THE ROLE OF LIBRARIES IN PROMOTING ETHICAL USE OF INFORMATION

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Introduction Information ethics provides an ethical framework for library professionals to carry out information related works such as acquiring, storing, processing, making available and using information.

Ethics is a branch of philosophy that is concerned with human conduct, more specifically the behaviour of individuals in society. Ethics examines the rational justification for our moral judgments; it studies what is morally right or wrong, just or unjust (Kaddu 2007).

With increasing recognition of information as one of the most important ingredients of development, more recently the term 'information ethics' has drawn attention from various quarters. Chuang and Chen (1999) views information ethics as one aspect of a much larger philosophy, known as social ethics. According to Chuang and Chen (1999), information ethics 'deals with the moral conduct of information-users based on their responsibility and their accountability'. Free moral agents, individuals, organizations, and societies ought to be responsible for the actions they take.

Despite the presence of qualified professionals in libraries, and also rigorous campaigns by the library to uphold ethical standards in all spheres of information works, the question of information ethics is not widely recognized. The unprecedented explosion of information in all branches of knowledge, and massive proliferation of ICT tools and techniques have raised fundamental questions about privacy, freedom of expression, right to information and accessibility, among other issues. As a result, library and information professionals are struggling to solve the problems related to ethical use of information.

Information Ethics

Information ethics has been hugely affected by globalisation, which is characterized by extensive use of information and communication technologies, an increasingly open society, greater sharing of information, but also greater conflict among individuals and societies in

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asserting their dominance over others. This has posed new questions to the information professionals of today, because they have to serve an increasingly diverse group of clientele (Richard Mason 1986).

Information ethics investigates the ethical issues arising from the life cycle of information, including the generation, gathering, organization, retrieval, distribution and use of information (Cappurro 2008). As an interdisciplinary field of study, it relates among others to the fields of computer science, library and information science, philosophy, communication science, journalism and mass media. The focus areas include the right to privacy, the right of access to information, the right to intellectual property and the quality of information. Furthermore, information ethics addresses the moral conduct of information-users, based on their responsibility and their accountability. Free moral agents, individuals, organizations, and societies ought to be responsible for the actions they take.

Problem Statement

The ethical concerns of the libraries have been with regard to the freedom of access and use of information However; libraries have been sported to have greater functions in promoting the ethical use of information. Libraries promote ethical use of information in terms of provision of information, privacy of information, security of users' information, censorship and help avoid plagiarism, which is a risk to copyrighted information. Information through the librarians as the custodian is able to determine the kind of trend to be followed, so as to realize better services that is trusted by the public and users.

Ethical Use of Information

Ethics provide a framework for conducting essential information functions, such as instituting information policies and developing strategies for information services. Ethical conduct of information professionals is:

• Affirmation of the critical value of services

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- Affirmation of responsibility to themselves and society

- Affirmation of respect for others

- Affirmation of the need to improve society

Ethics is the field of study that is concerned with questions of value. Ethical judgments are concerned with distinguishing "good" or "bad" behaviour in a given situation. Ethics include the standards, values, morals, principles, etc., that we use as the basis for our decisions or actions. In ethical decision making, there is often no clear "right" or "wrong" answer. The categories of ethical concern include the following:

Privacy and confidentiality

Privacy is a fundamental human right and a cornerstone of a democratic society. It is rooted in the foundation of law, the secret ballot, doctor patient confidentiality, lawyer-client privilege, the notion of private property, and the value our society places on the autonomy of the individual. Unfortunately, the growth of electronic technologies has challenged the ability of countries to ensure the privacy rights of their citizens. Many countries are concerned about the protection of their citizens' personal information, have adopted privacy laws and fair information practices. So, the ethical challenge is how to create institutions and procedures that foster this virtue, as an individual and social one, without falling into Big Brother nightmares. In this regard, Mason (1986) warns that

"…more than 60,000 state and local agencies, for provide information to the National Crime Information Centre and it is accessed by law officers nearly 400,000 times a day. Yet studies show that over 4% of the stolen vehicle entries, 6% of the warrant entries, and perhaps as much as one half of the local law enforcement criminal history records are in error. At risk is the safety of the law enforcement officers who access it, the effectiveness of the police in controlling crime, and the freedom of the citizens whose names appear in the files. This leads to a concern for accuracy".

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Accuracy and safety

Safe and accurate information can increase quality of information, which in turn leads to better consequences for both individuals and organizations. In fact, lack of accurate and safe information The Role of Libraries in Promoting Ethical use of Information 19 (misinformation) results in wrong and inaccurate decisions, as well as low quality performance, and existence of it results in good outputs.

Intellectual property versus plagiarism

In 1999, McFarland indicates that technological developments ignore the social role of the creator and of the work itself, thus overlooking their ethically significant relationships with the rest of society. The balance is lost. One could conclude that he emphasizes on necessity as a more balanced view. In this respect, WIPO1 (2002) has published a report entitled "Intellectual property on the Internet: A survey of issues" addresses the far-reaching impact that digital technologies (the Internet in particular) have had on intellectual property (IP) and the international IP system.

Access and equity

The rapid growth of electronic technology as a means of accessing information has led to increased concern over differences in access to information for various social, economic and ethnic groups. Smith, M. M. (1993), describe the right of freedom of access to information as essential, because without it, it is impossible to establish sustainable development. Access to information is thus a "common good, which must be distributed equally and according to developmental needs of people". Confirming low accessibility and inequity, Baker (2003) concludes that

"...in a world where globalization, technological evolution, and fierce competition have led to the creation of new elite- those who are information rich, the knowledge workers- the vast majority of the world's population stands to be left behind. The failure to develop a new form of "social contract", which takes into account the information needs of

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citizens in developing countries, will have disastrous results for humanity as a whole. So, it is recommended that technological tools are used to facilitate equitable access to information until such time as the imbalances can be equalized, and everyone has instant universal access".

Conflict of interest

Ethics are especially questioned in situations where there is a conflict of interests. Librarians and information professionals will face many situations where there may be conflict of interests, and they must rely on their professional standards and the values of the organization.

Freelancing is an area that is very controversial in information centres. There may be instances when an employee of the organization approaches the information professional with the request to help them research information for a project that is unrelated to their work. This employee may offer to pay the professional for their time. Through word of mouth this could potentially lead to more freelance work, and quite a bit of extra income for the information professional. There is nothing unethical about agreeing to do research, and for someone to pay you outside of work. However, the information professional must make sure that "outside of work" is where this freelancing remains. The biggest problem that information professional will face with freelancing, is how to avoid having it interfere with their duties at work (Hauptman 1988). The information professional of course can't do this outside research while at work, but they must also make sure that this outside research isn't keeping them up late at night or causing stress that could interfere with their performance at work (Hauptman 1988). There is also the issue of using the employer's databases to perform research, even if the librarian has the intention of reimbursing the company. The only way this is acceptable is if the information professional has permission from their supervisor (Hauptman 1988).

Another ethical issue that may arise involves consulting users. The information professional will sometimes be asked for advice as well as information. For example, a

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corporate information professional could be asked their advice on what stock to buy. A medical librarian will sometimes be asked for medical advice or even a diagnosis from patients, etc. (Hauptman 1988). Information professionals must avoid giving medical or legal advice to patrons, because the patron could hold the librarian and the organization responsible. There is a thin line between guiding a user and giving out advice. It is not just poor ethical practice to give out advice, it is also against the law, and so the information professional and organization could be held liable (Hauptman 1988). Information professionals should never put themselves in situation where they could risk legal action (Mintz 1991). Once the information professional reaches the point where the information being given is beyond facts or instruction, it is necessary to recommend the patron contact someone that is trained to help them (Hauptman 1988).

Factors that Influence Information Ethics

While the primary concern of the library and information professionals is information ethics, they also have to uphold their professional ethics. This relates to the application of principles to actions and decisions taken by information professionals. In today's world, the areas which directly and indirectly influence information ethics are:

- *Globalisation:* One of the most important features of modern society is globalization, which is characterized by extensive use of information and communication technologies, an increasingly open society, greater sharing of information and also greater conflict among individuals and societies in asserting their dominance over others.

- *More emphasis on individualism*: People tend to be more individualistic these days; they frequently place more importance upon individual good rather than social good. As a result, there has been an increased demand for individualized and customized services from the library and information centres.

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• *Privacy and information security*: With the increasing amount of networks, the security of public and private data held in databases, web sites and other information repositories are always at risk. People have become more worried about their privacy and libraries, as preservers and providers of sensitive information have to deal with this concern.

• *Diversification of 'information works'*: Unlike their predecessors, today's library and information professionals are burdened with greater and bigger responsibilities. In addition to being information providers, they now frequently have to assume the roles of educators, consultants, technology experts, translators and synthesizers, among others. They must achieve new skills and capabilities for successfully performing these duties.

• *Conflict between 'right to information' and 'ethical use of information'*: Many countries around the world have laws ensuring people's right to receiving and using information. However, library and information professionals find themselves in tricky situations, where they have to strike a balance between 'restricted use of information' and 'right to information'.

• *Access to information*: The issue of universal access to information may create a dilemma for many libraries. Many public and professional declarations refer unequivocally to free and public access to information. For example, the British Library Association code of conduct states that any individual should be granted free and public access to information. However, there is the risk that too great an emphasis on providing a service free of charge may result in funding problems, which could endanger the survival of information centres. Similarly, providing a service at zero cost often results in its devaluation, which also has as a consequence the undermining of the prestige and feasibility of the profession.

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Challenges of Libraries in Promoting the Ethical use of Information

Recruitment, education, and retention of librarians

The need to find and retain quality leadership for libraries is a key issue for the future. Even as retirements seem to increase, fewer librarians are entering the profession as a whole, and even fewer librarians are entering the academic library field in particular. Ensuring education of new librarians and re-educating existing librarians with skills and knowledge to support new roles in a digital information age, especially roles involving teaching and library promotion, is a challenge for the profession as well as ethical information.

Creation of digital resources and their preservation

Methods to determine what should be digitized, to find resources to do the work and to develop appropriate bibliographic control mechanisms for digital materials offer complex challenges. In addition, librarians want to ensure that digital materials are preserved appropriately and that permanent access to those materials can be provided.

Impact of information technology on library services

Librarians are aware that an appropriate institutional balance needs to be maintained between traditional library materials and services, and those services (which sometimes overlap) represented by instructional and information technology departments.

Conclusion

Arguments have been made that sanctions need to be written into a new code of ethics to make sure librarians behave ethically. Lanier (1993) discusses how a code can be enforced when ethics is so subjective.

It is self-evident that there are additional ethical and moral issues influenced by new information technologies, which should be addressed. Considering above issues, it can be concluded that only identifying such problems is not a solution, but rather providing global

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strategies and recommendations, which promote equity, justice, accessibility, privacy and accuracy.

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