WhatsApp: Instant Reference Service at East West University Library!

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Libraries should always have a perspective of being where users are. Today, libraries are not dealing with the conventional services. Libraries are acting as a social hub for a community. We are living in social media milieu, and young people prefer to choose interactive communication media. We all know that libraries all around the world are using interactive web 2.0 tools so that patrons are engaging with libraries at any time whenever they need. In this regards, "WhatsApp" is indeed an interactive web 2.0 tool.

East-West University (EWU) is the forerunner library in terms of using interactive social media tools subsuming Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, YouTube, Google+ to engage with patrons.

To engage with users, EWU library first introduced instant messaging service using Meebo software in 2010. However, Meebo was acquired by Google in 2012, and it was discontinued. For that reason, EWU library started to use Zoho software to continue the engagement with patrons named **Virtual Reference Service** but this service hour is limited. That's why, to enlarge service hours, EWU library has initiated **Instant Reference Service using WhatsApp** in September 2017 for the first time in Bangladesh on trial basis to provide reference queries to its users. This service will be developed gradually with more valuable features in future. The service hour is 9:00 am to 9:00 pm, from Sunday to Thursday.

This service has unveiled as a new horizon for Library and Information Science (LIS) sector in Bangladesh. It is a direct and user-friendly service for library users to contact library personnel. Users may ask about services and resources provided by EWU Library and request information immediately via WhatsApp messages.

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Sunday to Thursday
9 AM to 9 PM
Contact us: 01858196272

By using WhatsApp library can easily send real-time messages, video, image, audio, and other information with patrons. In addition, WhatsApp is acting as the best tool for information gathering and information dissemination in a timely and cost-effective manner. Now the total population of Bangladesh is 166 million and 147 million people use mobile phones while around 80 million people access the internet (BTRC, 2018). Therefore, it will be quite easy for libraries in Bangladesh to introduce virtual reference services by using WhatsApp so that patrons can contact library personnel with any question through WhatsApp, directly from their mobile phone. It should be mentioned that some renowned libraries in Bangladesh have taken initiatives to use the mobile phone for providing different types of services. Research has shown that many libraries are using WhatsApp to provide alert services about library product and services, create a new group to provide Current Awareness Service (CAS), Selective Dissemination Information (SDI) service, Reference Services, Research Consultation and Instruction and so on. Besides, the following points are imperative for libraries if they use WhatsApp:

WhatsApp will ease collaborations and promote effective communication between library staff and their patrons.

It is easier to use in the library. It helps to gather feedback to enhance user services. It provides latest and updates information.

The user can able to ask for their required document from any places in real time environment.

In the end, LIS professionals need to commence innovative ideas for their patrons for the survival in this contemporary environment. We have different types of users, and we have the power to transform our services from traditional to virtual according to user's need. Therefore, using WhatsApp to provide reference services can be a useful tool for technophile library patrons.

WhatsApp @ East West University Library