

IFLA Trend Report 2024 – Overview of Trends from the Literature Review

The below highlights the seven major trends identified by the authors of our literature review, and the associated sub-trends. They are not always obviously ‘good’ or ‘bad’, but may work in different ways, in different places, and in different circumstances. They are the building blocks for the different scenarios that libraries and the communities they serve may face in future. This work is made possible by a grant from Stichting IFLA Global Libraries (SIGL).

Trend 1: Knowledge practices are changing, and the future holds both opportunities and challenges for equity in knowledge systems

Around the world, countries and communities are recognising the need to prioritise diverse and marginalised voices in areas ranging from entertainment and storytelling to policy- and decision-making. Additionally, as much knowledge around the world is not held in written texts, new ways to incorporate traditional and non-Western knowledge and knowledge systems into mainstream and dominant cultures are being developed. But the rise of platforms can also distort knowledge sharing.

- A growing demand for diverse voices
- Misinformation continues to impact society
- Platformisation impacts equitable access to information
- Balancing information regulation for human development & wellbeing
- Ever more personalised and tailored information delivery
- New ways to create, share and use information emerge

Trend 2: AI and other technologies are transforming society, and how we create, share and use information

One of the most dominant trends over the coming years will be the influence of artificial intelligence on our lives. Developments in the field are moving quickly and as a society we are still catching up with what this means for us all ethically, politically, socially, culturally and economically. Information technology trends more broadly will frame how information and knowledge are, and will be, constructed, shaped, shared, engaged with and used.

- Generative AI has great potential, but also potential harms
- The circulation of deepfakes increases the existing challenges of misinformation
- Mixed reality technologies offer new ways to engage with information
- Data usage and network speeds increase
- Digital twins (such as of cultures at risk of disappearance) are scaling up
- Security is an increasingly pressing issue for organisations

Trend 3: Trust is being renegotiated, especially in government and media

Trust in governments and public institutions around the world is declining. The public now trusts scientists, peers and company technical experts more than government and media to provide information about important information like new scientific developments, medical information and innovation. With more people questioning mainstream media and government information, transparency and openness are key to re-establishing trust.

- Trust in governments and institutions is declining
- The loss of local news production is affecting those communities already disadvantaged in other ways

- The open movement(s) face(s) challenges
- Privacy is being traded for accessibility

Trend 4: Skills and abilities are becoming more complex, but also essential

As societies become ever more complex due to the impact of digital technologies, people need to develop practical skills to use devices, software and systems. They also need critical and creative skills to successfully navigate and benefit from media and information environments. These skills are necessary beyond the workplace, and the need to develop practical and critical new skills is essential for people to thrive in the future.

- There is a global talent shortage and a growing demand for digital skills and competencies
- Media and information literacy benefits individuals and communities
- Information and digital skills improve safety

Trend 5: Digital technologies are unevenly distributed, but could boost equity

Around the world more people are accessing and using technology in their everyday lives. However there are still significant numbers who do not have access to the connections and devices required to fully participate in society. Aside from the access requirements prompted by the global move to a digital economy and digital-first services, those with access to quality devices and connections provide an opportunity for people to connect and communicate, create and play, and learn and share.

- The digital divide is deepening
- Essential services are migrating to digital-first and digital-only service provision that requires a digital identity
- Inclusive cultural information frameworks create equitable futures

Trend 6: Information systems are using more resources, impacting the planet

New technologies are using large amounts of energy and materials to run and be maintained. As this tech grows, so too do the implications for the environment, especially in places where e-waste is a problem, and for countries already experiencing the effects of the climate crisis. AI and technologies like it rely on a great deal of computing power and energy to run. As AI scales up, so too do its resource requirements and the potential for material environmental effects.

- Joining the green economy is essential to address climate change
- E-waste is a growing problem

Trend 7: People are seeking community connections – spaces to share are key

Community connections are an essential aspect of health and wellbeing. As people are increasingly prompted to carry out day-to-day interactions online, they in reaction prioritising and seeking out valuable in-person connections in their local community. This trend is also compounded by the increase in people who are working from home and seeking out authentic, fun and creative opportunities for engagement with others.

- Social isolation is a growing problem
- Increasingly, local, place-based events and collaborations build community resilience and capabilities
- Storytelling is used more often to connect people and generations
- There is further growth in online communities
- We see more flexible working in flexible spaces