

Chapter 13

Open Access to Knowledge and Challenges in Digital Libraries: Nigeria's Peculiarity

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ABSTRACT

Information access has been a major challenge to researchers, especially in Africa and majorly in Nigeria. The exploitation experienced by researchers who do not have free access to papers but have to pay constitutes a major factor for consideration of Open Access Initiative. An exposition on the oppositions confronted by proponents of open access initiative has been done in this work; the change management process and challenges encountered and how to obliterate the challenges are presented in this chapter. Academics across the globe are coming to terms with open access initiative but the Nigeria environment has not fully integrated into this philosophy. This chapter points out the need to embrace open access initiative. It was concluded that open access signals a new dawn for conducting research by granting free access to the deluge of information available across the globe. The open access initiative challenges publishers who place unnecessary restrictions on access of scholarly publications. This makes research endeavours of scholars around the globe easily accessible, thus enabling researchers to extend the frontiers of existing knowledge.

INTRODUCTION

Unfettered access to knowledge is a necessity for researchers who are charged with the responsibility of proffering solution to the myriad of challenges confronting humanity. Academics rely on relevant and timely literature from different parts of the world in order to be able to measure level of development, know the existing gaps in their fields of study and also avoid duplication of efforts. It has however been reported in several studies that access to knowledge and information sources have been hampered by

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-3093-0.ch013

several factors such as copyright laws, cost of publication and access to journal among others (Christian, 2008; Li, & Banach, 2011; Ezeani and Ezema, 2011). Predominantly, scholars face challenges related to access to current and high quality peer reviewed articles in their fields available in journals hosted by renown publishers across the globe. Access to journals hosted on these platforms attracts costs, which in most cases, exceed an individual's personal financial capability. It is only researchers who are affiliated to financially robust institutions, who are able to subscribe to electronic databases that have unhindered access to these electronic resources.

This situation has been a limiting factor to accessing timely and relevant information for quality research and could also discourage researchers. When researchers are confronted by brick walls in accessing information, it automatically reduces their capacity to make new discoveries which consequently hinders them from being able to make meaningful contributions as well proffer solutions to issues of global concern. Africans are predominantly affected by these restrictions put in place by publishers. A member of faculty in a Nigerian institution of higher learning expressed frustration with respect to having access to an article published by him; he lamented thus:

This is unfair! I sweated to publish an article in a journal, to access it, the publisher insisted I must subscribe. Where do I get the money? Have I not been intellectually robbed?

There are many others who are confronted by this type of dilemma and have been frustrated as a result of the restricted access to relevant information at critical stages of their careers and research endeavors. This has further fueled the agitation for the open access initiative. Knowledge is expanding at the speed of light and scholars are trying to keep abreast of them, hence placing restriction on information at whatever level for whatever reason negates the spirit of research which thrives on knowledge sharing. Effective knowledge transfer is the pivot for balanced development, especially in the 21st century that the world has become a global village. This realization necessitated the collaboration of scholars around the world to clamour for open access to knowledge which aids the free flow of scholarly communication.

Scholarly Communication

Scholarly communication connotes the conceptualization, materialization, transformation, assessment (peer-review), dissemination and preservation of knowledge related to research and other scholarly activities. The research lifecycle most often revolves around these concepts. Traditional approach to documentation and circulation of research output was so prevalent until the introduction of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) which has significantly reduced paper format for release of journals and books that convey research outputs. Dissemination and spread of research outputs can now be done through several digital formats which allow for quick and unlimited access to research findings through an array of networking facilities through the internet. Self-publishing and archiving are becoming more common with the aid of web 2.0. Knowledge creation, preservation and communication have been made possible, hence less dependence on publishers who used to monopolize this process. This development however portends a great challenge for libraries and librarians, especially those that have not fully embraced the concept of the digital library. The onus therefore lies on libraries to create an enabling environment (digital libraries) and librarians to fully embrace ICT in order to be able to render effective and efficient support to researchers in several disciplines that depend on them for information in their areas of research interest.

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