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AT THE TIME OF SOCIAL DISTANCING DUE TO COVID-19
LOCKDOWN: A STUDY AMONG THE LIBRARY PROFESSIONALS
AND STUDENTS IN INDIA**

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EFFICACY OF SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES IN LIBRARY SERVICES AT THE TIME OF SOCIAL DISTANCING DUE TO COVID-19 LOCKDOWN: A STUDY AMONG THE LIBRARY PROFESSIONALS AND STUDENTS IN INDIA

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Abstract

The ongoing outbreak of Corona virus Disease (COVID-19) compelled the world to begin a new way of life. Social distancing is the best way to prevent the spread of it. Currently, the entire library system around the world is being closed, facing hard choices. Even at this drastic time, the library and its services cannot be completely closed. Libraries are to be reassigned and should reach out to users at the same time as respecting the rules and restrictions around social distancing. Social networking sites (SNSs) provide the library a new and exciting way to reach out to users. SNSs due to their popularity are globally used to exchange various kinds of information. This study was to assess and evaluate the use and awareness of library professionals and students to exchange and share library services during social distancing due to COVID-19 lockdown via SNSs in India. The outcome of the study suggested the necessity of SNSs in the library to exchange and share the services.

Keywords

Social Networking Sites (SNSs), Library Professionals, COVID-19, Lockdown, Social Distancing, Library Services

1. Introduction

There are many ways and means used in the library platforms to share and exchange library services. Right now, SNSs are the largest platform where real-time information can be shared among users from highly personal to academic needs. The latest development and advancement in the area of information and communication technologies necessitated library professionals to move with excessive speed and urgency into the web-enabled programs. Other than the library platforms, people make use of SNSs to share information in different situations. The

public accesses SNSs to acquire needed information and exchange their opinions and suggestions. Lifang Li and collaborators conclude in their study that social media platforms help the concerned authorities and individuals to understand the many types of information especially the situational information during emergencies¹. The world as a whole faces a need for social distancing due to the pandemic COVID-19. In such a desperate circumstance, the responses of library professionals and students must be urgent, comprehensive, and should immediately supply library services and sources to those most in need. This study is an observation among Indian library professionals and students in their use of SNSs to share and exchange library services efficiently and effectively even at the time of social distancing due to COVID-19 lockdown.

2. Literature Review

The study by Ansari and Nazim infers that social networking tools may be used as an interactive platform for LIS professionals to reaching out their various categories of users; young generation professionals are more active and feel comfortable through their techno-savvy nature compared to the traditional way of providing serving services². At present, the library must be changed according to the digital needs of library users. The study unquestionably agrees that library professionals cannot keep themselves aside from the use of social media in the LIS domain due to the popularity of social media. This study ends by finding a symbiotic relationship between the libraries and social media, and the important key between them is library professionals³. SNSs are important tools for libraries and to satisfy the ever-increasing users demand for information⁴.

Researches in the area of SNSs during disasters have concluded that they are the additional channels to communicate disaster-related information in order to create a better understanding of the ongoing situation. SNSs create a kind of collective awareness basically because of their capability to provide real-time and factual Information⁵. The latest study conducted by Lifang Li *et al.* concludes, social media platforms help the authorities who come up with proper emergency response strategies and situational information. It is identified that authorities and public obtain immediate help or aid during COVID-19 when the related posts are shared by them through SNSs⁶.

3. Objectives

The followings are the objectives of the study.

- i. To assess the awareness of library professionals on SNSs.

- ii. To evaluate the role and use of SNSs in the library services during the time of social distancing due to COVID-19 lockdown.
- iii. To make a list of important SNSs used by library professionals.
- iv. To analyze the need for practice in the area of SNSs during the time of professional studies and to suggest for future preparedness.
- v. To analyze the capability of library professionals to share and exchange the library services effectively through SNSs.

4. Library Professionals and SNSs

Generally, library professionals are librarians, lecturers, research scholars, technical assistants or students. The recent developments caused to have fundamental changes in the role and skill of library professionals and outdated the traditional concept. The traditional librarian was taking care of a library and its records. Traditional skills of librarians are still relevant but professional survival is possible by moving with new developments and fundamental changes. At the present age, only the skilled and experienced one will survive and those with only traditional concepts will disappear without a trace. So library professionals should be familiarized with new technologies. The experts perceived that the traditional library model would not be replaced by a virtual one, but the traditional model would undergo significant changes, especially about accessing information outside the library⁷. It becomes the duty of library professionals to educate the library users to access various information through forthcoming technologies. It is reported in various researches and studies that SNSs would govern the main part of the library in sharing and communicating knowledge similarly to all users. SNSs are one of the modern techniques to market library networks, products, services and to have perpetual relationships with users. Various kinds of SNSs are used by library professionals and students for the promotion of their services and marketing of the products. WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, LinkedIn, Blogs, Snapchat, Telegram and Instagram, etc. are some of the SNSs.

Boyd and Ellison defined SNSs as web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system⁸. Later they redefined it. It is an online environment where users can also produce and insert content at the disposal of their contacts or the entire community⁹. It emphasizes that the content is the power behind social networking. Thus SNSs can be considered as web-based platforms through which people can connect and interact with each other. SNSs maintain progressing touch with other library professionals, users as well as other

libraries. The availability, sharing, and exchange of desired information to the users within a short time are some of the main advantages of SNSs. It becomes possible for the library to carry out some activities by the arrival of SNSs which were not possible before.

5. COVID -19 and Social Distancing

The novel corona virus appeared in December 2019 in Wuhan, the capital city of Hubei province and a major transportation hub of China¹⁰. Studies conclude that it is transmitted through droplets created when an infected person coughs or sneezes or through something that has been contaminated with the virus.¹¹WHO named this virus infection as Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) on 12th February 2020 and considered social distancing as one of the preventive measures. It means to increase the physical space between people to lessen the chance of spreading. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi calls for social distancing as one of the key concepts to protect the nation from COVID-19 when he addressed the nation on television on 19th March 2020. Later the central government was forced to announce complete lockdown as the death toll from COVID-19 rose. The ongoing studies of COVID-19, health care, and media exposure recommend the responsible use of SNSs to spread the most up-to-date and current information to the public¹². Social networking sites (SNSs) make a huge influence on society. They play a big role in political, social, commercial, economical and entertainment industry fields with many novel strategies and advertisements.

As the country recommends practicing social distancing, libraries have stopped programs in which people spend long periods together. At the same time, certain libraries have closed reading rooms, some are allowing people to collect books on appointment either inside or outside of the building and still some libraries have closed and gone fully online. It is reported that many of the library associations and libraries have started social media campaigns to facilitate remote access to library collections and services specially to academic publications and articles to help learning and research to continue¹³.

6. Methodology

The survey method is used for this study. A structured questionnaire was prepared and circulated among library professionals and students by e-mail, and SNSs. A total of 200 questionnaires was distributed, and 170 of them had responded. The response rate was 85%. It was conducted in between 31st March and 08th April 2020 (The study started and ended during the lockdown period).

7. Data Analysis and Interpretation

The data collected were analyzed statistically. Considering the total responders, 56.5% of them were females, and 43.5% were males. 52.9% of responders were library professionals and the rest belonged to students. The study concluded that 95.3% of them had access to SNSs.

7.1 Role of SNSs to communicate about library services

Figure 1 discusses the role of SNSs in communicating library services. When 33.5% of responders strongly agreed with the argument, 57.10% agreed that SNSs were necessary to communicate about library services. Though very less, 8.2% had taken a neutral position.

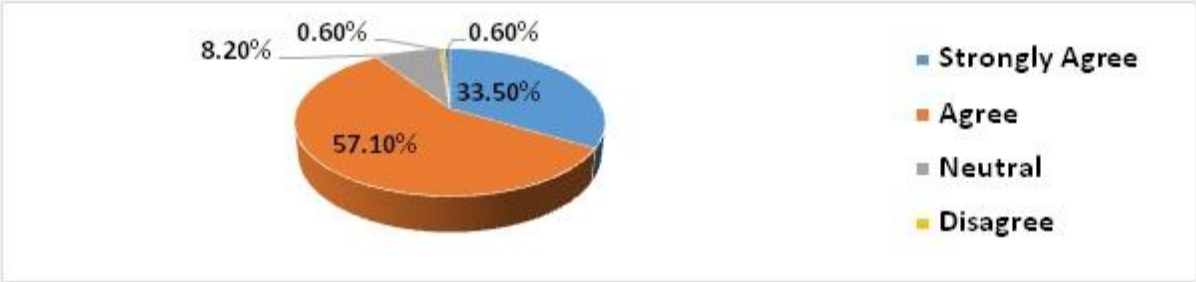


Figure 1:Role of SNSs to communicate about library services

7.2 Use of SNSs to reach out to library users

Figure 2 explains the relation between SNSs and library users during social distancing. It was concluded that 42.9% agreed that SNSs were always used to reach out to library users. Among them, 27.6% agreed that during social distancing, SNSs were used to maintain the relation with library users.

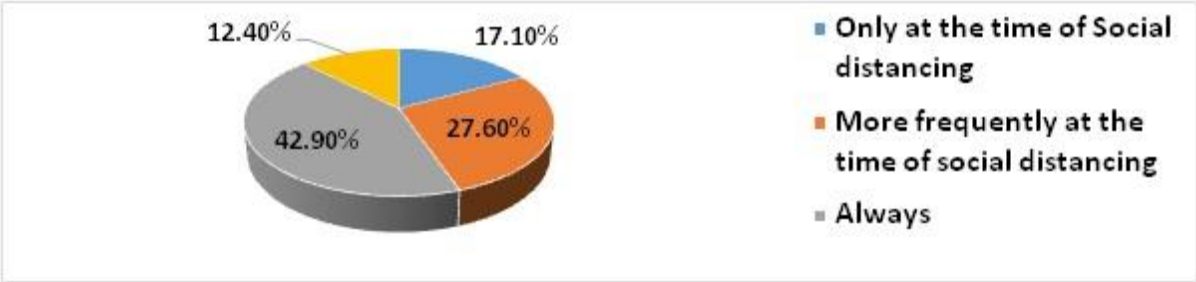


Figure 2:SNSs to reach out to library users

7.3 Use of SNSs to provide library services

It was the area of study to conclude when library professionals and students had started to use SNSs to provide library services. Figure 3 proves that they started to use SNSs before COVID-19 to share library services. 15.3% started to use SNSs.11.8% of responders stated that they had never used SNSs to provide library services.

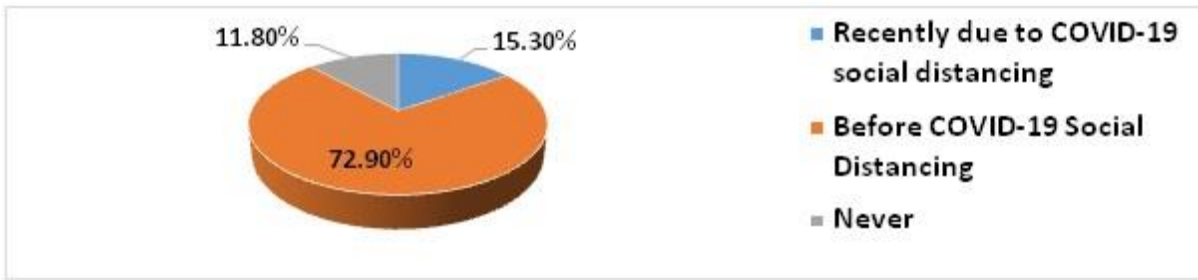


Figure 3: Use of SNSs to provide library services

7.4 List of SNSs used by Library Professionals and Students

When responders were asked to select any four of the following SNSs namely Facebook, LinkedIn, Snapchat, YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, Blog, etc. Majority of them selected WhatsApp (figure 4). Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram came second, third and fourth positions respectively. It gave the idea of SNSs that were relevant in the library platform.

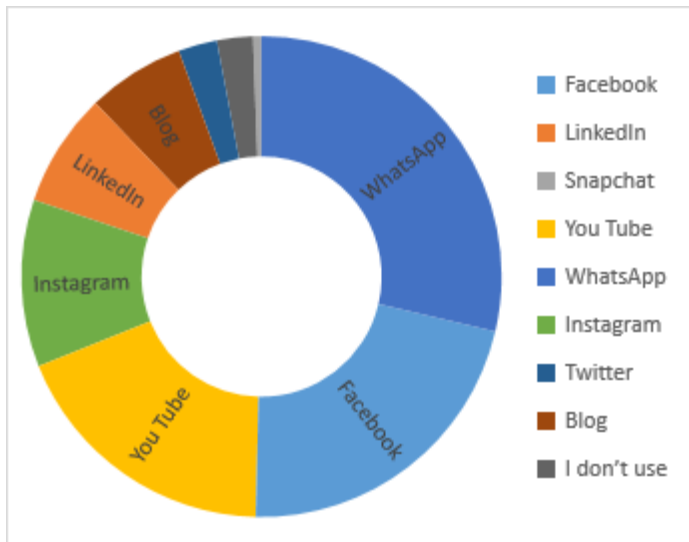


Figure 4: List of SNSs

7.5 Devices used to access SNSs

Figure 5 is related to the devices used to access SNSs. The majority (85.9%) used mobile phones to access SNSs. Mobile phones can connect to the internet and run apps from anywhere and at any time. Meanwhile, access to laptops/desktops and tablets were rarer.

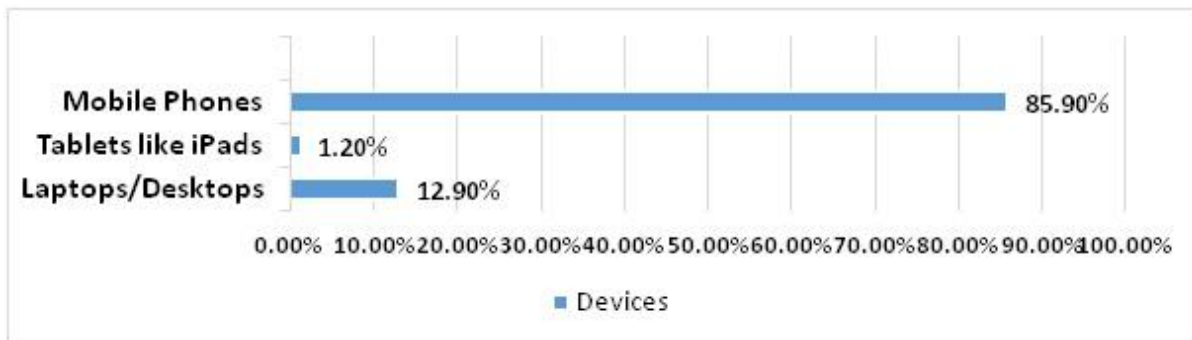


Figure 5: Devices used to access SNSs

7.6 SNSs, the effective tool during social distancing

SNSs create network communication among library users. 26.5% strongly agreed that SNSs were effective tools to reach out to users in communicating library services during social distancing (figure 6). 50% of them agreed with the same statement. Though it was only 14.1% who strongly disagreed with the statement, it should be noted for further studies.

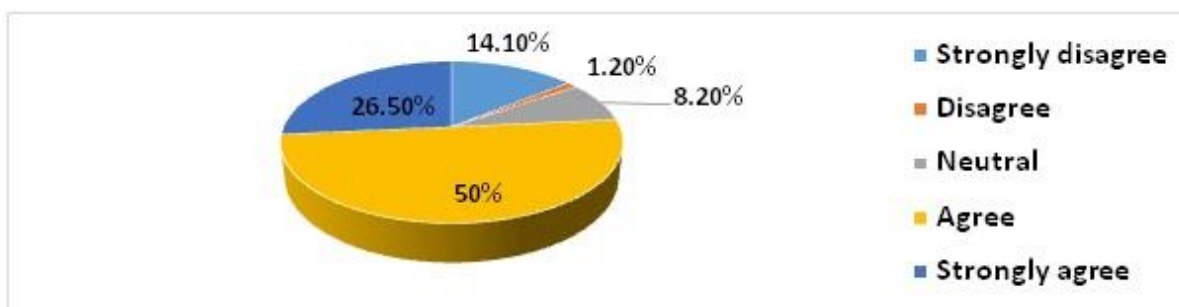


Figure 6: SNSs, an effective tool in the library

7.7 Awareness and Ability of Library Professionals and Students in using SNSs

The majority of responders (92.4%) were aware of the availability of library services in SNSs. According to the responders, 7.6% of them were not aware of the same. 81.8% of them confessed that they were well versed in using SNSs. 18.2% agreed that they needed direction and orientation in proper use of SNSs. Around 61.8% agreed that they learned to use SNSs in the library platform as part of the syllabus. Though it is only 38.2% who stood with the statement that the syllabus was not sufficient for learning SNSs.

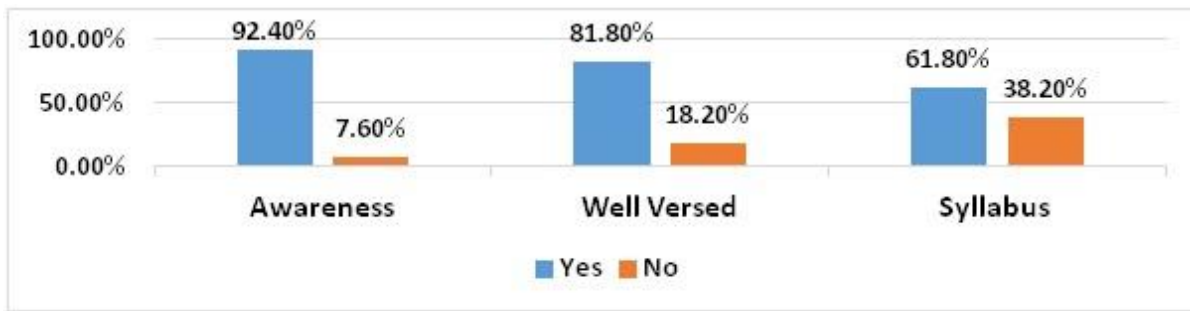


Figure 7: Awareness and Ability of Library Professionals and Students in using SNSs

7.8 Source of learning to use SNSs

To the question, how responders learned to use SNSs, 46.5% accepted of the self-study. At the same time, 37.1% learned to use SNSs as part of their professional studies. Still, 15.3% learned to use them from various other sources. 1.2% of them didn't use SNSs.

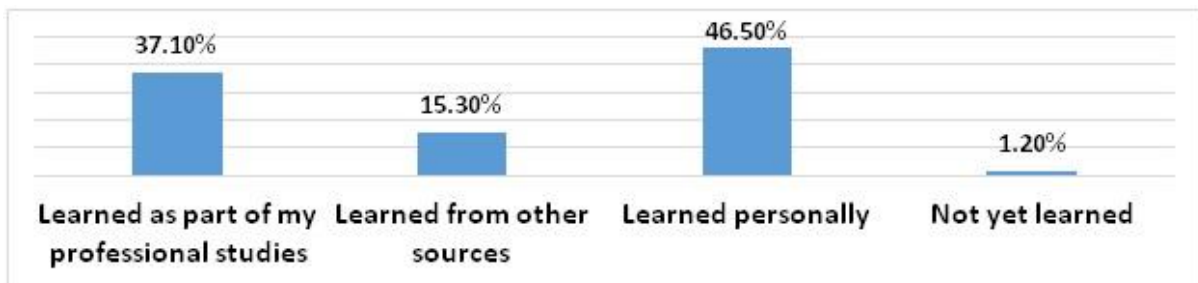


Figure 8: Source of learning to use SNSs

7.9 Barriers in using SNSs during social distancing

Figure 9 shows the barriers faced by responders in sharing and exchanging library services during COVID-19 social distancing. 39.4% faced technological barriers. Only a slight difference was there among the other two categories 'no barriers' (22.9%) and 'other kinds of barriers' (20%). Contextual barriers, the other category were faced around 6%.

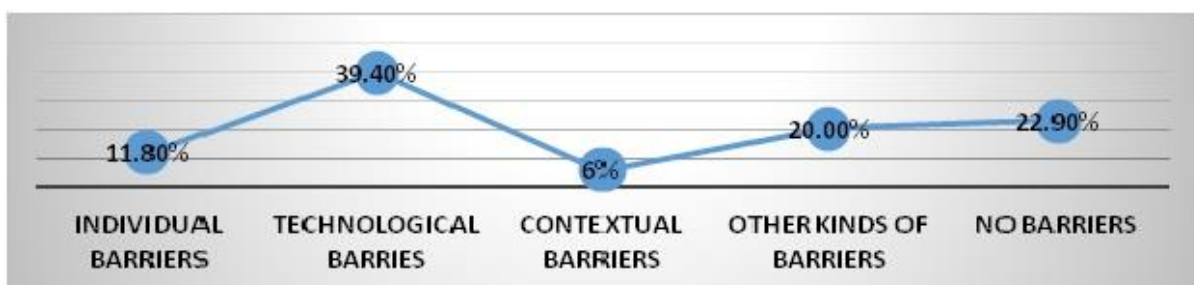


Figure 9: Barriers in using SNSs during social distancing

7.10 Social distancing forced library professionals and students to use SNSs

The main duty of library professionals is to make available the resources to users. Due to various reasons, it may not be possible always. Many of the activities and functions in the library were blocked due to COVID-19. The question was whether social distancing forced

library professionals and students to communicate library services through SNSs (figure 10). When 14.1% strongly agreed with the statement, 50.6% agreed with the same. 23.5% were having a neutral position. 8.2% and 3.5% strongly disagreed and disagreed with the statement respectively.

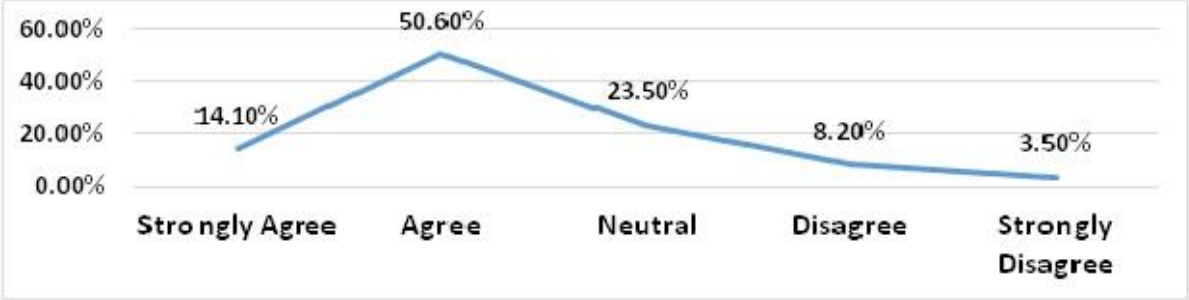


Figure 10: Social distancing forced to use SNSs

7.11 Future use of SNSs to communicate library services

The feedback to the question of using SNSs in the future, 82.9% of responders noted that they would use them in the future in comparison to other indicators, such as ‘no’ and ‘maybe’.

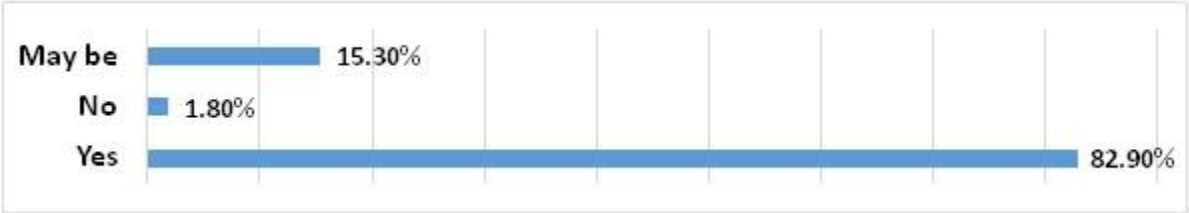


Figure 11: Future use of SNSs in communicating library services

8. Findings

The following findings can be summarized in this study.

- Most of the library professionals and students have access to more than two SNSs and they are aware of SNSs.
- Many of them agree that SNSs have a specific role in communicating, organizing and disseminating library sources, products and services.
- As part of the professional studies, they become aware and well versed in using SNSs.
- Though the physical presence of the user is decreased due to COVID-19 social distancing, they maintain persistent relations with library users through SNSs.
- Even before COVID-19 social distancing, SNSs are used by them in the library platform.
- WhatsApp and Facebook are the two main SNSs used in the library platform.
- The mobile phone is used more than desktop or laptop or iPad to access SNSs.

- Social distancing has forced them to apply SNSs for efficient and effective communication with users and faced technological barriers while using SNSs.
- A large number of them agree that SNSs are necessary to share and exchange library services even when social distancing and lockdown happen again.
- LIS education throws them into deep ends of concepts and meanings of recent techniques and technologies, and be prepared enough to manage and apply them in information resources, services, and technologies.
- Library professionals and students responded to the questionnaire when it was reached out to them through SNSs especially WhatsApp and Facebook. Many of them did not respond to the e-mail at first. It was a personal experience.

9. Suggestions

- Sherpa speaks of the proactive information professional role of a librarian¹⁴. Library professionals should move from a passive intermediary role to guide patrons to information services towards analyzing and repackaging information services responsibly and effectively.
- To continue a perpetual relation with library users, professionals should know both their areas of needed information and SNSs they use to acquire the same.
- The role of library professionals should be an educator in future. It is not based on the technological competence only but service to people.
- Social networking is a personal experience. Users are accustomed to texting or chatting or messaging with an individual, not an institution. The personal quality is missing from many library sites¹⁵. It is needed to maintain the personal experience with the users by using SNSs.
- Infections of COVID-19 make quick changes in health conditions, daily life, social relationships and economic sphere all over the world. These consequences are key lessons and basing on them library professionals should open up new possible actions to set more stable, sustainable and effective ways to disseminate library services.
- To avoid the risk of infection from COVID-19, there is a chance of having reverse quarantine order. The library platform must prepare enough to meet their information needs if such a situation happens.

10. Conclusion

The outcome of the study gives a practical outlook to library professionals and students in the use of SNSs to share and exchange library services. Beyond the traditional ways to reach out

to library users, SNSs give new options for professionals to reach out to them. In this scenario, they must grab the full potentiality of the SNSs. They need actual experience other than tabletop or simulation exercises. Last few decades, there are many catastrophic events befell on humanity just like giant asteroid hit and nuclear war. But pandemic diseases have been listed in the highest position always. The particular study concludes that though libraries were caught off-balance in the first days of lockdown due to lack of proper planning, they recovered equilibrium very quickly. SNSs are popular in the field of the library and information science as they have low barriers to reach to users. It would be a great mistake to believe that once the deeply distressed and disturbing experience passed, we would go back to normal. By confronting the present challenges, we should build up future principles, policies, and proposals. It can be summed up briefly that both the library profession and the use of SNSs complement each other.

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