Library Websites: An Evaluation

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1. INTRODUCTION

Evaluation of any services, process or activity in management usually referees to determining its worth. It is assessment, valuation, appraisal, criticism, review, calculation, measurement or need to know closely the utility. Evaluation thus is matter of comparison of actual results, not only with anticipated results but also with external standards, in the light of existing institutional realities which may be relevant to evaluating future transactions of the programme or services and provide an objective basis for decision making. The Libraries and Information Centres can be and needs to be evaluated so as to know the quality of its services and functioning. The evaluation has become much more important and essential in these days of information and communication technologies and computerised information services.

Information technology is a universal concept. It has now become an integral part in all spheres of human activities and also in the working environment. Information technology has been making such an impact different sectors of human activity that the present period has come to be called as information age. In the context of library and information management, it has become synonymous with automation and modernization of libraries and information centres. The libraries and information centres play a vital role in providing library and information services. If IT is adopted the libraries in academic environment can also provide qualitative, value - added information services to its users on par with other R&D information centres and can have remote access to the internationally available information resources. Library is one of the largest and most expensive educational resources of any academic institution. Library should be able to provide value based library and information services. It is delivery platform of new ideas and is virtually the heart of the institution and a complex network of sophisticated system. Libraries play role in education, spread of literacy, research and overall socio-economic development of a country.

2. NEED AND PURPOSES OF WEBSITES EVALUATION

The value of resources and its ability to satisfy the information requirements of the user will vary from user. The authenticity of information thus published in WWW becomes a question mark with access to valuable resource, users face difficulties in identifying and using that have resources in an efficient manner. One of the main obstacles that have grown up in the digital environment is the important analytic skill of determining the reliability of the information that is found in the web. Thus internet has allowed accessing materials on subjects that would have been difficult of impossible to access, it does requires that users of these resources to adjudicate their selection of materials for use.

- The need for evaluation arises because;

- Information published on net may not be authentic

- The author may not be qualified for writing the article

- It may not be current

- It may not be reliable

3. WEBSITE AND WEBSITE EVALUATION

A site (location or URL) on the World Wide Web, each website contains home page, which is the first document users see when they enter the site. The site might also contain additional document and files. Each site is owned and managed by an individual, company or organization. A websites is a collection of hypermedia documents that are grouped together under one broad subject. An organisation presence on the web may consist of one websites or it may consist of a series of smaller websites that are either autonomous or linked. A university's website, for example, may contain a website for the library and for each faculty. Most commonly a hypermedia document that has a single source file is called a webpage. A hypermedia document that has a single source file is called a webpage. The home page is the webpage that is considered the usual starting point from which users search each websites. The home page is often regarded as the index of contents page that provides users with key information about what is available on the other web pages within the websites. A well designed home page links all subsequent internal information and also provides links to external material. A university's library home page for example; should have link to its parent institutions home page

3.1 Website Evaluation

The web evaluation effort to anticipate based on our experience in evaluating other phenomena the types of questions that can be addressed and the methods that are likely to play a prominent role. Much of the evaluation that will

be done will use familiar approaches, borrowing from other fields. But as with any new technology, these methods will have to be adopted and new strategies devised to address the unique phenomenon of the web. In many ways a websites provide an ideal context for evaluation. It is relatively easy to control and modify the website development is an ongoing endeavour and one that progresses thought several definable stages.

4. FEATURES OF LIBRARY WEBSITES

A library page should have the following features:

- The page should highlight the names of the library and its parent organisation in an appealing manner

- A brief listing of the major information resources with hyperlinks to each of them.

- A brief listing of the major information services with hyperlinks where ever necessary

- Highlights on some important events in the library, special collection etc.

- Hyperlinks to general information about library, library guide, library publications, recent additions list, library bulletins etc.

- Shortcuts to online resources, preferably in a pop- up menu box format, which may include.

- Electronics journals, popular magazines, newspapers etc

- Institutions of interest and other important libraries and information centres.

- Internet guides, conference, symposia. Workshops etc.

5. DESIGNING AND WORKING OF LIBRARY WEBSITES

Servers(s) connected to the internet with the help of a device called router is knows as websites. To build a own site a library needs suitable computers as servers to display pages and provide information to a data base query. Page browsing and data driven access are different in their working. The former needs a web authoring /publishing tools like HTML (Hyper Text Markup Language) but the latter needs programming languages like java and visual basic for their navigation design. The database servers are built with the help of data base management software like hunt sites and web object which are having facility for internet connectivity. The difference in access and organisation methodology for two types of information gives hierarchical and modular structure to the website servers. Other services like E-mail, file transfer and conferencing need user nodes on the site providing relevant and software and hardware. Most of the research journals, current contents, bibliographies and many books have started published on CD-ROMs. There are three ways to enable web servers to provide library catalogue, indexes and news databases. There are three ways to enable web servers to provide library data.

1. SSI (Server Side Include)

2. CGI (Common Gateway Interface)

3. API (Application Programming Interface)

6. WORKING OF WEBSITE

As a websites may have a network of services all communication with the internet is automatic with the help of application programming interface (API) and through router. A user entering the website gets a page offering icons and hierarchical menu based access to the services. E-mail arrivals can be searched at intervals of time operation work can be easily taken over by library staff. Website makes a user as a node of internet. Website, it include the information regarding admissions, scholarships, rules and regulation, courses, departments, staff and their profiles, workshops, conferences, seminars and symposia. Websites is important to a library to give 24 hour service and online help to international clients. Development a website on internet is a costly affair as for as hardware and other costs are concerned. Home pages can have text, graphics, pictures and animation. Some homepages can add sound and multimedia capabilities. Any access to a home page is called a hit.

7. INDIAN LIBRARIES IN THE WEB: TRENDS

Currently many government organisations industries, educational institutions and other bodies host their information and services on internet. In educational institutions, library plays a vital role. The libraries of esteemed and prestigious institutions have their own websites. Many libraries in India have their websites that contain varied information on resource (both electronic and print) membership, service, staff directory, virtual tour etc., A major limitation of these libraries is that most of their websites are not updated regularly. Few libraries provide their services through internet. Some websites have extra features like links to other professionals and users do not know the problems faced to access the online journals. Some of the issues are such as cost, link, index etc. Every link in a library website should be a services provided to the user. Most of the websites just list the services that they provide but neither offer link nor provide a service through links. In India exclusive library websites developed in the last decade. In Karnataka many universities library have developed their own library website.

8. GENERAL CRITERIA FOR WEBSITE EVALUATION

- **Authority:** The reputation of an author is a important factor in evaluating the internet sources. As anybody can publish any information on net without reviewing and editing, so it is essential to know whether the author is really qualified to write that article. His/ her position, experience and whether he/she is associated with any recognised organisation or not some of the factors that are to be taken into consideration are: is it clearly written who is the author

of the information; what is the author's position, qualification, past writings etc.; is the author associated with an organization; what are the basic goals and objectives of the organizations; who is the sponsor; is the sponsor reputable; is there any phone-no, or E-mail address to contact the author for more information.

- **Accessibility:** The accessibility is; how easy is to get to the site; can it be read by many kinds of software; do they prefer a particular browser; how easy it is to use the site; some of the electronic journals are available in PDF format, which requires acrobat reader; so it is required to mention name of the special software if it is needed to access the page.

- **Arrangement:** The arrangement of the contents of the page should be logical. It should be easy to use. The links and buttons of the page should be consistent and logical and the screens should be easy to read

- **Currency:** The use of information depends on whether it is provided in right time. Information should be current. Whether the site is current or updated regularly, is an important criterion to evaluate the net sources: whether the page is dated; when it was last updated; have some of them expired or moved; what is the frequency of updating; are there any other indications that the materials are kept current.

- **Response time:** Response time is considered to be an important evaluation criterion. A site is evaluated on the basis of how much time it takes to load a page. A response time of 15 minutes is considered to be limit of user's patience. Though the response time is not controlled fully by the designer a good page will be built to load in a few seconds on most client servers.

- **Stability:** Stability is one more criterion which can be used to evaluate the websites. Some of the questions that are to be while evaluating the sites are: is the site stable; does the link address change frequently; if the address changes whether the old page is left open with new link or address to direct users from old page to new page.

- **Accuracy:** Information provided to the users should be accurate. If it is not accurate then it is of no use. Accuracy of the information sources provided on the net should be judged by considering the following factors: is the information reliable and error free; is there an editor of some one who checks the information; but currently no web standards exist to ensure accuracy. Spelling mistakes of a page have to be considered. If a page contains more spelling mistakes then it is not considered as accurate

- **Audience:** The objective of given the information should be defined clearly. As the relevancy varies with purpose and users needs for each and every site targeted audience should be defined.

- **Coverage:** The questions to be asked while evaluating a site on the basis of coverage are: what topics are covered; how in-depth is the material; what languages are covered; what time period is covered.

- **Completeness and Style:** One of the qualities of information is completeness. So the information provided in a site should be complete. Style indicates: are the sentences and directions clear; is the grammar correct; is it interactive so that user can use buttons, forms and feedback instruments.

9. SPECIAL CRITERIA FOR WEBSITE EVALUATION

A part from the general criteria for website evaluation the some special tools for evaluation of library websites. A tool deals how it stands in www in effective manner. The evaluation tools can address the status of the common users also. The special for evaluation of web sites are:

- **Library catalogue:** Catalogues shows the strength of library collection and is tools for quick retrieval of the documents. One of the most important services of library is the provision of online public catalogue. It enables to save the time of the user, because remote users can access the catalogue form house or anywhere the world when it is available in web.

- **Layout and floor plan:** It describes location of the library and outline of library structure. It gives floor wise sections and services plan of the library.

- **Library Virtual Tour:** Virtual tour shows the original objects of the library section, facilities and serves places. Users are enthusiastic to view a tour because it presents the overview of library building and its services. Some libraries present a website online tour like direct visit to the library.

- **Online Book Recommendation:** Recommendation books is a primary right of the library user. Some major libraries websites offers this type of services to the user.

- **Link to the Personalised collection:** Personalised collection are the collection maintained by the library about the institution document, report motion pictures, handbooks, house journals, circulars etc., member can access the information out of campus, if this provision is added in the library website.

- **Updating Information:** Updating is the important issues of website evaluation. Without updating the content, the information becomes obsolete. Updating of content is very essential for any website. It is one of the important criteria for a evaluation of websites.

- **Recent Addition Updates:** New arrivals and recent additions upgrade the library collection. Acquisition of online and print publications should be reflected in the library webpage.

- **Electronic Resource Access:** Most of the libraries

subscribe online journals, E-books and other type of reference sources like encyclopaedia, dictionaries, patents etc. Access to the resources with in the campus is the trend now which could be possible through the library pages. So, the user can access the electronic collection from anywhere with user login.

• **Book reservation:** Transaction of library materials is the primary function of the library system. Majority of the libraries added online reservation system in their website.

• **Online Membership:** Western countries libraries enrolling of membership is carried through online. Hence there is

potential for Indian libraries to introduce this provision to their website for users minimize the manual work. In India British Council Library and other few libraries added this facility in their website.

• **Analysis:** Based on the above tools evaluate the libraries web pages and how they satisfy the uses needs. Today the trend in information access has changed and the users demand desktop libraries. In such information ages, the information factors can be used to assess the websites. Content distribution in the home page; Deep linkage; Subject coverage; Systematic management of information.

10. THE TABLE GIVEN BELOW GIVES A GLANCE OF THE EVALUATION OF FIVE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY WEBSITES IN KARNATAKA

Statement of Evaluation	University of Mysore	Karnataka University	Mangalore University	Gulbarga University	Kuvempu University
Purpose statement	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Special Centres	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Automation Library	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Site Map	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
Services Contact	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Current of Resources	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Web OPAC	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Database Resources	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
E-Books	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
E-Journals	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Index	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Search Facility	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
FAQ	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Library Rules & Hours	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Subject Guide	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Links tools included on all pages	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Feedback	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Photo Gallery	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Copy right	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

11. CONCLUSION

The evaluation of websites helps to determine the authenticity, quality of information, currency and reliability of information provided. This in turn help to know if every information that is meant for specific group of audience, the purpose, the target audience and the relevancy of accuracy of information which can be judged for modifications and changes to improvements in providing efficient services to the audience by the website.

A good website must present the library photo in the main webpage as it increases the appearance of the webpage. The links to other library's catalogue could be made available on the web pages. Most of the libraries have link to only home

pages of the other libraries but then if the users are interested to see every section pages of the other libraries could be of great use. Recent resources, editions, suggestions and feedback on the webpage will certainly help to improve the services of libraries. Library websites should certainly help to improve the service of libraries. Library websites should contain information about every section, services and facilities of the library. The comprehensiveness is certainly an important feature of websites as it enhance its use and facilitates the users to get their require, relevant information. Further, the library websites must be preferably continuously updated maintained. The revision of home pages should also be done as and when required as it helps to save time money and energy to access quick the recent advances in their areas of interest. As an

example on the basis of the criteria followed for website evaluation the Mysore University Library, Karnataka University Library, Gulbarga University Library, Mangalore University Library, Kuvempu University Library websites information is presented in the table. It is therefore urged strongly that the need and importance of creating, updating and maintaining a university library website so as to enhance the use library resources in these days of information and communication technology, information proliferation and information explosion in the networked era is essential. Thus helping the audience to search, locate and retrieve their relevant information pin pointedly expeditiously and exhaustively which are the basis and objective of librarianship and library websites.

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