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Narrative Review

Social Networks: Libraries During COVID-19 Pandemic

Reyhaneh Gholamisuq¹ , Azam Shahbodaghi^{1*} , Maryam Kazerani¹ 

¹ Department of Medical Library and Information Science, School of Allied Medical Sciences, Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran.

Abstract

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* Corresponding author

Azam Shahbodaghi.

Email: shahbodaghi@

sbm.u.ac.ir



Introduction: The COVID-19 pandemic has changed how libraries provide services to their users. Social networks have become one of the most important ways libraries could communicate with users during that time. This study aims to review articles that have addressed the roles, services, and challenges of libraries in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic on social networks.

Methods: This study is a narrative review. The study population includes English-language articles indexed in reputable databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, and articles retrieved through Google Scholar published in reputable journals.

Results: Libraries have played various roles on social networks during the COVID-19 pandemic, and despite the challenges they faced, they shared their services on these networks with users.

Conclusion: The COVID-19 pandemic has facilitated libraries' acceptance and use of social networks and has led to the emergence of roles, speed in providing online services, and facing challenges. Familiarity with the different roles of libraries during the COVID-19 pandemic on social networks and utilizing the potential of these networks can provide useful information for policymakers to make informed decisions regarding the use of social networks, which can help make clearer decisions in the future when facing other pandemics and take measures to combat them.

Introduction

COVID-19 is an infectious disease first detected in China in December 2019 and spread rapidly worldwide. On January 30, 2020, the World Health Organization declared the outbreak of COVID-19 a public health emergency; on March 11, 2020, it declared the disease a global pandemic (1). Due to the speed and ease of spread of this virus through the respiratory tract (2), there was a huge fear of contracting it among the people (3), which led to

the emergence of extreme behaviors in search of information related to it (4). Some studies have shown that during the COVID-19 pandemic, people have used social networks unprecedentedly to search for and share information (5,6).

With the spread of COVID-19, the performance of libraries, like other organizations, faced changes and experienced from low restrictions to complete closure. In this situation, libraries faced



many challenges. To maintain their position and relationship with society, they provided non-stop services to users (7,8) and online interaction in new ways (9). Using social networks to disseminate information and provide services to users was another solution libraries used to face the situation (10). On the other hand, the situation presented a good opportunity for libraries. Since the key to managing a chaotic situation is accurate and correct information (11), people need authentic information due to the large volume of false information in social networks. Lack of access to appropriate information and low public awareness of this disease could increase the risk of contracting this disease (12). On the other hand, it was not easy to distinguish false information from true information, and libraries could play an important role in providing reliable and trustworthy sources during COVID-19 (13,14) and taking steps to improve public health (7). In this situation, libraries must use social networks more (12).

To play their role optimally, libraries could use various strategies in social networks, such as relying on people's empowerment programs in the form of information and media literacy (13,15), providing quality and reliable information to users (7,13,16), especially to fight against fake news related to COVID-19 (13) and to support research

(13, 16). However, to what extent libraries could use the capacity of social networks is a topic that has been the basis of some research. In this study, the authors decided to review the articles investigating libraries' use of social networks to provide services and play a role during the COVID-19 pandemic and the challenges they face.

Methods

The present study is a narrative review. Articles from reputable magazines have been used to compile it. To find the texts using equivalent keywords for the three concepts of social networks, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the library, the databases PubMed, Science Direct, Scopus, Web of Sciences, and the Google Scholar search engine have been explored.

The retrieved articles were reviewed and evaluated by the research team, and the original articles that dealt with the use of social networks by libraries to play a role and provide services in the COVID-19 pandemic and the challenges facing them were selected. Then, these studies were used to extract research findings.

Results

Twelve original articles were examined to answer the research questions, presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Characteristics of the studies

S/N	Authors	Year of publication	Country	Research population	Type of library	Social network
1	Koulouris et al. (7)	2020	Greece	189 libraries	all types, except school libraries	Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube, Flickr, and others
2	Alajmi & Albudaiwi (8)	2020	New York	9,450 tweets published by 38 public libraries	public library	Twitter
3	Neog (10)	2020	India	University Librarians of four Universities of Assam	Academic Library	Facebook, Twitter, Blog, WhatsApp, and others
4	Martínez-Cardama & Pacios (17)	2020	Spain	11,867 tweets and retweets from fifty-six libraries	Academic Library	Twitter



Table 1. Characteristics of the ... (continued)

S/N	Authors	Year of publication	Country	Research population	Type of library	Social network
5	Guo et al. (16)	2020	China	Chinese academic libraries	Academic Library	WeChat
6	Hamzat & Otulugbu (18)	2020	Nigeria	201 Library and information scientists	Public library, academic library, school library	WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube, Quora, and Flipboard
7	Prabowo & Manabat (14)	2021	Indonesia	Three academic libraries	Islamic academic libraries	Instagram
8	Choi & Kim (19)	2021	United States	Fifty-seven public library Twitter accounts (1465 tweets and 516 retweets)	Public library	Twitter
9	Mabruri & Aisyah (20)	2022	Southeast Asia	three National Libraries	National Library	Instagram
10	Banda & Chewe (9)	2022	Zambia	Five university libraries	University Library	WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube
11	Harisanty et al. (15)	2022	Indonesia	148 people exposed to COVID-19, and 214 public libraries	Public library	Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, YouTube, Telegram, and TikTok
12	Choi & Kim (21)	2022	United States	Forty public library Twitter accounts (2623 tweets and 666 retweets)	Public library	Twitter

According to the studied studies, during the COVID-19 pandemic, libraries have played different roles in social networks. Table 2 shows these roles.

Table 2. The role of libraries during COVID-19 in social networks

Role	Reference numbers
Providing and sharing timely and reliable scientific content and information	(7,15,17,19)
Providing services and information resources	(8,10,15,17,19,20)
Dissemination and providing information related to COVID-19	(8,10,16,18)
Improving information literacy	(16)
Providing psychological support	(8,14)
Providing information on financial/health/food support	(8)
Enabling a culture of preparedness	(14)

In Table 3, based on the reviewed studies, the services provided by libraries through social networks during the COVID-19 pandemic have been illustrated.

Table 3. Library services provided during COVID-19 in social networks

Library services	Reference numbers
Announcements services	(7–10,14,15,17,19–21)
Educational services	(7,8,14,16,17,20)
Collection services	(7–10,14,16,17,19–21)
Library services, in general	(7–10,15,17,21)
Reference services	(7,9,10,14,16)
Selective of dissemination information(SDI)	(9)
Research support services	(16)
Other	(8,14,20)

Table 4. deals with libraries' challenges concerning social networks during COVID-19.

Table 4. Challenges facing libraries in using social networks during the COVID-19 pandemic

Challenges	Reference numbers
Poor ICT infrastructure devices and lack of high-speed internet	(9,10)
Resistance from some librarians to exploit social media to deliver library services and their lack of a positive attitude	(9,10)
Lack of policy guidelines	(9,10)
Poor budget	(7,9)
Growth and maintenance of audience	(7)
Managing multiple platforms	(7)
Lack of staff and/or time	(7)
Content copyright issues	(7)
Lack of digital media literacy skills	(9)
Users' low response to library services	(10)

Discussion

Although the COVID-19 pandemic brought the world a terrible surprise, one of its results was the inevitable increase in the use of information and communication technologies to face the limitations caused by social distancing and nationwide quarantines (22). The unique ability of social networks to publish and quickly exchange information made billions of people worldwide join these media to quickly access information about this emerging disease (23). Since libraries are one of the most important custodians of publishing and exchanging authentic and reliable information, it is important to know whether these institutions could use the platform of social networks more to fulfill their roles, what services they provided during the COVID-19 pandemic, and what challenges they have faced along the way.

The role of libraries during COVID-19 in social networks

The important role of libraries in spreading health information, especially in the global crisis of COVID-19, is undeniable (24). Libraries could play their role in social networks differently during the COVID-19 era. According to the findings of some researchers (7,15,17,19), libraries could play their role by providing and sharing timely and reliable scientific information to promote public health and fight against fake news and the spreading of false information. However, few libraries did this role, and it can be said that they missed this opportunity. This statement has been confirmed in other studies stating that libraries can play an important role in providing reliable and valid information and preventing false information in social networks where there is much



false information about COVID-19 and other diseases (12,20,25). Providing services and information resources to meet the information needs of society, availability of services, helping to maintain learning and thinking, communicating with users, and using social networks as a communication channel in health emergencies are some of the roles of libraries at that time (8,10,15,17,19,20). According to the findings of some researchers, libraries published and presented information related to COVID-19 to inform their users (8,10,16,18). During the COVID-19 pandemic, when a large amount of information is circulating, it is important to remember the importance of libraries and the role of librarians in organizing and disseminating information to society (11).

A finding regarding the fight against false information has emphasized education to improve the information literacy of users (16). Providing psychological support by the library through virtual conversation with users, creating peace and relieving stress, and sharing hopeful posts to overcome the epidemic (8,14) were other roles of libraries. In some studies, information on financial, health, and food support was shared, and users were directed to reliable sources of sales packages, health updates, and food in their areas (8). Creating a culture of disaster preparedness through posters, photos, and hygiene requests related to COVID-19 (14) was another role of libraries in social networks during the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, two studies mentioned using social networks to refund delays and fines (8,14).

In this regard, Ali & Gatiti described the role of librarians and information specialists in the context of an epidemic in the three dimensions of promoting public health awareness by creating and disseminating information related to preventive measures, supporting the research team, researchers and professors by providing information on the latest developments, research and literature and responding to the basic needs of regular library users have been categorized (26).

Services provided during the COVID-19 in social networks

During COVID-19, due to the physical closure of libraries, one of the most important ways to communicate with users and provide services was to be active on social networks. Some researchers investigated the content and services libraries shared in their social networks during COVID-19. The services provided in the research findings can be divided into eight categories: information services,

educational services, collection services, library services in general, reference services, selective information services, research support services, and others. Information services, according to the findings of some researchers, are in the form of contents such as information about library closures or program postponements (8), news related to library services (10), news and announcements related to COVID-19 (15,19, 21), news and programs not related to COVID-19 (8,19,21), and information about library activities (14,17) and library events (7-10,19,20). The findings of some researchers show that educational services include providing information related to the virus and health instructions and training to find reliable information (8), transmitting reliable information and combating false information (17), scientific content about COVID-19, or general information (20), educational services related to COVID-19, which caused rumors to be rejected (16), and online education (7,14). According to the findings of some researchers, library collection services include online electronic information resources and services (9), resources related to COVID-19 (10, 19), providing information about remote library resources (8), free electronic resources during COVID-19 (16), promoting and publishing the library collection (7, 9, 14, 19, 20), and publishing the collection and online resources (9, 17). In the findings of some researchers, they mentioned the content of library services they considered in general (7-10,15,17,21). According to the findings, reference services (7,9,10,14,16), selective information services (9), and research support services (16) were among the other services provided by libraries in social networks during COVID-19. Other services included thanks, suggestions, comments, requests (8), and greetings with users (14, 20). Some of the services mentioned in the article by Ayeni et al. titled "A systematic review of library services provision in response to covid-19 pandemic" (27), are consistent with the present research. These services include support for virtual teaching and learning, research support, virtual reference services, public health and safety, and providing information related to the virus and public health literacy.

Challenges

While using social networks is useful, it also brings challenges (18). Some researchers listed libraries' challenges in these networks during COVID-19. They state that libraries provide library services during the epidemic in social networks with challenges such as weak infrastructure related to information

and communication technology, lack of high-speed internet, lack of positive attitude and resistance of some librarians in using social networks, lack of policies and official guidelines were found in the use of social networks (9,10). The lack of funds was also considered a challenge in research (7,9). In a study, growing and maintaining your followers on social networks were the biggest challenges facing libraries and managing multiple social media platforms, lack of staff or time, lack of social media strategies, and content copyright issues (7) were other cases mentioned in this research. The other challenges were the lack of digital media literacy skills (9) and the low response of users (10). Ashiq et al. in a systematic review article titled "Transformation of libraries during covid-19 pandemic: a systematic review" stated that the biggest challenges are human and infrastructure issues such as the lack of telecommuting culture and skill problems, weak technology infrastructure and problems connecting to the internet and copyright issues. It turned out that this situation was getting worse due to the lack of funds and resources. In addition, this research mentioned the lack of social network policy as a challenge (28). In a systematic review article, Ayeni et al. addressed the challenges facing libraries in the era of COVID-19 and pointed to issues such as budget, issues related to information and communication technology, and internet services, as in the present study (27).

Despite the challenges of social networks, the potential of these networks for libraries, especially in the era of COVID-19, cannot be ignored. Therefore, libraries can investigate these challenges and find ways to solve them to make maximum use of these networks in normal situations and different crises.

Conclusion

According to the review of the literature, it can be said that during COVID-19, libraries could use the potential of social networks as an opportunity. In addition to transferring the provision of library services to these networks, they could emphasize their important role in disseminating authentic information

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related to COVID-19 and educating their users in the direction of their awareness and promoting health literacy. Additionally, they will take a big step in presenting their role by providing mental support to the users during the COVID-19 pandemic and making it easier for them to pass that time. The findings of this review study show that the COVID-19 pandemic has facilitated the acceptance and use of social networks by libraries and has caused the emergence of roles in these networks, the speed of how to provide services online, and facing challenges in this direction.

Declarations

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Ethical statement

The present article has been extracted from a master thesis, that has been approved by the ethics committee of SBMU (ethics code: IR.SBMU.RETECH.REC.1400.1180). All the authors have observed all the ethical issues in writing and publishing.

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Authors' contributions

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