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Academic libraries and librarians in time of pandemic and war

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Abstract

The outbreak of virus, known as corona or Covid-19 by the world health organization has thrown the global community into distress and anxiety. While the developed countries are test-running their techno-medical prowess in effort to develop drugs and measures to curtail much spread. The non-developed countries like Nigeria have found the pandemic a herculean task to contend with due to poor advancement in technology and information management. This study highlighted information poverty as a result of dependence on

social media as information source which has left the country managing and circulation fake news. Fake news and conspiracy theories, population and hunger, religion, doctor to patient ration, social gathering ignorance have provided challenges to the fight against the pandemic. The librarians and library associations have been earmarked as vital towards genuine information provision and dissemination. The study concludes that Nigeria should rise to fight the pandemic since most countries of the world are affected too.

Keywords: pandemic, librarians, patient, virus

Introduction

An academic library is a library that is attached to academic institutions above the secondary level, serving the teaching and research needs of students and staff. These libraries serve two complementary purposes: to support the school's curriculum, and to support the research of the academic faculty and students. Academic libraries are information centers established in support of the mission of their parent institutions to generate knowledge, equip people with knowledge in order to serve the society and advance the well-being of mankind (John 2013) [2]. Majority of the academic libraries concentrate more on acquiring maximum information resources by purchasing textbooks, reference works, journals (both in printed as well as electronics media) which includes course materials and consortia. In the context of this study presume the argument that "better library and laboratory facilitate better education". Of late the argument was modified as "better access to resources and well informed users are lifelong learners" and hence creates good academic environment (Butdisuwan 2009) [1]. Libraries could serve as antidotes to populist demagogues and 'dangerous' ideas, and give workers an education that would enable them to appreciate the virtues of the rising free-market system.

The University (academic) libraries get their mission from that of the parent organization which is the University. They are thus influenced by the context in which that parent organization operates. The core function of the universities according to Aguolu and Aguolu (2002) [3] are; development of human resources for meeting manpower needs, provision of intellectual leadership, Advancement of knowledge through research development oriented, pure and applied, conservation of knowledge, pursuit, promotion and dissemination of knowledge through teaching and learning. So in this regard, it is believed that no establishment could exist without good human resources and financial control for effective planning and actualizing of it parent organization. Management of library as an organization is not different from what obtains in other organizations. The major difference that may be noticed is the fact that libraries are service oriented and not for profit making, especially as it concerns the academic libraries. However, the not-for-profit nature of academic and most libraries cannot prevent the management team from achieving the desired goals. The parent organization's core function cannot be satisfactorily performed without the library stated objectives. Ifidon (2007) [5] outlined the major objectives of University libraries as; provision of materials both in prints and e-resources to help library users in their personal self-development, provision of information resources for research and advanced study by lecturers, students and even government, provision of materials in support of the learning process. Cooperation with other libraries to broaden access to materials with a view to developing a network of University library resources which are at the disposal by staff and students meeting the specialized information needs of the University community.

UNESCO, (2007) defines ICT as technologies that are used to transmit, process, store, create, display, share or exchange information by electronic means. They include radio, television, video, DVD, telephone (both fixed line and mobile phones), satellite systems, computer, network hardware, software, as well as the equipment and services associated with these technologies. To Nwachukwu, (2007) ^[8] Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is the application of computers and other technologies for the acquisition, organization, storage, retrieval, and dissemination of information. However, in this context, Information Technology (IT) is the use of internet, satellite system, to store, retrieve and disseminate information in the form of data, text, image and others in the management of academic libraries services. Evan's (2001) comment that there is no need for any library to attempt to acquire hard copies of all publications, this is because with suitable computer software, telecommunication equipment, memory facilities as well as input and output devices, a research in a remote outpost of civilization would be able to search the comprehensive electronic databases in the advanced developed economies, and be able to obtain needed information in electronic or hard copy format.

With the adoption of information technology (IT), libraries now use various types of technologies to aid the services they render to their users. Everyday new technological advances affect the way information is handled in libraries and centered. The adoption of IT technologies is felt by libraries in every aspect. Computing technology, communication technology and mass storage technology are some of the area of continuous development that reshape the way that libraries access, retrieve, store, manipulate and disseminate information to users. The academic library has been from its inception an integral part of institutions of higher learning, rather than an appendix or adjunct (Krubu 2011) ^[10].

Lawal (2001) ^[11] pointed out that "with the adoption of IT in academic library activity especially in the form of library collection development strategies, library building and consortia". IT presents an opportunity to provide value-added information services and access to a wide variety of digital based information resources to their clients. the author further stated that various academic libraries are also using modern ITs to automate their core functions, implement efficient and effective library cooperation and resource sharing networks, implement management information systems, develop institutional repositories of digital local contents, and digital libraries: and initiate IT based capacity building programmes for library users.

The introduction of information technology (IT) trends has led to reorganization, transformation of academic libraries, change in work patterns, demand for new skills, job retraining and reclassification positions. Technological innovations of the past twenty-five years, such as the electronic database, online services, CD-Roms and internet have radically transformed access to information. IT holds the key to the success of modernizing information services in the area of academic libraries of Universities (Brown 2009) ^[12].

The Applications of IT are numerous but mainly it is used in converting the existing paper-print records in the entire process of storage, retrieval and dissemination. The electronic revolution is impacting seriously on the traditional role of the University library as an institution that collects, store information, and makes it available to its users. In this age of internet, the electronic information sources are very

accessible, reliable and high cost-effective, and that this is having an edge over print sources in the outbreak of virus, known as corona or Covid-19.

Coronavirus known as "COVID-19" appeared in the city of Wuhan, China, and has spread rapidly to more than 70 countries across the world. However, the viruses found no evidence that was made in a laboratory or otherwise engineered. According to World Health Organization (2020) the origin of the virus confirmed that, it was originated through natural process. (Zhou, et. al. 2020) ^[14]. Investigations have shown that some bat SARS-CoVs have the possibility to infect human. According to World Health Organization WHO 2020 corona virus disease is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus which affect people in different ways. The common symptoms include fever, dry cough, tiredness, shortness of breath, pains and aches, sore throat, and very few people will report diarrhoea, nausea or a runny nose. The virus spreads rapidly across the world. The WHO report on 2nd April 2020, 00:15 GMT shows that there 827,419 confirmed cases of coronavirus in 206 countries. The fast spread of this virus has called the attention of the world to quickly take all the necessary measure fight and control the spread of the virus. Presently, the global community is ravaged by the pandemic while the end to the COVID-19 pandemic remains unknown due to variations of its spread among the countries.

The first case of COVID-19 was reported to have been confirmed in Africa on 14th February 2020, and subsequently to the sub Saharan Africa. Consequently, Nigeria has also recorded a first case of COVID-19 virus on 27th February 2020 where an Italian citizen who entered Nigeria from Milan on a business trip, was tested positive in Lagos, Nigeria. Similarly, on 9th March 2020 a second case of the virus was reported in Ogun State all in South West of Nigeria. However, the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (2020). on 1st April 2020 reported 12 new cases in the country, which account for 210 confirm cases, 25 discharge, and 3 deaths among other 13 African countries identified as high-risk for the spread of the virus. The Federal government of Nigeria has set up a Coronavirus Preparedness Group (CPG) to mitigate the impact of the virus on 31st January 2020. Although, on 28th January 2020, the Federal Government of Nigeria assured its citizen on the readiness and strength to prevent the spread of coronavirus in the country. Likewise, the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) set up a group for coronavirus which was ready to activate the incident if any case emerged in Nigeria.

In all other contexts, available evidence indicates that COVID-19 virus is transmitted during close contact through respiratory droplets (such as coughing) and by fomites 2-8. Furthermore, the virus can spread directly from person to person when a COVID-19 case coughs or exhales producing droplets that reach the nose, mouth or eyes of another person. Alternatively, as the droplets are too heavy to be airborne, they land on objects and surfaces surrounding the person. Other people become infected with COVID-19 by touching these contaminated objects or surfaces, then touching their eyes, nose or mouth. According to the currently available evidence, transmission through smaller droplet nuclei (airborne transmission) that propagate through air at distances longer than 1 meter is limited to aerosol generating procedures during clinical care of COVID-19 patients.

The quick measures in public awareness on sign and symptoms of the virus, and advices for the public on how to

cure themselves from the virus. As such, WHO continues to advise that everyone maintain hand hygiene regularly, follows respiratory etiquette recommendations and frequently clean and disinfect surfaces? Also continues to recommend the significance of maintaining physical distances and averting people with fever or respiratory symptoms. These preventive measures will reduce viral transmission. The losses and lessons from the first outbreak of SARS that was traced to coronavirus in China in November 2002 and possibility of seasonal predilection moved the world health organization in 2003 called for vigilance and preparedness against future outbreak. Therefore, current outbreak of COVID-19 virus has been taken into cognizance by most developed countries, require awareness and measure for possible spread of the diseases. Wu, and McGoogan (2020) reported that the effects and causes of possible re-emergence, and steps to curtail large spread casualty have been the preoccupation of the scientific societies in the developed countries, and the potential causes of the outbreak have been researched and documented. However, in Nigeria, Chen, et al (2020) ^[17] express that it seem to no traceable clinical and social research on the virus. Basically, most information making round in current circumstances are mostly through the social media.

Majority of Nigerian citizens are uninformed Jogwu (2010) ^[19] and this affects their perception and reaction to every post on the social media. This is to say that most social media news without authentic links are forwarded immediately by the people without verifying the authenticity of the source. More so, psychological trauma most people go through because of the effect and fear over such news is a virus of a different kind. A man was posted on social media to have been the driver to the index case in Nigeria, had sent a post after few days through the same social media and openly refuted the allegation. Similarly, a current case in Benue state is currently marred in confusion as the woman who was quoted to have tested positive to the virus, who claimed to be in the UK has also refuted the claim, and reported through the social media to be hale and healthy. The report about the Vice Chancellor of Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka is unclarified information. It was reported in social media stated the VC has tested positive while the VC through his media aid had claimed the news as false. The government is yet to make categorical statement about these cases, the implication is that the real cases may not have been discovered, therefore possible transmissions are eminent through social media. These mist-march call acquit needs for the role of libraries and library association in disseminating information during covid- 19 pandemic

UNESCO press released on COVID-19 dated 24th March 2020 stated that “the number of students affected by the school and university closures in 138 countries has nearly quadrupled to 1.37 billion, representing more than 3 out of 4 children and youth worldwide UNESCO (2020). In addition, stated that nearly 60.2 million teachers are no longer in the classrooms.” (www.en.unesco.org). However, these measures have drastically affected libraries in the world. Libraries have experienced closure or restrict their services. This does not necessarily mean that libraries are not providing services for all or some of their users through online and virtual/ remote approaches. Public services have been paralyzed, academic activities and classes have restricted to online due to closure of colleges. Community need information on how to cure themselves against

coronavirus, scientist and researchers are highly engaged to control the situation. In this time, libraries have a role to play in the provision of access to information resources and services. On 23rd March 2020, the president of IFLA had announced that “Libraries around the world are being affected by the emergence and spread of the coronavirus. After this situation, the libraries around the globe have to mobilize and provide a collection of valuable and reliable information on coronavirus in order to give people a source they can trust” IFLA (2020). Libraries can strengthen online services to provide access to their resources. Recently, National Digital Library has initiated of specially designed collections of 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. The services are provided through the library social networking National Digital Library of India (2020).

The roles of the Nigerian libraries and the associations are more crucial in the face of the prevailing global pandemic. Nauven (2020) stated that it is not apparent that fake news and misinformation have created confusion and subsequently, posed greater challenge to every effort to curtail the spread of the virus. In this regard, academic, special and public libraries in Nigeria can provide and share information quickly, efficiently and in real-time as strategies in response to COVID- 19 pandemic through their social networking pages like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn. Academic Libraries can provide a platform for gathering and disseminating information to promote awareness of the current situation. African Library and Information Associations and Institutions (2020).

Academic libraries have a vital role to play in the provision and dissemination of genuine information to cure and fight coronavirus to their respective users through social media. However, the closure of academic activities necessitates most of class to operate online. Libraries also can provide online services to assist students with access to materials for assignments, selection and dissemination of information resources on COVID-19 to researchers, virtual research help, virtual instruction, online reference services, access to e-books and e-journal, linking users to health institutions and organization on information relating to coronavirus, publish a pamphlet and handbills for safety measures against coronavirus. Recently, Information Technology (IT) and internet companies such as Google, Microsoft have provided free teaching and learning tools to support students and teachers learning at home. For example, Google launched its “Teach from Home Hub” in aid to teachers and learners across the world unable to attend schools (<https://memeburn.com/2020/03/google-teach-from-home-covid-19/>). Libraries in Nigeria can facilitate access to those tools.

Role of Library Associations IFLA statement on COVID-19 and the Global Library Field stated the actions by associations on this public health emergency (<https://www.ifla.org/covid-19-and-libraries>). They stated that library associations are acting to inform their members and help them in difficult times. Many have set up pages with list of reliable sources and guidance at the national level complementing advice at the regional or global levels - and encouraged coordination and communication among library directors in order to disclose ideas and practices. Library associations in Nigeria such as Nigerian Library Association

(NLA), National Association of Library Science Educators (NALISE), Nigerian Association of Law Libraries (NALL), Medical Library Association of Nigeria (MLA-NG) and National Association Library Science Students (NALISS) can do the same. Nigerian Library Association can provide resources and tools on online learning, pandemic Preparedness Guild. They can also work with government ministries and agencies on the dissemination of information related to the pandemic and promote digital content that can be used to encourage education.

Based on the situation analysis, Nigeria as a country is yet to grow technologically, especially in social media information awareness and use. Sharp growth on new cases based on daily update indicates that there is lack of authentic information that will aid in tracking victim contacts. Irregular statement by government based on prevailing information has created doubt in the mind of citizen regarding the authenticity of the news on COVID-19 in Nigeria. Further, prevailing fake news that are spread through the social media have impaired compliance to programmes aimed to curtailing the spread of the virus, such as social distancing which have been ignored by the peasants and religious sycophants who see the pandemic as farce. There is fear that more cases will emerge from the submission of this article due to irregularity in news and governments failure to stand up for the day to day update on the issue. Therefore, the Nigerian libraries and library associations can provide a platform to compile and disseminate information to promote awareness on the current situation in Nigeria. Therefore, libraries should carefully plan, efficiently executed, well reported a means of disseminating an authentic and reliable information to the community, it can be a vital tool in controlling false information and ensure total eradication of Coronavirus (COVID-2019) virus.

Recent blanket closure of public libraries in Britain due to the coronavirus pandemic obscures the fact that in the decade of austerity that preceded it hundreds of service points had already closed their doors. Most of those that remained open were in crisis, grappling with slashed budgets and reliant on volunteers, who now outnumber paid staff three to one. Increasingly, paid staff are on casual contracts, many being merely hourly paid. The number of qualified, professional staff – the very people needed to ‘fight fires’ and innovate in a period of decline – has significantly decreased.

Socially, libraries were advocated as a means of attracting the masses away from immoral or ‘irrational’ pastimes. Yet support for libraries, which mostly came from above, was not just about controlling working-class culture. Libraries were meant to be for the benefit of the very middle classes who endorsed them. Middle-class readers welcomed what in effect became mini British Museum reading rooms at the centre of provincial towns, initially in the Midlands and the north. Big town libraries, like those established in Manchester and Liverpool, were much better resourced than the private subscription and commercial libraries that the ‘respectable’ classes had relied on previously.

Library promoters also identified economic benefits. In 1850, in looking forward to the Great Exhibition scheduled for the following year, the Art Journal warned that Britain had yielded the ‘palm of excellence’ to French, German and Bohemian manufacturers in respect of goods that contained a critical artistic-design element. Library promoters argued that increased exposure to art and design through the provision of art books and artefacts in attached museums would improve

the quality of manufacturers because taste would be universally elevated and workers’ skills improved. While acknowledging the economic power of art, Edward Edwards, the country’s first public librarian, believed libraries could help relieve the alienating, dehumanizing effect of industrialization. He suggested that giving artisans access to books would not only ‘solace the intervals of toil’ but also ‘put new meaning in the toil, and new life in the toiler’. Linked to this was the idea that a library offered sanctuary from an urbanizing society in which the pace and stresses of life were rapidly increasing.

These pioneering motivations encapsulate the dynamism that was to characterize the public library over the next century and a half: a public institution that sought to satisfy both aesthetic and material human impulses. The public library carried these philosophical credentials with it through subsequent crisis. During the Lancashire cotton famine in the 1860s, libraries provided refuge for swathes of unemployed textile workers, who were praised for reading, not rioting. Around the turn of the century, as imperial rivalry intensified, as Britain’s economic hegemony was threatened and as fears escalated around the degeneration of the ‘race’, strong educational and ‘national efficiency’ notes were sounded. These were reflected in the upgrading of reference services and the growth of children’s libraries – aided in no small measure by the ‘collectivist self-help’ philosophy of American industrialist Andrew Carnegie, who donated funds for the construction of hundreds of library buildings.

In 1914, many librarians went to war, and there were other interruptions to service, but reading for light relief as well as about the causes of the conflict and other international matters increased in popularity. Technical and commercial departments were inaugurated in the context of the reconstruction effort, which was partly aimed at guarding against the spread of revolutionary ideas. Reconstruction also gave rise to reformed legislation (in 1919), which allowed county councils to open libraries, thereby giving library access to millions in rural areas for the first time. During the Great Depression of the 1930s, libraries offered distraction from the misery of daily life. In the Second World War, 50 libraries were destroyed or severely damaged. Those that survived the bombing were blacked out, but the opening hours of many were lengthened and a massive boom in reading was accommodated, as people sought diversion and ways to maintain morale.

A massive library building programme in the post-war period helped drag the country out of austerity. The bold, concrete-and-glass modernist libraries of the 1960s, alongside a new Public Libraries Act in 1964 – which for the first time made the provision of a ‘comprehensive’ library service by local authorities compulsory – represented a huge investment in the public library ideal. This was coupled with a more vocal discussion about disadvantaged members of society who had been informally excluded from library services, among them alienated young people and ethnic minorities. For such people, it was argued, libraries might just as well not have been open.

To rectify these inequalities and move away from a universal, one-size-fits-all approach, attempts were made in the 1970s and 1980s to develop a ‘community librarianship’ mode of service delivery, which sought to de-institutionalise the library service, engage with local communities, identify and work with existing grassroots organisations and, above all, prioritise the needs of the disadvantaged, the culturally

excluded and – a term more widely used then than now – the underclass. This strategy ran alongside and prefaced more populist initiatives in the form of the provision of new materials and services, from audio and video tapes (1980s) and CDs (1990s) to internet access (late 1990s) and DVDs (2000s). In reaction, these innovations prompted claims – which continue to circulate – that libraries and librarians should not be, respectively, entertainment centres or social workers. Rather, services should go back to basics and revolve around books.

Therefore there is need for appropriate information to be provided to the citizens to curtail the spread of the virus since most of the fear and panic comes as a result of misinformation from unscrupulous media whereas the virus can be learned to live with. Preferredness to avoid further lockdown that involve billions of students out of school and millions of teachers should be avoided by strengthening library online services to provide access to their resources. Conclusively Libraries also can provide online services to assist students with access to materials for assignments, selection and dissemination of information resources on COVID-19 to researchers, virtual research help, virtual instruction, online reference services, access to e-books and e-journal, linking users to health institutions and organization on information relating to coronavirus, publish a pamphlet and handbills for safety measures against coronavirus.

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