

# The Use Of Online Library By University Students During Covid-19 For Academic Gratification

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## ABSTRACT

Libraries as media play a vital role in justifying the desires of users. The more online libraries meet the users' wants, the better gratified they are. To identify university students' needs and extent of gratification from the use of an online library during COVID-19, the need for this study. The study adopted the uses and gratification approach as the theoretical foundation to improve the use of online libraries by university students. We argue that for an online library to be effectively used to attain gratification, there is a need for university students to have trust in its use. The study concluded that an accessible online library will motivate university students to use it, thereby setting a standard for gratification pursued (GP). The use will lead to gratification attainment (GA), while gratification attainment will motivate continuous use of the online library. For university students to be gratified with the use of an online library, the services must be available and accessible. For an online library to be available and accessible for university students' use, the following, among others, are recommended: awareness of online library use should be created; strategies to market the use of an online library should be adopted.

**Keywords:** Covid-19, Gratification, Information and communication, Online library, University students, Uses and gratification theory

## INTRODUCTION

A library is a vital facility for the enhancement of teaching, learning, and research (Fatokun, Salman and Adanlawo, 2022). It is the hub of all academic activities provided to achieve intellectual excellence. A library can only be regarded as the hub of all academic activities if there are adequate library resources that are well utilized. With the outbreak of COVID-19, libraries have been hampered in performing their crucial role in our universities. Since academic classes in most universities have been moved to online, the need has arisen for libraries to operate online as well. The libraries in universities were prompted to introduce online resources to meet students' information needs as well as researchers. To help online classes that exude as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, university

libraries are endeavoring to satisfy the needs of students and researchers through digital collections. Likewise, a number of publishers are also playing their societal role by providing open access to some of their resources during the pandemic (Adanlawo, 2021).

The fact that most university libraries were not fully prepared for online activities, university libraries are striving to satisfy the needs of students digitally. Though, the response to COVID-19 from libraries with hybrid collections was encouraging, most universities in the developing nations are not finding it easy to provide academic services to students. Some of the libraries were able to provide VPN access to their users, especially students. Nevertheless, a few libraries were providing this facility for campus residents only. The trend to promote

online content due to COVID-19 arose (Tammamo, 2020; Uba, 2022), not only e-books, but also a series of innovative digital content. This led most university libraries to focus their strategies on the acquisition of licenses for the digital collection. The pandemic exacerbated the transformation of libraries and a new vision to go online emanated.

At present, libraries have been playing a critical role in promoting open access and developing tutorials and module contents for university students. Despite the challenges, there is a need for university libraries to meet the needs of students, adopt online working practices in order to support online classes, and provide information to researchers. The importance of the online library as a key to education is showcased by COVID-19. The use is essential for academic gratification by university students. However, are university students well informed of the use of online libraries for academic gratification?

This study categorized libraries as media institutions as they have the capability to transfer both the collective and historical memory of different ethnic groups (Mehrad and Tajer, 2016). This study aims to provide information on the need for online library use by university students for academic gratification. In providing the information, the theory of uses and gratifications is used to explain why university students use online libraries during this pandemic. The study is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1. How has online access to libraries evolved in the COVID-19 period?

RQ2. Are resources available for online library use by university students?

RQ3. Are university students properly informed of the use of online libraries?

RQ4. Are university students satisfied (gratification attained) with online library services?

The study is structured as follows: introduction; theoretical foundation for the study; provision and the use of an accessible online library during COVID-19; problems associated with the use of an online library; conclusion and recommendations.

## **Theoretical Foundation**

### **Uses and Gratifications Theory**

Uses and gratification theory is relevant and helpful to this study. The proponents of the theory argue that the theory provides a richer analysis of gratification that is derived from using a certain medium (Whiting and Williams, 2013). Uses and gratification explains that a person or group of people's needs are met with the use of media. Uses and gratification theory describes why people seek certain media to satisfy certain needs. The purpose of the media adoption is to attain gratification. Adanlawo and Rugbeer (2021) define gratification as the pleasurable emotional reaction of happiness in response to the fulfillment of a want or desire. This study focuses on the gratification of university students' needs to excel in their academic pursuits.

In order for students to actively study and excel in their academic pursuits, there is a need to adopt the use of a digital/online library. To meet the expectations of students during the pandemic, universities across the globe need to provide accessible online libraries. The overview outlined in the introduction part of the study proves that a digital/online library is a no-choice alternative for university students during the COVID-19 period. The online library can thus be used as a medium by university students to attain gratification, closing the gap created by COVID-19.

In the context of uses and gratification theory, pressures on university students to adapt to online library use can come from various needs for gratification. Mehrad and Tajer (2016) categorized the needs into five aspects, namely: cognitive, affective, personal integrative, social integrative, and tension-free needs. The focus of this study is on cognitive need gratification. Cognitive needs, as described by Adanlawo and Reddy (2020); Mehrad and Tajer (2016), are the use of media to acquire knowledge, information, and facts. The basic premise of the uses and gratification theory is that individuals seek out media that fulfill their needs and lead to decisive gratification (Whiting and Williams, 2013).

In this sense, the students' cognitive needs can be gratified when they are able to retrieve relevant documents needed. In this sense, the students are likely to be satisfied. Therefore, the effectiveness of the online library as a medium with the ability to give feedback is ascertained. There are two components of the uses and gratification theory; gratification pursued (GP) and gratification attained (GA). University students, as online library users, are satisfied when they are able to retrieve the relevant documents needed. In a moment, the gratification attained (GA) is greater than the gratification pursued (GP), university students' need for the use of an online library is gratified. But in a situation whereby the gratification attained (GA) is less than the gratification pursued (GP), the students will not be satisfied. Therefore, there is a need to seek another form of media that will satisfy their needs.

The question that should come to mind is: is gratification attained (GA) by university students from the use of an online library equal to gratification pursued (GP)? Meaning, is the purpose of using an online library by university students achieved? If not, what can be done to achieve maximum gratification?

### **Provision and the Use of Accessible Online Library During Covid-19**

With the emergence of COVID-19, the form of library services has changed. The emergence of COVID-19 brought about the provision of e-books and e-journals for the use of university students. Through an online library, the retrieval of information is more convenient for university students. This is to say that online libraries have now become a buzzword in the fields of information, teaching, learning, and knowledge. According to Younus and Ul-Haq (2022), online libraries are fundamental in the provision of necessary information on time to the users, especially university students irrespective of their locality. The joy of an online library is that university students have the pleasure of being wherever they want and, likewise, accessing the library's contents. Hartini et al. (2022) assert that online libraries facilitate effective information that will lead to knowledge development.

Universities around the world are aiming to give students the best possible access to an online library. The principles of open access, open source, and open licenses are to be provided for effective learning environments for university students. University libraries are to make available free access to digital content, update their websites, and, likewise, respond to students' queries (Adanlawo and Chaka, 2022). Universities across the globe need to subscribe to online databases that can be accessed through the internet. This way, effective access to electronic books and journals by students will be achieved. Charles, Sasireka and Mary (2022) refer to online databases as a collection of electronic information sources (e-journals and e-books) from numerous disciplines. The authors assert that most of the databases are provided free of charge to libraries in developing countries by their publishers in order to make things easy. Likewise, a number of publishers are developing e-resources packages including e-books, e-

journals, and e-databases for research and higher education development.

The provision of the databases is not the most important thing, but the usage. To increase the use of databases by university students, university administrators must raise awareness of their availability. Awareness can be created in various forms (Adanlawo and Rugbeer, 2019), ranging from organizing awareness programmes for university students and having database training sessions. Yuliana and Ifadah (2022) identify the e-resources campaign as an important step towards database management. In a moment, when the database is properly managed, university students will have uninterrupted access to the online library. According to Kamble and Trivedi (2022), accessibility is a critical component of e-resources. This indicates that accessibility and usage of information is the cutting edge among university students. The more informed the university students, the better they perform in their academic pursuits. University libraries are in the right position to assist students during the pandemic by providing them with unlimited access to relevant information. It is worth noting that since COVID-19, libraries have learned the importance of networking. To ensure that students have access to an online library, it is crucial to check accessibility features and ensure that university students are able to access the content available on their database. For proper access to be achieved, the need to check bandwidth for internet access.

Libraries, as communication media, must be able to attract university students and meet their informational needs as soon as possible. University students who are well satisfied (gratified) with the online library will continue with the use of the online library. Fatokun, Salman and Adanlawo (2022) assert that satisfaction with online library services indicates

that the library is successful in the provision of good quality services. In order to create quality services, Yuliana and Ifadah (2022) assert that university libraries across the globe need to provide ideal library services.

To provide an ideal online library service, there is a need for the provision of a digital strategy that is not limited to e-books. Such a digital strategy should aim to transform libraries in an innovative way. With the transformation, the online library can contribute towards university students' skill development. Skill development among university students will reduce the digital skills gap and inequalities among students globally (Patel and Anitha, 2022). The quality of library services has been improved with COVID-19. The pandemic encourages and helps libraries improve the quality of library web and market library services (Uba, 2022).

Fortunately, the online library has led to a new epoch of information and communication sharing. It generates opportunities for university students and book publishers. Most publishers have made their websites available freely for use, which gives university students the opportunity to access electronic books free of charge. This facilitated the rapid acceptance of electronic resources by students and academics. Presently, there is an indication that both students and academics can competently access and use an online library. Despite the innovation brought to libraries, there are numerous problems associated with the use of online libraries.

### **Problems Associated with the Use of Online Library**

Provision of library services during the pandemic is a major challenge for all libraries, especially university libraries. As most university libraries across the globe are closed due to COVID-19, university libraries are moving their services to the web-based using a variety of media and

communication tools. University libraries must provide digital services in order to fulfill their basic role of supporting teaching, learning, and research processes in universities (Younus and Ul-Haq, 2022). Thus, there are significant challenges for university libraries in meeting the needs of both students and academics. The libraries in the universities are to support online classes which emanated as a result of the pandemic, meet the information needs of both students and researchers, and embrace the practice of working online.

Despite positive attitudes towards the use of online libraries, there are some frustrations regarding their use. Subramanian and Jegan (2020) identify a lack of know-how in the use of computers and a restriction of access to e-books and e-journals by authors and publishers. For students to access most of these documents via an online library has been a challenge. The issue of copyright was a big obstacle. Digitalizing the textbooks in the university libraries was not possible. Likewise, it was not easy to ask the publishers for authorization to use their books. To worsen the situation, most university students from developing nations lack digital literacy skills, whereby they lack the ability to operate computer systems. Likewise, some university students are living in deep rural areas with very poor internet access or no connections at all. Some of these problems make it difficult for students to be gratified with the use of an online library, especially in developing nations of Africa.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

As mentioned earlier, libraries are considered a form of media. The vital role of any medium is to justify the desires of the users. The more the media (online libraries) satisfies these desires, the happier the users are. To identify university students' needs and extent of gratification from

the use of an online library, the need for this study. The study adopted the uses and gratification approach as the theoretical foundation to improve the use of online libraries by university students. We argue that for an online library to be effectively used to attain gratification, there is a need for university students to have trust in its use. Trust in the online library indicates that university students are willing to believe that the media has desirable characteristics and thus can be trusted (Adanlawo and Rugbeer, 2021).

Online library would only replace physical library if university students are gratified with the use. Before gratification can be attained by university students, there must be provisions for and access to an online library. An accessible online library will motivate the students to use it, thereby setting a standard for gratification pursued (GP). The use will lead to gratification attainment (GA). Gratification attainment will motivate continuous use of the online library. For university students to be gratified with the use of an online library, the services must be available and accessible. To have an available and accessible online library for university students to use, the following are recommended:

Universities around the world, particularly in developing countries, should raise awareness about the existence of online libraries; marketing strategies to encourage students to use online libraries should be implemented; financial support from companies to improve internet suppliers and the purchase of more e-books and journals will go a long way toward ensuring that university students continue to use online libraries.

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