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The Role of Law Librarians in Knowledge Based Society; Nigerian Perspective

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Introduction

Knowledge enhances human's ability to make the right decisions and is a means of human survival on earth. When rightly nurtured and applied, it has been used as an instrument for social, political, and economic dominance among nations of the world. One unique characteristic of the 21st century is the proliferation of information resources and the unprecedented growth of knowledge in various fields. This development has ushered us into a new civilization where knowledge is considered the most significant asset available to organizations and society for wealth creation. The fact that knowledge plays a key role in our present society necessitates the need to tap into this discourse as a major economic resource for the good of society.

Gupta (2015), opined that a knowledge society is not a new occurrence, after all, fishermen have long shared the knowledge of predicting the weather in their community and, this knowledge gets added to the social capital of the community. The knowledge society is often used to describe the advancement towards a post-industrial society. However, others refer to it as a normative goal that organizations or countries aspire to attain. In the same vein, Bedford, Donley, and Lensenmayer (2015), while commenting on the perception of library professionals of the knowledge society, observed that library professionals have wrongly construed knowledge society as one characterized by a strict focus on digital resources and extended use of other virtual platforms in information service delivery, rather it is the extensive use and dissemination of knowledge of every form for the growth of the society.

From the above definitions and conceptions, it is vivid that with the advancement in digital technology, knowledge societies become easily circulated because of the need to ensure sustainability. Also, the application of technology in this regard offers unlimited possibilities in generating, sharing, and retrieving knowledge between the "haves" and the "haves not". The goal, therefore, is to engage critical stakeholders in knowledge management such as law librarians in harnessing their multidisciplinary skills as information custodians to ensure easy access and proper dissemination of knowledge primarily within the legal community and the society at large. This can only be achieved when librarians are willing to take up new roles beyond the traditional task of collecting, organizing, and disseminating information to a user. They must see themselves as knowledge facilitators rather than information collectors. The desire to take on this new role will help ensure the proper dissemination of accumulated legal knowledge within society. It is on this premise that this paper examines the role of law librarians in a knowledge-based society.

The Concept of Knowledge Society

Bedford, Donley and Lensenmayer (2015) defined a knowledge society as one in which all members of a society engage in knowledge transactions in different spheres. Afgan & Carvalho cited in Anyaoku et al (2014) defined knowledge society as a human-structured organization based on contemporary developed knowledge and represents the new quality of life support systems based on the need for knowledge distribution, access to information and the capacity to transform information into knowledge. However, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (2005) conceptualized it as the ability to readily identify, generate, process, distribute and use information to build and apply knowledge for human development. The World Bank believes that for better understanding, the concept should be divided into four categories:

- i. Institutional structures that provide incentives for entrepreneurship and the use of knowledge.
- ii. Availability of skilled labour and a good education system.
- iii. Access to information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure
- iv. A vibrant innovation landscape that includes academics, the private sector, and civil society.

In essence, knowledge societies depict a civilization having a strong reliance on the use of knowledge in varied forms, discovered through technological or scientific research. The explosion of information resources characterized by the information age has contributed significantly to the competitive advantage among nations, companies and societies through the skillful application of knowledge. Therefore, a major attribute of the knowledge society, is the focus on education, research and development(R&D) to scale up the human capital resources needed to proffer effective solutions to problems. In this manner, knowledge becomes the primary factor of production for wealth creation and sustainability. Unlike the industrial society where land, labour and capital were key factors of production. In the new civilization, knowledge is regarded as the most element of production applied for the good and development of Society. Put differently, knowledge society represents the interplay between knowledge and education in enhancing human capital for societal good, prosperity, and advancement of the people often manifested in the quality of life of the people or through their products and services. The focus, therefore, is on intellectual capabilities and not on natural resources or the nation's population size (workforce).

During the 18th to late 20th century, the wealth creation of any nation was largely dependent on the amount of physical labour it possessed as they were considered the most important factors of production. This fact explains Europe's involvement in the slave trade because slaves were seen as a cheap form of labour for the evolving industries in Europe. However, at the turn of the 21st century, knowledge which is perceived as an excellent technical skill or the relational ability for solving problems is emphasized, because the engagement of human skill in production activities determines the economic growth of a nation, as such, it became an alternative to natural resources and manual labour. Gupta (2015) observed that about two third of the world's wealth comes from knowledge-based companies such as Google, Microsoft, Yahoo, etc. which are situated in developed countries.

Many view this concept as a misnomer. The most potent argument put forward against this concept is that man has always been endowed with different kinds of knowledge whether intrinsic or explicit from the beginning and at various epochs of human history. Why then do we discuss it as an emerging concept? Horridge (2011), and Robert E Lane, American Sociologist gave a fine distinction of what the concept represents in this contemporary time. He affirmed that there is an element of knowledge creation, consumption and advancement in every society. However, in the knowledge society, this is present in a greater measure.

Bhattacharyya (2009) believes that this concept is better understood within five principles. That is access to knowledge, knowledge concept, knowledge creation, knowledge application and development of better knowledge services. He further opined that the success of this concept in any society is predicated on the increased focus on educational opportunities and improved library infrastructure. Bhattacharyya's (2009) position seems to ignore the fact that the concept has its origin in a more scientific context. Bedford, Donley, and Lensenmayer (2015) remarked that the knowledge age presents librarians with new opportunities to leverage their intellectual capital beyond the use of digital resources and other channels of delivering information resources to users.

A major characteristic of the knowledge society is that employees' worth will be defined by the intellectual capacity to contribute significantly to an organization, therefore the overall performance of the firm will be dependent on the aggregate intellectual environment of the staff in the organization. The focus then will be on how to invest in human capital development and a skilled workforce which in the new dispensation, will be considered the most cherished asset. Similarly, the focus of law librarians should move from the basic role of selecting and acquiring legal resources for use, to expending sufficient time to improve their intellectual capacity as professionals to function as knowledge facilitators in the knowledge

society. Other essential characteristics include; universal access to information; a skilled citizen who relies on information technology; equal access to education; occupations-creativity & management preservation and promotion of cultural diversity including multilingualism; freedom of expression as well as a network of knowledge organizations and corporate culture (Gupta, 2015). Knowledge generation and dissemination, are two cardinal codes for operating in the knowledge society, the law librarian's operation in information dissemination, can help actualize this goal.

Knowledge Society and Information Society Distinguished

Many writers have expressed their concern over the possibility of confusing the concept of knowledge and information as well as the knowledge information society because of their apparent similarities. On one hand, knowledge society is relatively concerned with how to equip citizens with relevant information to enable them to make quality decisions that will improve both their job performance and their general well-being, on the other hand, the information society is patently concerned with the creation and dissemination of raw data (processed or unprocessed). Lor and Britz cited in Bedford et al (2015) provided a beautiful distinction between both concepts. They posit that an information society is mainly focused on Information Communication Technology (ICT), information management, and distribution. On the other hand, knowledge society is focused on the creation, distribution, use, and reuse of knowledge.

According to David (2001), knowledge is that which empowers its possessor, in whatever field with the capability for engaging in intellectual or physical activity. Knowledge, therefore, is a matter of cognitive capability. Information on the other hand applies to all structured and formatted data that remain passive and inert until applied by those with the knowledge needed to interpret and process them. For instance, when a young technician receives a user manual, he or she is not given knowledge but information on how to run the machine, however, his knowledge of being able to interpret the information, will be helpful and will serve to reduce the cost of knowledge reproduction.

The Functionality of Libraries in the Knowledge Society

The library is established to meet the informational, educational and recreational needs of its user. Library is an important instrument of social transformation through its role in collecting and organizing information resources in different branches of knowledge for use to acquire knowledge (Ayandokun & Nworu, 2022). All over the world, libraries are transforming

themselves from mere repository hubs to service centers for knowledge seekers. Historically, library management had in an attempt to assuage the thirst for knowledge by the users, expended most of its resources in acquiring volumes of printed material for the benefit of the users because as it were, the pride and the value of a library at the time were based on the size and quantity of its collections rather than interactive and collaborative services (now recognized in modern librarianship as reference services). This, paradigm shift in library services is perhaps attributed to the presence of competition among information service providers. Today, owing to the proliferation of information sources, the focus and effectiveness of the modern library are measured in terms of the ease at which user can access and use available information resources. Information accessibility is currently influenced by information communication technology (ICT), particularly digital technology.

Presently, information professionals and law librarians are in a race to harness the potential of new technology by providing users with a wide range of current information across the world via digital or electronic platforms, enabling the user to access library resources from the comfort of their homes or offices thereby breaking the geographical barriers that exist in a traditional library setting. Like the modern smartphone or smart television, we now also have smart libraries (Bedford et-al, 2015).

The law library is often inundated with myriads of resources, at first this may seem useful, however, the materials are worthless without adequate knowledge of access to the knowledge contained in them. In this era of digital explosion, more information is stored in digital formats making it imperative for the user to acquire similar knowledge or understand how to use them. Although the legal profession from Nigeria's perspective is generally slow to adapt to change. However, the law itself is dynamic, like the dispensation we have found ourselves. It is therefore imperative that members of the legal profession accept this new trend to meet the need of their clients. The same is true of the law librarian who is naturally used to physical books being held in the library. The days when legal knowledge is confined to book materials are gone, today, a lot of information resources are stored in electronic format. Since lawyers, judges, or law students are always involved in making decisions, the law librarian's role in this regard, is to help the user understand the relevance of each source to their search and how to use them. This will enable them to reach an informed decision.

Tiku (2017) asserts that a judge was misled in his court decision based on the information put up by google news. This speaks volume of proper evaluation of information sources, and emphasized that mere access to information is not sufficient, law librarian must

do more to ensure the information provided is accurate and lead to knowledge. Again, improving individual legal knowledge, not information, is the pursuit of law librarianship. Therefore, law librarians must strive to provide users access to knowledge. What does it mean to provide access to knowledge? It could mean the interpretation of knowledge sources in a manner that will give the user an improved or new understanding for a better decision. It could also mean helping the user evaluate the appropriate information channel necessary to satisfy his need and applied the knowledge gained in solving any legal or social problem. This skill is particularly useful in this era of information explosion. Judges have been misled in giving judgment likewise lawyers in advising their clients. Avoiding such ineptitude on the part of some lawyers has necessitated the inclusion of *caveats* in online publications to avert legal consequences. Law librarians are distinctively placed to serve as navigators, interpreters, and organizers of the patterns in the shifting legal information landscape to aid knowledge acquisition.

The Law Librarian

Typically, a law librarian is primarily concerned with the responsibility of providing legal information resources to members of the legal community, including private legal practitioners, paralegal staff, judges, teachers, faculty members, and students in the academic environment. American Association of Law Libraries (2022) defines a law librarian as a legal information professional whose job is to research, analyze, and evaluate the accuracy, validity, and quality of information sources. Their roles also include teaching, training, writing, managing, procuring as well as classifying library materials. Law librarians, are usually engaged in various establishment including, law firms, courts, college libraries, law school libraries, government departments and related organizations. Every law librarian aspires to match the information need of the users with the required legal information for personal improvement, research, and decision making. Onoyeya and Ajayi (2015) opined that the expectation of law librarian is to possess broad knowledge or expertise of legal resources together with concrete competence in law and librarianship. Similarly, Olorunfemi (2016) posits that a law librarian is a librarian attached to a law library and works to provide access to legal information sources within the law library. It is believed that this dual qualification will enhance the law librarian's ability to perform his task effectively.

However, Whisner (2008) is of the view that the librarian does not need a law degree to function in this capacity. Although, she was quick to add that getting a law degree or being a legal practitioner comes with an enormous advantage such as familiarization with the subject

matter, principles of law, legal terms, procedures, and institutions. In addition, it helps to build the law librarian's confidence in relating with his or her patrons who are members of the legal profession. The negative perception of non-lawyers acting as librarians may affect the quality of service that may be rendered as well as their relationship with the library patrons. This view may not always be the case because there are some law libraries in which the librarians are neither lawyers nor do they have any law degree. Again, we can say being on job for a long time with a genuine commitment to personal improvement, might enhance better service delivery. Although, without background training in law, such librarians may have difficulty satisfying the needs of library users because for what it is worth, the person may have no genuine interest in the discipline. Again, the considerable utility will be gained when a legal practitioner is made to direct the affairs of a law library as against when it is controlled by a non-legal practitioner, especially in academic law libraries.

It is pertinent to mention that the Council of Legal Education, (CLE) the main statutory body responsible for regulating and providing legal education for lawyers in Nigeria has made it a requirement for accrediting Universities to have a legal practitioner as the law librarian, a person with a degree in law from any accredited university and a Masters in library science (MLS) from accredited library school to ensure quick access to information and retrieval. The CLE having hindsight of the huge advantages of having a qualified legal Practitioner as law librarian in a typical academic law library made it part of the required conditions for accrediting such faculty/institution for the discipline of law. Despite these glaring necessities many information professionals especially those in the field of Library and Information Science have construed this policy rather narrowly seeing it as a means of creating more jobs opportunities for legal practitioners in the country, while others have argued that it is a practical manifestation of the professional arrogance associated with the legal profession. Also, it must be pointed out that this same policy is true with the American Bar Association.

Many have argued that the role of a law librarian can be conveniently performed by a qualified librarian with a degree in library and information science only, without additional qualification. It is submitted, that this amount to putting a square peg in a round hole because a law librarian will be able to adequately facilitate the effective utilization of legal knowledge among his users owing to his dual knowledge capacity in the field of law and library science.

The practical implication of thinking otherwise is that it may, affect the level of interaction between a knowledge seeker and the non-lawyer acting as law a librarian and invariably affect the future use of the library. Furthermore, librarian roles in the knowledge economy should go beyond the provision of legal literature and possess a certain level of

emotional intelligence coupled with a background of knowledge of the law to address user queries. Another similar implication is that it may reduce friction between the knowledge seeker and the knowledge provider. Without peaceful co-existence even with a huge body of legal knowledge, there can be no meaningful development in the society.

Roles of Law Librarianship in the Emerging Knowledge Society

Legal practitioners as part of their traditional responsibility, rely heavily on legal knowledge for their daily affairs whether in the courtroom between lawyers and judges or the classroom between teachers and students, without the availability of legal information, society will be static. Innovation, growth, and development are usual consequences of improved knowledge. The importance of information to lawyers and law students as significant components of the legal system cannot be overemphasized. Essentially, law librarianship a subset of librarianship exists to fulfill this role.

According to Dada (2011), law librarianship is a hybrid of two professions, librarianship and law which is dedicated to the service of the legal profession, and incidentally, both are interdependent with a common threshold for information. The law librarian is an acclaimed information professional whose primary responsibility is to satisfy the information need of a special category of users. There is an intricate relationship between information and knowledge because one leads to the other. Information is transformed into knowledge through appropriate processing steps. Librarians pay more emphasis on information. However, as pointed out above information does not necessarily lead to knowledge. Sensiper cited in Liew (2007) refers to knowledge as information that is relevant, actionable and based at least partially on experience. Davenport and Prusak (2002) opined that knowledge is a mixture of organized experiences, values, information, and insights offering a framework to evaluate new experiences and information.

Law librarians can help a user identify their knowledge gap and match the appropriate information resources necessary to fulfill a task. This speaks to the redefining roles of law librarians in the knowledge economy focusing on facilitating the acquisition and dissemination of timely relevant legal information to their users. The implication is that law librarians themselves must not only be versed in their identified field but must show genuine interest in the need of the user. It is proposed that constant personal self-development will be of immense benefit to the law librarian.

The advent of digital technology has been a game changer in the process of acquiring, storing, and disseminating legal information, this tool has also been instrumental in shaping the information-seeking behavior of the digital information user (lawyers, judges, and students). These electronic networks and devices have led to the proliferation of information in various formats including the internet (web). The challenge presented by digitalization and ICT is that users now have an enormous task to sieve through these super highways of information resources to satisfy their information needs in acquiring the new and necessary knowledge for improving job performance. Sadly, an unskilled user may be discouraged at the end of the day if the result turns out to be unsuccessful perhaps if the approach to the information source was wrongful. While these inventions and innovation may have contributed to unrestricted access to information, it has also presented a major problem to untrained users on how to source for relevant information on the internet as there may be thousands or millions of articles with information sources, available to answer the user's query. Thus, the Danish Agency for Libraries and media cited in Bedford et al (2015) noted that "...even though the internet is a rich source of information, the citizen's access to the internet is not sufficient to ensure value-creating knowledge development" it concluded that the physical and digital collections continue to be a vital knowledge base.

The trend of the moment is that users depend heavily on digital space for their information needs. However, we must point out that individuals or organizations cannot benefit from the knowledge economy by relying only on technology alone. Philip, Yu, Hameed, and El-Akhdary (2017) assert that there is a need for organizations to encourage staff to circulate every new idea or information learned to promote the organizational knowledge.

As part of his traditional responsibility in the new age, a law librarian must keep abreast with legal dynamics as they unfold in the international space through constant research with a view to effectively assist the user in legal research, brief writing, bibliography, guidance, and writing legal opinion. Anyaegbu et al (2013). In addition, scholars like Urhibo (2017) have remarked that the law librarian should be able to routinely lead staff workshops and seminars, organize conferences, and give talks in any area of legal discussion in addition to his normal library managerial and technical responsibility in indexing, editing and abstracting of legal research and report. Thus, in the knowledge society, a law librarian's role in the development of law as a body of knowledge may be manifested in answering reference questions, engaging in the writing of articles, cataloging of legal literature, teaching law students, holding meetings with faculty members, judges or attorneys, implements new technologies and attend

professional legal meetings and support research (The American Association of Law Libraries (AALL) (2015)).

The functionality of the law librarian will be critical in facilitating knowledge within the legal society. Again, knowledge availability does not necessarily translate to knowledge applicability, hence the art of selecting and making use of legal knowledge resources is a desired skill that must be possessed by the law librarian as an information professional. The law librarian has a role in assisting legal practitioners and other users in this category to develop, interpret, articulate and disseminate legal knowledge within the social space.

To achieve this, Bedford, et al recommends that library schools should provide librarians with the necessary skills to develop the intellectual capacity needed for knowledge facilitation, because the librarian, which they refer to as a knowledge facilitator is useful in knowledge transaction and in bridging the gap between “knowing-doing”. Their roles in the new age and in the library will not only be to facilitate the creation of knowledge but to orchestrate the even distribution of knowledge by providing avenues and opportunities for sharing knowledge. (Alvesson, 2001, Garcia, 2006 cited in Bedford, 2015). The roles are succinctly summed up as follows; ability to engage in conversation, facilitate dialogue facilitate trust among the creators and users and vice versa, facilitate knowledge elicitation, facilitate knowledge creation initiative and opportunities and lastly, facilitate the enhancement of knowledge creation and transfer across organizations and communities without geographical or cultural barriers. However, Sthul, (2019) in her approach, enumerated eight skills the librarian must possess in the 21st century to feature effectively as a knowledge facilitator;

1. **Identity Management:** Law Librarian should be able to examine the profiles of users to assist them by matching their knowledge need with the necessary legal material that may be useful to the user.
2. **Network Awareness:** it is expected that the librarian is vast in the use of social networking sites for sharing of views and creating awareness through networking.
3. **Expert Search:** it is crucial in this era of technology and multiple search engines that a librarian be skilled in navigating the web to find resources and potential library user.
4. **Content Management:** in this context, law librarians can cross-link people and ideas among the conglomerates of different groups.
5. **Context Awareness:** law librarians should be diversified in knowledge and have the ability to link information to people’s profile.
6. **Collaborative:** networking ensures knowledge sharing, establishes a communication link with experts, and allows users to develop a team working skill.

7. **Flexibility:** Easy content creation and sharing, easy to update files and personal contact
8. **Ability to Teach:** The law librarian, in addition to other managerial functions, must be willing and able to train users about new technologies, skills and competences needed to survive in the new environment. Users need to know how to navigate the web as a new method of learning requires a form of connectivity with other people as knowledge is no longer acquired in a linear manner.

She equally proposed that librarians should be active in educating their patrons on the use of social media in accessing, communicating and sharing knowledge.

Mainka et-al. (2013) while speaking on the roles of the library in the knowledge society, attempted a narrow approach to understanding the expected roles of libraries in a new age. According to him, the roles can be conveniently divided into two groups- digital libraries and physical libraries. Bedford et al faulted this characterization because of its limited focus on technology and content. In their view, the information provided in form of e-journals, e-books, e-newspapers databases and online catalogues are encoded and static, not sources of knowledge or intellectual capital.

Law librarians in the knowledge society must seek to provide their patrons with all digital services in different formats as well as reference services and ensure an open channel of communication through the use of social media complemented with the provision of physical spaces for meeting, learning, and working. Sthul (2019) accentuated this position when she argued that social networking sites like Facebook, WhatsApp, My Space, Ning, Blogs, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr, and Library Thing are all useful in enabling librarians and users to interact and share resources dynamically within the social cyberspace. Her view is apt because the use of social media is fast becoming a regular part of everyday lives among various user groups, especially among teens and young adults. In a study carried out by Pew Research Centre in the United States, 95% of teens are said to have access to a smartphone, while 45% say they are ‘almost constantly’ online (Baglari et al; 2020.). Thus, Dickson and Holley (2010) were right when they noted that “online social networking provides an avenue to reach college students in their environment”.

Again, the law librarian can adopt this tool to promote information delivery and answer reference queries. Professionally, the librarian has a lot to gain from the use of social media because it helps to redefine the interactive roles between the librarian and the user. In social networking sites, the user is an active participant and a co-creator and contributes to building the body of knowledge (Sthul;2019).

Impact of Digital Tools on Law Librarians in Discharging their Responsibility

- It helps facilitates and promotes effective communication between law librarians and their client.
- It helps to bridge the information gap between the user and the information professional.
- It is useful in answering reference queries.
- It helps to market library services.
- It helps the librarian to provide easy access to “legal” information.
- The use of social media helps the librarian market his skills and product to the outside world.
- Announcing the new arrival through social networking sites.
- Sharing links to articles on the internet.

Conclusion

The emerging social and technological advancements have led us into a new civilization of knowledge society wherein knowledge is considered the most important asset for the growth and development of any nation. Therefore, it is important to note that the law librarian and information professionals have an active role to play in the knowledge society, in ensuring access to knowledge resources. Law librarians must not limit themselves to the traditional roles of cataloging, classifying indexing of “legal” information sources, or answering reference queries rather they must redefine their roles to stay relevant in the current age. Apart from the provision of access to information, they must learn to be dynamic in their approach, for instance, ensuring the unrestricted flow of ideas, thoughts, and knowledge by encouraging interaction and collaboration between the knowledge creators and the users using physical environment or virtual environment like social media sites. Although, librarians generally have been known as key players in information management while the library acts as information management centers. However, in the new civilization, where knowledge is considered an asset. Law librarians must reinvent themselves from being information managers to knowledge managers and ensure that library resources are available for facilitating the impartation of knowledge, skill, ideas, and thoughts necessary for individual empowerment in the emerging knowledge society.

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