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Academic Libraries' Obstacles and Problems During Covid-19 pandemic: Librarians' Response to Service Model

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Abstract: This research articles explore about problems and obstacles faced by academic librarians due to covid-19 outbreak through analysing of multiple data volumes. Covid-19 outbreak raised multiple problems not only for entire society but also for academic librarians, to explore the pattern of obstacles and problems which were faced by academic librarian a survey approach was utilized to get data needed for the current research paper. The Covid-19 pandemic had an impact on how all associations and institutions operated, which led to the emergence of numerous issues and challenges that human had never before faced, similarly academic librarians also faced many problems such as total shut down of academic libraries, budget constraint, problems in collection development, mentally health of library employees, providing standard services during covid-19 outbreak and many more. In response to these obstacles and problem academic librarians adopted new approach to provide standard services to library patrons. The outcome of this research will definitely help the academic librarians to deal the situation like SARS 2 pandemic in the future.

Keywords: Covid-19 Outbreak, Academic Libraries, Libraries' Obstacles, Libraries' Problems

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INTRODUCTION

SARS-CoV-2 was new phenomena at global level, first found in the country China as per the report of WHO which impacted impressively the higher education system at the world-wide level and libraries are not the exception of this and faced multiple sets of obstacles and problems in term of library operations, management and providing services to library patrons. In such scenario academic librarians were in a situation where paradigm shift from print to online in the context of collection was the necessity to provide services to library users. In March 2020, the Government of India (GOI) imposed a complete lockdown out of fear that the corona virus would spread widely. As a result, all libraries were shut down completely and were unable to serve their customers. In general SARS-CoV-2 is transmittable disease which can be spread through droplets which come out through body of person while coughing and sneezing. Additionally, it is capable of spreading across a variety of the surfaces, encompassing things like printed stuff. Due to the fact that student's study in groups, it was unable to provide in-person assistance, utilise the computers and other equipment in the library, and there was a severe lack of seating due to this circumstance.

With the spread of corona virus all academic institutions were closed and physical services was not possible in such circumstances academic librarians adopted new approach of service model by using different digital technology and offerings online products and services. Social media tools like Facebook, YouTube, twitter was used widely in term of providing services to library patrons. Many academic

librarians were organised "asked the session" for their patrons so that the problems and obstacles which are facing by library users can be handle sharply and solution must be providing accordingly with high level of service standard. Providing services to library patrons is prime objective of any library but with health emergency the pattern changed from physical to online in which library websites and other online tools played significant role. All the information related to library such as circulation, user reservation, waive off overdue charges, library hours, library staff availability, new arrival, access of e-resources were uploaded on the library websites so that users can not face any hurdle in term of use of library. Apart from providing online services, the academic librarians tried to reach user needs and demand at personal level due to corona virus. The present research study tried to find out the following research questions.

RQ1: What obstacles and problems faced by librarians during covid-19 outbreak.

RQ2: Librarians' response to scenario changed due to covid-19 outbreak in term of service model.

RQ3: Are virtual services backbone of libraries during and post covid-19 era?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Various articles, reports, books, expert review were thoroughly read out to streamline the trend in the context of problems and obstacles faced by academic librarians to provide better services to their patrons, prior to this research investigation. With the instructions of GOI about complete shutdown of all activities, libraries and its employees along with managers adopted new approach by using digital technology for the betterment of their clientele. Library websites were used as more impressively tool to overcome the obtundation of covid-19 in term of library services **(Verma, Nitesh Kumar, 2022)** apart from this**,** academic libraries were also faced many challenges with regards to operation of Library such as Space, Collection Development, Library Service Providing Pattern**(Chakraborty, Sukla, 2021).** The impact of the COVID-19 epidemic and the issues it created in terms of IT infrastructure, the adoption of a new platform of service model, space management, and other areas startled librarians **(Bawack, Roseline, 2023).** Prior to covid-19 outbreak libraries were providing print and e-resources material to their patrons more focusable print material due to in person service but with the closure of libraries the challenge came out that how material will be provided during covid-19 in such scenario librarian response in term of providing e-resources through digital technology with the help of remote access **(Srirahayu, D.P., 2020).** Academic libraries deal with various services like circulation, table of content and many more, but reference service is the key service of all type of libraries and provided in various mode like in person or virtual, no doubt prior to corona virus disease librarians were focusing more on in-person mode but scenario changed from in-person to virtual reference mode due corona-19 pandemic **(Akande, S.O., 2023).** The covid-19 outbreak forced librarians to reconsider the service model they had previously adopted and gave them the chance to adopt new approaches, such as using social media tools, AI-based library services, and having more in-depth conversations with the librarians to better understand the true needs and requirements of library users **(Devan-NV, Neetha, 2021).** libraries along with cultural institute of resources speedily installed Ex Libris' reading catalogue of documents for solution and enable the most important shift for digital learning, and educational institutions thinking about implementing additional systems in a short amount of time, such as a web-based studying list control solution. In general, the rapid deployment

satisfied Library immediate need to support internet instruction and studying **(Black, 2020).** The accessibility of video streaming on numerous platforms with various licensing schemes complicates its use even more. Assisted information Services, instructions, and learner in navigating the availability of video resources for remote education during the worldwide outbreak, as beneficial for the future of library users **(Tara, M.G., 2021).**

OBJECTIVE OF STUDY

The prime objective of the current research is to find out obstacles and problems faced by academic libraries during covid-19 outbreak into the following areas.

1. To find out challenges faced by academic libraries while implemented new service model.

2. To find out problems in the context of space and collection management of academic libraries during covid-19 outbreak.

3. To find out obstacles and problems in information literacy programmes during covid-19 outbreak.

4. To reveal challenges faced by Academic Librarians while creating digital platform during covid-19 outbreak.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To gather the data required for the current inquiry, the survey approach was used. A well-structured questionnaire including nominal and ordinal data was created for this aim. The basic random sampling strategy was used as the sampling technique or method for the current research or study, emphasising that every unit or proportion had a chance to be chosen in the sample. Participants received the survey questionnaire by email and in-person delivery, and the data was processed using SPSS 21.0 and MS Excel**.**

SAMPLE SIZE

For the present study, the formula created by Rehman Bukhari in the year 2020 was used to indicate the proper sample size. The complete detail is shown here in visual form**.**

Bukhari Sample Size Calculator 2020		Formula for known population;
Confidence Level	95%	
Sample Proportion (p)	0.5	
Margin of Error (e)	0.05	
Population Size (N)	856	
Alpha divide by 2	0.025	
Z-Score (z)	1.96	
Sample Size	265	

$$\text{Sample size} = \frac{\dfrac{z^2 \times p\,(1-p)}{e^2}}{1 + \left(\dfrac{z^2 \times p\,(1-p)}{e^2 N} \right)}$$

A population of 856 people requires a sample size of at least 265 colleges, as represented in the visual depiction, for the research study to be legitimate and valid. The study's 285 college libraries were chosen.

COVERAGE

This research investigation focuses on the challenges and issues libraries encountered during the Covid-19

outbreak theme, as well as how academic librarians responded to the service model for a better understanding of library clientele needs and requirements during the Covid-19 scenario. Only Delhi NCR College libraries and librarians' responses to these circumstances were examined in the study.

FINDING/RESULT

The conclusion or discovery was based on two aspects: first, the challenges and issues that academic libraries confront, and second, how librarians addressed these issues within the framework of a service model by utilising various digital technology as well as social media platforms. There were noteworthy discoveries about each issue pertaining to the challenges and issues that academic libraries encountered during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Challenge of Physical Distance Precaution

The difficulties faced by library employees in upholding physical separation protocols during the epidemic are examined in Table 1. 7.2% of those surveyed stated that holding sizable events during the pandemic was a significant challenge for library employees. It was difficult to plan events that generally draw a sizable crowd because large gatherings were discouraged in order to stop the spread of COVID-19. The need to make sure that book returns are adequately sanitised was the difficulty that was mentioned the most frequently. About 36.7% of respondents mentioned it. Libraries had to take precautions to sanitise and disinfect returned materials in order to reduce the danger of viral transmission. The majority of respondents (45.7%) stated that it was difficult to collect fines. Some libraries altered or stopped their fine collection practises in response to the epidemic in order to avoid physical contact and encourage patrons to return materials without being penalised. About 10.4% of respondents said that during the pandemic, planning exhibitions was difficult. In order to maintain a physical barrier, physical gatherings and displays were either prohibited or severely restricted during exhibitions. In conclusion, the physical separation procedures that library employees had to take during the epidemic presented a number of difficulties. The organisation of exhibitions, collecting fines, sanitising book returns, and hosting huge programmes were among the difficulties that needed to be overcome in order to protect the workers and clients.

Table 1: What particular aspect of maintaining physical distance precautions during the epidemic has presented a considerable problem for library staff?

		Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
	hosting large program	45	7.2%	15.8%
	Ensuring book return are sanitized	229	36.7%	80.4%
	Collecting Fine	285	45.7%	100.0%
	Organization of Exhibition	65	10.4%	22.8%
	Total	624	100.0%	218.9%

Problem of Physical Space and engagement with Users

Table 2 examines the impact that the closure of physical library locations has had on the ability of library

staff to interact with patrons. According to about 25.0% of respondents, the closure of physical library locations gave staff members more time to interact personally with patrons. This implies that library employees have more opportunity to contact with customers on an individual basis without having to worry about running physical locations, potentially through virtual methods or other tailored approaches. Equally as many respondents (25.0%) stated that because of the lack of physical spaces, library staff members now spend more time on administrative duties. This change might have occurred as a result of shifting resources and labour from in-person services to administrative and digital chores necessary to support remote services. The elimination of physical library locations, according to another 25.0% of respondents, left users with less options for one-on-one support and direction. This implies that, despite personnel having more time for human contact, customers were less likely to receive the kind of traditional face-to-face support they might have expected due to the lack of physical locations. According to about 24.9% of responses, the closure of physical library spaces gave staff members additional chances to unwind and take breaks. This might mean that the move to digital and remote services made it possible for workers to have more flexible work schedules or breaks.

Table 2 How has the loss of physical library spaces affected the capacity of library employees to engage with users?

	Responses		Percent of Cases
	N	Percent	
more time to have personal reach	279	25.0%	97.9%
Focused on administrative task	279	25.0%	97.9%
Less opportunities personal assistance and guidance	279	25.0%	97.9%
Staff can relax and take breaks frequently	277	24.9%	97.2%
Total	1114	100.0%	390.9%

Obstacles of Remote Work and Virtual Assistance

The major challenges that library personnel have when working remotely and providing virtual support are examined in Table 3. When it comes to remote jobs and virtual support, about 25.8% of respondents said that library employees typically faced obstacles due to inadequate internet connectivity. This implies that some employees may have encountered difficulties with internet connectivity, which is essential for carrying out virtual work and offering online services. The inability to utilise a computer was cited as a common barrier by about 24.7% of respondents for library employees engaged in remote work and virtual support. The difficulty of implementing new technology was another frequent issue, mentioned by 24.4% of respondents. This implies that the quick uptake of new digital tools and technology during the pandemic would have presented difficulties for library employees in terms of training and acclimating to new systems. In the context of remote work and virtual support, over 25.1% of respondents said that a decline in the demand for e-resources constituted a hindrance for library employees. This suggests that alterations in user behaviour throughout the pandemic may have decreased the demand for some digital materials, altering the workload and priorities of library employees. In conclusion, the adjustment to remote employment and offering virtual support was difficult for library staff. These obstacles included a lack of

computer literacy, difficulties implementing new technology, and changes in user demand for e-resources. It is likely that training, infrastructure upgrades, and modifications to the library's digital services were needed to overcome these obstacles.

Table 3: What has been a typical barrier for remote employment and virtual assistance for library staff?

	Responses		Percent of Cases
	N	Percent	
Internet Limited Access	268	25.8%	94.0%
Inability to use computer	257	24.7%	90.2%
Difficulty in adopting New Technology	253	24.4%	88.8%
Decreased the demand of e-resources	261	25.1%	91.6%
Total	1039	100.0%	364.6%

Challenge of Fair Access of Resources

The challenges faced by library staff in ensuring equitable access to resources during the epidemic are highlighted in Table 4. A sizable fraction of respondents, roughly 44.6%, stated that one of the challenges faced by library staff was the difficulty of offering individualised services to only a small number of patrons. This indicates that providing individualised assistance or resources to particular clients while upholding fairness and equity may have been limited or constrained. Regarding the digital divide and maintaining technology accessibility, the majority of respondents—roughly 55.4%—identified this as a serious challenge for library staff members during the epidemic. This illustrates the more general difficulty libraries confront in bridging the divide between people with different degrees of technology access and expertise, particularly during a time when many services moved online. In conclusion, library staff struggled to maintain equitable access to resources throughout the epidemic while addressing the digital gap and delivering personalised services. These challenges demonstrate how challenging and multifaceted equitable resource allocation is in the digital era.

Table 4: What difficulties did library personnel encounter in attempting to ensure that everyone had fair access to resources throughout the pandemic?

	Responses		Percent of Cases
	N	Percent	
Providing individualized services just to a select few customers	229	44.6%	80.4%
Addressing the digital divide and making technology accessible	285	55.4%	100.0%
Total	514	100.0%	180.4%

Challenge regarding User Interaction

Table 5 lists the challenges faced by library personnel in providing a sense of community and connection to patrons during the pandemic. According to about 25.5% of respondents, one of these challenges was patrons' lack of interest in library services. This implies that some library users might not have actively sought out or actively engaged with the community-building services provided by the library during the pandemic. The difficulties of developing a personal relationship with customers was another issue mentioned by 24.7% of respondents. Due to remote or infrequent interactions, the pandemic may have made it more difficult for library employees to communicate personally with patrons. Around 24.5% of those surveyed said that a barrier was the overwhelming demand for community services. This implies that programmes targeted at building a sense of connection and community were in great demand, potentially placing a pressure on library resources. About 25.4% of those surveyed said that consumers had expressed a wish to be alone themselves, which may have complicated efforts to foster a sense of community. During the pandemic, some clients might have preferred seclusion or little social interaction.

Table 5: What obstacle has the library staff had to overcome in order to give customers a sense of connection and community during the pandemic?

	Responses		Percent of Cases
	N	Percent	
The users not interested in services	276	25.5%	96.8%
Difficulty in personal connection	267	24.7%	93.7%
excessive demand for community services	265	24.5%	93.0%
Customers have said they want to be alone	275	25.4%	96.5%
Total	1083	100.0%	380.0%

Challenge of budget Constraint

Table 6 examines how staffing reductions during COVID-19 affected the services that librarians could provide: About 25.1% of those surveyed said that the epidemic has increased their library's budget. This increase may have given the library more funding to support services, giving it greater leeway to respond to COVID-19's issues. Another 25.0% of those surveyed said the money for their library was unchanged. This shows that some libraries were able to maintain their pre-existing budget levels despite the epidemic, which probably helped to continue ongoing services. Approximately 24.2% of respondents said that having insufficient funds to buy new materials was a problem. This restriction might have made it more difficult for the library to grow its collection during the pandemic. About 25.7% of those surveyed claimed that the increase in funding only applied to the physical collection. Physical materials may have been given precedence over digital or virtual resources in this allocation. Budget cuts generally had a mixed effect on libraries, with some seeing budget increases or maintaining funding levels while others experienced restrictions, particularly when it came to adding new materials or allocating funds for digital services. The amount of money that was available and how it was distributed during the epidemic had a significant impact on the library's capacity to offer services.

Table 6: How have cutbacks in funding and budgets impacted the ability of library employees to

offer services during COVID-19?

	Responses		Percent of Cases
	N	Percent	
Budget Increased	267	25.1%	93.7%
Funds remained unchanged	266	25.0%	93.3%
Limited resources for purchase of new materials	257	24.2%	90.2%
Funds increased only for physical collection	273	25.7%	95.8%
Total	1063	100.0%	373.0%

DISCUSSION

The findings, which were derived from the explanation of tables clearly indicates that covid-19 pandemic created so many problems and obstacles which never faced before. Academic librarians faced many problems in each and every section of the library such as budget constraint, difficulties in library users' interaction, the resources which are available in the library were used fairly or not, working remotely and virtual assistance to library users related issues, problem of physical space, collection development, service and many more. But academic librarians sharply adopted new approach to accomplish the need and requirements of library users by utilizing new digital technology along with social media tools like Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Zoom and many more. Handling the query of library users in the period of covid-19 was very difficult whereas library employees had not sufficient IT infrastructure. There is no doubt that library employees like other human being facing the same mentally or psychological problem which were created due to covid-19 pandemic, in such scenario library employees were providing the information services to the library users whether it was related to library usage or covid-19 related general information through various mode like library websites, ask the librarian session and many more mode.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATION

The findings of this inquiry were based on a scenario where the Covid-19 pandemic gave librarians the chance to consider new service models and approaches within the context of a health emergency. The subject of a modern library is digital collection and technology for high quality service to library customers. The current study will serve as a helpful manual for librarians and library authorities regarding how high-level library services can be delivered to contemporary library customers by using various technology tools and methods in the event of SARS 2.

CONCLUSION

This study sheds light on the significance of issues and challenges experienced by academic libraries during COVID-19 and librarians' responses to service models that aid patrons in receiving library services during health emergencies like SARS2. Prior to COVID-19, during COVID-19, and after COVID-19, academic library issues and challenges differ. The information gathered from the librarians concentrated more on the challenges and issues that affect university libraries. Without a sure, the covid-19 outbreak prevented physical access to libraries, but it was the reality of virtual use that provided librarians a fresh perspective

on how to offer better services. During SARS 2, physical reference services were not a reality, but librarians strove to provide reference services to library patrons virtually when a personal touch was lacking between library employees and patrons. In conclusion, the SARS 2 situation may be viewed as an opportunity for librarians or library authorities to introduce a new service model for library users by exploiting cutting-edge digital technology.

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