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LIBRARY SERVICES DELIVERY DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC: A SURVEY OF LIBRARIANS IN UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES IN SOUTH-SOUTH, NIGERIA

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Abstract
The main purpose of this study is to investigate academic library service delivery during the COVID-19 pandemic, identify library online facilities used during the outbreak, types of library services rendered, and the challenges of online library service delivery during the crisis in Nigeria. The study adopted a descriptive research design. The population of the study consists of 110 academic librarians in six state universities in South-South Nigeria. Questionnaire is used to collect data for this study. The frequency count was used to analyze the data. The study revealed that WhatsApp, Facebook and Email were mostly used to deliver skeletal online library services during the COVID-19 pandemic. Reference, information services, current awareness services (CAS), selective dissemination of information (SDI) were services rendered. Inadequate ICT infrastructure and unskilled manpower, poor budgetary allocations were inhibitors identified. The study recommended that libraries should engage more social media outlets in their operations, librarians should acquire emerging technological skills and parent organizations should remedy the challenges identified to enable academic libraries function optimally during situations like the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords: Online service delivery, Covid-19 pandemic, social media, university libraries, Nigeria.

Introduction

COVID-19 started in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China, in December, 2019 (Adayi et al, 2020). The World Health Organization (WHO) (2020) declared it a public health emergency of international concern on the 30th of January 2020 and recognized it as a pandemic on 11th March, 2020. It spread rapidly across the world which led to severe global socio-economic disruptions, postponement of sports, religious, business, and cultural events and the death of many people in the world, Institutions of learning and libraries were not spared (Adayi et al, 2020). This led to the global decision to close the educational sector as a panacea to the spread of this deadly disease. The COVID-19 experience made most countries' educational systems switch to online learning mode because this was the only option left as physical contact was prohibited.

Adetayo & Williams. (2021) reported that the methods of information dissemination

by libraries in most Nigerian tertiary institutions have been conventional. Information resources are acquired, organized and reserved in different segments of the library building, even though some of the academic libraries also provide access to electronic information resources using IP addresses remotely through login details like usernames and passwords. Winata et al. (2020), as cited in Brooks et al. (2020), librarians worldwide extend emerging technologies to their operations to avoid the possible second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. Online facilities were used by Librarians and Information practitioners in providing scholarly interaction, web interaction, digital content, and collaborations, developing robust search interfaces, and providing multiple opportunities for researchers among others Adetayo & Williams. (2021). This paper, therefore, describes a brief history of the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria, identifies some online facilities used during the COVID-19 pandemic, types of services rendered, and the challenges of online library service delivery.

In response to the COVID-19 crises, library services have undergone significant transformations and innovations. The pandemic has hastened the transition to digital and virtual services, leading to an increased reliance on technology for virtual programming, curbside pickup, and digital collections (Ram, 2023). Jain & Agarwal, (2023). Academic libraries, in particular, have developed pandemic-proof programmes that are context-specific, ensuring students' access to library services and a significant increase in both offline and online engagement. The novel aspect of this study is its focus on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on academic library services in the context of South-South Nigeria. The research goes beyond general acknowledgements of the shift to online services by providing a detailed analysis of the online facilities used, the types of services rendered and the challenges faced by librarians in the new digital landscape. The study focuses on social media platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook and Email highlights the practical strategies used by librarians to stay in touch with patrons during the pandemic. Furthermore, the study's geographical focus on South-South Nigeria deepens understanding of regional challenges such as infrastructure issues and regional disparities. In essence, this study contributes a nuanced perspective on the transformation of academic library services during the pandemic.

Statement of the Problem

Before the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria, literature revealed that academic libraries focused on rendering library services via physical contact (Al-Daihani, & ALAwadhi 2015). As a result of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, academic libraries all over the world have changed their ways of rendering services by deploying online facilities using digital technologies and social media which enable librarians to render services irrespective of the location and boundaries linked to patrons and pick-up request. However, observations and personal interactions with colleagues have shown that academic libraries in South-South Nigeria are yet to fully deploy online facilities in rendering services during the COVID-19 era. As a result, this study was to examine the precise state of affairs and to proffer solutions where possible.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study was to investigate academic library service delivery during the COVID-19 pandemic in South-South, Nigeria. The specific objectives were to:

i. identify the online facilities the libraries used for service delivery during the COVID-19 outbreak.
ii. determine the type of services the libraries rendered during the pandemic.
iii. examine the challenges faced by the librarians/libraries in Nigeria rendering library services during the COVID-19 era.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study.

1. What are the online facilities libraries used for service delivery during the COVID-19 outbreak?
2. What are the types of services libraries rendered during the COVID-19 pandemic?
3. What are the challenges faced by librarians/libraries in rendering services during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Review of Related Literature

Academic Library Services Rendered during COVID-19 Pandemic.

The social media phenomenon presents a major shift, in communication as it flattens the world and brings people together to interact and transact (Vassilakaki & Papaconstantinou, 2023). In this time of COVID-19, the power of social media usage rests on the fact that social conversation is one of the ways to communicate without physical contact. The Covid-19 pandemic has led the world to new norms (Chiderah & Iroeze, 2021). The WHO (2020) advised the world to adopt new norms to curtail the spread across the globe. Byun and Slavin (2020) identified library services according to the international standard as reference services, information services, current awareness services, document delivery services, abstracting and indexing services, institutional repositories, technical services, and Ask-a-librarian services. Considering the recent changes, the digital library offers contactless academic support with online resources and services.

Francisco (2023) posited that library professionals can play with ICT tools and spread the information to the community of users. The library professionals can also provide cloud-based library services, authentication technologies, remote access electronic resource management systems, library services platform & Lib Guide/IRs, advocating marketing of library services through Blogs and other social media networks, etc. All these can be done through various online platforms in academic libraries. The study by Kaluveviciute (2020) on "e-learning and changing roles of academic Libraries" concludes that e-learning (online platform) if adopted readily by Libraries, will play an important role in providing authentic resources. Academic Libraries strategically tailor their resources and services to cater for their users. This adaptation involves the provision

of electronic resources, offering e-reference services to address patrons' needs, and engaging with virtual users.

Fernandez-Ramos (2016) cited in Ifijeh and Yusuf (2020) stated that university libraries in developed countries have always applied online platforms to meet the information needs of the users, providing user education and information literacy, as well as conducting orientation to fresh students. In the course of the Covid-19 pandemic, many university libraries across Europe and America continued to render online services to their users during the lockdown (University of Sussex Library, 2020).

Facilities for Online Library Service Delivery during COVID-19 Pandemic

Perumal, R (2020), identified social media networks used by most Nigerian libraries today as online facilities for rendering library services such as Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, blogs and library websites. It is pertinent to examine online facilities used for library service delivery during the COVID-19 pandemic. Social media networks are increasing speedily as conduits of communication and interaction among individuals. One of the major advantages of social media networks is their capacity to build relationships and social interaction among individuals; thus, if adopted by libraries will help them to provide the information needs of their users (Chiderah & Iroeze, 2021).

According to Cheng et al. (2020), social media platforms serve as a channel for students to interact, share and exchange information within virtual communities and networks among their university peers. In light of the COVID-19 crises, the utilization of social media has evolved, presenting a new dimension for promoting library services. When effectively employed, this approach has the potential to significantly improve the management and productivity of university libraries. At the time of this study, COVID-19 has brought the opportunity to change the old tactics of university library services and operations in other to remain relevant in information management and service delivery for user satisfaction. More so, Chu, & Nkepah (2012) carried out research on rendering library services through social media during lockdown due to COVID-19 with special reference to the University Library of Assam and suggested that the library should provide information to make their users aware of COVID-19. The study concluded that library users should be aware of availability of social media services for libraries for optimum utility of users. Furthermore, the need to enhance the delivery of Library Services and products in the Covid-19 era is acute. As a result, the study of Asif and Singh (2020) affirmed that academic libraries are now exploring all possible opportunities to maximize their outreach and management with their actual potential users, they added that social media offers great potential for this purpose.

Syn, Sinn and Kim (2023) argued that university libraries in Nigeria are now sharing information resources to accelerate work operations and foster cooperation between Nations of State. Obar and Wildman (2015) highlighted that there are some common features of social media such as internet-based applications; user-generated

content, digital photos or videos, and generated data through all online interactions. Kolawole and Oghenetega (2020) argued that social media should promote the development of online social networks by linking the profiles of users to that of their groups. In Hiremath et al.'s (2023), it was highlighted that the implementation of an automated system has the potential to streamline various processes, leading to enhanced efficiency. This includes accelerating the registration of new users, facilitating the charging and discharging of materials, optimizing indexing, improving bibliographic services, and expediting document delivery. The Facebook platform, in particular, stands out as a popular social media tool among users and proves valuable for efficient document delivery. Omini and Ayanlade, (2019) noted that Facebook has become very popular with young people and is a common place where students easily share information. However, social media like Google Scholar has highlighted leading medical journals and other sites related to the Covid-19 outbreak. Because of the above, WHO is working with Facebook, Pinterest, Tencent, Koo and TikTok to provide the public with accurate information on eliminating misinformation and disinformation (WHO, 2021). The innovations by these social media organizations can be correlated by librarians through sharing these services with the community of users in the COVID-19 era. Given the above, Chukwuyere, et al. (2020) assert that librarians can beef up their efforts to link users and patrons to the right social media sources for access thereby directly playing their role in public health information and educating users regarding the importance of observing covid-19 protocol. Similarly, social media sites appear to be positively and significantly associated with knowledge-sharing intention.

Challenges of online service delivery during the pandemic

The COVID-19 emergency has made more evident issues the academic libraries have grappled with for years and are yet to be resolved. These issues have become a frequent threat to the smooth operation of academic libraries. Some of the issues are:

Epileptic power supply: Dhawan (2020), asserted that epileptic power supply in Nigeria is an age-long problem which has affected almost every aspect of the economy with no exception to the educational sector. The ICT facilities which are the backbone of which social media tools are deployed use electricity (power) to function. Unstable power supply can affect the efficient use of online library service delivery.

Inadequate Information and Communication Technology infrastructure: Byun and Slavin (2020) observed that relevant authorities have not paid enough attention to acquiring ICT hardware and software that the libraries required to deploy online services delivery, especially during the COVID-19 crisis. Technological infrastructural deficits seem to be the major barriers to the execution of online library service delivery.

Inadequate skilled manpower: The sudden increase of the COVID-19 pandemic forced

Governments worldwide to close all academic activities because student health is of utmost importance. Libraries have been affected by a cut of staff strength to fifty per cent and maintain duty roster while others work from home. Library buildings were accessible with only one door open. This has affected the workforce and the required skilled manpower available at work, to be able to maximize their use in meeting the dynamic information needs of users and contribute meaningfully to the emerging changes posed by the COVID-19 crisis.

Poor budgetary allocation: Libraries and librarians are finding it difficult to cope with library finances to meet their operations as library budgets and allocations from parent institutions continue to shrink in the current economic environment posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, they have maintained their level of relevance in the face of budget cuts by implementing various strategies, to deliver on their mandate.

Research Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive research design, providing a comprehensive overview of the current state of the subject of investigation. The population of the study consists of 110 academic librarians in six state universities in South-South, Nigeria. Questionnaire was used as the data collection tool. Out of 132 questionnaires distributed, 110 copies were returned, which gave a response rate of 91% used for the study. The frequency count was used to analyze the data.

Results

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by University

s/n	Institutions	Respondents	%
1	Niger Delta University	20	18.2
2	Rivers State University	18	16.3
3	Akwa Ibom State University	19	17.3
4	Cross River State University	15	13.6
5	Ambrose Ali University	18	16.4
6	Delta State University	20	18.2
	Total	**110**	**100**

Table 1: shows the number of respondents in each university library that participated in the study.

The result indicates there were many qualified Liberians to man the various libraries.

Table 2: Social media platforms used to render library services during the COVID-19 pandemic.

S/n	Social Media Tools	Frequency	Percentage %
1	Twitter	11	10
2	Facebook	17	15.5
3	Instagram	12	10.9
4	E-mail	13	11.8
5	WhatsApp Messenger	23	20.9
6	Blogs	9	8.2
7	Library website	10	9
8.	Youtube	8	7.3
9.	LinkedIn	7	6.4
	Total	**110**	**100**

Results in Table 2: show that the most predominantly used of the social media tools were WhatsApp, Facebook, Email, Instagram and Twitter. This has enabled the libraries and Librarians to offer skeletal services during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 3: Types of services rendered during the COVID-19 pandemic.

S/N	Services	Frequency	Percentage %
1	Online reference services	16	14.5
2	Information services	16	14.5
3	Current Awareness Services (CAS)	13	11.8
4	Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI)	13	11.8
5	Document Delivery Service (DDS)	6	5.5
6	Remote access to e-resources	9	8.2
7	Abstracting and indexing services	10	9.1
8.	Personal phone	12	10.9
9	Institution repository service	8	7.3
10	Ask-a-librarian service	7	6.4
	Total	**110**	**100**

Table 3: Reveal that online reference service, information services, current awareness service, and selective dissemination information service were the most rendered services by the libraries during COVID-19.

Table 4: Challenges of online service delivery

S/N	Challenges	Frequency	Percentage %
1	Inadequate ICT infrastructure	26	23.6
2	Epileptic power supply	19	17.3
3	Poor budgetary allocation	22	20.0
4	Inadequate Technical skilled manpower	26	23.6
5	Poor accessibility to remote areas	17	15.5
	Total	**110**	**100**

Results in Table 4: show that Inadequate ICT infrastructures and technical skilled manpower are the major inhibitors to online service delivery in academic libraries during the COVID -19 pandemic in south-south Nigeria.

Summary of Findings

The study revealed that libraries shifted all the possible on-site services to online resource facilities through the social media. Whatsapp and Facebook among others were used to deliver skeletal services during the COVID 19 pandemic. This finding is in line with the study by Rohit, Kumar and Bhatt (2022) that affirmed that social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, email, among others, enable patrons to have direct contact with information specialists to ask any questions and get an answer. Therefore, it has been established through the findings of this study that online facilities such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Email, among others were key online facilities used in academic libraries in rendering services during covid-19 pandemic.

The types of services rendered during covid-19 pandemic in academic libraries, reference services, general information services, and current awareness services (CAS), Selective Dissemination services of Information (SDI) were mostly used among other services rendered during the Pandemic. This finding supports Devan and Tripathi's (2021) which revealed that academic libraries provide both traditional and modern ICT-based services during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The challenges the library faced in rendering online service delivery during the COVID-19 epidemic includes inadequate ICT infrastructure, shortage of technically skilled manpower, and poor budgetary allocation were predominant inhibitors. This finding corroborates that of Dhawan (2020), who stated that epileptic power supply is a major concern in Nigeria because there is no guarantee of at least a few hours of uninterrupted power supply.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has altered the way things are done in every sector of the economy, particularly in education and academic libraries. Students and librarians should learn the required skills, knowledge, and abilities to access digital collections and content. Librarians should develop strategies to stay in touch with their patrons at all times, by using internet tools such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Email, Instagram, to promote library materials and services. This will help the organization stay relevant in this time of global health crisis. Academic libraries in South-South Nigeria should take advantage of the opportunities offered by these networks to promote online users' access to information resources and services. Despite the issue of infrastructures and COVID-19 protocols, the adoption and right exploitation of Social media tools or facilities for better and efficient library service delivery to their users is the starting point for libraries to remain relevant in the post-COVID-19 era.

Recommendations

Based on the analysis of the study, the following recommendations were made.

1. Libraries/Librarians should be equipped with online facilities to enable them to render services during the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. As nations go through these difficult moments, academic libraries/librarians should take responsibility and serve the purpose of meeting their users' needs as well as embark on self-development programs to enhance their skills to be relevant in a world of digital divide in times of crisis.
3. Parent organizations should take proactive measures to provide funding to meet the needs and improve on library infrastructure.

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