
Towards Developing a Digital Library: A Study of Nagaland University

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Abstract

One of the most important developments in the library domain is digitization of library materials. The digital library development movement is probably the most perplexing and promising development for libraries since the beginning of automation. This paper briefly discusses the concept and implications of digital library, and provides initiatives to be taken in Nagaland University with particular emphasis to the library at Headquarters: Lumami.

Keywords: Information Technology, Digital Library, Nagaland University, Lumami

1. Introduction

We are in the age of a networked society where Information Technology in addition to its use in all spheres of human activity has been used extensively to record, store and disseminate the information in the digital form. Information Technology has almost converted the world into a global village.

The academic and research libraries across the globe are striving to harness technology for achieving scholarly knowledge management, which is fast proliferating, distributed and scattered. Knowledge Management leveraging on information science (IS) and information technology (IT) is the recent trend and strategy seen in the advanced academic and corporate environment. Building world standard digital libraries, as powerhouses of knowledge, that are able to address the complex issues put forth by the technology push as well as the demand pull are fast catching up worldwide attention. Particularly in India, Open Digital Library (ODL) initiatives are picking up unprecedented Institutional as well as professional group attention owing to a variety of excellent features offered by Digital Libraries.

Digital libraries have attracted almost all the developed and developing countries due to its multifaceted features and the opportunities it extend to the information providers and information seekers. It offers new levels of access to broader audiences of users and new opportunities for library and information science field to advance both in theory and practice.

In spite of the serious challenges posed for creating effective digital libraries and providing cutting edge digital information, yet the advantages outweigh most of the bottlenecks and hardships and therefore, the importance of digital libraries have been recognized by all nations of the world.

2. Definition

There are many different kinds of digital libraries creating, delivering and preserving digital objects that derive from many different formats of underlying data, and it is very difficult to formulate a

definition that encapsulates all these.

The Digital Library Federation (DLF) which is a consortium of libraries and related agencies that are pioneering the use of electronic-information technologies to extend their collections and services, realizing the need of common understanding of the term 'digital library' developed the following definition:

Digital libraries are organizations that provide the resources, including the specialized staff, to select, structure, offer intellectual access, to interpret, distribute, preserve the integrity of, and ensure the persistence over time of collections of digital works so that they are readily and economically available for use by a defined community or set of communities.

This is a full and a good working definition because it is broad enough to comprehend other uses of the term. Digital libraries are the digital face of traditional libraries that include both digital collections and traditional, fixed media collection. So they encompass both electronic and paper materials. Digital libraries are being pursued because they allow for a wide distribution of a vast amount of data and because they provide new ways of interacting with information and manipulating data. Most of the technology for digital libraries exists and is in active use on the internet and the World Wide Web (WWW). A digital library could potentially change the library from a community-based institution to a more active part of a global system. The majority of a library's holdings would no longer be printed text, but would incorporate large amounts of multimedia information as well.

New digital libraries can try to go beyond being paperless versions of traditional libraries in at least three ways: First, freed of the need to store copies of (sometimes rare) documents, they can focus more on services that will help students and faculty find and organize information in vast virtual collections. Secondly, freed of the need to maintain collections in locations physically near their communities of readers, they can plan to aggregate virtual holdings into more encompassing, complete and up-to-date collections. Thirdly, freed of the dominance of static print (audio and video can be digitized as readily as can typed text), digital libraries can grapple with the complexities of representing and cataloguing new multimedia documents.

Digital libraries are not going to replace the physical existence of documents completely but no doubt to meet the present demand, to satisfy the non local user digitization must be introduced so that at least libraries becomes of hybrid nature. The initial cost of digitization is high but experiment shows that once digitization is introduced than the cost to manage this collection will be cheaper than that of any traditional library. Day by day the cost of digitization is decreasing, the online publication is increasing, and the need of user [s] is shifting towards a different environment so it [is] needless to say that after one or two years my library or your library will be digitized. It is high time therefore, to all information and library professionals that they gear themselves to take the challenge.

3. Nagaland University Lumami Library

Nagaland University was born by an Act of Parliament in 1994. The University presently has four campuses. Lumami, the headquarters and permanent campus is located in Zunheboto district. The teaching departments comprise both the Sciences viz, Botany, Chemistry, Geography and Zoology, and Social Science stream viz, Economics, Political Science and Sociology. All these departments in addition to imparting quality academic instructions are also actively involved in various research programs and other academic activities.

The library at Headquarters: Lumami started in August 1997 from scratch, and is the youngest, as compared to Kohima and Medziphema campus libraries, which have large collection holdings. IT facility wise too, the two campuses have the advantage as these two campuses are centrally located and have easy access to the commercial centre of the State, Dimapur.

Although much remains to be achieved as compared to the libraries within and outside the State, yet the steady march ahead during these past eleven years has been significant both in terms of infrastructural facilities and services provided. The library today has a document collection of 13,500 books, 94 journals and periodicals, 7 national and regional newspapers, and 380 bound journals. It uses the SOUL software for its library activities and provides Internet facility (VSAT-Broadband) to its users. It serves 309 Post Graduate students, 33 teachers, 20 Research Scholars (registered in the library till 2008 March), non-teaching staff, and alumni of the University. It also extends services to teachers and scholars of other institutions in certain cases, although Inter Library Loan is not currently available.

The library has seven staff headed by an Assistant Librarian. There is no Information Scientist in the library, but a System Administrator looks after the IT area. In spite of the IT facilities available (LAN has been recently introduced in the campus), most of the library services provided are still performed in the traditional method.

4. Towards a Digital Library

Building a digital library is expensive and resource-intensive. Before embarking on such a venture, it is important to consider some basic principles underlying the design, implementation, and maintenance of any digital library. When creating digital library systems containing valuable content, we are making important promises to both current and future users. Seriously attending to the principles and the practices that evolve from them places us in a much better position. Valuable content should be handled with care and rendered in the highest quality possible and should not disappear. We need to understand how to preserve and safeguard digital material, so it doesn't become obsolete. We need also to strive for continued open access to all knowledge. There is no better time to start than now and no better place to start than with our own valuable collections.

5. Some of the problems confronted by the library are:

1. The library staff lacks skill and expertise in handling ICT application.
2. The campus being located in a remote area lacks good computer network infrastructure to extend the services beyond the campus premises.
3. The computerization process of the library is not being fairly supported in terms of finance.
4. The library is not adequately equipped with latest hardware and software to provide modern computerized services to its users.
5. Lumami library is yet to computerize some of the essential operations or services.
6. Lack of proper user education in the library makes the available computerized services under utilized.
7. No regular staff training in regard to IT based resources and services has been conducted.

Digital information is transforming the conduct of teaching and research. There are debates about the speed of change and the nature of the change, but there is no doubt that the creation, transmission, accessing, and archiving of information will increasingly be digital. How effectively or efficiently the library moves along is an open question. While problems and challenges in building a digital library exist, there is a need that the library should move into the world of digital information.

6. To this end the following suggestions are put forth:

1. Adequate funds should be made available to the library for procuring necessary hardware and software from time to time and sufficient budgetary provisions on regular basis should be made to maintain the computerized system.
2. Sufficient number of latest computers should be procured for use in various sections as well as for the users to make use of OPAC and Internet.
3. There should be adequate equipments and tools available for conducting video conferencing for creating an effective communication channel.
4. The library should procure software which will be capable of meeting the Library's as well as user requirements.
5. There is a need for trained and skilled professional staff to shoulder the responsibility of the computerization process in the library, and periodic in-service training of staff in handling IT operations and services should be undertaken.

Time is a major factor for each user of the library and digitization is the only solution to the problem. Digital libraries are needed to provide quality-based service at the user's doorstep.

7. Conclusion

In an era when a large number of useful information products are available only in digital format, the gap between the so-called 'information rich' and 'information poor' is widening further. To overcome this unfortunate situation, we should set aside adequate resources for collecting digital information. We also need to give priority to staff training, and user education in regard to ICT based resources and services. Our library also need proper ICT infrastructure including hardware, software and human resource, and library staff to be trained properly to make use of the resources to the highest level, both conventional and digital resources.

It is hoped that with the passage of time the library at Headquarters: Lumami will evolve for dynamic digital program that will

1. Employ technologies that will make the library collections and resources more widely accessible to patrons
2. Collect, create and disseminate significant publications in electronic formats so that library and research collections continue to be universal and comprehensive
3. Build collaborations with other institutions both within and outside the State, to create shared assets and enabling libraries to store, preserve, provide access to, and expand their resources
4. Create a culture of technical and strategic innovation so that libraries can fulfill both traditional and new initiatives
5. Reinvent libraries and move towards flexible, responsive, user-centered institutions.

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