

Review

Emergence of electronic library resources: A threat to librarians?

Oshilalu, Habdulahakeem Adeyinka

Bells University of Technology, Ota, Ogun State, Nigeria. E-mail: princeoshilalu@yahoo.com.
Tel: +2348062267882, +2348020711406.

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The influence of electronic library resources on the activities of librarians in modern age cannot be over-emphasized. Despite its huge influences, one wonders why it is perceived as a threat to the information professions? This work is much of a conviction and a call on librarians to embrace the emergence of electronic library resources as a development that is capable of increasing their productivity rather than perceiving it as any form of threat. The work examines some ways through which electronic library resources could appear in form of threat to Librarians. Moreso, it provides some measures that could be taken by librarians to counter the threat without much hassles. The article urges librarians to rise up to the task of getting the best out of the existence of electronic library resources. In conclusion, the article affirms that the emergence of electronic library resources is a true reflection that the library is a growing organism and the emergence of this set of library materials is one of the growths expected from library that is committed to meeting users' information needs within the shortest possible means of all type.

Key words: Library, librarians, library resources, electronic library resources, library user, librarians' threat, library growth.

INTRODUCTION

Does electronic library resources pose any form of threat to Librarians as an individual or librarianship as a profession? And why do they? If they do? Since the emergence of electronic publishing, libraries could not but include electronic materials into her collections. In modern age, books, journals and many others information materials are seen in electronic forms.

For effective service delivery, librarians are expected to be current with man and his varying demand for information and information resources. Also they are expected to be able to implement support mechanisms for these resources to obtain optimum use and users' satisfaction. It is no more news that the demand for electronic resources is on the high side compared to the demand for conventional library resources. For the library to remain a growing organism, librarians are expected to be the agent behind the growth. They are expected not to be lacking behind; they should grow and develop themselves (Skills very essential) to meet up with the numerous requirements of their clientele. With the rate at which technology is growing, one begins to wonder if man is able to grow in an equitable dimension. If man is

able to grow in line with technology, there is no problem but if he could not? It becomes a threat to man. The problem is not in computer thinking like men, but can men ever think like computers?

The issue of technology growth becomes an issue to librarians as a professional because they are expected to provide support mechanisms for the usage of every library material. Librarians are expected to have a good understanding of how users require information in the past and how technological growth has changed these processes over time. They are expected to keep acquiring knowledge in order to be able to guide users on e-resources access and use. Modern technology cough out new method of meeting users' information needs almost on daily basic. Also, it should be noted that users in the present age require fast and effective information and information materials within the shortest point in time.

On daily basis, loads and lots of information roll out via various components of modern technology. Invariably, not all that is published is credible enough for use by every information seekers/users. Based on that, librarians are faced with the challenge of linking the right set of



Figure 1. The CD shelf of Bells University of Technology Library, Ota.

information with the right set of users at the right point in time. Professionally, librarians are expected to link-up information resources with their users and vice versa. As professionals, librarians are expected to teach their users from information overload and explosion by teaching them techniques to use in accessing and assessing various information resources.

Information overload and explosion are problems posed by modern technology but they could be controlled by librarians as they are professionally groomed in information handling, processing, disseminating, delivery and usage. Librarians can teach their users skills such as reading skills, study skills and mail filtering skills. Also, libraries need to acquire more current information resources for use by their clientele.

ELECTRONIC LIBRARY RESOURCES {e-Resources}

Gone are those days when librarians deal basically with paper resources, libraries are now in sophisticated forms to the extent of earning itself so many names to connote its present status. Little wonder, libraries of present age are called names, such as “Virtual Library”, “Digital Library” and “Electronic Library”. Libraries now deal with electronic library resources that use computer and other closely related devices to access and use the information content. Electronic library resources are computer readable files that occupy lesser space compared to the traditional library resources. Aina (2003) opines that access and usage of e-resources can only be from computer and/or a closely related device. Microcomputers, mainframe, mobile phones and many others are means through which individual or group could use and or access electronic resources via a local or remote area network (Tenopir, 2003). Figure 1 below is a good example of an electronic library resource located in an academic library.

Electronic resources consist of data (information represented by numbers, text, graphics, images, maps, moving images, music, sound, and many others).

programs (instructions that process data for use) or a combination of data and programs. The material is available in monograph, serial, e-book and sometimes on a website (Rule 9.0A1 of AACR2, 1988).

The rate at which information and information materials are being stored and distributed electronically is on the increase per day. Resources such as books, journals, indexes, dictionaries, encyclopedias and recreational materials (E.g. games), are available for use in electronic form in the present electronic age. Electronic materials are acquired via purchase, subscription or freely from their source. Publishers of various e-resources adhere to some standard features, though; some electronic resources have features unique to their usage. Therefore, librarians need to undergo training in order to effectively administer Electronic Information Resources.

HOW IT BECOMES A THREAT

Like or dislike? Electronic library resources have come to stay. The emergence of electronic library resources is meant to be of great benefit to librarians but unfortunately, it becomes a threat to some sets of librarians. Primarily, computer and its components seem to be designed basically to communicate with each other. Only those who understand the various languages of the computer can conveniently communicate to the computer. If the computer is truly a tool for an information age as referred to by Capron (2000), librarians have to sit up to be an information provider of the modern age as well. Unfortunately, a only few set of people with “Mutually Exclusive Skills” have the ability to communicate effectively with the computer and human. Librarians are therefore charged with the responsibility of understanding the various languages spoken by the computer in order to be able to communicate effectively with the computer and their users simultaneously.

Foremost, this set of library materials will continue to threaten any librarian that hates dealing with electronic (Computers to be precise). Citing the case of Alex Zeffertt, a real-time systems software developer who does not like computers yet he develops software for use on computers. Obviously, some people do not like the computer but yet they have to deal with it (Miller, 2004). Imagine a librarian of the 21st century that does not like the computer not to talk of dealing with it. One can not but keep imagining how such a professional intends coping with the present of electronic resources amidst library collections. To such an individual, the emergence of electronic library resources will be a threat. The fact that one loves the computer is not convincing enough to know how to operate the computer. But loving the computer can help in developing computer skills. To be able to use the computer, one should have the ability to use computer packages very well. The problem that is noted here is that, by the time one is mastering a

computer package, another package that is likely to be better is developed and released. Librarians should be wary of the fact that computers appears in different forms. The fact that computer and its components keep developing on irregular interval is much of a threat on its own. It is just fortunate and unfortunate that computers keep growing and it will keep growing; inasmuch as people keep conducting research for better means of service delivery. Could this be the brain behind Nicholas Negroponte's computer quotes that goes thus:

“Computing is not about computing anymore, it is about living”.

Oshilalu (2009) opines that virtually everything done by man in the 21st century is computer related.

This claim asserted that computer and other components (Electronic Library Resources inclusive) will continue to be a threat to not just librarians but every human that fails to develop himself. Since librarians are expected to be current, those that are not developing themselves will continue to be threatened by the presence of electronic library resources till their kingdom comes. And eventually, they will have themselves to blame.

To err is human, but to really foul things up requires a computer (Farmer's Almanac). Really, computer can be a mess sometimes. Considering the fact that in a few minutes, a computer can crash and stop operating for a long period of time, it is enough to be taken as a threat to librarians. Librarians have to be very careful in dealing and handling of the computer in order not to lose information/information materials stored on it.

EMERGENCE OF ELECTRONIC LIBRARY RESOURCES: A THREAT TO LIBRARIANS

The emergence of electronic library resources has not been a threat to librarians but it will continue to threaten librarians that fail to admit that it is more of a 'challenge than a threat'. The emergence of electronic library resources challenges the professionalism of librarians in lots of forms. It challenges the diversify nature of the profession and it serves as a test of guiding principle (s) of Librarianship. If the library is truly a growing organism; then the emergence of electronic library resources should be seen as a growth in the profession. Are Librarians of developing countries truly of diminished resources? Ogunjipe (2005) ascribes Librarians of developing country to be of diminished resources simply because most of the materials they have in their libraries are not current. But that does not mean librarians in developing countries should relent in their quest to meet up with the information needs of their clientele. Adopting electronic resources into their library collection will help in quite a lot of ways since library users of the present age are going electronic.

Though, the emergence of electronic library resources

is a plus to librarianship, it presented itself in form of threat to librarians and it is admitted as threat by some Librarians/individuals. The challenges presented in form of threat by electronic library resources include the following.

Increase workload

With the emergence of electronic library resources, librarians now have additional work load. Aside having to add electronic resources to their library collections, they have lots and loads of electronic resources to treat. Ifidon (2009, 2010) affirms that electronic publishing has led to information overload and explosion. Based on this, librarians are now charged with the task of ensuring that the right information gets to the needed hand at the right time at the right place. In this case, it challenges the professionalism of librarians to ascertaining the quality of lots of materials to meet the numerous tastes of their users. Tenopir (2003) affirms that not all that is published electronically is credible for inclusion into library collection. But, one has to note that, every publisher has a target audience in mind.

Increase and continuous skills acquisition

Aside having knowledge of librarianship, librarians now require computer knowledge to be able to handle electronic library resources conveniently. Also, since some electronic library resources have unique access means, librarians cannot but keep updating their computer use skills.

Erratic power supply

This is mostly experience in developing countries like Nigeria. Since access to electronic library resources is with the aid of computer or such like devices, it becomes a problem to libraries to ensure that the library has constant supply of power to facilitate access and usage of electronic resources.

Material cost

With the emergence of electronic library resources, libraries are faced with the challenge of acquiring sophisticated materials needed to access and use these materials. The cost of acquiring this set of material is really a problem that must be addressed by library management.

EMERGENCE OF ELECTRONIC LIBRARY RESOURCES: A PLUS TO LIBRARIANS

“...why it is not a threat?”

The fact that electronic library resources makes library

services delivery to be easier and faster is enough to convince all that it is not a threat to any individual or profession. Going by the 5 basic rules guiding librarianship, the emergence of electronic library resources has only added flavour to the information profession.

The professional librarians is to provide every user his books, with the aid of electronic library resources, it is much quicker and faster to provide every user his book. Librarians do not have to be physical present with the users before the users could have required library books anymore. This could be done through the Intranet or Internet network without any physical contact between the parties involved (Ukoh, 1984). Among many others, the following are some positive impacts of the emergence of electronic library resources to librarians and her profession.

Remote access

Ability to access library resources without being close to any of the walls of the library is a great contribution of electronic library resources; they facilitate remote access. By so doing, access to library collections are less strenuous and quicker. Library users could access library resources without necessarily being within the four walls of the library with the aid of electronic resources via connection to an Intranet, Internet and or Extranet network. Little wonder, we now talk of electronic library (e-Library), Virtual Library and digitalized library.

Multiple accesses

With necessary software and connectivity in place, access to a given electronic library resource can be in multiple fold simultaneously. With electronic resources, a given electronic resource can be use consecutively by many people without delay or waiting in turns.

Quick access

Accessing electronic library resource is quite faster than conventional library resources. Aside facilitating remote access, some electronic library resources allow users to search a given material for a key word or term with answer in a jiffy.

Mobility

The transmission of electronic library resources from one place to another is with ease. Electronic library materials are very light and are usage friendly. Users can easily move them around on devices such as flash drives and

removable discs. With the emergence of electronic resources, libraries can easily relocate from one location to another since her resources are in virtual forms. Also, resource sharing between libraries is with ease.

Job simplicity

Emergence of electronic library resources has really helped librarians in library service delivery. It makes the discharge of library services less strenuous when compared to the handling processing and maintaining traditional library resources; in term of OPAC (Online Public Access Catalog), electronic cataloguing system; online reference services and host of many others.

Acquisition and maintenance

Compared to every other library resources, electronic library resources are easier and cheaper to maintain. Although, this set of materials deteriorate, they can easily be protected from most (if not all) deterioration agents. Electronic resources can last for eternity if necessary protective measures are put in place.

Research comfortability

The use of electronic resources has reduces the bulk of stress that researchers ought to have encountered in the cause of their research. Researchers can now move easily around with as many information resources as possible with the aid of electronic resources saved on external hard drive like compact disc (CD) compare to a load of conventional resources made available for research by the library in the past. Electronic resources make the job of librarians much easier in meeting with the demands of their users without taking much of their time.

Space consumption

Compared to the conventional library operation with lots of books/books shelves, electronic resources require few operating room and space. A single room could serve as a library due to the emergence of electronic library resources.

Conclusion

The emergence of electronic library resources is changing the work of librarians and other information professionals. More than ever, librarians need this new technology to meet with the ever changing taste of their numerous library users. Most, if not all library users of present age prefer electronic library resources to printed

library resources due to lots of reasons which vary from user to users. Rather than posing a threat to librarians, electronic library resources has being of great benefit to librarians that has taken adequate steps to adopt the resources into her operations. Librarians can now afford to go to bed while modern technology does the answering to users' query as programmed by the librarian in question. This does not mean that librarians are not needed, it simply mean that librarians work is less strenuous with the emergence of electronic library resources. Lots of other benefits were highlighted in this work. The threat noticed is that, librarians that fails to welcome the emergence of electronic library resources will only have his/herself to blame as new technology is really boosting library services. Libraries that want to be on track must be able to meet the information needs of her users in the required format. As such, electronic library resources does not pose any form of threat to librarians, rather, it should be perceive as an advancement of the professionalism of librarians.

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