CHANGING ROLE OF LIBRARIANS IN THE DIGITAL LIBRARY ENVIRONMENT: SKILLS, CURRENT TRENDS AND CHALLENGES

Dawa Doma Sherpa
Librarian, Dinhata College, Dinhata, Coochbehar
West-Bengal, India

ABSTRACT
This paper covers the challenging role of librarians in new digital library environment. The role of the librarian has become more dynamic and challenging in the digital age. Today the use of ICT (Information, Communication and Technology) has absolutely changed the role and responsibilities of librarians. The paper also tries to reflect skills, current trends and challenges required for the library and library professionals working at digital library environment.

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1. INTRODUCTION
Librarians are professionals trained in the acquisition, organization, retrieval, preserving the printed documents, dissemination of information and guide the users in searching the required information by them. Librarian also offers a helping hand for users to find out the required piece of information and to use it for personal and professional purposes. Today the concept of the librarian has rapidly changed under the influence of present electronic information age, where information is treated as an economic resource, a marketable commodity and as a social wealth, the librarians are to play an active and important role in the process of information communication system. The librarians are facing new challenges, new competitors, new demands, new expectations and a variety of information services from users. They are now to be more acquainted with the skill of handling new technologies related to collection, processing and dissemination of information. For working in the digital library environment, besides gaining the professional knowledge in library and information science, the library professionals should have the knowledge of information technology and its application in library operations and services, both in theoretical as well as practical level. The changing role of librarian implies a set of updated skills needed for facing the challenges created by the latest technologies in the present electronic information age.
OBJECTIVES

1. To define the concept of digital library.
2. The main objective of this paper is to explore the changing roles of the librarians to meet the changes and challenges in the digital environment.
3. To discuss about the various skills needed for the library professionals to meet the digital need of the user.

DEFINITION

Digital libraries may be defined as electronic information collections containing large and diverse repositories of digital objects, which can be accessed by a large number of geographically distributed users.

According to Clifford Lynch:
“Digital libraries are system providing users with coherent access to a very large, organized repository of information and knowledge”.

The Association of Research Libraries (ARL) in definitions and purposes of a digital library has defined a digital library as having these qualities

1. The digital library is not a single entity.
2. The digital library required technology to line the resources of many.
3. The linkage between the many digital libraries and information services are transparent to the end user.
4. Digital library collections are not limited to document surrogated: they extend to digital artifacts that cannot be represented or distributed in printed formats.

From the above definition, it may be briefly said that an ideal digital library is one in which all the information exists in digital form and all the functions are automated using advanced technologies.

1. CHANGING ROLES

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The responsibility of the librarian has increased in terms of packaging and repackaging of information, electronic publishing, advising users about the strategy to identify relevant electronic sources, etc. In such a new environment it will be very difficult for the librarian to decide what should be organized? How to give citation? How to organize the collection? etc. Thus librarian has to change himself and acquire more skills and additional role.

1.1. Leadership Role

One primary role of librarian is to provide leadership and expertise in the design, development, and ethical management of knowledge-based information system in order to meet the information needs and obligation of the patrons. He should enrich his management skills for organizing, managing and disseminating e-literacy to users.

1.2. Resource Person for Information, Editor and Publisher

The key role of librarians to work in a digital environment is as under:

Libraries have to cumulate all the relevant information from various resources on the different aspects that are of his/her scholar’s interest or in the interests of the organization, with which it is associated. Before collecting information he/she has to into consideration the following aspects for the end product, which they have to offer.
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- It must be according to requirement of its users.
- It must be equipped with powerful, easy to use, intelligent search engines.
- It must have attractive user interfaces.
- It must be reasonably priced.
- It must allow access from, and delivery to the users workstation.

1.3. Role of Librarians as Masters of Web
Librarian should be able to satisfy all type of users. Especially research scholar and young generation who uses internet frequently for the latest upgradation of the information. He should have knowledge of designing, developing, launching and maintaining of digital content management and assess, evaluate, recommend and test various methodologies policies and standards for utilizing computer software in the process of creating and preserving digital collections and resources.

1.4. Proactive Information Professional Role
The modern trend is for the role of the librarians to move from that of a passive intermediary role responsible for guiding patrons to appropriate information resources, towards that of a much more proactive professional role which includes analyzing and repackaging information, content information management and institutional digital repository management.

2. SKILLS
Librarian involved in information gathering, storage, retrieval and dissemination on one hand and on the other hand the computer specialists who supports the library and informational professionals in this endeavor. For successful implementation of Digital Library, it is essential that librarians are well trained and possess requisites knowledge and skills in this respect.

2.1. Technology Skills
Technology skills means those skills which are required to handle information technology and its other related fields such as computer operations, telecommunication media, creation of online database, designing of websites, searching information from internet etc.

2.1.1. Technological Tools Using Skills
Digital library environment means the advanced application of information technology on the library, so the librarian should have to be familiar with skills to handling information technology products, particularly keyboard, operating system, software, physical handling of gadgets, telecommunication products, DBMS, data and file management, DTP word processing, generation of reports, etc.

2.1.2. Skill of Using Internet
Skills of handling different computer communication networking architectures and systems i.e. LAN, MAN, and WAN as well as using of internet and other library related networks like INFLIBNET, CALIBNET, DELNET etc are required for a modern library professional working in IT environment to tackle the problems and challenges raised in building and maintaining a digital web-based library.
2.1.3. Skill of Using Computer Communication Networks

Speedy resource sharing and dissemination of information is possible only with the proper computer networking skills. Moreover, the library and information professionals should have the knowledge of network protocols like TCP/IP, UDP, HTTP, FTP etc.

2.1.4. Information Retrieval Skill

The librarian should have the professional technology skills required to apply information technology for service. This involves collection and organization of data in electronic form, indexing techniques, selection and evaluation of sources, searching techniques, updating techniques. The librarians should be in a position to help its diversified user community by providing retrospective searches, ready reference services, bibliographic service, selective dissemination of information services etc.

2.1.5. Traditional/Basic Skill

Traditional skill includes those basic skills, which are necessary for running operating a general traditional library. Skill for classification and cataloging of document, method of indexing and abstracting etc. are also required for the librarian working in the digital environment.

2.1.6. Communication Skills

Act as the mediator between information users seekers and the information resources or information providers.

- Communicates the value of library service to decision makers, staff and users.
- Communicates clearly and respectfully with customers and colleagues.
- Demonstrates active listening skills with customer and colleagues.
- Effectively negotiate with publishers, customers, management and vendors.

2.1.7. Managerial Skill

As the librarians are the manager of a library and information center, they should have some basic managerial skills for managing the different sections like Finance, Human resource etc. They should have to apply some of this managerial skill in planning, decision–making, motivation etc. Time management skill is one of the important managerial skills required for a successful librarian.

2.1.8. Preservation Skill

Like in the traditional library, the librarian in a digital library too should have the preservation skill for the E-Resources. They should have the knowledge of cryptography, firewall, and different anti-virus software for prevention and preservation of E-Resources.

3. CURRENT TRENDS

Before discussing on the new roles of librarians and information professional in the new era, let’s first look at the current trends discussed in most recent literature and information management. These current trends somehow or rather will have a bearing in shaping librarians and information professionals in the new era. They are summarized as follows:

- A vision towards information and knowledge rich society.
- Library functions in information and knowledge-based society.
- Knowledge–based economy-information and knowledge as drivers to boost the economy.
- Information management recognized as an important discipline.
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- Integrated and widespread ICT applications.
- Mushrooming of information systems-need for information system management (ISM).
- Role of digital/electronic/virtual library.
- Librarians are designated as cyber librarians.
- Competency-based assessment/training.
- Access role replace custodial role.
- Customer-focused/customer centered, user oriented approach in provision of services.
- Strategic alliances, partnership and collaborations.
- Librarians need new management knowledge and skills.
- Specialized knowledge and skills in library and information management.
- Trend to develop digital contents to facilitate access.

4. CHALLENGES
The major challenges faced by librarians in Digital Library Environment for providing digital information service to the knowledge society are:

4.1. Expensive: The major obstacle to digitization is that it is very expensive, especially to undertake alone in-house digitization. One estimate from the university of Michigan at Ann Arbor, the organization for JSTOR project puts the cost of digitization a signal page at 2 to 6 U.S Dollars price, based on his experience, say that certainly the provision of electronic publications to our users may have improved accessibility to information but not saved money.

4.2. Copyright: It is very easy to copy, replicate, message and distribute digital information. Copyright law has been violated in digital environment due to lack of control over content access and reproduction of multiple copies of digital media.

4.3. Technological Obsolescence: The major risk to digital object is not physical deterioration, but technological obsolescence of the devices (hardware and software) to read them.

4.4. Dependences on Technologies: Digital libraries are mostly dependent on suitable telecommunication link and computer system for proper utilization and information transfer, these libraries depend much on suitable technology and training of end users in handling of variety of retrieval software, search strategy, formulation and cost consideration in the case of online search.

4.5. Preservation: Archiving and preservation of electronic information may be one of the most challenging of all tasks. The digital storage media such as hard disks, tapes and floppy discs have a very short life span due to rapid technological obsolesces.

4.6. Pricing in Digital Environment: Pricing of information in the digital world is going to be very complex. Ownership is expected to give way to licensing, pay peruse, etc.

4.7. Technological Problem: As on today, the technology has not percolated to the required level, to make the digital libraries acceptable on par with the conversational libraries with printed documents.

2. CONCLUSION
Change is a basic natural phenomenon. Information technology is rapidly changing the world at every sphere including library. New tools of information technology have absolutely changed the role and responsibilities of librarians. In the Digital Library Environment, the librarians have to face many complex challenges posed by rapid revolutionary advances in Information Communication Technology. Librarians have to redesign their positions to meet evolving needs. Librarians need to improvement new practices and new technologies, manage change,
and improve performance to face future challenges of knowledge society. The role of librarian have changed in the digital library era. It is, therefore pertinent on the part of the librarian to acquire new skills required for developing and managing the digital libraries. The library and information professionals are required to acquire such knowledge and skills are the library is one of the highly information technology influenced service profession. The empowerment of library and information professionals with information technology skills is aimed at providing services that are expected of from the clientele in the new environment. Digital age has brought a tremendous change in the way information is stored and accessed. This has brought about a change in the concept of librarian, their collection and services. We must strive, struggle and improve new skills and take a leadership role in integrating these new systems and services into our libraries, for our own good and for the good of our users.

REFERENCES


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