

# Promoting Usage of the Academic Library during COVID-19 Pandemic

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## How to cite this article:

Sabitri Majhi, Bulu Maharana, Bharati Pati/Promoting Usage of the Academic Library during COVID-19 Pandemic/Indian J Lib Inf Sci 2022;16(2):119-126.

## Abstract

Young generation scholars rely more and more on Google and other web services for discovery and access. Sometimes libraries are not sure whether their information services and well organized collections are being utilized properly or not. This paper highlights the changing attitude of users in the digital environment and use of effective tools and techniques by Academic libraries for providing innovative library services to meet the changing user attitude. This paper also suggests ways and means for making innovation in providing resources and services to the users. It also explains the usage of web tools for effective promotion and marketing of library services to attract users to use the academic Library. At the same time this paper also explains the specific services and roles must be played by Library and Information Science Professionals (LIS) during COVID-19. We know that necessity is the mother of invention and we have realized it during the pandemic situation. Access to information is vital part for ensuring the quality of education. Adaptability is very essential in this sudden change because of COVID-19. So, libraries in general and academic libraries in particular must take specific measures to address this situation. This paper has explored various adaptive measures taken by libraries and LIS professionals in response to COVID-19 in different countries. Based on that few adaptive measures to adapt during COVID-19 has been recommended for academic libraries in the developing countries in general and for academic libraries of India in particular.

**Keywords:** Innovative library services; Academic Library; COVID-19; Web 2.0 tools; Social networking; Faculty-Librarian Collaboration.

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**Received on:** 08.11.2021

**Accepted on:** 30.11.2021

## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The users at academic institution have many options to retrieve information from the web, and they simply consider physical and digital libraries as one among many other sources of information. Even they don't consider Library resources as first or second choices among the academic communities. They find the open access resources as more suitable and easier to use. Hence the experts at the library need to use more effective tools to tackle the current transfer from the traditional system in libraries and academics. To tackle the



current circumstances the library must provide innovative services around user's activity area and facilitate them to manage the trouble in handling the massively rich resources.

Library professionals desire the best for their users, and it is wearisome when the reality does not match up to the expectations. Things will not happen only by the desire but it needs efforts to fulfill the desire. Despite budgetary constraints libraries can innovate in the most attractive ways in order to fulfill their desire and create innovative services for their users. Innovation is not a destination to reach rather making innovation is a continuous process. Innovation requires to be methodically embedded in us.

There is a change in the regular practices and services provided by academic libraries during the COVID-19 pandemic when the physical classes were stopped and online classes were started. The academic libraries specifically in the developing countries face a number of technical and financial challenges. Making off-campus access to subscription based resources, Lots of digital initiatives, measures to bridge digital divide among user community etc. needs lots of financial assistance. Low bandwidth, slow internet connectivity in villages affects the capacity of learners to access online tutorials and classes taken by teachers and information bearing resources delivered to the students.

The LIS professional in the developed countries responded smartly to the COVID-19 emergency and started to collaborate with teachers for online education and took immediate measures for getting connected with teachers and learners. However, libraries in developing countries lack facilities, resources, and ICT (information and Communication Technology) to operate in the prevailing condition. Thus, there are many challenges for academic libraries in fulfilling the needs of the users.

Open access resources are very useful for the academic communities during emergency. Open educational resources on Web, Off-campus access of electronic resources, theses and books repositories, and electronic document delivery services etc. are the key source for academic communities in the developing countries like India during the COVID19 lockdown.

## **ROLE OF COLLABORATION IN MAKING INNOVATIONS IN LIBRARIES**

Merriam Webster Dictionary (2014), defines innovation is "The act or process of introducing new ideas, devices, or methods". Libraries must use an extensive variety of tools and techniques in providing different services to the users. Very few users at current academic environment prefer to visit a library and talking front to front with a librarian or expert, majority of users prefer to communicate virtually. Whereas huge number of users prefers to have access to electronic resources on their own desktop and they expect library on their own desktop. In this situation it is difficult to make available everything to every user. Few users want to read a book by holding in the hand, some other want electronic access and it is very difficult to provide everything to everybody. Collaboration is a great solution to this problem. Library's services can be broadening by the help of collaboration.

Librarians at academic institution must work together with faculty to incorporate library resources into the teaching learning environments. Information literacy instruction must be provided when there is a need, i.e., for some projects and assignments; "work with scholars to provide access to their data sets, project notes, papers, etc. in virtual research environments and digital repositories; collaborate with information technology experts to develop online tutorials and user-friendly interfaces to local digital collections; collaborate with student support services to provide integrated services to students; and collaborate with librarians at other institutions to improve open source software, share resources, purchase materials, and preserve collections." (Corrall, S. 2012)

## **USAGE OF TOOLS AND TECHNOLOGIES FOR MAKING INNOVATIONS**

Discovery tools, Cloud computing, open source software, open content, social networking tools etc. must be used by the libraries for providing effective service to the users. Single interface must be provided to access the multiple resources subscribed by the institution using a centralized consolidated index that enable faster and enhanced search results. Lots of innovation can be made in academic institutions by using of web2.0 in

providing library services; communicating with library users and making the usage of web 2.0 tools in teaching learning process.

Since the library is the hub for learning in an academic institution, central library of each university should play an important role as a community centre for promoting the use of Web 2.0 tools in learning among the students. Web 2.0 tools are having lots of implication for providing library services to the users. Hence, the usage of Web2.0 by libraries for interacting with users and providing information services to the users leads to two fold benefits. It will promote usage of library services with a dynamic library portal with high degree of user interaction.

Library displays the newly purchased reading materials for the readers. The purpose is to inform the readers about new arrival document list to the users. This display can be done by posting the list of reading materials in the library web site as well as in social media site, which is the most visited media among the users. Library provides the reference service to all its readers that may be the long-term and short term service. The service can be provided promptly by using the web tools. Many libraries in the world providing virtual reference service on web named as "Ask a Librarian".

Scanning, classifying and organizing the daily use full news for the readers is a significant service

provided by the library called news paper clippings which provides the latest and current information. It is the Current Awareness Service, which keeps the users up-to-date of current developments. This service can be provided promptly by using the digital media which can be called as digitized news -paper clipping service.

Lot of innovation can also be made by the libraries using web2.0 in teaching- learning process. The tools of Web2.0 can provide a collaborative learning space for all the students of the university and to serve as a knowledge management system. However, right Web2.0 tool must be selected by the librarian for the learning communities according to their learning objective. Again each Web2.0 tool (Blog, Wiki, Document sharing etc) are having lot of online platforms, so right platform may be chosen having all the better features for learning. A specific platform under a Web2.0 tool may have features and facilities which may be more helpful for students belonging to particular subject or department. For example, under document sharing, 'Google Docs' is more useful for the students of social science than science and technology, as it is having the facilities of creating form, collecting responses for a survey and doing analysis of the collected responses along with other features similar to other document sharing platforms. Usually students of social science need to conduct survey work more than other disciplines do. In the following table list of Web2.0 tools which best fit to specific learning activities have been proposed.

Learning activities/ objectives	Tools best fit with the objective
Discussion with teachers and fellow students for exchanging ideas	Blog
Creation of FAQ on specific topics, Organizing course materials, Group Assignment	Wiki
Collaborative writing, Upload and sharing document	Document sharing
Retrieving, classifying, storing, sharing relevant course materials on web.	Social Bookmarking
Making instructional videos, subscribing relevant videos for learning, Uploading & sharing videos	Video sharing
Sharing research ideas and research results among peers	ResearchGate
Networking and communication	Social networking

## SCHOLARLY COMMUNICATION AND COPYRIGHT

Scholars at academic institution are not much aware about copyright and the issues of copyright. Academic libraries must put efforts to build up scholarly communication and copyright. Academic libraries must make the academic communities aware about the significance of scholarly communication and copyright issues. Proactive efforts must be from libraries to educate students

and faculty about authors' rights and different publishing options under open access. Rising use of open resources, creation of local digital collections, complexity of licensing issues, restriction in using e-resources and course management systems, emphasize the necessity for academic libraries to make the availability of intellectual property services.

Following table lists the effective products as well as process or techniques for making innovation in libraries.

### *Innovation in Products and Processes*

Product	Process
Institutional repository	Faculty Librarian Collaboration
Faceted browsing in OPACs	Cooperative preservation
Shared digital repository	Creating new library services
Archiving research data	Virtual reference desk
online tutorials	Assisting in Research
Popular electronic resources	Management of Bibliographic data of Researchers
easy to use interfaces to digital collections	Streaming video to classrooms
	Prompt dissemination of current Information
	Information literacy instruction
	Making virtual research environments

### MARKETING AND PROMOTION OF LIBRARY SERVICES

In this information society, academic libraries are facing a lot of challenges such as: financial crunch, emergence of new information technologies, changing user needs, and changing need for research and teaching. Users are more attracted towards open web rather than towards visiting the library. Even the users at academic institutions are not aware about the efficiency of the libraries and library professionals in assisting them in their teaching learning process as well as in research. Effective promotion and marketing is the real solution to face these challenges now and in the future also.

Librarians can use a group of web tools such as blogs, tools for media-sharing such as Flickr, YouTube, tools for networking with people such as Facebook etc. to market their services and products with lot of success. Information professionals can also use tools such as RSS (Really Simple Syndication), tagging etc. as a means of marketing and promotion of library resources. YouTube can be successfully used to market the library's collection and services. Photo sharing website Flickr allows libraries to post photographs, store photographs, sort and search them. In addition to posting information products for promotion purposes, library professionals can post photographs of the library, different sections of the library and staff to give a virtual tour of their users. Social networking tools like twitter, facebook etc. are becoming increasingly accepted, to showcase forthcoming events and hence libraries must take all the benefit out of this. Many papers have explored how Twitter is useful in libraries for market the services and products.(Fields, 2010; Stuart 2010).

### INTERNET IS NOT A SUBSTITUTE FOR LIBRARY

Plenty of substantial materials on the Internet are not for free. For example, “only about 8% of all journals are on the web, and an even smaller fraction of books are there”. (Herring, 2010) Internet is just like a vast unorganized library having scholarly as well as huge mass of unpublished literature. Users may use Google or any other search engines or Meta search engines to retrieve documents from web but the entire web can't be searched. Again there is no quality control on the web; anyone can create whatever content they want.

Libraries contain reading material that has been published after a thorough peer review process. Libraries also acquire varieties of database and journal that are not available through the web, or are not available freely. Libraries acquire information products that are most believable on different subjects and therefore can be trusted, but on the internet, anybody can publish anything. Librarians are having the capability to educate the users how to be smart consumers of information resources, i.e. how to evaluate information in any formats or media.

### ROLE OF LIS PROFESSIONALS IN RESPONSE TO COVID19

During the COVID-19 pandemic condition, when information outburst is enormous, it is the right time to tell again to the society that the significance of libraries and the role of librarians in identifying, organizing and disseminating the accurate information at right time. Precise and correct information is the key to manage the chaotic situation. Common people are the sufferer of this 'information overload'. Globally, there is fear caused by the over-consumption of incorrect information.



There are many reasons for information outbreak like creation and dissemination of false information in social media. Most people rely on Google and social media to access and share information. It is a quick and easy way to share information with the masses, by using Social Media but authenticity of most of the information is unchecked and is blindly 'forwarded' to others. These 'forwards' lead to an enormous flow in the number of 'fake' messages and rumors about corona virus, which misleads people. This can be disastrous in this crisis and may even put a person's health at risk. It has created a situation of 'infodemic' as declared by the Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO). This has severely affected research work and has also created chaos among the laypeople.

Libraries and Information institutes must come forward in such a crisis situation to play an essential role in making people aware about authentic source of information. The official page of the government of India, supplied all information on COVID-19 and required guidelines. To check this pandemic government initiated various programs and also developed Aarogya Setu mobile application to communicate required health information regarding containment of COVID10, best practices, risks etc.( <https://www.india.gov.in/>). Libraries can make information literacy sessions to educate people regarding those initiatives and to prepare the nation to fight against infodemic (spread of fake or misinformation)

The Library and Information Research Institute at Mexico, conducted webinars on misinformation, information overload, COVID 19 and open access and has been creating a list of open access resources on the topic.

Library can also create leaflets presenting the steps to identify and mark false news in various Medias. One of the example is presented like below.

## HOW DO I MARK A FACEBOOK POST AS FALSE NEWS?

### *To mark a post as false news:*

1. Click next to the post you'd like to mark as false.
2. Click Find support or report post.
3. Click False News, then click Next.
4. Click Done.

When visit to the academic institution is restricted for the learners and researchers, it is highly essential to have abundance of quality information sources

for their learning and research work. Library and Information Science (LIS) professionals must help the user communities for identifying authentic information and libraries must reach them virtually for providing resources and services as fast as possible. Academic Libraries can also request the publishers to open their resources publicly for a few months as all libraries do not have the remote access facility. Many publishers (Springer, Nature, IEEE, etc.) have already provided remote access to their users

Again the learning and research communities must have knowledge to carry out their learning and research using the online platform.

"Many university libraries are providing training on information literacy in order to help the researchers to carry out their research online. Libraries in Loveland and Colorado in the U.S are also offering online courses in information literacy during the pandemic"( <https://www.ifla.org/>)

Libraries in Malaysia are also active in making awareness of the activity of libraries in combatting fake news, and also many libraries carried out studies on information seeking behavior of the user communities during pandemic. IFLA"( <https://www.ifla.org/>)

As reviewed from various studies, it was found that open access resources were useful for the academic communities during emergency. Open educational resources on Web, Off-campus access of electronic resources, theses and books repositories, and electronic document delivery services etc. are the key source for academic communities during COVID19 lockdown.

As Off-campus access of electronic resources is highly essential for the user community, INFLIBNET Access Management Federation (INFED) adopted Shibboleth (Open Source software) software, for authenticating permitted users from universities and colleges. "The INFED is being set-up as a centralized agency to coordinate with member institutions of E-sodhsindhu consortium in the process of implementation of user authentication and access control mechanism distributed across participating institutions using standardized rules and metadata for exchange of attributes." (<http://infed.inflibnet.ac.in/>).

Those libraries having both print and electronic collections responded well during COVID-19 crisis.

Academic libraries found that lack of ICT literacy skills, digital divide, and slow internet connectivity were the major hindrances in academic communities' move from physical to online mode

and witnessed a scanty use of library's online services and resources. The study made following recommendations for the enhancement of services in such situations.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- e. The governments of India and other developing countries of the world have to increase the budget for libraries in order to enhance the e-resources and e-services and prioritize the digital change in the societies. Libraries must spend for getting new infrastructure, technology systems, and staff training, so that they can serve their user communities in emerging digital environments. Libraries need to renegotiate with their e-resources suppliers for the subscription licenses and must ask for remote access as students are off the campus.
- f. The governments should take initiatives for bridging the digital divide among the cities and villages. Off-campus access to e-resources is highly essential as majority of academic institutions in India allow students for physical classes only for few months before examination. Hence students remain off-campus for maximum duration.
- g. Libraries must act proactively for improving the digital literacy of the users. Libraries must collaborate with teaching communities, in handling Learning Management system, creating video tutorials etc.

Following table presents difficulties faced by academic communities during COVID-19 and the possible solution for that.

Difficulties during Global COVID-19 Pandemic	Library Services
1. Many libraries across the globe closed their physical buildings for users, Library was only open for staffs.	1. Usage of electronic resources and online databases has increased. Access to Digital Libraries and Institutional repositories also increased.
2. Difficulties in moving from Physical to Digital <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Digital Divide among user communities.</li> <li>b. Technology Barrier</li> <li>c. Unskilled library Staff</li> </ol>	2. a. Government initiatives to Bridge the digital divide by developing necessary infrastructure, b. Awareness Programmes by libraries to enhance digital Literacy skill of the user community. c. Staff training to develop skilled library staff.
3. Budget Constraint	3 Increase budget for the library; Promoting usage of Open source software; promoting usage of open access resources among user community are few steps to the budgetary Constraints in the library.
4. Flow in the number of 'fake' messages or flow of Misinformation in social media.	4 Awareness Programmes by library to identify and mark fake information

The contribution of the librarian is remarkable; in the various studies, we have found a librarian plays a vital role in all circumstances, and they are always ready to help the society.

## CONCLUSION

The concept of the library is changing gradually as virtual space is expanding and physical items in many libraries are declining. The majority of academic libraries provide access to more e-resources than physical items. Users prefer to visit the library resources through their own desktop or smart phone rather than visiting physically to the libraries. Hence the academic libraries must go ahead with the more and more development of ICT enabled library services. The primary aim of providing innovative library service is to provide the services in such away that the users can get utmost satisfaction and they will be attracted to visit the library web pagerather than visiting Google

regularly for their course materials. In this modern era giving innovative services is more essential than frequent advertisements. The users are more attracted and satisfied by innovative services rather than advertisements. There is a saying "customers create customers" likewise the Innovative library services can help in increasing the flow of users to the libraries rather than to the Google and hence the users can save themselves from the confusing navigation at Google or any other search engines.

Many academic institutions in India started to resume physical classes from the month of January 2021, only for the final year students. But as it is observed in Odisha, most of the parents are afraid about COVID19 and they are not allowing their children for physical classes. Hence, libraries should follow the new normal and must be prepare for new normal. Along with enhancing digital/online services Libraries have to reorganize the seating plan in the reading room, ensuring the sanitization of reading material and library furniture and must

ensure to maintain social distancing etc. to adapt during COVID19 pandemic.

Libraries should promote the academic communities for use of open access resources and open science. Libraries must organize various awareness programs by collaborating with teaching communities. They should also collaborate with them for developing tutorials and course contents.

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