PHILOSOPHY, LIBRARIES AND INFORMATION SOCIETY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The ceaseless transformation of technologies in information industries has consequently developed the world into what is today known as information society or computer age, creating new opportunities to librarians. It has as well charged them with some basic roles to work significantly for the growth and betterment of the information society. Meanwhile, this paper looks at the nature of information society and the trends of libraries in reference to Nigeria's capacity on the present information society. Seeing the fast tracking nature of advancement on information, this paper pose to evaluate how librarianship in Nigeria actually suits the dynamic environment in the present information society; whether Nigerian librarians fully capture the new technological aspect of information that will eliminate the information gap prevalent among the masses; if the philosophy behind librarianship is really functional; and if the users perfectly access information effectively in personal and/or professional lives. This study however examines the librarianship philosophy and its functional delivery systems within the context of information society in Nigeria. Thus, the methodology adopted in this work is mainly, the library research method. Write-ups and relevant materials on related topics are collated, synthesized and analyzed.

Keywords: Philosophy, Libraries, information society, Technology, Librarianship.

Introduction

Conventionally, library is the depository and the bedrock of the society's memory savings, which plays a major role in developing a society. It carries information in all aspect of human endeavors. As a resourceful place of information, it contributes tremendously the primary element of societal economic, cultural, and communal life. Having known that everything as Heraclitus acclaims is always in a state of flux, the society is not for once static but always changing. This condition of societies and human beings as social institutions and social transformations affect the role of libraries. The current society has experienced fast changes in almost every aspect of human endeavors. The impacts of digital technologies have sustained the growth of libraries. They play an essential role by changing entirely the conventional functions of the library. Library does not only deal with books but gathers information in numerous medias for the users. It adapts the present-day changes and handles the new and complex demands of the users. This is why librarians should ever be advanced in the mode of service provided to the users as this will enable the library to be more resourceful and relevant to the society.

According to Oriogu etal (2015, 92), "the growth and development of information carriers has moved from one form to another. From papyrus to clay tablets, from manuscripts to microfilms from printed documents to electronic and online resources, libraries and information centers have always been in the business of facilitating information to its diversified categories of users". This means that the information society relies more on the services provided by the librarians. The librarians serve as a link between users and information resources that have been in existence for years. They perform major role in providing, processing, organizing and circulating information to the world. This is why the role of librarians in the information society still remains a problem especially in developing countries. This study therefore examines the philosophy behind libraries and the functional delivery system of librarianship in Nigeria in the present-day information society.

Information Society: An Insight.
The resultant effects of the ongoing structural changes, economic and technological developments, and social changes in the global society have increasingly constituted multiple challenges globally. The genesis of the challenges could be traced from the turning point which has been squeezed out by misunderstandings and distortions related to the term - information society. To some, information society has been in existence as at late 19th century, and of recent some suggest the late 18th century, whereas some are concerned about the vitality of the concept whether *information* and *knowledge* have been playing an important role in history or not. The historical notion of information society, however, becomes so controversial that it somewhat concerns with a sociable circumstance in which a particular community can easily claim to have achieved by considering different standards of information that was opposed at the earlier stage of development. (Karvalics 2007,39). It is a society where greater part of social, religious, economic, cultural, and political activities are regulated through information and communication technology (ICT) networks which are all interoperable on daily basis. However, literatures do not proffer a general agreement in reference to when different countries emerged into information society. But all that could be said is that developed countries naturally in a gradual process became information societies before the developing countries proceed to enter the state of information society.

There upon, the definition of the term *information society* is also affected with numerous definitions as there is no one generally accepted definition. There are numerous aspects and approaches toward the definition and the characteristics of the term. Dutton (2003, 407) proffers the concept of information society as a society whereby storing, creating and networking of information and technological infrastructures commonly take place, and which are progressively fundamental to all kinds of social and economic activity. Oriogu etal (2015, 92) defines information society as a society distinguished by an elevation of information intensity in the habitual life of aborigines, institutions and organizations; through technological use, mainly for the coverage of personal, business, social and educational activities, with the ability to perform expeditiously all electronic information globally.

Gouveia (2003) expresses the concept of information society to mean the most recent moment of an economically developed society, the major enterprises and institutions that depend upon the development and use of information and communication technologies. Also, Masuda (1980) as cited in Karvalics (2007, 9) defines information society as a fresh kind of society whereby the owner of information is the hidden motive responsible for changes and development, and where intellectual ingenuity of humanity prospers. For Cronin (1986) it is "one in which labour has been intellectualized." It is obvious that the definitions are based on undisclosed assumptions concerning the areas of life that seem to have a vital change. Some focus differently on areas like, resources, activities, industries, products, community and people; while some care for the illustration of global ranges as an utmost important. Amidst of all the directions, it appears so relevant that for the content of the concept to be revealed, the attainable aims for checking of attitudes and multifaceted analysis have to be given. Thus, Rukanci and Anameric (2004) give an explicit conceptualization of information society with the belief that such society should be characterized thus:

    a. The emerge of the information sector with the development of information intensive production,
    b. The establishment of information networks, databanks and communication networks for faster access to the knowledge that everybody needs and has a right to reach,
    c. The change in the problems of humanity. Unemployment and dictatorship concerns in the financial regime of the industrial society changed for the anxieties about the future, privacy violation and not reaching the pace of the change in the information society.
    d. The substitution of muscle and machine power for the intellectual and mental capacity,
    e. Formation of the demographic structure in the information society where the qualified and well educated individuals take the priority,
    f. Prominence of the continuing education,
    g. Continuance of the new information production and, consequently, much more and quality publications.
    h. Broaden of the globalization as the time and space limitations no longer exist in communication and information access.

The above features among others reveal the outstanding analyses of the term extending to all sub-systems. A comprehensive analysis will help to check out when a society changes from the former phase to the information society – the changes though are independent upon every country's plan and efforts. According to Isazadeh (2004, 3), "each country has its own action plan for developing the information society of its own." This is why it becomes so victorious that the world now talks of the *Global Information Society*, a society where mobile phone and internet usage have become the ultimate measure of interconnectedness. Even the Islands, as the information age unfolds, join together in forming the *Global Information Society*.

However, in as much as the world today is recognized as an *information age*-where all societies of mankind is changing to one *global information society*, the sources and the accessibility of the information are what mattered most. Hence, libraries should be up to

date with the use of modern technologies that can provide and access the information resources that measure up with the information needs of people (users) in the society. Libraries of all kinds (whether public, academic or school) are expected to be equipped with facilities, and "digital" and qualified staff globally because it is among the areas where the lifetime learning abilities are being developed. This turns the whole system into a struggle against the modern-day digital divide, and the knowledge and information management among the librarians. A critical examination of the modern development of libraries in any information society (especially in Nigeria) is of great importance.

Philosophy and Librarianship in Information Society
It is obvious that librarianship has an enormous impact on the (global) information society. The influence of librarianship on human perception, knowledge, memory as well as motions has created general spheres of influence and public viewpoints, and has given support to core values on information and knowledge realities. Knowledge and information shape our socialization and community. They transform economy, science, politics, religion and law. The influential development of librarianship on the above realities has attracted a topic of philosophical analysis. One of the librarianship philosophical approaches focuses attention on the reformulation of traditional framework of library efficiencies. The minimum of such arguments is somewhat for ages and covers almost notable important subjects of philosophical discourses, extending to a point of reality, truth, culture, society, education or politics to time, space, emotion etc. The rethinking of this kind focuses upon the question how – in an information society – the routine experience together with the theoretical modeling of librarianship changed historically from book storing to internet networking. What major change has actually occurred since the inception of the internet?

Another philosophical approach is predominantly centered upon the technical sides of libraries and their efficiencies. It is so logical that the established idea of man has been defeated. Man has become nothing more than a subordinate to digital technologies. His carnal duties have been gradually replaced by digital technologies taking over the important jobs. The logic of mechanism has replaced the conventional order of knowledge. The favorable circumstances that came as a result of the circulation of the digital technologies, the rate at which internet and mobile telecommunication networks that increasingly spread globally, and the disclosed shared models for innovation and learning have given rise to new sources of inequality. Nonetheless, some scholars have argued that the terminology of digital divide has put much emphasis on the dualisms of information. The basic changes and power connections in a particular society are arguably influenced by the conditions which people could wish to take part in their information society. Thus, Warschauer (2002 & 2004) has discussed effectively the need for analytical framework that focuses on social inclusion instead of having an arbitrary divide, whereas Van Dijk (2005) and Norris (2001) look at the need for comparative research and studies that will engage in addressing the deficiencies of digital divide research. Van Dijk (2006, 1), for instance, points out "its lack of theory, conceptual definition, interdisciplinary approach, qualitative research and longitudinal research."

Notwithstanding, the rational approach concerning the digital divide as it affects the librarianship should be on how to bridge the digital divide (the breach between those who have access to internet and those without) among the library users especially in developing nations. It is not just having libraries but the kinds that are commensurate to the existing information society. Other thing that needs to be put into consideration is whether the library has the accessible internet within its location. Is the available access to internet actually affordable? What percentage of people can reach the affordability? What quality of service does it render in terms of internet speed? How has the society involved been able to acquire the necessary skills and technologies therein? Some other issues that might attract digital divide (inequality) include security, interconnectivity, digital literacy, and access to equipment. It is obvious that these digital inequalities ranging from the availability, affordability, interest, and to digital literacy exist globally. Even among the nations that have high overall connectivity rates cannot boast of 100% equity of sustainable internet access in rural, remote, and even urban areas. The measure at which all the libraries could be globally connected, secured, and trustworthy is doubtful. Wilson (2004) has explained the difficulties involved in addressing the problems associated with those who are directly affected with the digital divide-the internet variations. Comprehensively, the principal element of librarianship philosophy is no longer acknowledged with the ideas proclaimed by Raymond Smith that:

> a library is part of a social organization and that librarianship is a social process inextricably bound up with the life of a community. It was in special libraries that the place of the active information service in the progress of knowledge could be most clearly seen-the library playing its part alongside the other members of the organization, to promote the welfare of the organization by implementing its policy through books (Springer Nature 1962, 120).

The refinement of techniques has come up with new development in the system initiating new ways of social connections in all places through the network operation of information communication technology (ICT). The digitalization of library, the radical change of human of understanding in the context of sensible realities appears not to establish the stable future of "librarianship philosophy". Hence, in addition, one is not quite sure, how the librarianship will prosper in time to come within the context of (global) information society. It is also arguable in believing any kind of finality except possibly in the finality of transformation.

Meanwhile, how has the present-day librarians in the context of information society been able to make known the truth or accurate information? If it were to be on health issues, there would be a treatment for it. The same should be applicable to the case of accessing correct information. A lot of conjectural information is being spread over the net causing confusions. Where important information is required to be disclosed, it is the correct information that brings about solutions. The librarianship philosophy should be concerned on the capability of finding, assessing and using information adequately in individual and proficient lives. The kind of "information divides" and the refinement of techniques encircling the current information society have charged to satisfy a librarianship philosophy that would aim to proffer answer to the following: How the

correct information should always be reached; at what stage does the information resolve the current issues; how can an information be collected, organized, processed, stored, and be distributed among user population without the reformation of information and knowledge needed by the users. It is the duty of the contemporary library professionals to make people to be more information literate. Long (1986, 6) defines information literacy as educating people on how to provide solutions to their problems or to be more fit in getting their answers. If this definition is appropriate, then the librarians should be able to develop "the ability of knowing what kind of information, the layman needs, where that information is available, how could it be obtained; the possession of knowledge about subjects, books, libraries and library sources, documentation and information sources, services, systems, and centers networks, data bases, data banks and how to use them etc" (Weerasooriya 1997, 188). It therefore implies that librarianship belongs also to the field of information literacy whereby the general public who are educated and trained find it easy to access information as well as acquiring more knowledge especially when the primary function of the library is to see that they get the knowledge.

The present-day existence of information society is as a result of constant changes in information professionalism. The library and information spheres are also open to question of being changed in accordance with the resilience and the needs of the society which is as well a subject to change. The changes in librarianship, like other professionals, should be considered normal provided the traditional values are somewhat suitable to the new circumstances. The profession of librarianship should always be ready to work towards the dynamic situations of the contemporary information society. According to Butler (1973, 111):

> a professional library worker must possess a scientific, generalized knowledge which will enable him to discover the complex library needs of a mixed community. His primary concern is with the social effect of the institution. The technical library worker must have been vocationally trained to control the apparatus of the library for an effective realization of its prescribed purposes.

The challenges surrounding the present day librarianship remain the fact that it has to work round the clock basis of the critical information society. Foskett (1962) has argued that the librarians are the principal figures when it concerns the circulation of information from the originators to the users simply because the reader is in person associated with them. Their physical presence matters a lot to the users as many might need to be guided as well as providing answers to their enquires. They should also be involved in looking forward to connecting the new information coming up daily in the library from the known requirements of the users.

By and large, the rout to excellence in information society is by acquiring the knowledge and using its power. In today's global village, any society that cannot obtain, and make use of the existing information is bound to be operating within the standards of the olden days. It is the responsibility of all society's libraries, be it developed or developing countries to posses the catalyst effect in changing to the information society by making sure they come to terms of the information, and aspire to catch up with the pressing lack of the

information in the society. Libraries are the cultural and social institutions that help to nurture people to be qualified and who would in return lift the community to the level of the information society. It is through the assistance of libraries that one could have access to the recorded data that has been piled up. It is also the responsibility of the librarians to define and form the recorded data in a situation where the academic projects are documented in touchable form. Presently, libraries remain the environments where lifelong learning abilities are developed. Libraries have direct connection with the information society. Therefore, the librarianship philosophy should be to educate the skills of technology involved in order to function efficiently in the information society so that the challenging roles facing the career will be encountered.

Librarianship and Information Society in Nigeria

There is no information society that does not have one challenge or the other simply because of its constant transformation. It is so clear that new technologies are springing up from which improvements are always made to the existing technologies on regular basis in order to catch up with the latest development. Thus, libraries on the general note have this challenge of fast advancement in telecommunication facilities. It is quite observable that it is almost when librarians appear to have known or mastered a specific software facilities that the need for upgradement is always required to enable them achieve better results.

In the case of Nigeria, it is not just the problem of rapid upgradement in the system. But the outstanding ones remain that there are irregular supply of electricity and inadequate funding of libraries. Others in some cases are the defective telecommunication facilities and poor level of competency among the librarians. Adigun (2015, 64-5) has it that "in many Nigerian libraries, the internet connection is so slow that often times it is impossible to download and print documents from the internet." The librarians have also been affected greatly by the emergences of ICTs mainly on the digital resources, high-tech gadgets and the current information overload.

Moreover, there may be some other cases of abnormalities entangled with Nigeria's librarianship that are not mention in this paper which are still hindering their proper functionality in the present information society, but the librarians should endeavor to be up and doing in order to carry the citizens along with other societies. Librarianship is not just by physical features but by competent access and provision of productive services to the public. It therefore entails that for there to be fruitful services as expected by the users of the digital age, libraries must be mobilized with the aimed info-tech and human expertise. They are the information professionals whose expected roles and services are utmost needed in the information society. According to Rothman (2011), adaptability, resourcefulness, adequate habitude of doing things, having the affection for resolving issues are the most crucial attributes an information pundit can be endowed with. He further states that librarians should: "… adapt rather than perish" and "information professional should be championed of clarity and conclusion who find accessible ways to describe complex topics". Thereupon, the librarians in Nigeria should understand from the above discussions that they are entrusted with much roles and services delivery system of the digital age. Romas (2007) expatiates further when he says that a 21st century librarian is:

an information broker for both prints and electronic media, who selects, acquires, organizes, repackages and provides access to both digital and print information sources; a change agent, that is a technology application leader who liaises with the computer science unit to design and manage the library ICT; a facilitator, making access to information easier by providing access to network, purchases appropriate library software, databases, e-books and e-journals; an educator, who trains users on how to access both prints and electronics. He also educates them on the use of search engines to surf materials from the internet; a business manager, who possesses the ability to negotiate with publishers. He also discusses license agreements fore-books, e-journals and databases; an image maker who is capable of adding value to the library in order to gain management support and project a positive image to the outside world.

Lankes (2011, 13) summarizes the fact by saying that the librarians' responsibility is nothing but to enhance society by assisting the progress of knowledge production in their society. Therefore, librarians in Nigeria should revolutionize themselves and welcome a more functioning and changing role in order to be most relevant in the information society. And in order to equate with the present responsibilities, they should engage themselves with conferences and retraining frequently to enable them perform their job effectively in present day information society.

Conclusion

Librarianship remains the information-dependent that serves the society because it constantly calls on tabbed information stores that already exists in conventional fields of study. And for Nigerian society to excel on rapid flow of knowledge and information there should be a proper tradition of being committed with a philosophical exercise of librarianship. When there is a practice of transformation towards envious functional delivery system of librarianship in Nigeria, they will gain more power to create, influence and add more value in the information society. Being the essential artisans of global information provider and knowledge managers, librarians have no option than to engage in a librarianship philosophy; be digitalized and act efficiently in accordance with the present day information society.

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