

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)

Libraries at University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Winter 10-20-2020

EXPERIENCE OF AN ACADEMIC LIBRARY DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Mathias Gabriel Kasa
mgkasa@abu.edu.ng

Abdulsalam Yusuf
Kashim Ibrahim Library, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria, abdulsk89@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac>



Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Kasa, Mathias Gabriel and Yusuf, Abdulsalam, "EXPERIENCE OF AN ACADEMIC LIBRARY DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC" (2020). *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)*. 4456.
<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/4456>

EXPERIENCE OF AN ACADEMIC LIBRARY DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Kasa, M. Gabriel (CLN, PhD)¹ and Abdulsalam Yusuf (CLN)²

¹Department of Library and Information Science

Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria

²Kashim Ibrahim Library,

Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria

Abstract

The study shared the experience of an academic library during the COVID-19 pandemic in a Nigerian University. The study was a descriptive survey to purposively sample 2687 subscribers to the library social media platform “the Telegram” used to disseminate library services. The findings revealed that there were more males (83%) than female (17%) subscribers, a total of 446 information resources were disseminated through provision of their links (402), as pdf (31) and Jpeg (8). Applications, documents and videos were the least formats used which was challenged by inadequacies of working from home, poor infrastructure and lack of working space, as well as data subscription was paid from staff pockets. In conclusion, the global pandemic was acknowledged to affect the academic library positively and negatively. Recommended was that demographic elements of the telegram group should be expanded, institutional repository hosted by the library should be leveraged on and acquisition of electronic gadgets should be done immediately.

Keywords: Academic library, COVID-19, pandemic, social media, telegram

Introduction

Nations around the globe are scrambling to end the spread of the COVID 19 pandemic which like the Spanish flu has flared-up a worldwide wellbeing crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic was attested by the World Health Organization (WHO) on January 30, 2020; and by March 11, 2020 the WHO pronounced the emergency as a pandemic (Jegede, 2020). The United Nations Education and Scientific Council (UNESCO) press released on COVID-19 dated 24th March 2020 provided perturbing revelations of “the number of students whom academic activities have been affected by academic institutions closures in 138 countries has nearly quadrupled to 1.37 billion, representing more than 3 out of 4 children and youth worldwide. In term of teaching personnel, nearly 60.2 million teachers are no longer in the classrooms (UNESCO, 2020). These challenges have significantly affected library’s roles of facilitation and support to the institutions to attain their academic objectiveness, even though the libraries are close to physical contact, it does not mean that they are not providing services through online and virtual/remote approaches.

The online services have become order of the day, first, to ensure that public services which have been paralyzed by the pandemic, the closure of academic and classes due to different regimes

of lockdowns and restrictions, and second to guarantee that access to information resources and services is provided to their respective community. Therefore, as libraries around the world are being affected by the emergence and spread of the corona virus, the situation has caused libraries around the globe, particularly academic libraries to mobilize and provide a collection of valuable and reliable information in order to give people trusted and reliable information for decision making. Ladan, Haruna and Madu (2020) gave instances of different types of libraries initiation which designated e-resources for specific group of students to help the student community in the difficult situation rising out of the suspension of physical classes and closure of physical libraries arising out of COVID-19 lockdown.

In Nigeria, the management of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria on Tuesday 24th March 2020 disseminated through its special bulletin a “stay-at-home” directive in compliance with the Federal government’s commitment to contain the spread of COVID-19 in the country (Ahmadu Bello University Special Bulletin, 2020). The consequence of such directive to contain COVID-19 have been enumerated by Jacob, Abigeal and Lydia (2020) to disrupt academic activities on higher institutions thereby also reducing international education, disruption of academic calendar, cancellation of local and international conferences, responsible for teaching and learning gaps, loss of workforce in the educational institutions, and cut in budget of higher education.

Worthy of note is the ways by which COVID-19 usurped every other academic activity directly or indirectly related the objective and roles of academic libraries in Nigeria. In specific terms, in early March 2020, COVID-19 blindsided academic libraries with little time to plan for the safety of patrons and employees as well as to enforce the directive of the Federal government, the presidential task force on COVID-19 and the management of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. The Kashim Ibrahim Library (headquarter of the university library complex) was moved to provide information resources and services using social media supported platform that is interactive, friendly, popular and ensure that there is strict compliance with the work from home order by the federal government.

Considering the demographic pressure of the library community and the emergency needs to provide access to resources and services for over 30,000 patrons of the library, the library consider the use of a social media platform that could continue the professional and para-professional facilitating roles at different chain of teaching and learning, and are able to observe all the guidelines to contain the spread of COVID-19. The library resorted to identify a social

media platform that is capable of accommodating the five tiers of categorized stakeholders of the library. These comprised of library staff (professional and paraprofessional), postgraduate students, undergraduate students, academic, and the non-academic staff of the university who the library staff (receive and provide) should interact with and respond to their queries according to their information needs.

Telegram was the first choice to continue communicating and providing access to resources and services to satisfy the needs of its users. It was first launched on August 14, 2013 (for iOS) and for Android launched on October 20, 2013 (alpha version). Telegram is a messaging app that can be used on all devices at the same time. It sync messages seamlessly, has speed and security across any phones, tablets or computers. Messages disseminated comprise short messages, photos, videos and files of any type (doc, zip, mp3, mp4, app, link), as well as create groups for several hundred as members. It could serve as channels for broadcasting to unlimited audiences (telegram.org/faq, 2020).

The choice of Telegram is borne from the understanding that it function like short messaging system (SMS) and email combined, and takes care of individual personal or business messaging needs, and support end-to-end encrypted voice calls and with 2GB cloud storage to store all data it appealed to the library to exploit for the discharge of her responsibilities such as Q&A (support replies, mentions and hashtag), (keep communication of the library large communities). Like the institutional repository, Telegram has provision to appoint admins who could help the specific communities respond to their queries as subject specialists. Though the focus is the stakeholders, Telegram has rooms for visitors who are likely to join, freely discuss and collect feedback from the library and its patrons.

Brief on Ahmadu Bello University Library complex

The Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria was established in 1962 and became the premier university in northern Nigeria (Anonymous, 2011). By 2020, it has 13 faculties, a postgraduate school, college of medical sciences, 94 academic departments, five research-based institutes, and a division of agricultural colleges. Student enrolments into the university's degree and sub-degree programs is at about 35,000 admitted from within and outside Nigeria (international communities). Its main library is the Kashim Ibrahim Library which also serve as headquarter of the university library complex.

The university library complex comprises the Kashim Ibrahim Library, eleven other satellite libraries located in faculties, research-based institutes, and the 94 departmental libraries supporting and facilitating teaching, research and learning in the university.

Problem statement

Academic library role of facilitation and support have been altered by the unsolicited COVID-19 pandemic and the resultant stay at home globally. Services offered by these organ of tertiary institutions were halted. It became uncertain when the pandemic will be over and obvious to come up with measures to curb the menace it is likely to create such as expanding gaps of existing poor access to information and causes of ignorance. Use of social media is among the new platforms that facilitate dissemination and interactive services of the new normal during the COVID-19 era. Institutions of learning and research needed to be salvaged, and organs such as academic libraries are failing in their statutory responsibilities which should not be allowed to persist. This study is our shared experience of an academic library during the covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria.

Objectives

The main objective of this paper is to enumerate the experience of Library complex of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The specific objectives are to:

1. determine the demographic distribution of registered communities of the library complex telegram group;
2. find the monthly disseminated resources and sources of information for the Telegram group members, and
3. examine the implications of the challenges enumerated by the Telegram administrators on effective service delivery

Literature Review

Demographic and social media use

Social media use has become dominant in most discourse that factor the influence of the internet on effective communication, knowledge sharing, collaboration, and feedbacks related service support. This implied that every human being is a key player, however, each with certain category of prevailing tendencies when the focus is on the use of social media. Ahmed, Hanif and

Meenai (2015) averred that “children and youths are quick adopters of internet for uses such as communication, education or entertainments” (p.32).

The varied populations possess characters which influence the use of the internet platforms it support and the attraction therein. Demographic factors such as age, educational level. Gender, income and marital status play significant role to understand internet use dispositions irrespective of the combination of the factors during investigation. Studies have reported that demographic factors dispose assumptions such as male use the platforms more for the purpose of downloading and for purchasing items, while female use is most for messaging and social networking. It is also premised that younger users are most active than older users for diverse purposes (Chan & Fang, 2007). Ahmed *et al.* (2015) affirmed people between ages of 16 -25 use the social media platform more than those between 46 – 55 years

Antoun (2015) opined that exploring demographic factors to investigate internet use could expose the different attributes of internet users such as the extent of digital divide, device divide, and usage divide. He found females to be significantly associable with internet use than male, and recorded a decrease for age in a monotonic way from 87.9% among respondents aged 18 – 24 to 50.6% among those aged 65 and older using bivariate. According to Bilgic, Duman and Seferoglu in Kilic and Güzeller, (2017), demographic studies on the use of internet could facilitate understanding of composite elements of digital natives, review their information needs in education, and pedagogical approaches most appropriate to attract and retain them (Kilic & Güzeller,, 2017).

Another aspect which demographic impulse of social media users in academic library is pertinent is for facilitating the underscoring of teacher-student, and stakeholders-library relationship. The latter should provide the best educational environment that ensure the objectives of the tertiary institution is achieved (Sheikh-Abdullah, 2016).

Dissemination of information using social media supported platforms

In several climes, the purpose of dissemination of information using social media platforms include for research, accessing information, and social networking (Kilic & Güzeller,, 2017). Some authors were specific on roles and influence of social media, for instance, social media platform such as Facebook have shown the tendency to reposition future design of curriculum (Noh, *et al.*, 2013). DeWitt *et al.* (2013) suggested YouTube for the dissemination of information in the field of performing arts education.

In Nigeria, studies revealed the use of social media in the library is to offer on the spot library services to patrons (Ezeani & Eke, 2011). Social media and library services are increasingly being embedded for reasons such as it ease communicating, provide large net worth publicity and instant feedback for library effectiveness and efficiency (Idiegbeyan-Ose *et al.*, 2016). It is also observed from literature that social media use has infiltrated distinguished library services and taken a global phenomenon such that libraries utilize the platforms to provide opportunities to access services and resources on one hand, on the other support and allows interactions that is contributory and knowledge-based focused. The dissemination of information take the forms of audios, applications, text, pictures, and videos. The gadgets required include hand held devices and computers that are connected to the internet.

Quadri and Idowu (2014) reported statistically that about 73% of libraries situate the use of social media for current awareness services, 63.3% for reference services, 56.7% for selective dissemination of information and 58% for library orientation. The advantages of using social media for the dissemination of information have been itemized by Taylor and Francis in Idiegbeyan-Ose *et al.* (2016) to comprise that; (i) social media ensures feedback from users thereby enhancing library services evaluation; (ii) social media increase users of library content; (iii) social media makes publicity of library events, programmes and service cheap; (iv) social media ensure connection and interaction with other libraries and librarians; and (v) social media requires little or no training on the interfaces because they are very user friendly.

Challenges associated with Social media utilization for the dissemination of library services

Literature have revealed that challenges abound on the use of social media from the thrust of patrons' perspectives as well as libraries providing the services through their proxies (staff). These two fronts when independently assessed and evaluated could help proffer solutions such as purpose of use, perception, behavioral pattern, real-time response and choice of a platform for information dissemination and services. For instance, when the concern of students are addressed, education would be improved, it will ripple to the lecturer who are aware that access to teaching materials and the preparedness of the student towards the next class is inevitable. On the part of the library, effectiveness and efficiency, diligence and responsiveness to stakeholders' contributions cannot be jeopardized. Reiterating the challenges associated with the use of technologies, Ajuwon and Popoola (2014) blamed the limitation of telecommunication infrastructure such as internet and leveraged on that fact that it is poorly developed and deployed,

connection cost is high an impediment for obtaining sufficient international bandwidth and for paying for international tariff.

Working from home which globally was advocated for was not sustainable because of the challenges of a “third force” which is power outages. There are concerns shared by other authors on Nigerian institutions such as large number of staff and students do not have free access to the internet. These stakeholders are responsible for the payments from their pocket. The internet diffusion study on Africa revealed that 43.2% university lecturers in Kenya have access fees to the internet paid by their institutions, whereas only about 13% of their counterparts in Nigeria had internet access fees paid (Oyelaran-Oyeyinka & Lal, 2003).

Methodology

This paper describes the library’s strategy that was used to meet the needs of its end-users during the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria. The approaches used are the authors’ personal experiences working at an academic library, observations of the library’s responses with respect to Telegram quarries, as well as the reflections among the professional and paraprofessionals who served as administrators of the Telegram project in terms of challenges. It highlights the current initiatives to provide information resources and services during a COVID-19 crisis.

The ABU library complex Telegram was created on 10th May, 2020 to fulfill the pressing request of its patrons incapacitated by the “stay-at-home” directives of the Nigerian government. Therefore, as a case study it was comfortable to use combinations of statistics and metrics on the platform which has 4 major headings that could quantify and traced all activities performed. The sampling technique was purposive to ensure that only the outcomes of the administrators’ responses to queries were considered. The data used for the study was collected from the day of the group creation (10th May, 2020) to 31st August, 2020. The study period covers about four months which was the likely period the government directives could be reviewed in the country.

Findings and Discussion

Table 1: Demographic distribution of registered communities of library complex telegram group.

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	2,230	83.0
Female	457	17.0
Total	2,687	100

Source: Survey, 2020

Table 1 shows that there are 2230 male and 457 female members subscribed to the Telegram, which sum equals 2687 members. This implies that both the males and the females' patrons of the library subscribed but with greater percentage of males compared with the females. Several suppositions have been advanced by other authors, for instance, Antoun (2015) who contradicts our findings with more female subscribers and significantly associated them to the use of social media. Further analyses such as age, and marital status was deficient because they were not readily assessable which were also pointers to the extent of use and influence of demographic factors to predicting subscription onto social media platform (Kilic & Güzeller, 2017).

Table 2: Monthly dissemination of information sources and resources on the telegram group.

Months	Types of shared files							Total
	Pdf	App	Links	Doc	Audio	Jpeg	Video	
May			8					8
June	4		189	1	1	8	1	204
July	13		111					124
August	14	1	94		1			110
Total	31	1	402	1	2	8	1	446

Source: Survey, 2020

Key: pdf – portable display format; App – applications, links – links, Doc – document, Audio – audio files (mp3, mp4), jpeg – images and picture support platform, and video – video support files (YouTube)

Table 2 shows the monthly dissemination pattern of sources and information resources on the Telegram platform. In total there are 446 sources and resources of various file format that was shared across all the 4 months to the community of library complex Telegram group. These include different types of files shared and format. The results statistically showed that links dominated

because it comprised different sources of information such as the hypertext transfer protocols, digital object identifiers and other interfaces known to the Telegram administrators to provide access to information needed by the patrons. Also disseminated are shared files in response to the users' queries.

The results according to monthly statistics showed that in May, 8 links was provided for the dissemination of shared information throughout. However in June there was increase transactions and a total of 204 resources and sources of information disseminated. This include 4 pdf files, 189 links, 1 word document, 1 audio, 8 jpeg files which contains pictures and 1 video. There was a drop in July to 124 sources and resources disseminated, that include 13 pdf files and 111 links. In August there was a further drop to 110 sources and resources in response to the user's queries. Fourteen (14) pdf files, 1 App (application), 94 links and 1 audio comprised resources and sources of information disseminated.

The results in Table 2 indicates that dissemination of sources and information resources using social media is new to the library complex patrons, which nevertheless is not new to Nigerian academic libraries (Ezeani and Eke, 2011). The roles of the social media platform chosen for the dissemination of information has been reiterated for numerous benefits. Those of this study agreed with the findings of Idiegbeyan-Ose *et al.* (2016).

Experience of the Library with challenges caused by working from “home directives”

Telecommuting was a sudden decision for the library because of the “new normal”, it therefore necessitated a drastic change in the library services. The fall out was caused by the fact that the library employees were not equipped with technologies at home to be able to effectively and efficiently work from there. It severed challenges in some cases because working remotely was never envisaged and no provisions was readily available because of the locked down that regrettably made the library not effective with services delivery.

In the process of learning to do their work at home, some library staff have experienced frustration due to various problems such as inconsistent internet services providers', timelines variations and in most cases these library staff pay for data/bandwidth from their own pockets.

The limitation of working from home increase by experiencing difficulty caused by factors such as library colleagues not being able to collaborate, support each other on the social network subscribed by the library. Many staff became hesitant, irritated and negative emotional feelings set in. These negative emotions that prevailed include staff isolation, anxiety, uncertainty and stress.

Some complain of not having a private working space at home. The library retooling effort was also affected in terms of sustaining the confidence and ability of library staff to explore and use the right tools to provide virtual services efficiently, confidently and comfortably during the pandemic period.

Challenges abound on the use of social media platforms for service provisions that are out of reach and control in libraries of developing countries, those identified by this study were corroborated by Ajuwon and Popoola (2014) for Nigeria, and on a larger scale by Oyelaran-Oyeyinka and Lal (2003) for the continent of Africa.

Conclusion

The global pandemic has impacted both positively and negatively on library services, users and effectiveness of library personnel who provide these services in many ways. The changes are visible and pronounced on operating traditional models, practices and corresponding interfaces. The challenges of using social media platforms affected library staff and patrons. Some of the challenges have opened the door for libraries to learn, become more equipped and fast tract the use of technologies. On the other hand, it suggest creativity and collaboration to ease past the unforeseen barriers such as the one created by COVID-19. Even though, the COVID-19 crisis has brought the use of Telegram for the library complex in a manner that were in the past unseen or non-existential simply put have demonstrated that the potential of the library to provide an all including and free e-content using the online platform is doable. The global pandemic and other disasters cannot and should not rattle the essential role of a university libraries before, during, and after with appropriate and responsive measures put in place.

Recommendation

The following recommendations are made from the findings of the study:

1. The demographic element accessible from the Telegram group was shallow, it is pertinent to expand it in order to help the library obtain demographic constructs that can be used to underscore stakeholders, the information dispersed to them and categorize the response according to their status as well as aid decision making. Particularly to be included should be patrons status (staff, (academic or non-academic staff), student (undergraduate or postgraduate), community, faculty, and department.

2. The dissemination of information sources and resources on the Telegram group did not include large number of links to the institutional repository. It is recommended that there should be extensive use of the repository for the dissemination of information since it cater for faculties, departments and fields of specialization in the university, and also for the fact that it is the centralize storage of all types of institutional output, including unpublished literature, it could also enable the library to keep track of, and analyze research performance of the library stakeholders within the confine of creative commons and digital management systems.
3. As library services are extensively integrating and migrating onto several social media platforms, it is obvious that provision of ubiquitous services (virtual) cannot be ignored. Therefore, it is recommended that electronic gadgets that support social media platforms be acquired and data be subscribed for the purpose of the prescribed library function it was designate to achieve.

References

- Ahmadu Bello University Special Bulletin (2020). Corona virus update: stay-at-home directive. 2 (2), ISSN: 0345-0749.
- Ahmed, R. R., Hanif, M., & Meenai, Y. A. (2015). Relationship between demographic and internet usage. *Journal of Information Engineering and Application*, 5 (10), 32 – 38.
- Ajuwon, G. A., & Popoola, S. O. (2014). Influence of internet accessibility and demographic factors on utilization of web-based health information resources by resident doctors in Nigeria. *African journal of medicine and medical sciences*, 43(Suppl 1), 61.
- Anonymous (2011). Postgraduate student's handbook (2011 – 2013). School of Postgraduate studies, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. Zaria::ABUP, pp. 80 – 82.
- Antoun, C. (2015). Who are the internet users, mobile internet users, and mobile-mostly internet users?: Demographic differences across internet users subgroup in the U.S. In: Toninelli, D., Pinter, R., & de Pedraza, P. (eds.). *Mobile Research Methods: Opportunities and Challenges of Mobile Research Methodologies*, pp. 99 – 117. London: Ubiquity Press. DOI. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5334/bar.g>. License CCBY4.0.
- Chan, K., & Fang, W. (2007). Use of internet and traditional media among young people. *Young Consumers* 8 (4), 244 – 256.
- DeWitt, D., Alias, N., Sitaj, S., Yaakub, M. Y., Ayob, J., & Ishak, R. (2013). The potential of YouTube for teaching and learning in the performing arts. In: *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 103, 1118 – 1126. doi: 10.1016/j.sbspro.2013.10.439.
- Ezeani, C.N., & Eke, H.N. (2011). Transformation of Web 2.0 into Lib 2.0 for Driving Access to Knowledge by Academic Libraries in Nigeria. In 48th National Conference and Annual General Meeting of the Nigerian Library Association. Theme: Knowledge Management for National Development. HEBN Publishers, Ibadan, p.80.
- <https://telegram.org/faq> (2020). Basic questions about Telegram. Accessed on 24th September, 2020
- Idiegbeyan-Ose, J., Ifijeh, G., Segun-Adeniran, G., Fagbohun, M., & Esse, U. (2016). Library professionals and social network sites: Use, relevance and challenges from university libraries in Ogun State, Nigeria. *DESIDOC Journal of Library & Information Technology*, 36 (6), 417-423 DOI: 10.14429/djlit.36.6.10406
- Jacob N. O., Abigeal I., Lydia A. E. (2020). Impact of COVID-19 on the higher institutions development in Nigeria. *Electronic Research Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 2 (II), 2706 – 8242.
- Jegede, D. (2020). Perception of undergraduate students on the impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on higher institutions development in Federal Capital Territory Abuja, Nigeria. *Electronic Research Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 2 (II), 2706 – 8242.
- Kilic, A. F., & Güzeller, C. O. (2017). Demographic factors affecting internet using purpose of high school students. *Malaysian Online Journal of Educational Technology*, 5 (1), 34 – 45.
- Ladan, A., Haruna, B., & Madu, U. A. (2020). COVID-19 pandemic and social media news in Nigeria: The role of libraries and library associations in information dissemination. *International Journal of Innovation and Research in Educational Sciences*, 7 (2), 2349–5219
- Noh, N. M., Razak, S. H. A., Alias, N., Siraj, S., Jamil, M. R. M., & Hussin, Z. (2013). Usage of Facebook: The future impact of curriculum implementation on students in Malaysia. In: *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 103, 1261 – 1270. Elsevier B. V. doi: 10.1016/j.sbspro.2013.10.455.

- Oyelaran-Oyeyinka, B., & Lal, K. (2005). Internet diffusion in sub-Saharan Africa: A cross-country analysis. *Telecommunications policy*, 29(7), 507-527.
- Quadri, G., & Idowu, O. (2014). The use of social media for information dissemination by librarians in Nigerian universities. Paper presented at 15th Annual IS conference, University of Zululand, South Africa, September.
- Sheikh-Abdullah, S. H. (2016). Transforming science teaching environment for the 21st Century primary schools pupils. *Malaysian Online Journal of Educational Technology*, 4 (4), 68 – 76.
- UNESCO (2020). Press release, 24th March, 2020 on COVID-19. <https://en.unesco.org>.