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Dissemination of electronic journals

A content analysis of the library websites of technical university libraries in North India

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Abstract

Purpose – As electronic journals are developing as a new information platform, their promotional activities require something more than just notifications. Promotion is the decisive factor in the effective use of a sophisticated service called electronic journal. Library websites act as a best promotional medium to spread awareness about electronic journals and to act as a gateway to provide a customized interface for enhanced navigation and ease of access. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the websites of technical university libraries to ascertain that libraries are effectively utilizing their respective websites to provide trouble-free access to electronic journals available in the library.

Design/methodology/approach – For the purpose of this study, a research instrument in the form of comprehensive checklist was developed to evaluate the accessibility of electronic journals from the websites of technical university libraries.

Findings – The research reveals that technical university libraries are trying to set up useful websites but the library websites of most of the institutes seem to be at primitive stage. Majority of libraries' websites have very simple and basic features. Overall, they fall short of their potential to act as a platform for proper dissemination of electronic journals. There is enormous scope for the improvement of the websites of the institutions under study. A few recommendations were made for the improvement of these websites in the form of enhancement in various aspects like quality content, users' convenience and artistic composition.

Originality/value – The portal technology has enabled libraries to provide the user with an interface from where information of high relevance can be accessed with ease. The article suggests that websites of technical university libraries can incorporate a lot more information to enhance the utilization of electronic journals. It is time for librarians to feel their responsibility as web content managers and be more conscientious in providing the information on the library websites keeping in view the information requirements of the users. If the library website has a dedicated webpage for providing information exclusively for electronic journals, it will be easy for users to have a single access point for accessing all the electronic journals provided by the various publishers. This paper will be helpful to librarians who are planning to strategically develop their websites.

Keywords E-journals, Web sites, University libraries, India, User interfaces, Electronic journals

Paper type Research paper



Introduction

As electronic journals are developing as a new information platform, their promotional activities require something more than just notifications. Promotion is the decisive factor in the effective use of a sophisticated service called electronic journals. Library websites act as a best promotional medium to spread awareness about electronic journals. It is also analogous to an "electronic billboard" for the publicity of the electronic journals thereby providing increased visibility and enhanced access. Osorio

(2001) has precisely pointed out that the website has become one of the academic library's most visible artifacts for communicating with users, and the home page has become the starting point for users conducting library research to explore the resources available. The fact is that contemporary users are informed about the library services through a library website without any need of visiting the library in person. Therefore, it is almost obligatory for the modern academic libraries to have web presence in the form of library website to fulfill their missions.

An academic library website is a compilation of precise and descriptive information on the world wide web (www) for a specific user in the form of text, audio and video material, databases, graphics, links etc. Diaz (1998) envisions the different roles that a library website can play; it can serve the role of workstation for both the user and the librarian by allowing searching what is available in electronic form. It may be in the form of subscribed databases or digitized copies of the in-house databases. As the website of a library is a gateway to access library's collections, resources and services, it should have ingenious qualities to provide easy navigation and access to electronic resources. Library websites have emerged as a proactive and service-oriented medium for dissemination of electronic journals wherein providing comprehensive bibliographic access to all electronic journals. It is very easy for the users to have access to all the electronic journals if the library is consolidating their access on a single platform, which is the website. In the absence of a functional website, electronic resources will remain underutilized as the users are deprived of a channel, which facilitates them to exploit these resources fully. In the present scenario, it is difficult for libraries to deny the importance of providing a website, which is rich in relevant information and provides trouble free navigation for the electronic journals.

Since by now, it is affirmed that contemporary library websites have also emerged as a vital tool for providing access to electronic journals. These act as an important link between the users and the electronic journal collection and play an important role in promoting and maximizing access to electronic journals. In the present scenario, it is very essential to ascertain that while facing the boom of electronic journals, how the academic libraries are adopting "best practices" for providing easy access to electronic journals. The aim of the present study then is to analyze the content of library websites of the technical university libraries in North India in order to ascertain how effectively the libraries are utilizing their respective websites to provide easy access to electronic journals subscribed by the library and other open source databases relevant to the different courses run by the institution.

Literature review

In order to find out previous studies done on the evaluation of library websites and commonly accepted standards for the same, a review of the literature was done. Evaluation of library websites has developed as a significant topic of discussion since the emergence of the twenty first century. Still (2001) examined library websites in four English-speaking countries and found that visual display of information was almost similar across all countries in spite of some cultural differences. Most of the libraries were providing access to an online catalogue and some databases and even links to some bookstores, however information is provided about general instructional material and user manual on remote access. Raward (2001) considered that to design a website with reliable content and easily navigable user interface is a challenge for webpage

developers. While developing an academic library webpage, usability and acceptance by library users are the major issues involved, so the author suggested a Usability Index Checklist (UIC) as a method for evaluating website designs that could help the librarians in modification of academic library websites. Osorio (2001) in his research reported the predominant design features and content elements of home pages of 45 science-engineering libraries. In order to create a model homepage, each feature having a percentage of about thirty or higher was considered a predominant feature and is incorporated into the model. In another major study, Wang (2001) investigated the resources and services for remote access from Alabama four-year public university library websites, and the results seem in conformity with a substantial body of evidence regarding the distance education services. Online catalogues and electronic databases are the main stream of resources and services for remote access. Research guides, Internet links, reference services by phone and e-mail, and library information are gaining popularity.

Lee and Teh (2001) appraised the content and design of twelve academic library websites of public and private institutions of higher learning in Malaysia and accomplished that the academic libraries there have generally set up well-designed and useful websites but a few of them offered electronic databases. A number of academic library websites, however, have very simple and basic features. Overall, they fall short of expectations as virtual expressions of the quality levels of academic libraries. Brower (2004) examined the websites of 41 health sciences libraries, but with an emphasis on best practice for navigational design. Bower's research recommended that some important navigational elements for all health science library's home pages like bibliographical databases listed by title, e-books, electronic journals, hours of operations, instructions or tutorials, news and services. Ganski (2008) did the similar study to check the accessibility of e-resources from Theological library websites. She used the qualitative content analysis method and found that half of the websites make e-resources available and are easily accessible through a quick navigational pathway. In the same year, Astani and Elhindi (2008) explored the effectiveness of university websites to attract students. They concluded that higher education institutions are required to address the needs of their target audience and design effective websites so that they will attract students. These websites also need to improve in updating their information and presenting it in a layout that will make it easier for users to locate the information of interest.

The literature survey shows that more and more research is paying attention to library websites, especially for the promotional activities related to online resources and services. Although the literature offers considerable guidance on creating and maintaining websites, there is still a substantial lack of standards for evaluating them.

Objective and scope of the study

The study aims to determine the use of library websites by the technical university libraries in North India for dissemination of electronic journals. Specifically, the study aimed to find out if the library websites:

- Provide information about existing facilities and services.
- Offer links to full-text electronic journals and other e-content.
- List library staff titles and names with telephone numbers and e-mail IDs.

- Provide well-structured FAQs as a part of the website and guide appropriately to all levels of users.

The present study confines itself to the evaluation of library websites of seven technical universities in North India, which are listed below:

- (1) Dr B R Ambedkar National Institute of Technology, Jalandhar (NITJ) (www.nitj.ac.in/cen-lib/)
- (2) National Institute of Technology, Hamirpur (NITH) (www.nitham.ac.in/library/index.html)
- (3) National Institute of Technology, Kurukshetra (NITK) (www.nitkkr.ac.in/libfacility.htm)
- (4) National Institute of Technology, Srinagar (NITS) (www.nitsri.net/library.html)
- (5) PEC University of Technology, Chandigarh (PEC) (<http://pec.ac.in/library/Library.asp>)
- (6) Sant Longowal Institute of Engineering and Technology, Longowal (SLIET) (www.sliet.ac.in/Facilities/Library/General.html)
- (7) Thapar University, Patiala (TUP) (<http://cl.thapar.edu/>)

Research methodology

There are many checklists designed for evaluating the library web sites but there are only a few regarding checking the accessibility of electronic resources through academic library web sites. For the purpose of this study, a quantitative research instrument (see Appendix, Figure A1), in the form of comprehensive checklist, was designed to evaluate the accessibility of electronic journals from the web sites of technical university libraries. The instrument was built on the basis of earlier studies embarked on by different authors and a pamphlet prepared by the Elsevier Library Connect (2003) entitled “How to design library web sites to maximize usability”. The author tried to identify and assess a clear and simple set of key criteria for evaluating library web sites with a special reference to promoting the use of electronic journals. The study relies only on the web site exploration of the seven libraries web sites under study.

The web sites of these libraries were visited by the author during the months of November and December 2010 and evaluated based on their positioning, searching facilities, help features etc. A comprehensive site search was conducted with qualitative content analysis and tabulation of data is done for critical analysis and comparison of all the web sites.

Findings of the study

The main source of access to electronic journals for these libraries is the Indian National Digital Library in Engineering Science and Technology (INDEST) Consortium. The Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) in India set up this consortium, for shared subscription of electronic resources, in 2002. It is the most ambitious initiative taken for “consortia-based subscription to electronic resources for technical education system’ in the country. INDEST serves to benefit members by

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“shared subscription” through a consortium of libraries. The sharing of resources at highly discounted rates of subscription aims to increase access to electronic journals, etc. for researchers across the country, while obtaining better terms of agreement with publishers. The aim, according to INDEST, is to improve “quality and quantity of research” (Sen, 2003). All electronic resources being subscribed to are available from the publishers’ web sites. The consortium’s web address is <http://paniit.iitd.ac.in/indest>.

Access to all the electronic journals is provided by activating a range of permitted internet protocol (IP) address for the institution and is governed by license agreements, which restrict their use to within four walls of the institution. It is not possible for the users to access the electronic journals beyond the limitations of the campus and they are deprived of $24 \times 7 \times 365$ access as usually conceived.

The web site of all the libraries is a part of the homepage of the parent institution. Almost half (three out of seven) of homepages prominently link the library web site under Central facilities, two homepages provide link under Quick Links and one each under Infrastructure and Centres respectively. TUP is providing link to electronic journals from the institution’s home page also.

All bar one of the technical university libraries (six out of seven) have library web sites, which is further a collection of various web pages giving library related information. Only NITK has a library webpage. The majority of the web sites provide only static information about library and its services.

The general information (Table I) about the library includes mission statement of library, working hours, membership, library rules. It may also include information about different library sections, facilities available etc. Table I clearly describes the general information available on technical university library web sites. Only one library i.e. NITS is having its mission statement on the library web site. Six out of seven libraries have mentioned their working hours. More than half the libraries (four out of seven) provide membership details and library rules. Two libraries namely NITJ and NITH have given information about facilities being provided by the libraries and only PEC has provided information about various library sections. Not a single library has included a site map or hit counter or date of updating as an integral part of its web site. For the libraries to give a sort of visual identification of library, it is advisable that

Information	NITJ	NITH	NITK	NITS	PEC	SLIET	TUP
Mission statement	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N
Working hours	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y
Membership	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y	Y
Library rules	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	Y
Site map	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
Library sections	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N
Hit counter	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
Facilities/services	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N
Date of update	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
Photograph	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y

Table I.
General information

Notes: Y = Yes, N = No

library web sites must carry some photographs etc. Most of the libraries under study are carrying this practice for image credentials.

In Table II, information about library collection on the web sites of respective technical university libraries is mentioned. Majority of library web sites have given information about collection of documents except for the NITS and NITJ. More than half of the libraries (four out of seven) have provided information about book bank and non-print media. Only two libraries namely NITH and NITK have given information about Back volumes of journals and Standards available in the library. It is quite surprising to note that the web sites of all the libraries have information about electronic resources but only four libraries out of seven have furnished information about journals in print form.

The number of electronic journals each library is subscribing to is shown in Table III. It is evident from the table that the highest number of full text electronic journals is being subscribed to by the TUP i.e. 23 and the least number (six) of full text e-resources are being subscribed by the PEC. This table also gives information about the bibliographic databases being subscribed to in these libraries. The highest number of bibliographic databases is being subscribed by the NITK, while PEC does not subscribe to any bibliographic databases.

Table IV shows that the web sites of all the libraries is having a publisher-wise list of electronic journals, whereas a majority of libraries (five out of seven) are not maintaining alphabetical list of publishers. TUP is also providing a comprehensive alphabetical list of titles of all the journals in Excel format. Two libraries namely NITS and NITK have just mentioned the URL of various publishers but not provided the active hyperlinks. PEC and TUP web sites have also provided links to journals available in the public domain. One element has a surprisingly low ranking, namely the Web OPAC. Not a single library has provided a link to a Web OPAC nor any information about the availability of electronic journals through an OPAC.

Information	NITJ	NITH	NITK	NITS	PEC	SLIET	TUP
Books	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y
Journals (print)	N	N	Y	N	Y	Y	Y
Electronic journals	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Book bank	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y
Back volumes of journals	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	N
Conference proceedings	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
Standards	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	N
Theses and dissertation	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N
Non-print media	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N

Notes: Y = Yes, N = No

Table II.
Information about library
collection

E-Resources	NITJ	NITH	NITK	NITS	PEC	SLIET	TUP
Full text electronic journals	9	10	15	9	6	8	23
Bibliographic databases	3	3	5	1	0	2	2

Table III.
Number of e-resources

Amenities related to electronic journals given on the library web sites are presented in Table V. It is evident from Table V that not a single library webpage is providing search options to help users in finding the desired content. All library web sites have neither provided any information about licensing matters nor for copyright issues. More than half of the library web sites (four out of seven) have listed names of library staff along with their designation, telephone numbers and e-mail IDs. NITH has just listed the names of library staff members without any contact details and two library web sites namely PEC and NITS have no mention of library staff. It is also indicated that not a single library web site is providing links to external search engines or any information about licensing. More than half of the library web sites (four out of seven) have given information about the INDEST Consortium. Not a single library web site has given any users' guide to help them with accessibility of electronic journals. Only one library web site namely TUP has provided help to users in form of FAQs and Suggestion Box, so it is having scope for further improvement.

Discussions

The library web site is an important tool for communicating the electronic journals to its readers. The users must be made well-versed with the available electronic journals by creating a user-friendly interface. The organization of electronic journals has become vital, as earlier librarians had access to less number of databases or electronic journals pertaining to a subject domain, but now the web has made possible access to a large number of databases. Librarians cannot leave their users in a flood of electronic information where finding pertinent information can be very intricate and at times can

Table IV.
Links and retrieval
interface

Retrieval Interface	NITJ	NITH	NITK	NITS	PEC	SLIET	TUP
A-Z title list	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
Publisher-wise list	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Subject wise list	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y
OPAC	N	Y	N	N	Y	N	Y
WEB OPAC	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
Open access journals	N	N	N	N	Y	N	Y
Active hyperlinks	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y

Notes: Y = Yes, N = No

Table V.
Amenities related to
electronic journals

Information	NITJ	NITH	NITK	NITS	PEC	SLIET	TUP
FAQs	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y
Contact number of staff	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y	Y
Links to external search engines	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
Licensing information	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
User education/help	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
INDEST consortium information	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N
Copyright issues	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
Suggestion box	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y

Notes: Y = Yes, N = No

be a time-consuming and frustrating experience. Effective management of electronic journals on library web sites can result in improved access and satisfy the information needs of the users promptly.

Most of the libraries in this study are merely providing a list of publishers to inform the users about electronic journals. However, a subject specific list of all the electronic journals being subscribed along with active links should be made an integral part of the library webpage. It is also optimal to offer an A-Z title list (Ashcroft and Langdon, 2002) on the library web site. However, this is feasible only for the libraries having a relatively low number of electronic journals as a lengthy alphabetical list by title of journals may lead to chaos and this will mar the very purpose of effective retrieval of information. Therefore, the best professional practice might be to organize electronic journals by classifying them in subject or keyword-specific web pages.

It is also evident from the findings that most of the libraries are providing only static information about library and its services, an effort should be made to develop interactive web portal by hosting links to all the electronic journals different journals available from different sources. Not all users necessarily have the technical expertise to extract the exact information from the chaos of the net and plethora of interfaces (delivery mechanisms) available with different publishers, which may leave the user perplexed. Hence, web sites should be developed into more informative portals with publishers' instructions on how to access a particular electronic journal package being an integral part of the web site. Guides and tutorials help the users to take out the most from what is available in form of electronic journals and it should be one of the vital components of the library web site. Usually, each publisher's web site has FAQs to help users to find quick answers to some routine questions. Library web sites must also provide well-structured FAQs as a key ingredient of their web site. Poll (2007) stated that the users follow the line of minimum effort and so the web site should be guide by the shortest possible way to the most-used information. This makes it almost obligatory for the libraries to make it easy for the users to find things, move around and view the webpage conveniently. That is to say they must limit the mouse clicks to get to the full-text electronic journals and keep the download time to minimum etc, which will make the user to extract maximum from the library web site.

It is also manifested from the study that most of the library web sites are deficient in providing staff related information. To make the "available" electronic journals "accessible", the human touch is a must. Consequently, web sites of all the libraries must contain staff directories by listing staff names with titles and designations, telephone numbers, e-mail IDs with the intention that users can approach them in case of any difficulty.

The web site of a library is like virtual drawing room or the virtual reception area of the office, so it should be impressive and appealing. Three C's are to be kept in mind while developing library web sites i.e. Quality Content, Users' Convenience and Artistic Composition. The result is a user-friendly site having superb presentation of the content that can be tailored to cater for the specific needs of the users, so users could be involved directly or indirectly in the design and development process of library web site. Refining of web sites should also be a continuous process for making them rich in content and easy to navigate. This is possible by identifying and appointing skilled persons, who will be responsible for the improvement of the library web sites and in a way, to present a gorgeous visage of library to global community through the www.

The time has come when libraries of technical universities should seriously plan to develop dedicated web portals for providing access to subject specific lists, which will be supportive for searching and viewing electronic journals through a standardized interface. It will also enable the user to navigate an interface from where information of high relevance can be accessed with ease.

Conclusion

This content analysis of library web sites of technical university libraries in North India shows that the majority of their web sites are at primitive stage of development when a lot more information could be incorporated to enhance utilization of electronic journals. Only a few of the libraries under study have begun to offer services such as OPAC, access to online databases, electronic journals, e-books, digitized local content via the library web site. Therefore, it is found that library web sites of the technical universities under study are not fully utilized as enablers to provide easy access to their e-resources. They are trying to improve their service base especially for access and delivery of electronic journals through library web sites. If libraries want to promote electronic journals rigorously then the library web site is the best medium. A carefully designed web site has an edge over the search engines as the former provides links to digital resources keeping in view the needs of a specific user. These carefully weave together selected and relevant electronic journals to provide coherent view of the discipline at one single point thus relieving the user from the hassles of accessing different electronic journals from different web sites. Library web sites might be able to function as a means of publicizing and customizing the dissemination of electronic journals. However, there is lack of consistency in the information organization in most of the library web sites. These libraries should pay attention to suitably design and develop their web sites as these have become as important as physical buildings itself. The bottom line is that it is high time for librarians to feel their responsibility as web content managers and be more conscientious in providing the information on the library web sites keeping in view the information requirements of the users. The need of the hour is to develop a web site which make the navigation to relevant e-information a gratifying experience. To probe the future trend, it would be interesting to revisit the web sites of various libraries under study in a few years and perceive what types of materials are available at that moment.

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Further reading

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(See appendix overleaf.)

Research Instrument for Evaluating the Use of Library Website for Dissemination of Electronic Journals

1. Demographics:		
Name of Institution:	_____	
URL:	_____	
Name of Library:	_____	
URL:	_____	
Consortium Membership:	_____	
2. General Information:		
Mission statement		
History of library	Yes []	No []
Working Hours	Yes []	No []
Membership	Yes []	No []
Library Rules	Yes []	No []
Library Sections	Yes []	No []
Facilities/Services	Yes []	No []
3. Information about Library Collection:		
Books	Yes []	No []
Journals (print)	Yes []	No []
Electronic journals	Yes []	No []
Book Bank	Yes []	No []
Back volumes of journals	Yes []	No []
Conference Proceedings	Yes []	No []
Standards	Yes []	No []
These & Dissertation	Yes []	No []
Non-Print Media	Yes []	No []
4. Number of E-Resources:		
Full text-Electronic journals	_____	
Bibliographic databases	_____	
5. Links and Retrieval Interface:		
A-Z Title List	Yes []	No []
Publisher-wise List	Yes []	No []
Subject wise list	Yes []	No []
OPAC	Yes []	No []
WEB OPAC	Yes []	No []
Open Access Journals	Yes []	No []
Active Hyperlinks	Yes []	No []
6. Amenities related to E-Resources:		
FAQs	Yes []	No []
Contact No. of staff	Yes []	No []
Links to external search engines	Yes []	No []
Licensing information	Yes []	No []
User Education/Help	Yes []	No []
Consortium Information	Yes []	No []
Copyright Issues	Yes []	No []
Suggestion Box	Yes []	No []
7. Researcher's Observation:		

Figure A1.
Research instrument for evaluating the use of library website for dissemination of electronic journals

About the author

Seema Vasishta works as Senior Librarian at PEC University of Technology, Chandigarh, India. She has over 15 years' professional experience. She holds a Master's degree in Anthropology and obtained her Master's degree in Library and Information Science from Panjab University, Chandigarh, with specialization in Computer Applications in Information Centres. Currently she is pursuing her PhD in Library and Information Science from Punjabi University, Patiala. She has contributed more than 25 research articles and papers in various reputed professional international and national journals, *festschrift* volumes and conferences proceedings. She has participated in many international conferences and national conferences /workshops etc. She has also delivered various expert presentations. Her current areas of research include digital libraries, networked information resources, automation of libraries, information services and institutional repositories. Seema Vasishta can be contacted at: seema313@gmail.com

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