



ROLE OF LIBRARIES IN DISSEMINATING INFORMATION ON CORONA VIRUS DISEASE IN NIGERIA

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Abstract: The paper examines the role of the libraries in disseminating information on corona virus disease in Nigeria. It discusses the concepts of libraries, their services and brief history of corona virus. The paper shows that the information needs of the people were numerous and could be met through mobile libraries via mobile driven and internet-based libraries services. The challenges of accessing information were due to lack of facilities, illiteracy, poverty, lack of information infrastructure, etc. The library through its services and roles can prevent and control the spread of corona virus among the library users through educational, recreational, collaboration or partnership roles with other institutions, social media, mobile phones etc. It concludes by stating that the library should be equipped and empowered to operate as an essential service like media houses, Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), World Health Organisation etc, during this pandemic. It further recommends among other things that libraries should be funded by all levels of government in other to acquire recent information materials, equipment and facilities for effectiveness in information dissemination among the people.

Keywords: Libraries, Mobile Libraries, Corona Virus, Information dissemination

Introduction

Libraries are information centres established to provide information which generate knowledge and equip people with relevant information in order to serve the society. Libraries form vital part of the world's system of education, information acquisition, storage, dissemination and retrieval. They make books, film recordings and media knowledge available to people in an organised manner. Since information is a very important tool to any nation or individual, wherever the information can be gotten, it becomes a power house. Unlike the reading rooms which were used to disseminate war-time information during the World War II, was turned around

after the post war with the help of international organisations such as British Council, UNESCO, to form the peoples' university, otherwise known as public library. According to Nnadozie (2007), public libraries are those government or public funded libraries established to provide free services on equal basis to the generality of the people without discrimination. So in this era of another "World War" called corona virus disease pandemic, libraries reserve great deal of roles to perform even more than what were done in the past..

Library as a social institution plays a crucial role in dissemination of medical, educational, economic, historical, global etc. information. These roles are to

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enhance individuals, groups or nations' ability to take informed decision. Lack of these roles by the libraries and other information professionals have cost the world a colossal lost in terms of human life, hunger, recession, finance and others. Therefore libraries should be repositioned and be equipped in providing quality information, offering virtual reference services, partnership, use of social media, advocacies, mobile services and information packaging, to the seekers and the society at large especially in this pandemic era.

Information is indispensable to human existence. Everyone needs it especially in this time of corona virus: the teacher, the student, the administrator, the entrepreneur, the farmer, the worker in the factory and the field, researcher, the industrial and business manager, the artisan, all need the information to equip themselves to stay alive and to prevent the spread of corona virus. The basic information role of the library is to collect material containing information through appropriate methods. It is primarily in this sense that a library is described as an information centre. But a library also has an informational role in the sense of providing information relating to the needs of the people. A library can stock information materials to help those who are on a lock down or at home, frontline workers like the doctor, nurse, and other essential workers like Nigeria Center for Disease Control (NCDC), World Health Organisation (WHO) etc during this period. Libraries through their services and resources can provide helpful guidance to the patients, medicals workers and the general public at this time. Ononogbo (2003), states that information reduces uncertainty, while improving the accuracy of decisions. In short, a library should be so equipped and organised that it will be able to serve its community with all types of information that may be in actual or potential demand at this COVID 19 Period.

Mobile services in libraries are provided through mobile libraries via an extension of public libraries.

Mobile libraries could be classified under two categories, one has to do with collections of books and other information materials arranged in vehicles to provide a library service to individuals, groups or communities. They use it to describe a motorised vehicle carrying library material. These mobile libraries can be called Bookmobile, Bibliobus, Bucherbus, etc. Any library service that does not stay in one place (static) is classified as a mobile library. The modern mobile library may carry DVD's, CD's, computers, pictures, maps, toys and leaflets as well as books. It will have facilities to download material onto disk and memory device. Motorised vehicles are not the only means of transport rather boats, trains, planes, motorcycles and various animals are used to provide services (IFLA 2010). These channels could be used to inform the library communities about the preventive measures of the corona virus 2019 (COVID19) pandemic. Another aspect of this mobile library has to do with library and materials that are available 24 hours a day linked with internet device through Application (App) or Website (web) facilities, which are emerging technology in libraries.

Broadbent (1982) stressed that one significant point, namely, that as much as the library has informational role in the society, being one component of communication system, it has other vital social functions to perform. These he explained might be recreational, cultural, social or educational. Information centres are the veritable repository of knowledge that underpins socio-economic, political and cultural development of any country. They are avenues of knowledge that constitute one of the principal instruments in building a richer and better social order. Therefore these vital roles and services provided by libraries can be termed essential to the community's needs. This could be applied in this period of COVID19 to prevent the spread of the disease.

Beckman (1982) explained that information centres like libraries are viewed as being more dynamic. So could



be used at this period for information dissemination on guidelines for this deadly disease.

Corona virus disease which is otherwise known as COVID 19 is currently the disease ravaging human life. The disease has caused the death of over 500,000 people in the world today and over 10,000,000 are said to have confirmed cases since the inception of the disease in China. (dailypost.ng). The world is looking up for a solution to this very pandemic which cannot be far from informed decision, which is gained through information dissemination through the libraries, information agencies and medical professionals with its allied institutions to the civil societies. The danger is that the vaccine to handle the deadly disease is yet unknown. Therefore, the best option is to take a personal responsibility by controlling and preventing the spread of the disease, which depend on adhering to protective measures prescribed by the World Health Organisation, and other Health Professionals. These measures cannot be put into use without adequate awareness, sensitization and information to the populace.

Libraries and their services

Libraries are institutions that package, process, store and disseminate information to their communities. Libraries are far reaching body for information sources and services that are responsible for acquiring, providing access to books, periodicals and other media resources that meet the educational, recreational and information needs of their users (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2003). Libraries provide services to their clients or patrons to make sure that information sources, services, and resources are well utilized for users' benefits. Information relating to the measures to control and prevent the spread of the corona virus can also be packaged by the libraries to their patrons.

Based on these definitions, the library exists for unrestricted provision of books and related materials to serve the study, vocational, cultural and recreational and

information needs of the members of the public particularly those living within the environment or locality where it is situated. Since the library is established to serve the information needs of the community, efforts should therefore be made to provide collections and services that will satisfy these needs. Some of these libraries and their services are outlined by the following:

Mobile Libraries

Mobile libraries and services will be divided into two parts namely mobile driven libraries or libraries on “wheels” and Mobile internet-based libraries. These are types of public libraries extension programme (library) that provide outreach services, delivered externally to library members, the community and other stakeholder groups. These can be in form of internet- based mobile service via websites (web) or Application (app) and can be a version of services, programs or other activities delivered at the physical branch through a vehicle (Allison, 2013).

Mobile driven libraries or libraries on “wheels”

Mobile libraries are collections of books and other information materials arranged in vehicles to provide a library service to communities. Mobile libraries bring resources outside of the library's fixed location to users who otherwise may not get a chance to benefit from them. This period of lock down and stay at home, mobile library could be engaged to educate the people either at their homes, locations informing them and creating awareness of the COVID 19 pandemic. Some examples of mobile libraries are:

Bookmobile is most common type of mobile library. It is built around a van, bus or other driven autos. It provides also a type of library service that makes use of wagon, wheels, or vehicle to provide library service to its communities. Bookmobiles expand the reach of libraries by transporting information materials to potential users, providing library services to people in different locations



as need arises. Bookmobiles have been based on various means of conveyance, including donkeys, elephants, horses, trains, watercraft, wagons, camels, mules, Bicycles, carts and motor vehicles. According to Want (1990), to meet the growing demand for "greener" bookmobiles that deliver outreach services to their patrons, some bookmobile manufacturers have introduced significant advances to reduce their carbon footprint, such as solar/battery solutions in lieu of traditional generators, and all-electric and hybrid-electric chassis. People can be reached through this means on the measures to control the spread of corona virus.

Boat is another type of a mobile library service which is called a floating library. In this case, the mobile library is a boat. A boat library is a great way to connect communities that may not have easy access to the services that a main branch library can provide to its residents (Shaorong Liu, 2013). The boat library or book boat can access these areas and communities providing materials and library resources. Some of these communities might be caught off by the social amenities of good roads, social media, facilities and their only hope of sensitization on the measures and regulation on the COVID 19 pandemic depend only on the information source of boat library.

Bike: The book bike looks more like a 3-wheeler bike that can hold up 100 volumes. It is considered the most practical mobile library, the bike library or 'books on bikes' as some call it. This version of the mobile library is most likely the most affordable and can effectively extend the reach of public libraries and increase awareness of the library to users and non-users alike. (Marc 2019). The inception of the book bike made the library vast and attracted a lot of media and public attention. In fact, wherever the bike ends at a time turns into a mini pop-up library. The main advantages of bike library are the flexibility and relatively low operating cost (Wikipedia 2010). It is also worthy to note that some mobile libraries

(wheels) have Wi-Fi hotspot to accessing technology resources and information.

This form of library could be used to reach people of different kind of users with the relevant information. It has the advantages of binging library to remote or unique areas not only to strengthen the benefits and perception of the library but also to update the communities with the recent information especially in this era of corona virus pandemic.

The Internet-based mobile library

This type of mobile libraries and services make use of internet resources. On like The mobile driven library which has a location, rather, the mobile internet-based library refers to library services and materials that are available 24 hours a day on any type of device possibly with website or applications. Ihiwhu, Ruteyan and Eghwubare (2010), state that if librarians are to continue to make substantial contributions as information disseminators, they will have to understand and exploit Information Communication and Technology (ICT) infrastructure and emerging technologies in delivery services to their clientele. Internet –based library becomes the best option in serving the community.

Website or web: This is a type of mobile library resources that provide 24/7 libraries service to the patron. A web application is accessed using a web browser such as Internet Explorer, Firefox or Safari, at the comfort of home and get the latest information in the society. Libraries can use the source to reach their communities on the danger of the COVID 19 and the possible way to prevent its spread.

Applications: Applications, or apps, are an emerging technology that is impacting libraries. Apps work differently than websites. An app is specific to an operating system and is downloaded to a device that connects directly to a service. Apps are developed to work through the Internet and outside the web. Many library vendors have developed, or are in the



process of launching, their own apps that work with their services. Apps eliminate competition from search engine discovery, and provide fewer headaches over browser and operating system compatibility. . Libraries must work with vendors to develop apps that work across library resources and clearly brand the library. (Anderson and Rainie, 2012).

A mobile device provides a different experience than a desktop computer and requires more than a resized screen. In particular, mobile device users are often in a hurry, and are looking for targeted information, thus only the most frequently-used links should be presented. It is particularly important to provide links to mobile versions of popular databases, options for reviewed or rated sources, and, when possible, a link for real-time help. When libraries support mobile computing they may have to develop several different websites for a variety of devices.

These updated form in the form of m libraries, also known as mobile libraries in which patrons are delivered content electronically (Brena; Michelle 2010). The update information can base on the recent COVID 19 pandemic that is ravaging human race and its possible way to curb it.

Use of social media: This is another internet-based communication to libraries communities. Khan and Bhatti (2012) put it thus; social media provides more opportunity to reach your community, target specific audiences, and give them a chance to interact with your library. Web 2.0 tools such as Whatsapp, YouTube, Face book, twitter, blogs, online groups, Instagram, which are also known as social media have made it possible for people to connect to one another through the internet. Libraries can engage their clients through social media on issues of interest especially on the control and prevention of the spread of COVID 19. With Web 2.0 technologies the library can connect people with information; these have brought new roles for library professionals.

Mobile Phone: Mobile devices like smart phones have improved communication and enhanced the way information is being created, delivered and accessed. In support of library service, the use of SMS (short Message services) can be employed to answer reference queries, and alert uses on new arrivals and upcoming event like the regulation on the control of COVID 19, from WHO, NCDC, Federal Ministry of Health. etc. The libraries can provide effective library services through mobile phones like the GSM (Global system for Mobile communication). This could be flashed through a facility called – broacastll where one text message is sent to all the library contacts listed in the address book on the mobile phone at once. (Ihiwhu, Ruteyan and Eghwubare, 2010).

Partnership/collaboration: Libraries in partnership with other relevant agencies like the World Health Organisation, Nigeria Centre for Disease Control, (NCDC), Federal Ministry of Health and Media centres can create an activity center for users to have up to date information on the COVID 19 malady. The possible way to tackle this pandemic cannot rely on only one agency and it source of information. There should be a collaborative effort on all to defeat this disease by given reliable information to the people knowing full well the value and importance of good information at this time.

Current Information Services: Libraries offer some services like Current Awareness Services (CAS) Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI), Reference services etc. These are services that can keep up to date with latest information in specific subject areas and to a specific person sometimes in customized or personalized form. And could be used at this time of pandemic to assist the people on the regulations of the COVID 19 pandemic.

Brief History of Corona Virus 2019 (COVID19)

The end of the year 2019 witnessed an unfortunate scenario, an outbreak of a deadly disease called the Corona virus disease 2019 (COVID-19). The



disease is a highly transmittable and pathogenic viral infection caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome corona virus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). The recent outbreak was in December 2019, first noticed in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China and spread around the world. Corona viruses are a large family of zoonotic viruses that cause illness ranging from the common cold to severe respiratory diseases. The intermediate source of origin and transfer to humans is not known, however, the rapid human to human transfer has been confirmed widely. These viruses are able to be transmitted from animals to humans (worldmeters.info)

COVID-19 is the most recent to make the jump to human infection. Common signs of COVID-19 infection are similar to the common cold and include respiratory symptoms such as dry cough, fever, shortness of breath, and breathing difficulties. In more severe cases, infection can cause pneumonia, severe acute respiratory syndrome, kidney failure, and death. The COVID-19 infection is spread from one person to others via droplets produced from the respiratory system of infected people, often during coughing or sneezing. According to current data, time from exposure to onset of symptoms is usually between two and 14 days, with an average of five days. There is no clinically approved antiviral drug or vaccine available to be used against COVID-19. However, few broad-spectrum antiviral drugs have been evaluated against COVID-19 in clinical trials, resulted in clinical recovery. It has now been confirmed on six continents and in more than 198 countries. The treatment of the victims are mainly on the symptom and applying malaria or fever related drugs, using antibiotics and immune building supplements. Some other countries in the world use herbal syrups for the treatment. This viral disease has caused the death of over 5,000,000 people and over 9,000,000 confirmed cases (dailypost.ng).

The role of libraries and corona virus pandemic

Library is described as a social institution and an information centre which is established to serve its immediate community with relevant information. These functions made library service an essential one in any given society. The basic information role of the library is to collect material containing information through appropriate methods. But a library also has an information role in the sense of providing information relating to the socio-economic needs of the people. library should be so equipped and organised that it will be able to serve its community with all types of information that may be in actual or potential demand especially at this era of corona virus pandemic, library has much role to play as to reposition its stand in the meeting the need of the people by dissemination information on the measure to control and prevent the spread of COVID 19 pandemic in our society.

It is believed that libraries hold the key to world of knowledge and information, the people should possess information about their environment especially at this period of COVID 19 pandemic. These regulations and measures such as: staying home, keep a safe distance from others, self-isolation from friends and family, don't touch your eyes, nose, or mouth, cover coughs and sneezes with your elbow or tissue, practice frequent hand hygiene, wear a face mask recommended by Federal Ministry of Health Nigeria and Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) should be put in use through adequate awareness, sensitization and information to the populace. According to Okoro 2007, people should possess information about their environment which tallies with present information society where fundamental right to information and knowledge is encouraged.

Again, library has an information role in the sense of providing information relating to the health and socio-economic needs of the people. A library can stock corona virus information materials in posters, bill boards,



and magazines and leaflets to help those who could not assess other means of communication either because of their level of education or sheer indifference. Similarly, well-produced cartoon or picture books would be helpful in providing guidance to illiterate society and children to internalize the message. In short, a library should be so equipped and organised that it will be able to serve its community with all types of information that may be in actual or potential demand. Through this medium people could be educated enough to take a right decision how to take a personal responsibility and safety measures about their life during this devastating period in human history.

Libraries through their types and outreach services should reach their potential patrons at different locations with relevant information about the COVID 19. Remote places could be accessible through the bus, bike and even the boat libraries to the hinter parts of the communities where mass media and other social amenities may not be accessible. This shows that library with its facilities could be the bases and hope of the common man at this period of COVID 19 pandemic.

The role of libraries with the advent of internet cannot be over emphasized. Libraries continued to help their patrons more with the use of tablets and mobile phones and resources such as websites and applications as an emerging technology that is impacting libraries. With these innovation library users can at any time and any where get current information about the happening around them even at their convenient. This enables the users to source, sorts, articulate and disseminate information which they need.

The collaborated role of libraries and librarians should not be undermined if effectiveness in information dissemination should be achieved. Information gathering and dissemination needed a collaborated effort, so libraries should partner with other agencies to make their roles effective. According to Tinuade and Fadekemi

(2015), these media are known to have a large coverage of audience which should be exploited by libraries in reaching the populace. Such agencies like NCDC, Media stations, Federal Ministry of Health and World Health Organization should cooperate with libraries. These agencies or bodies will enhance authenticity and reliability of libraries information to their communities, knowing full well that information is vital at this period of “war” in the world caused by COVID-19 pandemic.

The recreational and leisure role of libraries are very important at this period of COVID 19 pandemic. This period characteristics different phases of lock-downs in the nation, some are partial, others are total, a healthy use of leisure is a matter of great importance in community life at this period of no activities, so that the time is not devoted to negative and destructive activities. The library should cater to the recreational needs of its users by stocking information materials suited for the purpose. Health materials, novels and other forms of literature, works of art, books of travels, biographies, popular magazines, etc., are primarily books of recreation and they should have a place in every mobile library.

Libraries and librarians can offer some services like Current Awareness Services (CAS), Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI), Reference services etc. to their patrons at this time of pandemic. The libraries will enable them to be abreast with the recent information and regulations on how to prevent and control the spread of the disease and also to be safe. According to Kubenje and Aghoghovwia (2008), libraries should offer customize services of relevant literature, provide bibliographic services, offer selective dissemination of information and current awareness services to the rural people, in order to meet up with their information need in this pandemic era.

So library should be considered as an essential service like other agencies like media houses, health workers, NCDC staff. It should be provided with the



necessary empowerments such as personal protective equipment (PPE) or kits, license or approval papers, funds, facilities or materials and man power to perform at this period without restriction or interruption.

The challenges of libraries and corona virus pandemic

The challenges of libraries are numerous, ranging from inability to accessing information by the users due to lack of facilities, illiteracy, poverty, lack of information infrastructure to lack of government empowerment and support. Government should also accord the libraries the necessary backing to operate by providing facilities; outreach or mobile equipment, training and necessary fund both for the staff motivation, education, provision of reading and information materials.

Conclusion

The paper concludes by emphasizing that libraries play important roles in providing relevant information during this era of covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria. Librarians should be provided with the necessary information materials, personal protective equipment (PPE) or kits, licenses or approval papers, funds, vehicles, in other to meet up with the information need of the people even at the remote areas of the society. So the patrons (communities) will be able to make informed decision as a result of the awareness created by the libraries against the deadly disease called corona virus.

Recommendations

The study recommends that libraries should acquire recent information materials such as books, journals, posters, magazines and cassette recordings to use to educate the people on the danger of contacting corona virus. Also the equipment needs for the libraries should also be made available by the appropriate authorities, federal, state and local governments in other to enhance their outreach mobile services such facilities like information infrastructure, boat, bus, personal protective equipment, man-power training etc. Furthermore, it is known that information is vital and varied, so libraries

should be accorded due recognition as an essential service like other institutions like Media houses, NCDC, WHO, etc. to operate. Moreover, fund and financing is a major factor that cannot be overlooked, government should give direct grant to the libraries to sustain their activities at this time.

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