

Analysis of Contents of Tanzanian University Library Websites

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Abstract: *A study was carried out between January and February 2013 to analyze the contents of 16 university and university college library websites in Tanzania using content analysis method. The consolidated data were analyzed using Microsoft Excel and presented in tabular form. The study findings revealed that although many university library websites have some commonalities, these websites miss many important features. Some library websites have very little content that do not provide a real picture about their collections, resources and services. The websites also lack uniformity despite many similarities that university libraries possess. There is poor presentation of details on e-resources and library services. It is recommended that the design of library websites should be driven by the information needs and seeking behaviour of target users rather than technology or library functions. Website designers should make use of current and emerging technologies to provide library users with opportunities to locate and retrieve information efficiently. Furthermore, library websites should be updated regularly in order to respond to users' changing needs. Recommendations on future research are also provided.*

Keywords: library website, university, library services, Tanzania

INTRODUCTION

Phenomenal advances in Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) increasingly transform the way libraries carry out their operations. Among other ICT-enabled developments, many libraries have developed websites which serve as gateways for promoting, guiding and facilitating access to library services. A comprehensive library website provides access to library resources and online databases subscribed by the library; provides links to other databases and repositories; enhances access to web based resources; gives access to computerized library operations; and promotes and markets library collections, services and facilities (Konnur *et al.*, 2010). Callicott (2002) adds that a library website brings about certain links closer to the homepage as well as rename and reorganize certain tags that make sense to all users. Library websites can also speed up librarians' work in assisting users to find information. For instance, technologies such as blogs, Facebook, wikis, tagging and others facilitate information sharing among librarians and library users. Library websites eliminate constraints of time and distance in accessing information. The functions of library websites are summarized by Diaz (1998:41):

A library website can, and by default, does play a variety of roles. First, a library website often serves the role of a library workstation, both for the

users and for the librarians serving them. It is a tool that will help to speed up or slow down the reference librarians' work in assisting patrons to find information. It is a tool that will help or hinder the user in finding the answer to a very simple question, such as how to determine if the library has a particular book and where it might be found.

University libraries play a vital role in supporting their parent universities to fulfill teaching, learning, research and outreach functions. By collecting, organizing, preserving, and enable availability of print and electronic information resources, university libraries are indispensable for students to augment their learning and for staff to pursue training and research works. Hence, university library websites are gateways that facilitate access to information services that support universities to pursue their objectives. It is thus important to ensure that the contents of the university library websites provide a full scope of library collections and services for users to know all that the library can offer. Ideally, the contents of library websites should be organized into categories that match what library users expect to find. In other words, the design of library websites should be driven by information needs of users. Since users of university libraries share many common traits and most universities have similar functions, it is therefore expected that university library websites will have many similarities in their contents.

Library website development in Tanzania started in the late 1990s mostly as part of their parent institutions' websites. At present, university libraries in the country are in different stages of computerizing their operations and have already developed or are developing websites. It should be noted however that website development and maintenance is a continuous process in which the contents keep on being added, changed and removed. This study was designed to analyze the contents of university library websites in Tanzania in order to suggest measures for improvement. The study would enable librarians and website designers to see what common elements are being used, and possibly learn about other options with regards to design or services. The study would give librarians a better sense of the contents available on their websites. It would also be useful to webmasters majority whose backgrounds are more familiar with the technical aspects rather than content management.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A number of studies have analyzed the contents of library websites around the world. Cohen and Still (1999) analyzed the websites of research and university libraries and they listed a series of elements that they considered core to any academic website. Many of these elements were links to information resources, including the library's Online Public Access Catalog (OPAC), Internet subject guides, search engines, subscription databases, and electronic journal services. A study of university library websites in four English speaking countries found that the visual display of information was similar across all countries and that all 150 library websites provided access to their own catalogue and some databases. Most also provided access to other library catalogues, a description of services and an update date. However, there was much less information on instructional materials and remote access (Still, 2001). Brower (2004) analyzed academic health library websites' contents and navigational elements. Based on the results, a formula was

developed which listed items that should appear on all academic health library homepages. Michalec (2006) analyzed the contents, contact details, hours of operations, information about the library collections, the library webpage location on the parent organization website, and number of clicks required to navigate library information. The author also analyzed the availability of search engine links, internet subject resources, local resources, electronic databases, and links to reference assistance along with other basic library-related information contents. Qutab and Mahmood (2009) analyzed contents of library websites in Pakistan and found that there were no standards for content selection in developing library websites. Library websites lack uniformity and some missed important features. In India, Vijayakumar *et al.* (2009) reported that the library websites of Indian Institute of Technologies were different from one another in many respects.

There are also studies that analyzed the availability of web 2.0 technologies on library websites. Linh (2008) analyzed types of Web 2.0 technologies that were applied in Australasian university library websites. The findings indicate that two-third of the Australasian university libraries deployed one or more Web 2.0 technologies in their websites. Only four Web 2.0 technologies were used for specific purposes and with some basic features. Mohamed and Anjana (2010) analyzed the websites of national libraries of Asian countries and found that many libraries have a common pattern of content and design. However, only six national libraries websites have deployed one or more web 2.0 technologies.

METHODOLOGY

A total of 16 websites of university and University College libraries were involved in this study from among 37 Tanzanian universities and university colleges. This list was retrieved from the Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU) website. The selection of the study sample was purposive basing on the availability and accessibility of the library websites during this study. All university and university college library websites that were accessible were included in the study sample. These were the library websites of the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM), Muhimbili University of Health and Allied Sciences (MUHAS), Ardhi University (ARU), Mzumbe University (MU), Catholic University of Health and Allied Sciences (CUHAS), Zanzibar University (ZU), Sokoine University of Agriculture (SUA), Moshi University College of Cooperative and Business Studies (MUCCoBS), Tumaini University Makumira Dar es Salaam College (TUMADARCo), Stefano Moshi Memorial University College (SMMUCo), Kilimanjaro Christian Medical College (KCMC), Tumaini University Makumira (TUMA), Mwenge University College of Education (MWUCE), Teofilo Kisanji University (TEKU), Muslim University of Morogoro (MUM) and the Hubert Kairuki Memorial University (HKMU).

Content analysis method was used to collect and analyze data. This is a research method concerned with the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the content of communication (Baran, 2002). Since content analysis is used for studying communication artifacts, websites lend themselves *prima facie* to content analysis (Weare and Lin, 2000; Babbie, 2007). All selected websites were examined and

analyzed based on a checklist adapted and modified from the literature (Mohamed and Anjana, 2010). The checklist included general information as well as information on library collections, electronic resources, and library services. Data were collected between January and February 2013. The consolidated data were analyzed using Microsoft Excel and presented in Tables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings in Table 1 show the general details of the library websites. Most libraries provided details on their opening and closing hours (81.3%), membership (68.8%), library rules (62.5%), history (56.3%) and mission statements (56.3%) on their websites. Some libraries provided information on location (43.8%), contact (37.5%) and as well as news events (31.3%) on their websites. Quite a few libraries had staff information (25%) and date of updation (12.5%) on their websites. While many libraries provided many aspects as far as general information is concerned on their websites, there are also a number of libraries that miss important items in this category. The HKMU library website for example, had not provided anything on the general information category. The MU and MWUCE libraries provided only two aspects each on their websites. This is a serious weakness because general information provides users with an overview of a particular library.

Table 1: General Information

General information	UDSM	MUHAS	ARU	MU	HKMU	TEKU	MUM	CUHAS	ZU	SUA	MUCCoBS	TUDARCo	SMMUCo	KCMC	TUMA	MWUCE	Frequency	Percent
History	√	√	√			√	√	√	√	√	√						9	56.3
Mission statement	√	√		√		√		√	√	√			√	√			9	56.3
Location	√	√	√					√		√		√	√				7	43.8
Library hours	√	√	√	√			√	√	√	√		√	√	√	√	√	13	81.3
Library rules	√	√	√			√		√	√	√		√	√		√		10	62.5
News and events	√	√							√	√						√	5	31.3
Membership	√	√	√			√		√	√	√	√	√	√		√		11	68.8
Library Staff	√	√							√	√							4	25.0
Date of updation	√									√							2	12.5
Contacts	√	√							√	√	√		√				6	37.5

The study findings in Table 2 indicate that nearly all (93.8%) libraries provided information on general book collection on their websites. Majority (81.3%) of the websites also provided information on the libraries' periodical collections particularly journals and newsletters. About two thirds (62.5%) of the websites had information on special collections available in the libraries. Information on

audio/video/CD/DVD materials was available on half (50%) of the library websites and seven libraries (43.8%) had information on newspaper collections. A few libraries provided details on research reports (25%) as well as theses and dissertations (18.8%) on their websites. None of the websites had information on microforms and map collections.

Most libraries provided information on their book and periodical collections is mainly because of the fact that the size, quality and diversity of library collection is the most important resource that indicates the library's ability to meet the information needs of users. It is therefore essential for any library to provide information on its collection in order to attract users. SMMUCo library did not provide information on its collections, which is a serious weakness.

On the other hand, there is no library that provided information on the availability of microforms and maps perhaps because these resources are becoming obsolete following developments in e-resources.

Table 2: Information about library collection

Collection	UDSM	MUHAS	ARU	MU	HKMU	TEKU	MUM	CUHAS	ZU	SUA	MUCCoBS	TUDARCo	SMMUCo	KCMC	TUMA	MWUCE	Frequency	Percent
General Book Collection	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√		√	√	√	15	93.8
Special Collection	√	√	√			√		√	√	√	√	√				√	10	62.5
Journals and newsletters	√	√	√		√	√		√	√	√	√	√		√	√	√	13	81.3
Audio/Video/CD/DVDs	√		√			√	√	√		√	√					√	8	50.0
Newspapers	√	√	√			√				√		√				√	7	43.8
Microforms																	0	0.0
Maps																	0	0.0
Theses/Dissertations	√					√				√							3	18.8
Research Reports	√								√	√		√					4	25.0

Developments in ICTs have made it necessary for libraries to adopt electronic resources on their collections and services. Nearly two thirds (62.5%) of the libraries had information on e-journals their websites and close to one third (31.3%) had details on e-books. TUDACO library website is the only that had information on e-theses and MUHAS library website is the only that had information on institutional repository.

Two library websites (UDSM and ZU) had information on other databases and other two websites (MUHAS and SUA) had online tutorials (Table 3). The findings on availability of e-resources information on the libraries' websites paint a picture that many libraries in the country have not explored the use of most e-resources. Apart from e-journals, many other e-resources are depicted on very few websites.

Table 3: Information on e-resource

E-resource	UDSM	MUHAS	ARU	MU	HKMU	TEKU	MUM	CUHAS	ZU	SUA	MUCCoBS	TUDARCo	SMMUCo	KCMC	TUMA	MWUCE	Frequency	Percent
E-Books	√	√	√						√			√					5	31.3
E-Journals	√	√	√			√		√	√	√		√			√	√	10	62.5
E-Theses												√					1	6.3
Institutional Repository		√															1	6.3
Other Databases	√								√								2	12.5
Online Tutorials		√								√							2	12.5

Table 4 depicts various services that were made available through the university library websites. About two thirds of the library websites had information on loan services (68.8%) and OPAC (62.5%). Half (50%) of the websites had details on reference services and over a third (37.5%) had information on links to other online resources. The findings reveal further that the availability of Web 2.0 technologies on the studied libraries websites was very low. Only MUHAS and ZU library websites had some types of Web 2.0 applications. This is contrary to Linhø (2008) study which reported that two-thirds of the Australasian university libraries deployed one or more Web 2.0 technologies in their websites. Web 2.0 is the term given to the second generation of the World Wide Web in which content is user-generated and dynamic and users are allowed to interact and collaborate. These include blogs, wikis, video sharing sites, forums, and social bookmarking.

Table 4: Information on library services

Library Services	UDSM	MUHAS	ARU	MU	HKMU	TEKU	MUM	CUHAS	ZU	SUA	MUCCoB	TUDARCo	SMMUCo	KCMC	TUMA	MWUCE	Frequency	Percent
OPAC	√	√	√		√			√	√	√	√	√			√		10	62.5
Loan	√	√	√		√	√			√	√	√	√	√		√		11	68.8
Document Delivery Service										√		√					2	12.5
Reference	√	√				√		√	√	√	√	√					8	50.0
Sitting Capacity							√				√						2	12.5
Outreach/ Exhibitions						√											1	6.3
Web 2.0 applications		√							√								2	12.5
Links	√	√	√							√		√				√	6	37.5
Site search	√	√								√							3	18.8
Training and Guidance	√	√								√							3	18.8

The findings indicate further that two websites (SUA and TUDACO) had

information on Document Delivery Service and two other websites (MUM and MUCCoBS) had information on the libraries' sitting capacity. Only a few (18.8%) university library websites had information on training programmes. Despite the fact that library exhibitions are necessary for raising awareness of the collections and services, only one library (TEKU) had information on outreach/exhibitions on its website. The fact that most library websites do not provide adequate information on what the libraries offer is again a serious weakness because users do not get information on the services provided by a particular library and what they can do to access the library collections. The core value of libraries is the service they provide to their users.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study findings have revealed that although university library websites have some commonalities in terms of book and periodical collections, opening hours, membership, and loan services, on the other hand these websites lack many important features. They also lack uniformity despite many similarities that university libraries possess. While some websites provide general information as well as details of their collections, e-resources and library services, other libraries have very little of these contents on their websites. Some library websites have very little content that do not provide a real picture about their collections, resources and services. One reason for this situation could be the fact that most university library websites are part of their parent institution websites and in many cases librarians are rarely involved in designing the websites because they are not familiar with technical aspects. Specifically, the findings indicate that there is poor presentation of details on e-resources and library services suggesting that most libraries do not make full use of ICTs to popularize their services.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on findings of this study, it is recommended that the design of library websites should be driven by the information needs and seeking behaviour of target users rather than technology or library functions. In other words, website designers should focus on library users by presenting the contents in a customized manner. Website designers should make use of current and emerging technologies to provide library users with opportunities to locate and retrieve information without time and distance barriers. It is also recommended that websites should be updated from time to time in order to respond to users' changing needs. Future research may be conducted to verify the availability and quality of what is presented on the library websites. In addition, a user-perceived assessment can be carried out to ascertain the quality of library websites. Furthermore, a similar study can be carried out to other types of libraries such as public and special libraries in the country.

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