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Information Brokerage Skills: a Necessity in the Digital Library Environment

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Abstract: As digital technologies continue to revolutionize the information landscape, the role of information professionals has evolved significantly. In the digital library environment, information brokerage skills have become a necessity to bridge the gap between users and the vast amount of digital information available. This seminar explores the critical role of information brokerage skills in digital libraries, emphasizing their importance in information retrieval, evaluation, curation, user support, and information literacy instruction. It also examines the challenges and opportunities presented by the digital age and discusses how information professionals can leverage their expertise to enhance the digital library experience for users. By embracing the challenges and opportunities of the digital age, information brokers play a pivotal role in shaping the future of digital libraries and promoting information literacy in the digital era. In conclusion, information brokerage skills are indispensable in the digital library environment. Information professionals, equipped with information retrieval expertise, curation abilities, and information literacy instruction, enhance the digital library experience and empower users in navigating the digital information landscape.

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INTRODUCTION

The advent of the internet and digital technologies has transformed information access and dissemination, leading to the emergence of digital libraries as valuable repositories of knowledge. These libraries provide vast collections of digital resources, making them indispensable for researchers, students, and the general public (Ihekwoaba, Okwor & Uzowulu, 2023). However, the abundance of digital information can be overwhelming, necessitating the expertise of information brokers to facilitate effective information retrieval and utilization. Information brokers play a pivotal role in the digital library environment by mediating between users and resources, ensuring efficient and relevant information retrieval (Chikaodi, Nwachukwu & Nwofor,). They possess information retrieval expertise and utilize advanced search strategies to locate pertinent resources quickly and efficiently. Moreover, information brokers are skilled in critically evaluating the credibility and relevance of digital resources, promoting information literacy and encouraging users to think critically about the information they access.

Customized information services are a hallmark of information brokers, as they provide personalized assistance based on users' specific needs and objectives. By understanding users' research goals or learning objectives, information brokers deliver tailored information solutions that meet individual requirements effectively. Furthermore, information brokers curate digital content and organize it into curated collections and subject guides to enhance resource discovery and accessibility (Wijewickrama, Rameezdeen & Chileshe, 2021). They utilize metadata standards and classification systems to improve resource organization and discoverability, simplifying users' access to valuable information. Information literacy instruction is another crucial aspect of information brokerage. Information brokers conduct training sessions, workshops, and webinars to educate users on effective search techniques, critical evaluation of information, and ethical use of digital resources. By empowering users with information literacy skills, information brokers contribute to the development of more informed and discerning information consumers (Araujo, Neijens & Vliegthart, 2017).

User support and interaction are core responsibilities of information brokers, as they respond to user queries, troubleshoot technical issues, and offer expert guidance on optimizing the use of digital library resources. Additionally, information brokers continuously update their skills to stay abreast of technological advancements and emerging trends in the digital landscape. Despite the benefits of digital libraries, challenges such as information overload, misinformation, and privacy concerns persist. Information brokers actively address these issues by curating reliable content, combatting misinformation, and safeguarding user data.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Information Brokerage in the Digital Library

Information brokerage is a vital function that serves as a bridge between users and the wealth of digital information available in the digital library environment. It encompasses a range of activities aimed at facilitating seamless access to relevant, credible, and timely information. In the age of information overload, where digital content proliferates across various platforms and formats, information brokers play a pivotal role in ensuring that users can navigate this vast landscape effectively (Akbas, Markov, Subasi & Weisbrod, 2018). At its core, information brokerage is about understanding users' information needs and connecting them with the most appropriate resources. Information brokers possess advanced knowledge of information retrieval

techniques, search strategies, and database navigation. They leverage their expertise to locate and retrieve relevant information efficiently, saving users valuable time and effort.

In the digital library environment, the role of information brokers takes on added significance due to the sheer volume and diversity of digital content. Digital libraries house an extensive array of resources, including e-books, academic journals, research papers, multimedia materials, and more. Curating this content and organizing it effectively is a daunting task, but it is essential to enhance resource discovery and ensure that users can access the information they seek with ease (Lingo, 2023). Information brokers curate digital content by creating curated collections, subject guides, and thematic repositories. These curated collections focus on specific topics, disciplines, or research areas, providing users with a more targeted approach to accessing information (Brooks, Oshri & Ravishankar, 2018). By organizing digital resources based on metadata standards and classification systems, information brokers improve the discoverability of resources, making it easier for users to find relevant content related to their research or interests.

In addition to resource curation, information brokers also excel at information evaluation. In the digital age, where misinformation and fake news can easily spread, the ability to assess the credibility and reliability of sources is critical. Information brokers apply their expertise in information literacy principles to guide users in critically evaluating digital resources, discerning trustworthy information from misleading or biased content. Moreover, information brokers offer personalized support and guidance to users throughout their information-seeking journey (Gonzalez, Bollinger, Yip, Pina, Roldan & Nieto-Ruiz, 2022). They interact with users, understanding their specific information requirements, and tailor their assistance accordingly. By engaging in user support and interaction, information brokers provide valuable insights, answer queries, troubleshoot technical issues, and offer expert advice to help users optimize their use of digital library resources effectively.

Furthermore, information brokerage is closely linked to information literacy instruction. Information brokers conduct workshops, training sessions, and educational programs to promote information literacy among users. These initiatives equip users with essential skills, such as effective search techniques, critical evaluation, and ethical use of information (Turner, Forster, Peterson, Mahon & Fitzsimmons, 2020). Empowering users with information literacy skills not only enhances their ability to access information but also fosters their ability to think critically and make informed decisions in the digital realm. Information brokers play a multifaceted role, mediating between users and digital resources to ensure efficient and effective information retrieval (Ni & Liu, 2018). By curating digital content, organizing information, offering personalized support, and promoting information literacy, information brokers empower users to navigate the vast array of digital resources confidently.

In a world inundated with digital information, information brokers serve as invaluable guides, facilitating users' access to relevant, credible, and timely information and contributing to a more informed and knowledge-driven society. Information brokers, also known as information specialists, knowledge navigators, or information professionals, play a pivotal role in the digital library environment. They possess the expertise to navigate the complexities of digital information, mediating between users and resources to facilitate effective information retrieval and utilization.

2. Information Retrieval and Evaluation

Information brokers possess advanced knowledge of search strategies, databases, and information retrieval techniques. They can efficiently locate and retrieve information from digital repositories, ensuring that users access the most relevant resources. Additionally, information brokers excel at evaluating the quality, credibility, and currency of digital information, mitigating the risk of misinformation and promoting information literacy. Information brokers are skilled professionals equipped with advanced knowledge of search strategies, databases, and information retrieval techniques (Orphan, Laderman & Gildersleeve, 2021). Their expertise enables them to efficiently navigate the vast digital landscape and locate relevant information from digital repositories, ensuring that users access the most valuable and pertinent resources.

- a. Advanced Information Retrieval Techniques:** Information brokers are well-versed in employing sophisticated search techniques to optimize the information retrieval process. They understand the intricacies of search algorithms, Boolean operators, truncation, and other search modifiers to conduct precise and targeted searches. By combining these techniques, information brokers can filter out irrelevant results and present users with accurate and meaningful information.
- b. Database Navigation:** Digital libraries and online databases host an extensive array of resources. Information brokers have a comprehensive understanding of these databases, their scope, and the type of content they offer. This knowledge allows them to identify the most appropriate databases for specific research topics and user needs. Efficient database navigation enhances the speed and accuracy of information retrieval, saving users time and effort.
- c. Evaluating Information Quality:** In an era marked by the proliferation of information, the accuracy and reliability of sources become crucial. Information brokers possess the skills to critically evaluate the quality of digital information. They assess factors such as the credibility of the author or source, the objectivity of the information, and the presence of bias or misinformation. By evaluating information quality, information brokers help users discern credible sources from unreliable ones, promoting information literacy and encouraging users to be discerning consumers of digital content.
- d. Ensuring Information Credibility:** Information brokers play a crucial role in mitigating the risk of misinformation in the digital space. With the abundance of fake news and misleading content online, information brokers act as gatekeepers, ensuring that users have access to accurate and reliable information (Adistie, Mediani, Lumbantobing, Maryam & Hendrawati, 2020). By verifying the credibility of digital resources, information brokers contribute to the dissemination of trustworthy information, thus fostering a more informed and knowledgeable society.
- e. Currency of Information.** The currency of information is vital in rapidly changing fields such as science, technology, and current events. Information brokers are adept at identifying the most up-to-date and recent information. They consider publication dates, version numbers, and updates to ensure that users access the latest information available. This currency of information is particularly crucial in research and decision-making processes, where outdated information could lead to incorrect conclusions.
- f. Promoting Information Literacy:** Information brokers actively promote information literacy among users. They educate users on how to critically evaluate sources, spot biased information, and verify information credibility. By empowering users with information

literacy skills, information brokers enable them to make well-informed decisions and be discerning consumers of digital content.

3. Resource Curation and Discovery

Curating digital content is essential in the digital library environment. Information brokers organize resources into curated collections and subject guides, facilitating resource discovery and improving the overall user experience. They employ metadata standards and classification systems to enhance resource accessibility and discoverability. Curating digital content is a fundamental aspect of managing the vast and diverse array of resources in the digital library environment (Bourret, Nozères, C. Parent & Parent, 2023). Information brokers play a crucial role in organizing and presenting digital content in a way that enhances resource discovery, facilitates efficient navigation, and ultimately improves the overall user experience.

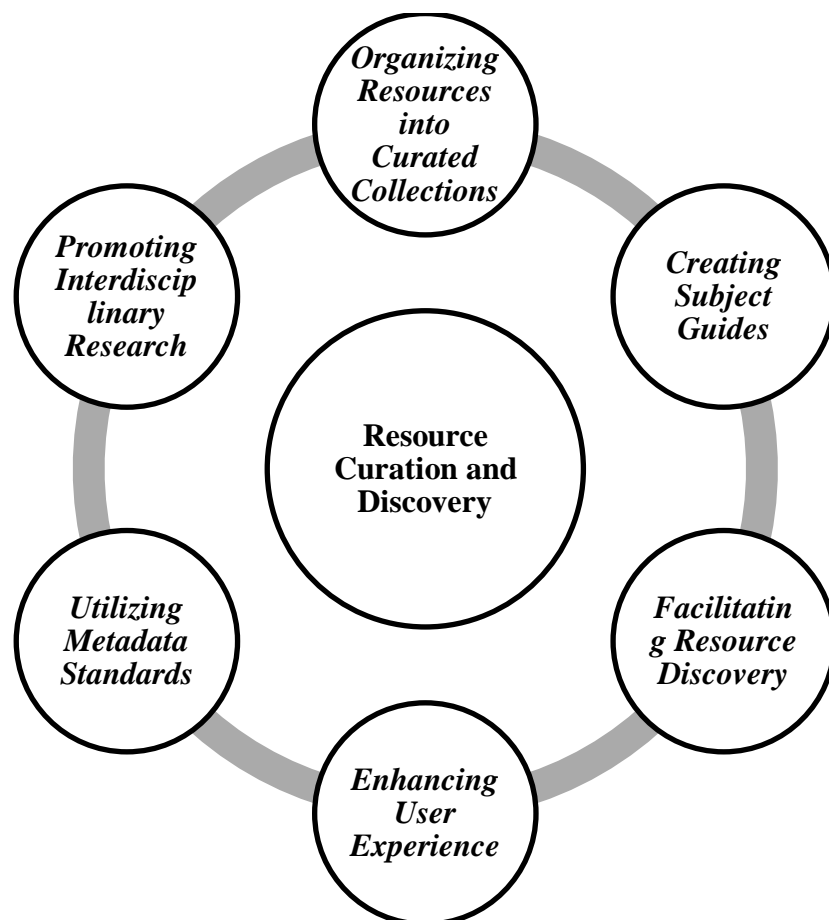


Figure 1.
Resource Curation and Discovery system

- a. **Organizing Resources into Curated Collections:** Information brokers curate digital content by grouping related resources into curated collections. These collections are organized around specific themes, topics, or subject areas, making it easier for users to locate resources relevant to their interests or research needs. Curated collections can cover a wide range of topics, from academic disciplines to niche subjects, ensuring that users can access a comprehensive selection of resources on a particular subject.

- b. *Creating Subject Guides:*** Subject guides are another valuable tool employed by information brokers to curate digital content. Subject guides offer a curated list of resources, databases, and reference materials specific to a particular subject or academic field. These guides provide users with a curated pathway to explore authoritative sources related to their research interests, saving them time and effort in finding relevant materials
- c. *Facilitating Resource Discovery:*** In the digital library environment, the sheer volume of resources can be overwhelming for users. Curated collections and subject guides act as navigational aids, guiding users to the most valuable and credible resources available. By providing a curated selection of resources, information brokers simplify the process of resource discovery, ensuring that users can find high-quality content that aligns with their information needs
- d. *Enhancing User Experience:*** A well-curated digital library enhances the overall user experience. Information brokers take into consideration the user interface, accessibility, and usability when organizing resources. By presenting resources in a coherent and user-friendly manner, information brokers create a seamless experience for users, encouraging them to explore the digital library further.
- e. *Utilizing Metadata Standards and Classification Systems:*** Metadata standards and classification systems are essential tools that information brokers employ to enhance resource accessibility and discoverability. Metadata provides descriptive information about each resource, including title, author, publication date, and subject keywords. By adhering to standardized metadata formats, information brokers ensure consistency and uniformity in resource descriptions, making it easier for users to search and find relevant materials.
- f. *Promoting Interdisciplinary Research:*** Curating digital content allows information brokers to create interdisciplinary connections between different subject areas. By organizing resources that cut across various disciplines, information brokers encourage users to explore diverse perspectives and uncover new research opportunities. This interdisciplinary approach fosters innovative thinking and enriches users' understanding of complex topics.
- g. *User Support and Interaction:***
One of the key roles of information brokers is to provide personalized and hands-on support to users. They address user queries, assist with technical issues, and guide users in navigating digital library interfaces effectively. User interaction and feedback are invaluable for continuously improving digital library services. Providing personalized and hands-on support to users is a cornerstone of the information broker's role in the digital library environment (Bouysset & Fiorucci, 2021). As information professionals, information brokers act as guides, facilitators, and problem solvers, ensuring that users have a positive and enriching experience while navigating the vast array of digital resources.

- 4. *Addressing User Queries:*** Information brokers are readily available to address user queries and information needs. Whether through online chat services, email correspondence, or in-person interactions, information brokers actively engage with users to understand their

specific requirements. By patiently listening to users' questions and concerns, information brokers can offer tailored solutions and direct users to the most relevant resources.

- a. **Assisting with Technical Issues:** The digital library environment often presents technical challenges, such as difficulties accessing resources, login issues, or problems with database navigation. Information brokers possess technical expertise and are well-equipped to troubleshoot and resolve these issues promptly. Their ability to navigate the digital library's infrastructure enables them to assist users in overcoming any technical barriers they encounter.
- b. **Guiding Users in Navigating Interfaces:** Digital libraries can be complex, with multiple databases, search features, and tools. Information brokers play a crucial role in guiding users through these interfaces, ensuring that users can effectively utilize the available functionalities to locate and retrieve information. By providing step-by-step guidance, information brokers empower users to maximize the digital library's capabilities and streamline their research processes.

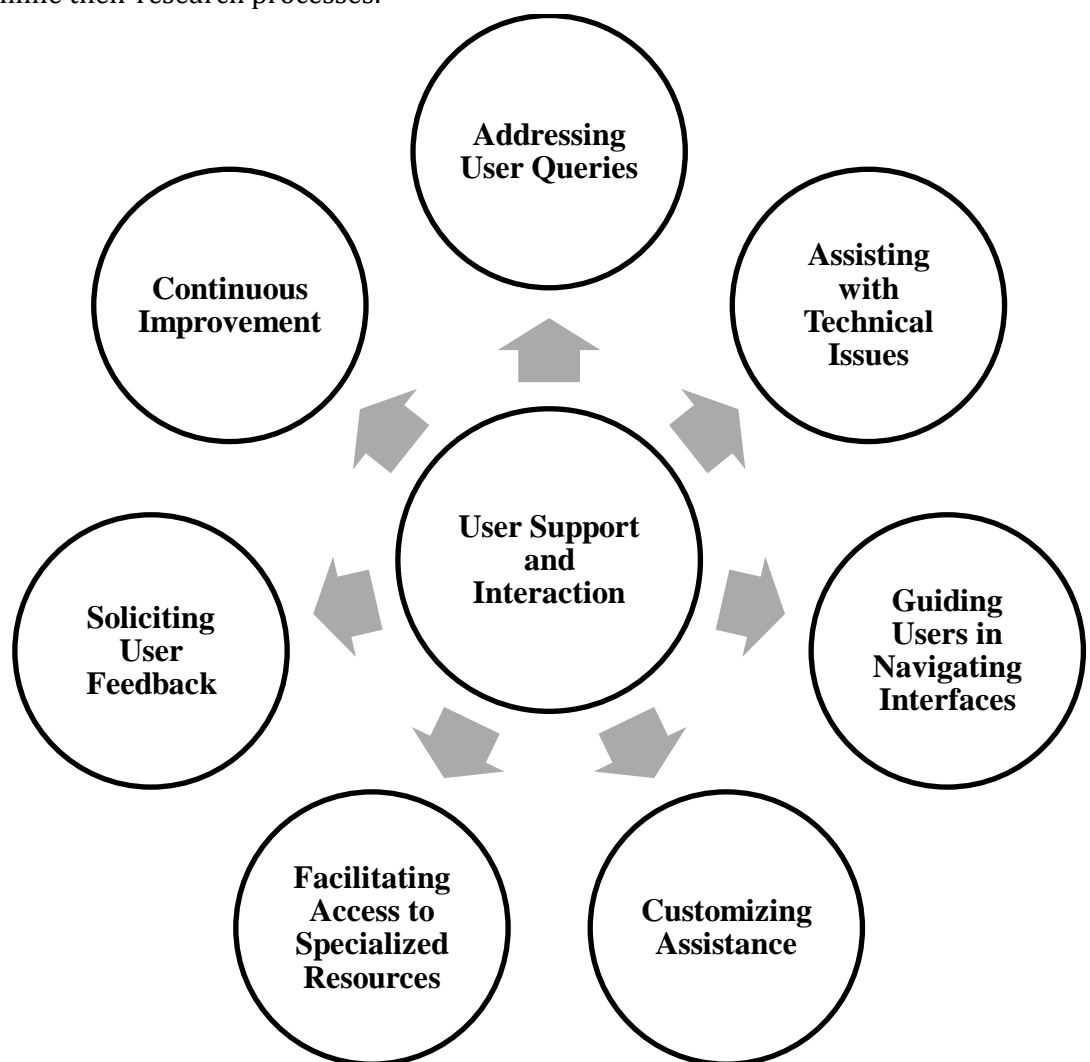


Figure 2. User Support and Interaction mechanism

- c. **Customizing Assistance:** Every user has unique information needs, research goals, and preferences. Information brokers recognize this diversity and tailor their assistance accordingly. By understanding users' specific contexts, information brokers can offer

customized support that aligns with users' individual objectives. This personalized approach enhances user satisfaction and increases the likelihood of successful information retrieval.

- d. Facilitating Access to Specialized Resources:** Some research topics or academic disciplines require access to specialized databases, journals, or resources. Information brokers are adept at identifying and facilitating access to these specialized resources, ensuring that users can delve deeper into their research areas with the most relevant and authoritative materials at their disposal.
- e. Soliciting User Feedback:** User interaction and feedback play a vital role in shaping and improving digital library services. Information brokers actively seek user input to gauge user satisfaction, identify areas for improvement, and understand emerging information needs. By soliciting user feedback through surveys, focus groups, or user testing sessions, information brokers gain valuable insights that inform the enhancement of digital library services.
- f. Continuous Improvement:** In response to user feedback and changing user needs, information brokers work collaboratively with library administrators and technology teams to continuously improve digital library services. They advocate for user-centric design and play an essential role in implementing updates, improvements, and new features that enhance the overall user experience.

5. Information Literacy Instruction:

Information brokers play a crucial role in promoting information literacy, a vital skill in the digital age where information is abundant and easily accessible. Through various educational initiatives, such as training sessions, workshops, and webinars, information brokers empower users with essential information literacy skills. Information brokers design training programs that cover effective search strategies, enabling users to navigate digital libraries and online databases efficiently. They teach users how to use advanced search techniques, select appropriate keywords, and utilize search filters to obtain precise and relevant results (Araujo, Neijens & Vliegthart, 2017). By mastering these strategies, users can save time and find accurate information more effectively.

Critical evaluation of sources is another key aspect of information literacy instruction provided by information brokers. They educate users on how to assess the credibility, accuracy, and objectivity of information sources. Users learn to identify biased or unreliable content and distinguish between credible sources and misinformation. This skill is particularly important in an era of fake news and misinformation, as it helps users make informed decisions and avoid spreading unreliable information (Lingo, 2023).

Ethical use of information is also emphasized by information brokers. They educate users on copyright laws, fair use, and proper citation practices to ensure that users respect intellectual property rights and academic integrity when using digital resources. By promoting ethical information use, information brokers contribute to a responsible and respectful information-sharing culture. Information literacy instruction empowers users to become independent and critical thinkers. Users gain confidence in their ability to locate, evaluate, and use information effectively. These skills are invaluable in academic settings, professional environments, and

everyday life, enabling users to make well-informed decisions, conduct thorough research, and think critically about the information they encounter.

6. Challenges and Opportunities:

The digital age has revolutionized the way information is accessed, disseminated, and managed, presenting both challenges and opportunities for information brokerage in digital libraries. Information professionals, such as information brokers, play a crucial role in navigating these changes to ensure that users have a seamless and enriching experience while accessing digital resources (Colibaba, Skinner & Furgal, 2019).

a. Challenges:

- 1) **Information Overload:** The digital landscape is flooded with an overwhelming amount of information. Users may struggle to filter through the vast sea of digital content to find the most relevant and credible resources (Hamad, Fakhuri & Abdel Jabbar, 2022). Information brokers face the challenge of assisting users in efficiently accessing information without feeling overwhelmed by the sheer volume of data.
- 2) **Misinformation and Fake News:** The digital age has seen an increase in the dissemination of misinformation and fake news, leading to information distrust and confusion among users. Information brokers must promote information literacy and critical thinking to help users discern reliable sources from misleading or false information.
- 3) **Privacy and Security Concerns:** As digital libraries collect and store user data, ensuring privacy and security becomes paramount. Information brokers must adhere to stringent data protection measures and educate users on safeguarding their personal information while using digital library services.

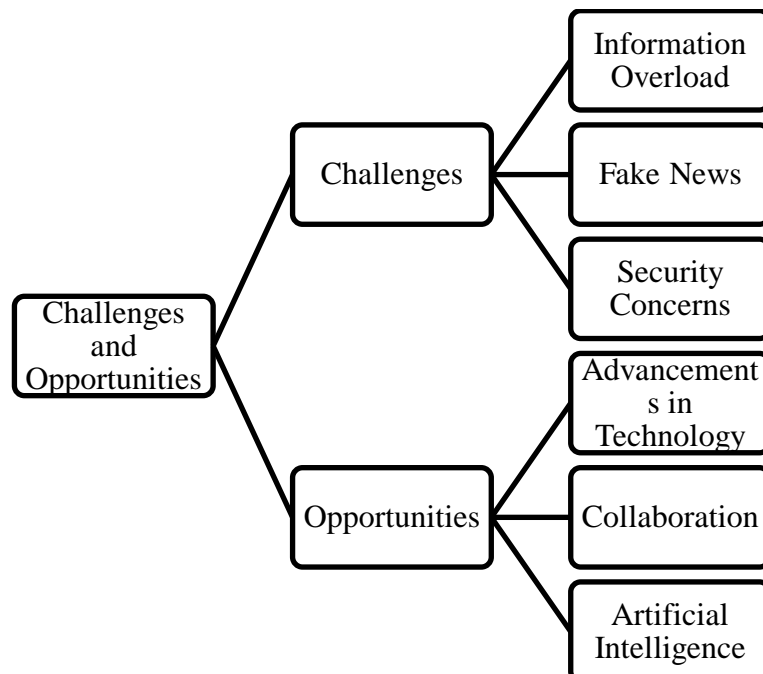


Figure 3. Challenges and Opportunities

b. Opportunities:

- 1) **Advancements in Technology:** The rapid advancements in technology offer information professionals a wide range of tools and resources to enhance their information brokerage skills. Access to advanced search algorithms, data mining, and natural language processing enables information brokers to deliver more accurate and relevant search results to users.
- 2) **Artificial Intelligence and Data Analytics:** The integration of artificial intelligence and data analytics in digital libraries opens up new possibilities for information brokers. AI-powered chatbots and virtual assistants can provide immediate responses to user queries, while data analytics can offer insights into user preferences and trends, facilitating personalized recommendations.
- 3) **Collaboration and Networking:** Digital libraries provide a platform for information professionals to collaborate and network on a global scale. Virtual conferences, web forums, and social media platforms facilitate the exchange of knowledge, best practices, and innovative ideas among information brokers worldwide.

8. Future Directions:

As digital libraries continue to evolve and shape the information landscape, the role of information brokers will remain indispensable in facilitating efficient and effective information access for users. To thrive in the ever-changing digital environment, future information professionals must possess a combination of adaptability, continuous learning, interdisciplinary collaboration, and user-centric focus (Ihekwoaba, Okwor, & Uzowulu, 2023; Wijewickrama, Rameezdeenn & Chileshe, 2021).

- a. **Adaptability:** The digital world is characterized by rapid technological advancements and shifts in information trends. Future information brokers must be adaptable and quick to embrace new tools, technologies, and platforms that emerge in the digital library space. Adapting to change ensures that information brokers can effectively meet users' evolving needs and provide innovative solutions to information challenges.
- b. **Continuous Learning:** In the dynamic digital age, learning must be a lifelong endeavor for information professionals. Continuous education and professional development are essential for staying abreast of the latest developments in information science, data management, and emerging technologies.
- c. **Technological Proficiency:** Future information brokers must be technologically proficient to navigate the digital library environment effectively. This includes mastering advanced search techniques, data analytics tools, artificial intelligence, and other emerging technologies that facilitate information retrieval and resource management. A strong foundation in technology empowers information brokers to provide users with accurate and relevant information tailored to their needs.
- d. **Interdisciplinary Collaboration:** Collaboration across disciplines is vital for information brokers to provide comprehensive and well-rounded support to users. Embracing interdisciplinary collaboration enables information brokers to leverage diverse perspectives, knowledge, and expertise in addressing complex information needs. Working with experts from various fields enriches the information brokerage process, leading to more robust solutions and services for users.
- e. **User-Centric Approach:** Information brokers must prioritize the needs and preferences of users to deliver personalized and relevant information services. Understanding user behavior,

information-seeking habits, and research interests enables information brokers to tailor their assistance, making information retrieval more efficient and user-friendly. A user-centric approach fosters user satisfaction and strengthens the relationship between information professionals and library users.

- f. **Embracing Data-driven Insights:**The digital library environment generates vast amounts of data on user interactions, preferences, and resource usage. Future information brokers should embrace data-driven insights to gain a deeper understanding of user needs and optimize information services. Analyzing user data can lead to valuable insights that inform decision-making, resource curation, and service improvement, enhancing the overall user experience.
- g. **Proactive Service Improvement:**To remain relevant in the digital library landscape, information brokers must continuously evaluate and improve their services. Soliciting user feedback, conducting usability studies, and monitoring user satisfaction are essential practices for identifying areas of improvement. Proactively addressing user needs and concerns helps to maintain high-quality information services and reinforces the value of information brokerage skills.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, information brokerage skills play a crucial role in the digital library environment, where the volume and diversity of digital information continue to grow exponentially. Information professionals, such as information brokers, possess a unique set of expertise that enables them to effectively manage and leverage digital resources, benefiting both users and the digital library ecosystem. One of the key strengths of information brokers lies in their information retrieval expertise. They are adept at employing advanced search strategies, utilizing databases, and navigating digital interfaces to deliver accurate and relevant information to users. In an era of information overload, information brokers act as invaluable guides, helping users navigate through the vast sea of digital content and locate the most pertinent resources efficiently.

Curation abilities are another indispensable aspect of information brokerage skills. Information brokers curate digital content by organizing resources into curated collections, subject guides, and thematic repositories. This curation not only enhances resource discoverability but also promotes interdisciplinary connections, fostering innovative thinking and exploration of diverse perspectives. Moreover, information brokers' role in information literacy instruction is pivotal in equipping users with essential skills to navigate the digital information landscape critically. By promoting information literacy, information brokers empower users to evaluate information sources, discern credible information from misinformation, and ethically use digital resources. Information literacy is a cornerstone for fostering a knowledgeable and informed society in the digital age.

Information brokers also embrace the challenges and opportunities presented by the digital age. They address challenges such as information overload, misinformation, and privacy concerns by staying updated on evolving technologies, data management practices, and user needs. As technology advances, information brokers harness the power of artificial intelligence, data analytics, and user data to deliver personalized and user-centric information services.

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