
USABILITY OF SMARTPHONE FOR REFERENCE SERVICE PROVISION IN LINE WITH THE REALITIES OF THE NEW NORMAL OF SOCIAL DISTANCING

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Abstract

The paper discussed the usability of a smart phone for service provision in libraries and how it can enhance service delivery, in the era of pandemic, adjusting to the social distancing. Conceptual clarification of smartphones and Reference services were provided focusing on which smartphones are used in carryout Reference services provision, how smart phone users can access information from the circulation unit without having to visit the library, using Mobile Phone Current Awareness Library Services, Library Instructions and Virtual Tours. Some popular benefits of Mobile Devices in application of Reference Service was summarized as, it is user friendly; it is a personalized service, time saving, user participation, location awareness and limited Access. Challenges in the use of smartphones in providing reference services as thus: inadequate power supply, lack of knowledge for such services, bandwidth problem, privacy, and other factors. Conclusion was drawn as well as recommendations, it is hoped that from this study, librarians should implement smart phone usage in their respective institution in order to improve and enhance the library services so that it is available to users at any place and any time. More and more changes are expected within four to five years in the field of mobile technology and its application to libraries.

Introduction

In the age of information and communication technology, libraries have changed their services and housekeeping operations for providing access to their collection. Libraries are deeply interested in channels for the dissemination of information, such as mobile phones, telephone lines, cellular networks, and the internet. Libraries have been challenged in satisfying their user's needs since their target market which are researchers, lecturers, undergraduate, and postgraduate students is demanding and dynamic. Yang and Li (2016) Observe, that the prosperity of the Internet and access to the Internet and World Wide Web (www) has made it

possible for university lecturers, researchers, and students to locate what they need without going to the library.

Like most service institutions, libraries need to engage in marketing their products and services and finding quicker ways of reaching out to their users on time. In the recent world development of the outbreak of the pandemic, the mode of living changed from living together to the social distancing to prevent the spread of the Coronavirus disease which started in 2019 (COVID-19), and in adapting the preventive measures of social distancing, libraries have adopted the new normal ways of social distancing in the provision of library services with the available mobile phones almost owned by each citizen recently. According to Singh & Nikandia (2017), mobile technologies are new communication tools and these are transforming how people can search the information, receive the information, and interact with the information daily.

These mobile phone tools offer convenient access to world information, across borders of a subject, discipline, and organization. Mobile phones are important tools to facilitate prompt handling and response to the stream of user's questions from within and out of the library user community. Most university libraries have Smartphone lines, which are mostly used for administrative purposes and located in the library administrator's office. Smartphones could be used at the enquiring desks, for Short Message Services (SMS) or text facilities available on all Smartphones, and can also be used to create awareness amongst the library users about upcoming events and new arrivals. Libraries need to keep abreast of the dynamically changing needs of their clientele. According to Abdulrazzaq, and Al-Ani (2018)

Mobile phone library service is such a specialized and personalized information service that can be achieved using the wireless technologies made available to all. Renewal notifications

could be sent to alert users, that books are almost due or overdue. Websites housed information that Offers free SMS to mobile phone services on the Internet. As cell phone technology continues to evolve, it will have a significant impact on libraries as the Internet. However, reference services through which the library in the 21st-century librarian needs to provide using smartphones since the era of the pandemic does not allow crowded places but social distancing. the researchers expect that this study will bring to light the relationship that exists among smartphones and areas where smartphones can be applicable to reference services and the benefit of using smartphones for reference services in the library

Conceptual clarification

Smartphones and Reference Service

Reference service is the personal assistance rendered by the reference librarian to library users to achieve valuable service. Ogunniyi, Efosa, and Sheji (2013) say reference service is the personal assistance given by librarians to library users in pursuit of information; the assistance could be informed of information itself or could be any library activity deliberately designed to facilitate easy retrieval of information. Reference service is one of the essential services provided in the library.

Chebe (2012) opined that reference service involves establishing contact between the patrons and collection through the connection of users with collections. This new type of service, called a digital or virtual reference, has emerged as the result of various factors, including the advent and wide use of the Internet and the development of software capable of providing synchronous and asynchronous service. Digital/virtual reference is quite new but has

quickly become popular because of demands by patrons to access information anytime, anywhere.

Some professionals simply define the terms “digital reference” and “virtual reference” as similar in service and scope. Others provide a more specific explanation. Alessia (2004) as cited in Damilola, Okesanya, Abiodun, and Kusoro,(2018) says that digital reference is also “called chat reference, virtual reference, online reference, and synchronous reference” according to the above author digital, virtual, and e-reference are the same type of service and that they all use librarians as intermediaries to assist users in finding information in a digital environment.

However, the traditional methods of reference services delivery are lacking as they are not prompt and far-reaching. This makes it necessary to utilize other means of meeting users’ demands in a networked environment such as the use of mobile technologies. Smartphones and tablets are mobile technologies among the six new growing developments that could considerably influence teaching, learning, and research in necessary training (Sung, Chang, & Liu, 2016) Smartphones are available to almost every user of the library in recent times some are in 3g while others are in 4G network facility, Libraries also offer wi-fi facility to users, similarly, Adeyinka and Durodulo (2021) confirm that most Smartphone makes use of wireless mobile networks (Edge, 3G, 4G, and even 5G) and offer email, internet services, and advanced call features as well as (in most cases) a full QWERTY keyboard, either with a physical keyboard attached to the device or one embedded into the operating system.

The mobile Web offers users access to information quickly and it helps to interact with the library staff to obtain specific information without having to come to the library. Damilola, Okesanya, Abiodun, and Kusoro,(2018)

Areas in Which Smartphones Are Used To Carry Out Reference Service Provision

Access to Information at circulation unit: Mobile technologies have had a tremendous impact on the provision of library services, through the mobile web, user can access information to anywhere at any time and it will be of great help for users who wants to apply the social distancing rule to avoid crowding places and provides a constant link to required information resources. Mobile devices offer users to browsing and searching library resources. According to Liu and Briggs (2015) stated that the most common mobile services offered were mobile sites, text messaging services, e-books, and mobile access to databases and the catalog.

In addition, chat/IM services, social media accounts, and apps were very popular.

Users do not need to wait at the library transaction counter to renew/reserve books and therefore the time of the user is saved, with Personalized Service. Mobile phones helps in services that are specialized and personalized that helps to interact with library professionals and gain specific references assistance from the reference librarian, on how information can be made available to users through emails and smart-phone application. All online resources accessible on their desktop also become accessible through mobiles.

Mobile Phone Library Current Awareness Services: Through text messaging library professionals should alert the users for new book notice, informing availability of reserved documents for collection, appraising about which/when books are overdue, library circulars, e-journals subscribed, change in timing, information about important events, etc. Such alert notifications can be generated automatically using integrated library management system/software and sent to user through smartphones. According to Anunobi (as cited by

Shammasi, 2012), Library awareness and use is the bedrock of information service provision, This type of service emphasizes making users aware (informed) of what the library has in terms of new acquisitions (new arrivals), new services, new rules or conditions governing library use as well as opening hours and ways of service also makes users know how to behave while in the library.

New Title Preview and New Arrivals Mobile gadgets can be used to disseminate information about newly acquired documents which are available irrespective of forms. Users aside vendors can also Suggest a purchase through smartphones, Librarians can receive the suggestions from the users via mobile phones. In such cases, users need not visit the libraries and write the requirements in a register.

Library Instructions and Virtual Tours: The library users, who don't have time to attend on-site workshops or library orientation, can get access to library tours on their mobile devices. Audio/virtual tours can be produced fairly quickly and it also can reduce staff time spent helping new users to orient themselves in the library and explaining the services provided by the library. Research consultation and user instruction as a kind of customer care service can also be rendered by Library staff to researchers through mobile phones.

Research scholars may have an interaction with the library staff to get the consultation and get suggestions via mobile phones such as specific definitions and information contents, information on current journals within the research area and new publication alerts for quality research, some of the user instruction like the handbook, virtual tour, bibliographic instruction, and links to literature search can be done using the smartphones.

In-house search of E-resources and Database: Library and institutions provide access to their owned databases and resources. User should just enter search terms and can see results that are designed specifically for mobile viewing. Some of the E-resources that can be accessed on your mobile devices without having to visit the library are www.pdfdrive.com, most e-books are made available at the site for free, libraries have a subscribed version for different disciplines and departments at a little token index on the websites for users to access through their mobile devices without visiting the library. The www.researchgate.com and www.academia.com.

Similarly, Tiemo, (2016) citing Appleton (2006) described online databases as those kinds of documents in digital format which are made available to users through computer-based information retrieval systems. as such can also be accessed using mobile phones through their website to avoid crowding in the library.

Online Reference service: Reference services have been the assistance offered to users in search of information in the library, has some many features and services which can be rendered using smart-phones technology on the digital reference services, where mobile applications are used to answer queries with a dedicated Whatsapp account, Facebook, Twitter, and Linked-in as well as another social media handle, these platforms can be explored with the use of smart-phones. All users queries can be sent to the available medium for live chat or to be attended to at a later date, the needed resources can be the source and arrange as well as presented to the user at a short period without haven to visit the library, the use of smartphones does not only saves time, it bridge the gap of distance for researchers searching from a far distance. According to Dika, Sani, and Ezeh (2016) Asserts that social media tools facilitate the delivery of information to meet search queries presented by many patrons, it helps the librarian answer queries from

different patrons at the same time reducing their physical presences in the libraries, especially with the era of the pandemic as advised on social distancing.

Library users can ask librarians anything through live chat and texting with mobiles. The reference services can be provided with the help of sending and receiving SMS. Immediate feedback is also possible from the user side. Instant Messaging (IM) for Reference services Mobile devices can use for instant answers like definitions, meanings, and other information from digital libraries and the web. While the institution has its own IM network, the library can also use web-based free instant messaging services from Google, America online, Way2sms etc.

Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI): SDI is a type of CAS that keeps the users in touch with the latest developments in the field of users' interest or it is a personalized service meant for the individuals or group of users having identical information needs. The users can be informed through SMS notifications, social networking sites, email, etc. which can be easily accessed through mobiles by the users.

Mobile Document Supply/ Inter Library Loan/ Document Delivery Service: Mobile technology presents new opportunities for sending document requests and scanned images and monitoring the use of collections as well as the automation of administrative operations. A user can have requested documents on his mobile phone via SMS, Email, etc.

Information Literacy (IL): The Library can offer a variety of instructional programs that include curriculum-integrated sessions, multimedia software training, and online learning modules through mobile APPS (digital literacy). Faculty may request curriculum-integrated library instruction sessions through mobile APPS. Training on databases usage and discovery

service use can also be done on smartphones. Etim (2013) stated that information literacy forms the basis for lifelong learning; it is common to all disciplines, to all learning environments, and all levels of education. It enables learners to master content and extend their investigation, become more self-directed, and assume greater control over their learning. As such information literacy makes individuals master the basic techniques needed to search for information independently and derive maximum satisfaction for exploring information resources made available in libraries.

Embedded Librarianship: Embedded librarians are integrated information experts that offer more direct research assistance to groups of faculty and students than the typical one-shot instruction session, often over an entire semester. The work of Embedded librarians has now become easier due to the help of mobile devices. He can now reach the distance learner with help of Library website real-time chats or APPS and can help every user according to their needs throughout the research period.

Mobile Printing: The library can provide the users with the facility of printing through their mobile phone for any instant requirement. However, the implementation of this technology is hindered because of its dependence on the capabilities of mobile devices.

Mobile Services for Visual Impairments: The use of mobile technology in special libraries is beneficial to assist persons with special abilities like visual. Such people are often unable to access them because there is no special interface for them. Mobile devices such as smartphones have screen readers that can help the disabled to access information. Visual or vibrating alerts devices, voice recognition, and auto-text make mobile phones accessible for those with physical disabilities. For Example LibriVox (Free access to over 24,000 audiobooks). If any library provides such members with the gateway of LibriVox they can use it through their mobile phone.

Marketing: Due to the explosion of information at the global level, the management of libraries is necessary to meet the information needs of users. Similarly, Daniel (2013), asserts that mobile phones have allowed present-day libraries to overshadow the conventional library methods. The world in which libraries exist has changed dramatically. It moves faster, relies on technology, and competes more intensely.

Marketing through mobile technologies, Libraries can use Social media, like, Facebook, Whatsapp, Instagram for the use of updating a user with the current events of the library, e.g. notification about new arrivals, social activities, and cultural programs organized by the library, library tour and vacation as well as videos from library week and exhibition, etc. Social media is an easy platform for the library to connect with its members because it is easy to use. Social media can also be used by the library for marketing the services available for a fee using smartphones.

Benefits of the usability of smartphones for reference service provision

Some popular benefit of Smartphones in the application of Library services can be summarized as follows:

It is user-friendly: Familiarity with their own devices and technology helps the users in accessing information quickly and does not require any special orientation and training.

It is a personalized service: Personalized service helps users to interact with library staff to seek specific information or reference away from the library. Flexibility and Freedom to Access

Information: Information access from anywhere at any time will be of great help for users who can't visit the library in person and provides a constant link to required information resources.

Time-Saving: Users need not record information about resources while browsing and searching library resources or wait at the library transaction (issue-return) counter to renew or borrow books and hence the time of the user saved.

User Participation: Libraries can enrich OPAC by allowing users to incorporate user created content like notes or images uploaded by users.

Location Awareness: Mobile communication enables libraries to offer location-based services/content through global positioning system(GPS) capabilities. Libraries can guide the users to the location of a specific document or service through maps and navigation tools.

Limitless Access: All online resources are accessible on their mobile devices without any fear of storage capacity.

Challenges Associated with the Use of Smartphones in Providing Reference Services

Cost: The high cost of computerizing library services is a major challenge. The cost of library automation, internet services using VSATs and other facilities needed for the take-off of library automation is enormous (Jegbefume, 2014) as cited in Damilolo et al (2019). More so, provision of funds for library development has remained very poor over the years. It is evident that no institution can ever develop beyond the available financial resources.

Inadequate Power Supply: Mobile technologies equipment depends solely on power supply to perform effectively. Nigeria as one of the developing countries faces a lot of hardship emanating from epileptic generation and supply of electricity. This situation is greatly hampering the development of the internet as incessant power outages are experienced. According (Ajayi, Shorunke and Akinola (2013), power supply has become unreliable and the alternatives is expensive and out of reach of many academic libraries which are poorly funded.

Lack of knowledge: Users of libraries find it difficult to make use of mobile technologies due to low level mobile literacy among them. This problem is aggravated by the short age of technology literate staff in library, lack of skilled human resources and funding to develop such skill in existing library. Without the relevant mobile skills, the library will be unable to guide the library patrons maximize available ICT facilities and explore the opportunities (Elisha, 2006) as cited in Damilola et al (2019)

Bandwidth problem: As mobile technologies evolve, high speed of network with sufficient band width is required. Sometimes, low speed and connectivity cause frustration among the users and librarians of the internet.

Privacy: Because of the risk that patron usage information can be used and exploited by law enforcement official and those who commit identity theft. Mobile technology is changing the relationship between libraries and their users--by expanding services and posing new challenges to reader's privacy.

Other factors: Saxena and Yadav (2013) have identified content ownership and licensing; high cost; limited memory of mobile devices; digital right management and dearth of technological expertise among staff.

Recommendations

1. The application of mobile phones to provide library and information services will open a new pathway towards this trend. This can be an astonishing means to outreach the users, enabling them to access library resources and services from anywhere at any time even when they are on move.

2. Mobile technology has become imperative to libraries. A library may reach remote users effectively by adopting mobile technology in its services.
3. Library policies and services should be flexible and open so that new information needs of users are met with new technologies.
4. The task of libraries is to exploit new technology in a more effective way to promote and integrate them into the design of future library services in a cost-efficient manner.
5. It is hoped that from this study, librarians should implement smartphone usage in their respective institution to improve and enhance the library services so that it is available to users at any place and any time. More and more changes are expected within four to five years in the field of mobile technology and its application to libraries.

Conclusion

The above discussion and examples clearly show how the smartphone can help to improve Library Services and help librarians to connect with library users anywhere and any time. In another view, it also helps library users to get benefit from the library services even if he or she can't avail library physically due to the pandemic and requirement to social distance. Advancement of ICT, new technologies and tools are emerging day by day to fulfill the demand of the users, as such smartphones are inevitable.

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