

Can Academic Libraries Keep Up with Digital Consumption Culture?

Jasmyne Johnson, Louisiana State University



Abstract

This study examines how digital consumption culture is reshaping academic libraries and investigates whether libraries can adapt to changing user expectations while maintaining commitments to equitable access, information literacy, preservation, and public service. Guided by the research question, “Can academic libraries adapt to digital consumption culture while maintaining their core values?” The study employed a literature review of scholarly articles, professional reports, and academic publications published primarily between 2015 and 2026. Literature was collected through major academic databases and analyzed using thematic synthesis. The reviewed literature served as the study’s data source. Analysis identified four major themes: the shift from ownership to subscription-based access, increasing platform dependency and vendor control, evolving research behaviors shaped by convenience and algorithms, and tensions between access and preservation. Findings indicate that digital platforms have expanded access to information but have also created financial, technological, and ethical challenges that threaten long-term sustainability and institutional autonomy. The study concludes that academic libraries can remain relevant by balancing user-centered services with preservation efforts and critical information literacy initiatives. Future research should examine the long-term effects of platform dependency, artificial intelligence, and algorithmic systems on scholarly communication and library services.

Keywords: academic libraries; digital consumption culture; subscription economy; platform dependency; information literacy; digital preservation; scholarly communication; user behavior; higher education

Introduction

Over the last decade, the rise of subscription-based media and digital avenues of consumption has steadily grown and quietly reshaped everyday life. As a result, such rapid expansion has fundamentally reshaped how users consume media and participate in contemporary culture. Streaming platforms function not only as entertainment providers, but also systems of technological and economic power that shape how audiences interact with content and with each other (Colbjørnsen, 2020).

As these platforms become more integrated into daily routines, they also influence assumptions about accessibility and participation. Traditional forms of gatekeeping have not disappeared in the digital age, they have simply become embedded within the platforms themselves (Siciliano, 2022). Subscription tiers, algorithmic recommendation systems, and platform design now influence what users can access and how they interact with digital spaces.

These changes have affected how people think about time and availability; researchers describe how streaming culture encourages expectations of immediacy and flexibility. Users are increasingly accustomed to accessing content on demand, across devices, and without interruption (Zhao, 2025). Yet these expectations exist alongside growing frustrations tied to rising costs, overlapping subscriptions, and restricted access

models. The rise of multiple subscription services has created mounting irritation among consumers. This phenomenon, subscription fatigue, is exhibited in the constant weariness from managing several platforms simultaneously and yet persists due to convenience and perceived value, continuing to drive engagement (Sarraf & Kar, 2026).

Nevertheless, streaming platforms have become deeply connected to public and cultural life. These services shape not only entertainment habits, but also broader patterns of communication, participation, and information sharing (Özgün & Treske, 2021). As digital platforms increasingly define how people interact with media and information, they also establish expectations for how institutions should deliver services online.

For academic libraries, this shift creates a complicated challenge. Libraries have long been grounded in values such as equitable access, privacy, preservation, and public service; principles that do not always align neatly with commercial platform models. However, users who are accustomed to the speed and convenience of subscription-based services may begin to expect similar experiences from library systems. This raises an important question: can academic libraries adapt to digital consumption culture without compromising the values that define their mission? Exploring this question requires not only examining the influence of subscription-based platforms on user expectations but also reflecting on how libraries can respond to these pressures while remaining committed to accessibility, education, and the public good.

With this in mind, this paper has two aims:

- 1.) Examine scholarship surrounding digital consumption culture and academic

libraries

- 2.) Analyze tensions between user expectations, technological dependency, and preservation responsibilities

Methodology

This study employed a literature review methodology to examine how digital consumption culture is influencing academic libraries and to identify key themes, challenges, and emerging trends within the existing scholarship. A literature review was selected because it is well suited for exploring broad, interdisciplinary topics and mapping the current state of research.

The review was guided by the following research question:

Can academic libraries adapt to digital consumption culture while maintaining their commitments to equitable access, information literacy, preservation, and public service?

To address this question, the review examined scholarship related to subscription-based access, platform dependency, changing research behaviors, and digital preservation.

Search Strategy

Literature searches were conducted using Sage Journals, Academic Search Complete, Taylor and Francis, ScienceDirect, SpringerNature, and Google Scholar. Keywords included combinations of terms such as *academic libraries, digital consumption culture, subscription economy, platform dependency, electronic resource licensing, digital preservation, information literacy, information search behavior, student engagement, higher education, university students, digital reading, and attention economy.*

The review focused primarily on sources published between 2015 and 2026, while also

incorporating foundational works that provided important theoretical context. Peer-reviewed articles, professional reports, and scholarly publications relevant to the research question were included.

Study Selection

Sources were screened through title, abstract, and full-text review. Literature was included if it addressed academic libraries, digital information environments, user behavior, platform-based access, or preservation challenges. Sources that fell outside the scope of higher education or lacked relevance to the research questions were excluded.

Data Charting

Relevant information from each source was recorded, including publication details, primary findings, and key themes. Particular attention was given to discussions of access models, vendor control, information-seeking behavior, attention patterns, information literacy, and preservation strategies.

Summarizing and Synthesizing Findings

The selected literature was analyzed using thematic synthesis. Findings were organized into four major themes: Libraries in a Subscription Economy, Platform Dependency and Vendor Control, Attention Spans and Research Habits, and Convenience Versus Preservation. The review focused on identifying recurring patterns, points of tension, and gaps in the literature to better understand how digital consumption culture is reshaping academic library services and priorities.

Libraries in a Subscription Economy

The Shift from Ownership to Access

Academic libraries have steadily moved away from owning physical collections and toward licensing digital access. In the print era, libraries purchased journals and books outright, meaning they retained permanent control over those materials even if subscriptions ended or publishers changed direction. Digital collections changed that relationship. Instead of ownership, libraries now often pay temporary access through databases, journal bundles, and e-resource packages controlled by vendors and publishers. This transition has allowed libraries to provide users with faster and broader access to information, but it also has created new financial, technological, and ethical challenges.

One of the clearest examples of this shift is the rise of subscription-based “Big Deal” packages. These agreements allow libraries to access large bundles of journals through contracts with major academic publishers. At first, these packages appeared to offer strong value because they dramatically increased the amount of content available to researchers. However, scholars (Shu et al., 2018) argue that Big Deals also reduced library flexibility and increased dependence on vendors. Rodríguez-Bravo et al. (2021) similarly explains that Big Deal models evolved into systems that prioritize publisher profit and scale over long-term collection sustainability. What began as a strategy for increasing access has, over time, become a source of financial and operational strain for many institutions.

The debate surrounding access versus ownership is central to discussions about digital collections. Libraries may technically provide users with access to thousands of journals, e-books, and streaming materials, but that access often exists only as long as

subscription payments continue. Unlike print collections, digital materials are governed by licensing agreements that place limits on how resources can be shared, preserved, or archived. McCracken et al. (2023) discuss how post-cancellation access rights are frequently inconsistent or difficult to enforce, leaving libraries vulnerable when subscriptions end. In practical terms, this means institutions can spend years paying for access to scholarly content without guaranteeing that access will remain available in the future.

Escalating Vendor Costs and Budget Pressures

These concerns become even more significant when paired with rising vendor costs. Subscription prices for academic journals and databases have increased steadily over time, often outpacing library budgets and institutional funding. Elsevier title-level pricing highlights how pricing structures from major publishers can create serious strain on collection budgets, particularly for public universities and smaller institutions with limited financial flexibility (Thornton & Brundy, 2021). Vendor monopolies and publisher consolidation have increased pricing power among a small number of companies that dominate scholarly communication. As a result, libraries are frequently forced to make difficult decisions about cancellations, collection reductions, or reallocating funds away from other services and initiatives.

The financial pressure created by these subscription models also exposes inequities across higher education. Wealthier institutions are often better positioned to absorb rising costs and maintain broad access to scholarly materials, while smaller institutions may face cancellations and reduced collections much sooner (Thornton &

Brundy, 2021). As a result, access to research can become uneven depending on institutional resources rather than academic need. In this way, subscription-based access does not simply shape library budgets; it also shapes who is able to participate fully in scholarly research.

Subscription Fatigue in Academic Contexts

At the same time, both libraries and users are experiencing forms of subscription fatigue. In consumer culture, subscription overload has become increasingly common as individuals manage multiple streaming services, software platforms, and digital memberships. This constant management of digital subscriptions may lead to feelings of frustration, exhaustion, and anxiety (George, 2024). Similar patterns are at risk of emerging within academic environments. Researchers and students now navigate a fragmented ecosystem of databases, authentication systems, publisher platforms, and paywalls. Instead of experiencing research as a straightforward discovery process, users often encounter interruptions that require institutional logins, VPN access, or navigating multiple interfaces.

Researchers also increasingly feel frustrated by changes in journal access and subscription limitations (Cooper & Rieger, 2021). When libraries cancel packages or lose access to certain titles, users may not fully understand why materials that were previously available suddenly disappear. This can create perceptions that the library itself is failing, even when the underlying issue stems from vendor pricing and licensing restrictions. Over time, constant platform switching and inconsistent access points may contribute to user disengagement, especially among students who are already accustomed to frictionless

digital experiences provided by commercial platforms like streaming services or social media applications.

Streaming Logic and Temporary Access Models

The rise of digital media has introduced new expectations regarding access and consumption. Contemporary users increasingly engage with information through streaming platforms, subscription services, and cloud-based resources that prioritize convenience, immediacy, and continuous availability. In these environments, access often takes precedence over ownership, reflecting a broader cultural shift toward temporary use rather than permanent possession.

This transition has significantly influenced library collections and resource management. Geuther et al. (2021) note that electronic resource licensing has become a dominant component of content development strategies, often replacing traditional ownership-based collection models. While licensing agreements can expand access to materials and reduce barriers to discovery, they also create uncertainty regarding long-term availability and preservation.

These developments illustrate a broader tension between short-term usability and long-term stewardship. As digital culture increasingly values convenience and constant consumption, libraries must navigate the challenges of preserving knowledge in environments where information is frequently treated as temporary, replaceable, and platform dependent.

Temporary Access Replacing Ownership

The growing dependence on licensed digital access also raises important concerns

about permanence and institutional stewardship. Libraries have historically served as long-term custodians of cultural and scholarly memory. However, when collections are primarily leased rather than owned, the permanence of those collections becomes fragile. If a publisher removes content, changes licensing terms, or shuts down a platform, libraries may lose access despite years of financial investment. The disappearance of access is not always visible immediately, but it fundamentally alters how libraries preserve and guarantee scholarly continuity.

Taken together, these issues reveal how deeply subscription culture has reshaped academic libraries. The shift toward licensed access has expanded the availability of digital scholarship in many ways, yet it has also introduced financial instability, platform dependence, and uncertainty around long-term preservation. Libraries now operate within systems where access can be temporary, costs are continually escalating, and users increasingly expect seamless digital experiences that libraries may struggle to provide within restrictive licensing frameworks.

Platform Dependency and Vendor Control

Reliance on Proprietary Systems

As academic libraries continue to expand their digital collections, they have also become increasingly dependent on proprietary platforms owned by commercial publishers and technology vendors. What once centered on locally managed collections and institutionally controlled archives has gradually shifted toward externally hosted systems that shape how information is accessed and preserved. While these platforms offer convenience and large-scale access, the literature suggests that they also introduce new

forms of dependency that can limit institutional autonomy and deepen corporate influence over scholarly communication (Ma, 2023).

Much of this discussion connects to the broader concept of platform capitalism. In, “Value, Rent, and Platform Capitalism” platforms are described not simply as neutral technologies, but as infrastructures designed to generate value through control, dependency, and data extraction. Rather than owning physical products, platform-based systems often profit by controlling access, collecting user data, and embedding themselves deeply into everyday workflows (Srnicsek, 2021). Within academic libraries, this model is increasingly visible through publisher-controlled databases, discovery layers, e-book platforms, and analytics systems that libraries rely on to deliver digital resources.

Van Dijck’s (2020) work on platformization further explains how infrastructures themselves become forms of power. Platforms do not simply organize information; they shape how users interact with knowledge and how institutions make decisions about access. Library discovery systems are now frequently integrated with proprietary technologies that influence search visibility, recommendation systems, and usage analytics. Over time, these systems become difficult to separate from daily library operations. The result is a form of technological lock-in where libraries may feel unable to move away from vendors because entire workflows, user expectations, and collections have become embedded within those ecosystems.

Bundled Access Models and Ecosystem Dependency

This dependency becomes especially visible in bundled subscription models. Large publishers increasingly provide content through interconnected packages that combine

journals, e-books, analytics tools, and discovery services into unified ecosystems. While these arrangements can simplify access, they also reduce collection flexibility. Libraries may be required to license broad packages rather than selectively acquiring materials that best fit institutional needs. Vendors often position themselves as essential infrastructure partners, yet the balance of power within these relationships frequently favors the corporations controlling the platforms (Ostergaard & Rosmann, 2016).

The literature also raises concerns about how vendor ecosystems shape user behavior and institutional priorities. Libraries are no longer simply purchasing access to information; they are participating in systems that collect and monetize user interaction data. Moore (2020) highlights how academic publishing platforms implement infrastructural intervention services, gathering analytics about reading habits, search activity, and research behaviors. Such systems allow publishers to gain insight into how scholarship is consumed while further strengthening their market influence. In this sense, platform dependency extends beyond content access and into questions surrounding surveillance, privacy, and control over scholarly activity.

Attention Spans and Research Habits

Algorithmic Consumption Habits

The ways individuals discover and engage with information have been increasingly shaped by algorithmic systems that prioritize personalization, relevance, and efficiency. Recommendation engines embedded within digital platforms curate content based on previous behaviors, encouraging users to consume information through algorithmically generated pathways rather than through deliberate exploration. As discussed in,

“Algorithmic Attention Systems and Writing-as-Content” these systems compete within the broader attention economy, where visibility and engagement become valuable commodities (Masters-Wheeler, 2024). Consequently, users become accustomed to receiving information that is filtered, ranked, and presented according to predicted interests, often reducing opportunities for active information seeking.

This shift has important implications for research behaviors. Rather than engaging in comprehensive searches, many users increasingly expect information to be readily available and tailored to their needs. The preference for concise, curated content reflects broader changes in information consumption patterns, where convenience and speed often take precedence over depth and exploration (Allen et al., 2025; Watson et al., 2025). These habits can encourage passive engagement with information, limiting exposure to diverse perspectives and reducing opportunities for critical evaluation.

Preference for Immediacy and Convenience

Alongside algorithmic personalization, contemporary information environments have cultivated expectations for immediate access to knowledge. Digital technologies have normalized instant retrieval, influencing how users approach academic research. Recent research suggests that university students increasingly prioritize convenience and immediacy when conducting online searches, often selecting information sources that are fast, familiar, and easily accessible rather than those requiring more complex search strategies (Dahlen & Hanson, 2023; Allen et al., 2025; Watson et al., 2025).

Reflecting this preference for efficiency, students frequently focus on the first few pages of search results and often rely on the prominence of articles within those results

when making source-selection decisions. This behavior underscores the importance of search algorithms in shaping information-seeking practices, as students are more likely to engage with sources that are presented as most relevant and immediately accessible. Consequently, algorithmic ranking systems play a significant role in directing students' attention and influencing the information they ultimately use in their academic work (Dahlen & Hanson, 2023).

This “search engine mentality” reflects a broader culture of convenience in which users expect research materials to be discoverable with minimal effort. As a result, patience for complex search strategies, iterative inquiry, and extensive exploration may be diminishing. These expectations also shape perceptions of library services, with users increasingly seeking streamlined, user-centered experiences that mirror the simplicity of commercial search platforms. While such developments can improve accessibility, they may also discourage the persistence and critical engagement often required for scholarly research.

Decline in Deep Reading and Sustained Engagement

A growing body of research suggests that digital reading environments can challenge sustained attention and deep engagement with texts. Chevet et al. (2022) examined attentional disruption during digital reading and found that various environmental and technological factors can interrupt reading flow, making it more difficult for readers to maintain concentration and comprehension. Frequent interruptions and fragmented attention may encourage reading practices characterized by scanning and skimming rather than careful, reflective engagement with complex materials.

Similarly, Vuorinen et al. (2024) found that digital reading behaviors are influenced by factors such as task context, technological experience, and user motivation. Their findings suggest that readers often adapt their reading strategies to digital environments, frequently prioritizing efficiency and information extraction over comprehensive understanding. While these strategies may be effective for locating specific information, they can reduce opportunities for critical analysis and deeper comprehension.

These trends align with broader concerns about the cognitive impacts of digital environments. As individuals become accustomed to rapidly shifting between sources, notifications, and tasks, sustained engagement with lengthy scholarly texts may become increasingly difficult. Consequently, researchers have raised concerns about declining reading comprehension, reduced reflection, and diminished critical interaction with complex arguments (List et al., 2024; Mason & Warmington, 2024).

Implications for Scholarly Engagement

The changing nature of attention and research habits presents significant challenges for scholarly engagement and information literacy development. The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) emphasizes that information literacy extends beyond locating information; it requires learners to critically evaluate sources, understand the creation and value of information, and engage thoughtfully with knowledge systems (ACRL, 2016). These competencies depend on sustained attention and reflection, skills that may be strained by increasingly fragmented information environments.

For academic librarians, these developments create a complex instructional

landscape. Dewan (2019) argues that libraries must recognize the realities of “continuous partial attention,” where users are frequently managing multiple streams of information simultaneously. Rather than simply lamenting changing attention patterns, librarians are encouraged to adapt services and instructional approaches that acknowledge contemporary user behaviors while still promoting meaningful engagement with information.

Ultimately, a tension exists between efficiency and depth in modern research practices. Digital technologies have dramatically improved access to information and reduced barriers to discovery. However, the same systems that support convenience can also undermine the sustained attention and critical inquiry essential to scholarly work. As higher education institutions seek to develop information-literate graduates, librarians and educators play a crucial role in helping students balance the demands of speed and accessibility with the deeper intellectual engagement required for rigorous research.

Convenience Versus Preservation

Libraries as Institutions of Preservation

For centuries, libraries have served as institutions dedicated not only to providing access to information but also to preserving knowledge for future generations. This preservation mission has traditionally involved collecting, organizing, and safeguarding materials so that scholarly and cultural records remain accessible over time. At its core, librarianship has been grounded in the belief that knowledge should endure beyond immediate use, supporting both present inquiry and future scholarship.

The preservation of information contributes to broader forms of cultural memory

and scholarly continuity. Libraries function as stewards of collective knowledge, ensuring that historical records, research outputs, and cultural artifacts remain available despite technological, social, or institutional change. Effective digital preservation requires long-term planning and sustainable curation systems capable of maintaining access and authenticity over extended periods (Rieger et al., 2022). Preservation, therefore, is not simply a technical function but a foundational responsibility that supports the continuity of scholarship and the preservation of cultural heritage.

Conflict Between Institutional Memory and User Demand

The growing emphasis on convenience has placed libraries in a complex position. Users often expect library services to mirror the seamless experiences offered by commercial technology companies, emphasizing speed, simplicity, and immediate access. These expectations have encouraged libraries to modernize services, streamline interfaces, and prioritize user-centered design.

However, this focus on convenience can conflict with the traditional preservation responsibilities of libraries. Polchow's (2021) discussion of perpetual access highlights the challenges institutions face when balancing user demand for immediate availability with the need to ensure enduring access to scholarly resources. Preservation initiatives often require significant investments in infrastructure, metadata management, storage, and long-term planning, activities that may be largely invisible to users but remain essential to maintaining institutional memory.

As a result, libraries increasingly confront questions about how their value is defined. While users may evaluate services based on convenience and accessibility,

librarians must also consider their responsibility to future researchers and communities.

This tension reflects a broader shift toward market-driven service models, where consumer expectations influence institutional priorities. Libraries must therefore balance modernization efforts with their enduring mission to preserve and protect knowledge.

Libraries and the Loss of Archival Autonomy

These concerns become especially significant when considering the historical role of libraries as custodians of knowledge. Traditionally, libraries have served not only as access points, but as institutions responsible for preserving cultural and scholarly memory across generations. Platform dependency complicates this responsibility because preservation increasingly relies on systems owned and managed by private corporations. A tension exists between libraries' archival mission and their dependence on vendor-controlled infrastructures.

Noûs (2021) reflects this tension by describing how many librarians view current scholarly communication systems as fundamentally unsustainable. Libraries are expected to preserve access to knowledge while operating within economic models that prioritize licensing, recurring payments, and corporate ownership over permanence. Ownership, once considered a standard part of collection development, is increasingly reframed as a preservation strategy rather than simply a purchasing preference.

Ultimately, the literature suggests that platform dependency has reshaped the relationship between libraries, technology, and scholarly access. Commercial platforms now influence not only what libraries can provide, but also how users discover information, how data is collected, and how scholarship is preserved over time. While

these infrastructures offer efficiency and expanded digital access, they also create forms of institutional vulnerability that challenge the traditional values of autonomy, stewardship, and long-term preservation. As libraries continue adapting to vendor-controlled ecosystems, questions surrounding power, sustainability, and archival responsibility remain central to the broader conversation about the future of academic knowledge.

Risks of Disappearing or Restricted Content

E-book platforms provide another example of this shifting dynamic. Research on e-book vendors as platform intermediaries show that vendors operate as the central liaison between libraries and publishers whilst, “...employ[ing] various strategies to control users from both ends to maintain their intermediary position” (Zhang & Hollie, 2025). As a result, libraries may license e-books through platforms that control pricing models, lending restrictions, interface design, and access terms. Unlike print collections, where ownership granted long-term stability, digital materials remain dependent on the ongoing existence and policies of third-party systems. This creates a fragile environment where access can change with little institutional control.

The risks associated with disappearing or restricted content are a growing concern throughout the literature. Digital materials can be removed, altered, or restricted when licenses expire, platforms change ownership, or vendors discontinue services. Unlike physical collections that remain on shelves unless intentionally removed, born-digital materials are inherently more vulnerable to instability. The ephemerality of digital information raises difficult questions about preservation and scholarly continuity.

Libraries may spend years paying for access to resources that ultimately remain outside their long-term control.

Emerging Preservation Strategies

In response to these challenges, libraries have developed new approaches that seek to reconcile access and preservation. Rather than viewing convenience and stewardship as competing goals, many institutions are adopting hybrid strategies that support both immediate usability and long-term sustainability.

One significant development has been the growth of collaborative digital repositories and institutional repositories. Narlock and Brower's (2021) case study demonstrates how repositories can be revitalized and sustained through ongoing organizational commitment, helping institutions preserve scholarly outputs while maintaining accessibility for users. Similarly, Nyitray and Reijerkerk (2021) emphasize the importance of trustworthy repository infrastructures that support both preservation goals and evolving user needs. These systems provide mechanisms for ensuring the long-term availability of digital content while adapting to technological change.

Libraries are also expanding born-digital preservation initiatives to address the growing volume of information created exclusively in digital environments. Wong and Chiu (2024) highlight the importance of web and social media archiving as forms of digital curation that preserve contemporary cultural and scholarly records. Likewise, Herzinger et al. (2020) argue that successful preservation programs require institutions to move beyond planning and actively implement preservation infrastructures capable of managing digital content at scale.

Open access initiatives and controlled digital lending models further illustrate efforts to reassert library autonomy within increasingly commercialized information ecosystems. These approaches seek to reduce dependence on restrictive licensing arrangements while supporting broader public access to knowledge. Collectively, such strategies represent an evolving vision of preservation, one that embraces technological innovation while maintaining libraries' longstanding commitment to safeguarding information.

Ultimately, the relationship between convenience and preservation remains one of the defining challenges facing contemporary libraries. Digital technologies have expanded access to information in unprecedented ways, yet they have also introduced new risks to long-term availability and stewardship. Emerging preservation strategies suggest that libraries are not abandoning their traditional mission but rather adapting it to a digital environment. By balancing user expectations with preservation responsibilities, libraries continue to serve as both gateways to information and guardians of the scholarly record.

Gaps in Current Scholarship

The literature surrounding digital consumption culture and academic libraries provides valuable insight into subscription economies, platform dependency, changing research behaviors, and preservation challenges. However, several important gaps remain. While many scholars examine these issues independently, fewer studies explore how they intersect and collectively shape the future of academic libraries.

One notable gap involves the long-term consequences of platform dependency. Scholars have documented concerns regarding vendor control, licensing restrictions, and

ecosystem lock-in (Srnicsek, 2021; Ostergaard & Rosmann, 2016), but there is less research examining how these dependencies may affect academic libraries over multiple decades. Questions surrounding institutional autonomy, data ownership, and preservation sustainability remain largely unresolved. As libraries become increasingly embedded within commercial infrastructures, understanding the cumulative effects of this dependence becomes increasingly important.

Additionally, much of the existing scholarship is reactive, documenting changes after they occur rather than examining emerging trends before they become widespread. Rapid developments in artificial intelligence, personalized search technologies, predictive recommendation systems, and algorithmically generated content may further transform research practices in ways that remain understudied. Future research will need to address not only current challenges but also the evolving technologies that continue to reshape information consumption.

Discussion

Implications for Academic Libraries

The gaps identified throughout the literature point toward several important implications for academic libraries. Most significantly, libraries may need to reconsider how they define accessibility in an era shaped by digital consumption culture. Historically, access meant making information available. Increasingly, however, users expect access to be immediate, personalized, intuitive, and available across multiple devices and platforms. Meeting these expectations requires libraries to think beyond collection development and consider the overall user experience.

At the same time, the literature suggests that libraries cannot simply replicate commercial platform models without compromising core professional values. Unlike streaming services and technology companies, libraries maintain commitments to privacy, intellectual freedom, preservation, and equitable access. These values often conflict with business models that prioritize user surveillance, algorithmic optimization, and subscription-based exclusivity. The challenge for libraries is not whether they should become more user-centered, but how they can improve convenience while preserving the principles that distinguish them from commercial platforms.

The changing nature of attention and information consumption also has implications for information literacy instruction. As users increasingly encounter information through algorithmically curated environments, librarians may play an even greater role in helping students understand how information is produced, organized, prioritized, and distributed. The Association of College and Research Libraries' (ACRL) framework emphasizes critical engagement with information systems, and this objective may become increasingly important as digital environments grow more complex and opaque (ACRL, 2016). Information literacy instruction may therefore need to expand beyond evaluating sources to include critical awareness of platforms, algorithms, and digital infrastructures.

Preservation presents another significant challenge. The literature consistently highlights tensions between immediate access and long-term stewardship (Polchow, 2021; Rieger et al., 2022). As collections become increasingly digital and subscription-based, libraries must continue investing in preservation infrastructure, institutional

repositories, and collaborative stewardship initiatives. These efforts are essential not only for maintaining access today but also for ensuring that future scholars inherit a stable and trustworthy scholarly record.

Conclusion

Looking Ahead: Can Academic Libraries Keep Up?

The central question of this review, whether academic libraries can keep up with digital consumption culture, may ultimately depend on how success is defined. If keeping up means competing directly with commercial platforms on speed, scale, and convenience, libraries will likely face significant challenges. Technology companies operate with resources, business models, and incentives that differ fundamentally from those of educational institutions.

However, the literature suggests a more nuanced possibility. Libraries have historically adapted to major technological shifts, from print to electronic journals, from card catalogs to digital discovery systems, and from physical archives to born-digital collections. The current transition may represent another stage in that ongoing evolution. Rather than abandoning their traditional mission, libraries appear to be redefining how that mission is fulfilled within increasingly digital environments.

Emerging initiatives such as open access publishing, institutional repositories, collaborative preservation networks, and user-centered service design demonstrate that adaptation is already occurring (Narlock & Brower, 2021; Nyitray & Reijerkerk, 2021; Wong & Chiu, 2024). These efforts suggest that libraries are not passive observers of digital consumption culture but active participants in shaping alternative models of

information access and stewardship.

Ultimately, the future of academic libraries may not rest on their ability to mimic streaming platforms but on their ability to offer something those platforms cannot. While commercial systems excel at delivering content efficiently, libraries remain uniquely positioned to support intellectual freedom, long-term preservation, critical inquiry, and equitable access to knowledge. As digital consumption culture continues to evolve, the most important challenge may be finding ways to balance convenience with these enduring values. The literature suggests that this balance will not be easy, but it may be essential to ensuring that academic libraries remain relevant, trusted, and sustainable institutions in the digital age.

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