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Internet Services for Exploring Social Science Resources

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Abstract

The 'Internet' is a communication channel consists of large number of interconnected computers. Each computer with individual IP addresses can exchange digitized information with any or all connected computer. Advantages of the Internet are its speed, timeliness, and ability to communicate instantaneously and availability of free information and freeware/shareware. It reduces barriers to publishing, facilitates quick revision of documents, and makes information easily available universally. "Moving wall" principle affects long-term availability of resources. Increasing use of the Internet for communication and phenomenal increase of Internet resources stimulate different types of services like E-mail, Mailing Lists, Usenet, WWW, Telnet and FTP. Examines potentialities of these services to meet users needs in accessing, communicating and disseminating data, information and other resources including computer files. Addresses of selective sites provide glimpses of current Indian activities in social sciences on the Internet.

1. Introduction

The Internet is simply a very large number of interconnected computers. These computers (each with its own address or 'IP number') are connected in a single global cooperative by wires, by fibre optic cables, by satellite links or by telephone lines. Each member computer of this cooperative can exchange large amounts of digitized information freely across the world with any or all other connected computers. The Internet offers social scientists and related professionals access to large amounts of information, data, and interpretative material in a timely, cost-effective, and comfortable manner [3]. Contributions can be made through:

- Exchange of electronic mail with distant colleagues
- Postings to the USENET newsgroups
- Posting to topic-particular Mailing Lists
- Publishing on Web

2. Objectives

It is important that the existing and potential users of social science information are made aware of major Internet Services and the potentialities of these services in accessing, retrieving and disseminating data, information and other resources. The objectives of the paper are identification of:

- Impacts of Internet as communication channel.
- Characteristics of Internet Resources.
- Potentialities of the Internet Services.
- Selected India related Social Science Sites

3. Impacts of the Internet

The Internet has potential to improve communications, efficiency and overall productivity of users. It facilitates:

- ✓ Better, faster, timelier communication with colleagues and sources of information.
- ✓ Enhanced collaboration.
- ✓ Better dissemination of information.
- ✓ Instantaneous peer review.
- ✓ Reduction in barriers to publication.
- ✓ Access to public databases.
- ✓ Free access to abstracts and/or tables of contents of periodical literature.

4. Characteristics of Internet Resources

The salient characteristics of the Internet Resources are as follows:

- Resources may be peer reviewed and/or self-published.
- Resources are not indexed &/or ranked using uniform techniques.
- No use of control vocabulary system for indexing.
- Time lag in indexing resources by search engines
- “Moving wall” concepts affects long-term availability of information
- URL and information content may change quickly.
- Troubles in network affect the access to information.
- Calls for new security mechanism because Internet is a public media.

5. Internet Services

E-mail, Mailing Lists, Usenet, WWW, Telnet and FTP are major services of the Internet. These services facilitate access of Internet resources. Scope and functions of each service have been discussed in the following sections.

5.1 *Electronic Mail (E-mail)*

E-mail is generic name for non-interactive communication of text, data, image and/or voice message between a sender and recipient(s) by utilizing telecommunication links [1]. The salient characteristics are:

Cost: Overseas communications and high traffic communications are cheap.

Speed: Increases speed of information transfer

Reliability: It is reliable

Distribution: Message can be forwarded to multiple recipients simultaneously &/or to a roaming recipient at a variety of locations.

File Exchange: Transfer of images and other types of documents across the Internet is possible.

Privacy: Email isn't necessarily private

Authenticity: It's possible to forge email

The following organizations provides free E-mail services in India:

Epatra [URL: <http://www.epatra.com>]

Rediff [URL: <http://www.rediff.com>]

5.2 Mailing Lists

Mailing lists use computer-mediated communication to allow educators and researchers to enter into subject or discipline specific communication with an international array of colleagues who would not be readily accessible through traditional means [3]. These lists act as forums for the:

- Sharing of information,
- Research methodology and
- Rare sources and documents, and Findings advice.

- **SOCWORK:** It is an open, unmoderated, general discussion listserv concerned with social work. [Subscription: majordomo@uwrf.edu]

- **India Development Information Network (Indev)** provides 'One-stop shop' for development information on India and allows creation of mailing lists. [URL: <http://www.indev.nic.in/cgi/wwwboard/index.cfm>]

The following Indian Sites provides platforms for Discussion Groups on social sciences:

- **India Mailing List** provides forum for research on British or European ancestors in India. [URL: <http://www.ozemail.com.au/~clday-mailing.htm>]

- **Indian Mailing Lists** provides access to India related Mailing Lists [URL: <http://inpros.com/india/india5.html>]

5.3 News Group (USENET)

Usenet is a worldwide-distributed discussion system. Usenet contains thousands of newsgroups which are, basically, electronic bulletin boards where users can post messages and reply to previous ones. Traditionally, Usenet has been accessed through a

newsreader program. It is now possible to browse newsgroups from the Web using sites like Deja [URL: <http://www.deja.com>]

*** Usenet Vs. Mailing Lists**

Usenet newsgroups and mailing lists are used as global discussion forums, but there are many differences [3].

UseNet	Mailing Lists
Post message in a common area for many users to view and reply to	Post message to a particular person or a group of persons.
Users access USENET Servers, if need arises.	User is interested in the subject
Unknown User (s)	Definite Recipient(s)
Selective reading/searching of messages is possible.	Members receive all messages
Access to Usenet depends on Service Providers	Access to the Internet ensures access to Mailing Lists.

The following sites act as surrogates to Indian and India related Usenet Groups:

- **IndiaAbroad.com** [URL: <http://indiafocus.indiaabroad.com/internet/newsgroup>]

- **The All India Sites** [URL: <http://www.gadnet.com/usenet.htm>]

5.4 World Wide Web (WWW)

The World Wide Web is defined as the portion of the Internet whose pages are inter-connected by hyperlinks. The characteristics of WWW are:

Geographical Reachability: The material stored on a Web server can be accessed from any place.

Platform Independence: The material can be consulted with any type of computer and with any browser.

Time Independence: The material can be accessed at any time

Multimedia Capability: Can show moving images, animation, etc.

Editing: Easy to update the contents.

Sharing: Users can share single copy.

Space Saving: Takes less storage space

Delivery: May be shipped over networks.

User Interface: Not standardized

The major www resource types are:

- **Organization:** Many of the important social science organizations have a home page.
 - Small Industries Development Organization [URL: <http://www.laghu-udyog.com>]
 - Reserve Bank of India [URL: <http://www.rbi.org>]
 - Cities and Districts of India. [URL: <http://inpros.com/india/india4.html>]
 - States of India [URL: <http://inpros.com/india/india3.html>]

- **Numerical Datasets**: The Internet is increasingly used as a means of storing and accessing social science numerical data.
 - Census of India [URL: <http://www.censusindia.net>]
 - Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy [URL: <http://www.cmie.com>]
 - National Stock Exchange [URL: <http://www.nse-india.com>]
 - General Information Service Terminal of NIC.
[<http://www.gist.ap.in/index.html>]
 - Central Statistical Organization. [URL: http://www.nic.in/stat/stat_act.htm]

- **Dictionary, Encyclopedia, Directory and other Reference Materials**: These not only include digitized versions of printed books but also new “book equivalents” where a web site provide primary access to original content held locally, created by single author or corporate body.
 - Encyclopedia Britannica [URL: <http://www.eb.com>]
 - Directory of Government of India Web Sites [URL: <http://www.nic.in>]
 - Directory of Scholarly and Professional E-Conferences (mailing lists) on Sociology. [URL: <http://www.mailbase.ac.uk/kovacs/S0104.html>]
 - Ethnologue: Provides overview of the languages spoken in India
[URL: <http://www.sil.org/ethnologue/countries/Inda.html>]
 - Prehistoric Rock Art of India gives an overview of Indian rock art and paintings. [URL: <http://www.lavanya-indology.com/rockart.htm>]

- **Electronic Journals, Working Papers, and Pre-Prints**: There is variance in online information provision, ranging from full-text electronic journals, to sites that only list Tables of Content; and from sites that point to single articles, to sites that point to vast collections of articles.
 - Economics and Political Weekly [URL: <http://www.epw.org.in>]
 - Many publishers provide access to Tables of Contents, full-text and abstracts of their journals.
 - Uncover [URL: <http://www.uncweb.carl.org>]
 - Elsevier [URL: <http://www.elsevier.nl>]
 - Springer-Verlag [URL: <http://www.springer.de>]
 - ESTOC [URL: <http://www.elsevier.nl/homepage/elecserv.htm>]

Working Papers

Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research
[URL: <http://www.igidr.ac.in>]
International Monetary Fund (IMF)
[URL: <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/cat/wp.cfm>]

- **Gateway**: Provides information about high quality Internet Sites of a given subject and/or disciplines. The sites are identified by academic librarians and subject specialists.

- Social Science Information Gateway (SOSIG)
[URL: <http://www.sosig.ac.uk/>]

- **Legal Documents:** Courts Informatics Division: There are two primary sections: Judis is a comprehensive and searchable on-line case law library containing all reportable Supreme Court judgments since 1950, and the India Code Text base a repository of all central acts of Parliament since 1834.
[URL: <http://caselaw.delhi.nic.in/caselaw/welcome.html>]

- **Current Affairs:** Current information is available from Newspapers, News Servers and Radio & TV.
 - India related News Servers
[URL: <http://indiafocus.indiainfo.com/media/newserver/index.html>]
 - Indian Newspapers
[URL: <http://indiafocus.indiainfo.com/media/newspaper/index.html>]
 - Radio & TV
STAR TV [URL: (<http://www.startv.com/eng/>) etc.
AIR [URL: <http://indiafocus.indiainfo.com/media/radio/index.html>]
Doordarshan
[URL: <http://indiafocus.indiainfo.com/media/tv/index.html>]

- **E-Commerce:** It is simply conducting the business on-line. This includes buying and selling products with digital cash and via Electronic data exchange (EDI).
 - Amazon.Com: Books and other documents are available by registering through E-mail. [URL: <http://www.amazon.com>]
 - Ibcindia.com: A horde of Indian books is what you can buy here. Place an order and pay by cheque later. [URL: <http://ibcindia.com/>]

- **Online Public Access Catalog (OPAC):** The library catalogs of individual libraries and group of libraries are also available.
 - Indian Statistical Institute Library, Calcutta. [www.isical.ac.in/~library]
 - Delhi Library Network [URL: <http://delnet.nic.in>]

- **Software:** It is a vital resource for study and teaching and empirical research.
 - Social Science Software Resources
[URL: http://www.nde.state.ne.us/SS/ss_soft.html]
 - Free Statistical Software Sites [URL: <http://www.statistics.com>]

- **Portal:** A Web site or service that offers a broad array of resources and services, such as e-mail, forums, search engines, and on-line shopping malls[5].
 - Indian Economy Portal [URL: <http://www.economywatch.com>]
 - Educational Institutions Resources Book
[URL: <http://www.indiaedu.com>]
 - Arts and Artists Online [URL: <http://www.indianart.com>]
 - CalcuttaInfo.Com [URL: <http://www.calcuttainfo.com>]

5.5 Telnet

Telnet is a service that lets you actually log onto, and operate another computer from your computer using Internet. This differs from other services on the Internet where you basically exchange files [3]. It is important for two reasons:

- You can use it to access a remote computer on which you have an account.
- Public resources on the Internet can be accessed via Telnet.

Bombay Stock Exchange [bseindia.com]: You need individual login-ID and password.

5.6 FTP

FTP stands for File Transfer Protocol and allows you to transfer file from one computer to another in a sophisticated manner [3]. It commonly

- Allows downloading any type of files.
- Distributes software over the Internet.
- Archives and disseminates the technical information.

History of the Decline and fall of the Roman Empire - by Edward Gibbon: The site contains the full text of the 1845 classic work by Edward Gibbon.

[URL: <ftp://sunsite.unc.edu/pub/docs/books/gutenberg/etext96/5dfre10.txt>]

5.7 Chat

It is real-time communication between two or more users via computer. Individual discussion groups are known as “Chat Room”. Once a chat has been initiated, either user can enter text by typing on the keyboard and entered text will appear on the other user(s) monitor [2]. The salient characteristics are:

- Immediate feedback
- Alternative communication tool
- Synchronous communication
- Getting people up and running
- Side conversations may get in the way
- People may login and logouts
- People with reading disabilities and language faces problems.

- ***Thinking Politica***: The site includes essays, chat, debates, and links, based around sociology, politics and philosophy. [URL: <http://home.freeuk.net/ethos/index1.htm>]

- ***India Page*** [URL: <http://www.indiachat.net>]

6. Conclusions

Internet has wrought dramatic changes in the generation, communication and dissemination of social science information. Internet is also a self-publishing media and not a library of evaluated publications. Hence everything must be analyzed for its appropriateness for use.

Increasing use of the Internet for communication and phenomenal increase of Internet resources stimulates different types of services. These services differ in potentialities to meet users needs in communicating, accessing, and disseminating data, information and other resources including computer files. Addresses of selective sites provide glimpses of current Indian activities in social sciences on the Internet.

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