

Research Article

Reinventing Librarianship: The Gig Economy and the Changing Boundaries of Library Service

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Abstract

The gig economy is changing how work is organized, and this has implications for librarianship. Gig work, coordinated through digital platforms, has expanded beyond low-skilled tasks into knowledge-intensive and professional activity, producing workers who are mobile, independent, and detached from any single institution, yet heavily dependent on information to sustain their work. This paper argued that this development challenges librarianship in two connected ways. First, gig workers form an emerging information community whose needs, spanning professional development, digital skills, market information, regulatory and intellectual property knowledge, and continuous learning, fall outside the institutional affiliation and physical proximity that traditional library service has depended on. Second, librarians themselves can apply their expertise outside the conventional library institution, through freelance consultancy, embedded and remote research support, information brokerage, and related practices, raising questions about whether professional librarianship must remain tied to library employment. The paper examined both developments, along with the opportunities and risks they raise, and proposed a shift from institution-centered librarianship to information-community-centered librarianship, in which the library is understood less as a fixed place and more as an information infrastructure. It concluded that reinventing librarianship does not mean abandoning its traditional values, but extending the capacity of the profession to respond to changing forms of work, knowledge production, and information use.

Keywords

Gig Economy, Librarianship, Information Community, Freelance Librarianship, Library Service Boundaries, Professional Identity

1. Introduction

Gig work is characterized by short-term, task-based, project-based, freelance and independent engagements, increasingly coordinated through digital platforms. It represents a significant reorganization of contemporary work, extending beyond low-skilled platform services to include knowledge-intensive and professional activities. Digital platforms have made it possible for workers to provide services to multiple

clients across geographical boundaries, weakening the traditional connection between worker, workplace and employer [10, 11]. Work is, consequently, becoming more mobile, flexible and distributed, with individuals able to participate in economic activities without permanent attachment to a conventional organization. This transformation is significant to librarianship because changes in the organization of work also

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create changes in how people seek, produce, share and use information. The gig economy is, therefore, not merely producing a different category of worker; it is contributing to the emergence of information communities whose characteristics may differ from those traditionally served by libraries. This changing relationship between work, people and information calls for a reconsideration of how librarianship defines its users and its services.

Traditional librarianship has largely been organized around the library as a defined institution and the librarian as a professional operating within that institutional setting. Library services have, consequently, tended to be designed around identifiable communities, including students, researchers, employees and residents within particular institutional or geographical boundaries. Historical and philosophical discussions of librarianship, however, indicate that the identity and role of the librarian have evolved in response to changing relationships between information, people and society [6, 15]. The emergence of gig workers presents another challenge to these established boundaries. Unlike conventional employees, gig workers may operate independently, work remotely and move continuously between clients, projects and locations, while remaining heavily dependent on information for professional development, market opportunities, communication, decision-making and the completion of tasks. Their relationship with information is, therefore, not necessarily anchored to a particular institution or physical workplace. This raises an important question for librarianship: what does information service mean when the information user is mobile, independent, digitally connected and economically detached from a conventional institution? The question becomes particularly important when considering the responsibility of the library to respond to changing information communities.

From the perspective of library service, the gig economy may, consequently, be understood as creating an emerging community of information users whose needs warrant consideration. Gig workers require access to current professional knowledge, digital skills, market information, research resources, regulatory information, entrepreneurship resources and opportunities for continuous learning. Yet their mobility and limited attachment to conventional organizations may make traditional models of library service less responsive to their circumstances. Libraries have already been moving towards digital and remote forms of service as changing user behaviours increasingly require information access beyond the physical library. The issue is, therefore, not simply whether libraries possess relevant information resources, but whether those resources and services can reach users whose work and information needs exist outside established institutional boundaries. For gig workers, the library may need to be conceived less as a fixed physical destination and more as an accessible information infrastructure capable of supporting users across changing workplaces and circumstances. The emergence of such users, consequently, challenges librarianship to reconsider not only what information it provides, but

whom it recognizes as part of its user community and how that community can be reached.

It is against this changing landscape that reinventing librarianship becomes pertinent. Two related developments can be considered. First, librarians themselves may participate in the gig economy through freelance, consultancy, remote, contract or project-based information work, raising questions about whether professional librarianship must remain tied to conventional institutional employment. Second, and more directly related to library service, gig workers may constitute an emerging information community whose needs do not fit neatly within traditional categories of library users. The second development does not necessarily imply an expansion of librarianship as a profession, rather, it challenges the boundaries within which library services are conceived and delivered. At the same time, the possibility of librarians practicing information work beyond conventional library institutions raises a related question about the professional boundaries of librarianship itself. Thus, the gig economy presents librarianship with a dual challenge which are how should libraries respond to emerging communities whose information needs are detached from conventional institutions, and how should librarians understand their professional role when information work itself is increasingly mobile and distributed? The gig economy should, therefore, be examined not merely as a trend in employment, but as a development capable of challenging established conceptions of library users, service boundaries and professional practice. It is within this context that the changing boundaries of library service and the need to rethink the future orientation of librarianship become worthy of critical examination.

2. Literature Review

Gig work is not confined to low-skilled platform services such as ride-hailing or delivery but has extended into knowledge-intensive and professional domains. K ässi and Lehdonvirta [9] found sustained double-digit annual growth in demand for online gig work, with software development, writing and professional services accounting for a significant share of this growth. This expansion reflects a change in how work is organized around digital platforms, where workers depend on their ability to locate, interpret and apply information for clients, often without physical contact. Unlike conventional contract or casual work, digital platforms increasingly mediate different aspects of the working relationship, including how work is obtained, priced, monitored and evaluated. Wood *et al.* [15] observed that algorithmic management increasingly performs functions previously carried out through direct organizational supervision. Workers are, therefore, able to work for multiple clients and across different projects rather than remain attached to a single organization or workplace.

Dedema [2] observed that gig workers must continuously define and redefine their professional positioning, skills

and market value, often without the institutional structures, professional associations, or workplace colleagues who might otherwise supply that information informally. They must locate clients, interpret shifting platform algorithms, keep pace with market rates and in-demand skills, and manage reputational information across multiple platforms at once, tasks that amount, cumulatively, to a continuous, self-directed practice of information seeking, evaluation and production. It is this pattern, not the employment arrangement alone, that makes the gig economy a matter of consequence for librarianship: what is changing is not simply how people are paid for their labour, but the environment within which they must find, judge and use information in order to retain their jobs.

Librarianship relied on two traditional boundaries. The first is the boundary of the institution which placed the library as physical or organizational space, where collections are built, services are designed, and access is granted to those affiliated with the institution, usually by enrolment, employment, residency, or membership. The second is the boundary of the profession where the librarian is positioned as someone whose work is performed within a defined institutional setting. These boundaries provided the library and librarian a manageable scope, a definable community to serve, and a stable basis on which collections, budgets and staffing could be planned.

Gray [6] argued that the role of the librarian has changed in response to changes in how knowledge is produced, organized and circulated. This suggests that librarianship has not been defined by a fixed set of roles across different periods. Klein and Lenart [11] further argued that the traditional essentialist conception of librarian identity, which assumes that certain fixed properties or functions define the librarian, does not adequately reflect the complexity of the profession and may contribute to exclusion and stereotyping. The authors, therefore, proposed a relational conception of librarian identity, in which the identity of the librarian develops through interactions with information, users and the context of professional practice. Mattern [12] observed that changes in the technological and competitive information environment are creating new job designations and professional roles for librarians. These changes suggest the need to reconsider professional identity in response to changing information environments rather than maintaining a fixed conception of librarianship. Consequently, the institutional and professional boundaries of librarianship are not permanent features of the profession but arrangements that developed in response to particular forms of work, information and community. As these conditions change, the boundaries may also require reconsideration. The gig economy directly challenges these boundaries by producing information users, and potentially information professionals, who do not fit easily within traditional institutional and professional arrangements.

3. Gig Workers as an Emerging Information Community

Unlike conventional employees who may obtain information, training and support from employers, colleagues, professional associations or other institutional structures, gig workers often have to locate and manage such information independently. They require information on employment and gig opportunities, professional development, digital skills, market rates and client expectations. They may also need information on entrepreneurship, research resources, financial and regulatory requirements, intellectual property, client and project management, continuous learning and professional networking. These needs are connected to the responsibility of managing an independent professional career and are, therefore, central to the way gig workers sustain their work. The importance of information and digital competence to gig work is evident in existing studies. Fiers [4], in a study of online freelancers on platforms such as Upwork and Fiverr, found that digital skills influence how freelancers use platform tools, respond to challenges and improve their work opportunities. F  ret and Cros [3] similarly found that online freelancers rely on self-directed learning, peer advice, forums and informal support networks because formal organizational structures are often limited. Dedema [4] also observed that gig workers continually develop and present their professional identity within competitive digital markets. Hence, gig work requires workers to continually seek, evaluate and apply information without relying on the information structures normally available within conventional employment.

The characteristics of gig work further explain this information dependence. Gig workers are mobile, moving between projects, clients and locations; independent, with greater responsibility for their own work and outcomes; digitally connected, relying on platforms and digital networks to perform their activities; and institutionally detached, with limited long-term affiliation to a single organization capable of providing information, training or professional support [9, 15]. This detachment, however, does not reduce their dependence on information. Perhaps, it may increase the responsibility placed on the individual to locate, evaluate and use information required for professional activity. This characteristic makes gig workers relevant to librarianship as an emerging information community and raises questions about whether existing library services adequately respond to users whose information needs are not tied to conventional institutional membership.

A gig worker is, therefore, both detached from institutions and highly dependent on information. These two conditions have traditionally been closely connected in library service because libraries have mainly served users through institutional affiliation or geographical proximity. Students are connected to universities (academic library), residents to public libraries (National and public library), and employees to organizational libraries (special library). Gig workers do not always have such stable affiliations, yet they have significant information

needs relating to skills, markets, regulation, intellectual property and professional development. If libraries continue to define their service communities mainly through institutional affiliation or physical proximity, gig workers may remain outside these services, not because their information needs are less important, but because existing service boundaries were not designed for their circumstances. This makes gig workers relevant to librarianship, not because they require entirely different information, but because they require information under conditions that traditional library-service models may not adequately accommodate.

To address the identified gap, this paper conceptualizes the gig economy as a dual transformation of librarianship: the emergence of gig workers as an information community and the extension of librarians' professional practice beyond conventional library institutions. Existing literature largely examines gig work in relation to employment, digital labour, and worker experiences, while limited attention has been given to its implications for library service boundaries and professional identity. The paper therefore proposes an information-community-centred perspective that shifts attention from institutional affiliation to users' information needs and from the library as a workplace to librarianship as transferable information expertise. The selected cases of gig workers as emerging information users and librarians' engagement in freelance, remote, consultancy, brokerage, research-support and related information practices provide the basis for demonstrating these two dimensions. Together, they support the paper's conceptual argument that the gig economy simultaneously challenges who librarianship serves and where and how librarians practice.

4. Rethinking the Scope of Library Service: From Library Users to Information Communities

Recognizing gig workers as an information community with legitimate information needs is equally necessary that librarians should consider how library services should respond to their circumstances. The issue is not necessarily the creation of a separate service or programme for gig workers, but the need to reconsider service models that are based on assumptions of physical presence, institutional affiliation and regular service hours. The conditions of gig work also increasingly apply to other users whose work and learning are mobile and digitally mediated. Library services, therefore, need to provide access through flexible channels that can reach users beyond the physical library. This requires greater emphasis on virtual, mobile and distributed services. Virtual reference through chat and email, provides users with access to library assistance without requiring physical presence, while emerging technologies are creating additional possibilities for remote service delivery [10]. Institutional membership may need to be complemented by approaches that allow broader access to relevant

information resources, while conventional opening hours may be less suitable for users whose work is organized around clients, projects and different time zones. Library collections and services may also need to become more responsive to specific work-related information needs rather than relying only on general provision. Hillman and Ward [7] found that effective outreach to distance-learning users depended on active communication, partnerships and personalized engagement rather than simply making services available online. These developments suggest that the changing conditions of work require libraries to reconsider how services are accessed and how users are reached.

Underlying all of these shifts is a more fundamental preconception, one Mattern [12] captured well in describing the library not merely as a place but as an infrastructure, an informational and social substrate that a community draws on rather than a building a community visits. Understood this way, digital information literacy, online research support, open educational resources and community-based information services are not a scattered list of add-on programmes but different expressions of a single underlying shift: from library-as-destination to library-as-infrastructure, from a model that waits inside its walls to one that is present wherever its users happen to be working.

This does not require libraries to create separate services exclusively for gig workers. Rather, it requires libraries to redesign their services around the changing conditions under which people work and use information. Gig workers clearly demonstrate these conditions through their mobility, remote work and limited institutional affiliation, but these characteristics are not exclusive to them. Services designed to reach mobile, remote and institutionally unaffiliated users can also benefit distance learners, alumni, community members without formal affiliation and other users whose work and learning are increasingly less tied to fixed institutions. The gig worker is, therefore, not necessarily a new user category requiring a separate library service, but an example of a broader change in the conditions that libraries must consider when designing and delivering services.

5. Reinventing the Librarian: Professional Practice Beyond the Library

The relevance of the gig economy to librarianship is not limited to gig workers as library users. It also extends to librarians, whose professional knowledge and skills can increasingly be applied outside the traditional library institution. These emerging forms of work provide an opportunity to examine the boundaries of professional librarianship and consider whether information work must remain tied to the conventional library setting. The underlisted examined these forms of professional practice and what they reveal about the changing boundaries of librarianship.

Freelance information consultancy - freelance information consultancy is a way librarians can extend their professional expertise beyond the traditional library institution. In this arrangement, librarians can provide research, information organization and advisory services to different clients on a project basis. In Nigeria, freelance librarianship has been identified as a possible income pathway for graduates facing limited conventional employment opportunities [1]. This suggests that freelance librarianship is not merely a theoretical possibility but an emerging form of professional engagement. The significance of this model is that it separates the librarian's expertise from the library as an employer. The client engages the librarian based on the information skills and services provided rather than on the institution to which the librarian belongs.

Remote research assistance - where freelance consultancy is defined by its independence from any single institution, remote research assistance often retains an institutional relationship but severs the assumption that the librarian must be physically present within it. F  ret and Cros [3] described how the embedded research librarian model, in which librarians attach themselves directly to research project teams rather than waiting at a reference desk, has been extended into ongoing, multi-year partnerships supporting grant coordinators through open access and data management obligations, delivered largely outside the traditional library building and often without the user ever setting foot in it. Starr [14] envisioned the librarian behind the wall (virtual), and collection in the cloud, or there will be unintended consequences. This is a useful reminder that *beyond the library* does not always mean *outside institutions*. It can equally mean embedded inside institutions the library previously kept at arm's length.

Virtual reference - Virtual reference has developed beyond its earlier role as a substitute for in-person service and is now an established method of library service delivery. Keikha *et al.*, [10] identified the use of chat, email and AI-assisted first-line support in virtual reference services. The significance of this development for professional identity is not only the technology involved but the change it creates where reference work can be performed. A reference transaction can take place without the librarian and user being in the same physical location. This challenges the traditional assumption that reference work must be performed from a physical reference desk within the library.

Information brokerage - information brokerage is one of the established forms of librarianship practiced outside the traditional library. Onaade [13] described information brokerage as the buying and selling of information as a product and identifies roles such as information consultant, independent researcher and freelance librarian. The profession also has international examples through professional bodies such as the Association of Independent Information Professionals. The existence of information brokerage shows that librarians have long applied their expertise outside conventional library employment. It, therefore, demonstrates that the separation between professional librarianship and the library institution is

not absolute and that information expertise can be provided directly to clients outside the traditional library setting.

Knowledge-management consultancy - knowledge-management consultancy applies librarians' skills in classification, organization and information retrieval to the management of an internal knowledge of the organization. The work involves capturing knowledge held by employees, organizing it and making it accessible for future use. Librarians with relevant training can apply these skills in organizational settings outside the traditional library. However, such work is often described using knowledge-management rather than library terminology. This distinction raises an important issue for professional identity: the skills associated with librarianship may continue to be applied even when the individual is not identified by the title of librarian.

Research support - research support outside the traditional library extends the librarian's role in assisting researchers with the identification, evaluation and use of information. It involves competencies such as developing effective search strategies, identifying relevant sources, evaluating the quality and credibility of information, and supporting evidence synthesis. Unlike the traditional model in which research support is provided within a library institution, these services can be offered directly to researchers, research teams or organizations regardless of their institutional affiliation. The significance of this practice is that it demonstrates that research-support expertise can be provided independently of the physical library and the organizational structure in which the librarian traditionally operates.

Data and information services - data and information services extend the librarian's traditional responsibility for organizing and providing access to information into environments where information increasingly exists as datasets, research outputs, digital documents and other electronic assets. The librarian's expertise in classification, metadata, organization, storage and retrieval remains relevant, although the materials being managed may no longer form part of a conventional library collection. Such services also involve managing information throughout its lifecycle to ensure that it remains organized, accessible and discoverable. These competencies can be applied within research institutions, businesses and other organizations that require effective management of digital information, whether or not they maintain a conventional library.

Information literacy training - information literacy training extends the librarian's instructional role beyond programmes conducted within a library. Librarians can provide training on information searching, source evaluation, information verification, ethical use of information and the effective use of digital resources to individuals and organizations outside the traditional library environment. When delivered independently, the librarian cannot rely on the institutional authority of the library to establish credibility and must demonstrate expertise through the quality of the training provided. This shows that information literacy instruction is not dependent on the physical library but on the librarian's ability to teach individuals

how to identify, evaluate and use information effectively.

Content curation - content curation involves identifying, evaluating, selecting, organizing and presenting relevant information for a particular audience or purpose. These activities are closely related to the librarian's traditional responsibility for evaluating information resources and selecting materials based on relevance, quality and authority. Content curation is now applied in corporate communication, digital media, research environments and knowledge-sharing platforms, extending this expertise beyond conventional library collections. The transfer of this function to non-library settings demonstrates that the ability to evaluate and organize information has wider application than managing library collections. It can, therefore, serve organizations and audiences that have no direct relationship with a library.

Research analytics - research analytics provides another area in which librarians can apply their expertise beyond traditional library services. Bibliometric analysis, citation analysis, research impact assessment and related activities enable librarians to support decisions concerning research performance, funding, collaboration and institutional strategy. These services may be provided to researchers, academic departments, university administrators, funders and other stakeholders who may have little direct interaction with the library. The librarian's knowledge of scholarly communication, bibliographic data and research outputs provides a basis for this work. Research analytics, therefore, demonstrates how library expertise can contribute to institutional decision-making beyond the traditional functions of collection development and information provision.

Digital information services - digital information services provide a broad area for applying librarians' expertise in environments where information is created, stored and accessed electronically. These services may include digital platform management, digital preservation, metadata creation, discovery-system administration and the organization of electronic information resources. Organizations that do not operate conventional libraries may, nevertheless, require these services to ensure that their digital information remains organized, accessible and usable. The librarian's knowledge of information organization, retrieval, preservation and access is, therefore, applicable to digital environments beyond the library. This further demonstrates that professional information work can be performed in different organizational settings without necessarily requiring a conventional library structure.

Considered together, these practices reveal a common pattern rather than a collection of unrelated career options. What connects them to librarianship is not the institutional setting in which they are performed but the transferable expertise involved in managing information and knowledge. This includes organizing information, supporting its retrieval, evaluating its quality, disseminating it and facilitating its use, whether these activities take place in a library, another organization or independently. This raises an important question:

what does being a librarian mean when professional information work can be performed outside the traditional library institution? The library provides the institutional setting in which librarians have traditionally applied their expertise, but the expertise itself has wider applications. The gig economy, therefore, does not necessarily create an entirely new professional possibility for librarians; rather, it highlights more visible the distinction between librarianship as professional expertise and the library as its traditional workplace.

6. The Double Transformation: New Users and New Professional Boundaries

The preceding arguments have focused on two related issues: who libraries serve and where and how librarians practice. Considered together, these issues show that the gig economy creates a double transformation in librarianship. The first concerns the demand-side of library service, as new groups of information users emerge whose work and information needs are not tied to conventional institutional structures. The second concerns the supply-side of professional practice, as librarians apply their information expertise through freelance, remote, consultancy and other forms of work outside the traditional library institution. Table 1 below brings these two dimensions together and shows how the gig economy challenges both the boundaries of the library service community and the boundaries of professional librarianship.

Table 1. Librarianship: Old versus New.

SN	Traditional Orientation	Emerging Orientation
1	Library-centered	Information-centered
2	Institutional users	Fluid information communities
3	Fixed workplace	Distributed work
4	Physical access	Physical and virtual access
5	Permanent employment	Multiple forms of professional engagement
6	Defined institutional boundaries	Flexible service boundaries
7	Librarian within library	Librarian as information professional

The table shows a shift from a library-centered orientation to an information-centered orientation. Traditionally, the library, the institution, the workplace and the profession were closely connected: librarians worked within a defined library, served users identified through institutional or geographical affiliation,

and provided services mainly through physical access. The emerging orientation separates these elements. Information users may form fluid communities based on their information needs and circumstances rather than institutional membership, while librarians may apply their expertise through distributed work and multiple forms of professional engagement. Gig workers illustrate this shift because they may have strong and continuous information needs without permanent attachment to a particular institution [9, 15]. At the same time, librarians can apply their expertise through freelance consultancy, information brokerage and other forms of professional engagement outside conventional library employment [1, 13]. Table 1, therefore, demonstrates that the gig economy challenges two boundaries simultaneously: the boundary of who libraries serve and the boundary of where librarians practice.

The first challenge concerns the library service community. If information communities can develop around shared work conditions, mobility and information needs rather than institutional affiliation, then library service cannot be defined entirely by membership or geographical proximity. The second concerns professional practice. If librarians can provide research support, information consultancy, knowledge management, content curation and other information services outside the library, then employment within a library cannot be treated as the only setting for professional librarianship. Gray [6] opined that librarian identity changes across different periods. The significance of the gig economy, therefore, lies in the combination of these two changes. A change in users alone would require libraries to expand their services, while librarians working outside libraries alone would represent mainly a change in employment patterns. When both occur together, however, the traditional relationship between the library, its users, the workplace and the librarian is being reconsidered. Reinventing librarianship, therefore, refers to this simultaneous reconsideration of the boundaries of library service and professional practice.

7. Opportunities, Risks and Professional Implications

The gig economy exposes important gaps in how librarianship defines its users and professional boundaries, but it should not be viewed only as an opportunity. Gig work also has recognized challenges that need to be considered when examining its implications for librarianship. Therefore, reinventing librarianship in response to the gig economy requires attention to both its opportunities and risks. The following discussion considers these two dimensions separately, examining the opportunities that the gig economy creates for librarianship alongside the risks that may arise from changing patterns of work and professional practice.

7.1. Opportunities

- 1) *Expanded reach of library services* - The gig economy

provides an opportunity for libraries to extend services beyond users who are physically present or institutionally affiliated. Greater use of virtual and mobile services can reach gig workers, distance learners, alumni and community members without formal affiliation. This shifts library service from a model based mainly on physical and institutional access towards one that can respond to users wherever they access and use information.

- 2) *New information communities* - Recognizing gig workers as an information community provides libraries with an opportunity to respond to a group whose information needs may not be adequately addressed through conventional services. Their needs relating to professional development, digital skills, markets, regulation and continuous learning provide a basis for developing relevant services [2].
- 3) *Alternative professional opportunities* - The gig economy can create professional opportunities for librarians through freelance consultancy, research support, information brokerage and other forms of independent information work. Such opportunities can provide alternatives where conventional library positions are limited [1].
- 4) *Entrepreneurship* - Librarians can develop businesses around their information expertise rather than depending entirely on salaried library employment. Information brokerage provides an example of how information expertise can be developed into a professional service offered directly to clients [13].
- 5) *Flexible professional engagement* - Project-based and multiple-client engagements can allow librarians to diversify their professional activities. A librarian may work with different organizations or clients at the same time rather than depend entirely on one employer. This can provide greater flexibility in professional engagement.
- 6) *Increased visibility of librarians' information expertise* - Professional practice outside the library can expose organizations, researchers, businesses and other users to the information expertise of librarians. This may increase recognition of librarians' capabilities in research, information organization, evaluation, retrieval and knowledge management.
- 7) *New partnerships with gig workers and digital platforms* - Libraries can develop partnerships with gig workers, freelancer associations and digital platforms to provide information literacy, digital skills training, research support and other relevant services. Such partnerships can help libraries reach information users who may not ordinarily engage with conventional library services.

7.2. Risks

- 1) *Precarious employment* - Gig work can involve insecure employment and limited employment protections. Li-

brarians who enter this form of work may, therefore, experience greater employment uncertainty than those in conventional library positions [8].

- 2) *Unstable income* - Dependence on short-term projects and individual clients can make income unpredictable. Gig workers may experience periods of high demand followed by periods with few available projects, creating financial uncertainty [5].
- 3) *Erosion of professional identity* - Professional identity may be affected when librarians work outside the institutional and professional relationships through which their identity has traditionally developed. Klein and Lenart (2020) argued that librarian identity is relational and influenced by professional and contextual relationships. Reduced connection with library institutions may, therefore, affect how librarians understand and present their professional identity.
- 4) *Exploitation of professional labour* - Platform-mediated work can expose workers to algorithmic management, ratings, client control and pressure to accept work at competitive rates [15]. Librarians providing professional services through such platforms may face similar conditions, particularly where professional expertise is treated primarily as a service that can be purchased at the lowest available cost.
- 5) *Weakened professional standards* - Professional practice outside library institutions may create challenges for maintaining established standards of competence and ethical practice. Without institutional oversight, professional codes, accreditation and peer review may be harder to apply. This could allow individuals without adequate professional preparation to offer information services under titles associated with librarianship.
- 6) *Digital inequality* - Participation in gig-based professional practice depends substantially on digital skills and access to appropriate technologies. Fiers [4] demonstrated that digital competence influences how freelancers participate effectively in platform-based work. Librarians with limited digital skills may, therefore, be disadvantaged in emerging forms of professional engagement.
- 7) *Exclusion of workers without adequate connectivity* - The dependence of gig work on digital platforms can exclude individuals who lack reliable internet access, appropriate devices or stable digital infrastructure. This concern is particularly relevant in contexts where connectivity remains uneven [5]. The same problem may affect users who are expected to access increasingly virtual library services.
- 8) *Commodification of information services* - Providing information services through individual contracts and pay-per-task arrangements may encourage the treatment of information expertise as a commercial product. This may create tension with the traditional public-service orientation of librarianship, particularly where access to

information becomes dependent primarily on a user's ability to pay.

8. Toward a New Philosophy of Library Service

The arguments developed in this paper support a shift from institution-centered librarianship to information-community-centered librarianship. Institution-centered librarianship places the library at the center of collections, services, professional roles and user identification. Users are mainly defined by their relationship with the institution, while librarians are defined by their positions within it. Information-community-centered librarianship reverses this arrangement by beginning with the information needs of the community, whether the community is institutionally affiliated, geographically defined or distributed across different locations. The gig worker provides a clear example of this orientation because gig workers can have significant and continuous information needs without permanent attachment to a particular institution. The same shift applies to professional identity. Rather than defining the librarian mainly through employment in a library, information expertise can become a central basis for understanding professional identity. Gray [6] showed that librarian roles have changed across different periods, while Klein and Lenart [11] argued that librarian identity is relational and continues to develop in response to changing contexts. The forms of professional practice discussed in this paper, including freelance consultancy, research support and information brokerage, demonstrate how this expertise can be applied beyond traditional library employment.

This position also supports a broader understanding of the library as an information infrastructure rather than only a physical place. A library can continue to provide physical collections, spaces and face-to-face services while also providing information through virtual, mobile and distributed channels. Mattern [12] presented the library as infrastructure, an approach that supports an understanding of the library as a system that enables access to information rather than as a space that users must always physically enter. This does not require the traditional library to be abandoned. Physical libraries remain important to users whose information needs are adequately served through existing institutional and geographical arrangements. The argument is, instead, that the boundaries of librarianship should not be determined solely by the physical and organizational boundaries of the library. The library remains an important setting for applying librarians' expertise, but it is not the only setting in which such expertise can be legitimately applied. The gig economy, therefore, provides a basis for reconsidering both who libraries serve and where librarians practice, supporting a conception of librarianship that is centered more on information needs and professional expertise than on institutional location.

9. Conclusion

This paper has argued that the gig economy challenges librarianship in two interconnected ways. First, it creates new information communities, exemplified by gig workers but not limited to them, whose needs are real, patterned, and consequential, yet extend beyond the institutional affiliation and geographical proximity on which traditional library service boundaries have long depended. Second, it creates genuine possibilities for librarians to practice information work beyond conventional institutional settings, through freelance consultancy, embedded and remote research support, information brokerage, and a widening range of related practices that draw on the same underlying expertise the library has always claimed as its own. These two developments formed the gap in the study; they are not separate observations but a single double transformation, unsettling at once who librarianship serves and where and how librarians may practice. It is this double movement, rather than either strand alone, that justifies treating the gig economy as more than an employment trend and gives the title of this paper its full weight. To reinvent librarianship in the sense this paper has argued for is not to abandon the profession's traditional values, its commitment to organized, evaluated, equitably accessible knowledge, but to extend the profession's capacity to carry those values into changing forms of work, knowledge production, and information use. The library, understood as infrastructure rather than only as place, and the librarian, understood through transferable expertise rather than only through institutional employment, remain recognizably continuous with what librarianship has always been. What has changed is not the profession's underlying commitment, but the range of conditions under which that commitment must now be exercised.

Author Contributions

Susan Nnadozie Umeozor: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal Analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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