Digital Reference Services to the Rescue: exploring online help tools in academic libraries amidst the pandemic

Vinzon-Co, M. R.[1]* and **Janio, R. V.[2]**

[1]De La Salle University Manila, Philippines
[2]University of the Philippines Diliman, Philippines
minette.vinzon@dlsu.edu.ph

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic obliged libraries to close their physical doors to their users. They are resulting in libraries opening their virtual doors, providing digital reference services available to their users. This study aims to explore how academic libraries use online help tools amidst the pandemic. A quantitative content analysis of the top 500 universities library websites was extracted from the Center for World University Rankings. Web contents were manually scanned. NVivo, John Davies Word Cloud Generator, and MSExcel were used for data analysis and visualization. Results reveal that top-ranking universities utilize the online help tools: library website and Email (100%), Instant Messaging/Chat (64.57%), Webform (52.43%), FAQs (68.22%), Online Library Instruction (70.65%), Facebook (74.70%), Twitter (73.28%), Instagram (62.35%), YoutTube (54.25%) and Blogs (75.51%). Although there are free downloadable IM/Chat apps available, 222 (44.67%) academic libraries do not utilize IM/chat services. Thus, DRS is part of today's essential library services. This study provides (1) empirical data that simplifies the selection process in deciding which online help tools (2) provide fast and effective digital reference services during and after the pandemic (3) draws best practices and serves as a benchmark for Philippine academic libraries in finding new, affordable and alternative online help tools in creating and providing their own digital reference services.

Keywords: *Content analysis, online help tools, virtual reference services*