Enhancing Information Management in Libraries Through Application of Multi-media

BY

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Abstract

The paper looked at the application of Multimedia Resources in enhancing Information Management in Libraries. The paper identified the various ways in which multimedia resources are used in enhancing information management in libraries. This includes preservation of information, circulation of materials, answering users' queries, resource sharing, entertainment purposes, information delivery, self learning tools, multimedia catalogues, electronic publishing and geographic information systems and social networking. The writers noted that despite these numerous advantages of application of multimedia resources to libraries, libraries are still having various challenges in their applications. Such challenges includes; lack of equipments, lack of interest by library management in acquiring and managing multimedia resources, mismanagement of multimedia resources, lack of funds, lack of preservation of multimedia and lack of trained personnel. It is recommended that funds should be provided for continuing education and trainings for multimedia staff and provision of stable budget. Furthermore, equipments should be provided; obsolete or damaged materials should be repaired or removed, before purchase; spare parts must be available, multimedia staff must be dedicated to their work; library instructions should include use of multimedia and regular trainings, seminars, conferences and workshops should be organised.

Introduction

The effectiveness of a library is usually determined by the success with which the library is able to provide and satisfy users' information needs. Ochukwu (2010) stated that the basic aim of establishing libraries and other information organisations in modern society is to be able to respond to the information needs of different users. In order to effectively achieve the objectives of a library in terms of teaching, learning, research and publications, libraries have in various times used several techniques and technologies in managing information. First, was the introduction of printing in the 15" Century, later still- pictures, (microfilm), negative film, moving pictures, video tapes, television, sound recording disc, sound tapes, and microcomputers. However, one of challenge of most of these forms was that each was acquired and stored separately because the information retrieval device used were different from each form of the media. As a result, combining information from different forms became difficult. During the late 1980s computer specialists succeeded in combining text, graphics, animation, audio, and video information into a computer which is now referred to as Multimedia.

The evolution of multimedia has brought significant changes in the library and information services provided by libraries. As a result of this evolution, libraries have also become centres where enormous information are acquired, accessed, organized, stored, retrieved, and disseminated to users in various formats according to how it suits them.

Concept of Multimedia

Babatunde and Ronke, (2010) cited Angnew, Kellerman and Meyer (1996) and defined multi media as the combination of various digital media types such as text, images, sound and video, into an integrated multi-sensory interactive application or presentation to convey a message or information to an audience. While Olayide (2010) quoted, Okoro (2009) and described multi-media as resources that are not in book or print formats but which are capable of appealing to the eyes, ears, or sense of touch or a combination of more than one of these. As identified by Ramaiah (1998) there are seven important elements of multi-media. They are:

- Text: information about an object/event notes, captions, subtitles, contents, indexes, dictionaries and help facilities

- Data: tables, charts, graphs, spreadsheet, statistics and raw data.
- Graphics: both traditional and computer generated such as drawings, prints and maps
- Photographic images: these include negatives, slides, prints (both from digital still and video cameras and scanned photographs)
- Audio: including speech and music digitized from cassettes, tapes and CDs etc
- Animation: Including both computer generated video.
- Video: (digital) either converted from analog film or entirely created with a computer.

Furthermore, Babatunde and Ronke (2010) quoted Babajide (2003) and identified multimedia to include computer hardware, computer software, public address systems, slides, overhead projectors, opaque projections, videos, cassettes, audiotapes, cassette recorders, flip, time sequence, stream charts, Diorama still motion pictures etc.

Enhancing Information Management through the Application of Multimedia Resources

Information management is the skilful exercise of control over the acquisition, organisation, storage, security, retrieval and dissemination of the information resources essential to the successful operation of a business, agency, organization or institution. (Reitz, 2004) The application of multi-media in enhancing information management cannot be overemphasised. With multi-media information management can be done in a more effective manner through the following ways:

Preservation of information: Multimedia resources like CD-ROM audio tapes, videos, can carry very large information like print resources. These materials can also be used purely for educational and research purposes. Nnajam (2010) quoted Zinyengere (2008) and averred that multimedia resources are vital elements of our collective memory determine our achievements over the years, documenting our past, present and determine our future. With multimedia resources like video and tape major historical events can be captured and preserved in libraries. For example, Nigeria Independence of 1960, the Nigerian Civil War and transition ceremony of one government to the other are still being viewed by one generation of user to another through the storage of such information by libraries and various information centres.

Circulation of materials: It is no gain saying to state that the use of print materials by library users is decreasing every day. Several users now prefer to access information materials using multimedia resources. Most printed materials are now available in electronic format. For example, some libraries have acquired large volumes of e-books, e-journals , e-dictionaries, e-encyclopedias and are also subscribing to various academic professional databases e.g HINARI, REPEC, OARE, ARDI, WIPO, OKR and worldwidesceince.org Users with the aid of their computers, flash drives and CDs can easily save and access them at their convenience without necessarily coming into the library. Library clientele now have a choice of selecting either print or multimedia publications.

Answering of users queries: With the application of multimedia resources in libraries, the traditional face to face interaction between a reference librarian and a user is declining. Reference services provided by libraries have been transformed by information technologies. For example reference questions can now be easily answered through e-mail, SMS, Chat and Video-conferencing.

Resource sharing: Multimedia resources make it possible for resource sharing among users and group of libraries. This is because with a multimedia resource like video conferencing many users can be reached at the same time. Ogunsola (2011) emphasized on the importance of multimedia by stating that boundaries between countries would become less important. Many nations have used multimedia resources to transmit information over long distances. As a result of this the barrier of time and space is overcome. It is now possible to deliver and attend training, seminars, conferences, and workshops without necessarily being at the venue.

Entertainment purposes: Materials such as audiotapes, compact disc and videos can serve as entertainment tools for patrons. Events such as matriculation ceremonies, graduation ceremonies, inaugural lectures, documentaries and world events like football matches could be stored so that users can enjoy watching and listening to them at their leisure period.

Improvement in information service delivery: Improving accessibility to both information resources and services has been the concern of most libraries. The application of multimedia resources in information management has brought a lot of improvement in information delivery in libraries. Libraries are now able to meet various preferences of patrons such as scholarly scientific and vocational information resources in different formats. Information can now also be accessed by distant users without necessarily coming into the library.

- **Self learning tools:** Multimedia resources provide practical or self education in various subject areas. Such areas include How- to -do –it- Manual, recipes of various foods, vehicles repairs etc. Information materials such as handbooks, manuals and guides are now available on CDs and video tapes.
- **Trainings:** Most libraries now use multimedia resources like projectors, CDs and video tapes as instructional materials to train library staff and provide library instructions for patrons. The advantage multimedia resources have over print as a medium for training is that it is interactive.
- **Multimedia catalogues:** In acquiring information materials for libraries, multimedia catalogues are now available: These multimedia catalogues are usually not bulky like the print versions and they also have very high storage capacity and can easily be shared among other libraries, faculties, colleges, and departments for collection development purposes.
- **Electronic publishing:** The introduction of CD writers and recordable CDs have solved some of the problems of the libraries in storing old and less used materials especially materials on gray literature. Also, information can now be published in different format by publishers and authors for ease of use by students. Ramalah, (1998) opined that multimedia resources are now the most viable alternatives to paper based publishing.
- **Geographic Information System:** Multimedia resources such as audio and video images are also now available and they usually contain information on images of buildings, maps, atlas, and are used as reference tools.
- **Social Networking:** The internet which is also a type of multimedia have provided avenues for libraries to improve their services .Ezeani and Igwesi (2012) stated that different libraries in the country have now realised the need to move with the times with the use of social media such as Face Book, MySpace, Twitter, You tube etc. With this platform, libraries can now advertise and publicize their services and products to users and potential users. They also use these tools to display new arrivals, provide current awareness services, provide user education and get feedback from users. Another advantage of this platform is that information gets to wider audience because most people use it as a forum for interaction and socialization. It is also very cheap to maintain.

Challenges of Multimedia Applications in Libraries

Despite the numerous advantages of multimedia resources their applications to information management in libraries no doubt are being faced with one challenge or the other. Student population is increasing every day. Most libraries do not have enough equipment to meet the demands of users. Where the equipment is available most or some of them are not up to date and even functional. Troll (2001) in his view stated that students do not use the multimedia resources sometimes because their personal computers are better equipped and faster, to handle multimedia tasks and are loaded with all the software they need to perform their task than the ones available in the library.

Librarians and library management are hardly interested in acquiring and managing multimedia resources. As a result of this lukewarm attitude many libraries do not have a functional multimedia resource centre and multimedia librarians to manage the section. For example the Federal University of Technology Library was established in 1984, and it never had a multimedia unit until 2014. Oyebode (2015) stressed the mismanagement of ICT resources in University of Lagos (UNILAG). He argued that the digital library that was donated to the university by MTN in 2005 had been placed under lock and key in the last five years and much to the dissatisfaction of users and the donor organisation.

The requisite software to set up a multimedia facility in libraries is very expensive. Library's budgets are most times insufficient to keep pace with the high cost of technologies that rapidly becomes obsolete. Furthermore, Odigie and Eneh (2011) stated that most multimedia resources easily become obsolete. Diskette which was used in the computer media is not compatible with modern systems again. So are the packages used in the 1980s such as "WORDSTAR Professionals Release 4" is not compactable with the present day Microsoft Word.

Libraries now also face serious challenges in the preservation of multimedia materials. Most multimedia resources deteriorate easily and become inaccessible. Odigie and Eneh (2011) state that multimedia resources seems to be weaker than the poorest paper quality for a sparkle of dust can bring about a gap between a video-tape and the read write head. Furthermore, lack of skilled manpower is another problem

that militates against the use of these resources. Some are usually very complicated and cannot be operated easily.

Most Libraries face the challenges of lack of trained personnel to handle management of multimedia resources in Libraries. There have been several trainings and conferences organized by many libraries, Nigeria Library Association (NLA) and State Chapters of NLA on various aspects of librarianship, however not much attention had been given to multimedia resources. Multimedia librarians are faced with limited expertise on how to repair damaged materials. They also do not have the technological expertise on how to increase their life span.

Overcoming the Challenges

In order to overcome the challenges discussed above, there is need to put in place strategies in managing multimedia resources in libraries. The recommendations of this paper are as follows:

1.   Staff responsible for multimedia resources should belong to and participate in media related professional activities regularly.
2.   Library management should always be ready to fund continuing education, conferences and seminars for multimedia staff.
3.   A stable budget for the acquisition and maintenance of multimedia resources should be maintained by library management.
4.   The necessary equipment to access multimedia resources should be available and maintained to provide ready access to library users.
5.   Obsolete or damaged multimedia resources should be repaired or removed from library collections immediately they go bad.
6.   Before acquiring any of the multimedia equipment the media librarian must ensure that the spare part is available and easily repaired.
7.   The multimedia librarian must be dedicated and committed to his duties.
8.   Library instructions should also include use of multimedia resources.
9.   Library management and Library professional organization should regularly provide internal and external trainings, workshops, conferences and seminars on management of multimedia resources.

Conclusion

The application of multimedia resources in managing information resources in libraries is indeed a blessing. Library management should ensure they apply multimedia resources in order to improve their services within and outside the library. Furthermore, we are now in an information technology driven society where users expect libraries to provide them access to varieties of information resources in various formats. They also expect such resources to be easy to use, independent of time, place and subject discipline for the purpose of learning, entertainment, decision making and discovering of new knowledge.

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