

Library user behavior in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic situation in Training and Research Institutes in Sri Lanka.

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Abstract

The global crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, libraries in Sri Lanka faced unprecedented challenges, compelling them to transcend traditional roles. This study, conducted in Colombo, focuses on special libraries' transformation in the Western Province. Combining quantitative and qualitative methods, it examines patrons' needs, emphasizing the importance of online resources, digital collections, and social media networks. The findings underscore the demand for 24-hour access and remote facilities. Librarians, particularly in research and academic settings, are seen as pivotal in guiding information searches. Recommendations highlight the need for continual verification of online resources to ensure reliability in a rapidly evolving information landscape.

Keywords: *COVID-19 pandemic, Information Technology, Librarian role, Special libraries, User behavior*

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic situation that occurred at the beginning of 2020 was a global crisis. Sri Lanka was also affected by this plaque. Within that situation the Government requested Administrators to the General public to react appropriately. When the social economy in the country and also in the world collapsed, researchers and scholars had to find strategies and solutions to overcome the situation. Here they needed very accurate, timely and easily accessible information. So, library professionals were forced to go beyond their traditional professional

framework to provide services for their clients. By using new technological tools, communication systems and the internet efforts were made to provide more services within the 24 hours of the day.

The new information technology was aware of user services provided in modern libraries of the world, and was not widely implemented in Sri Lanka. But in the face of COVID-19, Librarians had to completely maintain their services using modern technologies especially in Special Libraries. So developing and transforming the available library resources and databases with the least amount of staff and technology they faced the challenge to provide the service continually to succeed in the economic and social crisis.

Objectives

Main objective of this study is to find whether the services provided by libraries are user-friendly and the behavior of patrons. Also, what extent are the services provided in this way reader friendly? Is the status co-sufficient? Need for further development? In what way? How should prepare for future patrons' needs? Were the main problems and find the solutions for them.

Materials and Methods

This was conducted in association with special libraries established in Colombo district in the Western Province of Sri Lanka. A special library is a library that collects information resources covering the relevant scope by prioritizing a particular subject, and has a unique user community for those information resources.

One research institute and one public service officers training institute libraries were selected for this study as per study convenience. Two

groups of users from service categories of Researcher and Academic staff were selected from total registered readers of the libraries respectively. One institution consists of 77 registered scientists in the Library and in other institutions all library users are considered library users. So, as sample data we selected only 17 scientists and 25 users from each institution. Total sample included 42. Google form was distributed among all of them and received only 38 replies. Face to face conversation and telephone conversation data gathered from 15 people of the same sample.

Followed both quantitative and qualitative analysis methods. “Qualitative methods offer the opportunity for participants to describe the subject of study in their own words and to do so largely on their own conditions” (Boeije, 2010: 32) Questionnaire (using google form) and telephone and face to face interviews, Data analysis was done under statistical methods using SPSS and NVivo. Collected patrons’ current requirements and the Libraries current services by using these methods.

Results and Discussion

According to the sample data of 42, 34 patrons’ showed library online catalogues, digital collections, web pages and other social media networks are very important to fulfill their information needs. And also 38 patron’s opinion was that the use of Facebook, Blogs, WhatsApp and also Artificial Intelligence based software (ex: ChatGPT) was very important.

“Acquisition of needed information resources leads to availability of required current information and will help students to conduct effective research and sound comprehensive work” (Gunasekera, Chamani

2016). More recent studies also have found the changing role of Libraries. As per the statement “Changing environment of the information world from a library-centered to information-centered entity” Gobalasuthanthiran, (K et.al. 2016). we found that fulfill such requirement of the library patrons may be most important to make their research most successful with information-centered change.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Patrons require 24 hour facilities, remote access and download facilities for accurate information resources quickly and easily. Digitization and correct use of information technology and social networks to overcome the challenges in Research Institute and academic institute libraries are possible.

Especially the users of the relevant sample were Researchers and consultants. They expected the role of a teacher from the Librarian in searching for information. Librarians should be aware of the research and teaching activities carried out by institutions regularly. It is the responsibility and role of the librarian to identify appropriate information resources and provide them timely.

Librarians should study, verify the current special software and databases that receive online. That is because sometimes information has been published incorrectly. For example, even today's popular Chat GPT software provides wrong information sometimes. This occurs because of the different language differences; subject differences affect the provision of data. There it should be confirmed thoroughly and provide the most reliable information to them, as we are forced to drive to developed countries without backing after such a pandemic situation in the world.

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