

A Study on User Engagement Program in Malaysian Academic Library During COVID-19

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Abstract. User engagement is essential to ensure the organization can achieve their objective, especially in providing services to the users, such as the academic library, which provide information and services to students, lecturers, researchers, and others. However, COVID-19 has spread wildly and severed the established connection, which resulted in the interruption of information delivery. Thus, the academic library finds ways to reach its users and provide the required services despite the obstacles. In this period, exploring methods used by the library to engage with users is intriguing.

Keywords: Library services, academic libraries, COVID-19, librarians, library management.

1 Introduction

Libraries can support continuing involvement initiatives on college and university campuses and assist civic action plans to have a more significant impact. Libraries' engagement responsibilities include: 1) establishing links between resources and promoting dialogue between campus and citizen scholars, 2) putting up and displaying exhibitions showcasing the research and creative output of community, student, and faculty scholars, and 3) supplying freely accessible online databases and research tools to highlight college and community research, resources, and collections. Nonetheless, based on Mclean (2018), there appears to be considerable controversy and debate related to the definition, concepts, and operations of user engagement. Although much research involving constructs uses the term "engagement," the concept, dimension, and operationalization of engagement are inconsistent and mixed in the academic literature (Zheng et al., 2015).

Academic libraries are creating networks between partners on and off campus to support academia's ongoing commitment to community involvement and engaged scholarship. Libraries are relationship builders for their campuses, and librarians understand the need to create solid, foundational ties within the local community. Libraries foster and improve community participation while laying the groundwork for research possibilities that support engaged scholarship by displaying faculty, student, and community research and making it freely accessible on and off campus.

1.1 Safe Behaviour

On January 25, 2020, it was revealed that Malaysia's first three cases of COVID-19 were imported. To determine whether an infection was imported into Malaysia, doctors look at the patient's travel history. When the number of COVID-19 cases began to rise during the second wave, Malaysia followed the lead of other countries

and formed the MCO (Jamal Hisham et al., 2021). COVID-19 phenomena have resulted in banting all large-scale public gatherings for the next two weeks. It included canceling religious events, sporting events, social gatherings, and other similar events. In addition, all government buildings and institutions, including schools, colleges, and businesses, will be shut down during MCO. However, all non-essential community services, including grocery stores, post offices, hospitals, banks, and pharmacies, will remain as usual (Nurfatihah & Mohamad Rahimi, 2020).

According to Bernama, to comply with the MCO, the National Library of Malaysia (NLM) will be temporarily closed to the public for 14 days. Moreover, due to the government's declaration of MCO (Phase 1), numerous Malaysian universities have closed their academic libraries and other non-essential operations. Because of the widespread closure of all academic library facilities and physical material, the circulation services have been expanded, and all users have been redirected to the digitized library services (Asma Wati et al., 2021).

It indicates the need to research libraries' strategies to attract and engage with their users. It is considered that libraries are responsible for providing their users with resources and services primarily in supporting the learning and teaching process. This article discusses the study's primary goal, which is to identify the various strategies employed by academic libraries in Malaysia to interact with their users during COVID-19.

2 Previous research on user engagement

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused several difficulties for libraries across the world. Nonetheless, libraries have remained true to their purpose throughout the tragedy because they are communal institutions, constantly changing and serving their communities in new and creative ways. Studies and research have examined library and user engagement activities during the pandemics period.

2.1 Social Media

Results from the research revealed that many Greek libraries utilize Facebook, and that information is shared on social media platforms daily or weekly, primarily for providing general updates about library operations and for promoting events, including images and videos of activities conducted (Koulouris et al., 2021). According to Omeluzor et al. (2021), many Nigerian libraries have begun using media to disseminate their resources due to the pandemic. During the COVID-19 pandemic, libraries may have been able to reach more people with their information services due to the assistance of the media. Libraries may reach out to more people and promote the services and resources using social media like Facebook. However, they should make an effort to increase user involvement by posting varied and exciting content (Penaflor, 2018), which shows the use of social media in the library even before the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.2 Digital/Digitization

According to Koulouris et al. (2021), every library type prioritized spreading the word about its digital collections and realized they needed to devote more resources to acquiring and publicizing their digital collections. The statement supported by Muhammad Rafiq et al. (2020) is that, to assist online courses amid the COVID-19 pandemic, academic libraries are attempting to meet their users' digital material requirements. Omeluzor et al. (2021) stated that after physical books were affected, throughout the lockdown and the following COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria, libraries adapted fast to electronic resources, including e-books, e-journals, databases, and the distribution of newspaper cuttings to its users. Increasing the open access to online materials over the network after the library's closure has been a top objective in China (Zhou, 2021). Tammaro (2020) stated that Associazione Italiana Biblioteche

(AIB)'s acquired usage data shows a remarkable rise in the number of times individuals have used digital resources.

2.3 *Traditional Library*

Librarians have a good intuition of duty to their communities, as seen by how they handled library operations throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Most utilized a combination of onsite and working remotely to continue to assist their users (Koulouris et al., 2021). In an article by Muhammad Rafiq et al. (2020), several respondents reported that their library had been physically shut but had transitioned to providing digital materials and services. Only one of the interviewees noted that his institution's library was partly accessible to on-campus faculty members and provided loan services. According to Zhou (2021), the second measure taken by libraries in Italy following their shutdown was to ensure the continuation of standard services. As a result, students could access materials not accessible at their institution through interlibrary loans, and libraries could send books directly to users.

2.4 *Librarian Roles*

According to Muhammad Rafiq et al. (2020), the respondents shared several societal obligations, including promoting reading practices and quality reading material for the benefit of individuals with social isolation. Respondents also suggested doing information literacy classes to equip the country against disinformation. Also, giving and encouraging soul-satisfying books for individuals' happiness were the answers to the question of the societal function of librarians throughout times of crisis. Also, Tammaro (2020) wrote that libraries' initial response was to continue providing the services patrons have come to expect, like book lending, interlibrary loan, cataloging, and reference, which the services work by the librarians.

3 **Methodology**

Data collection procedures are outlined in the research methodology section. Detailed directions for this research are unit of analysis, sampling, measurement, data collection, and data analysis. The unit of analysis for this research is Individuals. For instance, this research seeks to gather from librarians the methods employed by libraries during COVID-19 to engage with users. A sample size of 80 was chosen, with the target demographic for the research study being the librarians at a Malaysian Public University Academic Library. Descriptive statistical methods were used to summarize the data and were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

4 **Findings**

The research revealed the methods used by the library to engage with users during the COVID-19 period.

4.1 *Finding 1: Academic Library Staff Members' Profile*

Within this section, this study shows a more significant number of female staff members. Out of 60 respondents, most consisted of female respondents, with 40 (66.7%) compared to 20 (33.3%) male respondents with age range, most of the research respondents are above 29 years, and the highest age range is 30 to 39 years, 22 respondents (36.7%), followed by 40 to 49 years, 20 respondents (33.3%)

Table 1: Respondent Demographic Profile

Characteristics		N=60	Percentage (100%)
Gender	Male	20	33.3
	Female	40	66.7
Staff cadre	Deputy Chief Librarian	0	0
	Assistant Chief Librarian	10	16.7
	Senior Librarian	7	11.7
	Librarian	8	13.3
	Senior Librarian	20	33.3
	Assistant Librarian Assistant	15	25.0
Work experience	Less than 10 years	9	15.0
	10 to 20 years	28	46.7
	Above than 20 years	23	38.3

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics on demographic characteristics. Most of the respondents are working as “Senior Librarian Assistants,” with 20 respondents (33.3%) and 15 respondents (25%) operating as “Librarian Assistants” at the Malaysian Public University Academic Library. Most respondents are in User Service Division with 15 respondents (25%), the second highest is Knowledge Resource Division with 11 respondents (18.3%) and followed by University Archive Division with 10 respondents (16.7%).

Moreover, 23 respondents (38.3%) out of a total of 60 respondents have been working above 20 years. In comparison, 28 respondents (46.7%) have 10 to 20 years of working experience, and another 9 respondents (15%) had worked for a shorter period, which is less than 10 years.

There are studies on Malaysian libraries’, librarians’, and library associations’ responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. Most of the libraries in Malaysia respond by having a digital platform to engage with their users. For example, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia has increased the number of infographics, digital posters, and videos. Accessing digital library collections is also being actively promoted. Hashimah Yusoff, the Head of the Resource Centre at the Malaysian Ministry of Communications and Multimedia, also promotes the resources and digital services. It is stated that the Centre provides digital book evaluations, Jom Baca e-Buku/Let’s Read e-Books, a digital exhibition on guidance to house libraries, and other services.

While in this study, it could be seen that 23 respondents (38.3%) have been working above 20 years old. The respondents might have problems using the digital platform, and some might prefer face-to-face engagement with the users. Lynn et al. (2010) stated from the sample in the study, a significant statistical tendency for face-to-face training with a minimum of 73.1% of respondents across all age groups.

4.2 Finding 2: The Change of Services During COVID-19

This section highlights the change in services in the academic library during COVID-19. The changes in user services in the library during COVID-19 are the increased virtual/online reference services, 47 respondents (78.3%), while eight (13.3%) selected in-person reference services. Another change was identifying or providing general information resources regarding COVID-19 and the increased phone reference services selected by 2 respondents (3.3%).

Table 2: Descriptive statistics on the change of services during COVID-19

Item	N=60	Percentage (100%)
The change of services during COVID-19.	Increased virtual/online reference services	47 78.3
	Reduced in-person reference services	8 13.3

Identified/provided general information resources regarding COVID-19	2	3.3
Increased phone reference services	2	3.3
No changes	1	1.7

4.3 Finding 3: The actions are taken or in planning to address users' needs

This section displays the actions taken or planning to address users' needs by the librarian and library staff. 30 respondents (50%) stated that developing new "how to" resources for accessing virtual resources, and 19 respondents (31.7%) chose to assist the students with distance learning in addressing users' needs. While 7 respondents (11.7%) stated that digitizing materials for students remote as the step respondents have taken or are planning to take to address users' needs.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics on the actions taken or in planning to address users' needs

Item	N=60	Percentage (100%)	
What steps have library staff taken or are planning to take to address users' needs?	Assisting students with distance learning	19	31.7
	Developing new "how to" resources for accessing virtual resources	30	50.0
	Digitizing materials for student remote use	7	11.7
	Purchasing and/or curating additional online research and/or homework resources	4	6.7
	Others	0	0

4.4 Finding 4: The most valuable knowledge, skills, abilities, and competencies for respondents in their position

This section presents the most valuable knowledge, skills, abilities, and competencies for respondents in their position. 28 respondents (46.7%) stated the most valuable knowledge, skills, abilities, and competencies for their position are knowledge of trends in librarianship – for example, collections, scholarly communications, new service models, special collections, and others. The second highest is communication skills which consist of written, oral, and interpersonal abilities chosen by 12 respondents (20%). Also, knowledge of higher education is important, which was selected by 9 respondents (15%), that include teaching, learning, research, and funding.

Table 4: Descriptive statistics on the most valuable knowledge, skills, abilities, and competencies for respondents in their position

Item	N=60	Percentage (100%)	
Which of the following knowledge, skills, abilities, and competencies are currently most valuable for you in your position?	Communication skills	12	20.0
	Knowledge of higher education	9	15.0
	Knowledge of trends in librarianship	28	46.7
	Management skills	5	8.3

5 Discussion and Recommendation

This research study is on the methods used by the library to engage with users during the COVID-19 period. Most librarians and staff stated that the library uses online and offline methods to engage with users. Up to now, the library is working to maintain the physical library while improving services by implementing an online platform. Even with the decrease in its use since the COVID-19 pandemic, it could be said that the physical library is still relevant in providing resources for the users' educational use, which is also supported by the previous expert interview with the Head of the librarian from The Malaysian Public University Academic Library. The Head of the librarian said the users are still physically coming to the academic library since it has a learning environment. Zhou (2021) also stated that from the survey questionnaire, most participants said they enjoyed their time studying independently and encountered no difficulties utilizing digital library resources. Even so, many still preferred offline education.

Many chose increasing virtual or online reference services as the change of services during the COVID-19 pandemic. The library also developed new "how to" resources for accessing virtual resources to address users' needs during COVID-19. It indicates the library had implemented digital services to reach users during restrictions on movement. Martzoukou (2020) discussed in the previous paper that libraries with many online students and employees who were used to working from home before COVID-19 could already be in a good stance to provide a variety of online services. At the same time, libraries with a smaller number of online students and staff are being asked to redefine themselves and develop a comprehensive set of online services as they move into a new era of digitization.

Additionally, librarians and staff chose guidelines from state or federal agencies as the information gathered for decision-making. Also, the knowledge of librarianship trends such as collections, scholarly communications, and special collections is valuable for librarians and library staff in their position. According to Munro & Philips (2008), even while faculty individuals hold specific expertise in their areas of study, depending on them for collection creation may result in a regional focus in collection creation, leaving gaps in the collection. Participation of librarians in the selection procedure should result in a comprehensive library. The most significant decisions are made when librarianship ability and subject expertise are integrated. It designates that the librarians play an essential role in managing the library's direction, which they are persons making decisions for each step taken and could affect the library's future.

It is recommended for the academic library to enhance the technological skills of staff members. The Malaysian Public University Academic Library could enhance the staff members' technological skills by signing up for classes provided. There are various classes provided in Malaysia since technology has been an important aspect nowadays. The academic library could send their staff members in a large number or only send a representative of the library. The representative will return to the academic library and hold a knowledge-sharing session in which the staff member will usually teach the others. They also could hold the class by themselves. Most organizations are taking this option since they could save the organization's budget. As mentioned previously, the classes provided usually will cost a big budget. However, by managing their class, the organization could save money and invest in other things. It is also easier since the staff members would feel comfortable with each other since they are from the same organization.

Moreover, the staff members could always refer to the expert when having technological problems or learn more regarding technological skills since they are in the same organization. There are various advantages to the academic library by having technological skills since many have integrated technology. According to Shi (2015), the library could save much time using computer technology to retrieve and

organize resources. Also, users could borrow library materials and obtain the desired knowledge as quickly as necessary. Moreover, the library's materials will be more organized using technology, which minimizes the probability of human mistakes and increases the reliability and quality of the collected data. The application of technology increases the effectiveness of library resource planning, reduces costs, enhances customer service, and saves time.

Also, the academic library should strengthen the users' technical training. The Malaysian Public University Academic Library is responsible for users' information resources and always finds the latest ways to help the users. However, it is a waste of time and the library's budget if the users do not use the services and resources. It is because some services and resources are too complicated to use, which results in abandoning them. The academic library could hold an annual class for the users in which the librarian and library staff will teach them how to use the system and retrieve information from it. The librarian or library staff will be responsible for holding a class regarding each of the latest technologies implemented in the library. It will help users use the services and feel the intensity of the library is willing to spend time and energy to help them. According to Nurul Fariyah & Asmahani (2021), online services in academic libraries have transformed the library into a hub for all scholarly and instructional pursuits within the institution. The institution must implement online distant learning (ODL) for all aspects of the educational process, including library services. Chinese University of Hong Kong Library provides online training through Zoom Conference Meeting and developing library services in inventive methods, waiving overdue penalties, auto loan terms, and auto-renewal materials lending.

6 Conclusion

Overall, there are several ways to guarantee that users will positively interact with the organization (in this case, the academic library). It is because user participation is crucial for an academic library to effectively serve its patrons, including students, faculty members, researchers, and others, by granting them access to reliable information sources. The user engagement program will make it easier for users to understand the services provided and establish connections with the academic library. Academic libraries may interact with consumers in various ways and innovate in new methods, such as exploiting online platforms, introducing digitalization, or improving current services, even in the face of the advent of COVID-19. They are also responsible for managing user engagement by providing the method for users to reach the information needed.

As a result, the author intends to propose future recommendations to the library concerning the methods used by them in engaging with users during the COVID-19 pandemic. The library should strengthen its digital platform by giving more input through digitization and focusing on digital services. Through digital, the librarians could provide resources to users at any time and place. Also, the upper-level management needs to ensure the librarians are compatible with the use of digital and prepare them well by giving workshops or classes. It is because the library not only deals with students' resources but also needs to provide enough resources to the lecturers, researchers, and others.

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Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

This research paper contributes to the field of Library and Information Management.

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