LIBRARIES AND LIBRARIANS AS DIGITAL NAVIGATORS: CHANGING THE PERCEPTIONS IN NIGERIA'S INFORMATION AGE.

BY

Ubochi Elvis Uchenna[1], FaitMary Uzoegbu[2], Nse Judith[3], Eweama Uju Rosemary[4], Onyemelusi R. Chinenye[5] and Favour Akachi Zarachiahu[6]

Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education Owerri[1,2], Federal University of Technology Owerri[3] and Federal Polytechnic Nekede[3,6]-and Federal College of Land Resources Technology[5]

08064188371-elvisamss@yahoo.com

Abstract

The rapid evolution of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) has transformed the global information landscape, redefining the traditional roles of libraries and librarians. In Nigeria, libraries are increasingly shifting from physical repositories of books to dynamic digital knowledge hubs. This paper examines the evolving role of librarians as "digital navigators" in Nigeria's information age, highlighting the transformation of professional responsibilities, emerging competencies, and changing public perceptions. Using a conceptual and literature-based approach, the study explores how librarians facilitate digital literacy, manage digital resources, and bridge the digital divide. It also identifies key challenges such as inadequate funding, infrastructural deficits, and skills gaps. The paper concludes that repositioning librarians as digital navigators is essential for national development and recommends strategic investment in capacity building, ICT infrastructure, and policy support.

Keywords: Digital libraries, digital literacy, librarians, Nigeria, information age, digital navigation

Introduction.

The emergence of the digital information age has significantly altered how information is created, stored, accessed, and disseminated. Libraries, once regarded primarily as custodians of books and other printed materials, are now evolving into technologically driven information centers. This shift is particularly important in Nigeria as a nation, where ICT adoption continues to expand across educational and professional sectors.

Traditionally, librarians and other library staff were perceived as gatekeepers of books. However, the digital revolution has necessitated a transformation in both function and perception. Librarians are now expected to act as intermediaries between users and complex digital information systems. This evolving role has given rise to the concept of librarians as digital navigators—professionals who guide users in locating, evaluating, and utilizing digital information effectively.

Digital libraries refer to organized collections of digital content accessible via electronic means. They include e-books, databases, multimedia resources, and institutional repositories. The emergence of digital libraries is driven by the need to manage the "information explosion" resulting from technological advancement. Thiruppathi(2024) went further to state that A digital library is a virtual collection of information resources **that can include e-books, research articles, multimedia files, historical archives, and other digital materials, accessible via the internet or specialized applications. Unlike traditional libraries, which rely on physical collections, Furfuri (2025) commented that digital libraries allow users to** search**,** retrieve, and interact with information remotely**, breaking geographical and temporal barriers. They are designed to support education, research, and lifelong learning by providing organized and efficient access to vast collections of materials**

On the other hand, digital navigators are professionals who assist individuals in accessing and using digital tools and information resources. In the library context, they help users overcome barriers related to technology, information literacy, and access (Attah, 2021). Digital navigators provide personalized, ongoing support **to help community members overcome barriers to digital access. They assist with securing affordable internet, connecting devices, and developing digital skills necessary for education, employment, healthcare, and other essential services-. Services can be delivered** in-person, by phone, email, video chat, or through community-based organizations**, often embedded in trusted local institutions like libraries, schools, and senior center. Digital navigators also** access individual needs, recommend resources, and follow up **to ensure clients achieve their digital goals. Some navigators specialize in areas such as healthcare, higher education, or support**

for people with disabilities, returning citizens, or caregivers (Niyi, 2023). They often provide multilingual and culturally competent support to reach diverse communities

The information age is characterized by the rapid production and dissemination of information facilitated by ICTs. It demands new competencies from both information providers and users. The Information Age, also known as the Digital Age, is a period characterized by the rapid expansion of information technology and the Internet, fundamentally changing how individuals access and share information. This era began with the creation of the World Wide Web and gained momentum with the development of personal computers by companies like Microsoft and Apple, making technology more accessible to the general public (Barth-Nengia & Uchendu,2024). As a result, people can now find and disseminate information more quickly than ever before.

According to Ogunode, Somadina, and Yahaya (2021), the *information age (digital age) is* characterized by the spread of the Internet and information technology. In the information age, individuals are able to access more information than ever before at faster speeds than history previously allowed. The information age truly began with the creation of the World Wide Web. However, its advantages began to spread with the advent of the personal computer, which was improved and advanced by technology companies such as Microsoft and Apple. Although the information age ushered in many advantages, it also introduced problems, such as invasion of privacy and the spread of inaccurate information

Evolution of Libraries in Nigeria

Libraries in Nigeria have undergone significant transformation from traditional print-based systems to hybrid and digital models. The integration of ICT has enabled libraries to provide remote access to information resources, online catalogues, and electronic databases. Studies show that Nigerian academic libraries are increasingly adopting digital tools to meet the needs of modern users–. This evolution reflects global trends and underscores the necessity for libraries to remain relevant in a technology-driven society.

Libraries in the territory, that is today known as Nigeria came into existence as a result of colonialism. Libraries were

highly influenced by the colonialists and they were developed in line with the needs and interests of the colonial masters. Public libraries and other libraries in Nigeria were established with the ideology of the colonial masters in mind. In Lagos there was a private library known as Tom Jones library which established between 1910 and 1920. Tom Jones was a wealthy Nigerian merchant who established library for the people of Lagos. Herbert Macaulay and Henry car also had libraries.

Ugocha (2011) as saying that in 1910, the High court library and the Federal Ministry of Justice Library were established in the 1920s. The Lagos Book club was established by a group of expatriate civil servants who were predominantly British citizens. These expatriates circulated the books among themselves (Ugocha 2011). In 1932, the Carnegie corporation of New York gave a grant of $6000 to the Lagos book club and it metamorphosed into Lagos Library in June the same year. It was a subscription library, apart from the Lagos Book club there were subsidiaries located at Abeokuta, Portharcourt , Zaria, Enugu etc. There were also public Reading rooms opened during the second world war that were used to spread propaganda and they were found more in western and Northern Nigeria. The Lagos Book Club was the forerunner of public library in Nigeria. Public libraries existed in western Region in 1967, Midwestern Region had libraries in 1963 and Northern Region established library services in 1952 (Saliu, 1999).

The Eastern Region had the most flourishing library which was established in July 1955 after the UNESCO public library seminar that took place in 1953 at University of Ibadan. The Eastern Regional Library which was a UNESCO pilot public library project, had legal backing (Aguolu and Aguolu, 1997) Academic libraries in Nigeria are synonymous with academic institutions. The University libraries in Nigeria started with the establishment of University College Ibadan in 1948. The nucleus of University of Ibadan library was based on Henry carr‟s library. The school libraries in Nigeria were associated with missionaries that came into Nigeria.

The various churches had schools and these schools had libraries. ~~However~~However, school libraries in the real sense started in 1961 and resulted in the appointment of UNESCO school library Adviser Mr. H.V Bonny in 1962. In Nigeria, the first special libraries

were established by colonial masters in the High Court and Ministry of Justice Lagos (Oyedum, 2006).

The evolution of libraries in Nigeria is a fascinating journey that reflects the nation's rich cultural heritage, colonial history, and the relentless pursuit of knowledge. Libraries have served as vital institutions for preserving information, fostering education, and promoting literacy in Nigerian society. Before the advent of formal libraries, knowledge in Nigeria was preserved through oral traditions and local practices. Elders and scholars played a crucial role in transmitting knowledge from generation to generation

Following Nigeria's independence in 1960, there was a renewed focus on developing libraries as tools for national development and education. The government recognized the importance of libraries in fostering literacy and information dissemination. Ugocha(2011) highlighted the different levels of libraries that was established in Nigeria;

- National Library of Nigeria: Established in 1964, the National Library aimed to coordinate library services nationwide and promote reading culture.
- State and Local Government Libraries: Various states established libraries to cater to the educational needs of their residents.
- University Libraries: Higher education institutions began to develop extensive library collections to support academic research and learning.

The late 20th century saw the integration of technology into library services. The introduction of computers and digital resources transformed how libraries operated, allowing for improved cataloging, access to a broader range of resources, and the emergence of digital libraries.

Today, libraries in Nigeria are evolving to meet the needs of a diverse population. They are no longer just repositories of books but are becoming community hubs that offer various services:

- Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Centers: Many libraries now provide access to computers and the

internet, bridging the digital divide.

- **Community Engagement Programs: Libraries host workshops, literacy programs, and cultural events to engage the community.**
- **Digital Libraries: Initiatives to digitize collections are underway, making resources accessible to a broader audience.**

Changing Roles of Librarians in the Digital Information Age

In the digital era, librarians are mainly focused on digital library services and 24/7 faster delivery of information using mobile technologies based tools/apps (Library Wiki, WhatsApp, Library App and Digital Library Apps etc) to fulfil user expectations on their mobile devices anywhere and anytime. Currently, library professionals are also known as key evolving specialities in modern librarianship: digital librarians, system librarians, repository managers, digital curators, information managers and knowledge managers (Nilesh, 2025). The digital librarian plays a new dynamic role to easily accessing of ICT infrastructures and ICT enable services which held digital information including abstracts, indexes, full-text databases, sound and video recording in the digital formats. Digital librarianship mainly focuses on the concept of library professionals who are working in the digital library. The digital information management systems have changed the way the librarian acquires, processes, stores and delivers information to users in the 21st century. The various role and responsibilities of a digital librarian have also been discussed in support of high quality academic and research facilities in the digital environment.

As technology rapidly transforms the way we access information, and resources are increasingly available online and in digital formats, the established role of the library as a physical space housing racks of books is looking increasingly out of step with the needs of students and researchers. Hamza et.al.(2025) stated that, allied with technology, library users' needs and preferences are helping to drive the change in libraries. Students, researchers and teachers now expect to be able to access information around the clock, from almost anywhere in the world and via a growing number of devices, from laptops to phones. As the information technologies are changing day-today and growing at a tremendous speed, the knowledge society is

becoming more complex, competitive and dependent on technological changes and information explosion. The need for e-information services to the users are also growing and becoming very essential. The impact of web based e-learning and teaching environment has influenced every facet of library and information services in academic libraries and providing new opportunities and challenges to the library professional for involvement in the knowledge based society including electronic and multimedia publishing, Internet based-information services, global networking, web based digital resources etc.The digital age has expanded the scope of librarianship beyond traditional functions such as cataloguing and circulation. Some of the expected roles are;

[1.] ~~1.~~ Information Management and Curation. Librarians now manage both physical and digital collections, ensuring accessibility and organization of vast information resources.

[2.]

~~1.~~ ~~2.~~ Digital Literacy Facilitation. Librarians play a critical role in teaching users how to effectively search, evaluate, and use digital information. it is the duty of the librarians to enlighten library users on various information sources and access tools. Users in this current age required information beyond the books on the shelves. Information like; access pointer, digital tools, various sources and necessary restrictions in the use of digital resources.

[3.]

2. **~~3.~~ Technology Integration. Modern librarians utilize digital tools such as databases, virtual learning platforms, and AI-driven systems to enhance service delivery. Technology integration is to make sure tech is used effectively to support learning, research, access to information. According to Ogunbadede and Egitaghab (2026), the involves;**

- **Digital resources- how to managing e-books, databases, online journals and digital archives.**
- **Training users on how to use the library software and databases.**
- **Innovation- introducing makerspaces, coding programs etc.**
- **Collaboration with various bodies to integrate tech and digital content into the curriculum.**

[4.] **4.——Research Support Services. Research support services are the help and resources libraries and institutions provide to assist users with their research work from start to finish. They assist researchers in data management, referencing, plagiarism detection, and access to scholarly resources. Olayemi et.al. (2025) insisted that Librarians should be equipped to assist the users with the following;**

- **information discovery,**
- **reference management.**
- **Literature review support**
- **Data services**
- **Publishing support**
- **Research impact**
- **Institutional repository**
- **Research consultations**
- **Copyright and ethics**

[5.] **5.—Knowledge Preservation. Digital knowledge preservation is about making sure digital information stays accessible and usable long term, even as tech changes. Libraries continue to preserve cultural and intellectual heritage through digitization initiatives. Panji (2023) expanded roles highlight the transition of librarians into multifaceted information professionals. The core duties of the librarians comprises;**

- **Digitization- ability to convert physical materials into digital formats to prevent loss and improve access.**
- **Digital archiving-having knowledge of storing born-digital content and digitized materials in secure repositories.**
- **Metadata creation-**
- **Backup and disaster recovery-**
- **Digital Curation-**
- **Managing institutional repositories-**
- **Advocacy policy- ability to develop policies for digital preservation and educating users on why it matters.**

Librarians as Digital Navigators in the Nigeria digital age.

The concept of librarians as digital navigators emphasizes their role in guiding users through complex digital environments. Librarians as digital navigators stand at the point to guide users and researchers through the complex online world to find, evaluate and use information effectively. It is a newer way to describe the modern librarians' role beyond just books. According to Idubor and Ogunbodede (2024), As digital navigators, librarians are expected to engage in the following;

- **Bridging the Digital Divide. In Nigeria, disparities in access to technology persist. Librarians help bridge this gap by providing access to digital tools and training users. Librarians functions in several ways to assist users with low tech skills to access e-government services, apply for jobs online, use email, or set up devices.**
- **Enhancing Information Literacy. Digital navigation involves teaching users how to critically evaluate online information, reducing misinformation and improving research quality. Librarians as information analyst should show library users on how to spot misinformation, fact-check, evaluate websites, and understand algorithms/bias in search results.**
- **Supporting Lifelong Learning: Libraries provide access to online courses, e-resources, and learning platforms, promoting continuous education.**
- **Facilitating Access to E-Government and Services: Librarians assist citizens in accessing online government services, job applications, and digital platforms.**
- **Supports digital tools- librarians should assume the position of training the users on e-books, citation managers, data tools, learning platforms, and other software for school, work, or personal use.**
- **Connects to resources- links people to online courses, telehealth–, digital archives and community services they might not find on their own.**

Changing Perceptions of Librarians in Nigeria

Historically, librarians were often viewed as passive custodians of books. However, this perception is gradually changing due to technological advancements. For a long time, many people in Nigeria saw librarians as just "book keepers" or the person who stamps books and stay in a quiet room. That perception is shifting fast. Nilesh (2025) highlighted the various perceptions;

Old perception vs New reality

	OLD VIEW	NEW REALITY
1	Book custodian	Information specialist+ digital

		navigator.
2	Passive quiet role	Active teacher, trainer, and tech facilitator
3	Work only with print books	Manages e-resources, databases, repositories, makespaces.
4	Limited to library building	Embedded in classrooms, online platforms,community outreach.
5	Clerical work	Research support, data managenment, digital literacy expert.

It is very paramount to note that in the current digital era in Nigeria information age, modern librarians are no more seen and recognized as book holders but now recognized as:

- **Information specialists**
- **Digital educators**
- **Research partners**
- **Technology facilitators**

Librarians in Nigeria are rebranding as ICT-compliant information professionals, research partners, and digital inclusion champions. The more they lead tech projects, teach, and show impact, the more the "book keeper" stereotype fades. Some key factors that brought about the change and thereby making them digital navigators (Edet & Alex-Nmecha, 2023);

- **Technology integration: University and public libraries now run digital repositories, e-libraries, and virtual services. Librarians manage NUC virtual libraries, TETFund e-resources, and institutional repositories. This involves the use of various digital devices and software packages that required technological skills and capacity. Considering the efficiency and effectiveness of this integration, librarians are expected to upskill and re-skill in order to be productive in the current information age.**
- **Information literacy demand: With misinformation and fake news issues, librarians are now key in teaching students and the public how to evaluate online info.**
- **NLA & LRCN advocacy– The Nigerian Library Association and Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria push professionalization, emphasizing librarians as knowledge managers, not just shelvers.**

- **Academic requirements – Universities require librarians to have MLIS/PhD and publish research. Many now teach GST courses on use of library and ICT.**
- **Community roles – Public librarians run digital skills programs, support JAMB/UTME CBT prep, and provide e-government access for communities.**
- **COVID-19 impact – Lockdowns forced libraries online. Librarians who delivered e-resources and Zoom trainings changed minds about their relevance.**

Despite this progress, some misconceptions persist, particularly in underfunded public library systems where outdated infrastructure affects service delivery.

Digital Competencies Required for Librarians

Technology advancement has experienced a rapid increase in digital era, but not all librarians possess the qualified competencies to address the associated challenges. To function effectively as digital navigators, librarians must acquire new skills, including:

- **ICT proficiency**
- **Data management and analytics**
- **Information literacy instruction**
- **Cybersecurity awareness**
- **Use of digital library systems**

Research indicates that Nigerian librarians possess basic digital competencies but still require advanced skills development for effective productivity in today's digital information era.

Challenges Facing Libraries and Librarians in Nigeria

In the dynamic milieu of the 21st century, libraries are confronted with multifaceted challenges in the provision of contemporary library services. The advent of digital technologies has revolutionized information consumption patterns, necessitating libraries to integrate digital resources and engage with a tech-savvy audience. This transition, however, presents hurdles related to technology adoption, digital literacy, and the imperative to meet evolving user expectations. Libraries must navigate the delicate balance between traditional print collections and the burgeoning digital sphere while ensuring equitable access for all. These challenges ranges from;

Inadequate Funding

Limited financial resources hinder the acquisition of modern technologies and infrastructure. Poor funding of digital system in Nigerian libraries has hampered the development of digital education in the nation. libraries are underfunded in Nigeria and this affects" all programmes including the digitalization programme in the sector. Dada et al.(2022) noted that inadequate financing and allocation for digital technology at libraries have resulted in an insufficient supply of digital facilities, equipment, and materials. This has affected the needed transformation for the libraries and librarians.

Poor ICT Infrastructure

Unstable internet connectivity and power supply affect digital service delivery thereby limiting the needed transformation in the current digital information age in Nigeria. This has gotten to the alarming stage where most institutions find it difficult host an active server for a year (Guardian, 2022). The cost of subscription is on a high side.

Skills Gap

There is a need for continuous training and professional development among librarians.

Resistance to Change

Some professionals are slow to adapt to new technologies and practices. Another challenge to the digitalization of the information system in Nigeria by libraries and librarians is resistance to change by most librarians in the sector. Many key librarians across the country are afraid of changing from the old ways of doing things to new and modern methods. This is normal in all human activities and life processes, as people tend to be comfortable and hold on to the old ways of doing things rather than adopt new processes (Titus, 2018).

Policy and Institutional Constraints

Lack of supportive policies limits innovation and growth in the library system. Poor policy implementation has been a challenge to the changing perception of the librarians in Nigeria. To realize the international goals of having libraries and librarians as digital navigators in Nigeria, the federal government has to developed different ICT policies and digital policies to enable the development of digital education system in Nigeria.

High Cost of Maintenance:

High-tech digital facilities needs maintenance always. The sustainability and survival of digital facilities depend on high maintenance culture from users. The maintenance of these technological facilities is very expensive to carry out. Ogunode (2020) submitted that the cost implication required for maintaining ICT facilities is high and this made many administrators limit the time allocation for internet services within the university environment.

Strategies for Enhancing the Role of Libraries and Librarians

- **Training and professional development initiatives. Regular organization of capacity building programs librarians and other library staff will go a long way to enhance their roles in our system. Librarians will actively function as the digital navigators in the present day information age when they are adequately equipped with the necessary knowledge (Akinyenre, 2022).**
- **Community engagement and outreach programs: community engagement and outreaches will enhance the change in the perception of libraries and librarians.**
- **Collaboration with educational institutions and technology provider: full collaboration with bodies that matters in the digital information system will enhance librarians' transformation into the digital information era.**

Opportunities in the Digital Age

Despite challenges, the digital age presents numerous opportunities:

- **Expansion of digital collections.**
- **Collaboration with global information networks.**
- **Integration of artificial intelligence in library services.**
- **Increased visibility and relevance of libraries.**
- **Emerging technologies such as AI and data systems are shaping the future of librarianship, requiring enhanced digital literacy for readiness.**

Recommendations

To strengthen the role of librarians as digital navigators, the following measures are recommended:

- **Investment in ICT Infrastructure: Government and institutions should prioritize funding for digital library development.**
- **Capacity Building: Continuous training programs should be implemented for librarians.**
- **Policy Development: National policies should support digital transformation in libraries.**
- **Public Awareness Campaigns: Efforts should be made to improve public perception of librarians by introducing regular community engagement either by physical or social media.**
- **Collaboration: Libraries should partner with educational institutions and technology organizations in the development of libraries and librarians' skills.**

Conclusion

The transformation of libraries in Nigeria reflects the broader changes brought about by the digital age. Librarians are no longer mere custodians of books but active digital navigators who facilitate access to information and empower users with essential skills. While challenges remain, the opportunities for growth and impact are significant. By embracing innovation and redefining professional roles, librarians can continue to play a crucial role in Nigeria's information society.

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