Smart Libraries: A Smart Decision?

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Agenda

01 Background
02 Objectives
03 Method
04 Political Economy
05 Discussion
06 Next Steps
What is ‘smart’?

A desirable state where technology is used to increase the efficiency of tasks and perform automation to facilitate work and everyday processes (Freyberg, 2018)
What does ‘smart’ mean for libraries?

‘Smartness’ can be implemented to varying degrees in libraries

Automation of environment
Algorithm–based provision of resources
Digitized assistance
Robot collaboration
What does ‘smart’ mean for libraries?

There is no clear consensus on the characteristics that comprise ‘smart’ libraries, but they can be grouped into one of four areas (Schöpfel, 2018)

- Smart Services
- Smart Governance
- Smart Individuals
- Smart Place
EDI and smart libraries

Offers open access, open software and tools, advanced infrastructure

Concept model of a smart library
(Freyberg, 2018)

Blended bookshelf
(Freyberg, 2018)
EDI and smart libraries

Algorithms are often designed for “cisgender, white, able-bodied, neurotypical, and male” individuals (Swauger, 2020)
Research and objectives

1. Is it desirable for academic libraries to evolve alongside the smart movement?

2. If so, how can we ensure that the adoption of these smart technologies in libraries, provide equitable, diverse, and inclusive service for library patrons and workers?
A political economy approach

“Political economy is the study of the social relations, particularly the power relations, that mutually constitute the production, distribution, and consumption of resources, including communication resources” (Mosco, 2009)

1 Social Capital
2 Digital Labour
The ‘smart’ movement

This movement emerges from capitalistic, corporate ideals that can be perceived as contradictory to the objectives of academic libraries.

Closed and opaque infrastructure

Smart technology?

Academic library openness and transparency
Historical background

Emily McPherson College Library (circa 1960s)

National Library of Medicine (1987)
Historical background

“Exciting new technologies [...] can be seductive and cause us to forget that the mind, not the instrument, should control society's purpose and goals” (Veaner, 1985)
How does this impact EDI?

Biases and prejudice are learned from societal structures, and they operate through individual and structural actions.

1. How the algorithms were designed
2. What values, attitudes, beliefs, and worldviews were embedded in the design of this system
Structural and systematic racism

Racial prejudice + power = structural and systemic racism
What is social capital?

The relationship and interactions among people and communities that build networks, norms, and social trust for mutual benefit

1. Sharing space for a variety of different groups
2. Accommodating diverse needs
3. Enhancing social interaction and trust
Academic libraries and social capital

Public libraries vs. academic libraries?
How smart technology could threaten social capital?

1. Social networks
2. Perceptions of libraries
3. Trust and shared values
4. Civic participation
Factor 1: Social networks

● Build social networks between students, faculty, researchers, etc.

● Serve a diverse range of patrons
Factor 2: Perceptions of the library

- Libraries as trusted mediators
- Privacy and surveillance issues
Factor 3: Trust and shared values

Struggle between capitalistic values vs. open values
Factor 4: Civic participation

Resistance to smart technologies

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Reduction in social capital
● Is smart technology overcomplicating the library space?

● Have libraries become another space where big tech can flourish?

● As patrons of the library, have we just become ‘users’ of the smart library?
Digital labour

Changes to the nature of work for both waged workers and unwaged patrons

1. Automation
2. Audience Commodity
Automation

Who is impacted by automation?

Who does automation benefit?

Human labour

Digital labour
Audience Commodity

“And away from the job, your labor time is sold (through the audience commodity), although you do not sell it” (Smythe, 1981)
How do we transition to Industry 4.0 while reconciling the impact of smart technology on EDI?
Questions to ask

1. Is smart technology the right solution to the problem?

2. What are the patrons’ needs?

3. Can the library support smart technologies?
Considerations for smart technology

● Strong leadership and vision
● Locate areas of potential issue for EDI
  ○ Ethics
  ○ Bias and fairness
  ○ Accountability
  ○ Explainability
  ○ Privacy
● Focus on both individual and structural change
Future research

Content-based gaps

- Current state of ‘smart’ within different academic library departments
- Academic librarian and patron perspective on adoption of smart technologies

Methodological gaps

- Survey-based research
- Participant observation

Deliverables

- Research articles (non-reviews)
- Program description
Are smart libraries a smart decision for EDI?
Thank you!

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References


References


Bibliography


