

HOW LIBRARIES KEPT THE LOCK, DOWN IN LOCKDOWN

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Abstract Many people think of libraries as physical buildings to access documents, journals, and manuscripts; however, over the past few decades, libraries have been rapidly evolving beyond the physical, becoming powerful digital and virtual institutions, working significantly with the tangible library concept. The COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdown has pushed normal life out of gear, and the library professionals understood that things were changing. Aiming this paradigm shift of library services and activities into the 'new normal', many librarians and information professionals across the world have found innovative ways in library services to serve the users in an effective way. In this paper, we identify and evaluate new normal library services and innovative resources and management methods used by the librarians and information professionals during the lockdown to beat the lockdown blues. We explore how library professionals were working constantly on finding ways to provide access to people in need of knowledge, while keeping them safe, how libraries were transforming their activities and services into the 'new normal', and how libraries kept the lock, down in lockdown.

Keywords: Lockdown, Library, Information Services, Innovative Services, Librarian, Mobile Services, COVID-19, Pandemic

INTRODUCTION

On 11th March 2020, WHO declared "Novel Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) outbreak as a pandemic and reiterated the call for countries to take immediate actions and scale up response to treat, detect and reduce transmission to save people's lives." Whereas, the National Disaster Management Authority, Government of India, is satisfied that the country is threatened by the spread of COVID-19, which has been declared as a pandemic by the World Health Organisation, and that is necessary to take effective measures to prevent its spread across the country and for mitigation of the threatening disaster situation.

On 24th March, 2020, the National Disaster Management Authority, in exercise of the powers conferred under Section 10(2)(1) of the Disaster Management Act, 2005, has issued Orders on lockdown measures and directed the Ministries/ Department of Government of India, State Governments and State Authorities to take measures for ensuring social distancing so as to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the country.

There were worldwide lockdowns, curfews, quarantines, and similar restrictions because of the COVID-19 pandemic. UNESCO reported that, "Countries and territories around the world have enforced lockdowns of varying degrees. Some include total movement control while others have enforced restrictions based on time. Mostly, only essential businesses are allowed to remain open. Schools, universities and colleges have closed either on a nationwide or local basis in 161 countries, affecting approximately 98.6% of the world's student population".

This has affected the world population in so many ways, including educational and learning prospects; and when it comes to education and learning, easy access to libraries plays a vital role. However, with the lockdown it was difficult to reach libraries. Sharma (2020) stated that, "the lockdown has accelerated adoption of digital technology. Business houses, educational institutes, analytics, computer, data management methods and online education solutions have been forced to work in tandem and improve in quality and delivery time to handle such situations. This is an ideal time to experiment and deploy new tools to make education delivery meaningful to students who can't go to campuses. It's a chance to be more efficient and productive while developing new and improved professional skills/knowledge through online learning and assessment. "During the lockdown, libraries around the country were closed; readers had no access to books and services provided by the conventional libraries. The idea of walking two blocks and entering the library was no longer possible, because the world around us was no longer the same. However, this did not mean that the library services were closed. On the contrary, library professionals were working constantly on finding ways to provide access to people in need of knowledge, while keeping them safe.

A SNEAK PEAK OF LIBRARIES DURING LOCKDOWN

Libraries and Information centres were working constantly during the lockdown, and because of their new and innovative

services, their work was encouraged and publicized by the media. National- and international-based information centres provided services according to the new normal.

Worldwide Highlights

- Flood (2020) wrote in the Guardian Weekly, under the title 'The sound of silence: Visiting the library during lockdown', that "Libraries are currently closed all around the world, and, while demand for e-book loans is booming, there's far more to a library than just borrowing books. There's the hallowed sense of being surrounded by learning, the peaceful community of being around other readers, and the pervasive smell of books."
- BBC News (2020) published that the libraries across England have reported a surge in online borrowing during the coronavirus lockdown as the nation seeks escapism and comfort in e-books. Loans of online e-books, e-magazines, and audio books were up an average of 63% in March compared to the previous year, and 120,000 people joined libraries in the three weeks after lockdown began.
- Nick Poole, from the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP), said this could "turn out to be a watershed moment for libraries". "Not only are we attracting an entirely new audience, we're able to demonstrate that the library is every bit as accessible online as it is in person," he said.

Initiatives taken by the International Library Organisation

- EBLIDA (2020) European library, identifies five 'new normal' for a European Library Agenda in the post-COVID-19 era:
 - Exponential social distancing: a well-connected two-meter library;
 - Technologies are mutating and shaping libraries in new ways;
 - Uncharted economic territory: review the library budget composition;
 - Library governance at central and local levels;
 - Do not forget the climate change opportunity and threat.
- O'Brien-Hall (2020) posted that the CILIP, UK's library and information association, announces the launch of the 'National Shelf Service', a new daily YouTube broadcast featuring book recommendations from professional librarians, focusing on helping children and families discover new, diverse reading experiences.

Alison Brumwell, Chair of the CILIP Youth Libraries Group, said, "Librarians have a unique ability to connect readers with unusual and diverse reading experiences that fire the imagination, build empathy,

and help develop their skills and confidence. This is a great opportunity for our profession to support the nation through this current crisis."

National Highlights

- Mohan (2020) published in the New Indian Express, "Residents' association sets up new library to beat lockdown blues. 'Rajeev Nagar Residents' Association of government staff quarters at Karamana has decided to set up a brand new library at the association hall to creatively engage children and adults. Association president R Raveendran said that there are around 700 to 800 children at the staff quarters and the library would help engage them. Around 700 books have already been mobilised for the library."
- Raghavan (2020) wrote in India Today about the different library situations during the lockdown. The Delhi Public Library has opened 18 of its 33 branches on May 5, albeit only for issuing and returning books. The Delhi Public Library has held 11 webinars during the lockdown. The India International Centre (IIC) Library, on the other hand, has been open since July 4. However, only around six people are allowed in the library at a time. The British Council Library (BCL) is partially open in Delhi, although many other of its branches in India have been shut.

Initiative by National Library Organisation

- NDL (2020), the National Digital Library of India, has built a repository named 'COVID-19 research resource repository', to bring in the latest research materials from across the world – a kind of a single-window access to various types of materials related to COVID-19, be it data, research work, videos, challenges, or funds. The National Digital Library of India has opened up its 3.5 crore-strong digital content, such as e-books, question papers and solutions, lecture materials, and thesis, among others, to help students study at home.
- IIT Kharagpur library opened its services to all students, providing special COVID-19-related literature and information, ranging from research writings, projects, funding, start-ups, datasets, and multimedia content under a single section 'COVID-19 Research Repository'. Almost all the IIT libraries were proactive in promoting and amplifying the use of these useful resources, by highlighting the NDLI link on their website homepage. It was indeed a sort of 'Bibliotherapy' during the COVID-19 crisis, with an objective of turning the crisis into an opportunity (Dadhe & Dubey, 2020).

LIBRARY TRANSITION FROM THE TRADITIONAL TO THE NEW NORMAL

The COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdown have pushed normal life out of gear, and the library

understood that things were changing. Library professionals had to find new, creative ways for libraries to operate and serve communities, or libraries would slowly start to die. Libraries may adopt new normal in terms of collections,

services, spaces, and operations, in hopes they stimulate new thoughtful and sustained dialogue. In this paper, we will identify the library's new tech-transformed services and new resources and management methods to beat lockdown blues.



Tech-Transformation of Books to e-Books

The books are the soul of the library. Libraries are undergoing a digital tech-transformation, enabled by the Internet and e-book technology, which offer a novel channel for providing books to the readers. Although the use of e-books was already in place before the pandemic, it was not religiously followed; the need for e-books was perceived during the lockdown.

Sengupta (2020) explained that during the lockdown, “the trends in e-books followed a specific pattern. The demand was mainly for books by legacy authors like Ruskin Bond or Sudha Murty”. “People generally opted for books they are familiar with,” Kumar shares. There has been a change since March 2020. “In the initial part of the lockdown, a lot of demands for books related to spirituality, wellness, and health. Another big trend was for children’s books. With every extension, parents are going online to check for books for children to keep them occupied. Lately, there has been a discernible increase in demand for books on financial topics, investment, and ways to manage money. “The lockdown has taught that reading will never go away, although the medium might change. During the pandemic, the digital

libraries were able to provide e-books to the readers because they have a collection of e-books or e-resources; however, traditional libraries faced difficulties in acquiring and providing e-books to the readers.

Some renowned publishers like Cambridge University Press, Springer-Nature, Sage E-Adhyayan, and many more platforms provided ample number of e-books free of cost for the consumption of the public during the lockdown.

This pandemic is a situation for traditional libraries to realise that the libraries have to transform physical books to e-books with the use of tech-transformation, for effective use of the library. To avoid future uncertainties, libraries should proactively provide services in the virtual mode.

Journals Making Way to Android and IOS

The COVID-19 pandemic has speeded up implementation of digital technology in every organisation. The libraries took this situation as an opportunity to provide library services in digital form, to whatever extent possible. In this progression, many libraries are providing journals in Android- and IOS-based mobile phones.

To benefit the library readers during the lockdown, libraries are providing electronic journals, links of journal publishers (national and international), and other supported databases.

Many information centres provided e-resources to online users in accessing specific journals or publishers. Many publishers, such as Balai, ALA, SAGE, Pustaka, Cambridge University Press, and EBSCO Host cooperated with the libraries.

e-PG Pathshala is an initiative of the MHRD under its National Mission on Education through ICT (NME-ICT), being accomplished by the UGC to provide e-content, enclosing modules on social science, arts, fine arts, and natural and mathematical science, which was beneficial to the academic libraries that could provide the content to the library users.

Print Newspaper to Portable Document Format

Most of the citizens have a regular habit of reading the morning newspaper in print form. During the lockdown, people missed this because of the non-availability of newspaper delivery in print form. Most people grumbled about e-newspapers and felt uncomfortable reading newspapers in the e-format.

This was the correct time for the librarians to acquaint themselves with and make the readers' community aware of the paperless e-newspapers and e-news services, and transmit periodic information on literacy programmes among the library users' community for inspiring, endorsing, and evolving their news reading habit simply and effectively. It was handy to create a pleasing news reading experience among the library readers. All electronic newspapers provide newspapers in a portable document format (pdf), which looks exactly like a print newspaper. They also provide news in their respective websites for access to wide-ranging news. The pandemic taught the librarians to be prepared to provide print newspapers service in a portable document format and make it a permanent service at the library.

From IP-based Database to Login ID-based Access

During the lockdown, there was no possibility of going anywhere; it was not possible for readers to visit the library. Most of the libraries purchased e-resources in two modes: first is IP-based and second is Login ID-based. Most of the libraries purchased the former database because of security concerns. So, the pandemic taught librarians to focus on providing remote e-services or login ID-based access for the convenience of the readers.

Some publishers or information centres like e-Shodh Sindhu, National Digital Library of India, JSTORE, Cambridge University Press, Elsevier, ACM Digital Library, and Springer-Nature provided free remote electronic resource services for the convenience of the academicians or the public for research work, during the lockdown.

Traditional Services to Email and Cloud-based Services

Cloud computing is very popular these days and is used in libraries around the world. The libraries prefer to host automation systems, websites, digital libraries, e-resources, and other resources on cloud-based servers. The need for cloud services emerged due to the involvement of huge infrastructure requirements for different activities and services provided by the institutions. Maintaining different services with infrastructure for different purposes is expensive and difficult for any organisation/institution. To overcome this, cloud computing is a good solution and is useful. Libraries or institutions face a difficulty when there is data loss or hardware failure. It becomes a challenging task to recover the data or restore the system with ease, as stated by Tripathi and Pandey (2020). During the lockdown, many libraries switched their email-based services to cloud-based services. Cloud-based services are helpful in restoring data easily in the cloud server, and provide access to data anywhere.

Library Websites to Mobile-based Applications

During the pandemic lockdown, the use of palm devices or mobile phones was growing on a daily basis. This makes it necessary for information centres or libraries to invent new ways to use mobile devices to connect to library services. The Education Minister of Karnataka said, "The COVID-19 lockdown has led to an exponential growth in the downloading of Karnataka Government's digital library app. The state transformed its legacy libraries into digital libraries and launched a library app on February 26, 2020. Since then 25,000 people have taken to free e-learning and downloaded the library app." (*Economic Times*) There were many educational platform-initiated mobile-based service applications, such as E-Balbharati App. (Maharashtra state), DIKSHA Mobile App. (MHRD), NROER (National Repository of Open Educational Resources), Global Digital Library, and so on.

Advices and Services on the Go

The recrudescence period was an ideal time to experiment and set up new tools to make information delivery meaning-

ful to library readers who could not visit the library due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Many librarians and information professionals provide virtual services, such as document delivery service, reference service, literature search, current awareness service, systematic reviews of literature, and selective dissemination service. Many librarians have initiated library events through webinars, to communicate with library readers via Zoom, Microsoft Team, Skype, Telegram, Jitsi Meet, GoToWebinar/GoToMeeting, Moodle, and YouTube Channel.

IITI has conducted a virtual orientation programme to increase the usability of its facilities and services. IIT libraries were on the forefront in educating, engaging, and empowering its users by knowledge dissemination and proliferation in different areas of academia. The role of libraries in proliferation of knowledge was more consolidated by activities and webinars conducted by the libraries during the crisis. It was found that various topics of deliberations in these webinars were very relevant and apt, in line with 'making a difference' in providing something to everyone in an easy and convenient manner (Dadhe & Dubey, 2020).

CONCLUSION

The sphere has transformed during the pandemic and we need to better recognise the new kinds of digitalised library services that will be very helpful for the library users. We should also be more dynamic in transforming the traditional services into digital services. Dadhe and Dubey (2020) stated that users may demand additional digital resources if the situation does not improve for a longer period of time. Libraries should take a decision while selecting any new features or refining the existing features in the services to be planned post COVID-19, which will at least reduce the gap that students are likely to experience if restriction to visit the physical libraries continues even after re-opening of the institutions. Adoption of a tech-led holistic approach is the only way that can help tide over the challenges and keep the libraries functioning. Libraries have been smart during this time and evolved as a continuous learning factory.

It can be said from this study that a paradigm shift of library services and activities into the 'new normal' services has occurred, like the tech-transformation of books to e-books; making journals available in Android- and IOS-supported formats; arranging remote and Login ID-based access; setting up cloud-based services; making available library website services in mobile device applications; providing print newspaper service in a portable document format; and making all the new normal services a permanent feature of the library. In addition, we should contemplate how we could uplift the librarians and information professionals to act as leaders in the digital transformation of the library.

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