

Effective Barriers to Obtaining the Right of Reproduction and Representation Licenses to Digitize Book Resources in Iranian Digital Libraries

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to identify the barriers to obtaining copyright and reproduction and representation licenses from publishers for the digitization of book resources in Iranian digital libraries, and to propose solutions for overcoming these barriers.

Methodology: This study adopted a qualitative approach using document analysis. Data collection and analysis were conducted based on the thematic analysis framework proposed by Attride-Stirling and further developed by Clarke and Braun. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with 10 experts in the fields of publishing and digital libraries. In addition, relevant national and international studies were reviewed to extract barriers and solutions related to the licensing process.

Findings: A total of 272 basic themes, 57 organizing themes, and 2 global themes were identified, encompassing executive, financial, and technical dimensions. The reliability of the findings was assessed using the Holsti method. The thematic network related to the right of reproduction and representation of book resources in Iranian digital libraries highlights a range of executive, financial, and technical barriers, along with corresponding solutions.

With respect to executive and financial barriers and solutions, key issues included policy and guideline formulation, trust-building by libraries, the role of resource-aggregating companies, identification of the responsible policymaking authority, provision of supportive facilities, and enhanced interaction between publishers and libraries. Technical barriers and solutions focused on infrastructure readiness, cybersecurity for digital representation of books, metadata standards, digitization workflows, digital lending models, and challenges associated with the digitization process.

Conclusion: Based on the analysis of the identified barriers, several solutions are proposed, including ensuring continuous and transparent payments to publishers and rights holders by libraries; providing fair financial compensation to creators; limiting access to small excerpts of books to comply with copyright regulations; implementing legal metadata to clearly document copyright status; and applying appropriate copyright notices. The implementation of these measures can enhance trust between publishers and libraries, enrich digital collections, protect digital resources, and facilitate user access to digital content.

Value: Obtaining permission from publishers for the digitization of books represents one of the fundamental challenges faced by digital libraries in Iran. Despite its importance, this issue has received limited scholarly attention. By systematically identifying barriers and proposing practical solutions, this study fills an important research gap and provides a useful framework for policymakers, libraries, and publishers involved in the digitization of book resources.

Keywords: *Copyright, Technical Measures, Licensing, Book Sources, Digital Libraries of Iran*

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Extended Abstract

Introduction: Collecting digital resources or developing digital libraries is a complex process that requires robust legal and technical infrastructures to protect digital rights. As Coyle notes, documenting copyright status assists users, authors, and libraries by clarifying the conditions of resource use and ownership. Digitization has become an essential component of library services in the twenty-first century; however, it faces numerous challenges, particularly in developing countries such as Iran. One of the most complex aspects of digital library development is obtaining copyright licenses from publishers for the digitization of book resources. This process involves intertwined technical, legal, financial, and administrative considerations that require careful analysis and the formulation of strategic solutions.

Purpose: This study aims to identify the barriers to obtaining copyright licenses from publishers for the digitization of book resources in Iranian digital libraries and to propose practical solutions for overcoming these barriers.

Methodology: This research adopted a qualitative approach using document analysis and thematic analysis methods. Data were analyzed following the thematic analysis framework proposed by Attride-Stirling, Clarke, and Braun. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 experts in the fields of publishing and digital libraries, including four digital library specialists (DL1–DL4) and six publishing experts (PUB1–PUB6). Participants were selected through purposive and snowball sampling based on their expertise in copyright issues, familiarity with the publishing industry, and experience in digital library management. In addition to the interviews, relevant national and international studies were reviewed to extract barriers and potential solutions related to licensing for digitization. The reliability of the coding process was assessed using the Holsti method, yielding a reliability coefficient of 83.6%, which indicates an acceptable level of trustworthiness.

Findings: The qualitative thematic analysis resulted in the identification of 272 basic themes, 57 organizing themes, and two overarching themes encompassing technical, executive, and financial barriers. These findings reveal a range of significant challenges and corresponding practical strategies. Due to space limitations, the executive and financial barriers are presented in Table 1, while the main technical findings and recommendations are discussed in the text.

The results indicate that Iranian digital libraries face substantial technical challenges, including inadequate technological infrastructure, outdated equipment, rapid technological changes, the absence of comprehensive digital preservation plans, and weak information security systems. These issues threaten the long-term accessibility and sustainability of digitized resources. In addition, the lack of standardized metadata complicates copyright management and rights documentation. Proposed technical solutions include providing access only to limited portions of works to comply with copyright regulations, adopting metadata standards such as METS, implementing controlled digital lending based on legal licenses, using digital rights management (DRM) systems to prevent unauthorized copying, conducting regular software updates accompanied by systematic backups, employing proxy servers and web services to improve content transfer, and strengthening cybersecurity measures to enhance publisher trust.

Furthermore, the study shows that Iranian digital libraries encounter executive and financial barriers, such as the absence of clear national policies, insufficient



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strategic planning, and limited financial resources allocated to digitization projects. High licensing costs and inadequate staff expertise further exacerbate these challenges. To address these issues, the study recommends that the National Library of Iran assume a coordinating role in the licensing process, promote trust-building mechanisms with publishers through transparent and continuous compensation, establish intermediary organizations between libraries and publishers, provide supportive incentives such as free digitization services, and develop clear contractual and policy frameworks to facilitate collaboration (Table 1 and Figure 1).

Table 1. Executive and Financial Barriers: Results of Comprehensive Thematic Analysis

Organizing Themes	Basic Themes	Sources	Interviews
Publishing Economics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publishers' reluctance to offer their resources to the public due to loss of exclusive rights • Publishers' unwillingness to offer bestselling books in digital libraries • Lack of publishers' awareness of business scope in electronic space 	(Musa and Musa, 2012)	PUB4, DL1
Budget and Financial Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential costs of staff, services and equipment over time • Impact of adequate budget allocation on digitization quality • Lack of sufficient budget especially in developing countries • Inadequate budget • Cost-intensive digitization • High cost of software and lack of sufficient scanners • Cost-free digitization issues for publishers • Lack of precise budget allocation for implementing optimal digitization strategy • Cost-intensive digitization 	(Gertz, 2013); (Mamman Mshelia& Mshelia, 2021); (Eze Asogwa, 2011); (Adera Amollo, 2011)	PUB6, DL3, DL4
Specialized Human Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inadequate knowledge of specialists in digitization • Lack of human capital and technical specialists in digitization • Lack of sufficient competency and skills for digitization • Lack of application of technical skills among library specialists • Use of non-specialists and lack of precise identification of technical issues • Shortage of human resources 	(Mamman Mshelia& Mshelia, 2021); (Eze Asogwa, 2011; Pandey and Misra 2014); (Ahmad and Rafiq, 2023)	DL3, DL4
Policy and Strategy Determination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of National Library policy for paying material rights • Absence of principles and policies for book provision in digital libraries • Inability to make decisions for establishing a new digital transformation program 	_____	PUB5, PUB6, DL3
Traditional Approaches in Publishing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-professional nature of the country's publishing • Non-specialized publishers 	_____	PUB5, PUB6
Digital Publishing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-compliance with copyright of electronic resources in storage, reproduction, modification, and electronic transmission of texts and images • Lack of transparency in scope and provisions of intellectual property rights for using digitized books in digital libraries • Absence of codified and uniform laws on how to sell digital publishing 	_____	DL1, DL2, DL3
Publishers' Concerns and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publishers' distrust of servers and systems 	_____	PUB6, DL4

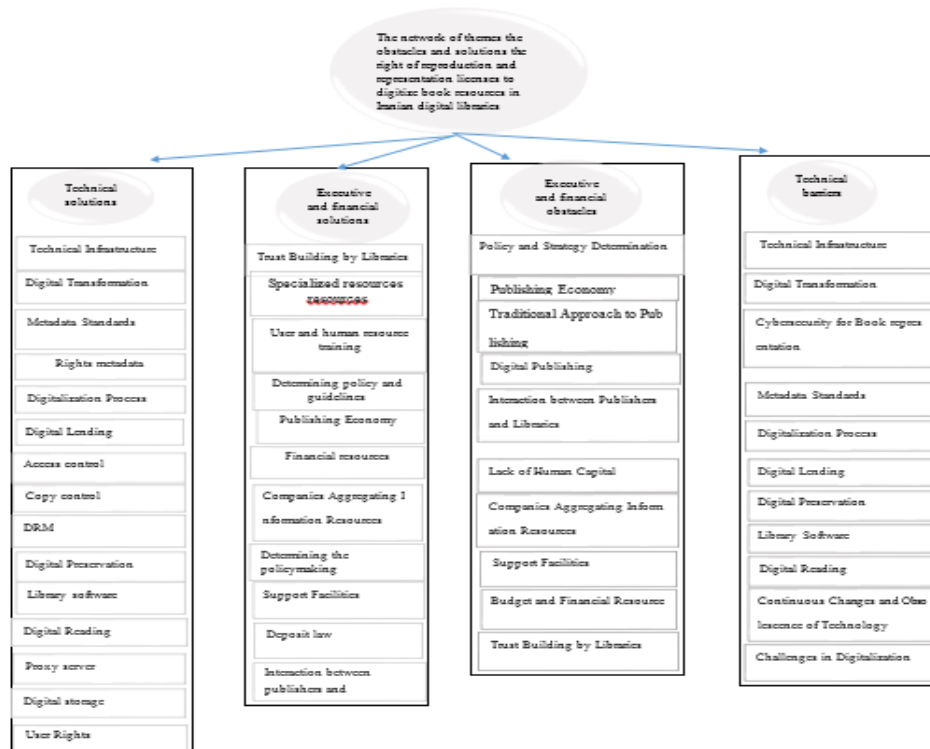


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Organizing Themes	Basic Themes	Sources	Interviews
Trust-Building by Libraries	• Publishers' distrust of libraries for offering books in digital libraries		
Information Resource Aggregating Companies	• Lack of intermediary between library and publisher in book provision • Absence of digitization service companies in Iran	_____	PUB1, PUB6
Publisher-Library Interaction	• Limited communications between library managers and librarians with publishers	_____	DL1

Figure 1: Thematic Network of Executive and Financial Barriers



Conclusion: By conducting this research and proposing practical solutions, it becomes possible to build trust among publishers, enrich and safeguard digital resources, and improve user access. The findings indicate that effective copyright licensing for digital books requires a coordinated approach encompassing technical infrastructure, legal frameworks, financial sustainability, and institutional capacity. In this regard, the National Library of Iran can play a pivotal role in facilitating communication between publishers and libraries and in ensuring compliance with copyright regulations. Achieving these objectives necessitates close collaboration among governmental bodies, libraries, publishers, and creators in order to establish a sustainable system that balances copyright protection with broader educational and research access.

Value: Obtaining permission from publishers for the digitization of books represents a major challenge for libraries and has not previously been examined in the Iranian context. This research analyzes the obstacles associated with copyright licensing and proposes practical solutions to address publishers' concerns and enhance digital content management. By offering the first comprehensive analysis of



these barriers in Iranian digital libraries, the study fills a significant research gap and provides actionable recommendations for policymakers, library managers, and stakeholders in the publishing industry.

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