MANAGEMENT OF DIGITAL SERVICES DURING COVID-19 IN THE LIBRARY OF MEDICAL UNIVERSITY OF PLEVEN

Gabriel Georgiev

Medical University of Pleven (BULGARIA)

Abstract

During Covid-19, libraries face enormous challenges and requirements. Some of them have started offering new and stable online opportunities for their users. As part of the international library space, the Library of Medical University of Pleven (L at MU-Pleven) created new online services and consolidated proven ones. They emerged as a kind of a meaningful and purposeful project *for managing digital resources during an epidemiological situation*, and the need for their management is palpable.

The subject of the present study is the digital services, provided by the Library of MU – Pleven, such as: remote extension of the term for rewriting; constant communication with a librarian through the social network Facebook and e-mail; increasing the Digital Collections at the request of student teachers; online-re-registration in order to provide access to digital content; information mediation - providing addresses of free databases. Particular attention is paid to the cooperation with the research department. We assist in obtaining remote access to the Scopus database and the Web of Science of doctoral students, postgraduates and lecturers, in order to continue the scientific activity.

The methodology of conducting the research is based on taking an online interview. Each of the librarians is tasked to do a specific task - to manage a particular digital service. A linear management structure has been created. Each of the subordinates receives orders from only one head - director of the library - above him and reports only to him. Formal connections are made through direct contacts. This ensures the stability of the relationship between co- workers and the responsibility is individual.

The conclusion from the research is that, unfortunately, there are no trained staff to react in atypical situations such as period of social isolation due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but it is necessary to transform positions into "moves". That is why we have chosen a simplified management model that can be changed in the future. Although slightly "primitive", we think that simple things are more digestible and easy to implement. Thus, an unprepared user or staff member will be able to adapt fast. We hope that this will be in favour of some libraries that decide to follow our example.

Keywords: management, digital services, library space, Covid-19, linear structure, libraries, Medical University Pleven

INTRODUCTION

Libraries worldwide are facing a great challenge because of the Covid-19 epidemic. They contain a huge amount of knowledge, which has to be transformed in a new way to be easily affordable to consumers in the digital world. Gradually the traditional library specialist becomes an informational broker (Denchev, 2012). It is important for the libraries when a selection of the relevant digital content of the reader's needs is done, provided to its customers in a harmless way and managed correctly. A crucial moment in the structure of management plays the pyramid of knowledge. It must be started from the individual detail – the facts; there has to be an event that changes the recipients' opinion – the information; knowledge to the message should be given and finally wisdom should be reached by recognising the truth. Facing this situation libraries all over the world are mobilizing. In the professional literature on library and information sciences in reports from UNESCO, EBLIDA, IFLA, ALA there are on-going discussions on what measures should be taken to improve remote access to information.

METHODOLOGY

The research methodology is a retrospective phenomenological study based on an electronic interview. Periods of activity of Library at Medical University in Pleven (L at MU-Pleven) are compared before and after the quarantine because of Covid-19 and the relevant conclusions are made.

PRESENTATION OF LIBRARY AT MEDICAL UNIVERSITY PLEVEN

Library at MU-Pleven was founded in 1974. It is 685m² big. 3 reading rooms are available (150 m²) with 71 seats for reading, 12 computers and 10 tablets with a free access, connected to Internet; a resource center with 2 multifunctional devices (a copy machine, a printer and a colourful scanner), one of which is fully colourful; 3 desktop scanners, 2 of which are Photo Scanners. The library serves the teaching staff, the Bulgarian and the international students of the University. An automated library information system e-Lib/i-Lib has been established, which gives students and academic staff access to the library's electronic catalogues, and to the digital collections for those of them who are members of the library (http://ilib.mu-pleven.bg). Since 2015 there is a Facebook page of the library (https://bg-bg.facebook.com/libraryofMUPleven/).

Library at MU-Pleven is another information redistributor that creates, validates and manages new digital services in the Covid-19 circumstances. The phenomenological research motivates the thesis that the conclusions and lessons from our work may be of interest to other Bulgarian and foreign libraries. To make a strategy for reorganising of the activity: the experience of a number of library institutions was examined; peculiar electronic interviews in social media were held; information from IFLA, UNESCO, ALA and EBLIDA's sites was tracked. The conclusion is: it is necessary that a *project for management of digital resources during an epidemiological situation is developed and applied*. For the project's easier assimilation and realisation, it was decided a linear management structure to be used. The experience of librarians from different countries, shared on EBILDA's site, is also considered (EBLIDA, 2020).

MANAGEMENT DECISIONS IN THE LIBRARY AT MU PLEVEN DURING COVID-19 (MARCH - MAY 2020)

In the presented library environment we started tracking the change in the wishes of our users during the declared emergency situation due to Covid-19.

It is normal when the processes are tracked. This is because in reality there surely wasn't a trained librarian in the world to work in the conditions of Covid-19 and in Library at MU-Pleven a work "in step" was needed. We accepted the difficulties as a challenge to be met by implementing *a project for management of digital resources during an epidemiological situation* (Todorova, 2014). As a management method, it was decided to move to a *linear management structure* (Linear, 2020).

The linear structure of government dates back to the Old World as a model of military management. It is often used in small businesses. Typical for this type of structure is that all power is concentrated in one person; this means that we have a centralised management. Since in the library work a total of 7 people this structure happens to be suitable in the specific conditions of remote work in an emergency situation. It is simplified and easy to apply. In practice, in a linear management structure the director's orders are passed directly to each subordinate. Specialists have a clearly defined responsibility, and feedback on the progress, problems and implementation of activities is given directly to the director of the library. Centralized management allows easy monitoring without much effort. Given the fact that the

staff is small, there is no need to impose something new and difficult to digest.

In two months - 13.03.2020 – 13.05.2020, 183 calls were carried out (electronic interviews) mostly via the library's Facebook page and a smaller amount via e-mail between readers and a staff member.

The statistics from the Facebook page show that for two months visits have doubled. From the graphics (Fig. 1 and Fig. 2) it is obvious that in the first three months of 2020, when coronavirus wasn't a discussed topic, our posts have reached maximum of 600 views, whereas during the first wave and the subsequent quarantine period, consumer interest in requesting and receiving library e-documents increased to 1,400 people. It is significant that the information published on the Facebook page of the library is valuable, useful and appealing to our users.
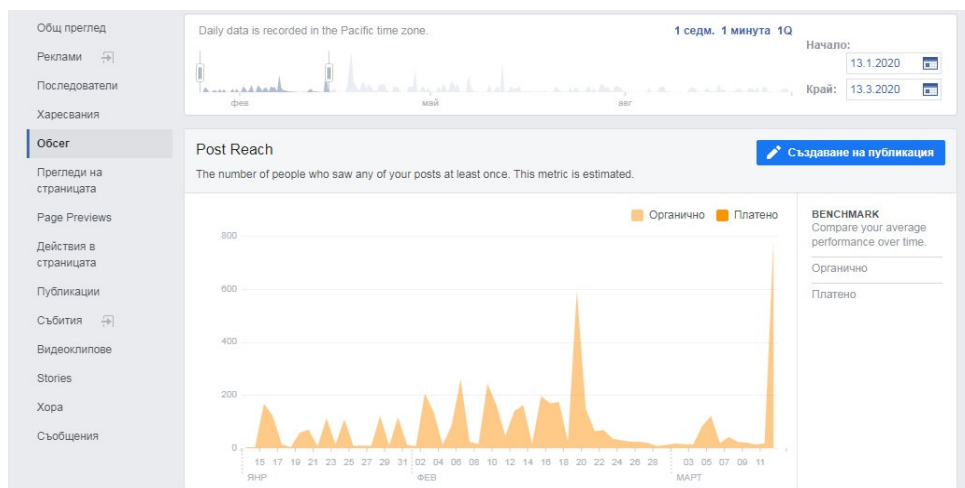

Figure 1. *Post Reach (January - March)*

Figure 2. Post Reach (April - May)

RESULTS OF THE FENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

Information and feedback from readers made it possible to run this phenomenological study. The conclusions are based on personal experience and on the basis of shared by librarians working in global organizations, published mainly on EBILDA's site.

In order to achieve working management decisions, the latest information and news were constantly monitored and generated by the library associations IFLA, UNESCO, ALA and

EBLIDA. IFLA STRATEGY 2019-2924 (Strategic Direction 2 - Inspire and Enhance Professional Practice) (IFLA, 2019) also had influence. 2.1 Produce, communicate and distribute key resources and materials that inspire the profession. The need of shared experience is extremely important. It gives models for following on the basis of good practices and is a prerequisite for the development of cooperation between institutions. To obtain information on user satisfaction, more than 180 electronic interviews on Facebook and correspondence via e-mail were analysed.

The following six types of digital services with sustainable consumer interest can be distinguished, based on the results of the phenomenological study:

1. *A constant dialogue with a librarian even during Covid-19.*

This becomes possible by the using information and communication technologies, mainly the Internet. Almost 24/7 the users of Library at MU-Pleven received answers to their questions. Even out of the officially announced opening hours, we have strived to be available to our customers. The questions are answered by a librarian who has good communication skills, knows how to handle with social networks well and has the motivation to keep in touch with readers. Thus, the full capacity of the library staff is used, taking into account the personal attitudes of colleagues, and at the same time under the centralized control of the director of the library. We also took an example from BLIA's checklist, published on EBILDA's website: Checklist Point 10. Some of the Bulgarian public libraries have initiated email contact with the patrons to help them access the digital services; Checklist Point 8. The German Library Association is offering an overview of special services provided by libraries in the time of corona virus (https://bibliotheksportal.de/spotlight-corona) (EBLIDA, 2020).

The linear management structure allows the librarian to receive orders from only one person and to report only to him, to be able to react in a timely manner without the need for third party intervention. Communication with an authorized representative of the library has increased by over 100% compared to the period before the quarantine.

2. *Remote extension of the period for returning the books.*

After the final term for returning the books has expired - within 3 months, readers can apply for its extension through the Facebook page of the library. For this purpose, the titular librarian, who is in service, accepts the electronic requests and then fulfil them in a timely manner. Thus, on the one hand, it is not necessary for the consumer to come to the place, and on the other hand tolerance is shown and its term of use is extended without being fined for delay. The form of reporting is again only the library's director's, which means the linear management structure is observed. Books are being returned only during work time. The regular returning of expired books has been approximately preserved, with a slight increase of about 10% compared to the period before the quarantine.

3. *Increasing the number of digital collections as requested by teachers and students.*

Digitizing a textbook is a rather hard and slow process. For its realization is used the book scanner Bookeye – 4. It is necessary to first scan the content of the document and then to process it, to attach digital content to the site and only then to make it available for use in accordance with the exceptions and limitations at Bulgarian Copyright and Related Rights Act (Todorova, 2017). Use is available in the secure network of the library, using a username and password. They are provided on site at the library during the pandemic – remotely. Each user signs a declaration that protects from illegal dissemination of the provided information. A necessary condition to use this service is that the user has paid the fee to the library for the respective calendar year. Requests for creating a new digital content needed for consumers' education and research have also increased by more than 100% compared to the period before

the quarantine.

4. *Online re-registration in order to provide access to digital content.*

When readers do not register for the respective calendar year, they lose access to the digital content. That's why it is necessary for them to submit an electronic application that they want to re-register. A certain librarian accepts the users' requests and re-registers, and they are obliged to pay the fee when it is possible. In this case, re-registration is made – that means he has already signed a declaration and the only condition he has not fulfilled is the fee. A librarian prepares a list for all re-registered readers (during considered period of two months - 50 people). This is a slight increase of about 15% compared to the period before the quarantine. In addition to our own observation, we have taken into account publications from the shared experience of a number of EBLIDA's member countries: Checklist Point 9. Some of the digital services of the academic and public libraries in Bulgaria are freely accessible to everyone; Checklist. Point 14. In Denmark library policies focus on the distribution of digital library resources and services are under pressure (EBLIDA, 2020).

5. *Informational mediation - providing addresses of free databases.*

Information on open access to scientific information was shared via Facebook. These were mostly global platforms that partially provided open access to full-text scientific articles and reports for a certain period of time. This really helped the work of both the library and the people in the research department. The use of these databases is naturally increased by over 100%, due to the free access and the impossibility to use real books. According to Bulgarian Library and Information Association (BLIA) and what is written on EBILDA's webpage: Checklist point 7. The academic libraries started to promote through social media the available electronic resources and digital collections and to provide access to them not only to the academic staff and students but in most of the cases to a wider audience (EBLIDA, 2020).

6. *Assistance for obtaining remote access to the Scopus database and the Web of Science for doctoral students, postgraduates and lecturers.*

Good collaboration with the research department and the need to continue researching (during Covid-19) are the basis for the creation of the latest digital service. In order to remotely access these two scientometric databases, it is necessary to use the IP addresses provided by the university. After registration, users must enter once from the IP-range of the university. Within 6 months it is possible to use a database from any point with a username and password, as the only condition is to have Internet. Here is the good work with the research department. About 50% of doctoral students sought assistance in creating such profiles. Once again, we used international experience and solutions: Checklist Point 16. ENSSIB (The National School for Librarians and Information Scientists) has made available its resources and distant-learning courses: https://www.enssib.fr/ouverture-ressources-Enssib. The webinar concerning "The role of libraries in the face of the Covid- 19 crisis (Séminaire Biblio-Covid19 https://raphaellebats.blogspot.com/2020/03/seminaire-bib-covid.html) was very useful (EBLIDA, 2020).

M. Book's view on the management of digital resources in academic libraries is interesting and useful (Boock, 2019). According to him, the library should be in support of a broad range of research life-cycle activities. We fully accept the thesis that we should not only be custodians of knowledge, but also participate in its creation, dissemination and preservation. For this purpose, it is necessary to transform some positions, gradually changing their characteristics (Scholarly Communications Librarian (formerly a cataloging and materials repair staff position) (Boock, 2019) and thus to differentiate the services necessary for researches. As part of these services, "Electronic Archive" was built in Library at MU-Pleven with digital content of the scientific production of the university. It will also be a major module for the library's

informational system in the future. The e-repository will store digital copies of dissertations, publications, collections and other types of academic research - author's work of university professors. They will be available after the author signs a declaration of agreement. During Covid-19, this gradually became a paramount task for the library's team as part of the collaboration with the research department. Due to staff limitation, the process will take longer. Training for the academic staff and doctoral students on academic publishing and self-archiving is taken into account, including through remote forms - by creating videos on YouTube, power point presentations etc.

CONCLUSIONS

The conclusion is that there are no trained personnel for management in the conditions of Covid-19 at this moment. The probability of making a lot of changes depending on the duration of the epidemiological situation is high. It is affirmed that we must listen to the consumer's voice, which determines the democracy of the decisions taken. Simple but direct actions show efficiency and ability to directly impact needs at any time. Even the fact that we can answer questions 24/7 from a distance, shows the potential of the library institution. As La Rochelle says: "Library is larger than Geography. Discoveries in the physical world will end someday, but never in the literature one".

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