Article

INFORMATION POLICY PROVISION: WHOSE RESPONSIBILITY? THE LIBRARIANS' VIEW AND DILEMMA

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Abstract

This expository research paper tried a definition for Information Policy. The dilemmas librarians encounter in discharging their duties especially, ethical issues, were highlighted. Globalization of information policy and effect of information policy on acquisition and reference librarians are treated. The aim of this research was to survey the understanding of the meaning of library policy and information policy by librarians, and to ascertain their knowledge of whose responsibility it is to provide each of those policies. Survey method with the use of questionnaire and oral interview were used for data collection. 200 copies of questionnaire were distributed to librarians of five selected universities in Lagos and Ogun States in Nigeria. 184 copies were returned and made use of. The research found out that many librarians could not differentiate between library policy and information policy. The respondents overwhelmingly agreed that government, lawyers, librarians, ICT professionals, and other information workers should actively be involved in the provision of information policy with librarians leading. It was recommended that heads of libraries and library schools should include information policy in school curriculum. Employers of library and information scientists should make sure that new employees understand their library's policy. Conclusion was that solution should not be solo; government information agencies, private sectors, and lawyers should be involved in formulating and providing an enduring information policy.

KEYWORDS: Information policy; Information society; Library policy; Library ethics; Library in adult education; Globalization

INTRODUCTION

Information policy is an afterthought caused by mishaps and negative unforeseen contingencies resulting in information discrimination processes. With Information Technology came myriads of ways of accessing information and multitude of ways of behavior of information disseminators. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) have affected human beings socially, economically, politically, and culturally. The impact of ICT is so significant that there is need to think about it. ICT's impact is felt most of production, circulation and consumption of information. There is ICT virtually in every human endeavour. Library and Librarians, one of the processors and custodians of information is more affected than other professions, hence this paper is focused on them. Difference information packages create different problems soliciting special solutions. So no one policy can solve all the challenges that emanate as a result of information from different forms and formats. Rules and regulations that guide information production and utilization otherwise called information policy have their own challenges.

Libraries and librarians which are the processors, custodians, and disseminators of information and most likely, because of their strategic position in this affair, the policy to effect the policies are most of the times at the crossroads of attack from the information producers and the information users. This paper will highlight the dilemma that librarians encounter in an effort to discharge their duty diligently. Can they satisfy their customers without infringing on information policy laws? Will their professional ethics allow them to perform their work effectively and efficiently?

OBJECTIVE OF THIS STUDY

The major aim of this study is to test librarians 'understanding of both library and information policies. The librarians would be tested to ascertain whether they know the difference between library policy and information policy. This paper will also be addressing the perception people have on globalization as it affects policy making. Some library ethical issues in relation to library use, librarians, and information policy will be highlighted. Vital to this topic is the role of libraries in a society. At the end of this study better understanding of those who should be involved in formulation of information policy would be known.

THE ROLE OF LIBRARIES IN INFORMATION SOCIETY

Importance of Information

Information is important to existence of any reasoning living organism and any living organ. For our body systems to function well there should be a constant communication between the organ and the brain through the arteries and veins to the hormones and finally to the processor-the brain-which interprets and sends back a response for action. Action taken is communicated back and the vicious circle continues. This analogy also applied to human to human communication. Information generated must be transferred from one person to the other through some communication media. Information is vital to human existence and sustenance. Information is life.

Information acquired from various authentic sources (Nzotta 1993; Vickery 1987) is needed for decision making, impacts on knowledge, makes people aware of their rights and privileges, and gingers citizens for action (Opeke 1993; Onyemerekeya and Uhegbu 1998; and Kantumoya 1992). It is a resource for human survival just like land, labour, and capital (Hughes 1991). Starvation from information may lead to death of activities. So information should made available and accessible.

Record of History

Libraries are as old as records. As early as about 3600 to 2357 B.C. "Sumerian civilization flourished in the Tigris-Euphrates Valley" (Gate 1983: 4) in the continent of Africa. By 3100 B.C. Sumerian historians had begun to record their history. This was the beginning of records-keeping and consequently libraries. Records of commerce, religion and the ancient gods and goddesses were kept.

Agreements, alliances and all kinds of transactions were recorded. Different writing tools and writing materials and different method of preservation and dissemination were in use then. Since then, human beings have been generating, acquiring, storing, and disseminating information in different media till today. Information has accumulated so much yet man is still crazy for more and better and faster ways of discharging the information.

Information Society

The term "Information Society" came as a result of application of information tools in dissemination of information thereby making a good living out of it. Feather and Sturges (2003: 303) said that the term information society "refers to a society in which

information, rather than material goods, has become the chief economic, social and cultural motor". The decline in economy from the traditional industries like mining and manufacturing or the industrial age led to the alternate lucrative source of income which is information. Daniel Bell (1976) referred to this period as the "post-industrial" era. This new money minting business in enhanced by Information Communication Technology (ICT) which is the channel propelling information society. The internet is the leader in this information age followed by satellite communication and mobile telephones. All these are in addition to other mass and inter-personalized long existing media.

Role of Libraries in this Information Society Era

Though price for information technology is measurably low, average people in some poor countries like Nigeria cannot still afford it. Majority of illiterate Nigerians "missed the opportunity of attending formal school due to financial problems" (Onohwakpor 2005). Quoting Ogunseye 1981, p. 232, Onohwakpor highlighted five ways libraries could help in adult literacy. Among them are:

- A state of literacy may be attained and maintained;
- The adult may continuously improve his knowledge and skills;
- The individual is enabled to adjust to existing social, political, and economic systems;
- The adult may be made aware of the common citizenship, cultural heritage, and societal values, and thus adapt to changing roles in adult life;
- The individual may develop his personality and full potential, widening the range of his perception, interest and skills.

These are some of the reasons, based on the literacy perceptive, why there should be public libraries for the communities. The poor countries cannot continue to lag behind, because the rich countries cannot be stagnant waiting for them. So the government has to step in to bridge the gap. The government does this through the libraries especially the public libraries by providing the infrastructure and the manpower. So governments should provide libraries in all local government areas where none exists. Some versed local governments may be provided with more than one library. Some local government areas may have community libraries depending on their equidistance from each other. These centres should be provided with internet, television, radio, telephone call centres (this may not be free), hard-copy reading materials especially newspapers and magazines for current information. By this, rate of illiteracy, which is high in

developing countries like Nigeria, will reduce. Satisfaction of the users in information acquisition is the basic goal, but the sustainability of the workers (librarians or information scientists), is also vital.

In summary, libraries are obliged to acquire, process, manage, store, disseminate, and eliminate or archive information. The joy of librarians is to satisfy their clienteles, and this is achieved by having all that it takes to do so - the materials and the technology. Librarians face a kind of hindrance in the discharge of their duties to satisfy their customers due to lack of information policies to protect them in some of their services.

DEFINITION OF INFORMATION POLICY

Information policy is not easy to define because of its wide coverage. By implication it is related to principles, laws, guidelines, regulations, rules and even procedures guiding the management of information through its lifecycle. Information policy "comprises all the laws, regulations and public policies that encourage, discourage and regulate the creation, use, storage and communication of information" (Feather & Sturge, 2003 p 278).

Evelyn Daniel (2000), gave a mind boggling definition to information policy but it is well accepted. She says that information policy is "the set of rules, formal and informal, that directly restrict, encourage, or otherwise shape the flow of information". She went on to list five areas that information policy impacts on, as:
   a. Literacy
   b. Privatization and distribution of government information
   c. Freedom of information access
   d. Protection of personal privacy
   e. Intellectual property rights.

An area that was conspicuously left out is the area of information communication technology with its myriads of social and economic problems.

WHY POLICIES

Policies are made to deter or punish non-compliance. Methods adopted for enforcement of policies depend on the perception of the policy makers. Policies should be looked at as a deterrent or as a corrective measure, but it could also be used to solve a social problem. In the hypothetical example by Ian Rowlands on his contribution to

information policy formation in the International Encyclopedia of Information and Library Science, 2nd edition page 282, he brought the issue of people sleeping on the streets where the problem could either be described as "Vagrancy" or as "Homelessness". The definition of the problem determines the type of policy to make to solve the problem. If the problem is viewed as vagrancy, the response becomes "tougher forms of policing", but where viewed as homelessness the policy response becomes to "provide low-cost housing".

Information policy has a vicious cycle. Once one policy solves a problem another problem oozes from the other side. It could be from the implementation stage of the existing policy.

GLOBALIZATION AND INFORMATION POLICY

Information policy affects every geographical region. As ICT is global, as information is global, so should information policy be global. This is where caution is needed because the world has no single economy or culture. This makes it very difficult to have a worldly acceptable information policy. At the same time it is necessary to have a world information policy since information has no boundary.

GLOBALIZATION AND THE LIBRARY

The effect of globalization felt during the global economic crisis was called economic recession. As was wrongly predicted that it would not affect Nigeria by the then Central Bank of Nigeria governor Professor Soludo, globalization is integrating the world into a global economy. "Globalization can undermine the development of the library and information sector in Nigeria. This is where national information policy becomes necessary, so that while the nation's library and information industry benefits from globalization, its side effects can also be properly controlled" (Uhegbu 2008).

Globalization has its pros and cons. Anti-globalization scholars perceive globalization as an underdevelopment strategy employed by the developed countries to create boredom to the developing countries. To them globalization encourages economic exploitation and deceit "where a few powerful and greedy individuals and nations seek to subjugate and exploit an unsuspecting majority". To this group globalization is a means championed by developed countries to control the flow of goods and services to make the weak countries perpetually disadvantaged. (Adejo, 2003, Asouzu, 2004,'Ninisin, 2000).

Nigerian Libraries face this challenge. With meager resources (finance) being allocated for the acquisition of information materials, the next alternative will be resorting to begging. The developed countries see the developing countries, Nigeria being their giant, as a dumping ground for unwanted books and scrap equipments. Influx of such materials does not give impetus to local authors and publishers. Nigerian libraries eventually become filled up with old books and junk computers and other equipments.

Globalization apologists (Rujgumanu, Salami, Occampo, Martin, and Stern), see globalization as a means of development to the third world countries ie "developing". Through globalization, information, ideas, activities, technologies, goods, services, capital, and even people are integrated. Libraries benefit through cooperation in interlibrary loan both physical and through ICT. There is cross-fertilization of ideas and cross- border connectivity through seminars, workshops, trainings, and exchange of mails. Undoubtedly there are gains in globalization of information but with the unrestricted access to the internet and the continuous quest for Nigerian Libraries for free materials, authors and publishers in Nigeria are going to die an unnatural death. Uhegbu (2008), citing Uhegbu (2004) said that "Nigeria's information environment is open to all sorts of information and information-generating products, however, not only are some of them irrelevant to the information needs of Nigerians, many are character-destroying facilities". Therefore it is expedient that there should be information policy guiding the use of certain information in Nigerian Libraries. Information should be packaged to meet Nigerian needs. There should be a policy to ensure that books and non-books that are in the libraries of developing and even developed countries must have a specified local content just as consumers groups have succeeded in doing in the bread industry in the flour mills of Nigeria. Globalization should be symbiotic, both the developed and the developing countries should benefit.

LIBRARY POLICIES

A Library is an information centre. It acquires, processes, organizes, stores, manages, disseminates, and eliminates or archives information and information resources. Though libraries serve the public especially National, State and Municipal or Local Government libraries, each of them has peculiar rules and regulations which form a miniature information policy. Information policy is a public policy meant to monitor government agenda and since libraries (except private and some special libraries) are established by the government for information needs and educational purposes of her citizens, therefore their policies should be regarded as public policies.

Every library has policies guiding it in its operations. There are policies that affect customer services, customer behaviour, the use of technology especially the internet, children's use of the library, materials' selection, and suppliers/vendors. To maintain order in any library, policies should be made and adhered to. Though they may be called library policies because of their geographic limitation, they can be regarded, in a sense, as information policies. Policies involving customer, services impose greater challenges to librarians than any others. Such laws as copyright law, information privacy, and even human rights laws.

LIBRARIANS' DILEMMA IN INFORMATION POLICY AND DUE DILIGENCE

Ethical issues in information policy are so broad that thus a lot is involved. It is a subject that calls for special attention. Librarians are on the side of open access to information, literacy, lifelong learning, the pursuit of happiness, the joy of a novel on a summer afternoon etc. We believe in information as a common good. We are opposed to many things - censorship, the assault on privacy, less access to government information, (Schneider 2010, p. 458), in addition to peculiar individual library rules and regulations. All these values are controversial in information policy. Taking copyright law as a case study, "digitization means making copies" (Reding 2005). According to Reding having a digital copy does not mean you can disseminate it to the public. "Under current EU Law and international agreements, digitized material can only be made accessible online if it is in the public domain or with the explicit consent of the rights' holder". In a situation like this the librarians are in a dilemma of making their digitized collection accessible to the public without facing the wrath of the law. Works are only in the public domain when the author has been dead for more than 70 years. This could also only be possible if there is no body or committee in charge of the author's estate (where there is no inheritor). So librarians need enabling policies to help them discharge their duties effectively.

REFERENCE LIBRARIANS AND INFORMATION POLICY

Reference librarians are most affected ethically in the discharge of their duties. Mason (2010) brought the story of Hauptman (1990) who in 1975 visited thirteen libraries requesting from reference librarians for information for building a bomb "that would enable him to blow up a suburban home. Not one librarian refused to help fulfill his request". It is true that there is a policy that information is for all but there is an ethical issue of the effect of that information on the larger society. Mason (2010) quoting

Hauptman 1990, p.15 calls it the "dubious professional commitment to dispense information". "If there is any reason to suspect foul play or that any physical harm could come to anyone by the giving of information, then the onus is on the reference librarian to refuse to provide information" (Nasen 2010 p.2). Hauptman (op. cit p.16) advices that, "whenever there is a direct conflict between professional ethics and societal good, the latter must take precedence". This is possible where the government has already stipulated what constitutes "societal good", if not, the librarian is not liable to any damage by the use of the information he gave. Again this is a matter of ethics and conscience.

METHODOLOGY Survey method was used in gathering data for this research through the use of questionnaire. Data was collected from the five librarians of the five universities made up of one federal university, two each of state and private universities. All of them were kind enough to make available their university library policies. All of them have written library policies. The University librarians also granted oral interview to the researcher. Two hundred copies of questionnaire were distributed to the five Nigerian universities in two western states of Nigeria, Ogun and Lagos States. Forty copies each were distributed randomly to selected librarians from each of the five universities.

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND INTERPRETATION
Out of the 200 copies of questionnaire distributed for data collection, 184 were returned showing a 92% success. No use of demography was made since it was of no significance to the study. The first question asked was to know if they have a library policy.

Does Your Library Have a Library Policy? This was followed by: Is Library Policy a Mini Information Policy? The last of this kind of questions was; Is Library Policy Different from Information Policy? All these questions were to test their awareness and understanding of the meaning of information policy. Under are their responses:

LIBRARIANS' KNOWLEDGE OF LIBRARY POLICY

	Yes Figure. (%)	Not Sure Figure (%)	NO Figure (%)
Does your library have a library policy?	140 (76)	25 (14)	19 (10)
Is library policy a mini information policy?	103 (56)	53 (29)	28 (15)
Is library policy different from information policy	107 (69)	29 (18)	20 (13)

TABLE 1
Table 1 shows that only 76% of the librarians are aware that the library they work in has library policy; 14% are not sure whether the library they work in has library policy or not. Nineteen persons making 10% of the respondents out rightly said their library had no policy.

All the libraries have written library policies guiding their activities. How come that a good number of the workers who have worked more than one year in the respective libraries said they were not sure (25, 14%) and that they had no library policy (19, 10%). respectively. A combination of those who 'Are not sure' and those who said 'No' came to 24%. This could be that the Head of the library did not tell them of the library policy during orientation for new workers. Since the library policy was written it could be that they did not care to read or they had forgotten. It could also be that the policy does not affect the department where they are working and so were not told about it then until when they may be transferred to the unit where it would be useful.

Though an appreciable number (76%) of the librarians were aware of the library policy, it is not good enough. Efforts should be made for a higher percentage if not 100% of the librarians to know of the policy of the library where they work.

IS LIBRARY POLICY A MINI INFORMATION POLICY OR DIFFERENT?
One hundred and three (56%) of the respondents said that library policy is a mini information policy. Almost half of the respondents either did not know or were not sure. This is a clear indication that many librarians do not know what information policy is all about. They do not know its scope.

The librarians' ignorance of the scope of information policy was more exposed in the answer to the next question; is Library Policy Different From Information Policy? Though an overwhelming 69% said 'yes', a high percentage of 31 were either 'Not sure' or said 'No'. If the custodians of information are confused about the definition of information policy or with the scope and coverage of it, then there is a huge work to be done. One would expect at least 90% of library and information scientists to be able to explain to none information workers the meaning of information policy and what it entails. Library policy is part of information policy.

PROVISION OF INFORMATION POLICY

One of the questions posed to the librarians/respondents was: Who should be involved in provision of information policy? Three alternative answers were provided for the respondents to choose from - Very Important; Fairly Important; and Not Important. Table 2 below shows the responses.

PEOPLE INVOLVED IN PROVISION OF INFORMATION POLICY

Who should be involved in the provision of information policy?	Very Important	Fairly Important	Not Important
LIBRARIAN	172 (93%)	9 (5%)	4 (2%)
GOVERNMENT	171 (93%)	9 (5%)	4 (2%)
ICT PROFESSIONAL	171 (93%)	5 (3%)	8 (4%)
INFORMATION WORKERS	160 (87%)	16 (9%)	8 (4%)

An impressive response from the respondents showed that the government, the lawyers, the librarians, the information communication technologists, and other information professionals should be involved in the provision of information policy with the lawyers having the least involvement though with a high percentage (78%). This shows that all these persons or professions should take part in making information policy for any country or for the world.

Could it be inferred that librarians occupied the first position because librarians were used in the research? It could not be. Librarians are custodians of information and therefore should be in the forefront in the provision of information policy. To this effect it is recommended that professionals other than the librarians be used in other researches of this nature.

RECOMMENDATION

This research showed how naive many librarians are with the knowledge of information policy. Therefore, it is recommended that library policy be a part of the library orientation given to librarians on employment. Different libraries have different policies so even if a librarian has been working for a decade in a different library the policy of his new place should be made known to him. It is not enough to hand a library policy to a new worker, efforts should be made to make sure that he notices and studies the policy.

Information policy should be part of undergraduate library schools curriculum even if it is just in teaching the rudiments of it. It should be made a compulsory course for postgraduate students of library and information science.

Librarians and information scientists should be vanguards in the provision of information policy. They should not be secondary in advocating for the provision of information policy. Librarians, ICT workers, and other information professionals comprising of the media and allied professions should be on the front burner fighting for information policy law because they are most affected.

CONCLUSION

Librarians are in a dilemma in this issue of information policy. It is evident from the research that many librarians do not know the scope and the extent of information policy. It seems that information policy is conflicting with a lot of promises to clienteles on information access and utilization. For democracy to flourish, citizens need free and open access to information. The ICT sets a platform where people can connect with millions of other users and generators of information without any constraint by location, time in days, onsite rules, cost, or other barriers (Kranich 2010). Government and information agencies both private and nongovernmental should come together to find solutions to this dilemma hindering progress to effective information dissemination. Government can form a committee comprising of librarians, ICT professionals, mass media personnel, and lawyers to formulate policies on information that will guide the country. Librarians should lead.

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