

Changing role of librarians in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic: A Nigerian perspective

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ABSTRACT

Librarians' role goes beyond the delivery of services such as providing current awareness, selective dissemination of information, and referral services among others. It involves helping people to comprehend vital information through the provision of media and information literacy support. One of the recent issues is curtailing the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. The main objective of the study was to determine the changing roles of librarians in preventing the pandemic, and the challenges in sharing information on the COVID-19 pandemic. A descriptive survey design using Google Forms was used. Google form links were sent to the online forum of librarians in Nigeria. A population of 759 was derived from various online platforms. The Krejcie and Morgan sampling method was used to pick the sample size of 250 respondents, to achieve the sampling size, the research was observant to make sure the number of respondents did not exceed the sample size by constantly checking the response report. The return rate was 127 librarians. The study's findings revealed that librarians used formal and informal channels to disseminate information to society in the wake of the pandemic. It further revealed that WhatsApp groups, Facebook, and flyers, among others were the most used channels. The findings also revealed that librarians play a critical role in preventing the pandemic spread by posting cleaning, safety measure and social distancing information on various WhatsApp groups they belong to. The study recommends that libraries should also consider other means of communication such as visiting market places, visiting local communities, peer group discussions, and use of telegram, among others to advocate for the prevention of COVID-19 pandemic.

(Keywords: Librarians, Covid-19, Information dissemination, Communication channels, Social Media, Pandemic)

I. INTRODUCTION

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the novel human coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak, which began in Wuhan, China on December 8, 2019, a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) on January 30, 2020 (Cucinotta & Vanelli, 2020). Before this time, the infection was novel, with little awareness of its existence among researchers, doctors and the general public. As a result,

methods and actions to limit its spread and control were put in place by health practitioners. Social places, including libraries, were closed sometimes to comply with public health requirements for COVID-19 pandemic prevention.

Libraries collect information sources and make them available to the public through various means, whether for education, information, or personal growth and knowledge. Whether public or academic, libraries are

meant to provide information resources for problem-solving with the help of professional librarians. The main role of libraries in Nigeria is to provide current, historical and vital information that will enhance educational and information literacy among the citizen. In the context of this article, librarians provide vital information through various communication mediums that educate the public on how to prevent and protect themselves in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Nagarkar (2020), libraries provide trustworthy information that is crucial for the development of vaccines and sensitization of the public on how to improve healthy living during and after the outbreak.

To avoid misinformation, librarians use various mediums of communication to expand their roles with the aim of disseminating COVID-19 pandemic information. Many libraries are using various mediums of communication to provide online information on how to prevent the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, librarians have expanded their role despite the closure of libraries, to enhance online services, library education, provision of online information resources, referral service selective dissemination of information, current awareness services, among others.

Statement of the problem

The COVID-19 new normal has posed more challenges to librarians to acquire new skills and roles in the services provided by libraries in Nigeria; as a result, libraries struggle to acclimatize themselves with the new paradigm shift of service delivery to the general public, especially in creating awareness of the effect and precaution measures expected from members of the society in the wake of COVID-19. This new role has challenged librarians to explore more communication media to disseminate

necessary information related to the COVID-19 pandemic. This position has grown increasingly significant in the aftermath of the COVID-19 epidemic, librarians have had several problems in providing referral, current awareness selective dissemination services after the COVID-19 outbreak. As a result, most libraries were closed down, leading to libraries relying more on technology to provide services in disseminating the COVID-19 pandemic, using various unfamiliar communication mediums. The paper investigated the role of librarians in the aftermath of the COVID-19 outbreak in Nigeria.

Objectives of the study

The objective of the study is to:

1. Assess the role of librarians in preventing the COVID-19 pandemic
2. Assess the medium of communication by librarians in disseminating information on the COVID-19 pandemic,
3. To identify the challenges in disseminating information on the COVID-19 pandemic.

II. ROLE OF LIBRARIANS DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Librarians learn the facts about this public health catastrophe, inform the public, and modify services and programming to suit changing community needs (Whitney *et al.*, 2017). Libraries are intended to gather print and electronic information for users. According to Okike (2020), librarians play an essential role in providing COVID-19-related information and resources to the public via the various technological channels at their disposal, especially since most people may not visit the library or the library may be closed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT), particularly computers and the Internet, in library

functions, has enabled libraries to provide remote reader services regardless of location, time, or distance. Thus the library is in a better position to play a role during pandemic.

As a result, libraries must design a new method of gathering, organizing, and sharing factual information on COVID-19 while keeping social distance in mind to prevent physical contact. In light of the preceding, Okike (2020) claims that there are new ways to disseminate authentic and fraudulent information; it is up to librarians to bring out the actual information for their readers to avoid misinformation. Libraries, by nature, can be helpful during the pandemic because they can spread information about the virus that will make people more aware of it (Nagarkar, 2020).

According to Feather *et al.* (2012), libraries give information on the epidemic to improve public awareness. Feather *et al.* (2012), further argue that the availability of essential information during pandemics aids in lowering public concern, which is vital in preventing new infections. Knowledge gained from diverse study materials is critical in assisting public health professionals in developing preventative strategies. Wang and Lund (2020) did a similar study to Feather *et al.* (2012) on the function of libraries in pandemics. They discovered that libraries were critical sources of trustworthy information during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study's authors emphasize that libraries are in a better position to acquire, assess, publish, and share information with the public due to their dependability, expertise, and experience in delivering information without producing fear or worry.

Majid and Rahmat (2013) argue that providing timely and accurate information during pandemics aids in controlling the spread. However, a significant problem was that library users did not comprehend some of the phrases used during public interactions, prompting them to seek further

information on the Internet, on how to curtail the pandemic. According to Wang and Lund (2020), librarians are taught to teach the public how to distinguish between reliable and non-credible sources, as well as valid and incorrect data. Ma *et al.*, (2018) agree with the claims and add that librarians are better positioned to advise on the reliability of sources since they have spent most of their careers processing information, which includes interactions with publishers. According to Majid and Rahmat (2013), libraries create a multi-stakeholder society since they are active in many sectors and execute activities to streamline procedures in these areas. Allen and Taylor (2017) go on to say that they collaborate with a variety of people to provide services in both the commercial and governmental sectors.

Ma *et al.* (2018) posit that libraries collaborate with researchers to disseminate research findings to the public on how to prevent and manage the COVID-19 pandemic. Researchers have developed a vaccine for COVID-19, and libraries are playing a vital role in providing the necessary information to enable the study as well as publicizing the research findings and making them available to the public. Databases, according to Latif *et al.* (2020), provide information about COVID-19 to raise public awareness. According to the study, users may use library services such as electronic books to keep them occupied during the pandemic time, minimizing their worry and the psychological repercussions of the shift in lifestyle. Similarly, Allen and Taylor (2017) discovered that libraries provide e-learning platforms. Due to school closures, the library has been quite helpful in allowing kids to continue their education from home and gain new skills, thereby preventing boredom. Consequently, it is apparent that libraries are particularly useful during pandemics.

Literature reviewed has shown that despite the effort made by librarians to pass necessary information on the COVID-19 pandemic, they have not been able to explore other roles like library education. Also despite the various communication medium available, librarians have not been able to explore all these channels to propagate the COVID-19 pandemic prevention.

III. METHODOLOGY

A descriptive survey and a structured questionnaire were designed using GoogleForms. Google form links were

VI. FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

The findings are based on the questionnaires filled out by respondents to confirm the objectives of the study. The questionnaire was analyzed to arrive at the finding based on specific objectives such as the role of librarians in preventing the COVID-19 pandemic; librarian medium of communication in disseminating information on the COVID-19 pandemic; and challenges of disseminating information on the COVID-19 pandemic. The result was interpreted based on the finding.

sent to the online forum of librarians in Nigeria. A population of 759 was derived from various online library platforms. The Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sampling method was used to pick the sample size of 250 respondents, to achieve the sampling size, the research was observant to make sure the number of respondents did not exceed the sample size by constantly checking the response report. Simple percentages, graphs and charts were used as methods of data analysis.

Demographic response based on the types of libraries

LISedunetwork, (2016) identifies various types of libraries where professional librarians can provide services, such as public, academic, special, and school libraries, among others. The researcher posted a Google form question on the librarian WhatsApp platform to identify available types of librarians. Out of 250 sampled, only 127 filled out the online Google form. The graph below aims to identify the type of library the librarians work with and how they have been able to manage information services during the pandemic period.

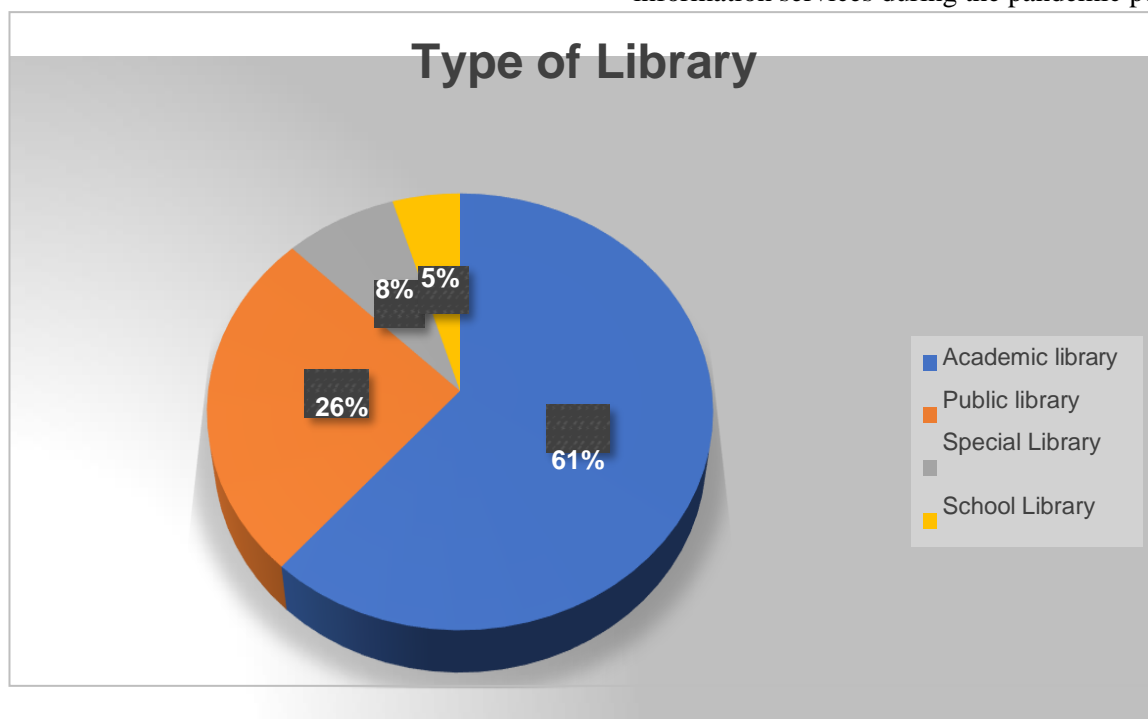


Figure 1: Types of libraries under study

Figure 1 shows that 61% of the respondents are from academic libraries, and 26% of the respondents work with public libraries. While only 8% and 5% respectively work with special and school libraries. The implication is that the majority of the respondents are from academic libraries. Yaya (2019) agreed with this data in his article on job satisfaction among librarians in Nigerian public universities. He found that academic libraries are the highest employers of labour in Nigeria.

Qualification of the respondents

Academic qualification refers to the minimum level of knowledge expected of those working in a specific field (Goad 2002). Education qualification data was captured in terms of the respondents' level of education such as BLIS/B. Tech, MLS/M.Tech, Ph.D. To understand the respondent's disposition and literacy level regarding the Covid 19 pandemic question on the academic qualification of the respondents were asked.

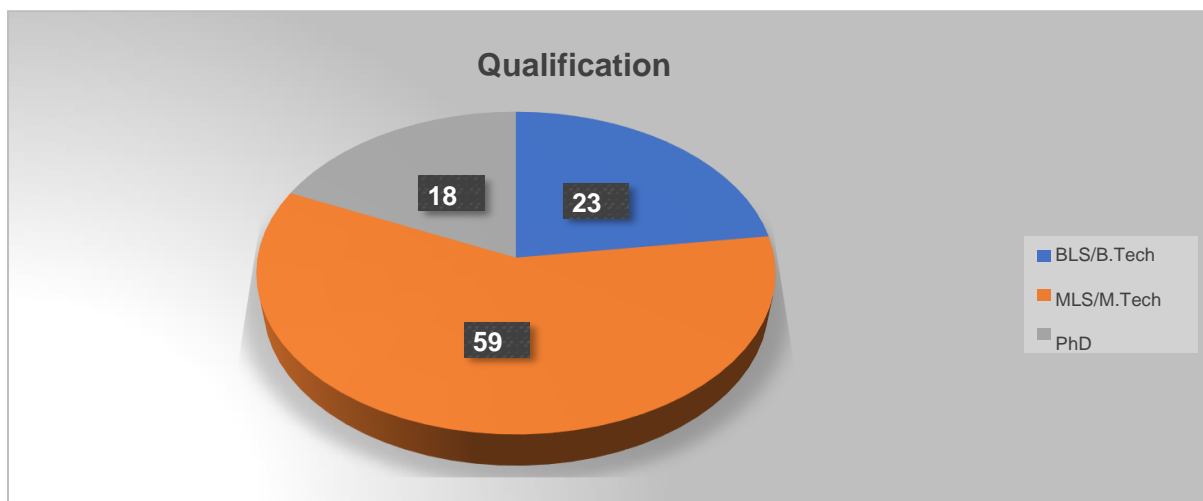


Figure 2: Qualifications of the respondents

Figure 2 shows that 59% of the respondents have a Master's in library science/ technology, and 23% have a Bachelor in Library science/ Technology. Only 18% of the respondents have a Ph.D. in information science. The import of this is that the respondents are literate enough to understand the concept of library services in the wake of the Covid 19 pandemic.

Medium of communication by librarians

A medium of communication is a channel through which information (the message) is transmitted between a speaker or writer (the sender) and an audience (the receiver). Figure 3 shows theme of communication by librarians in the process of providing services to patrons.

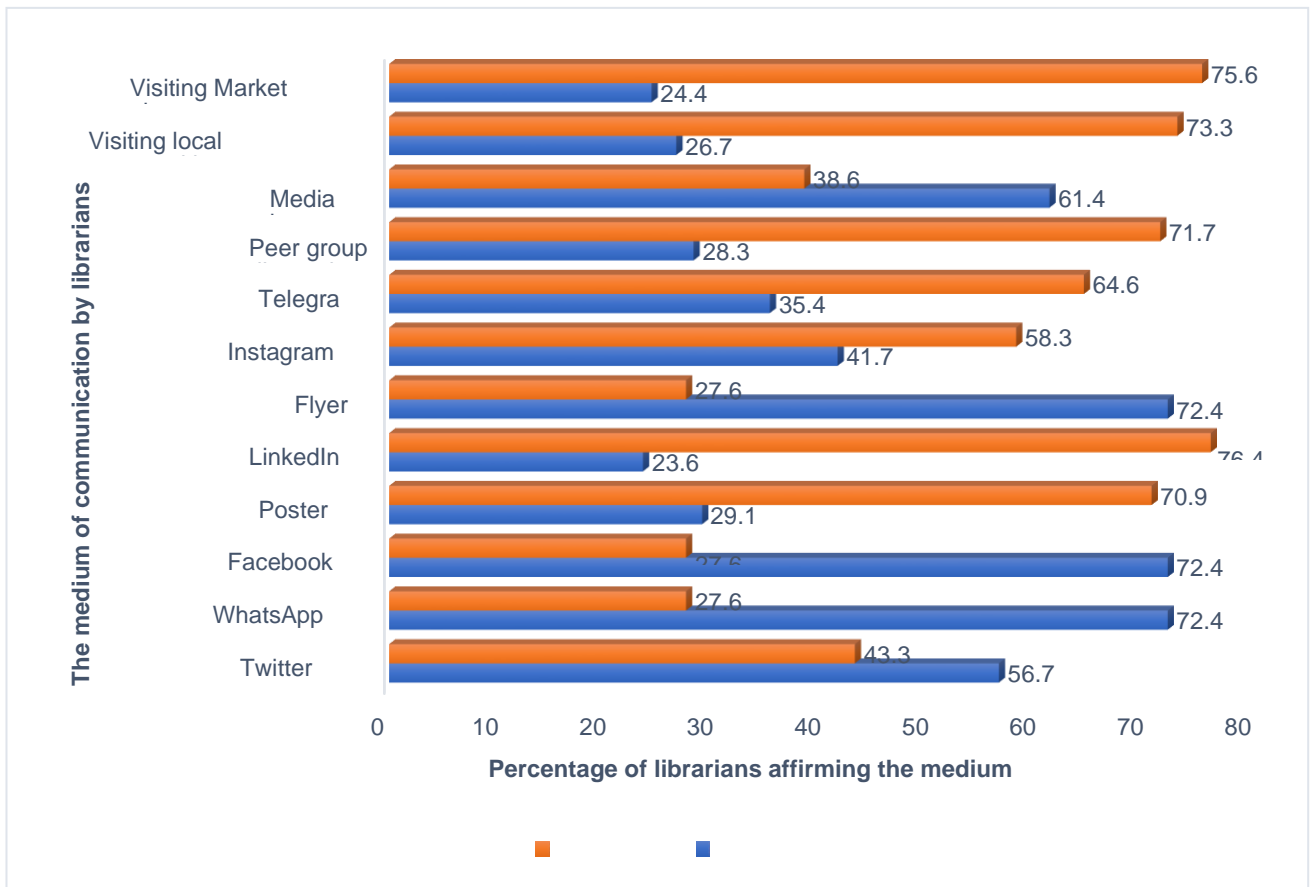


Figure 3: Respondents' medium of communication

Means of communication during covid 19 were WhatsApp, Facebook (72.4%), flyers (72.4%), media houses (38.6%) and Twitter (56.7%). Similarly, the respondents disagreed that LinkedIn (76.4%), visiting market places (75.6%), visiting local communities (73.3%), peer group discussion (71.7%), and Instagram (58.3%) were other means of communication during the COVID-19 pandemic. The meaning of this is that librarians are not exploring some other key communication mediums such as LinkedIn, posters, and peer group discussions among others to provide services in the wake of COVID-19. This data agrees with the findings of Whittlesey (2020) titled communications during a pandemic. He found out that libraries may use

third-party video conferencing services social media, or other forms of communication such as texts, emails, phone calls, teleconferencing, voicemails, and handwritten notes.

Role of the library in preventing Covid-19

The below data shows the role of librarians in preventing Covid 19 pandemic. Out of 250 sampled, only 127 filled out the online Google form. This data aims to show the role library has played in preventing the spread of the virus as an information professional

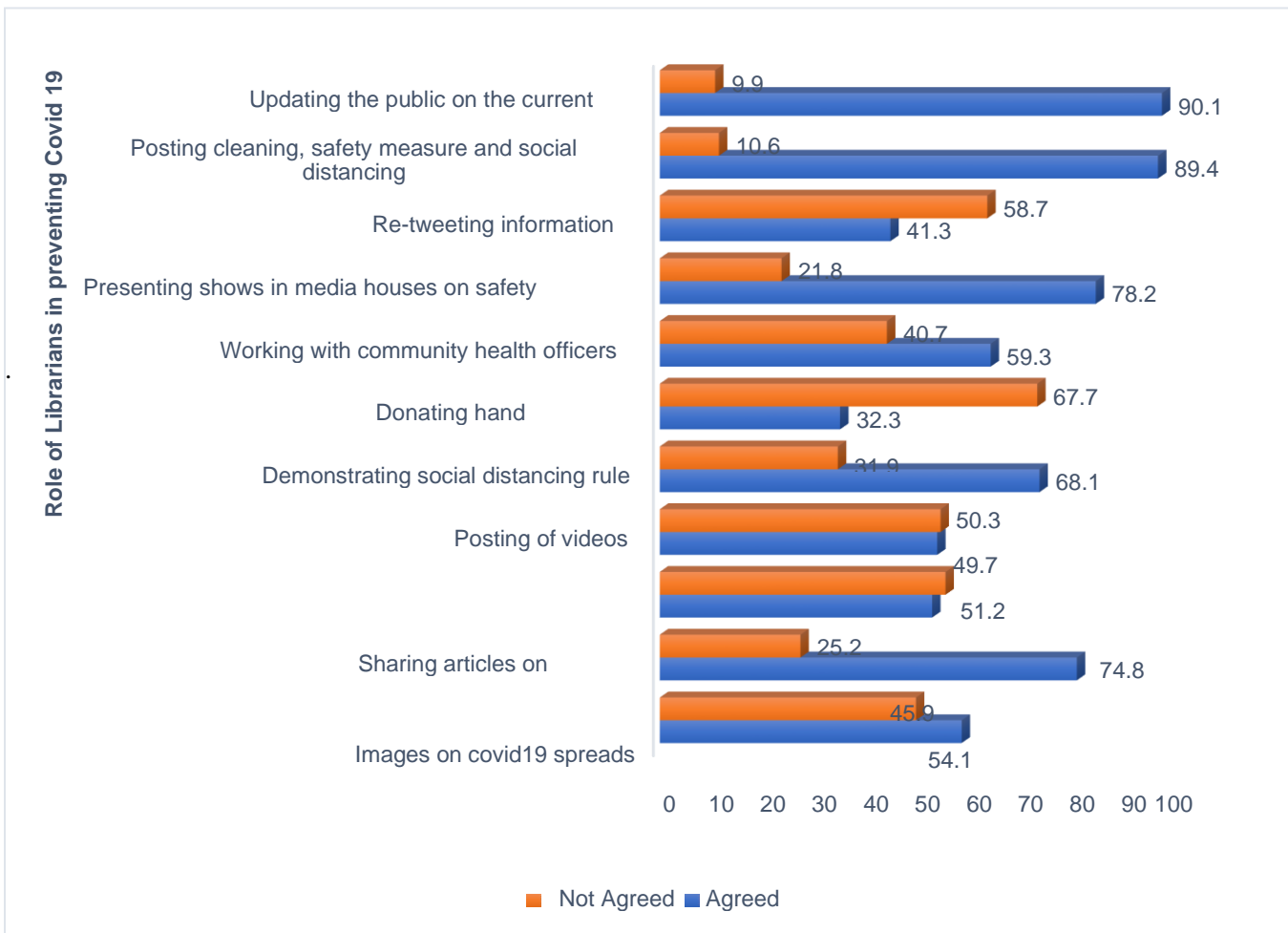


Figure 4: Role of a library in preventing COVID-19

Figure 4 shows that librarians play the role of updating the public on the current status (90.1%), safety measures and social distancing information(89.4%),presenting safety measures shown in media houses (78.2%), sharing articles on Covid 19(74.8), demonstrating social distance rules (68.1%) and image display on Covid 19 (54.1%). Also, the respondents disagreed that librarians play the role of distributing flyers (51.2%), re-tweeting information (58.7%), donating hand sanitizers (67.7%),posting of videos (50.3%).The import of this data is that although

librarians are playing some roles in preventing COVID-19 in the process of providing services, some other key preventive measures are not covered to prevent COVID-19spread.

Challenges faced by librarians during the Covid-19 pandemic

The graph below shows the numerous challenges faced by librarians during the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic

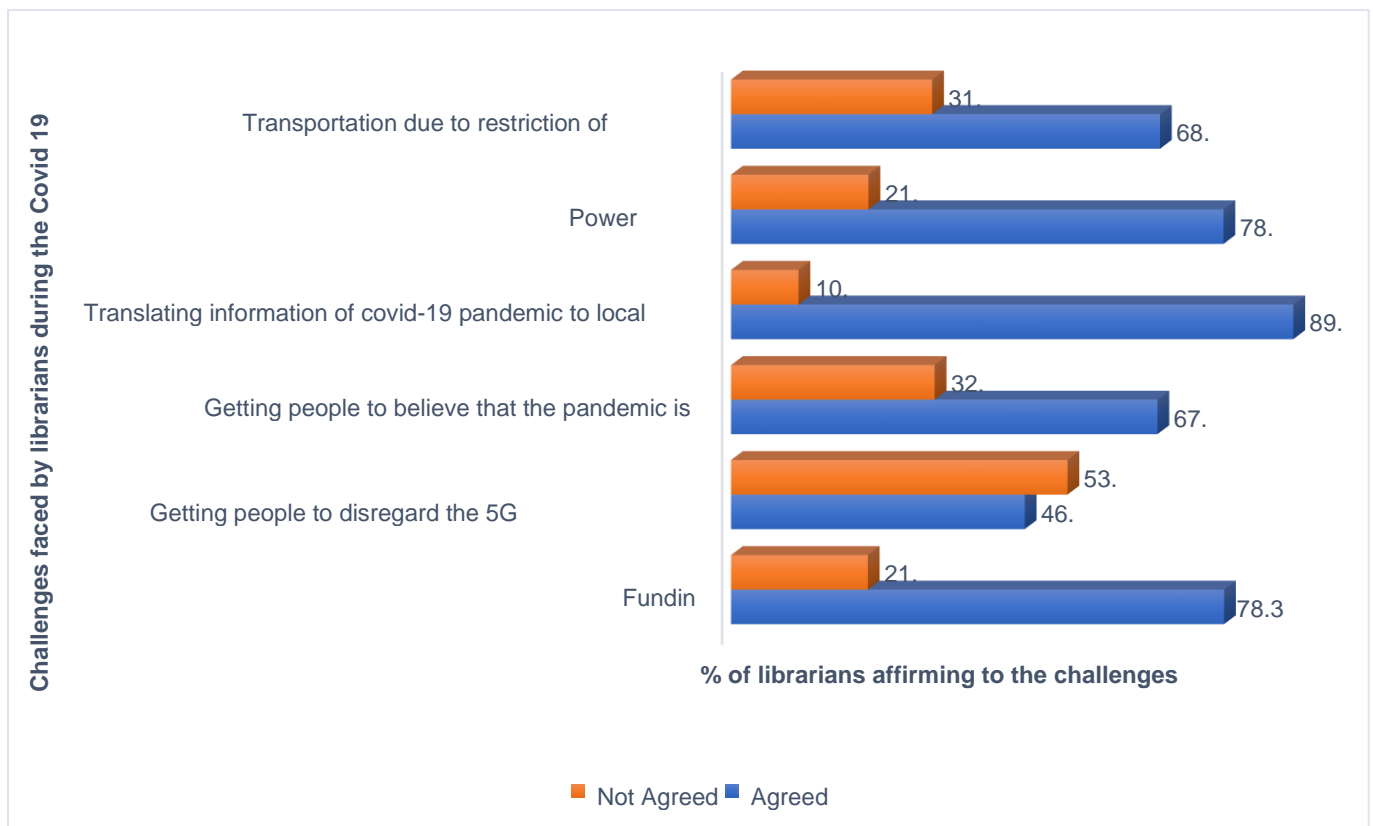


Figure 5: Challenges faced by librarians during the COVID-19 pandemic

The above responses show that the majority of the libraries in Nigeria are faced with such challenges as translating information about the COVID-19 pandemic into the local language (89.3%), funding (78.3%), power supply (78.2%), transportation due to restrictions of movement (68.1%), getting people to believe that the pandemic is real (67.7%).

V. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The findings show that the majority of the libraries only use a few channels of communication, such as Twitter, WhatsApp, Facebook, and media houses, in sensitizing the users on COVID-19 pandemic, thereby leaving other vital means of communication that can be deployed to sensitize users

on the COVID-19 pandemic, such as visiting market places, visiting local communities, peer group discussion, and use of telegram, among others. Even though libraries have played some vital roles in preventing COVID-19 spread, libraries have not been able to play other significant functions such as re-tweeting information, donating hand sanitizer posting videos, and distributing flyers. The findings also show the numerous challenges that the libraries faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as power supply, translating Covid related information to local languages, making people believe the reality of the pandemic, funding, and others.

VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The role of librarians as agents of change in the society has continued to increase in different aspects of life. Therefore, the study concludes that the librarians under study are not using all channels of communication to educate and prevent the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, limiting their ability to prevent the pandemic's spread. It is also concluded that librarians under investigation as information custodians did not play all of the expected roles in preventing the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. The study also concludes that the librarians under investigation face a variety of challenges that have prevented them from fulfilling their role as information managers in society. The study recommends that apart from the use of Twitter, WhatsApp, Facebook, and media houses, in sensitizing the users on the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic, the libraries should also consider the use of a variety of communication channels

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