

Academic Library Services and Safety Measures in Pandemic Era: New Normal

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of writing this article is to create the awareness among the professionals who preferred to serve their users during the period of covid-19 pandemic and to discuss the issues and challenges they have faced while confronting the tough situation and new techniques they used to beat the pandemic situation. Libraries are storehouses of information that support decision making in society. The COVID-19 pandemic shook the foundations of the operations of libraries. This paper aims to share the activities of library services in the new-normal era. Looking through the lens of the pandemic, the attention of librarians is drawn to the need for hygiene, cleaning and disinfecting during the new-normal era. It is seen in the past, a lot of services were being provided by them- either in manual mode or online in the digital era but Covid- 19 disease has completely changed the scenario. It is not sure how long it will take time to become normal and as per WHO and other sources, we have to live with it for a long time. So, it is expected that academic libraries will also have to reform their services and environment to provide services in the post Covid-19 environment. This paper suggests some measures that can be fruitful to cope with the effect of Covid-19 and to sustain the libraries in post Covid-19 era.

KEYWORDS: COVID-19, Academic libraries, Library Services, Pandemic, Social Distancing and The New Normal.

1. INTRODUCTION

The incidence of COVID-19 pandemic impacted greatly on library services, their mode of operations and job ethics. The pandemic pushes for transformation of traditional library services into digital information services and as such, library work pattern that adhere to the COVID19 laid down protocols. Hence, the availability of equipment and large internet networks, and the ability to use information technology were much needed to provide the innovative library services to face the new-normal era in libraries. Owing to this pandemic, most people in libraries have come up with the idea that librarians must create a gorgeous library presenting splendid services to online users. This service provides not only its e-resources but also all its collections, circulation activities, information and research supporting system. To build this marvellous library is not easy. Nevertheless, in this new normal era, libraries must prioritize their new form to provide the most appropriate practice to face the new-normal era. Unfortunately, several librarians were unfamiliar with conducting online activities in the library.

The growth and the shifting nature of knowledge as well as the equally changing demands of library patrons call for a corresponding response in some library practices and service delivery. Change in libraries is thus inevitable owing to the transforming nature of the environment in which they exist. Library information and communication technologies services such as live chats with librarians, remote access to library resources through the library Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC), the use of social media in service provision, library outreach programs, among other services, have been made library access possible and popular. It is worth mentioning that libraries and the world at large may not return to their previous modus operandi in terms of service provision after the pandemic. The new normal which is the use of the online services should be embraced for the survival of libraries.

Now it's high time to think vigorously to prepare the checklist for reopening the library keeping in mind all the standard operating procedures. Therefore Libraries are now inculcate policies for social distancing in the library, by reducing chairs in the reading space or probably reducing intake of users at a time to a barest minimum.

2. OBJECTIVES

The three main objectives during the pandemic are as follows:

- To understand the current library activities regarding hygiene, cleaning and disinfecting during the new-normal era, especially in reopening libraries;
- To determine the most appropriate practices of library services through social media during the new normal era; and
- To prepare the checklist for reopening libraries by librarians and users in library services during the new-normal era.

3.0 BACK GROUND STUDIES

Data for this study were collected using literature and documentary reviews from WebPages, blogs, social media, newsletters and specific journals discussing libraries in the new-normal era.

3.1 COVID-19: KEEPING HYGIENE, CLEANING AND DISINFECTING SURFACES IN LIBRARY SETTINGS

Managers should provide staff with training on hygiene practices and any procedural changes that have been implemented to avoid the spread of the virus. Sick staff members should not report to work. Those with symptoms such as sore throat, runny or blocked nose, coughing or sneezing should be advised not to attend activities or religious services (Coronavirus, 2020).

The most common consideration of staff having to reopen libraries during the COVID-19 pandemic was to increase cleaning efforts, both in terms of frequency and intensity. Some library systems worked with janitorial staff to perform additional cleaning measures, while smaller libraries scheduled extra cleaning times. All libraries increased the number of items they disinfected (Bowie, 2020).

In reducing the direct circulation between staff and visitors, many libraries provided circulation service in the drive-thru. The return of books was carried out through the drop box. Nevertheless, if the library does not have any drop box, the librarians should quarantine the returned books for four days to prevent the virus transmission from the books (Lara, 2020).

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The measures included arrangements for returned books to be stored separately for 72 h, a new cleaning regime and physical measures such as screens and signs (Rogers, 2020). It aims to safeguard the librarians and follow the health protocols during the new-normal era.

In Italy, where the libraries continued to offer online services while being closed by giving users access to digital libraries and references (Tammaro, 2020). Kuwait University also used the e-resources for writing research papers, and databases and e-journals were their most preferred resources (Hendal, 2020). The e-resources consisted of prestigious publishers, e-journals, e-books and other quality papers. Thus, users did not have to physically come to the library.

Provision is made for separate entrance and exit in the library. Safe handling of library materials and facilities are ensured through sanitation of library surfaces, objects, users and library staff. Used library materials are quarantine and sanitized before recirculation (Australian Library and Information Association, 2020).

All libraries enforce health protocols such as physical restrictions, providing hand washing facilities and making written rules regarding health protocols through posters posted in libraries or online (Fakhry, 2020).

Librarians began to change the library regulations considering health protocols. The new regulations determine the safety of both librarians and users. The results focus on users' needs, digital resources and learning styles. Hence, librarians must fight for a new normal with library collections and buildings, but mostly, with their expertise. Librarians, by title, education or spirit, must face the new normal that is pushing the society ahead. It must minister to those seeking information. It must support better decision-making in the wake of this pandemic and in preparation for the next crisis (Lankes, 2020).

In the new-normal era, differences in library opening hours existed. Several libraries applied for full day of open hours, and several others implemented the shift system, as visitors were still limited. Employees had to work in shifts, making communication with users. Therefore office spaces will need to be rethought as open-concept office spaces may give way to the enclosure (Cox, 2020). Moreover, social distancing regulations caused people to rarely leave the house.

3.2 COVID-19: LIBRARY SERVICES TO USERS THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

To connect with users, libraries used social media, which was widely used during this pandemic. Billions of people turned to connected devices to help them cope with life and work under lockdown because social media were more appropriate for marketing information and delivering personalized information resources to groups of people or individuals (Okike, 2020). There was a demand for librarians to increase their social media accounts. Several ideas were taken from several libraries that were successful in organizing social media. For instance, the National Library of Indonesia provided online service consultation through social media (Oktaviani, 2020). This service covered reference consultation, information literacy, application reference manager, copyright and thesis consultation with librarians.

The pandemic made more evidence of challenges that have not been resolved in libraries. The major effect on library services is in the area of information service access and delivery beyond the four wall of the library. Also more evident is the digital divide and social exclusion of less urban and rural area due to absent of adequate information infrastructure to aid digital information services. COVID-19 pandemic has made it necessary for most library services to migrate to an online environment where physical contact between librarians and users would not be necessary (Onifade, 2020).

To support the contactless-oriented changes, libraries, began to shift their physical activities to the online platform. Social networking such as What's App, Face book, Instagram, Webinar, Zoom, Google meeting, Microsoft team and many more to meeting the core needs of library users during the lockdown, to transfer information and to communicate with societies. The pandemic pushes for transformation of libraries and a new vision of services that focus on building new relationship with users (Tammara, 2020).

3.3. COVID-19: HOW COULD SHAPE THE FUTURE OF LIBRARIES

All libraries are now reopening, in a phased approach. Much effort has been focused on ensuring health and safety for both communities and staff (Arena, 2020; Ponzani & Maiello,2020). The reopening will be limited to the loan service, but all other services are limited by the need for social distance. It is the right time to think about an innovation of services that takes advantage of the experience just lived (Agnoli, 2020; Baldacchini, 2020; Baldi, 2020; De Vecchis, 2020; Solimine, 2020). Libraries from this experience have learned that they must not limit themselves to lending and reading, but that they must open up to communities (Baldi, 2020). Communities have become accustomed to online services; will they now want to return to traditional services? The COVID experience could somehow change the interaction between librarians and library users? However, there are no surveys in Italy on the impact that libraries have had on users in these three months, nor have there been surveys on the needs of users during the pandemic. Baldacchini (2020) has commented that the way in which the users of libraries (and more generally the society) reacted to the prolongation of periods of forced home stay is an important experience for libraries. It is therefore essential that libraries manage to adequately monitor and document what is happening in their relationships with users. There is a need for a digital strategy, not limited to e-books. A digital strategy should aim at the transformation of libraries, with an innovative vision of service.

3.4 COVID-19: CHECKLIST FOR REOPENING LIBRARIES

This is the opportunity for libraries to prioritise their existing services and refocus investment on the services which are most highly valued by users. Each library will have its own plans for reopening, depending on the sector and the specific needs of the library's community, but the following checklist provides a practical framework which outlines major considerations those library managers should be addressing, when planning to reopen their library.

3.4.1 THE INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF LIBRARY ASSOCIATIONS AND INSTITUTIONS (IFLA) HAVE PUBLISHED A GUIDE TO HELP LIBRARIES SET POLICIES AND CREATE A PLAN FOR REOPENING.

The temperature check unit/s (thermometer) at the entrance is an essential and suitable staffs to check the temperature is required during library working hours. In academic libraries in Hong Kong, the library users are subject to temperature checks and the face masks is essential (IFLA, 2020).

Reopening libraries : Limiting numbers in the library ; Limiting concentration of users ; Organising events and activities ; Promoting hygiene; Keeping staff safe; Public communication; Plans for re-opening around the world

3.4.2 CHECK LIST BY AUSTRALIAN LIBRARY AND INFORMATION ASSOCIATION ARE AS FOLLOWS

- **Planning;** Risk assessment; Operations and communications plans; Timeline and phasing (easing of lockdown, partial reopening, full reopening); Celebration of full reopening.
- **Communications;** Guidelines and training for staff; Information for stakeholders; Media alert through organisation's media team; Notification of services available; Be prepared for increased phone and email enquiries during the reopening phases; Use the opportunity to communicate the value of the library.
- **Social distancing measures;** Signage promoting social distancing; Floor marking; Rearrange furniture; Separate entrance and exit; Limited opening hours; Opening hours for specific user groups; Limit usage of spaces in the library (eg meeting rooms, café, toilets); Limited number of people in the library; Limited period of time in the library; Remove PCs to create space between terminals; Time limits on PC sessions; Limit numbers for face-to-face activities.
- **Safety precautions;** Work Health and Safety risk assessment to identify high risk areas; Cleaning schedule with focus on priority areas including shared devices and materials; Quarantine and/or sanitise returned items; Availability of wipes and sanitizer for staff and public use; Install screens where social distancing measure are less effective; Ask people who are unwell not to attend the library.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON LITERATURE REVIEWED ARE

- Libraries should made available social amenities needed to prevent the spread of the Corona viruses such hand sanitizer, water and soap for users to wash their hands. Library staff and users should be encouraged to used face mask and as well adhere to other COVID19 protocols when using the library.
- To be able to deliver dynamic information services, the librarian should be regularly trained on current trends and new technological tools for management and dissemination of information.
- Librarian should certainly ensure library materials and surfaces are cleaned before and after use.
- Libraries should provide pages with useful links to reliable information for users on their websites.
- Libraries should implement plans to offer remote services, e.g. e-Lending, e-Learning, as well as providing support for remote teaching.
- Links to reliable information sources should be provided on the library website.

CONCLUSION

Facing the new-normal era, libraries have new shapes of services supporting large-scale society restrictions. The most appropriate practice carried out by libraries was the implementation of health protocols in all aspects. There were still many disruptions both from librarians and users. Many obstacles came, such as substandard internet networks and internet wastage. The high risk of COVID-19 transmission in the library must also be considered. Therefore, choosing the right time and place is much needed. The institute organizing online activities in library services must think of managing the budget for new-normal activities. Users should be trained virtually to make use of e resources.

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