

# Chapter 12

## Beyond the Physical Library Space: Creating a 21st Century Digitally- Oriented Library Environment

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter examines the transformation of the physical library into a digital-oriented library environment. Space is regarded as an important feature of the physical library because the quantity of materials that can exist in the physical library is usually determined with regards to space. However, the emergence of digital technologies in the 21st century brought about the notion of digital-oriented library environment, in which a number of materials such as books, articles, and other print-based material can be converted to digital formats such as e-books, PDFs, and multimedia files which could be further stored on digital devices or uploaded online for users to access conveniently. The creation of the digital-oriented library environment has the capability of enabling librarians with innovative skills in order to meet the immediate information needs of library users. Therefore, librarians are required to understand their new roles in the 21st century and work towards creating a digital-oriented library environment.*

### INTRODUCTION

The world is at a verge of rapid evolutionary change with the emergence of digital technologies. The expansions in the fields of information communication technologies (ICTs) which aimed at improving information generation, dissemination and storage paved a path for the evolution of digital technologies which have rapidly grown to become the order of the day in most of the contemporary fields of specialization, most especially (with regards to this chapter) the library (Liu and Briggs 2015). The

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library is being transformed at a rapid pace in the 21st century, in which books and print-based materials are gradually being carted off shelves and scholarly records are being transformed exponentially from print-based journals, articles and monographs to digital formats on the open web and databases. Libraries are being transformed from the traditional slow-paced environment into an advanced digital-oriented environment where operations are carried out at a lightning fast speed. According to, Cosgrave and Kosturski (2016) space is an important characteristic of a physical library, thus the amount of floor space and shelf space is regarded to be very crucial. When spaces gradually become limited, the library is necessitated to install compact shelves to maximize the use of space, to remodify the structure of the library to expand space or to construct a new building entirely to create more space. The issue of space is essential for the physical library because the quantity of materials that can exist in a physical space is usually constrained by the size of the shape and the size of the materials. Therefore, physical space strongly influences most physical library's functions. However, this is not case for digital space, digital technologies are posited to occupy little or no space at all. The advantage of digital technologies, from the viewpoint of physical space, is thus that a number of physical materials (books, articles, monographs, encyclopedia, etc.) that would normally occupy a vast amount of physical space may be stored in a much smaller physical space, if converted to a digital form, for instance, E-books, PDF files and multimedia files that stored on smartphones, tablets and laptops. Therefore, the library would not be required to purchase compacts shelves nor would the library be required to construct new building because there would be unlimited amount of space, thus maximizing the number of users that would be enabled to have access to the library conveniently. Furthermore, Lund and Agbaji (2018) purport that, the use of digital technologies in the library has the capability of enhancing the workflow of librarians, which aids in the reduction of manual work done by librarians, thus proliferating library services.

## **THE PHYSICAL LIBRARY SPACE**

Over millennia, the physical library space has served as the repository of knowledge for societies based on a written culture. The physical library space has served a variety of purposes which includes the storage of reference materials, place of learning, meeting places and quiet study place (Akeriwa, Penzhorn and Holmner, 2015). Dempsey (2016) claims that "the physical library space enables the organization of information resources, thus adding value to them and making them readily available for users" (p. 58). Based on the fact that books, people and other physical information resources occupy the physical library space, libraries have evolved into complexes of buildings, rooms, and reading spaces in which people come together to access information materials. However, these spaces are manifestations of the library as place, which is more significant than a physical space.

Places are defined by functions, just as the library is recognized for the provision of information materials. Places stimulate and can represent states of mind, in the case of the library as a place, it matches the physical space with the intellectual space, thus linking people to ideas and to each other. Places both occur naturally and are deliberately designed, however, place-making is a deliberate process involving arrangement of objects and spaces to create an environment that supports desired activities. Based on this conception of place, Uzwyshyn (2016), posited that there are three key factors that justifies the library as a physical space;

- the physical-conceptual continuum,

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