever it is physically present, in case a book has been wrongly issued to anon-authorized user. In short, IoT means that all things are connected to the Internet to do three basic things:

- To collect information and then send it.
- To receive information and then act in it.
- That do both.

In all of these, IoT has made it possible to allow each authorized user to refer to the library without even being physically present.

## CONCLUSION

In this synergy between the library, the librarian and technology, librarians have the ability to determine the difference between new technology and necessary technology; which things really connect and improve services and which things merely make people look current. A cutting edge technology to one can be a bleeding edge technology to another. So what librarians do to connect and determine the difference is to carefully and essentially consider the new technology in the light of the core values of the library. The cultural Heritage of a Nation/Community is not something to be toyed with. It needs to be preserved for posterity. Moreover, it is the hub around which all development efforts should emanate otherwise the community will run into the problem of loss of identity, culture erosion, technology transfer and its resultant effect of underdevelopment.

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