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Library Engagements: Looking Beyond Covid-19

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ABSTRACT

The role of the Library and Information professionals has been integral in promoting knowledge cultures throughout the centuries. Libraries have undergone a sea change and have been keeping pace with the networked and digital world. Libraries are the gateways to the information resources that engage the readers in different ways and capacities. A crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic shut the doors of the physical libraries but the opportunities and the doors for the digital libraries were opened like never before in history. LIS professionals all around the world have taken up the challenge of providing the information services to the user communities and engaged them in the most positive manner. Digital libraries have mustered up to continuously promote, supplement and complement the online education that was ushered in the society. The study explores the type of services provided by libraries for the society particularly in the context of library services and library professionals who faced both the opportunities and challenges that arose out of the COVID-19 crisis. LIS professionals have a greater role to play in the coming times to lift the spirits of the society by providing innovative services. The study highlights the significant initiatives and information engagements undertaken by the libraries in the global context to meet the post lockdown needs and look beyond the COVID-19 era.

Key Words: Library Services, Information Resources, COVID-19

INTRODUCTION

The world has been gripped by a massive public health crisis, fundamentally altering the way individuals and entities work and interact with one another. In late December 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) noted initial media statements emanating from China's Wuhan Province about "viral pneumonia" cases. Within weeks, researchers determined these cases were caused by a novel, rapidly spreading, and life-threatening corona virus. Nations began assessing how they might protect their populations, with many instituting travel bans and the like, but the spread of the disease proved significantly hard to control, particularly given the globalized economic environment and the existence of rapid, long-distance travel. When the entire world is gripped with a never seen before pandemic, distraught with uncertainties and anxieties, the community particularly the younger generation need a ray of hope. When the classrooms had to be shut down, when the academic institutes had to close the doors for

millions of students, teaching-learning was almost forced to stop. But technologies came up as the saviour. The academic fraternity utilized and exploited the ICT platforms to connect with the students.

As a result, there is an unprecedented shift to distance learning. Institutes are rushing to move their courses online; students are embracing e-books and e-learning in droves; and scholars are relying heavily on electronic journals. More than 1.5 billion students and youth across the planet are or have been affected by school and university closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Global Education Coalition launched by UNESCO, is a platform for collaboration and exchange to protect the right to education during this unprecedented disruption and beyond. It brings together more than 140 members from the UN family, civil society, academia and the private sector to ensure that "Learning never stops"[1].

INDIAN SCENARIO: NATIONAL DIGITAL LIBRARY OF INDIA (NDLI)

In their 'Manifesto for Digital Libraries', UNESCO and the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) point out that 'The mission of the digital library is to give direct access to information resources […] in a structured and authoritative manner and thus to link information technology, education and culture in contemporary library service'[2]. Statistics from the world's leading e-libraries testify to their cultural significance. For instance, Europeana, a pan-European-Union virtual library, grants its half-a-million users access to almost 58 million digital contents every year.

The World Digital Library, developed by UNESCO and the Library of Congress, is a pioneering attempt to foster intercultural understanding by offering access to digital heritage from 200 countries. In India, the NDLI has begun an ambitious digitisation programme in collaboration with leading heritage archives, besides making available cultural texts that already exist in electronic form. It is also training archivists across the country to apply standardised 'rights statements' to digitized cultural objects, in order to communicate their copyright and reuse status to users.

National Digital Library of India (NDLI) is a virtual repository of learning resources which is not just a repository with search/browse facilities but provides a host of services for the learner community. It is sponsored and mentored by the Ministry of Education, Government of India, through its National Mission on Education through Information and Communication Technology (NMEICT). Filtered and federated searching is employed to facilitate focused searching so that learners can find the right resource with least effort and in minimum time. NDLI provides user group-specific services such as Examination Preparatory for School and College students and job aspirants. Services for Researchers and general learners are also provided. NDLI is

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[1]Global Education Coalition. (n.d.). Retrieved March 3, 2021, from https://globaleducationcoalition.unesco.org/

[2] National Digital Library of India. (n.d.). Retrieved March 3, 2021, from https://ndl.iitkgp.ac.in/

designed to hold content of any language and provides interface support for 10 most widely used Indian languages. It is built to provide support for all academic levels including researchers and life-long learners, all disciplines, all popular forms of access devices and differently-abled learners. It is designed to enable people to learn and prepare from best practices from all over the world and to facilitate researchers to perform inter-linked exploration from multiple sources. It is developed, operated and maintained by the Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur.

The following are included in COVID-19 research repository:
1. Scholarly publications
2. Data sets
3. Documents and videos
4. Journals & conferences
5. Ideas & fundings
6. Challenges & startups

Adhoc services introduced by NDLI in view of the COVID-19 situation include:
1. Access to print materials
   a. Easing of penalty rules
   b. Assistance in information searching and scholarly writing
2. Organisation of virtual events

Library Associations/Professional Bodies took initiatives to meet the challenges in different ways which are highlighted as well. Online learning turned into an opportunity during the COVID-19 pandemic to explore the positive information engagements through various webinars, workshops, etc. which were conducted by various organisations. North East India was not far behind, although there are bottlenecks and challenges in terms of digital divide and skill gaps among the user communities. Digital technology has completely changed in all factors, especially for the students. COVID-19 led to important innovations which was a great opportunity to utilize the time.

INDIAN SCENARIO: NATIONAL DIGITAL LIBRARY OF INDIA (NDLI)

Libraries around the world of all sorts have been working hard to provide access to collections and services remotely, often investing time and effort in updating websites and computer systems in order to deal with demand. The function of libraries as guardians of the historical report is as strong as ever. A submit from Ithaka S+R highlights quite a number initiatives to collect and preserve substances about the pandemic, whilst the International Internet Preservation Consortium is looking to coordinate efforts. Meanwhile, Columbia University has launched an archiving programme, as has the National Library of Spain, whilst Kingsport Library in Tennessee,

and Springfield County Libraries in Illinois, in the United States and the State Library of Victoria in Australia have requested individuals of the community to share their COVID-19 stories, and libraries in Huesca, Spain, for example, are encouraging young people to write memories about their experiences, which at the same time helps them cope with the stress they are feeling. The Association of Librarians and Archivists of Cameroon is working with the Bamenda University and the Ministry of Culture to coordinate archiving efforts in the USA in order to retain the instructions of the present. Finally, the work of libraries to guide lookup of direction continues, with the Information Science department at the University of Kuwait for example supporting lead lookup into the way in which information spreads on social media regarding COVID-19.

With so many offerings, as listed in Table 1, libraries in a number of nations have been capable of working with newspapers, radio stations and different communications channels in order to elevate awareness. Some activities and offerings may additionally be impossible, for instance with personnel unable to come to work to elevate out maintenance activities. In response, the Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Material has organized a guide, as has the French Association of Heritage Libraries. The Indo-Hittite University Libraries association (ANKOS) has intense resource sharing between its members through one portal, so as to accelerate access to analysis, and also the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has made a series of tutorials on however best to use library materials. The Federal University of Delaware is doing an equivalent, further as providing consultation via Whatsapp and videoconferencing. tutorial libraries around the world – for instance at East West University in Asian countries once more – have conjointly been delivered along with info concerning freely on the market resources, as incorporates a bibliothe at the govt. Degree school in Jammu and Jammu and Kashmir, India. The Central Library of the Al Ameed University in Iraq has looked to support reflection on COVID-19, and also the role of technology, through a seminar on the topic (now au courant YouTube), whereas the library of the University of Mustansiriyah, Iraq, is maintaining a count of the utilization of its electronic thesis deposit service and webinars joined by library workers. Some libraries also are trying to assist potential users UN agencies don't seem to be registered, and UN agencies cannot currently sign in face to face. The National Library of Baltic State for instance has established a policy for giving individuals access to books while not contact, as has the Turkish Ministry of Culture within the case of public libraries, whereas the National Library of Morocco is additionally maintaining on-line inscriptions. Austrian and Croatian libraries have enlarged access to eLending to the total population, whereas Iranian libraries have united to recognise each other's library cards so as to permit individuals to use the highest library to them. The Culture Connect organisation in European nations, that works with libraries, has conjointly opened its content to unregistered users, as has Booklist within the US, that works to supply book reviews and different materials. In several countries, libraries' supply of free wireless fidelity to users could be a key part of their supply. Within the US, there have been turn libraries to go away networks so users will access the web from their cars if they want to. In the capital of Kansas County, in the US,

bookmobiles equipped with square measure network/WLAN/wireless fidelity/WiFi/local area routers are visiting communities with low property. Elsewhere, tools like TV White area – a technology that uses components of the radio-spectrum not employed by different services to supply square measure networks at distance – are in operation through libraries to attach the unconnected. This could create a serious distinction for those that want the web, for instance, to learn. Others square measure giving access to Zoom subscriptions so as to assist library users keep up-to-date with friends. In doing this, some libraries have had to influence considerations around public access to supported wireless fidelity (although the yank Library Association has with success lobbied for such restrictions to be raised for now), or around public health considerations with individuals gathering in automotive parks.

Table 1. Services provided by different libraries in the global scenario

No.	Libraries	Services or initiatives
1	Columbia University Library	Have launched Archiving Programmes
2	University of Kuwait	Took the initiatives to spreads the awareness regarding COVID-19
3	Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Material	Has organized a guide
4	Indo-Hittite University Libraries Association (ANKOS)	Resource sharing between its members through one portal
5	The king Abdullah University of Science and Technology in Saudi Arabia	Made a series of tutorials to use library materials
6	The Federal University of Delaware	Made a series of tutorials to use library materials via WhatsApp and videoconferencing
7	The Central Library of Al Ameed University in Iraq	Took initiative to support reflection on COVID-19 & also the role of technology, through seminar on the topic
8	University of Mustansiriyah, Iraq	Maintaining a count of the utilization of its electronic thesis deposit service and webinars joined by library workers
9	National Library of Morocco	Maintaining online inscriptions
10	Austrian and Croatian libraries	Enlarged access to eLending
12	Irarian libraries	Have united to recognise each other's library cards to permit individuals to use the highest library facilities

RESILIENCE AMIDST COVID-19

Librarians at the National Library of Medicine in the United States – unique through the PubMed Central platform, have been aiding fundamental access to evidence for decision-makers. They have also worked carefully with publishers in order to make articles and collections open that would otherwise have been paywalled. Crucially, they have additionally labored to underline that, collections need to be available in machine-readable layout through the COVID-19 Open Research Database. This is fundamental if researchers are to be in a position to carry out text and records mining in order to pick out workable treatments or cures. Furthermore, the Library has also acknowledged the significance of discoverability, highlighting tools handy for figuring out relevant sources

on its website. Clearly, a key contribution to the discovery and application of data comes from it being in approaches that work for those who need to use it. Here too, health librarians are playing a key role.

From each day's briefings to each government and medical decision-makers to greater in-depth evaluations of the literature on rising issues, librarians are assisting to inform selections made. For example, Public Health England's Knowledge and Library Services crew is producing regular evaluations of emerging evidence, while the Irish National Health Library and Knowledge Service is sharing fast proof reviews, and the Health Libraries Group of the Australian Library and Information Association has compiled live responses to key literature searches. In Iran, librarians are additionally aiding efforts to make sense of the existing literature around corona viruses.

Library Research Services

Post Covid-19 scenarios must address Library Research Services providing a holistic range of services for students and research scholars from all disciplines. Some of the Services include:

1. Publish Your Research Tool Kit
2. Journal Metrics, Ranking, and Lists
3. Google Scholar Metrics
4. Scopus Journal Metrics
5. SJR (SCImago Journal Rank)
6. Other ranking tools that supplement Scopus & SJR
7. Ulrichsweb Global Serials Directory
8. Open Access
9. Choose and Apply a Creative Commons Licence
10. Directories of open access publications and repositories:
11. Directory of Open Access Repositories (OpenDOAR)
12. Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ)
13. Directory of Open Access Books (DOAB)
14. Massey Research Online
15. Massey Symplectic Elements
16. SHERPA/RoMEO
17. Researcher Development
18. Researcher Development Library Workshops

Key Engagements

One of the most intriguing aspects of the experience of lockdown due to COVID-19 is coming face to face with ourselves and those we live most closely with. For many, navigating daily relationships at home and work is an exercise in dodging difficult

conversations. When there is no way out – either physically or psychologically – we are forced to confront our own internal contradictions as well as the competing interests of others. But we can't remain bystanders in life – 'hollow men,' as T.S. Eliot would have called them – infants afraid to take responsibility and act; shirkers preoccupied with self-interest, stripped of their creative capacities. In the present context, leadership in librarianship can focus on several key engagements as presented in Table 2:

Table 2. Key library engagements in post-COVID-19

No.	Engagement(s)	Outcome(s)
1	Building Trust and Solidarity	The Community trusts the library as the genuine service organization which provides genuine information for a better living hood and promotes good education-life-long learning.
2	Addressing Digital Divide and Inequalities	The Library is the hub of all ICT activities addressing the information needs among all the members of the society.
3	Blended working environment	A new approach of learning and information engagements both in offline and online mode for the 21st century learners.
4	Rural and community engagement	Serving the communities in the most meaningful and relevant way possible. A continuous engagement between the library staff and the community in promoting democratic values and social upliftments.
5	Addressing United Nations SDG 2030 Goals	Promotion of IFLA's advocacy for the inclusion of access to information, safeguarding of cultural heritage, universal literacy, and access to information and communication technologies (ICT) in the United Nations SDG 2030 framework.

Keeping the present scenarios in mind, new change management approach, addressing what information professionals need to do to best manage and embed the change so as to continue to play a key part of the future, post-pandemic era is a continuous process. We are all together into the future championing innovation, collaboration, responsibility and democratic values.

OBSERVATIONS & SUGGESTIONS

Libraries now spend considerable resources to repeat all types of programs in multiple spaces. As we recover and simplify with online programming, we will offer a wider range of options to patrons across our service areas instead of repeating an equivalent program again and again at the branch level. With some thoughtful planning and a touch of innovation, libraries can develop smart new ways to allocate their limited resources.

Look at the worth proposition of the platform, libraries have truly excelled during COVID. Libraries have spent the past 20 years increasing and expanding their digital collections, sharing these collections across jurisdictions, and exploring new licensing models like pay-per-use of Hoopla and Kanopy. Having this groundwork in situ when COVID struck was foundational. Libraries could nimbly shift resources from print to digital and make popular original content like online story time and maker activities.

Digital use by patrons has skyrocketed. At an equivalent time, libraries are careful to make sure user privacy even with such expanded access.

At a flash when many feel isolated, the people are a part of libraries' value proposition—human connection—remains the foremost important. Some library workers have stepped into complex and challenging new roles like contact tracing or providing childcare for health care workers. Libraries have made efforts to directly connect with patrons via phone and mail. As unemployment continues to rise, libraries have stepped up to help with applications and job-hunting. It is suggested that libraries can collaborate with mental health professionals, counsellors to bring forth positive information seeking behaviour.

University librarians felt that digital divide, lack of digital literacy skills, and slow internet speed were the major barriers in their transition from physical to online mode and less use of library's online resources and web portals. Libraries see their individual and collective roles of societal and educational dimensions during these uncertain times. Leadership theories that are more recent, post-heroic in nature, encourage shared or distributed leadership practices. Library professionals may well be transforming into leaders in creating positive information engagements but challenges remain. Libraries strive and survive in the cultural and temporal contexts, without leadership and engagements service organizations will be a failure.

CONCLUSION

The pandemic has affected every aspect of the people, place, and platform value proposition. Take, for instance, the people aspect of libraries. The services that libraries provided in past downturns—access to computers and connections to human services—are difficult to supply when libraries aren't physically open or only open with limited access. At the same time, the necessity is greater than ever for these services. Additionally, support for student learning has never been more important, particularly for college kids without connectivity in their homes.

In the current health crisis created by COVID-19, the role of librarians has of necessity expanded significantly. Librarians are playing crucial roles from generating awareness, filtering fake information, supporting researchers and faculty members, to providing reference and document delivery services. Libraries are the guidance and counseling centers, the centre of recreational activities counting on the demands and needs of the community. It builds up the image of a trusted organization which spreads positivity and good will amongst all. Library professionals have always been committed to providing people with information; during the pandemic they're finding new ways to support their mission. We need to make the community feel and realize that the libraries are there to assist. Libraries are the repositories of data resources and therefore the knowledge portal which will give access to information packages. Libraries need to survive and thrive for the community in these challenging times. Reinvention and rethinking beyond COVID-19 is the mantra.

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