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Web-based Services in University Libraries: A Pakistani Perspective

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Introduction

Libraries use their websites to provide services to users without their physical presence. Some libraries provide only minimal information about their collections and services, while many offer more WebOPACs, access to online databases, e-books, virtual reference service, electronic reserves, Web-based user education tools, virtual tours, etc. National Digital Library Program, Pakistan Education and Research Network (PERN), and Research Repository of Pakistan are significant initiatives of Higher Education Commission of Pakistan (HEC), which promote technology and research in the country. Those initiatives have helped university libraries to be in a better position to provide state-of-the-art resources through traditional and modern systems. Many university libraries have developed their websites or are in the process of development.

There were many studies available on the design of library websites, role of library websites, web-based library services, and case studies of individual library websites in the international library literature. Rhodes and Chelin (1999) surveyed 68 university libraries in the UK and found that almost three quarters of the libraries make use of the web for user education. He suggested that web-based instruction is unlikely to completely replace traditional methods, but it can be used to supplement and extend existing provision. Halub (1999) stated that the librarians of Cedars-Sinai Health System have considered while maintaining and creating web-based library services: the design of website; offer what services you can; but weigh the advantages of providing the services against the time required to maintain them; make the content as accessible as possible; promote your website and make friends in other departments, especially information services. Ahmed (2002) found in a survey of seven Arabian Gulf university libraries that almost all the libraries are offering web-based services in one way or the other. Feldman and Strobel (2002) recommend that for advancing web-based services it is essential to initiate self-service circulation or librarian-mediated online reference. Saeed (1999) studied use of the Internet in 29 university libraries of Pakistan and found that there were only two university libraries with a web OPAC. Mirza (2007) surveyed six federally chartered general university libraries and found that reference service was being provided electronically by four (66.67 percent) university libraries, while three (50 percent) were providing electronic document delivery service.

University libraries are a hub of knowledge and information services in their institutions and are usually established along with their mother institutions as an integral part. According to HEC (2008), there are 124 general and specialized universities and degree-awarding institutes throughout the country including Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) and Federally Administrated Northern Areas (FANA) in public and private sector. The first university library established in the country is Punjab University Library (1882), Lahore, which is also the largest library with a collection of 500,000.

There is no study of web-based services offered by the university libraries of Pakistan. This first study measures the extent of web-based services offered by the general university libraries in Pakistan.

Objectives of the Study

1. To find out the number of university libraries having a website.
2. To find out whether the libraries have a direct hyperlink on their university homepage.
3. To investigate whether the university libraries have a static or dynamic website.
4. To measure the extent of the web-based services offered by the general university libraries in Pakistan.

Study Design

In this study, all the general university libraries (GUL), excluding one distance learning program, one virtual, and three universities whose major function is as a regulatory body (N=56) have been included. The information about these universities was retrieved from the website of Higher Education Commission of Pakistan, Islamabad. The methodology is content analysis of the websites of the university libraries. A checklist including name of the university library, province, sector, category, existence of library website, hyperlink on university home page, type (static or dynamic) of library website, and six categories of library and information services was prepared to analyze the contents. There were more web-based services offered by university libraries, but this study has focused on six categories, including general information about library, web OPAC, reference service, collection, circulation, and document delivery service/Inter Library Loan. These six categories were further divided into 33 sub-categories. The content analysis work was done during mid-August to mid-September, 2008.

Findings

Library Website

More than two-thirds of the libraries examined have a dedicated or partial website. A partial website is one having information about other facilities or services along with the library. There were 16 (28.6%) GULs without library website, while two (3.6%) GULs libraries have their websites in the process of construction. Data analysis shows that 20 (68%) public GULs and 18 (66.7%) private have a dedicated or partial website.

Table I. Library Website

Provinces	Yes	No	Under Construction	Total
Punjab	15	4	1	20
Sindh	9	4	0	13
NWFP	4	6	0	10
Balochistan	1	0	1	2
Federal Area	7	0	0	7
AJK	2	1	0	3

FATA/FANA	0	1	0	1
Total	38	16	2	56
Percent	67.9	28.6	3.6	

In most areas, the libraries have a dedicated or partial website at least two-thirds to three-quarters of the time.

Library's Hyperlink on University Website and Type of Website

More than half the libraries have a direct hyperlink on the university homepage, while nearly half have an indirect link from something like “facilities.” The same proportion have a dynamic (52 percent) or static (47 percent) website. A dynamic website is one with hyperlinks.

Web-based Library Services

General Information

This category includes an introduction to the library, hours, general library policies, contact information, etc. Nearly all have an introduction, while approximately 20 to 35 percent mention hours, general library policies, contact information, and a staff directory.

Table II. General Information

Web-based Library Service-General	Public Sector	Private Sector	Frequency	Percent
Library introduction (History, Vision, Objectives etc.)	17	18	35	92.1
Library hours	10	4	14	36.84
General library policies	9	3	12	31.57
Contact information	7	3	10	26.31
Staff Directory	7	2	9	23.68
Library sections/divisions/departments	5	1	6	15.78
Library news	2	1	3	7.89
Counter	2	1	3	7.89
Library map	1	0	1	2.63
General suggestions / feedback form	1	0	1	2.63
Virtual tour	0	0	0	0

Web OPAC

The web OPAC is a significant service offered by libraries through their websites. Less than one-fifth of the libraries have this service.

Web-based Reference and Information Literacy Services

Only 6 (15.78%) GULs provide general information about information literacy/instruction services, while only 5 (13.15%) libraries give general information about reference service. Another five (13.15%) have email reference, while only one (2.63%) has chat reference.

Table III. Web-based Reference and Information Literacy Services

Web-based Library Service-Reference	Public Sector	Private Sector	Frequency	Percent
General information about instructional-services/user education/information literacy	3	3	6	15.78
General information about Reference Service	5	3	5	13.15
Reference Service using email	2	3	5	13.15
Reference Service using web-chat	1	0	1	2.63
Reference Service using web-form	0	0	0	0
Text based tutorials for instructional-services/user education/information literacy	0	0	0	0
Web-based/Interactive tutorials for instructional services/user education/information literacy	0	0	0	0

Library Collection and Access to Electronic Resources

This category had seven variables. Forty to fifty percent of libraries provide access to online databases, digital collections, and descriptive information about their collections, while only 4 (10.52%) provide information about “New Arrivals.”

Table IV. Library Collection and Access to Electronic Resources

Web-based Library Service-Collection	Public Sector	Private Sector	Frequency	Percent
Access to online databases journals	13	5	18	47.36
Access to digital collection	13	4	17	44.73
General information about collections	10	5	15	39.47
New arrival list	3	1	4	10.52
Text based recommendation form	1	0	1	2.63
Web-based recommendation form	0	0	0	0
Collection development policies	0	0	0	0

Web-based Circulation

Web-based circulation services are attractive to patrons. In this study, four aspects of circulation services are analyzed. Table V had shown that descriptive information about circulation policies is provided by 12 (31.57%) GULs on their websites, while 10 (26.31%) also give the membership procedure.

Table IV. Web-based Circulation

Web-based Library Service-Circulation	Public Sector	Private Sector	Frequency	Percent
Circulation policies	9	3	12	31.57
Membership procedure	8	2	10	26.31
Patron's access to their accounts	0	1	1	2.63
Renewal and reserve facility	0	1	1	2.63

Interlibrary Loan (ILL) and Document Delivery

Less than one-quarter of the libraries provide descriptive information about ILL and document delivery, while one (2.63%) public sector GUL provides a text-based request form, and there is no use of a web-based request form for this service.

Table IV. Interlibrary Loan (ILL) and Document Delivery

Web-based Library Service-ILL/Document delivery	Public Sector	Private Sector	Frequency	Percent
ILL and document delivery policies	6	3	9	23.68
Text based request form	1	0	1	2.63
Web based request form	0	0	0	0

Conclusion

The study shows that web-based services in GULs of Pakistan are in their infancy. There is an urgent need to develop dynamic websites with a direct hyperlink on the university's homepage. LIS professionals must recognize the significance of web-based library services and take the initiative to provide them. HEC, LIS programs, and professional associations should provide training opportunities to librarians. Further research is needed to identify the problems faced by university libraries in introducing and maintaining web-based services.

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