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Reference Services in Private University Libraries of Assam: A Study

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Abstract

Objective:

The present study intends to investigate the private university libraries of Assam and their different kinds of library services and reference services, web 2.0 features and its different adopted methodology for the advancement of library services and how these library services are being provided and what are the technical or non-technical measures adopted by the library professional to perceived job performance. It also intends to carry out additional library facilities like an online learning support system and enabling future generations to utilize acquired knowledge from the study libraries.

Methodology:

For this study, both qualitative and quantitative approaches for data collection have been used. A structured questionnaire was prepared for librarians and the library user's and sent to the head of the libraries to find out the status and performance of reference services and a questionnaire for each particular library user was also distributed among the categories of library user's to carry out relevant information regarding user's demand and perceptions. A personal interview with the librarians of the study libraries and the library users were also conducted for proper measurement.

Findings:

The study findings show that the adoption of different categories of reference services to facilitate the category of users and online learning support system by the study libraries where

basic library services performed by 100% (13 numbers) ADBU, ADTU, MSSV, RGU, and 92% (12 numbers) AKU and 54% (7 numbers) KAV and RGU acquired highest 73% (16 numbers) for reference services and ADTU acquired highest 47% (7 numbers) for web-based reference services. It also highlighted the online learning support system where RGU acquired the highest 69% (11 numbers)

Originality:

It is an original work of my study which I have created independently that is free from any sort of plagiarism. It has not been published before in its current or a substantially similar form, nor is the work currently being considered for publication by any other journal/conference proceedings.

Keywords:

Assam, Private University Library, Library Service, Reference Service, Web-Based, Web 2.0, Online Learning Support, Information Communication Technology (ICT)

1. Introduction:

Libraries are the service-oriented institutions and it intends to convert potential visitors into regular users. The library is the heart of every academic institution where it occupies a central and important place in the frame of the academic library system and the university library is also one of the places not only a storehouse of books but also considered as a treasury of knowledge and dynamic tool of education and research. To enable future generations to utilize acquired knowledge and to fulfill their responsibilities more effectively university library plays an important role in the society through their effective library services.

Technological advancement and inventions of modern information communication technology (ICT) & internet, different changes have made and library field is no exception to these changes and services of the libraries, and it has been changing gradually according to new technologies and rising readers' expectations and needs, information overloads, variety of documents, availability of information and communication technologies. Libraries need to redesign their traditional library services to ICT-based library services and a human agency needs to enhance with modern technology to help the readers in the form of reference service. Though the ever-expanding availability of electronic resources tends to influence the nature of reference services, the essential component of "service" remains the same.

The library helps the readers in form of reference service and reference service is the process of helping readers to identify sources of information in response to a particular query, problem, or

assignment that need to be done and it also promotes the use of library materials, connect the users with the library documents and meet the requirement of information sources by the users. Reference services are provided in libraries to help the readers in making use of library facilities and which is concerned with direct, personal assistance to library users seeking information and to help the readers by providing relevant and timely information.

To fulfill the greater mission of the library and to enhance the use of holdings of the library, which is to maximize the use of resources and services, by helping the individual readers as personalized service and helps individual users in getting exactly what they want and reference services plays a vital role. The availability of electronic resources-subscription based and free Internet resources make the reference service more essential.

According to **Dr. S. R. Ranganathan**: “Reference service is the process of establishing contact between the reader and his documents in a personal way”

American Library Association defines reference service as “The provision and organization by a library service which is directly concerned with assistance to readers in their search for information on various subject, and in using the resources of the library in study and research.”

2. Review of Literature:

Reference service is one of the most important library services among the different categories of library services where it plays a major important role in disseminating information online to the information seekers of users and it is the only method to adopt library services to grow his or her knowledge

Singh (2012) “*Digital reference service in university libraries: a case study of Northern India*” discussed the various models of providing digital reference services in academic libraries including email, Ask A services, online chat reference, video conferencing, digital robots, and collaborative digital reference. This paper highlights the present status of digital

Kumari (2016) “*Web-based services in library and information science*” This article mainly discusses that what are web-based library services, their features, advantages, and disadvantages. Different web-based services i.e. library webpage, Web OPAC, ask-a-librarian, email have been highlighted.

Gupta (2015) “*Use of digital information resources and services in libraries of select IITs in India a study*” discussed that numbers of libraries are providing some kind of digital reference services. Link to e-resources, e-mail reference service, question point reference service, instant

messaging service, Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) service, user feedback from service, social media service, etc. are provided services by engineering college libraries.

Jadhav (2017) “*Evaluation of digital reference services in engineering college libraries affiliated to University of Pune*” discussed the digital reference services, cost-benefit analysis and evaluated the strength and weaknesses in engineering college libraries affiliated to University of Pune

Flierl (2021) “*Opportunities for Reference Services after Covid-19*” This article mainly discussed that how academic library reference services adapted to providing accurate and timely information to students, faculty, staff, and other users during a global pandemic. And discuss three specific opportunities for reference services in a post-Covid-19 world: evolution in technology, distributed staffing models, and measuring efficacy against student learning and success.

Hasan & Mushtaq (2021) “*Reference source and services in CSIR-IGIB, CSIR-NPL, CSIR-NISCAIR, CSIR-NISTADS and CSIR-CRRP*” the study discussed the availability of reference sources and reference services provided by the select CSIR laboratory libraries situated at Delhi and how to study libraries are aware its users to make use of reference sources and services through promotional activities and interaction with users.

Sawant (2021) “*Services offered by Indian libraries during COVID-19*” This study article mainly discussed the library services provided by Indian libraries during the COVID-19 lockdown and the problems faced by the libraries in providing their services.

3. Statement of the Problem

A review of the literature revealed that that

- Though the study has been found in web-based library services as well as digital library services and web 2.0 library services but no such comprehensive study regarding Reference Services in private university libraries of Assam has been conducted previously
- This study provides an insight into the current status of reference services in private university libraries in Assam.
- It will find out problems & prospects of private university libraries in Assam for providing traditional reference services and web-based reference services
- The study will fill the gap of LIS literature related to this area.

4. Scope & Limitations of the study:

Scope of research problem states the coverage of research and also covers the area in which research is to be done. This research study covers private university libraries of Assam. As per web site of the University Grants Commission of India (<https://www.ugc.ac.in>), there are 23 universities in Assam (2 Central universities, 15 State universities, and 6 private universities). Geographically these are spread over in three districts of Assam and the researcher can't carry out all the university libraries of Assam within the limited period to find out the status and performance of reference services in private university libraries of Assam and my study area will cover only private university libraries of Assam and which to be evaluated with reference services in a digital context.

5. Significance of the study

The significance of the study would enable libraries to provide effective library services to the user community and meet the rising readers' expectations and needs by following traditional reference services to ICT-enabled web-based reference services.

6. Objectives of the study

The main objective of the study is also taken into consideration the importance of both traditional and web-based reference services and to analyze the reference services and their utilization by the user community of private university libraries of Assam. Following are the research objectives were set:

- i. To find out the library services available in the study libraries
- ii. To find out the current level of reference services offered in the study libraries
- iii. To find out the availability and status of web-based reference services
- iv. To find out the overall performance of library services and to make a comparative analysis
- v. To find out the web 2.0 features available in the study libraries
- vi. To find out the status of online learning support systems in the study libraries
- vii. To find out the librarian's perceptions on reference services identify strength and weakness
- viii. To find out the positive and negative perceptions of library users regarding reference services

7. Methodology:

For the collection of data qualitative and quantitative measures have been approached to finding out the study results with a structured questionnaire where a physical library survey has been conducted and to find out the relevant information.

The following methods have been adopted for the aggregation of data for the study.

- i. The personal interview method has been accustomed for assemble observation from the librarian
- ii. A survey method was applied for carrying out the study.
- iii. Web 2.0 features practiced in the private university library websites that have been accumulated by retrieving the library website

Table 1: Basic Information of the Library

SI No	Abbreviation	University	YoE	URL
1	ADBU	Assam Don Bosco University	2009	http://www.dbuniversity.ac.in/
2	ADTU	Assam Down Town University	2010	www.adtu.in
3	AKU	The Assam Kaziranga University	2012	www.kazirangauniversity.in
4	MSSV	Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva Viswavidyalaya	2013	http://mssv.ac.in/
5	RGU	The Assam Royal Global University	2013	http://www.rgu.ac/
6	KAV	Krishnaguru Adhyatmik Visvavidyalaya	2017	https://kav.org.in/

YoE = Year of Establishment, URL= Uniform Resource Locator

8. Result & Discussion:

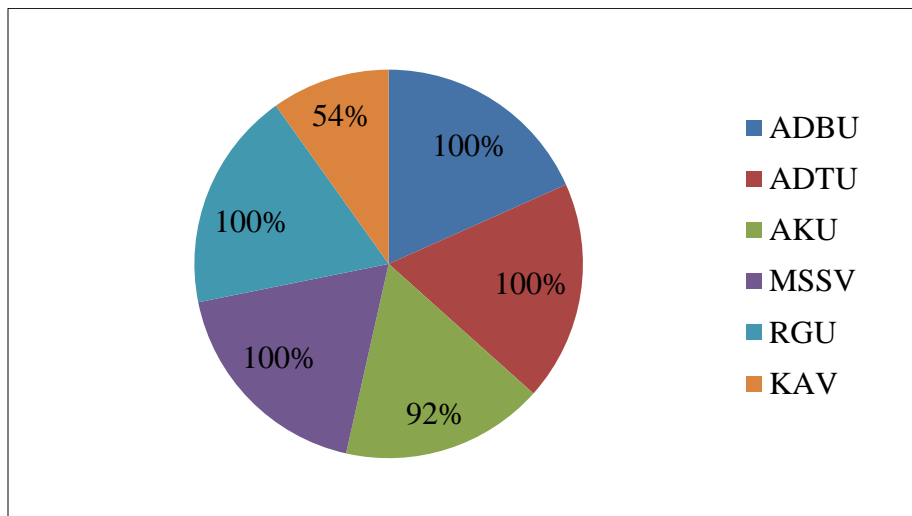
8.1 Basic Library Services:

Fig. 1 shows the performance of basic library services in the study libraries where out of 6 (Six) selected private university libraries of Assam 4 (Four) university libraries i.e. Assam Down Town University (ADTU) and Assam Don Bosco University (ADBU), Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva Viswavidyalaya (MSSV), The Assam Royal Global University (RGU) have incorporated 100% (13 Numbers) as the highest performing basic library services which are as-membership creation, lending or circulation service, reservations of documents, assistance to use

the library tools, reprographic service, reference service, readers advisory service, library orientation, internet service, online public access catalogue (OPAC), current awareness service (CAS), newspaper clippings and book exhibitions.

Whereas others 2 (Two) study libraries i.e. The Assam Kaziranga University (AKU) and Krishnaguru Adhyatmik Visvavidyalaya (KAV) have incorporated 92% (12 Numbers) and 54% (7 Numbers) of basic library services respectively

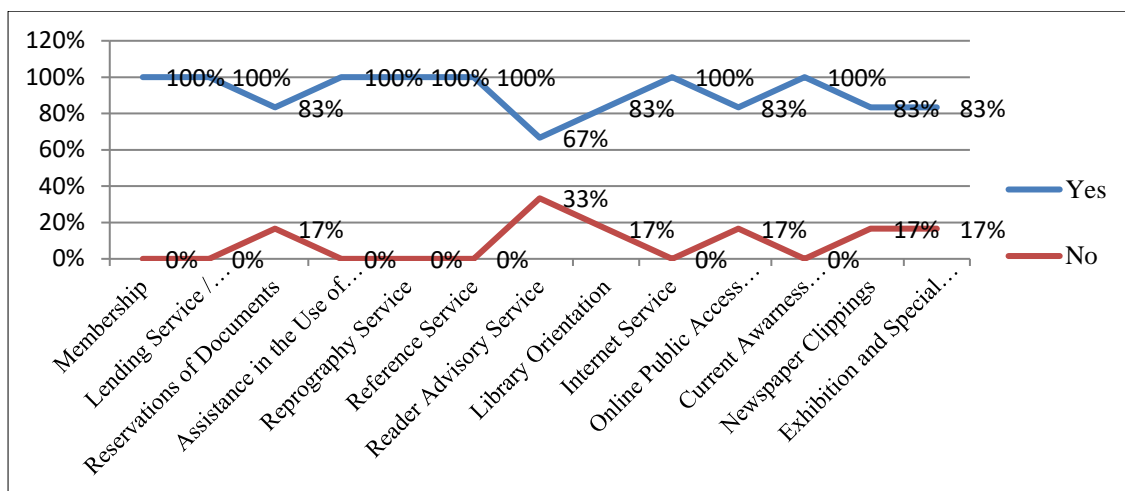
Fig. 1: Basic Library Services



8.2 Status of Basic Library Services:

Fig. 2 shows the status of basic library services and their performance highest to lowest by the study libraries namely ADBU, ADTU, AKU, MSSV, RGU, KAV, and the highest 100% (6 numbers) performed basic library services like “membership creation, lending or circulation service, assistance in the use of library and library tools, reprography service, reference service, internet service, current awareness service (CAS)” whereas second highest 83% (5 numbers) performed basic library services are “reservations of documents, library orientation, online public access catalogue (OPAC), newspaper clippings, exhibition, and special displays” and the lowest 67% (4 numbers) performed basic library services is “reader advisory service”

Fig. 2: Status of Basic Library Services



8.3 Reference Services:

In table 2 shows the distributions of reference services and their performance in the study libraries and it has found that not a single library performed reference services like “preparing library publications, abstracting & indexing services, a compilation of bibliographic services, translation services, reproduction of documents services and interlibrary loan (ILL) services. The highest 73% (16 numbers) acquired by RGU and similarly ADBU and ADTU have incorporated 68% (15 Numbers) as the second-highest offering reference services and the lowest 50% (11 numbers) acquired by KAV.

Table 2: Reference Services

Sl. No.	Reference Services	ADBU	ADTU	AKU	MSSV	RGU	KAV
1	Query Answering Service	1	1	1	1	1	1
2	Selective dissemination of information (SDI)	1	1	1	1	1	1
3	User Education Service	1	1	1	1	1	1
4	Library Tour	1	1	1	1	1	1
5	Holding of Library Exhibitions	1	1	1	1	1	1
6	Issue of library use permits	1	1	0	1	1	0
7	Contributing to or preparing library publications	0	0	0	0	0	0
8	Research Support / Advisory Service	1	1	1	1	1	1
9	Abstracting & Indexing	0	0	0	0	0	0
10	Compilation of Bibliographies	0	0	0	0	0	0
11	Display Current Periodicals	1	1	1	1	1	1
12	Translation Service	0	0	0	0	0	0
13	Reproduction of documents	0	0	0	0	0	0

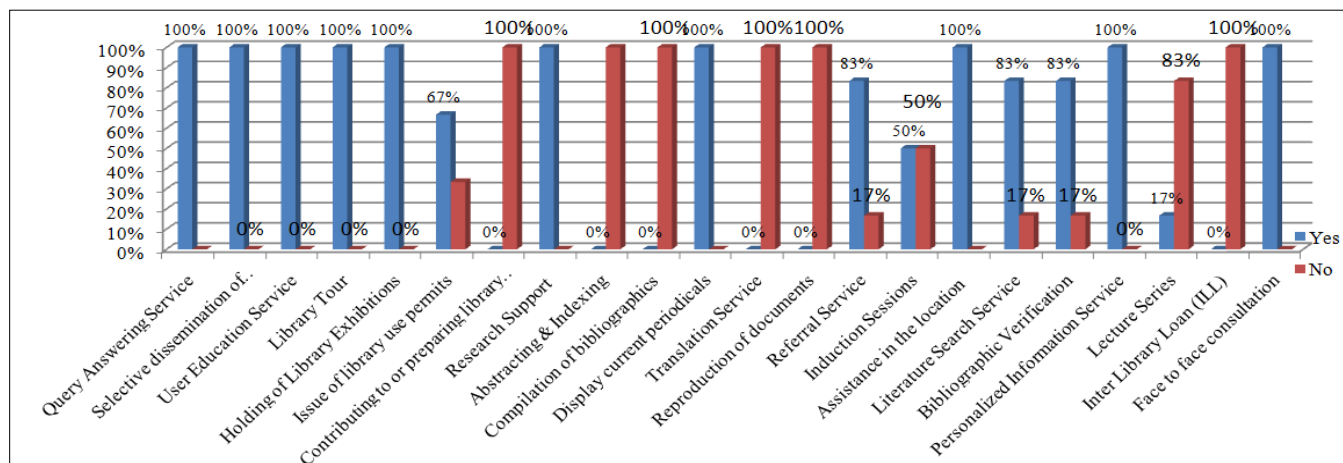
14	Referral Service	1	1	1	1	1	0
15	Induction Sessions	1	1	0	0	1	0
16	Assistance in the Location	1	1	1	1	1	1
17	Literature Search Service	1	1	1	1	1	0
18	Bibliographic Verification	1	1	0	1	1	1
19	Personalized Information Service	1	1	1	1	1	1
20	Lecture Series	0	0	0	0	1	0
21	Interlibrary Loan (ILL)	0	0	0	0	0	0
22	Face to Face Consultation	1	1	1	1	1	1
N= 22		15	15	12	14	16	11
Mean Score		68.1818	68.18	54.55	63.6364	72.73	50
Percentage		68%	68%	55%	64%	73%	50%

1= Yes, 0= NO

8.4 Status of Reference Services:

Fig. 3 shows the status of reference services that have been performed by the study libraries and its performance has been distributed highest to lowest based on the rate of acquired percentage. The highest 100% (6 numbers) performed reference services are “query answering service, selective dissemination of information (SDI), user education service, library tour, holding of library exhibitions, research support, display current periodicals, assistance in the location, personalized information service and face to face consultation”. The second highest 83% (5 numbers) performed reference services are “literature search service and bibliographic verification” and the lowest 0% (zero contribution) performed reference services are “contributing to or preparing library publications, abstracting & indexing, a compilation of bibliographies, translation service, reproduction of documents, interlibrary loan (ILL)

Fig. 3: Status of Reference Services



8.5 Web-Based Reference Service:

In table 3 giving the availability of different web-based reference services in the study libraries where ADTU scored the highest 47% (7 numbers) namely “web form, web chat, instant messaging, WhatsApp reference, email reference, through phone and social networking site (SNS) where MSSV and KAV have incorporated 20% (3 numbers) as lowest offering web-based reference services.

Table 3: Web-Based Reference Services

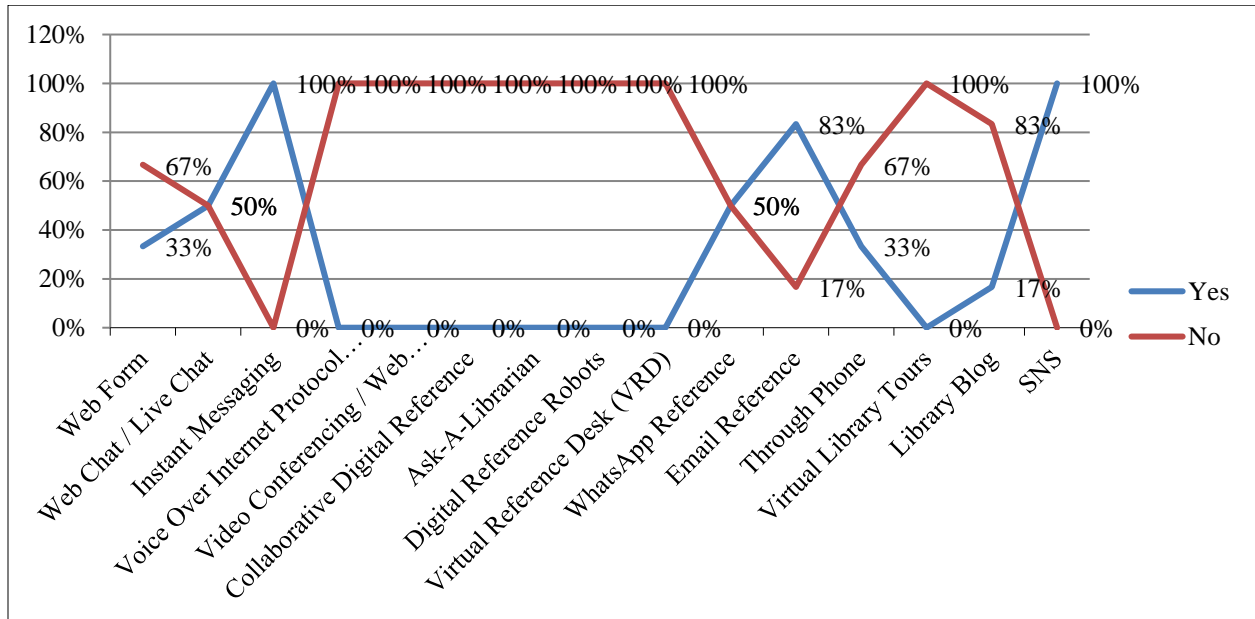
Sl. No.	Web-Based Reference Services	ADBU	ADTU	AKU	MSSV	RGU	KAV
1	Web Form	1	1	0	0	0	0
2	Web Chat / Live Chat	0	1	1	0	1	0
3	Instant Text Messaging	1	1	1	1	1	1
4	Voice Over Internet Protocol (VoIP)	0	0	0	0	0	0
5	Video Conferencing / WebCam Service	0	0	0	0	0	0
6	Collaborative Digital Reference	0	0	0	0	0	0
7	Ask-A-Librarian	0	0	0	0	0	0
8	Digital Reference Robots	0	0	0	0	0	0
9	Virtual Reference Desk (VRD)	0	0	0	0	0	0
10	WhatsApp Reference	1	1	0	0	0	1
11	Email Reference	1	1	1	1	1	0
12	Through Phone	1	1	0	0	0	0
13	Virtual Library Tours	0	0	0	0	0	0
14	Library Blog	0	0	0	0	1	0
15	Social Networking Site (SNS)	1	1	1	1	1	1
N= 15		6	7	4	3	5	3
Mean Score		40%	47%	27%	20%	33%	20%

1= Yes, 0= No

8.6 Status of Web-Based Reference Services

Fig.4 shows the status of web-based reference services that have been performed by the study libraries. The highest 100% (6 numbers) performed web-based reference services are “instant messaging and social networking site (SNS). The second highest 83% (5 numbers) performed web-based reference services is “email reference service” and the lowest 0% (Zero contribution) performed reference services are “voice over internet protocol (VoIP), video conferencing / webcam service, collaborative digital reference, ask-a-librarian, digital reference robots, virtual reference desk (VRD), virtual library tours”

Fig. 4: Status of Web-Based Reference Services



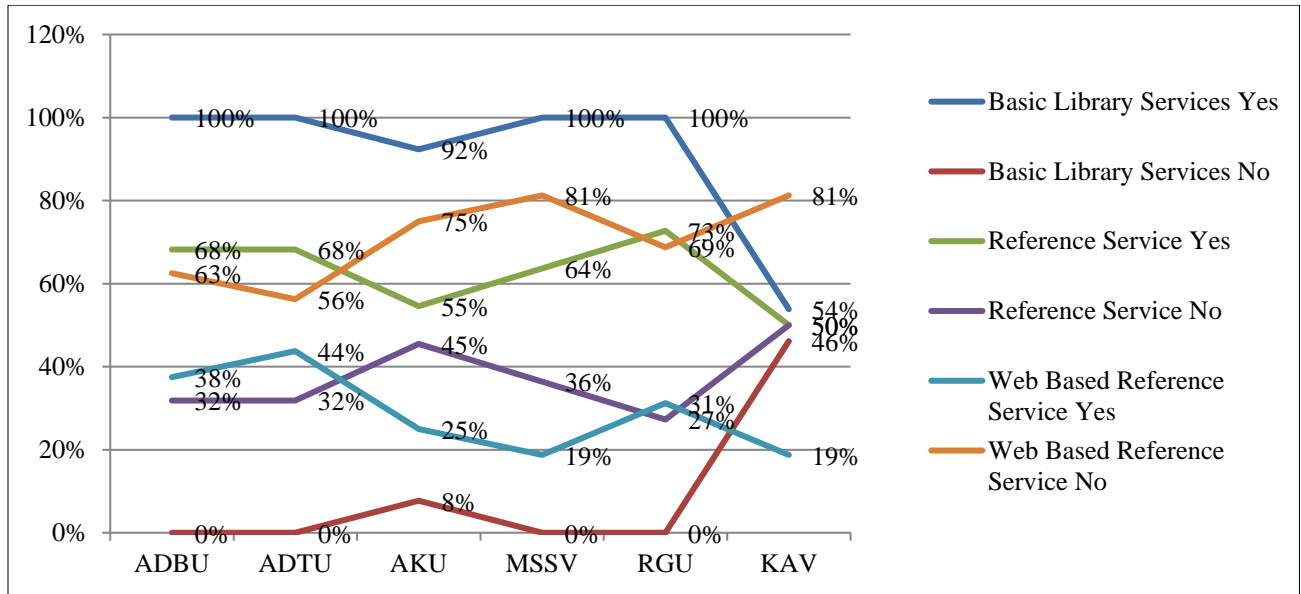
8.7 Performance of Library Services

Fig. 5 shows clearly the positive and negative performance in the study libraries and the performance of library services has been categorized into three basic categories namely “basic library service, reference service, and web-based reference service”. The highest positive performances in the category of “basic library services” have found 100% (13 Numbers) in the study libraries of ADBU, ADTU, MSSV, RGU, and KAV. The lowest positive performance 54% (7 Numbers) and the highest negative performance 46% (6 Numbers) have also been found in KAV libraries.

The positive and negative performances in the category of “reference services” in the study libraries have found highest 73% (16 numbers) and lowest 50% (11 numbers) positive performance acquired by RGU and KAV and the second-highest positive performance 68% (15 numbers) have also acquired by ABDU and ADTU separately. Whereas the highest negative performance was 50% (11 numbers) acquired by KAV.

The positive and negative performance has also been found in the category of “web-based reference services” where the highest 44% (7 numbers) positive performance acquired by ADTU and lowest 19% (3 numbers) positive performance equally acquired by MSSV and KAV and the negative performance highest 81% (13 numbers) equally acquired by MSSV and KAV.

Fig. 5: Performance for Library Services



8.8 Web 2.0 Features:

Table 4 gives the availability of web 2.0 features in the study libraries 'university's websites. The study finds that RGU has incorporated the highest four web 2.0 features 57% in their library websites blog, wiki, SNS, and Live Chat. AKU performed the second highest 43% three web 2.0 features like wiki, SNS, and Live Chat. The ADBU, ADTU, MSSV, and KAV have individually incorporated two 29% web 2.0 features, which are Wikipedia, SNS, and Live chat, and again it has found that not a single library performed web 2.0 features like RSS Feed, Podcast, IM. SNS is the highest 100% performed Web 2.0 features whereas other two Web 2.0 features like wiki and live chat are also performed 83.33% and 50% respectively by the study libraries

Table 4: Web 2.0 Features

University	Library URL	Blog	Wiki	RSS Feed	SNS	Podcast	IM	Live Chat
ADBU	https://www.dbuniversity.ac.in/Library.php	0	1	0	1	0	0	0
ADTU	https://adtu.in/information-corner	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
AKU	https://kazirangauniversity.in/student/general_rules	0	1	0	1	0	0	1
MSSV	https://mssv.ac.in/frontendpages/index/library	0	1	0	1	0	0	0
RGU	https://rgu.ac/learn.php	1	1	0	1	0	0	1
KAV	https://kav.org.in/	0	1	0	1	0	0	0
N=6		1	5	0	6	0	0	0
Mean Score		16.66%	83.33%	0%	100%	0%	0%	50

1= Yes, 0=No, SNS= Social Networking Site, IM = Instant Messaging

8.9 Preferences for Web-based or Web 2.0 Services

Fig. 6 shows the importance of web-based or web 2.0 services in the study libraries. 100% (17% + 33% + 50% = moderately important + important + very important = 100%) positive significance is given to library blog development as fast publication media to community connect.

83% (33% + 33% + 17% = fairly important + moderately important + important = 83%) positive significance is sought in Wikipedia platform for library as open information.

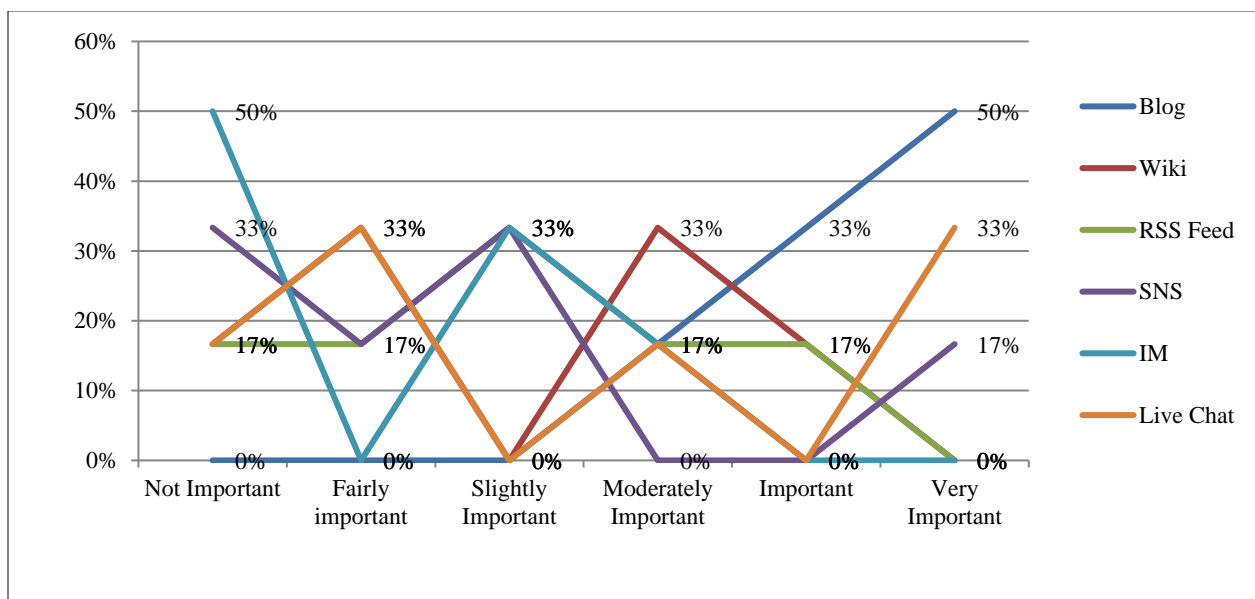
83% (17% + 33% + 17% + 17% = fairly important + slightly important + moderately important + important = 83%) positive significance is given to RSS feed for applications to access updates in library websites.

67% (17 + 33% + 17% = fairly important + slightly important + very important = 67%) positive significance is given to SNS (social networking sites) platform for open information through community connection

50% (33% + 17% = slightly important + moderately important = 50%) positive significance is given to IM (instant messaging) as real time text transmission over the internet and 50% negative significance is sought to IM (instant messaging)

83% (33% + 17% + 33% = fairly important + moderately important + very important = 83%) positive significance is given to live chat applications for library real time communication system.

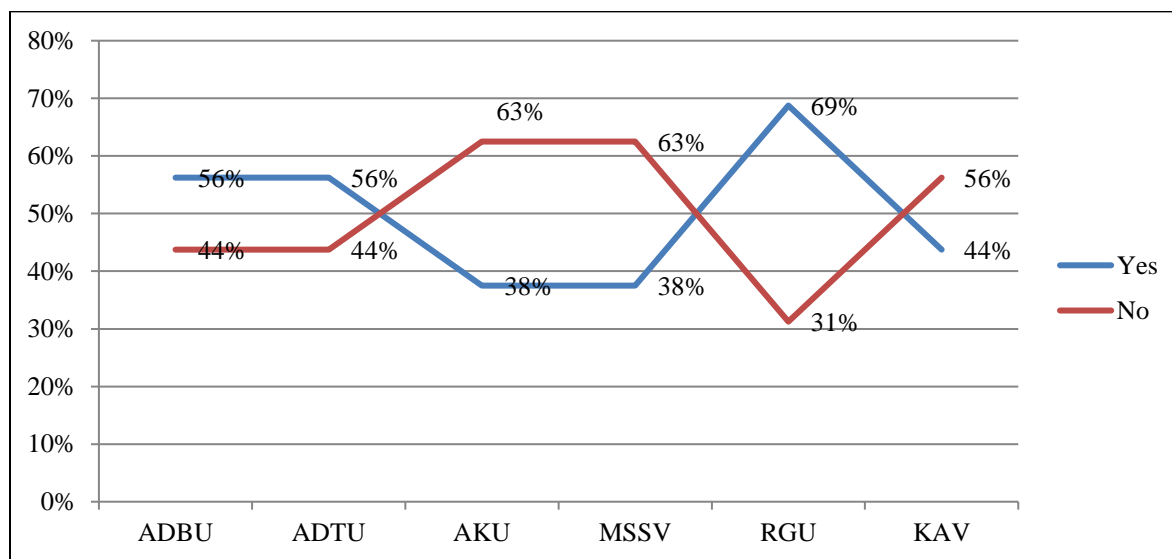
Fig. 6: Preferences for Web-based or Web 2.0 Services



8.10 Online Learning Support

Fig 7 shows the availability of different online learning support facilities in the study libraries where RGU acquired the highest 69% (11 numbers) and second-highest 56% (9 numbers) equally incorporated by ADBU and ADTU. The lowest offering is a 38% (6 numbers) online learning support facility equally acquired by AKU and MSSV.

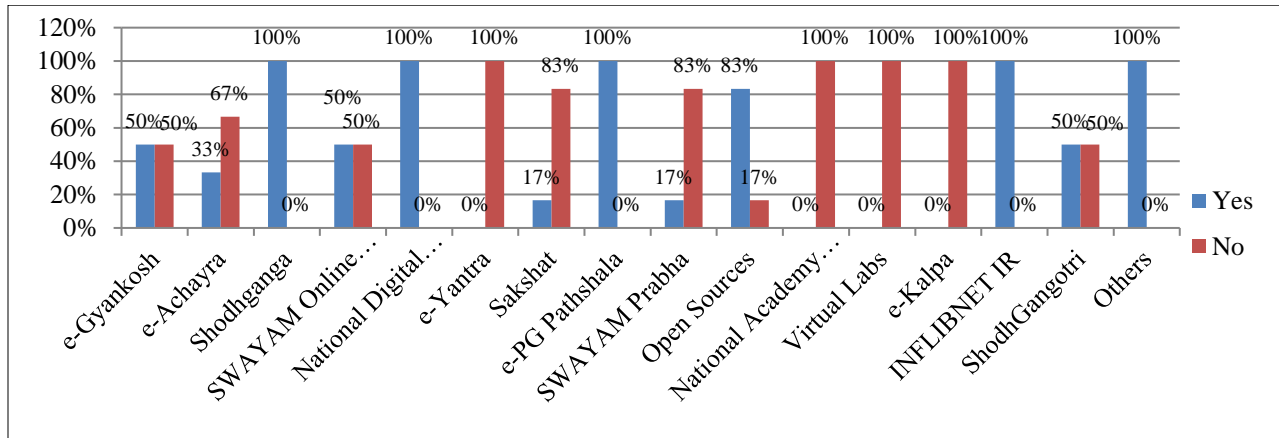
Fig. 7: Online Learning Support



8.11 Status of Online Learning Support:

Fig 8 clearly shows the status of the online learning support system by the study libraries. The highest 100% online learning supporting systems are “Shodhganga, national digital library (NDL), e-PG pathshala, INFLIBNET IR, others category” and the second highest 83% online learning supporting systems is “open source category” and 50% performed online learning support systems are “e-Gyankosh, SWAYAM online courses, ShodhGangotri’ and 0% performed online learning supporting systems are “e-Yantra, national academy of depository (NAD), virtual labs, e-Kalpa

Fig. 8: Status of Online Learning Support



8.12 Librarian's Perception on Reference Services:

Feedback gathered in this context on five common questions from librarian's views and they would prefer regarding reference services, collection, difficulties and its functionality of the study libraries have been described in Fig. 9

100% (33%+ 67% = Strongly Agree + Agree= 100%) positive perception is given by the librarians and they agree that the library has no sufficient reference collection due to sufficient funds or budget.

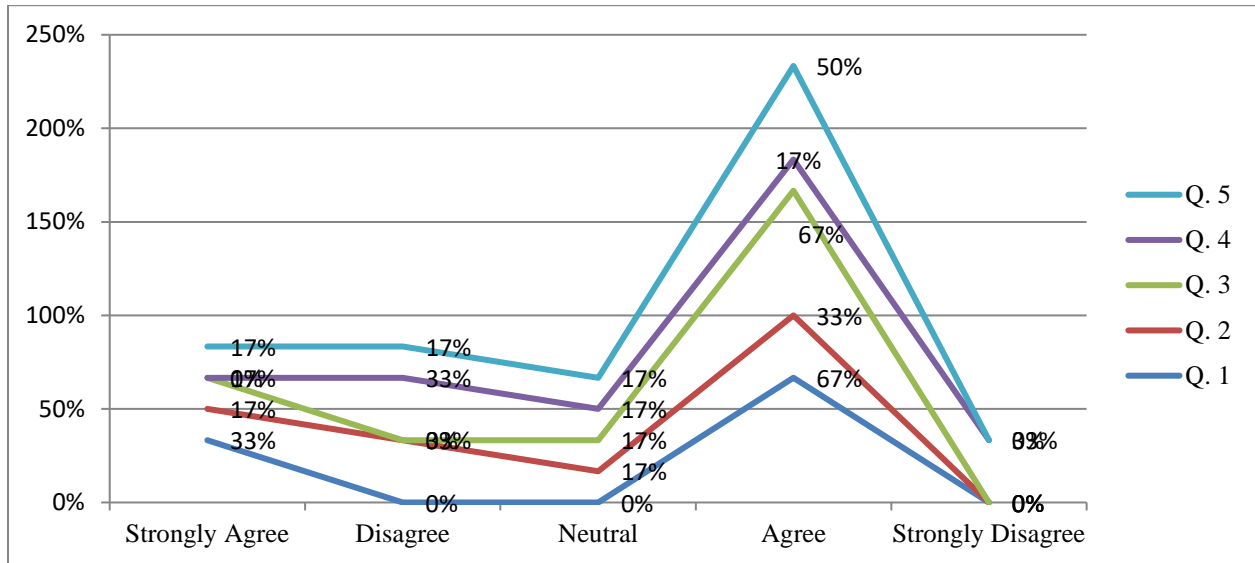
50% (17%+33%= Strongly Agree + Agree= 50%) positive and negative perception is given by the librarians that library authority is not interested to give separate reference section whereas 33% shows disagreement and 17% has given neutral comment.

84% (17%+67%= Strongly Agree + Agree= 84%) positive perception is given by the librarians that library gives web-based reference services frequently due to sufficient manpower and 17% has given neutral comment

66% (33%+33%= Disagree + Strongly Agree + = 66%) negative perception is given by the librarians that library has no users friendly reference section and it is not easy to locate and 17% agree that library has no users friendly reference section and it is not easy to locate and 17% has given neutral comment.

67% (17%+50%= Strongly Agree + Agree= 67%) positive perception, 17% gives negative perception and 17% has given neutral comment by the librarians that library shares information regarding OAR and subscription-based resources based on users query.

Fig. 9: Librarian's Perception on Reference Services



8.13 User's Perception on Reference Services

Feedback gathered in this context on five common questions from user's view and positive and negative perception were collected where they mostly agree with "library user needs some training for retrieving information resources and services and demands of the user's fulfilled by the study libraries have been described in Fig. 10

61% (25% + 35% = Strongly Agree + Agree= 61%) positive perception is given by the user and they agree that library provides intensive need-based reference services and it full fill the users demand and 26% of the library user are not agree and the reference services provided by the library is not satisfy the user demand and 13% of the user are not decided their views.

49% (18% + 30% = Strongly Agree + Agree= 49%) positive perception is given by the category of user that library personal are more responsive and they provides reference services timely where as 29% (25% + 4% = Disagree + Strongly Disagree= 29%) and 23% has not given their decision

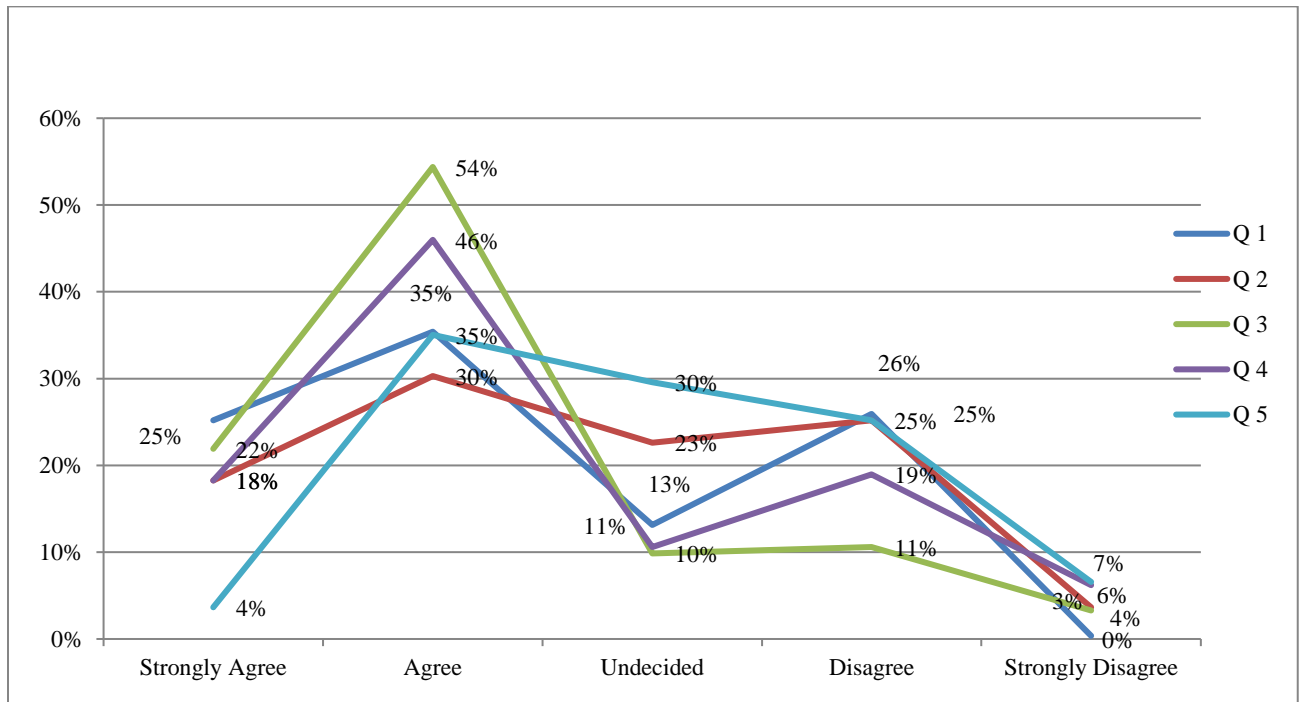
76% (22% + 54% = Strongly Agree + Agree= 76%) positive perception is given by the user that library user needs some training for retrieving information resources and services where 14% (11% + 3% = Disagree + Strongly Disagree= 14%) negative perception is given regarding user training and 10% has not given their decision

64% (18% + 46% = Strongly Agree + Agree= 64%) positive perception is given by the user that library need to adopt new methodology for web based reference services or Web 2.0 features and it will more productive where 25% (19% + 6% = Disagree + Strongly Disagree= 25%)

negative perception also given regarding adoption of new methodology and 11% user has not given their decision.

39% (5% + 35% = Strongly Agree + Agree= 39%) positive perception is given by the user that library provides authentic and relevant information on SNS And 32% (25% + 7% = Disagree + Strongly Disagree) negative perception is given regarding authenticity of information and 30% of the user has not given their decision.

Fig. 10: User's Perception of Reference Services



8.14 Suggestions and Recommendations

From the study, it has found that though study libraries provided different categories of library services which I had categorized into three library services as "Basic Library Services, References Services, and Web-Based Reference service"

Though the overall performance of basic library services is good in the manner the study libraries should implement references services like "Contributing to or preparing library publications, Abstracting Indexing, Compilation of bibliographies, Translation Services, Reproduction of documents, and Interlibrary Loan (ILL) to satisfy the rising demand of users.

The study libraries should implement more web-based reference services as positive performance as it is one of the most important and most specified library services in today's

context. Though it has found Instant Messaging in the category of web-based reference but in the study of web 2.0 features, it has not been highlighted in library's/university's websites.

The libraries should also try web 2.0 features in their library's/ university's websites to satisfy the need of users so that most of the users get benefited from these services

8.15 Conclusion:

People's academic activity and library services, as well as reference services, are more or less dependent on each other and to run the activities smoothly and steadily library and information center plays an important role through their library reference services and to fulfill the rising demands of the categories of library information and resources by the library users is not only challenging works for the library communities but also the toughest work for the entire library and library professional community.

Though the category of library and references services is implemented by the study libraries as traditionally or manually to some extent to satisfy the user's demand there must be, authorities of the study libraries should support with adequate human resources, information resources, technology support.

To enabling digital and web-based library services and to challenging the information-seeking demand and to cross over the digital divide among the community of library user's library and information center plays a vital role to leave out physical existence of library and adopt essential library services in an online or digitally.

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