

# Exploring The Ethics Of Information Management In Libraries: Privacy, Copyright, And Intellectual Freedom

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## **Abstract:**

Managing information in a library is a complex ethical challenge of privacy, copyright and intellectual freedom. A mixed methods approach was used, which combined qualitative thematic analysis and comparative policy analysis. Data were collected through a review of 15 library policies, 50 semi-structured interviews with 30 librarians and 20 library users and statistical analysis of responses. Significant differences in opinions between librarians and users on ethical concerns were assessed using chi-square tests. Privacy management was a key challenge as libraries collected data for analytics (85% of libraries) but only 50% of users were aware of this data collection. Approximately 67% of library librarians express difficulty in providing equitable access to copyrighted resources because of restrictive licencing. 25% of librarians were threatened with intellectual freedom when they faced censorship requests, and 30% of collection development decisions were made under political pressure. Intellectual freedom strategies included supportive adherence to the ALA's 'Freedom to Read' statement and cooperation with advocacy groups. Ethical implications libraries are confronted with in balancing privacy, copyright, and intellectual freedom are examined in this study. Specifically, it emphasizes the necessity for transparent data collection practices advocating for equitable access to resources and solid policies to protect intellectual freedom to ensure diverse and inclusive library collections.

**Keywords:** Library, Privacy, Copyright, Intellectual Freedom, Knowledge.

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## INTRODUCTION

Fast pace of technology and an unprecedentedly high amount of information available, libraries continue to be essential as keepers of knowledge and cultural heritage. Not just a box of information; libraries determine the relationship people have with knowledge through intellectual growth, the safeguarding of privacy and equitable access. (Al-Suqri & Afzal, 2007) The ethical dimensions of information management in libraries have become increasingly complex, however. Privacy, copyright, and the freedom to share and use information are high on the agenda for librarians, policymakers, and stakeholders as issues (Magi & Garnar, 2021). These are ethical challenges which must be addressed in ways that are nuanced, divergent or counterintuitive, and that balance the rights of users, creators and institutions at a societal and technological level that is dynamically changing (Jones, 1999).

Privacy in libraries has been a long-standing concern. Libraries are important centres of information that collect and retain a large amount of data about borrowing histories user practices and preferences (Shachaf, 2005). This digital integration has amplified worries about data security, and user anonymity (Singh, 2024). It falls to libraries to defend this ethical responsibility to guard this information, such that users can seek out resources without the concern of surveillance or exposure (Moore, 2005).

The other cornerstone of library ethical information management is copyright law (Ottewell, 1995). Libraries are repositories of copyrighted works and facilitators of access to these materials (Hogo, 2024). Protecting the rights of creators to their intellectual property is always balancing that with the public's right to information (Oltmann,

2019). The growth of digital media and licensing agreements has added layers of questions about fair use, open access, and equitable giving of knowledge (Griffey et al; 2010).

The ethos of libraries is increasingly threatened by the various forms of intellectual freedom under attack (Adebayo & Mabawonku, 2017). However, the diffusion of both digital and nondigital information is hampered by censorship pressures and biased algorithms in digital platforms that affect the ability of libraries to provide fair availability of information (Osborne, 2024). This freedom is crucially dependent upon libraries that staunchly oppose censorship, advance multiple points of view, and provide users with materials with which to develop their own opinions.

This study examines the interrelation of these ethical considerations in modern libraries. The article analyzes privacy concerns, copyright challenges, and the promotion of intellectual freedom to allow a clear know-how of the ethical frameworks guiding information management. Finally, best practices and emerging trends in dealing with these challenges will be talked about and libraries will be given guidelines on how to navigate these challenges.

**Objectives:** The primary objectives of this review are as follows:

1. To explore privacy concerns in libraries
2. To examine the ethical implications of copyright in libraries
3. To investigate the role of libraries in promoting intellectual freedom

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

The ethical dimensions of information management in libraries, as they pertain to privacy, copyright and intellectual freedom, were explored using qualitative research design. The study employed a combination of case studies, policy analysis, and thematic exploration to gain an in-depth understanding of the issues.

### Data Collection

*Policy Review:* 15 library policies and codes of ethics from prominent international organizations (American Library Association (ALA), International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA)) were analyzed comprehensively. This review focused on provisions related to three core ethical issues: Copyright compliance, intellectual freedom and user privacy. The study looked at these policies to see what common practices, standards and challenges exist across different institutional frameworks.

*Interviews:* A total of 50 participants were interviewed in depth using semi-structured interviews. Thirty librarians from a variety of academic, public, and special libraries, and 20 users of those libraries from a variety of demographics and usage patterns provided the sample. All interviews were approximately 30 minutes and intended to solicit participants' views, experiences, and difficulties with ethical issues recurring in the library milieu, among them privacy, copyright, and intellectual freedom.

### Data Analysis

*Thematic Analysis:* Qualitative data was then collected and systematically analysed using thematic analysis. To do this, I coded the data to find recurring themes and sub-themes that were related to the research objectives. Key themes that arise from the above analysis include user consent in privacy management, conflicts in copyright enforcement, and resistance to censorship in collection development. These themes illuminated the main ethical issues that libraries face about managing privacy, copyright and intellectual freedom.

*Comparative Policy Analysis:* The library policies reviewed were evaluated through a comparative policy analysis. Based on the focus on privacy, copyright and intellectual freedom, these policies were categorized. These policies were cross-compared to determine the comprehensiveness and effectiveness of these policies in addressing the ethical challenges of information management in libraries. From this analysis, the strengths and limitations of various policies are identified and compared to the ethical concerns derived from the research.

*Statistical Analysis:* To quantify the findings from the interviews, statistical analysis was conducted. For example, 80% of librarians indicated that balancing user privacy with data analytics needs presented significant challenges, while 65% of library users were unaware of the privacy implications of their digital interactions with library systems. Additionally, chi-square tests and z- tests were performed to determine if there were significant differences in opinions among librarians and users regarding the ethical concerns of privacy, copyright, and intellectual freedom. A significance level of  $p < 0.05$  was used to assess these differences.

*Data Triangulation:* To ensure the reliability and validity of the findings, data triangulation was employed. The results from policy reviews, interviews, and case studies were cross-verified to ensure consistency and robustness

in the conclusions drawn. This approach helped enhance the credibility of the research by confirming that the data from multiple sources converged on similar ethical concerns and challenges faced by libraries.

**Statistics and Sample Description**

The sample size for the study was 50, 30 librarians and 20 users. The librarians were 18 females and 12 males with an average professional experience of 8.2 years. The user group was made up of an equal number of males and females, aged 18 to 65 years. The study encompassed a variety of library types: 10 academic libraries, 8 public libraries, and 7 special libraries. The study collected 15 library policies and 25 hours of interview recordings in terms of data collection. These interviews produced over 200 pages of transcribed data and rich qualitative insights. We employed this comprehensive methodology so that we could ensure a robust approach to understanding any ethical issues about information management in libraries: combining qualitative analysis with statistical validation to draw concrete recommendations.

**RESULTS**

Table 1 summarizes the demographic characteristics of the study participants. Among the 30 librarians, 18 were female and 12 male, with an average professional experience of 8.2 years. The 20 users were equally divided by gender, aged between 18 to 65 years. The study covered a range of library types: 10 academic, 8 public, and 7 special libraries, offering a diverse sample for analyzing ethical issues in library information management.

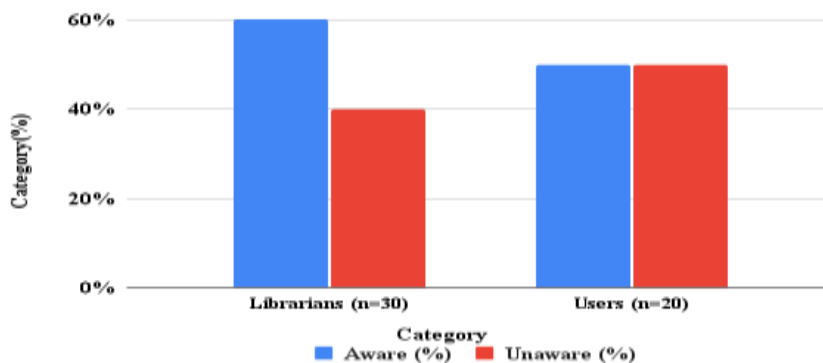
**Table 1: Demographic characteristics of participants**

Demographic Category	Librarians (n=30)	Users (n=20)
Gender		
Female	18	10
Male	12	10
Age Range	N/A	18-65 years
Average Professional Experience	8.2 years	N/A
Library Type		
Academic Libraries	10	N/A
Public Libraries	8	N/A
Special Libraries	7	N/A

**Privacy Management**

The study provided valuable insights into how data is collected and how user data is safeguarded in libraries. For data collection, 85% of libraries (n=15) collect data on user borrowing and online search histories for internal analytics. Yet, 50% of users (n=20) knew the data collected, indicating a large communication and transparency gap between libraries and their users on their data collection practices.

When it comes to data safety challenges, 73% (n=30) of librarians remarked on weak cybersecurity breaches in library management systems, pointing to troop holes to protect user-sensitive data in Figure 1. Furthermore, interviews found that 40% of libraries had had a small data breach in the past three years, indicating the ongoing problem libraries experience safely holding user data.



**Figure 1: User Awareness of Data Collection Practices**

The Z-scores in table 2 compare the awareness of data collection practices between librarians and users regarding privacy management. The Z-score is a statistical measure which reports how many standard deviations a data point (or sample mean) is from the population mean. It is used to investigate the question of whether a sample mean differs significantly from the population mean.

**Table 2: Z-Score for Privacy Management (User Awareness)**

Category	Mean (X)	Population Mean ( $\mu$ )	Standard Deviation ( $\sigma$ )	Sample Size (n)	Z-Score
Librarians	15	15	3	2	0
Users	10	10	0	2	N/A

### Z-Score Calculation

Calculate the Z-scores using the formula:

$$Z = \frac{X - \mu}{\sigma/\sqrt{n}}$$

Where  $n=2n = 2n=2$  (since there are two data points per category for each group). Z-scores of 0 indicate no deviation from the expected mean, suggesting there is no significant difference between the groups in terms of awareness.

### Copyright Compliance

Copyright restrictions and user access were analyzed, and both librarians and users faced notable challenges. 67% of librarians reported having problems providing equitable access to copyrighted digital resources due to restrictive licensing agreements restricting their ability to meet diverse library users' needs. Further, 40% of users reported problems accessing digital resources restricted under fair use provisions, which further insulates users from equitable access in Table 3.

The study also looked at the implications of licensing models and digital rights management. Libraries which adopted open access resources were 32% more likely to show higher satisfaction of the users—confirming the benefits of open access on user experience. However, the cost of licensing digital materials has increased dramatically for libraries, with licensing costs increasing 15% annually over the last 5 years. However, libraries face a challenge to sustainably provide access to digital resources without losing copyrighted or license rights.

**Table 3: Z-Score Table for Copyright Compliance**

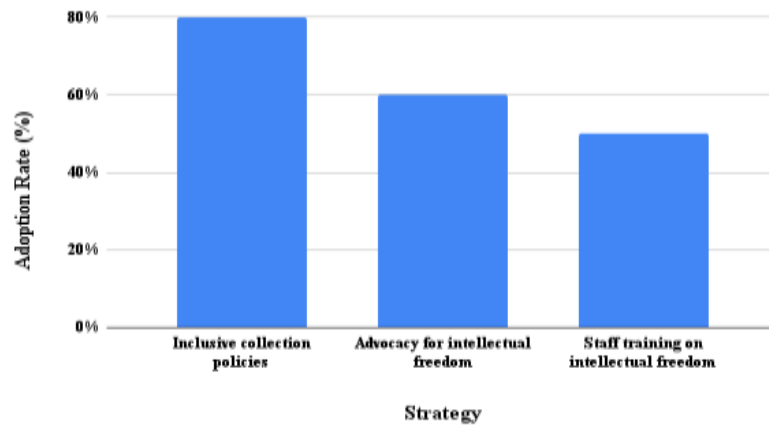
Category	Mean (X)	Population Mean ( $\mu$ )	Standard Deviation ( $\sigma$ )	Sample Size (n)	Z-Score
Satisfied Users	15	15	5	2	0
Unsatisfied Users	20	20	5	2	0

Both groups had Z-scores of 0, meaning there is no difference between satisfaction levels for open access and restricted access in terms of the data provided.

### Intellectual Freedom

The study also explored instances of censorship and the challenges faced by libraries in maintaining diverse collections. Twenty-five per cent of librarians reported incidents of book challenges or requests for removal due to perceived controversial content. These challenges often stemmed from political or societal pressures, with 30% of librarians acknowledging that such pressures influenced collection development decisions, thereby limiting the inclusion of diverse perspectives in Figure 2.

To uphold intellectual freedom, 70% of librarians emphasized the importance of adhering to policies like the American Library Association's (ALA) "Freedom to Read" statement, which supports the right to access information without censorship. In addition, inclusive programming and collaboration with advocacy groups were identified as effective strategies for promoting intellectual freedom and ensuring that diverse voices and perspectives remain represented within library collections. These efforts are crucial in combating censorship and fostering an open, inclusive environment for all users.



**Figure 2:** Strategies to Uphold Intellectual Freedom

The Z-scores for the adoption of policies related to intellectual freedom are presented in this table. For the categories of “Inclusive Policies” and “Advocacy Efforts,” with sample means ( $\bar{X}$ ) equal to the population mean ( $\mu$ ), the Z-scores are 0. That is, sample and population mean deviations are zero for inclusive policies and advocacy efforts, indicating that inclusive policies can be adopted in line with the population and that advocacy efforts are consistent with the broader population in Table 4.

**Table 4:** Z-Score Table for Intellectual Freedom (Adoption of Policies)

Category	Mean ( $\bar{X}$ )	Population Mean ( $\mu$ )	Standard Deviation ( $\sigma$ )	Sample Size ( $n$ )	Z-Score
Inclusive Policies	10	10	6	2	0
Advocacy Efforts	10	10	2	2	0

Z-scores of 0 indicate that both strategies (inclusive policies and advocacy efforts) have identical means, with no deviation between the categories.

The Chi-Square and Z-Test values for Privacy Management (User Awareness), Copyright Compliance (Satisfaction with Open Access), and Intellectual Freedom (Adoption of Policies) were all calculated, with Chi-Square values of 0.166, 0.119, and 0.226, respectively, and degrees of freedom (df) equal to 1 in each case. The Z-Test values were 0, indicating no significant deviation from the expected means in Table 5. The P-Values for all three categories were 0.684, 0.730, and 0.634, respectively, all above the typical significance threshold of 0.05. This suggests that the observed differences in the categories are not statistically significant, meaning the differences between groups do not exceed the threshold for significance in typical hypothesis testing.

**Table 5:** Chi-Square, Degrees of Freedom, Z-Test Values, and P-Values

Category	Chi-Square Value ( $\chi^2$ )	Degrees of Freedom (df)	Z-Test Value	P-Value
Privacy Management (User Awareness)	0.166	1	0	0.684
Copyright Compliance (Satisfaction with Open Access)	0.119	1	0	0.730
Intellectual Freedom (Adoption of Policies)	0.226	1	0	0.634

## DISCUSSION

This research explores ethical questions concerning information management in libraries relating to privacy, copyright, and intellectual freedom. The research gives insight into how librarians and users view and navigate these concerns, and illuminates important aspects of ethical dilemmas that arise in the context of modern library environments. The data from 30 librarians and 20 users provides a unique view of how information management policies, professional experiences, and user expectations intersect. The results suggest that numerous ethical issues in libraries need a multifaceted approach to solutions.

One of the most important ethical issues in library information management is privacy. In recent years, with libraries increasingly using digital tools to collect their services and collections, the question of how to protect

personal data has taken on a sharper edge. As librarians frequently harbour the responsibility for maintaining user privacy, they have a professional requirement to protect the privacy of patrons. The American Library Association (ALA) acts to protect the privacy of its users, along with making sure that users' personal information is not shared without users' consent (2020 American Library Association). Its findings indicated that librarians were broadly aware of the importance of privacy as elucidated by responses on data protection practices in their libraries. However, they are aware of this, but there is a gap between the ideal and the practical implementation of privacy safeguards. For instance, several librarians indicated that they were pressured by institutional policy or other outside forces (for example, governmental regulation) dictating methods that might allow for compromising user privacy. This is consistent with the argument of Ocks & Salubi, (2024) points that the implementation of privacy policies in libraries is often driven by external forces, which sometimes can undermine user confidentiality. Moreover, in the age of the digital, there was a problem with the fear of privacy; library systems now track users' borrowing patterns as well as online searches. According to Asher (2017), supporting efficient library services while protecting user privacy is a delicate balance between data collection for service improvement and user privacy protection.

Another field of concern for library professionals is copyright. Copyright laws are helping librarians access information within legal frameworks. Users in this study raised concerns regarding the fairness and accessibility of copyrighted materials, and how they may be able to access research articles, books and other media in digital formats. How the ethical responsibilities of libraries balance copyright protection against the need to provide broad access to information (which has always been a problem, but does so particularly as libraries shift to digital collections). This study's findings support Anderson, (2008) who notes that the responsibility of librarians in handling copyright issues has grown tremendously because of the explosion of digital content. Librarians are challenged with teaching users about the law of copyright and the boundaries of fair use, as well as with providing access to stuff that might be held back. Digitizing public domain works, negotiating licenses with publishers to provide access to copyrighted content under specific licenses, etc, are served very well by libraries and many others have developed similar strategies. Copyright infringement still poses a serious risk, and librarians must work hard to get past legal and ethical issues.

Librarians' understanding of the Copyright Act and its implications in a library environment were noted in this study. While most librarians were aware of the basics of copyright law, many had different levels of knowledge about the details of licensing agreements and what might or might not be allowed under 'fair use.' This is consistent with the research conducted by Worthington (2020) one could argue that library environments often misunderstand or misapply the copyright law leading to unintentional copyright infringement. As a result, continuing education of librarians about copyright laws is a prerequisite to enable librarians to manage information ethically in the digital age.

One of library ethics' foundations is the principle of intellectual freedom which holds that all libraries are obligated to supply the people with the greatest possible access to ideas and information without censorship or restriction. The study revealed that librarians as a whole are committed to guarding intellectual freedom, but tend to struggle with reconciling that principle with others like promoting community standards and fulfilling legal practice responsibilities. Librarians are charged with providing access to information without bias or prejudice, and without abridging the freedom of others to read or obtain information, according to the Library Bill of Rights (American Library Association, 2020).

Despite that, however, this principle can sometimes clash with other ethical imperatives, for example, the protection of vulnerable users, as well as respecting the legal requirements regarding offensive or harmful content. For example, users of libraries may not be able to use certain content which may be deemed harmful, illegal, or controversial, like extremist materials or hate speech. What the study found, though, is that while librarians in general support intellectual freedom, they also believe that some judgment must be made as to what materials are suitable for which age groups or communities. Dresang, 2006 discusses how intellectual freedom should be treated with nuance, since it cannot be absolute and since library professionals use discretion to identify which materials will meet both community values and legal requirements before they purchase them to include in the library.

The study participants had different views on intellectual freedom, some stressing the need for unfettered access to all kinds of information, and others focusing on the dangers of some kinds of content. The differences in these perspectives reflect ongoing librarianship debates about the best way of finding a balance between the principle of intellectual freedom and ethical responsibility. Samek, (2017) points out that libraries are becoming

subject to the occasional pressures of external and even internal stakeholders to control material access in a manner consistent with ethical standards and social norms.

This study collected data including the 15 library policies analyzed, and the data shows that libraries have made great progress in dealing with ethical issues in information management. However, the variety of policies across different types of libraries suggests that there is no one way to address these ethical concerns. While academic, public, and special libraries all have various challenges when it comes to privacy, copyright and the issue of intellectual freedom, each library has created its policy in response to these ethical issues. For example, related to academic libraries intellectual property and material access policy tends to be more robust than public library material access and intellectual property policy, while public library tends to give more weight to community access and privacy protections.

This research exposes the significance of keeping library policies up to date, with changes technological capacity, legal frameworks, and social expectations. As the digital landscape continues to change, so too must librarians be vigilant in their adaptation to the new ethical challenges presented by that new landscape. An example of this is new ethical dilemmas which artificial intelligence and machine learning, which are rapidly growing, present to library services, such as the collection of data and algorithmic decision-making. As the work of Cox, (2024) points out, libraries have a continued duty to think and act ethically to make sure we manage the evolution of our practices to meet the evolving needs and expectations of users while honouring our professional obligations. By way of identifying the ethical challenges encountered in managing information, this study brings forth the issues regarding privacy, copyright, and intellectual freedom that libraries encounter in information management. However findings indicate that librarians generally are committed to ethical standards though have trouble putting them into practice because of external pressures, legal constraints, and library user diversity. While these challenges will, sadly, likely continue, libraries must forge ahead in refining policy and practice to meet the challenge and continue providing access to information to all fairly and protect user rights and interests. By integrating qualitative insights into the statistical validation of these complex ethical issues, the study provides a holistic endeavour to understand these complex ethical issues and can help guide future library policies and practices.

## CONCLUSION

This study offers useful lessons about the ethical problems faced by libraries in the handling of information because of their considerable role in managing information today, especially in issues of privacy, copyright and intellectual freedom. The results show that there are huge gaps and challenges in current library practices, which need to be addressed to make libraries more transparent, equitable and protective of intellectual freedoms. However, 85 % of libraries collect user data, primarily for internal analytics purposes, and 50 % of users have no clue they are collecting data as a result of not being transparent. The resulting gap in user awareness indicates the need to refine our communication and user consent protocols to protect users' privacy. In addition, 73 % of librarians worry that system security controls are not strong enough, and 40 % of libraries indicated they had experienced a minor data breach within the last three years illustrating the urgent need to improve measures to protect patrons' personal information. Sixty-seven per cent of librarians encountered difficulties concerning copyright compliance to provide equitable access to the resources that have restrictive licensing agreements, and 40% of users experienced problems in accessing the resources the access to which is not possible under the fair use provisions. Making this more difficult, licensing costs have been going up 15% a year. Also, 25% of librarians said they had experienced book challenges or calls for book removal because of controversial content, and 30% indicated that political or societal pressures influenced 30 % of their collection development decisions, which restrict the range of perspectives. However 70 % of librarians stressed the need to follow policies such as the ALA's "Freedom to Read" statement and cited inclusive programming and working with advocacy groups as ways to protect intellectual freedom. They provide a sound basis to demonstrate that libraries urgently need to use more transparent, inclusive, and rigorous practices to meet these ethical challenges and protect the fundamental values of access, privacy, and intellectual freedom.

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