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Skill Sets Essential For Librarians In The Post-Pandemic Scenario: A Study On Librarians In The Higher Education Institutes In The State Of Goa, India

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SKILL SETS ESSENTIAL FOR LIBRARIANS IN THE POST-PANDEMIC SCENARIO: A STUDY ON LIBRARIANS IN THE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTES IN THE STATE OF GOA, INDIA.

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Abstract:

The Covid-19 pandemic has necessitated a tremendous shift in library services. Librarians need to equip themselves with the necessary skills to provide efficient services to the users. The objective of this study is to discover the digital skills possessed by the librarians and to evaluate the services that they are providing during the post pandemic era. Survey research was adopted and a structured questionnaire was used to collect data from the librarians working in the various higher education institutions in the State of Goa, India. Of the 64 institutions, 45 (70%) library professionals responded. The study found that most librarians lack the digital skills necessary. However, they are taking the necessary efforts to provide the services and keep the libraries going.

Keywords:

Covid-19, digital skills, library services, Web 2.0, digital library services

Introduction:

The outbreak of the Covid-19 Pandemic has brought about social and economic changes, with no exception to the field of education. Online classes have changed education dynamics in countries like India, where the traditional teaching method is more prevalent than virtual teaching. Technological changes in education took place quickly, and the pandemic forced the Indian education system to adopt technology in every possible way. Faculty members were offered online skill-based courses to acquire online teaching skills, enabling continuity in teaching programs. Likewise, the librarians also had to gear themselves with skills to deliver library services using digital technology.

Literature review:

In the past, society has witnessed the role played by libraries in providing essential information services amid emergency crises. Academic libraries are the core hub of information for the students, faculty, and researchers. Libraries are known to provide authentic and reliable information sources to satisfy the varying information needs of their users since their inception. With time, the needs and the techniques of information seeking have changed, and the libraries have established themselves as information providers with the changing times.

Although the librarians are attributed in making considerable contributions to the affected communities, Zach (2011) found that the librarian's significant role during the crisis is to protect their library collection and sustain to provide library services to the users. The Covid-

19 Pandemic has prompted the librarians to assess, modify, and expand their existing online offerings rather than requiring them to start from scratch (Walsh & Rana, 2020). The library professionals should possess digital skills since providing digital services seems to be the only way the librarian can extend the library services to the users during the lockdown period.

UNESCO (2018) defines digital skills as a range of abilities to use digital devices to access and manage information. Therefore, to provide adequate services, the librarian should possess computer literacy, web literacy, and manage digital resources and communicate effectively in a digital environment.

In their study, Ali and Gatiti (2020) reveal that the librarians in Pakistan supported their patrons by providing references, literature searches, conducting literature reviews, and document delivery. The study further identifies some of the key roles the librarians can play during the pandemic. Apart from maintaining the desired library services to the researchers and the academicians, the librarians can promote awareness on public health, control the spread of misinformation regarding the pandemic and also seek support from the publishers for free access to scholarly literature.

According to Asif and Singh (2020), scanning chapters from books and journal articles and offering them via chats or e-mails, listing the various resources available in the library and updating them regularly, creating valuable tutorials for the patrons, and uploading on library website are some of the virtual library services that librarians can offer to its patrons during the lockdown period. Adil (2020) recommended that librarians deliver online information literacy instructions through social media networks and develop online institutional repositories and library guides.

Many librarians use social media tools to provide information to the users about the various events. Patrons using these apps will receive alerts once any information is updated on the social media tools that would keep them updated. 'Text notifications' through mobile devices or 'mailing lists' can be used by librarians to share updates or personalized information to selected users (Okike, 2020).

Librarians can support teaching by creating and offering course-oriented information skills online courses that would enable the students to enhance their information skills (Walsh & Rana, 2020). Short self-paced courses on information searching, information retrieval, plagiarism, information ethics, and the like can be designed and offered on the library portal to take such courses as per their convenience.

When teaching-learning is digital, libraries also need to create and offer more platforms to access their e-resources. Librarians can collaborate with publishers so that the patrons can access other e-resources, thereby declining the digital divide. Information sources and services can be offered through digital library platforms (Tsekea & Chigwada, 2020). According to Chisitia (2020), libraries can provide web links of reliable web resources on their digital library platforms so that the users get access to authentic and relevant information. Information resources that the users highly demand can be scanned and uploaded to the institutional repository. While doing so, libraries have to confront copyright issues to augment the digital services to their patrons (Pokorna et al., 2020).

In addition to satisfying all the educational and research needs of the users, Cox and Brewster (2020), in their paper, take the librarian's role a step further by supporting the mental health

and well-being of the students in times of crisis. The emotional well-being of the students can be achieved by providing health awareness and offering e-resources for recreational purposes.

Objectives of the study:

1. To identify the measures employed by the librarians in providing library services during the Covid-19 pandemic.

2. To ascertain the digital skills possessed by the librarians.

3. To examine the role of librarians in promoting online teaching.

Methodology:

A quantitative study was conducted to study the skills possessed by the academic librarians of Goa, India, to impart library services to the users during the Covid-19 pandemic. The survey method was used to collect data from the academic librarians working in various college libraries in Goa, India. A structured questionnaire was constructed using Google Forms and mailed to the librarians of 64 higher education institutes that offer programs in pure science, engineering, medical science, social sciences, management, sports, and others. Forty-five librarians responded to the questionnaire; hence a response rate of 70% was achieved. Data provided on the library websites were also used in the study. The data were analysed using MS Excel and presented using tables and figures.

Data analysis and findings:

Availability of web OPAC

With the advancement in information technology in libraries, the traditional card catalogue shifted to OPAC that can be accessed via the LAN and further to Web-OPAC that helps link the library resources with the help of the internet. A library catalogue is a mirror that reflects the library collection. The catalogue reveals the availability of any document in the library.

During the pandemic, when the users are banned from physically visiting a library, the web-OPAC comes to one's aid to explore the library collection from their homes. This question, therefore, aims to find the number of libraries offering web-OPAC to their users, and the responses are depicted in the following figure no. 1

Figure no. 1
Availability of Web OPAC
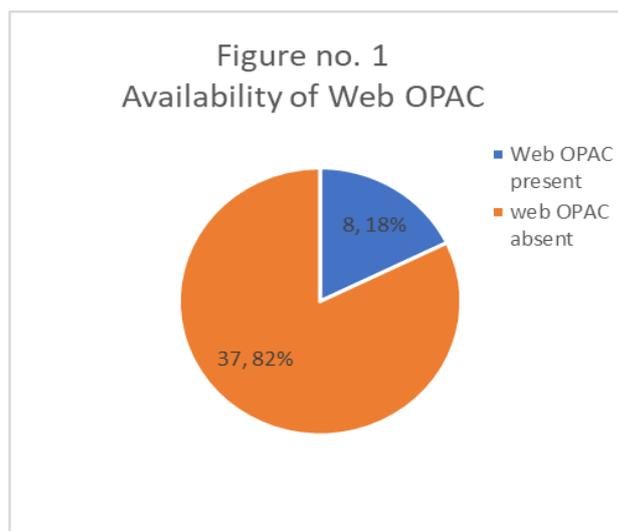
From the above figure no.1, we can analyze that web-OPAC is available in 18% of libraries under study, whereas 82% of libraries do not offer web-OPAC to their users. During the pandemic, when the users are not permitted to visit the library physically, the web-OPAC comes to one's aid wherein the users can explore the library collection from their homes. Though all the college libraries under study are automated, the OPAC is made available only via a local area network that can be accessed from the institute's campus.

Web 2.0 tools used to provide services:

Significant studies have revealed that librarians have used web 2.0 tools in providing digital services to users. When inquired which web 2.0 tools were used by the librarians to provide virtual services, the responses provided are revealed in the following table no. 1.

Table no. 1: Web 2.0 tools used to provide services

	Frequency	Percentage
e-mail	34	75.5%
Chat	21	46.6%
Social media	22	48.8%
SMS	15	33.3%

Table no. 1 reveals the web 2.0 tools used by the librarians to provide virtual services during the pandemic. The respondents were given to choose more than one provided option. The results showed that e-mail was used by 75.5% librarians, followed by 48.8% using social media sites like Facebook and Whatsapp, 46.6% used the chatting facility, and 33.3% used SMS to provide services in a digital environment. Thus, e-mail is the most widely used tool to provide virtual services.

In addition to the print sources, libraries subscribe to various e-resources like databases, e-journals, e-books, etc. The users should be able to access them from their homes during the lockdown period through remote access. Usually, the e-resources are displayed on the library website and can be accessed through the users' login credentials. Digital skills like computer literacy and web literacy are essential to provide services in this technological era. The following questions in table no. 2 were asked to assess the digital skills of library professionals.

Table no. 2

1. Does the librarian manage the website?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	28	62%
No	17	38%
2. Are you aware of remote access software?		
Yes	9	20%
No	36	80%
3. Can the library users access the subscribed databases from home?		
Yes	35	78%
No	10	22%
4. Is the library partially/fully digitized?		
Yes	15	33%
No	30	67%

Table no. 2 reveals that 62% of library professionals manage their websites. Managing the website by themselves gives them the advantage of promptly uploading content, keeping the website updated, and providing efficacious services. The library website is the main interface that can be used to provide access to library resources. All the library resources and services can be displayed on the library website, making it easier to utilize them. The access to e-resources can be provided by a suitable remote access software. However, from table no. 2, it can be seen that only 20% of librarians are aware of remote access software and utilize it to give access to its users. Users of 78% of libraries can access the library databases from their homes, which is a huge relief during the lockdown period. These libraries have commonly subscribed to the NLIST consortium of e-ShodhSindhu that can be accessed by allotting user-id and password to every user. To enhance the usage of library resources, the library staff can digitize some of the library resources while simultaneously taking care not to violate copyright laws and upload them on the digital library platform for the benefit of the users.

Role of librarian in supporting online teaching and research:

The internet offers numerous e-resources that can be freely accessed. The majority of the users are unaware of them, and the librarian supports teaching and research when these free e-resources are linked on an institution's website. The responses to whether library websites had links to free resources are depicted in figure no. 2.

Figure no. 2
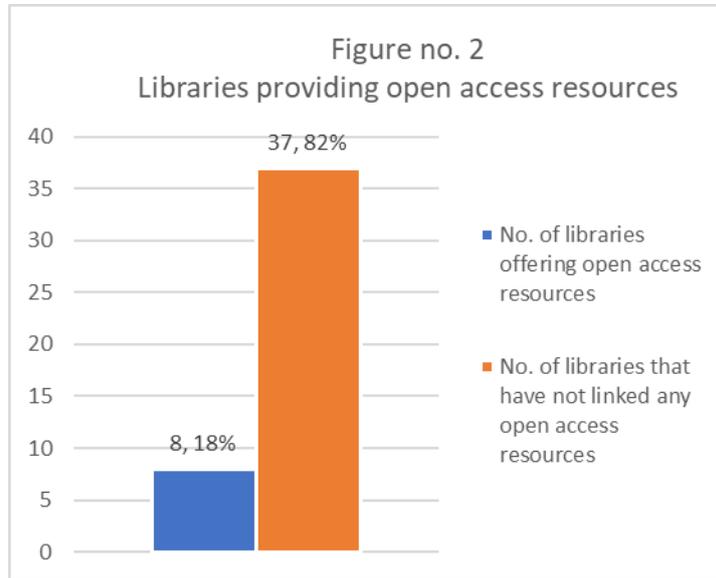Libraries providing open access resources

Figure no. 2 reveals that 82% of librarians have listed and linked the various free e-resources on their library webpage. Linking the e-resources gives an added advantage to the users as they can browse more information resources from their remote location.

Librarians conduct orientation and other programs for the users to educate them in making the best use of the library resources. The librarians can orient the users by creating videos and uploading them on the library web page during the lockdown period. Hence, the librarians were asked whether they know how to create videos using any suitable software, and the responses are revealed in figure no. 3

Figure no. 3
Awareness about software for creating videos
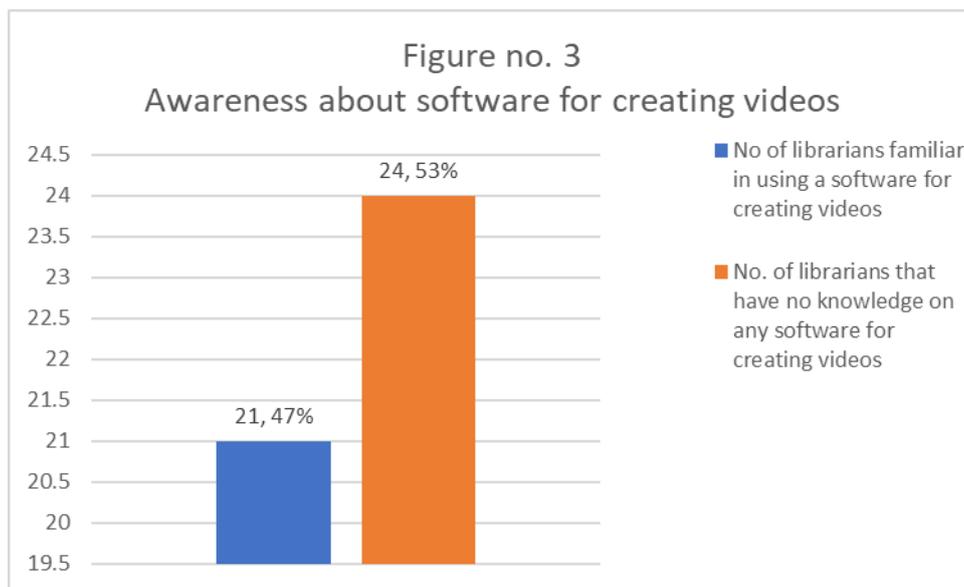
It can be seen from figure no.3 that 53% of librarians do not know how to create videos, and only 47% know to create videos using suitable software.

There is a shift in research communication from the traditional subscription form to the recent open access publishing wherein the research information is made freely available to the researchers. If researchers are informed about open access publications, they can access them to satisfy their research needs. Therefore, when asked whether the respondents were aware of open access publishing, the responses are illustrated in figure no. 4.

Figure no. 4
Awareness about open-access publishing
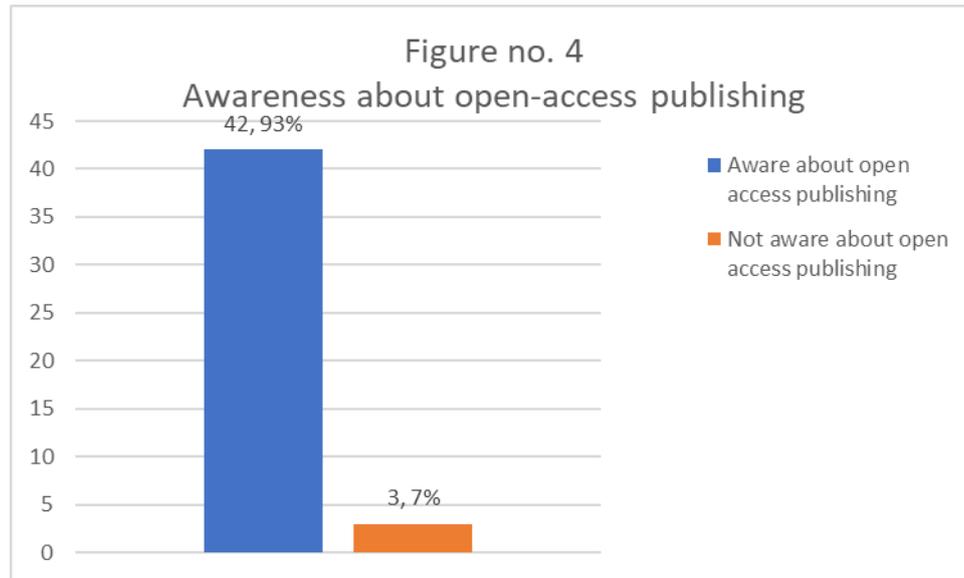
According to figure 4, 93% of library professionals are aware of open access publishing, whereas only 7% do not know about open access publishing.

Conclusion:

The Covid-19 pandemic has affected all the spheres of the society. People had to submit themselves to the various situations brought out by the pandemic. In libraries too, new strategies were adopted and implemented to endure the situation. The librarians had to depict their digital skills to provide services to the library users. This study aimed to evaluate the digital skills of the librarians from the higher education sector and their approaches during the crisis. The study found that the librarians are keen in providing library services however, most of them lack the digital skills necessary to provide these skills during the pandemic. Updating oneself through self-learning by attending various workshops and short-term courses can help to build the necessary skills.

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