

Information Diffusion during COVID-19 and Lockdown: The Role of Library Professionals.

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***Abstract** - A library is a social democratic institution that has been collecting, organizing, managing and maintaining knowledge for a long time. Based on the fact that all that information is not available to any library, the library industry today is rapidly advancing to new technology. In the past, writing media such as parchment, velam, papyrus and writing media such as Palmyra leaf and Ola leaf books were available in Sri Lanka. Man has passed through the Stone Age, the pastoral age, the agricultural age and many other eras and has now entered the industrial age. The focus of the industrial age is on information. All the arts in the world are determined based on information and the library has moved towards the concept of virtual library when it comes to the speed with which information is created in the world. The unpredictable impact of the Covid- 19 pandemic on all countries cannot be underestimated. That effect had a severe effect on the library system. Therefore libraries and librarians should organize their services during its pandemic and lockdown. It focuses on how its services are run, the safety measures to be followed in maintaining those services, the responsibilities and functions of library professionals in the event of a pandemic, as well as the technologies that libraries can use in providing services to their users.*

***Keywords:** Covid-19, library services, pandemic, library profession*

Introduction:

Libraries around the world have been facing lockdown challenges in providing access to its collections and services. All types of libraries have promoted their digital services during the corona virus pandemic situation. However, the physical resources are often put on demand by the users most preferably in the scientific organizations where research on drugs and pharmaceutical is being carried out for medical diagnosis and drug discovery. Libraries having significant number of e-resources may have enough opportunities to serve their users even in the lockdown period throughout the world. Several libraries have brought out their digital services organizing virtual exhibitions, highlighting content on the websites and Lets Read Together online campaign. There have also been major efforts to boost access to the library resources online as well as offline, for example by increasing the number of e- Books/ e-Journals/CD-DVD, etc. in order to lower the risk of virus spread.

Objectives

1. There are following objectives of the study:
2. To find out innovative ways to reach out library users

3. To identify the Preventive Measures and Guidelines for Libraries during COVID-19 Pandemic
4. To identify the role of library professionals in pandemic situation
5. To examine opportunities of Learning with the Virtual Platform/ Webinar in the Libraries

Literature Review

Librarians have to reach user populations and their need for up-to date relevant information. When this is done, there can be limitless access to the library and information resources by millions of users and information seekers and their optimal use. Echezona (2007) writes that by delivering high quality services, libraries and information centers have contributed immensely to ensure greater access to information resources. Shonhe and Jain (2017) observed that publishers presently provide a wide range of e-resources that are accessible through mobile technology. Going with the study by Okiy (2010), is an example of one study that revealed that students and lecturers in learning institutions increasingly demand and prefer access to electronic sources and networked information from their respective libraries. In the quest to meet up with the needs of library users, Shonhe (2017) suggests that libraries can use various information dissemination techniques such as personalized collections, SMS/ text notifications, QR codes, online reference services, social networks, websites, mailing lists and OPACs. Below are just a sample of existing digital strategies but many new opportunities continue to be developed. Personal space/ My Library is a self-service platform where library users manage their personalized accounts with custom-made collections. Here users can set up and manage their profile, preferences for searching library collections, receive alerts on reserved items, check their records, track Inter Library Loan (ILL) requests and renew borrowed items and Document Delivery Requests (DDR) (Saxena and Yadav, 2013; Verma and Verma, 2014). In this regards, librarians are able to send customized scanned documents, images, audio books and e-books to library users' personalized accounts. Text notifications via the use of mobile devices can disseminate information and multimedia content such as videos, images and audio files. Librarians can use this service to alert patrons regarding the latest information on happenings around COVID-19 on how to stay safe or other related information. In a study conducted by Shonhe and Jain (2017), most respondents prefer to access library collections or resources through mobile devices. Social media are more appropriate for use on marketing information and delivering personalized information resources to groups of people or individuals. Quick response (QR) codes, two dimensional barcodes that direct users to desired websites, can be used by libraries on a certain topic or subject area. Verma and Verma (2014) noted that QR codes are akin to mobile tagging. Online reference services can use for research outreach. According to Barnhart and Pierce (2011), online platforms allow librarians to create a bond with patrons and improve their efficiency through provision of a 24/7 reference and information service. Library websites can be used effectively to share information, links, share updates and announce news.

Mailing lists to targeted fusers can be used by libraries to receive personalized information at the same time.

Librarians and information dissemination redefined

Today, librarians are expected to manage digital libraries, organize digital knowledge and information and disseminate digital information owing to the fact that we are all have become a global village as a result of the internet. Pal (2013) notes that today's librarians must also acquire new psychological, social and professional capabilities. Additionally, Sreenivasulu (2000) notes that the ultimate goal of a digital librarian is to facilitate access to information just in time to the critical wants of end users and additionally to facilitate electronic publishing. Many libraries are renovating their library's physical spaces and environments around the concept of "learning commons" (Litzenberger, 2016). In this era of information explosion where thousands of bits of information are chunked out on daily basis, librarians are expected to collect, organize, store and disseminate

the information for consumption of the users. In the current global pandemic, there are new ways to deliver information both real and fake; it is left for librarians to sort out the real information for their users to avoid misinformation. It is expected that librarians work independently to deliver service-oriented, researcher-centered applications, instructional programmes, projects and services. Tait, E., Martzoukou, K. and Reid, P (2016) note that the tools and resources used to supply required information and transform it into knowledge have changed, but the librarian's role has remained unchanged. Especially now, it seems necessary to reflect and redefine the characteristics of a modern librarian that would best serve all users. Librarians may be indispensable in the era of the information diffusion because they play a distinctive and dynamic role in providing easy access to authoritative information at the right time and disseminating to the user in appropriate formats based on local user needs. Librarians must also possess high level of security to prevent hackers from users' personal details and the type of information they accessed. Okike and Adetoro (2019) confirmed in their study that it is pertinent that librarians re-tool and up-skill themselves in information and communication technology to ensure secure information systems.

Innovative ways to reach out library users

1. Virtual Reference service like chat/ e-mail
2. Self check-in and checkout of books
3. Scanning of chapters from books, journals articles for remote users
4. LibGuide- List of resources available in the library
5. Update library website dynamic content and useful tutorials

Preventive Measures and Guidelines for Libraries during COVID-19 Pandemic

Libraries are facing challenges and constraints in the lockdown. Governments regularly are taking different approaches, sometimes ordering the full closure of all institutions, in these situations library professionals may take following precautionary measures to curb the spread of COVID-19 through the libraries:

1. Stay at home if you feel sickness
2. Use appropriate sanitizer frequently
3. Roster of staff duty
4. Keep books at separate place at least for 48 hours when check in/check out
5. Maintain social distance
6. Follow good health and hygiene habits
7. Limiting concentration of users in reading room allowing just one table per user
8. Use mask and cover while sneezing or coughing
9. Avoid sneezing or coughing while handling books
10. Keeping surfaces clean, including toys and library computers surface like door knobs, switches and railing etc.
11. Use online platforms or social media to share Knowledge/ Information.
12. Provide remote access of library resources to the users
13. Promote paperless work culture in the libraries
14. Frequently used items such as magazines and newspapers may only be accessible to people with gloves and masks, etc.

Role of library professionals in pandemic situation

- In Sri Lanka, during the lockdown period, all people were unable to move from one place to another. The physical interface of libraries already shut down to follow the lockdown conditions but many libraries around the world offer its digital collection for the whole community for easy access. Library users who have library cards or not, can easily access and take advantage of available e-resources like e-books, e-journals, and online programmes offered

by different universities

- The Library Professionals can provide numerous online digital platforms where users can easily access their information. These online digital platform links can be shared on organization websites as well as through social media platforms. Delhi Public Library provides the various links of the digital platform on its website.
- Library Professionals can create a new app with freely available e-contents to access different resources on a single platform.
- Assist those people who are not familiar with digital tools.
- Implemented new e-library services

Utilization of Social Media Platforms as a Digital Library

Library Professionals can work as a Digital Library Professionals through social media platforms. Social media is a very vast platform to share information among users.

Such Social Media platforms are widely popular;

- WhatsApp (<https://www.whatsapp.com/>)
- Instagram (<https://www.instagram.com/>)
- Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/>)
- LinkedIn (<https://www.linkedin.com/feed/>)
- Telegram (<https://telegram.org/>) and many more

Opportunities of Learning with the Virtual Platform/ Webinar in the Libraries

This is time for library professionals to avail opportunities and improve their skills/ ability for outreach in virtual environment. They can organize virtual seminar or webinar, when a seminar is conducted online with the help of software it is called as the webinar. Now a day, there has been a trend of webinar and there are some specialized applications / software to conduct virtual meeting, webinar, video conferencing, live chat, etc. Web-based (virtual) seminar platform can be used to conduct online meetings, lectures and conferences. Webinar software provides online platform, where mutual interaction between the speakers and attendees takes place to carry out audio-visual communication. Webinar software provides real-time interactive features like multiple-hosts/ clients, polls/ voting, live chat, questions and answers, screen sharing, etc. This technology is also useful in online teaching, lectures, training and learning purposes. Downloading/ connecting links are given for few applications/ software, most of them offer free trial/ module and require simple process to run as indicated in the connecting links. Libraries can use these facilities for knowledge sharing purpose among the staff/ researchers/ users and following are widely used webinar hosting software worldwide:

Number of Application/ Software Connecting Links

- | | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| 1 Google Meet | https://meet.google.com/ |
| 2 Go To Meeting | https://www.gotomeeting.com/en-in |
| 3 Business Hangouts | https://business-hangouts.com/ |
| 4 Join Me | https://www.join.me/ |
| 5 Microsoft team chat-software | https://www.microsoft.com/enin/microsoft-365/microsoft-teams/group-chat-software |
| 6 My Own Conference | https://myownconference.com/ |
| 7 Skype for Business | https://www.skype.com/en/get-skype/ |
| 8 CISCO Webex | https://www.webex.com/content/webex/c/e |
| 9 Zoho Meeting | https://www.zoho.com/meeting |
| 10 Zoom | https://zoom.us/signin |

Tools for remote access to continue teaching and learning process

- Google Classroom (<https://classroom.google.com/>) Teaching and Learning Platform: An online teaching and learning platform Teacher can make online classrooms, upload teaching material, and conduct online quizzes.
- Google Hangouts Meet (https://meet.google.com/_meet) Video Conferencing: Stay connected with teachers and students for teaching and learning and official academic work.
- Zoom Classroom (<https://www.zoom.us/>) For Virtual classrooms and Video Conferencing: It is a platform for organizing meetings, interactive classrooms for teaching virtual and hybrid techniques and micro learning.
- WebEx Online VC tool (<https://www.webex.co.in/>) Video Conferencing, collaborations, virtual classrooms: It is the leading and widely using platform for webinars, official meetings, video conferencing, and webinars. Recently many webinars are organized by INFLIBNET in this platform with support of web of science teams and others.
- Go To Meeting (<https://www.gotomeeting.com/en-in/meeting/join-meeting>) Meeting tools and web-hosted service: It is an online meeting platform for various institutions. There are various features available in this tool like desktop sharing, and video conferencing that enables the users like customers, clients or colleagues through digital media.
- Go to Webinar (<https://www.gotomeeting.com/en-in/webinar/join-webinar>): It is online interactive software.
- Impart us (<https://impartus.com/>): Impart us Virtual Classroom for Live Online Classes - Free for Indian Schools and Colleges. Impart us ensures that students continue to have live and interactive access to teachers in the ongoing Corona virus Crisis.
- Easy class (<https://www.easyclass.com/>) Learning Management System: It provides a platform for educators to create online classes where they can store the study/ course materials online, assessment tests, class assignments, various quizzes and exams related documents. A feedback system and due dates facility is also available.
- Blackboard (<https://www.blackboard.com/>) Learning Management System: It provides a platform for educators to create online classes and share class announcements, learning materials, and make learning accessible anywhere.
- Padlet (<https://padlet.com/>):it is a platform to develop the boards, documents and web pages. It is used to upload videos, record your interview, and snap your photos and text posts.
- Edmodo (<https://www.edmodo.com/>) Learning Management System: Share class announcements, learning materials, and make learning accessible anywhere.
- Google Form (<https://www.google.com/forms/about/>) for online Quiz/ Test: Use google form for assessment purposes and take online quizzes. It also has features like randomization, result declaration, grading, and item analysis.
- Microsoft Teams (<https://teams.microsoft.com/start>): It is developed by Microsoft for teamwork. To update all your teams with instant chats, meetings, files, and apps together on a single platform.
- Moodle (<https://moodle.org/>): It is an Open Source Software which is designed for learning and to help educators create effective online courses for learners.
- Hyper say (<https://hypersay.com/live-presentations/>) a platform for live interactive presentations:
- Nearpod (<https://nearpod.com/>) Students Engagement Platform: Interactive Lessons that can be remotely led by the teacher.
- Testmoz (<https://testmoz.com/>) for online Quiz: It is a widely used web tool that allows you

to create online tests and quizzes.

- Mentimeter (<https://www.mentimeter.com/>) Interactive Learning Platform: It is a platform for meeting, web conferences, presentations which are easily connected through with smart phones and other electronic devices.
- Brain pop (<https://www.brainpop.com/>) (Educational tool): Brain pop makes rigorous learning experiences, makes interactive presentations, videos to engage all students in the teaching and learning process.
- Flip grid (<https://info.flipgrid.com/>) Video creation: Flip grid empowers every voice from grade 1 to Ph.D. classrooms across 190 countries.

Challenges for library professionals during covid 19

All over the world, Library Professionals are facing different challenges which services to offer and how to handle these situations of lockdown, extending from minimal restrictions to full closure.

- Many reputed libraries like the National Library of India, Delhi Public Library, and other reputed libraries all over the world are affected due to lockdown conditions and it is affecting the whole community of researchers, students, scholars, readers, etc. Shutting down libraries has a tremendous impact on the communities that we serve.
- University and college libraries, school libraries are also closed and many competitive exams, as well as academic exams, are still pending, therefore in this crucial time Library Professionals can serve those students of our country, they need information through the digital platform.
- It is human nature to feel from normal to sad, stressed, confused, and scared/ angry during a crisis. For Library Professionals the biggest challenge to cope up with these conditions during this lockdown and engage the whole community in a healthy environment.
- For opening the libraries for users under the government guidelines and human interest. Library services restriction or closing a library for the following social distancing principles is a difficult task.

How to tackle the above mentioned challenges by the library professions society during COVID 19

- By following the government guidelines Library Professionals can break the chain of corona virus as well as provide the different services remotely
- Collect the factual data and convert it into useful information that will help the whole community of different fields accurately
- Engage the whole community through social media and organize the Reading books challenge, Poster writing competitions, skill development programme, etc. that have facilitated people to manage normal life as previously and develop skills that will help to reduce their stress during the challenging time of this pandemic
- We are aware that central and state governments themselves are making many decisions and applying different approaches to serve better. Library Professionals can publish all the information through Social Media platforms
- Library Professionals can play with the following ICT tools and spread the information to the community. Library Professionals can provide Cloud-based library services, Authentication technologies: Remote Access, Electronic Resource Management System ERMs: CORAL, Discovery Services, Library Service Platform/ LibGuides / IRs, Advocating of OA (What is OA?) resources, Marketing of library services through Blogs and other Social Networking tools
- Library Professionals can provide Open sources, Open Course wares/ OERs (stand for

OER), Open learning resources, Webinar, Virtual Classrooms, ORCID, Citation generation: Mendeley, Zotero

- To provide information resources to users - “Different types of services, collections can be linked together and provide access on electronic platforms”
- Provide the libraries facilities for the users under the proper government guidelines and human interest
- Library Professionals can play an important role to serve the entire community therefore to define the various roles of Library Professionals in this pandemic situation of COVID 19 is necessary

To develop new skill sets and train the subordinate staff members

- It is the role of the Library Professionals to organize the training sessions for subordinate staff and trained them
- The digital environment provides an opportunity to learn various ICT skills
- Special training programmes for Para-professional staff, when required
- Library Professionals are developing various skill sets like organizing webinars, developing courseware, database management, staff training programmes, etc.

Other Roles of Library Professionals

- Other services, like to assist the users looking for new jobs, those who lost or fired by the company during the lockdown
- Many libraries are already providing assistance for unemployed people
- Many libraries are distributing the food to the needy

Library Professionals is required various Skills in this pandemic situation which are given below;

- Technical skills
- Communication skills
- Marketing skills
- Managerial skills
- Information Communication Technology (ICT) skills
- Library and information handling skills
- Understanding of cultural diversity
- Lifelong learning skills
- Evaluation and assessment skills
- Service orientation
- Customer service
- Presentation skills
- Knowledge mapping skills
- Soft Skills and more

Conclusion

Technological advancements have transformed the library services in digital era. Libraries on the web have become more competent and assured in terms of resource management and digitalization. Information societies are seeking information in digital format, therefore, library services depends upon skilled professionals. Library plays vital role in data acquisition, storage, analysis, interpretation and dissemination of information among the library users. This article has brought out opportunity to learn recent technological advancements in order to maximize

the usage of library resources and services in the prevailing worldwide lockdown and pandemic situations happening in the country. This article will provide an overview on preventive measures and modern tendencies in libraries to play proactive role in the present and post pandemic circumstances.

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