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Performance Of Vikram Sarabhai Library, IIM Ahmedabad At The Covid-19 Pandemic Period: An Analytical Study

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Abstract

By November of 2019 Covid-19 first emerged in China. After a few months by January 2020, Kerala reported India's first Covid-19 case. Within a few weeks from all corners of the country, it started to report positive cases Central Government announced a complete lockdown in the country from March 25, 2020. The majority of the migrant workers and other state students are trapped in lockdown. In the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad(IIMA) also the situation was the same, but the Vikram Sarabhai Library(VSL) of IIMA extended its services for the trapped users inside the campus physically and for others physically strictly following the Covid-19 protocol. With the help of various technologies and services, VSL was able to do it successfully. Many services already in use and many newly implemented helped the VSL to achieve it. The physical visitor's number declined during the time while the virtual visitor's number showed stability. The book, database & eJournals showed very little usage and the purchase of new books was also less in number. All the data for the study was collected from the VSL website.

Keywords - Vikram Sarabhai Library (VSL), IIM Ahmedabad, Covid-19, Library service, Automated library, Digital library, Virtual library services

1. Introduction

The library is a growing organism, is the fifth law of library science by S. R. Ranganathan. When it is considered in the case of Vikram Sarabhai Library (VSL) of Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad we can understand that it's 100 percent true and the library achieved it through its services. A library can say they were satisfying the fifth law of library science only if they fulfill the other four laws. This study examines whether the VSL was able to maintain that position.

The year 2020 was a challenging year of humankind. Covid-19 spread out all over the world and caused a complete shutdown. The situation in India was also critical and the government was forced to implement a complete shutdown in the country for several months. All the educational institutions in the country started to shut down by the mid of February 2020. But because of many reasons, many were stuck within the campuses for many months. The situation in IIMA was also similar and many students and staff were isolated on the campus.

Vikram Sarabhai Library was set up in 1962 and is one of the best management libraries in Asia. The library is open 24x7. VSLs mission is to facilitate convenient and user-friendly access to current, global and relevant information by identifying, acquiring, organizing, and retrieving information in various formats (print & non-print) to serve the information needs of the academic fraternity of IIMA to meet their teaching, research, consulting, training and learning requirements (Vikram Sarabhai Library, 2021).

VSL is always giving the most priority to its human resources. At the time of lockdown, for the students, staff, and family IIMA provided maximum care and support and the VSL played a vital role in it by providing its services physically and virtually for the users. The available staff within the campus and library trainees helped

to run the library and to provide the services physically and the staff outside worked virtually to achieve it. The library was kept open for the maximum time and provided the services during this period by strictly following the Covid-19 protocol.

As defined by WHO, “Coronaviruses (CoV) are a large family of viruses that cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS-CoV) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS-CoV). A novel coronavirus (nCoV) is a new strain that has not been previously identified in humans” (WHO, 2021) (On The Buzz, 2021) (PAHO, 2021).

Even at the time, all the world was locked down, VSL served users physically by integrating its services. So it's very important to study how VSL can manage the situation using its services and how successful those were. Also important to study its usage over the month during the period.

2. Review of Related Literature

Scanning the existing literature revealed the lack of studies about library services provided by the libraries during the pandemic or Vikram Sarabhai Libraries services. The first case of COVID-19 infection was reported in Kerala, India on January 27, 2020 (Andrews, et al., 2020). And the complete lockdown in India started on March 23, 2020, which halted the physical access to the literature in the academic community. The author discusses the impact of COVID- 19 on higher education in India and has put a few suggestions for continuing education activities of HEIs facing the challenges created by Covid-19 (Mohanty, 2020).

As based on Mary Branscombe’s report, the lockdown has resulted in most people taking to the internet and internet-based services to communicate, interact, and continue with their job responsibilities from home. Internet services have seen rises in usage from 40 % to 100 %, compared to pre-lockdown levels (De, Pandey, & Pal, 2020) (Branscombe, 2020). All these favorable conditions boost the e-learning, e-access of the literature. Many results show the healing of the digital divide during the COVID-19 pandemic (Correia, 2020). The electronic mode of information sharing is not only helpful in education but also helpful in other systems like the health system for sharing information with isolated patients (Hollander & Carr, 2020). A study from Pakistan highlights the three dimensions of the role of librarians during a pandemic; i) support public health awareness by creating and disseminating relevant information, ii) support the researchers, scholars, and faculties, and iii) provide routine services for the regular users (Ali & Gatiti, 2020).

In a study, provided the evidence for sound decision making while selecting any new features or refining the existing features in the services to be planned even after post COVID –19 which will at least reduce the gap that students are likely to experience if restriction to visit the physical facilities of the libraries will continue even after re-opening of the institutions (Dadhe & Dubey, 2020).

The recommendations given by the authors could help libraries proactively create risk communication strategies using social media for effective information services (Liu, Tu-Keefner, Zamir, & Hastings, 2017).

3. Methodology

This work is about the performance of VSL during the Covid-19 period from February 2020 to January 2020. This study is for studying the MoM performance of VSL in different aspects and understanding the physical and virtual access to VSL MoM during the period, various physical and virtual services by VSL, its usage, and resources added to VSL during the period.

The main objectives of this study are,

- To study the performance of VSL during Covid-19
- To understand how VSL able to serve physically and virtually during the Covid-19 pandemic
- To examine how different services helped to meet the user’s needs during the pandemic period virtually and physically
- To examine the usage of library services during the period

The web content analysis research method is used to collect data for the study. Data available on physical and virtual visitors, book transactions, ebooks, and print book added, eJournals, and Database usage are collected from the VSL website. The collected data were tabulated and analyzed using Microsoft Excel.

The limitations of the study are the data collected by visiting the VSL website only. And the parameters of this study are limited to the VSL during the Covid-19 pandemic period from February 2020 to January 2021 and how the value-added services helped the users to access the needed information. So the results of this study are not valid for an overall idea about the performance of VSL before or after this particular study period or the performance of other libraries during the study period. The availability of similar studies was also a limitation for the current study.

4. Analysis and Findings

Figure 4.1: Library Visitors



Figure 4.1 shows the library visitors count at VSL, IIMA during the pandemic. From Figure 1, we can understand the fall and rise in the number of users during each month from Feb 2020 to January 2021. In all these days of the pandemic, VSL managed to serve the users in all the possible ways. Till the library closed access to the external users in march 2020, the library had 998(81.40%), special visitors in February, and 228(18.56%) visitors in March.

VSL had only two-digit average users during the initial months of lockdown. 43(2.13%) users in April to 51(2.53%) in September, which means an average of 47 users per day for 6 months. Table 1 shows the gradual increase in the number of users visiting the library from October in 3 digit numbers and it crosses two hundred in December, 204(10.10%) after many restrictions were lifted and reached up to 273(13.52%) in January. And the trend shows that library usage is coming to normality.

The lowest number of users per day fell to 8 in August from 270 in February and rose to 142 in January. The highest number of users per day fell to 51 in April from 1204 in February and rose to 420 in January. The library had a total of 2019 visitors and 1226 special group visits during this period. Which means an average number of visitors of 168.25 and 613 respectively.

During the lockdown, the entry to the library was restricted to the IIM Ahmedabad inmates staying within the campus and the library ran with the help of staff inside the campus. Library provides the services to users strictly following the Covid-19 protocols and social distancing.

Figure 4.2: Virtual Visitors

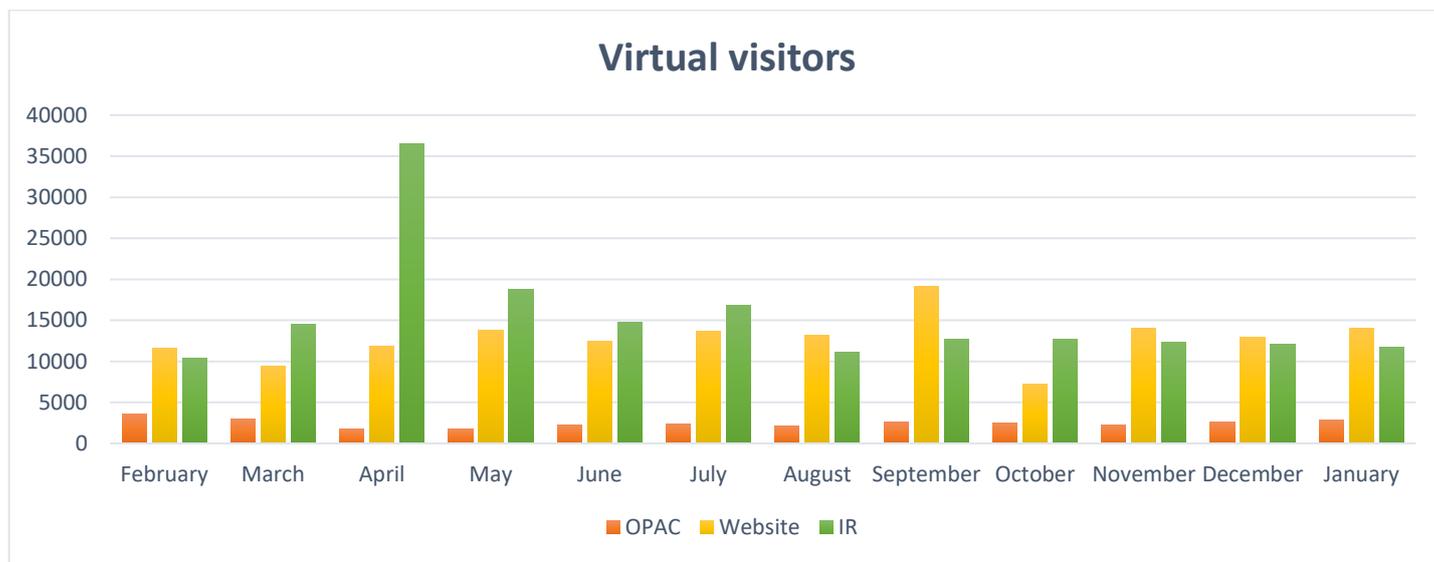


Figure 4.2 shows the virtual visitor's details of the VSL during the pandemic. A total of 29,531 users with an average of 2,460.9 used OPAC for the virtual services provided through it. A total of 1,53,322 users have visited the VSL websites for information. The highest was in February, 3,633(12.30%), and the lowest was in April, 1,776(6.01%). Regarding the website, it shows continuous improvement. From 11655(7.60%) visitors in February, it rose to 14,023(9.14%) in January. The highest number of virtual visitors was in September, 19,185(12.51%) During March and October, it fell to the four-digit number and during October it was only 7,245(4.73%) website visitors.

Regarding IR, it shows stability in the user's number except for the months from March to July. During these months the number of users was around or higher than the average number 15,363 of users. In April it was double the average number of users 36,464(19.78%) and the lowest was in February, 10,351(5.61%).

The pandemic situation causes difficulty for the user to visit the library and access its services physically. But through the advancement in technology VSL can provide the needed services for the user. The library provided needed information virtually mainly in 3 ways. Through OPAC, website, and IR.

4.2.1 OPAC & IR

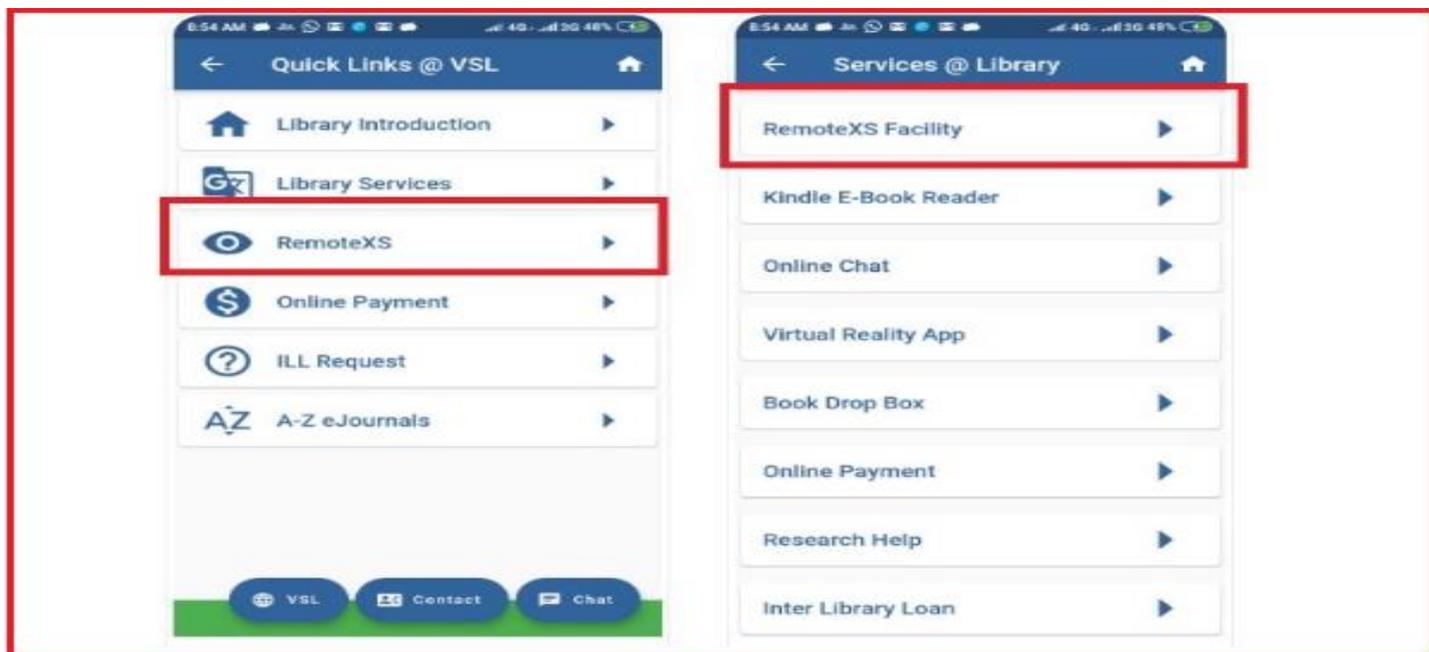
Through the OPAC service, the registered user to VSL can search, hold, renew or pay a fine over the books easily from anywhere 24*7. During the pandemic, this service helped the users to access the library circulation services from their comfortable places.

The Institutional repository service in VSL is provided through dSPACE which is an open-access software package. This service helped to disseminate digital copies of the intellectual output of IIMA for the users.

4.2.2 Virtual Reference service

The needed information, queries, and doubts of the users are collected, and solutions are disseminated through the services. Tawk.to is used for the chat services in VSL, the user can interact with the library staff to solve their doubts live between 9:00 am. to 9:00 pm. everyday.

Figure 4.2.3 Remote Access



The Remote access facility in VSL is provided to the current students and faculties only. This service in VSL is provided through the software RemoteXs. This figure 4.2.3 shows the interface of RemoteXs. Through the service, the users can access library services from their comfort zone. This service helped the users during the pandemic period access VSL services virtually and to access the DataBases, eJournals, articles, thesis, chat with library professionals and for ILL, etc.

Figure 4.3: Book Transactions

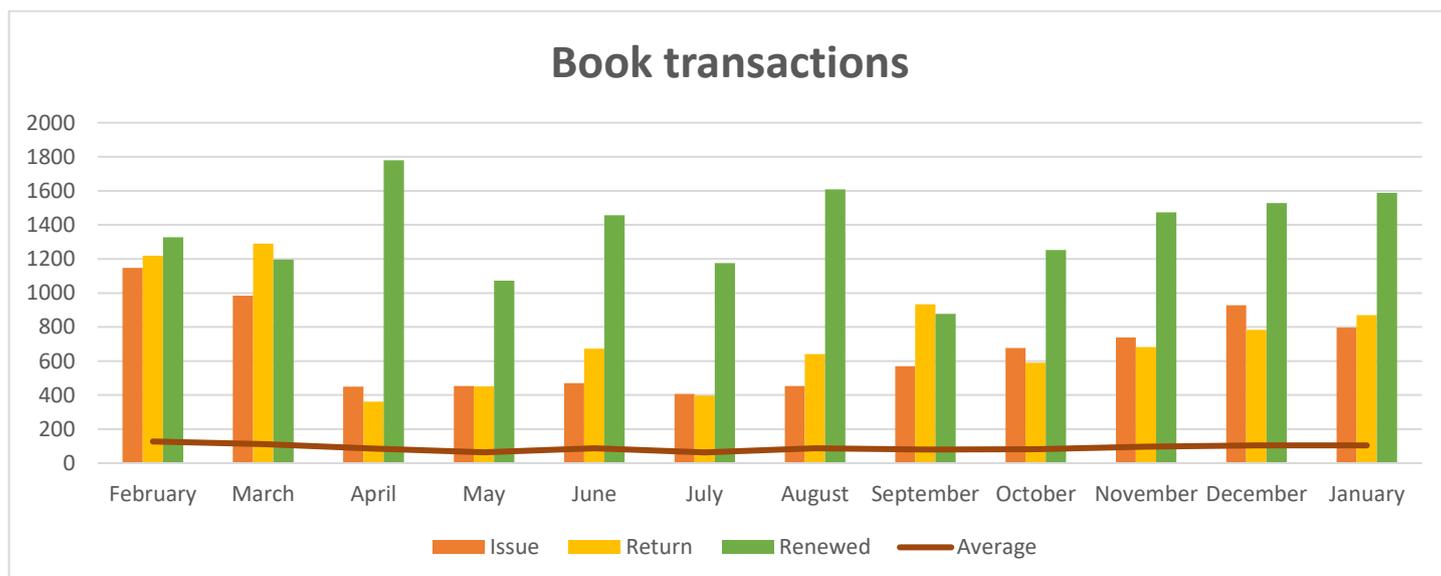


Figure 4.3 shows the book transaction details of the VSL during the pandemic. From the figure, it can understand that, from 1,147(14.21%) items issued during February, it declined to 406(5.03%) in July and from there it shows gradual progress till January, 797(9.87%) with little variations over the months. There are a total of 8072 items issued during the period with an average of 672.67 items per month.

The case of items returned also shows the decline in the number from four-digit number to three digits. The number of items returned also shows improvement over the month with little variations. The items returned during February were 1,219(13.71%) and it declined to 362(4.07%) in April followed by 397(4.46%) in July and with the gradual improvement, it rose to 870(9.78%) in January. And a total of 8,892 items were returned with an average of 741 items per month. The VSL had its lowest average transaction during May and July 63.8 respectively, it shows a decrease in the average number of transactions till July and shows growth from August up to an average of 105 in January.

Regarding the renewal of items, it shows only a slight variation with a marginal increase in the number during the period because of the library policy of auto-renewal of an item till the pandemic situation over or once the library starts to function normally. A total of 16,336 items were renewed with an average of 1,361.3 items per month. The number of items renewed was declined to 878(5.37%) in September from 1,528(9.35%) in February and from October 1,252(7.66%) it shows continuous improvement till January, 1,588(9.72%).

The book transaction showed a decline during the period because of the restrictions and few inmates on the campus.

Figure 4.3.1: RFID Kiosk & Dropbox



VSL provided a 24*7 running kiosk for self-check-in, check-out, or renewal of the books. Through the RFID enabled system library provides the service for users. For using this service, the user needs to carry their RFID ID card. For each transaction, the user will get an email alert, and the staff at circulation help the new users to use the kiosk.

Users can return their issued books through dropbox in the VSL or the new campus. In VSL the user can drop the issued books and will be returned automatically. The user will receive a receipt and book return information mail. In the case of the new campus dropbox, every day by 5 p.m. books will be collected from dropbox and returned through the library software. Once it's returned the user will get a confirmation mail.

During the pandemic time, the RFID kiosk and dropbox facility helped the library by providing a zero contact circulation service and saving time for both users and staff. Through this service, the library was able to keep open during the Covid-19 period but was able to break the chain of corona inside the campus. This system helps the library to keep open the circulation services 24*7 and ensures the security of books from theft.

Figure 4.4: Books Added



Figure 4.4 shows that VSL added a total of 51 eBooks and 1767 print books during the period. The number of eBooks added per month rose to 10(19.61%) books in May, June, and September from 3(5.88%) books in February and the number of eBooks purchased started to decline after September up to 0 in January. During this period the purchase of print books starts to decline from February's 343(19.41%) books. The lowest number of book purchases was in May, 61(3.45%).

The reading habit, demand for books, and purchase suggestions were increased during the period. But the problem with purchasing the print book was the Covid-19 restrictions like lockdown. The local vendors were the only source to get the books and for them, it's difficult to get out-of-stock books and for VSL to purchase books from far away vendors and eCommerce platforms were also difficult.

Figure 4.4.1: Kindle eBook Reader



Kindle e-book Reader Lending Service is a unique service provided by VSL. At present, the library has a total of 20 eBook readers with access to 1 million titles for free through Kindle unlimited eBook subscription. Amazon's Kindle Paperwhite & Kindle Voyage is used for the service. As like a book the user can place hold

over the eBook reader. The item is issued for a loan period of 15 days with a single renewal. At a time, a single Kindle is issued by the user with up to 10 books that can be kept in it.

The fine system was waived off for the Kindle eBook reader at the time of the pandemic and the restrictions for the renewal were also lifted during this period. The Kindle eBook reader helped VSL provide maximum items to a user through the minimum transaction and direct contact and able to encourage and support paperless reading. The eBook reader and its unlimited package helped the users to access maximum information through it and to avoid library visits.

4.4.2 eBook Databases

VSL provides eBook access for users through 13 eBook databases. Which provides 2,77,836 eBooks for users in different subjects, the collection varies from management, economics, finance, fiction, etc. In many eBook databases, VSL subscribed only to management, commerce, finance, or economic content. eBook database services are provided by major publishers like Sage, Taylor & Francis, Oxford, Emerald, etc.

These contents can be downloaded as a PDF file direct or can be downloaded and read through the registered Kindle eBook readers.

Figure 4.5: eJournals and Database Usages

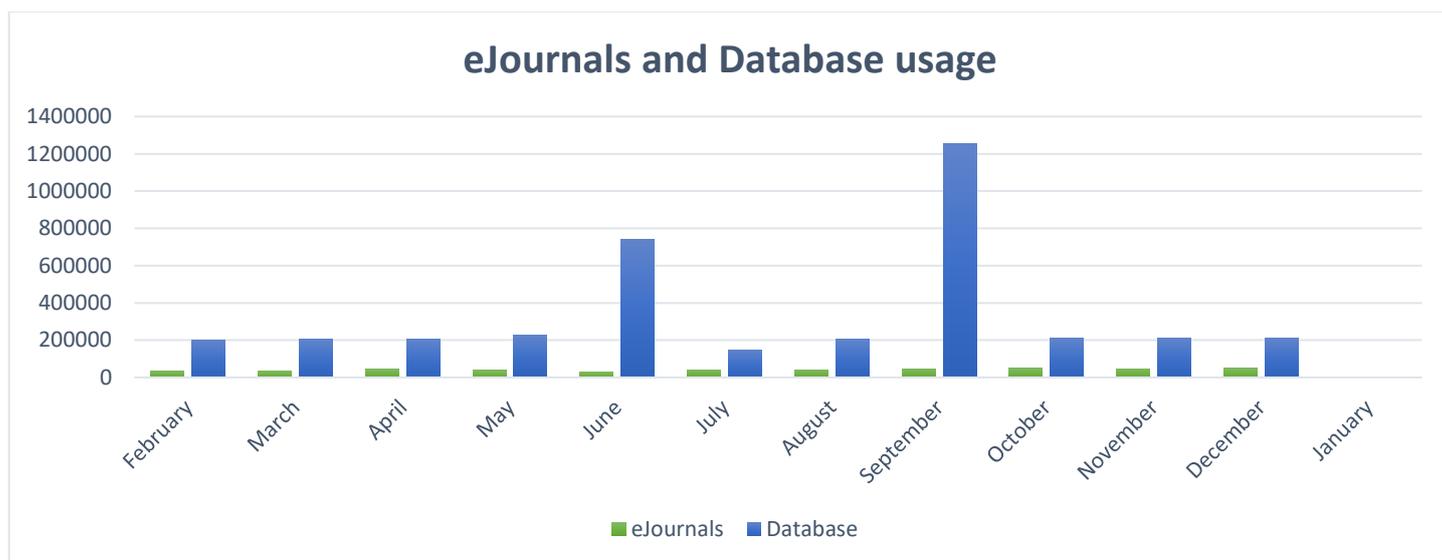


Figure 4.5 shows that VSL users had accessed a total of 4,58,942 eJournals with an average of 41,722 per month. The usage of eJournals shows stability from February to December. In February the usage was 35,591(7.75%) and it rose to 49,235(10.73%) in December. The least number of access was in June, 31,045(6.76%).

Regarding Database usage, there are a total of 38,15,406 times databases used by the user during this period with an average of 34,68,55 times per month. This shows the variation in usage count in each month from February 1,99,869(5.24%) to December 2,11,243(5.54%). The usage counts rose to 7,41,616(19.44%) in June and reached the maximum at 12,52,312(32.82%) in September. The lowest number of usage was in July, 1,49,138(3.91%).

The majority of the students are accessing the database services from the cyber lab within the library. The majority of the students accessed their needed information from the standalone databases like Bloomberg, ACE

MF/Equity, Refinitiv, Datastream, etc. But due to the pandemic, the usage from the library decreased and it reflected on the total usage. At the same time, the usage of eJournals shows stability in the same period.

4.5.1 Database

The VSL had a total of more than 165 databases for the users. The databases in the library are IP accessible or login required. Some databases are standalone which are accessible from the library cyber lab only. Except for a few of these, other databases can be accessed anywhere from the campus or through remote access at any time.

4.5.2 eJournals

VSL provides eJournals that can easily be accessed through EBSCO Discovery service covering 29,534 journals under 68 different subjects. The user can access these at any time from anywhere using remote access.

4.5.3 Research Assistance

The VSL also provides research assistance for the users in various ways. Through the dedicated Research Assistance options on the website, a user can submit a query, request for an article, book, or book chapter, request for research training or orientation, directly go to the research support tools and databases.

4.5.4 Subject Guide

The subject guide is the subject-specific list of resources available in the library. This list helps the user to easily find out the needed information from the vast collection. Through the subject guide, the user can company information, industry information, and socio-economic indicators.

5. Discussion

This study aims to fulfill its objectives and help the librarians, users, subject experts, and policymakers to identify how an institution can manage its activities during the pandemic period and provide the services physically and virtually by strictly following the Covid-19 protocol. This study also examines the innovative ideas adopted in different services in the VSL to automate and make the services faster. These services with prejudice help the VSL to handle the situation successfully.

The VSL provided services for the users within the campus physically with help of available library staff. The number of library visitors and transactions of items decreased during this period. The RFID kiosk and dropbox helped the users and VSL staff to make circulation service contactless and fast and break the chain of Covid-19 inside the campus. At the same time, the virtual usage of library services through IR, OPAC, and website showed stability during the period. The virtual reference services through email and Tawk.to helped the users to solve their queries from their safe places and the remote access helped the user to explore and access the VSL services virtually. The reference service in the library did such a good job to solve the heavy traffic of queries during the period.

The usage of eJournals shows stability while the databases show variation usage month to month. Databases and eJournals are the main sources of information for the scholars in IIMA. VSL has a subscription of more than 165 databases and 29,534 eJournals in 68 subjects. All these services helped VSL to meet its user's needs during the period.

This study faced the limitation of data collected visiting the VSL website only, and the study gave an idea about the performance of a particular period of February 2020 to January 2021 only. Also, this result is not valid to get an idea about the performance of other libraries during the same period.

Another important limitation was the availability of previous studies on similar topics. It became a challenge as well at the same time it opened the opportunity for the researchers. This study can be a foundation for future studies in similar topics and can be useful for other libraries and policymakers to make and implement plans to meet similar

situations in the future. This study keeps opening the opportunity for future studies on VSL, IIM libraries, and other libraries on similar topics.

5. Conclusion

The study on the performance of VSL during Covid-19 shows how challenging it was to meet the user need for the pandemic period. Many were isolated inside the campus and worried over their studies, career, family, and themselves. For them, VSL extended its support both physically and virtually using existing and new services. The staff who are inside the campus served from the library while others worked virtually from home. There are fewer users during the period who accessed the VSL physically while others accessed it virtually.

The library encouraged the virtual usage of the library using OPAC, IR, and Remote Access. The accessibility of libraries using these services showed stability during the period. The book added to the library was comparatively very less and the book traffic was also less and it was done through the self-check-in/out kiosk and dropbox. The reference service in the VSL did a great job by helping the users to solve their queries and disseminate the needed information through email and Tawk.to chat application. This study clearly shows how VSL using the latest library services faced the challenge and succeeded and became a model for other libraries, institutions, systems, and policymakers on meeting such situations in the future.

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