

Insights from Digital Communities Symposium: Call to Action in the Context of the Library and Information Sector

1. Introduction

The evolving digital era is reshaping the landscape of information science, redefining the value of the library and information science sector through the lens of the user's knowledge domain. As a sector that manages information across all eras, it functions like a DNA blueprint of humanity—storing, repackaging, and disseminating knowledge to meet societal needs, while equipping communities with digital literacy for effective information access. This article examines the research projects that were presented at Symposium 4 'Digital Communities', which formed part of the School of Law and Social Sciences 'International Research Conference 2025' *Law as a Catalyst for Social Development*, held on 27th February 2025. Symposium 4 was chaired by Professor Simon Burnett and Dr Konstantina Martzoukou (from the School of Law and Social Sciences at the Robert Gordon University). The research presentations, listed below, explored the complex interplay between technology, law, ethics, and social development in the digital overpowering community:

1. "Balancing Children's right and Digital Freedom: protecting Nigerian Children from online sexual predators". Presenter: Ibade Oluwabunlola Adisa-IbojoLead City University, Ibadan – Nigeria.
2. "Misinformation on social media". Presenter: Andrew Meechan. School of Law and Social Sciences, Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen.
3. "'Emoticons' in Contract Formation: Exploring the Unintended Complexities in Contemporary Business Law". Presenter: Bamikole Aduloju, PhD University of Birmingham Law School.
4. "Data Protection Law as a Catalyst for Social Development". Presenter: Anyasi Nonso Open Universiteit, Netherlands (Online).
5. "Cryptocurrency Regulation: A Closer Look at India's Impact". Presenters: Kiruthika Dhanapal, Chennai Dr Ambedkar Government Law College, Pudupakkam, Directorate of Legal Studies, Government of Tamil Nadu, India and Baalaaji Damo, Madras High Court & Founder of LawzAll, Tamil Nadu, India (Online).
6. "Exploring the role of law and virtue ethics in Data Science Health Research in the Data-Driven Era". Presenter: Oluchi C. Maduka Faculty of Law, University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

Overall, the research presentations spanned over three key themes of 1. Regulatory Challenges in Digital Spaces, 2. Digital Vulnerability and Protection, and 3. Balancing Rights and Protections. This paper examines the presented projects via a Library and Information Science (LIS) lens, using a data and information angle, as a multidimensional lens that can explore issues related to multiple subject domains. It investigates solutions for community vulnerabilities beyond traditional regulatory frameworks, exploring the issue of adaptability to the evolving challenges presented by advancing digital technologies.

2. Regulatory Challenges in Digital Spaces

Digital spaces are borderless and constantly evolving, yet they adapt to the cultural, geographical, economic, and social norms of their contexts - posing significant challenges for regulatory frameworks.

The research presentations on Emoticons and Cryptocurrency showed two sides of this issue (Aduloju, 2025; Dhanapal & Damo 2025). Emoticons, as digital communication tools, challenge the interpretation of contract law, while the decentralised nature of cryptocurrency necessitates international regulatory coordination.

From the viewpoint of Library and Information Science, the digital landscape has been constantly transforming, giving rise to digital counterparts of real-world concepts and entities, such as digital languages and currencies. As the digital landscape expands endlessly, traditional societal and legal structures grounded in defined boundaries, such as geography, society, and economy, are facing scrutiny. This is evident in the above two research studies. A universal language of Emoticons is appearing within the global digital context, and understanding and interpretation of this language is necessary, according to different contexts, to enhance the contract law. Similarly, cryptocurrency, the digital currency of the digital community, needs broader interpretation in the digital landscape since common cultural, geological, economic, and social boundaries are not applicable.

3. Digital Vulnerability and Protection

While digital spaces empower freedom and individuality, they also create new vulnerabilities for various populations. The research presentation on “Balancing Children's right and Digital Freedom”, explored the risks children face in the online environment (Adisa-Ibojo, 2025) and the susceptibility to misinformation that the general population faces, showcased in the “Misinformation on social media” (Meechan, 2025) explored these vulnerabilities, while the presentation on “Data protection law” (Anyasi, N., 2025), as an essential safeguard against privacy violations, addressed a solution that can be brought through, setting up laws as a protective measure.

From the viewpoint of Library and Information Science (LIS), laws can be seen as a necessary protective measure to safeguard vulnerable populations, such as children, within the digital context or in societies that are prone to be misled by misinformation, yet from the LIS lens, strong preventive measures can also be brought through informed access to the digital landscape. This can be achieved by enhancing digital literacy skills within diverse communities, in a way that will help the community to navigate the digital landscape with vigilance.

4. Balancing Rights and Protections

The study on “Balancing Children's Rights and Digital Freedom”, indicated that several laws related to child protection currently exist in Nigeria (Adisa-Ibojo, 2025). Yet there is a predicament of balancing digital freedom and digital security. The study suggested an immediate need to amend the Child Rights Act to solve this dilemma. It also indicated a need for collaboration between the Government, Non-Governmental Organisations, and digital technology companies, since child safety requires all stakeholders, rather than the individual involvement of the government only (Adisa-Ibojo, 2025).

The study on “Misinformation on social media”, explained the necessity of social media as an essential communication tool in today's global context (Meechan, 2025). It also emphasised that the importance of regulating social media, without restricting access since imbalanced regulation, may stifle freedom of expression, political freedoms, and cultural development. The study findings highlighted the impact of misinformation on social media. It also described how quickly information circulates on these platforms without verification, often because checking facts can be time-consuming, limited access to reliable sources may be possible, or individuals may deem it irrelevant to invest time in accuracy. Most importantly, financial and non-financial incentives exist to promote “organic” misinformation. This study sought to enhance awareness and encourage dialogue regarding social media regulation by promoting interdisciplinary knowledge exchange and collaboration (Meechan, 2025).

In “Emoticons in Contract Formation”, the researcher explained how emoticons (smileys, emojis, kaomojis, memes, and stickers), as informal communication tools, are interpenetrating business communication spaces, causing tension within traditional legal principles in contract law (Aduloju, 2025). The findings of the study reported that there are no statutory guidelines on the harmonisation of emojis, and the interpretation of emojis could defy objective tests since the interpretations are context-dependent (such as culture). Moreover, previous case reports with acceptance of emojis have been limited to simple contracts, while they have been rejected in complex and transactional agreements. The researcher further stated that this dual nature of treatment can lead to conflicting court decisions (Aduloju, 2025).

The study on “Data Protection Law” investigated data protection laws and the primary regulatory framework of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (Anyasi, N., 2025). It offered insights into how the fines, levied by GDPR, deter violations and why companies ignore the GDPR. The study findings stressed the need for heavier and stricter penalties for privacy data violations. Moreover, the research suggested a quicker mechanism to speed up the investigations into data privacy breaches and proposed the need for strong data protection practices to foster public trust. The study demonstrated how organisations can be encouraged to minimise data misuse, enhancing transparency and accountability, suggesting that this outcome will create opportunities for economic growth by fostering a competitive environment in which all companies adhere to the same data handling standards (Anyasi, N., 2025).

In the presentation on “Global cryptocurrency regulation”, researchers explained the growing momentum of cryptocurrency popularity over the past few years, both in a global context and specifically in India, making it an international phenomenon (Dhanapal & Damo 2025). They further explored the cross-border nature of cryptocurrencies and how they challenge the existing legal frameworks set on traditional social, cultural, and economic boundaries. Moreover, they expressed concerns about the absence of effective risk management and infrastructure for cryptocurrency management and the neutral and vague position of the Indian Government. The study proposed the need for an international consensus and the development of a standardised global framework for crypto assets. Moreover, it suggested incorporating cryptocurrency under the principles of international law (Dhanapal & Damo 2025).

All of these studies discussed the theme of balancing digital rights with protective measures. Attention was directed towards safeguarding digital freedom, which can be compromised by restrictions imposed as safety measures. Children, for example, deserve access to digital platforms (Adisa-Ibojo, 2025); however, balancing that access with protection from online predators is a complex challenge. The discussion also focused on finding a balance between leveraging data-driven technologies for economic growth and protecting privacy rights concurrently.

From the viewpoint of Library and Information Science, these imbalances and gaps within existing subject domains serve as a clarion call for the LIS field. They highlight the pressing need to transcend rigid, pre-classified knowledge structures and encourage the creation of new, integrated domains. By dismantling disciplinary silos, LIS can lead the way in constructing more adaptive and inclusive frameworks that reflect the interconnected realities of the digital age.

Overall Conclusion

The presentations collectively illustrated how digital technologies reshape communities and challenge existing legal, ethical, and social frameworks. This indicates a pressing need for innovative regulatory strategies that balance the advantages of digital technologies with necessary safeguards for vulnerable groups and broader societal interests (Adisa-Ibojo, 2025; Aduloju, 2025; Anyasi, 2025; Dhanapal & Damo, 2025; Meechan, 2025).

In the Library and Information Science field, it is evident that a digitally connected global community is emerging that traditional laws and regulations can neither control nor protect. The digital landscape is unrestricted by geological or socio-economic boundaries that form the foundation for conventional judicial systems. Hence, governing digital communities necessitates interdisciplinary teamwork, global coordination, and ongoing adjustments to swiftly changing technologies. Since the digital landscape is rapidly evolving, continuous adaptation of regulatory strategies at the same pace as changing technologies is essential.

Future Research Directions

Library and Information Science is vital in protecting the community in the digital landscape by promoting awareness and informed usage through enhancing digital literacy skills. To equip the community and prepare them, digital literacy programs should be introduced, continuously evaluated, and improved to suit the changing digital landscape.

The responsibility of supporting the community for safe navigation within the digital landscape does not fall to one stakeholder; it needs a holistic approach. It should be a collaborative effort of the government, industry, and civil society. Hence, collaborative models should be developed to link these stakeholders and enhance a protective environment within the digital community.

Understanding cross-cultural differences in digital vulnerability and protection needs is crucial for establishing literacy programs aimed at awareness as a preventive measure or implementing regulatory actions as protective measures.

Moreover, since country- or region-based traditional boundary rules do not apply to the digital landscape, there should be an international regulatory harmonisation mechanism for digital technologies.

References

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