

WhatsApp As an Innovative Tool for Library Services

Dr. Rajunaik S

*Selection Grade Librarian, Government First Grade College Ripponpet -577426, Hosanagara (Tq),
Shivamogga Dist. Karnataka-India*

Abstract—The rapid development of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has transformed the nature of library and information services. Academic libraries are increasingly adopting social media and mobile communication platforms to provide timely, convenient and user-oriented services. Among these platforms, WhatsApp has emerged as a widely used instant messaging application that provides opportunities for communication, information dissemination, reference assistance and user engagement. This article examines the potential of WhatsApp as an innovative tool for delivering library services in academic institutions. The paper discusses the major applications of WhatsApp in libraries, including current awareness services, reference services, circulation support, new-arrival alerts, information literacy, user orientation, document delivery, feedback collection, library promotion and virtual reference services. Previous studies indicate that users have a positive attitude toward receiving library services through WhatsApp and that the platform can improve the speed and accessibility of information services. However, issues relating to privacy, copyright, information overload, professional workload, digital literacy and institutional policies require careful consideration. The article concludes that WhatsApp can complement traditional and digital library services and can become an effective, low-cost communication channel when implemented with appropriate policies and professional practices.

Index Terms—WhatsApp, social media, Library Services, Academic Libraries, Mobile Information Services, Virtual Reference Service, Current Awareness Service, Digital Library.

I. INTRODUCTION:

Libraries have traditionally functioned as centres for collecting, organizing, preserving and disseminating knowledge. The emergence of ICT has significantly changed the way information is created, accessed and communicated. Users increasingly expect library

services to be available quickly, conveniently and through devices that they already use in their daily lives. Consequently, academic libraries are moving from conventional service models towards technology-enabled and user-centred information services.

Social media platforms have created new opportunities for libraries to communicate with their users. WhatsApp is particularly significant because it combines instant messaging, group communication, multimedia sharing, voice and video communication, document sharing and interactive communication in a single platform. Earlier research in India found that users had a positive attitude towards receiving library services through WhatsApp and considered it useful for alert services, virtual reference and notifications.

A study published in *Library Management* also found that WhatsApp was successfully used to provide user and reference services to students and staff, including users located away from the campus. More recent research continues to demonstrate the relevance of WhatsApp in academic library environments. A 2025 study conducted in Karnataka reported that students expressed interest in receiving services such as new-book information and newspaper services through WhatsApp. Thus, WhatsApp can be viewed not merely as a social communication application but as a potential extension of the academic library service environment.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

The major objectives of this article are:

- To examine the concept of WhatsApp as an innovative library service tool.
- To identify the major library services that can be delivered through WhatsApp.
- To examine the advantages of WhatsApp-based library services.

- To identify the challenges associated with using WhatsApp in libraries.
- To suggest strategies for effective implementation of WhatsApp library services.
- To examine the future potential of WhatsApp in academic libraries.

III. METHODOLOGY:

The present article is based on a review and conceptual analysis of published literature relating to WhatsApp, social media and library services. Relevant research articles, academic studies and professional literature were examined to understand the application of WhatsApp in library and information services. The literature indicates that WhatsApp has been investigated in different library contexts, including academic libraries, reference services, user communication, information dissemination and digital collection sharing. An Indian study published in the DESIDOC Journal of Library & Information Technology examined WhatsApp for effective delivery of library and information services and reported positive user perceptions regarding its potential for current awareness and virtual reference services.

IV. WHATSAPP AND LIBRARY SERVICES:

WhatsApp enables librarians and users to communicate through text, images, documents, audio, video and other digital content. Its simplicity and widespread adoption make it an attractive communication channel for libraries.

The major services that can be delivered through WhatsApp are discussed below.

4.1. Current Awareness Service:

Libraries can use WhatsApp to inform users about:

- Newly acquired books
- New journal issues
- New electronic resources
- Newspapers and magazines
- Institutional announcements
- Important academic events
- Seminars, workshops and conferences
- Competitive examination resources
- Open Educational Resources (OER)

WhatsApp groups or broadcast lists can enable librarians to disseminate information rapidly to large numbers of users.

4.2. Reference Service:

Reference service is one of the most promising applications of WhatsApp. Users can submit their information queries directly to the librarian through text messages, voice messages, images or documents. The librarian can provide:

- Bibliographic information
- Database guidance
- Search assistance
- Citation information
- Reference sources
- Research guidance
- Information literacy support

4.3. Virtual Reference Service:

WhatsApp can serve as a virtual reference desk. Users need not physically visit the library for every query. They can communicate with librarians remotely and receive assistance.

Research on virtual reference services has identified WhatsApp as a preferred channel because of its convenience, immediacy and relatively low learning requirements.

4.4. New Arrival Service:

Libraries can create a WhatsApp broadcast list for announcing newly acquired books, journals, e-books and other resources.

Cover images and brief bibliographic details can be shared with users. This service can increase awareness and potentially improve the use of newly acquired resources.

4.5. Circulation and Renewal Support:

WhatsApp can support routine circulation-related communication such as:

- Due-date reminders
- Overdue notifications
- Reservation information
- Book availability
- Renewal requests
- Return reminders
- Membership-related communication

Such communication can reduce delays and improve interaction between users and library staff.

4.6. Document Delivery Service:

Where copyright and licensing conditions permit, libraries can use WhatsApp to communicate with users regarding document delivery. Links to legally accessible resources, institutional repositories, open-access articles and library databases can be shared.

However, libraries should not use WhatsApp to distribute copyrighted materials without appropriate authorization.

4.7. Information Literacy:

WhatsApp can be used to conduct short information-literacy programmes. Librarians can send:

- Database search tutorials
- Short instructional videos
- Search strategies
- Citation guidelines
- Plagiarism-awareness materials
- Research tips
- Library orientation information

This approach can support continuous learning beyond the physical library.

4.8. User Orientation:

New students often require information about library rules, timings, membership procedures, online catalogues and electronic resources. WhatsApp can provide orientation information in an easily accessible form. A structured WhatsApp orientation group can be created for first-year students at the beginning of each academic year.

4.9. Feedback and User Support:

Libraries can use WhatsApp to collect user feedback regarding:

- Library facilities
- Collection requirements
- Reading-room services
- Digital resources
- Reference services
- Working hours
- User satisfaction

Feedback received through WhatsApp can help librarians identify user needs and improve services.

V. INNOVATIVE APPLICATIONS OF WHATSAPP IN LIBRARIES

WhatsApp can go beyond basic messaging when integrated into a planned library service model.

5.1. WhatsApp Library Help Desk:

A dedicated library WhatsApp number can function as a virtual help desk. Users can send their questions during specified service hours and librarians can respond systematically.

5.2. WhatsApp Broadcast Service:

Broadcast lists can be used to send personalized announcements without requiring users to participate in a group discussion. This can be particularly useful for current-awareness notifications.

5.3. WhatsApp Groups:

Subject-specific or programme-specific groups can be established for sharing library-related information. For example:

- B.A. Library Group
- B.Com. Library Group
- B.Sc. Library Group
- BBA. Library Group
- Research Scholars Group
- Faculty Research Group

5.4. QR Code Integration:

A library can display a QR code linking users directly to the library's WhatsApp account. QR codes can be placed on:

- Library notice boards
- Student ID information areas
- Library websites
- College prospectuses
- Orientation materials

5.5. Research Support:

WhatsApp can support researchers by providing information about:

- Research databases
- E-journals
- Citation management
- Research methodology resources
- Institutional repositories
- Open-access resources
- Research alerts

5.6 Professional Collaboration:

WhatsApp Groups can also support communication among librarians. A recent 2026 study explored WhatsApp Groups as a platform for digital collection sharing and informal resource-sharing among librarians, while also identifying concerns related to copyright, privacy, security and information organization.

VI. ADVANTAGES OF WHATSAPP FOR LIBRARY SERVICES

The major advantages include:

6.1 Easy Accessibility:

Users can access library communication through smartphones without needing specialized software.

6.2 Rapid Communication:

Information can be delivered almost immediately, making WhatsApp suitable for urgent announcements and current-awareness services.

6.3 Cost Effectiveness:

WhatsApp-based communication can be implemented with relatively low infrastructure costs when compared with developing a separate mobile application.

6.4 Multimedia Support:

Text, images, audio, video and documents can be communicated through the same platform.

6.5 Remote Access:

Students studying away from campus can communicate with librarians and receive information remotely.

6.6 User-Friendly Interface:

Most students are already familiar with instant messaging applications, reducing the need for extensive technical training.

6.7 Improved User Engagement:

Interactive communication enables users to ask questions, provide feedback and participate in library activities.

6.8 Support for Inclusive Services:

WhatsApp can help libraries extend services to users who may have difficulty visiting the physical library regularly.

VII. CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

Despite its advantages, WhatsApp-based library services present several challenges.

7.1 Privacy and Data Security:

Libraries deal with personal information and academic communication. Appropriate privacy and security practices are therefore essential.

7.2 Copyright Issues:

Sharing e-books, journal articles and other copyrighted materials through WhatsApp may create copyright and licensing problems. Libraries must ensure that shared materials are legally permitted.

7.3 Information Overload:

Frequent messages may cause users to ignore important library announcements. Librarians should therefore develop clear communication schedules.

7.4 Professional Workload:

Responding to messages continuously may increase librarians' workload. Service hours and response policies should be established.

7.5 Digital Divide

Not all users have equal access to smart phones, reliable internet connectivity or digital skills.

7.6 Lack of Information Organization:

WhatsApp is primarily a communication platform rather than a formal information-management system. Important information can become difficult to retrieve when large numbers of messages accumulate.

7.7 Institutional Policy:

Libraries should establish guidelines regarding official accounts, group administration, content sharing, privacy, copyright and response times.

7.8 Dependence on a Third-Party Platform:

Libraries should not rely exclusively on WhatsApp. Core library services should continue to be supported by the library management system, OPAC/discovery systems, institutional repositories and official websites.

VIII. STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION

For successful implementation, academic libraries should consider the following strategies:

1. Create an official library WhatsApp account.
2. Use a dedicated institutional mobile number.
3. Display the WhatsApp contact prominently on the library website and notice boards.
4. Define official service hours and expected response time.
5. Train librarians in digital communication and information literacy.
6. Develop guidelines for WhatsApp groups and broadcast lists.
7. Obtain user consent where appropriate.
8. Avoid sharing confidential personal information.
9. Respect copyright and licensing restrictions.
10. Maintain professional communication standards.
11. Record frequently asked questions for future reference.
12. Periodically evaluate user satisfaction.
13. Integrate WhatsApp with existing library services rather than treating it as a replacement.
14. Monitor the effectiveness of the service using appropriate usage statistics.

IX. PROPOSED MODEL FOR WHATSAPP-BASED LIBRARY SERVICES

A simple institutional model can be developed as follows:

- Library WhatsApp Account
- User Request
- Classification of Query*
- Reference Query
- Circulation Query
- New Arrival
- Database/Research Query
- Library Orientation
- General Information
- Librarian Response
- Information/Service Delivery
- User Feedback
- Service Evaluation and Improvement

This model can help libraries establish a systematic rather than informal approach to WhatsApp-based services.

X. ROLE OF WHATSAPP IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES:

The role of WhatsApp in academic libraries is particularly important because students increasingly use mobile devices as their primary communication tools. Research on Bangalore University library services found positive attitudes among users toward receiving library services through WhatsApp groups, particularly for study, teaching and research purposes. Similarly, research involving college library professionals found WhatsApp useful for providing enhanced services through smartphones, including communication involving messages, images, files, audio and video. A recent study of Government First Grade Colleges and State Government Universities in Karnataka also reported substantial use of social networking sites among librarians, with WhatsApp emerging as the most widely used platform among the SNSs examined.

These findings indicate that WhatsApp has considerable potential within the Indian academic library environment.

XI. FUTURE PROSPECTS:

The future of WhatsApp-based library services is likely to involve greater integration with digital library technologies. Libraries may develop structured workflows connecting WhatsApp communication with library management systems, discovery services, institutional repositories and digital reference services. Artificial intelligence and automated conversational systems may further enhance the platform by supporting frequently asked questions, basic reference assistance and service notifications. However, human librarians will continue to play an important role in complex information searching, research support, information evaluation and ethical decision-making. WhatsApp should therefore be considered a *complementary communication and service-delivery channel, rather than a replacement for professional library systems.

XII. CONCLUSION:

WhatsApp has emerged as an important innovative communication tool for modern library and information services. Its accessibility, immediacy,

multimedia capabilities and widespread user adoption make it particularly useful for academic libraries. It can support current awareness services, reference services, virtual reference, circulation communication, new-arrival alerts, document delivery, information literacy, research support, user orientation and feedback collection.

Research conducted in India and internationally demonstrates positive possibilities for WhatsApp-based library services. At the same time, privacy, copyright, security, information overload, professional workload and institutional governance must be addressed.

The successful implementation of WhatsApp in libraries depends not simply on using the application but on developing a *planned, professional, user-centred and policy-supported service model*. When appropriately integrated with existing library systems, WhatsApp can extend the reach of the library beyond its physical walls and help create a more responsive, accessible and digitally connected library service environment.

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