

Library Websites During the COVID-19 Pandemic

**Ester E Mnzava, and
Annajoyce S Katabalwa**

Sokoine University of Agriculture, Morogoro, Tanzania

Alexandria: The Journal of
National and International Library
and Information Issues
2021, Vol. 31(1-3) 12–22

© The Author(s) 2021

Article reuse guidelines:

sagepub.com/journals-permissions

DOI: 10.1177/09557490211058869

journals.sagepub.com/home/ala



Abstract

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has been shown to impact the business environment in different ways. The current paper presents how the university and research library websites in Tanzania responded to the changes in the working environment and style following the outbreak of COVID-19. This study employed a content analysis method to collect and analyse data from academic and research library websites in Tanzania. This study focuses on how library websites in Tanzania were used to update and connect library users with relevant information resources and services during the outbreak of the COVID-19. The findings show that 12 of the 24 library websites had the opening and closing hours, two university library websites had information related to the outbreak of the COVID-19 and 12 had no information related to the outbreak of the COVID-19. This study has an important practical implication for the academic and research librarians on the effective use of library websites for information sharing and communication.

Keywords

Library website, COVID-19 pandemic, research libraries, university libraries, website, coronavirus pandemic

Introduction

The rapid growth of new technologies has shown to transform the way individuals and organisations conduct their business. For instance, the use of websites has impacted information sharing and communication among business owners and their customers (Devi and Verma, 2018; Okechukwu and Anunobi, 2020). In the libraries, websites are used as an important gateway to various information resources and services such as access

Corresponding author:

Ester E Mnzava, Sokoine University of Agriculture, BOX 3022, Morogoro 67104, Tanzania.

Email: esternst@sua.ac.tz

to scholarly databases, online public access catalogue, research tools and useful links for research and academic purposes (Arshad and Ameen, 2015; Dominguez et al., 2015; Devi and Verma, 2016; Gohain, 2019; Valenti, 2019). The library websites are used to give general information such as library history, facilities, working hours, staff and contact information (Herring, 2007; Sife and Tandika, 2014; Gohain, 2019). Similarly, library users can get the experience of the particular library through a virtual tour on library websites (Gohain, 2019).

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic (coronavirus pandemic), several libraries in Africa and elsewhere had used their websites to share various updates related to the prevention of COVID-19, provide new arrangements for getting services from the library and updates from publishing industries (Ali and Gatiti, 2020; Petterson, 2020; University of Cape Town; University of Nairobi Library, 2020). This articulates that library websites remain important platforms that provide a convenient way through which libraries can communicate and share information with their users. Moreover, the library websites represent their respective libraries at the local and international level (Okechukwu and Anunobi, 2020). Therefore, effective management of the library websites is essential to facilitate its accessibility, ease of navigation and information discovery as well as communication between libraries and their users (Valenti, 2019). This paper intends to present how websites of the universities and research libraries in Tanzania had responded to the outbreak of COVID-19. Specifically, the study focused on the opening and closing hours of the libraries, new or special services and announcements on the library websites or pages.

Reviewed Literature

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted people differently from the individual to the global level. The working styles of most individuals and institutions have changed and librarians are learning new facts about the pandemic disease, informing the public and adapting new services to meet the changing community needs and behaviour (Ali and Gatiti, 2020; OCLC, 2020; University of Pretoria University of Bath Library, 2020; University of Cape Town University of Bath Library, 2020; University of Nairobi Library, 2020). The American Library Association (ALA) websites, for instance, provide different information resources from various sources to support librarians' needs in the current environment (American Library Association, 2020). This information includes information about professional development training/resources such as those related to conducting and evaluating distance library instructions as well as online reference service. Several libraries have established new ways of service delivery, such as online webinar and sessions to keep in touch with their users via various applications such as Google Classroom, Google Hangouts, Skype and Zoom (Ali and Gatiti, 2020). Social media platforms like Facebook are used to inform library users about available online resources in the libraries and special offers from different database publishers (Petterson, 2020; University of Cape Town; University of Nairobi Library, 2020). These publishers including Else, CDC, NEJM, JAMA, Lancet, Cell, BMJ, Nature, Science, Elsevier, Oxford, Wiley and medRxiv provide news, updates and promote research resources about

COVID-19 (Google Scholar, 2020). These updates are essential to support researchers and practitioners in health and cross-cutting fields.

Most of the libraries (academic, public and school) work remotely because many users have changed their information-seeking behaviour and, therefore, are not going to the libraries (IFLA, 2020). For instance, the UK local government association (2020) has reported more online new users of more than 600% since lockdown measures were introduced. However, most of these libraries are incapable of serving all users with e-books because of licence restrictions given by the publishers. Likewise, in France, an increase in the use of digital resources has been reported with a similar challenge of licence restrictions (Ministry of Culture-France, 2020).

The changes in the working environment and working style require librarians and their respective institutions to respond accordingly. Several libraries and other information service providers like database and journal publishers demonstrate how library websites can be used to inform and connect their users with essential information and services (Ali and Gatiti, 2020; OCLC, 2020; University of Pretoria University of Bath Library, 2020; University of Cape Town University of Bath Library, 2020; University of Nairobi University of Bath Library, 2020; Google Scholar, 2020). Nevertheless, there is a lack of information on how academic and research libraries in Tanzania employed their websites following the outbreak of the COVID-19.

Methodology

A content analysis method was used to collect and analyse data. The content analysis is a research method concerned with the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the content of communication (Franzosi, 2008). This method has been extensively used to analyse the contents of library websites (Verma and Devi, 2015; Savitha, 2016; Kumar and Mir, 2017). Content analysis was considered appropriate for this study because of its popularity in library research and the fact that it is context-sensitive, thus allowing for the examination of texts not subject to the influence of interests (Kim and Kuljis, 2010).

The websites of university and research libraries in Tanzania under the Consortium of Tanzania University and Research Libraries (COTUL) (<https://www.cotul.or.tz/>) were explored to determine how libraries have responded following the outbreak of COVID-19. These libraries were selected because they provide essential support in research and academic activities in Tanzania. Therefore, a list of 42 libraries was obtained from the COTUL website (COTUL, 2020). Then, a search was conducted on 18 May 2020 on the Google search engine by using the key terms from the names of each library to retrieve their websites since the list provided on the COTUL website did not have links for all libraries. Table 1 provides a list of library websites that were accessible. The Google search engine was selected because of its capability to use keywords to search the internet and retrieve results accordingly. Furthermore, it provides options to organise search results and broaden or narrow down to specific searches (Price, 2020). Regarding the time limit, it was paramount to retrieve the data within 1 day to reduce the possibility of any changes that could occur in these websites, thus ensuring the stability of the data collected

from these websites. The reason behind this is that changes can be easily made and a site seen on one day may not be the same afterwards (Patrias, 2017).

Therefore, only 24 websites were included in this study because other websites were either unavailable or not found. Then, the accessible websites were analysed according to a checklist, which guided the collection of information about the opening and closing hours of the libraries, information resources and services (if there was any special information or following the outbreak of COVID-19) from each website. Different sections of the websites such as the news, new updates, library services and opening and closing hours were visited. These sections were considered potential areas where the required information to address the objectives of this study can be found.

Findings and Discussion

Closing and Opening Hours of the Library

As pointed in the *Methodology* section, only 24 out of 42 websites of the university and research libraries in Tanzania were accessible. The websites/pages of the rest (18 libraries) were not available or found. The findings show that 12 library websites had information related to the opening and closing hours of the library, while 12 library websites had no information regarding the opening and closing hours of the library (see [Table I](#)). The findings further reveal that these libraries had no information that shows whether there were any changes in the opening and closing hours following the outbreak of COVID-19. This suggests that those libraries have changed working hours but this was not reflected on their websites. It also suggests that the information about the opening and closing time might be found in other parts of the websites than the sections explored by the researchers (see the *Methodology* section). The same explanations may also be applied to those libraries, which had no information about the service hours. Although any changes in working hours may have been communicated on other platforms such as mailing lists, social media platforms, posters and short message service (SMS) ([Shonhe, 2017](#); [Malekani and Benard, 2018](#)), the use of websites to share updates remains important. This is because academic and research library websites remain an essential gateway to library services ([Dominguez et al., 2015](#)). The library websites serve as a primary source of information to most of its users ([Verma and Shukla, 2017](#)). Furthermore, since the current age is characterised by library users who are more technology savvy and find most of their resources online ([Okechukwu and Anunobi, 2020](#)), the effective use of the library websites need to be emphasised.

These findings differ from the experience given by other library websites around the world including Africa. For example, the University of Cape Town library website informs its users that their libraries are closed but they will be open for virtual support for a specific time ([University of Cape Town Library, 2020](#)). Other libraries that had communicated changes in working hours include the Aldinga Library, Noarlunga Library, University of Pretoria Library, The University of Sheffield Library and Radboud University Library ([University of Pretoria Library, 2020](#); [City of Onkapinga Libraries, 2020](#)). These libraries communicate changes in their working schedules as well, as an

Table I. Websites for different libraries (universities & research institutions) in Tanzania Following the Outbreak of the COVID-19.

<i>Libraries</i>	<i>Opening/closing hours</i>	<i>During vacation</i>	<i>Any special arrangements or information</i>
Agakhan University in Tanzania Library	Monday–Friday: 6:30 am–8:00 pm Saturday: 8:30 am–5:00 pm Sunday: Closed	Monday–Friday: 8:30 am–5:15 pm Saturday and Sunday: Closed	None
Ardhi University Library	Monday–Friday: 09:00–22:00 Saturday: 09:00–18:30 Sunday and public holidays: 10:00–16:00	Monday–Friday: 09:00–16:00 Saturday and Sunday: Closed	None
Arusha Technical College Library	Not seen	Not seen	None
Dar es Salaam University College of Education (DUCE) Library	Monday–Friday 08:30–16:00 16:00–22:00 Saturday 08:30–18:00 and 18:00–22:00 Sunday 14:00–18:30 and 19:30–22:00	During vacation 08:30–16:00	None
East African Community Library	Not seen	Not seen	None
Hubert Kairuki Memorial University Library	Not seen	Not seen	None
Institute of Finance Management - Dar es Salaam Library	Not seen	Not seen	None
Institute of Finance Management - MZA Library	Not seen	Not seen	None
Institute of Tax Administration (ITA) Library	Monday–Friday 08:30–10:00 pm	Saturdays: 09:00–1:00 pm Sunday and public holidays: closed	None
Kampala International University in Tanzania (KIUT) Library	Monday–Friday: 08:00–10:00 am	Saturdays: 08:00–5:00 am, Sunday and public holidays: closed	None
Kilimanjaro Christian Medical College (KCMC) Library	Not seen	Not seen	None
Moshi Cooperative University (MOCU) Library	Not seen	Not seen	None

(continued)

Table I. (continued)

<i>Libraries</i>	<i>Opening/closing hours</i>	<i>During vacation</i>	<i>Any special arrangements or information</i>
The Muhimbili University of Health and Allied Sciences Library	Monday: 8:30–18:30 Saturday: 19:30–22:30 Sunday and holidays Closed	Not seen	None
Mwalimu Nyerere Memorial Academy Zanzibar Library	Monday–Saturday 9:00 am–18:00 pm 19:30 pm–22:0 pm Saturday: 9:00 am–13:00 pm	Not seen	None
Mwalimu Nyerere Memorial Academy DSM Library	Monday–Saturday 9:00 am–18:00 pm 19:30 pm–22:0 pm Saturday: 9:00 am–13:00 pm	Not seen	None
Mwenge Catholic University Library	Not seen	Not seen	Announcement to inform university community that the university has suspended all academic activities until further notice
Mzumbe University – Mbeya Campus Library	Monday to Friday: 08:00 pm–10:00 pm Saturday to Sunday: 10:00 am–09:30 pm Public holidays: Closed	Not seen	None
Mzumbe University – Morogoro Campus Library	Not seen	Not seen	None
Nelson Mandela African Institution of Science and Technology (NM-AIST) Library	Monday to Friday: 9.00 am–10.00 pm. Weekends and public holidays: Closed		None
Sokoine National Agricultural Library	Monday–Saturday: 08:00–18.30 hrs and 19.30–22.30 hrs Sunday: 14.00–18.30 hrs and 19.30–22.30 hrs	Monday–Saturday: 08.00–17.00 hrs Saturdays: 08.00–12.30 hrs Sundays and public holidays Closed	How to spot fake news about COVID-19
Tanzania Institute of Account DSM Library	Not seen	Not seen	None

(continued)

Table I. (continued)

<i>Libraries</i>	<i>Opening/closing hours</i>	<i>During vacation</i>	<i>Any special arrangements or information</i>
The United African University of Tanzania Library	Not seen	Not seen	None
Tumaini University Makumira Library	Not seen	Not seen	None
University of Dar es salaam Library	Various opening and closing hours for particular sections	Sunday and public holidays: Closed	None

alternative way of serving their users. For instance, virtual services and support for teaching, learning and research activities were shown to be available online and on phones.

Special Service Arrangements Following the Outbreak of the COVID-19

The researchers were also interested to see how the library websites were used to communicate any special arrangements for library services or any other information following the outbreak of COVID-19. The special service arrangements include any type of library service or means of serving library users that were employed following the outbreak of COVID-19 ([University of Cape Town Library, 2020](#); [University of Pretoria University of Bath Library, 2020](#); [City of Onkaparinga Libraries, 2020](#)). In Tanzania, the COVID-19 crisis caused a temporary closure of schools, universities and colleges and therefore, most of the library users did not visit their libraries as normal ([The Citizen, 2020](#)).

The findings reveal that only two library websites (Sokoine National Agricultural Library and Mwenge Catholic University Library) had information on how to spot fake news about COVID-19 and an announcement to inform the university community that the university has suspended all academic activities until further notice, respectively. The rest of the library websites (22) had no information related to COVID-19 or library services following the outbreak of COVID-19. These findings present a serious concern because as insisted by various scholars such as [Dominguez et al. \(2015\)](#), [Verma and Shukla \(2017\)](#) and [Okechukwu and Anunobi \(2020\)](#), the changing information-seeking behaviour of library users' and conveniences given by library websites require its effective use.

The findings from this study also present a different image from other libraries in Africa and elsewhere, where various updates related to COVID-19 were given on library websites. The updates given ranged from those related to the library services due to changes in the working environment and style to those related to the prevention of COVID-19. For instance, at the University of Pretoria, the library website provides links to various information resources on COVID-19 such as a link to the COVID-19 coronavirus South African Resource Portal and virtual support for teaching, learning and

research ([University of Pretoria Library, 2020](#)). The University of Cape Town library provides COVID-19 related scholar resources including books and journal articles for its community, COVID-19 library guide, FAQs and free access to resources from several publishers ([University of Cape Town Library, 2020](#)). Another experience is the University of Nairobi Library that has shared information about free resources from various publishing industries such as Springer, Nature, JSTOR, CORE Search engine and Project Muse. It also informs its users of various options for remote access to resources ([University of Nairobi Library, 2020](#)). Likewise, The University of Bath Library has provided contact information for specific services following the lock-down environment ([The University of Bath Library, 2020](#)). The practice given by different library websites such as that of the University of Pretoria, University of Cape Town and the University of Nairobi provides useful insights that can be learned by other libraries in Tanzania and elsewhere.

It is evident that around the world, libraries, through their websites, have responded differently following the outbreak of COVID-19. This is different in Tanzania, where information on how library websites were used when the academic activities were temporarily suspended was lacking. The lack of updates on the library websites regarding changes in service arrangements and more importantly on information resources, such as special offers for free access to scholarly resources and the opportunities given by the journal publishers to publish research results related to the COVID-19 ([Emerald Publishing, 2020](#)), presents a serious concern because library users such as instructors, researchers and students continue to work in a restricted environment that requires continued library support. Although there might be some other means which can be used to communicate and share information resources and services ([Shonhe, 2017](#); [Malekani and Benard, 2018](#)), the use of library websites cannot be ignored. [Table 1](#) presents how various universities and research libraries in Tanzania have responded to the outbreak of COVID-19 through their websites.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study concludes that most university libraries in Tanzania failed to use their websites for sharing information with their patrons during the COVID-19 pandemic. This conclusion presents a thoughtful concern because most of the academic activities were temporarily suspended and therefore library users, especially students, were not going to the library physically for services. It is also important to note that while students were not going to the classes, instructors and researchers continued to work. Therefore, essential updates from publishers such as information about free access to scholarly information and publishing opportunities, and other resources that can be accessed remotely were required to support academic and research activities from both individual and organization levels.

This study calls for the university and research librarians to use every opportunity given by information and communication technologies and particularly websites to address information needs of their users accordingly. It is important to note that library websites present a convenient platform for communication and sharing of information

resources and services. Furthermore, since library users are increasingly living in the online environment, it requires continuous updates to support their information needs. More importantly, library websites represent their institutions at the local and international level.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

References

- Ali MY and Gatiti P (2020) The COVID-19 (Coronavirus) pandemic: reflections on the roles of librarians and information professionals. *Health Information & Libraries Journal* 37: 158–162. DOI: [10.1111/hir.12307](https://doi.org/10.1111/hir.12307).
- American Library Association (ALA) (2020) *Pandemic Preparedness: Resources for Libraries*. [http://www.ala.org/tools/atoz/pandemic-preparedness#Library topics](http://www.ala.org/tools/atoz/pandemic-preparedness#Library%20topics).
- Arshad A and Ameen K (2015) Usage patterns of punjab university library website: a transactional log analysis study. *The Electronic Library* 33(1): 65–74.
- City of Onkaparinga Libraries (2020). Library locations and opening hours <https://www.onkaparingacity.com/Around-me/Libraries/Library-locations>.
- Consortium of Tanzania University and Research Institutions (COTUL) (2020). List of COTUL active members in 2018/2019 http://www.cotul.or.tz/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=97:vacantposition&catid=27&Itemid=342.
- Dominguez G, Hammill SJ and Brillat AI (2015) Toward a usable academic library web site: a case study of tried and tested usability practices. *Journal of Web Librarianship* 9(2–3): 99–120.
- Publishing, Emerald (2020) *New Publishing Fund to Help Researchers Rapidly Share Their Findings Related to COVID-19*. https://www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/topics/coronavirus/news/new-publishing-fund-help-researchers-rapidly-share-their-findings-related?utm_campaign=pim_dharp_eor_registrantapril_20200403&utm_medium=email&utm_source=smc_email_authorship.
- Franzosi R (2008) Content analysis: objective, systematic, and quantitative description of content. *Content Analysis* 1(1): 21–49.
- Gohain AB (2019) *Usage of Library Websites in Promoting Academic Library Services: A Survey with Special Reference to the Selected College Libraries of Upper Assam*. *Library Philosophy and Practice* (e-journal).
- Google (2020) Scholar search engine. Updates of COVID-19 related publications from publishers <https://scholar.google.com/>.
- Herring J (2007) Teacher librarians and the school library. In: Ferguson S (ed), *Libraries in the twenty-first century: Charting new directions in information services*. NSW: Center for Information Studies, pp. 27–42.

- IFLA (2020) *COVID-19 and the Global Library Field*. <https://www.ifla.org/covid-19-and-libraries#services>
- Kim I and Kuljis J (2010) Applying content analysis to web-based content. *Journal of Computing and Information Technology* 18(4): 369–375.
- Kumar S and Mir MS (2017) Content analysis of central universities library: websites of central region of India: a survey. *International Journal of Scientific & Technology Research* 6(6): 283–286.
- Local Government Association (2020) *LGA: 600 Percent Boom in Online Library Memberships in Some Areas since Coronavirus Lockdown*. <https://www.local.gov.uk/lga-600-percent-boom-online-library-memberships-some-areas-coronavirus-lockdown>
- Malekani A and Benard R (2018) *Effective Outreach Techniques for the Promotion of Library Information Resources in Academic Libraries in Tanzania: A Case of Sokoine National Agricultural Library*. *Library Philosophy and Practice* (e-journal) <https://sci-hub.st/http://suaire.suanet.ac.tz/handle/123456789/2374>
- Ministry of Culture (2020) *Survey: The Impact of the Covid-19 Health Crisis on the Digital Supply of Libraries in Territorial Libraries*. <https://www.culture.gouv.fr/Sites-thematiques/Livre-et-lecture/Actualites/Enquete-l-impact-de-la-crise-sanitaire-Covid-19-sur-l-offre-numerique-des-bibliotheques-des-bibliotheques-territoriales>
- OCLC (2020) COVID-19—We're in This Together. <https://www.oclc.org/en/covid-19.html>
- Okechukwu NN and Anunobi CV (2020) Availability and usability of academic library websites by undergraduates in federal universities in South East Nigeria. *UNIZIK Journal of Research in Library and Information Science (UJOLIS)* 5(1): 87–100.
- Patrias K (2017) Web Sites. In: Wendling D (ed), *Citing Medicine: The NLM Style Guide for Authors*. 2nd edition. Bethesda MD: National Library of Medicine (US).
- Peterson J (2020) *Social Library*. COVID-19 Edition, WebJunction: The learning place for libraries <https://www.webjunction.org/news/webjunction/social-library-153.html>
- Price C (2020) 17 great search engines you can use instead of Google. <https://www.searchenginejournal.com/alternative-search-engines/271409/#close>
- Savitha KS (2016) Content analysis of deemed university library websites of Karnataka state: a study. *International Journal of Digital Library Services* 6(1): 87–93.
- Shonhe L (2017) *A Literature Review of Information Dissemination Techniques in the 21st Century Era*. *Library Philosophy and Practice* (e-journal).
- Sife AS and Tandika Z (2014) *Analysis of Contents of Tanzanian University Library Websites*. Huria: Journal of the Open University of Tanzania, 17, pp. 42–49.
- The Citizen (2020) *Tanzania Bans All Public Gathering, Closes Schools, Suspends the Premier League over Coronavirus*. <https://www.thecitizen.co.tz/news/1840340-5494476-agwmfd/index.html>
- University of Bath Library (2020). Library opening times and staffed service hours: please check the advice below regarding contacting service staff during the current Covid-19 situation <https://www.bath.ac.uk/guides/library-opening-times-and-staffed-service-hours/>
- University of Cape Town Libraries (2020). Library services during COVID-19” <http://www.lib.uct.ac.za/covid19-libraryservices>
- University of Nairobi Library (2020) *Free Academic Resources during the COVID-19 Pandemic*. <https://uonlibrary.uonbi.ac.ke/slideshow-entry/free-academic-resources-during-covid-19-pandemic>

- University of Pretoria Department of Libraries (2020) *COVID-19 Update*. <https://www.library.up.ac.za/>
- Valenti AM (2019) Usability testing for a community college library website. *Library Hi Tech News* 36(1): 1–8.
- Verma MK and Devi KK (2015) Content analysis of central universities library websites of north eastern states of India: a survey. *Journal of Research in Librarianship* 2(5): 48–59.
- Verma NK and Shukla A (2017) Usability analysis of central universities libraries websites of north-east india: an evaluative study. *Journal of Advanced Research in Library and Information Science* 4(4): 37–41.