



QUALITY LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICES DURING COVID PANDEMIC: A REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

The corona virus pandemic has been an unparalleled event- a deep humanitarian crisis- that has disrupted our lives, our livelihoods, and our economies in an extraordinary manner. The catastrophe has not only threatened human lives, it has also reduced the capability of the industries and businesses to cope with the devastating impact. This also includes the knowledge industry, which has been a direct casualty of the pandemic. In the case of GLAM (Galleries, Libraries, Archives, Museum), they are facing hard choices as they start from minimal restrictions to full closure. The libraries cannot afford to close their regular duties of providing right information to the users. However amidst the pandemic, the libraries can continue to provide relevant information and knowledge sources to the information seekers including teachers, students, and researchers through various resources on virtual platforms. Apart from these formal roles, libraries also have social roles to play- as a provider of information literacy skills-which includes sensitizing and disseminating information on precautions of the SARS COVID-19; sharing the government guidelines in the communities; and boosting the morale of people. In this article, focus has been made on the role of the libraries in providing the quality information services to the users during the pandemic situation and what is its impact on the libraries and its users.

KEYWORDS: Covid-19, Quality Information Service, Library.

INTRODUCTION

In the year 2020, the world underwent a tectonic shift in terms of global crisis. Countries went for a complete lockdown to reduce further spread of the corona virus. Inevitably, India too had to declare a nationwide lockdown. Covid-19 has impacted every aspect of socio-political and economic life of the people around the globe. Prior to the COVID-19 crisis, there were a few Universities, Colleges and Schools using online resources that presented an opportunity and inspired the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and students to embrace digital resources and online platform as a medium for transaction of knowledge. However, with the pandemic there came major upheavals and changes in the education sector. The academic landscape underwent a complete change. Libraries in the academic institutions play an important role in imparting knowledge to the students, to assist them with relevant resources and help to improve their academic front. Due to the closing of all educational activities in the institutions, they could not visit libraries or access the resources. As a result, students were facing difficulties while searching and retrieving information they required during the pandemic. The situation had now changed: it quickly went from physical to online delivery of information services.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Dadhe and Dubey (2020) in "Library Services Provided during COVID-19 Pandemic: Content Analysis of Websites of Premier Technological Institutions of India", described how COVID-19 has challenged the education system. The study reveals about the various LIS services that

has provided during this pandemic situation. **Kaur Deol and Singh Brar (2021)** highlighted the role of libraries and the library staff played during the hectic period of COVID-19 in the article, "The Pandemic COVID-19 and Role of Academic Libraries". **Hasan (2020)** in the study "SOPs/Protocols for the Libraries in the New Normal", has described about the SOPs / Protocols which a library must follow for the safety of users which indicated despite all limitations, the libraries and the librarians must provide library services to the users in this pandemic situation. In "Library Services during COVID-19: An Attempt to Bridging the Learning Gaps", **Rai (2021)**, has discussed the barriers they have faced during the pandemic situation provided and what services has been provided by them during this situation.

DISCUSSION

Impact of Covid-19 on the Libraries: As physical footfall to libraries is strictly not agreed, librarians are active in providing online information services to the public. As everything was sudden at the time of pandemic, libraries had to come up with several challenges. The books that had been earlier issued by the users could not be returned due to a sudden lockdown. There were books, periodicals and other items which were yet to be placed and catalogued appropriately. Due to an indefinite shut down, the regular maintenance and cleanliness of the library became impossible, which could damage the books, periodicals and other reading materials. Besides the above mentioned, there is a growing concern of the challenges in fulfilling the needs of information seekers during the pandemic situation. Till date, it has been a



huge challenge for the librarians and other library staff to maintain the relevance of libraries, especially in times of crisis.

Role of the Library providing quality information services during pandemic: In the current scenario, the usage of the library services has drastically changed. Earlier, users would come to the library to seek day-to-day information and since it is an open platform, every user can receive knowledge as per their convenience. However, in the pandemic situation, libraries have transitioned from offline to online services. Libraries are playing a critical role in providing the information to users. Maximum of the resources are provided by the libraries through online, in text, audio or video formats. According to some of the librarians, the portable nature of smart phones will eventually allow anyone to access the library from anywhere, anytime. With lockdown posing as a serious impediment to knowledge access, surveys were conducted to investigate and understand the challenges better. Respondents were asked to give information on a series of statements applicable in the lockdown period.

Some of the significant services and facilities provided by the libraries under study are discussed below:-

Remote access to e-resources: The main objective of any academic library is to understand how they can enhance and strengthen the teaching, learning and research process by installing seamless document/information delivery system. Across the country, libraries of higher education have been working to provide services and access to collections to the users who have been displaced due to COVID-19. While all the libraries under study have provision of remote access to subscribe e-resources, a lot of them have taken efforts in leveraging and expanding existing online services. Notably IITGKP, IITK, IITBBS, IITGN, IITJ, IITI, IITM and IITBHU have displayed step by step user guides on remote login to get access to the licensed resources.

Free and Expanded Access: In this unexpected outbreak and difficult situation, some of the publishers are providing expanded access to e-resources which includes e-books, e-journals, e-databases etc. for a limited period. Libraries have highlighted the links of these free and expanded resources on their portal to facilitate visibility of these options available for users. This has helped the users in availing virtual services and thereby, visiting library portals frequently. Almost all the libraries have facilitated access points to provide digital versions of the newspaper and magazines that can be read using any convenient handy digital devices.

Open Access Resources: There are also free scholarly resources available that have helped the users in retrieving information's. Example: National Digital Library of India (NDLI), Shodhganga, a repository of Electronic Thesis and Dissertation, Directory of Open Access Journal (DOAJ), and Free Online Books, Book Boon, Directory of Open Access Books (DOAB) to name a few.

Resources related to COVID-19: Access to licensed electronic resources is subject to the terms and conditions under which they are procured. As the scientific community across the globe is racing against time to develop a definite treatment for the disease, access to as much as and as quickly as possible published literature to accelerate the on-going research in need of the hour. Notably a lot of commercial publishers and vendors have taken a significant initiative and have provided open access to materials related to COVID-19. Others have facilitated access by making it easier to log in and access materials from outside of official networks.

SOPs/Guidelines for the Libraries and users in the present scenario: The pandemic has changed the way we function in public and social spaces. The scenario is unprecedented, risky, and requires social distancing, use of masks and adherence to protocols. In the beginning of 2020, COVID-19 led to the closure of library buildings. Libraries and Librarians are now offering reduced or alternative services until full services resume, though generally the focus is on online services and digital contents.

CONCLUSION

COVID-19 has affected millions of people across the globe. The educational institutions are closed and there is no formal operation of teaching, learning and research going on. Under the circumstances along with the threat of physical disease, mental trauma and social disturbances, the academic libraries have been instrumental in providing, disseminating and exchanging knowledge sustainably. The libraries can provide relevant materials to teachers to prepare via online sources and recommend to them the open access as well-paid sources so that they can prepare their notes and can communicate to the students. Also, libraries have played a critical social role of bringing awareness of preventive COVID-19 measures, guidelines and protocols of the government, among our communities. Libraries have seamlessly delivered even during a challenging time and have evolved as a continuous learning factory. In conclusion, libraries have acted as enablers and have emerged as knowledge hubs, capable of rising to the occasion and playing an essential role in supporting the country despite the odds.

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