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7-10-2021

Rethinking Academic Library Services during Covid-19 pandemic: A case study on Father Moses Library, Rajagiri College of Social Sciences (Autonomous), Ernakulam, India.

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Devan NV, Neetha and Tripathi, Alok Kumar Dr, "Rethinking Academic Library Services during Covid-19 pandemic: A case study on Father Moses Library, Rajagiri College of Social Sciences (Autonomous), Ernakulam, India." (2021). *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)*. 6030.
https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/6030

1.0   Introduction:

The year 2020 has been a challenging one to people all over the world, effecting every perspective of the human life. Role of academic libraries changed according to the evolving paradigm shift in teaching methodologies as a result of the outbreak of Covid-19. The challenge to the libraries were the current global trends in online education and significant roles libraries can play. For Libraries to morph themselves into a form that is adaptive to the demands and requirements of the post Covid-19 era, extensive use of social networks, adoption of an intuitive and responsive website design and blended librarianship are some the practises recommended. Fr Moses library, being part of the Rajagiri College of Social Sciences (Autonomous) also had to adapt to many situational changes to cope up with the blended mode of teaching/learning adapted by the curriculum in the college.

2.0   Objectives of the study:

- To understand the differences in library services and functions provided by Fr Moses library in pre pandemic and post pandemic times;
- To understand the permanent changes in the outlook and behaviour of library professionals brought about by the covid outbreak;
- To examine how libraries can provide quality services to patrons and ensure proper usage of resources during pandemic period;
- To study accelerated dependence on e resources as compared to the traditional resources.

3.0   Literature Review:

Ali (2020)[2] in pointing out the importance of maintaining regular services to traditional patrons (with specific reference to Pakistan) also highlights the changed responsibilities of the librarians in utilizing public health education as a tool to raise awareness at the same time providing knowledge support to medical staff and researchers.

Ashim Kundu (2019)[13] in the paper presents an evaluation of the role of IT utilities in the transformation of academic library services. It prepares a brief overview of academic libraries' historical development, followed by a discussion of current academic libraries' challenges and opportunities. It then attempts consideration of the progress. The article also discusses the illustration of innovative technological advancement for data management, learning, and its effect on the academic library zone. Developing new roles and skills, say for example, adopting the "embedded librarian" persona, are now a must for the library personnel. The article concludes with an impression on future developments and IT Utilities in the post-COVID19 era.

Gmiterek (2021)[8] surveyed 18 Polish university libraries during the spring 2020 COVID-19 lockdown. The paper shows how libraries compared in their approach to using social media, and the level of engagement and collaboration with patrons during a time when the physical library was closed.

Ifijeh (2020)[10] examined the evolution of teaching methodologies in the Nigerian universities during the Covid-19 pandemic and observed the paradigm shifts in the roles of academic libraries. He has critically analysed the roles libraries can play in online education which is now a global need.

Mehta and Wang (2020)[16] share the experience of a university library in response to the COVID-19 pandemic since early March 2020.

Nadine Newman[17] in the paper, Academic Library Leadership Lessons from COVID-19, Leadership played a critical role during the COVID-19 crisis. Some of the important lessons drawn from the Norman Girvan Documentation Centre (University of the West Indies) who are a leading library services provider in the region are well reflected upon, especially in view of the repeated waves of the virus affecting the populace. The decisions the library leadership had to take in the first few months of the virus attack and their impact on all stakeholders are well disseminated for others to draw their own lessons.

Okike (2020)[18] describes Librarians and information professionals disseminate information as often as they have access to authoritative information and resources, Librarians and information dissemination redefined and various strategies adopted to fulfil the user requirements.

3.0   Fr. Moses Library, Rajagiri College of Social Sciences and its services during the pandemic:

Around the world, the libraries; public libraries, school libraries, academic and college libraries shut down in order to prevent the gathering and contact of people through which transmission of Covid-19 can be reduced to a greater extent. Libraries started to search for options that could make services reach the people and help them in the research as well academic pursuits and at the same time get them engaged in some way. Even though many libraries had already started the ICT oriented services, the sole dependence on it to serve the users were yet to be tested. Requirement of the libraries to remain active but not physically open by utilizing various alternative means became essential with the onset of the pandemic. Fr Moses library also served its users in multiple ways throughout the lockdown period and still continues to do an excellent service during the seemingly never ending pandemic times.

The aim of the study was to conduct an exploratory investigation on Fr Moses library's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The effort was to recognise the intricacies of "how and what" the library has implemented for providing digital services to its teaching faculty and students during the pandemic. It also describes the challenges and implications for the library professionals working from their residences and from remote locations. The study explored the practices and services patterns during the

pandemic when the classes in the college were suspended and online classes were started. The major challenge was the transition from physical to online delivery of information services. The blended mode was adapted by the teaching departments to which the library had to contribute in its own way with various reference services, access to databases, e-books and e-journals. The reactive surge of online classes offered the libraries its own bunch of challenges and opportunities.

A few roles that the Fr Moses Library played to provide functions and services through the application of information and communication technologies, namely:

3.1   Assisting in 'search strategies' for their research, dissertation and even assignments;

3.2   Teaching users the easy way to access various e-resources and databases;

3.3   Supporting the faculty members in collecting "review of literature" for their research and publication and other educational needs;

3.4   Subscribing to new databases and providing remote access facilities to all its users.

It is commendable how the Library also supported online education through the provision of electronic databases and its own institutional repository: **DSpace**. The electronic resources the library possess are listed in the library website and are accessible through hyperlinks.

Application of ICTs had largely helped the patrons for timely access of resources by increasing the access to a greater number of e-books, e-journals etc. Library professionals too faced several challenges, they worked at home; updated library and college websites; distributed information through social media and dedicated their time in improving technical skills. The technological advancements in library services helped the library to cope up with the 'new normal' and ensured proper services to users by parallely working smart. They achieved this by rebuilding the library services in a way that satisfied user needs and delivered timely services, by practising proper safety and hygiene of materials and premises. When the college partially reopened after the first wave of the covid-19 pandemic, Fr Moses library was all equipped to receive patrons by undertaking multiple rounds of fumigation and bringing other suitable changes in the infrastructure.

4.0   Users Health and well-being

Without doubt, safeguarding the health and well-being of staff and students is always the top priority when providing library services during COVID-19. Fr. Moses Library has implemented the following major precautionary health measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 inside the library:

4.1 Users are required to wear face masks and sanitise their hands thoroughly before entering the library.

4.2 Seating is strategically arranged to maintain proper social distancing.

4.3 Group gatherings at the tables are strictly prohibited.

4.4 Group study rooms are temporary closed to avoid mingling of users.

The library also provided hand sanitizers at service counters and in different areas of the library buildings, and scheduled regular intensive cleaning and fumigation processes. Returned books were handled carefully and not taken in in unless thoroughly sterilized.

Apart from relaxing the borrowing privileges, Fr. Moses Library also rolled out a new service namely "Ask the Librarian" to provide remote support from Library staff when users were off-campus. Users could communicate with and get assistance from the librarian-on-duty either by using chat, by transferring files, screen sharing or directly speaking to the librarian.

The borrowing rules were relaxed during the lockdown period for both faculty members and students. They were allowed more lenience for return of books and the financial penalty norms were also done away with.

5.0   Need and Importance of Information

This ever-changing world never stops but grows exponentially and is full of surprises which are developmentally and technologically dynamic in nature. In the present society, information has become another basic need for human beings just like food, cloth, shelter and water. Our world has now transformed into an Information society. There is great need for accessibility, availability and accuracy of information.

6.0   Types of services provided, traditional and modern:

Fr Moses library like any other academic library provides both traditional services as well modern ICT based services. Here is a list of few of its services:

6.1   Reference Services:

Reference Service is an important personalized service in any library. Traditionally, it is a one-to-one service provided by the reference librarian to users. But the current definition of this service has been transformed by technological developments. There are basically two types of reference services, short range reference service and long-range reference service.

6.2   Information Services:

Information services are generally said to be the non-traditional type of services that connects readers and information (document) from a library or information centre. In this type of service, the emphasis is on providing the users with exact information rather than a resource. The aim is to keep patrons up-to-date in their field of interest or specialization by anticipating their needs.

6.3   Current Awareness Services (CAS): CAS is a service that provides users with information on recent development and in fields which are of basic interest to the users. CAS informs users about new acquisitions/documents/e-resources that are recently purchased/received in their libraries. This service keeps the users well informed and up to date in their fields of special interest as well as in related subjects**.**

6.4   Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI): SDI is a form of CAS. SDI also keeps users in touch with the recent development and in fields which are of basic interest for the users. SDI supplies individuals or a group of users with the references of documents/resources relating to their predefined areas of interest.

6.5   Document Delivery Service (DDS): The DDS supplies documents to the user on demand either in original, its photocopy versions, or electronic delivery from a library collection to the residence of a library user, upon request. For this purpose, there are several Document Delivery Centres (DDC) that deliver the copies of papers from journals, conference proceedings, manuscripts, reports, images and other materials available in their collection/database. Most of these centres or libraries deliver documents free of cost to patrons.

6.6   Abstracting and indexing services (I&A): An abstract is considered to be a real surrogate of the document. Reading abstracts saves a lot of time for the researchers since they provide an overview of the paper. An abstract helps users get a clear idea about the real content without reading the whole document.

6.6   WEB OPAC: Online Public Access catalogue (OPAC) provides access to the catalogue of documents and resources procured by a library or a group of libraries through a computer terminal. It serves as a gateway to the resources collected and disseminated by a library. It allows searching the entire catalogue online, replacing the printed/hand-written card catalogues, conveniently and quickly, using one or more search criteria. It is a digital database of materials a library possess.

6.7   Institutional Repository Service (IR): DSpace is the institutional repository in Fr. Moses Library. Institutional Repositories collect and disseminate scholarly documents, in digital forms, of an institution's researchers, students and faculties' research works. It is the most essential resource in an organisation to promote its community members' intellectual outputs. All the scholarly output of an institution is saved in the repository.

6.8   Ask-a-librarian service: "Ask-a-librarian" services are virtual reference services providing question and answer services which connect users with librarians, especially those individuals who are subject experts in that particular field and can conduct precise searches. Users can submit their queries by using web forms or through emails. Librarians provides online, on-demand assistance as quickly as possible, once they receive the query, no matter where they are.

6.9   Library Bulletin: The library bulletin is a periodical publication that publishes news about that particular library. These are generally meant for the members or users of that library. The messages may be directed to all users of the bulletin board or only to a particular user group. But all messages can be read by all. Bulletins are now made available in digital formats and mailed to users or displayed in library websites.

6.10   Open Knowledge gateway

RCSS Open Knowledge Gateway (ROKG) provides a platform to the researchers, faculty members and students of RCSS to access the free academic open access resources available on the internet without geographical limitations. The team at Fr. Moses Library organized all these resources /Links and put it together on the platform of OKG. So take the optimum advantage of these resources and excel in your research**.**

6.11   Remote access to e-resources: The main aim of academic libraries is to provide quality resources to students thereby strengthening the teaching-learning process. For this provision of necessary infrastructure and funds are inevitable. Most of the academic libraries have provision of remote access to subscribed e-resources and they are expanding the online services access to library e-resources, such as databases, e-books, e journals etc.

7.0   Online- Databases available at Fr. Moses Library
•   Science Direct
•   Turnitin
•   EBSCO
•   N-LIST
•   DELNET
•   ACM-Digital Library
•   J-Gate Plus
•   SCOPUS

Fr Moses library ensured that all its users could access the various databases and e-journals in its collection. The username and password of each resource was made accessible to all its patrons through e-mail.

Web of Science, citation database of Clarivate Analytics through library network and resource sharing, Fr Moses library procure data from other Institutions. This helps in assessing the research productivity of our faculty members required for various accreditations.

8.0   Use of social networks:

Nowadays institutions and organisations own at least one account each in every possible social media platform. These media help create and promote awareness about their services at the same time providing materials and resources online. Ask a librarian service, FAQs and some other services are accessible through social media pages. The social media networks such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Telegram, YouTube and Twitter are the most widely used ones by libraries and Fr Moses Library also makes use of these platforms for this purpose.

9.0   Resources Related to COVID-19:

National Digital Library of India provides special COVID-19 related literature and information under a single section titled, 'COVID-19 Research Repository'. Ten major libraries of the country have put together a list of scholarly resources related to COVID-19 that can be freely accessed from anywhere in the world (Dadhe & Dubey, 2020)[4].

10.   Other services in Fr Moses Library include:

- virtual digital assistance
- instructional videos on using digital services (i.e., YouTube)
- online information service (chat, e-mail)
- E-magazines
- "library pod casts" (Haasio & Kannasto, 2020)[9]
- Spotify-lists created by the libraries
- streamed events (storytelling sessions, discussion forums, book clubs)
- Online book clubs
- guest interviews streamed online
- digital recreation activities for students
- virtual reading events online

11.   Role of Librarians and Library Staff during the Pandemic and its effect on them

The field of library and information science had also been facing the lockdown challenges since this outbreak. All types of libraries including academic and public libraries found difficulties in providing the services to patrons. Those libraries which possess only physical documents or resources faced problems in providing their services whereas, libraries having significant e-resources served the users. Meanwhile libraries tried their best to be in connection with the users by conducting different programs such as reading competition, review writing competition, arranging virtual book-clubs and so on. Libraries and educational sectors conducted webinars through specific platforms such as zoom, google meet, go to webinar apps etc. College and university libraries provided their e-content through their websites for easy access to their students and faculties. But not all are tech savvy and not all could

equally access the e-resources. Users faced so many problems including the connectivity issues and lack of updated systems and smart phones. This prevented them from accessing information from various sources.

The library professionals are playing different roles in this pandemic period being online and offline, whether or not they are physically present in the library. They are also facing different challenges for providing timely services to the users by handling difficult situations.

Librarians should have in-depth knowledge on the COVID-19 pandemic, its spread and transmission in order to provide useful information to the community and for the development of new strategies, policies, rules and regulations. As information professionals, librarians started developed new skills in this pandemic period, enhanced the communication and working routines. They started finding new and creative ways through which information can be disseminated and steps to be adopted once the library re-opens for its functions and activities.

12.   Conclusion:

It may be to too early to predicate when COVID-19 will be away. We have a lot to learn on how to continue library business under the "new normal" by exploring all possibilities and flexibilities in order to better serve our users. No doubt academic libraries in different countries and regions have different strategies to support their users in the best way they can. To end on a positive note, however, COVID-19 provides a unique opportunity for academic librarians to rethink their key roles and core values in supporting teaching and learning of their institutions during this very challenging time. This unprecedented scenario opened the eye of many libraries and their associations and made them re-think on the fact, that how the services could be provided to the users when a similar situation arises. The formulation should be like that, which makes it possible for the libraries to be prepared to work flexibly through any circumstances or difficulties, both online and offline.

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