

## **Library websites of Pakistani universities: an exploratory study**

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**Abstract.** Library websites are built to provide information to its users remotely and are platforms to offer many electronic services to its valued members and users. Library websites of Pakistani universities recognized by the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan are explored to find out the existence of library websites and their features. Through the review of literature a check list is prepared and then websites are surveyed and features found on them are reported against the checklist. Higher percentage of university library websites exists in public sector as compared to private sector institutions. A significant number of library websites found having less than three pages. Website aid tools including site index and FAQs; instructions/ tutorials about library use and information about library newsletter are rarely found on library web pages. More than 95% libraries are providing access to HEC digital library but university own-subscribed digital resources are very rare. Use of Web 2.0 including facebook, youtube, twitter and RSS feed are found on only few (19%) library websites.

**Keywords:** websites, library websites, web 2.0, universities, Pakistan, HEC digital library

### **1. Introduction**

Website is the face of an organization. It represents an organization virtually especially for those who want to get information about the activities, services and functions of the organization, without visiting physically. Organizations and institutions use websites to reach a wide range of users and to market its services and products. Universities play a vital role in the teaching at high level, and promotion and conduction of research which help in the increase of the body of theoretical knowledge. University libraries help the universities to gain these core objectives of education and research.

Libraries use their websites extensively to provide better services to its users. Internet has made revolutionary changes in our society and is converting our world into a global village. In today's digital age, when ebooks, digital resources, databases, OPACs, e-newsletters, electronic theses and dissertations, institutional repositories are used by the researchers heavily to fulfill their

research needs, the libraries have modified its services to coop their research needs. Libraries use web-based services which play a significant role in achieving the objectives and goals of the libraries. This study finds how effective the websites of the libraries of Pakistani universities and to give some suggestions about the improvement of these services offered through websites.

## **2. Statement of the problem**

The purpose of the study is to look into the effectiveness of the websites of university libraries in Pakistan, in terms of ease of use and the contents of the websites. Study is to find the good practices the libraries are using to make their websites informative, attractive and easy to use, and is to provide guidance to others who want to offer web based library services.

## **3. Objectives**

Objectives of this paper are summarized as:

- i. to look into the web presence of university libraries in Pakistan
- ii. to look into the site navigation provided on the websites
- iii. to analyze the currency of the contents of the websites
- iv. to give suggestions for creating better libraries' websites

## **4. Literature review**

There were many studies about the websites of the university libraries, its services through websites, guidelines to build effective library websites and user satisfaction about libraries' websites. These studies had been done in the different regions of the world including subcontinent, Europe, America and Middle East.

Ahmed (2004) studied the presence of cataloguing services' information and examined the kind and nature of cataloguing related resources present on the websites of the university libraries of three American universities and six Arabian Gulf university libraries ( in Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain and Oman). He stated that American university libraries provided comprehensive cataloguing resources but universities in Arabian Gulf the websites didn't have much information about cataloguing on their web pages. Only King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals had information about cataloguing department on the library website.

Onyancha (2007) examined the web presence and performance of libraries from six countries in the eastern and southern Africa. From the population of 65 universities, 59 universities had websites. He selected 36 libraries for study based on the homepage ownership and excluded those websites whose URLs were so long and contained punctuation marks or websites which were under construction. He found that 94.4% had provided links to library page(s) on the university homepage and 86.6% had offered OPACs on library websites.

Ahmed (2002) surveyed seven Arabian Gulf libraries and found that almost all the library websites offered services through web like web OPACs, web forms for book recommendations, comments and suggestions.

Lombard and Hite (2007) studied the satisfaction of user needs and following the university website guidelines to build effective library websites. They found that some libraries were found it difficult to provide effective services through library webpages, according to their university's web guidelines.

Manuel, Dearnley, and Walton (2010) surveyed 112 UK academic libraries and got 61.69% respond for their questionnaire. They found that there were several factors which were both operational and organizational causing hurdles which libraries had in managing their websites. Those factors included time pressure, non-availability of skilled staff and availability of limited resources.

Kim (2011) studied the academic library websites taken from the Yahoo directory and got 54% respond for his questionnaire, sent to the librarians. His study revealed an alarming fact that users used commercial websites resources at much higher rate than university library website resources.

Urbana-Champaign at the University of Illinois created a virtual library to replace its library & Information Science library. Searing and Greenlee (2011) evaluated the faculty and staff responses to that new model of library and stated that LIS faculty were very friendly and accepted the changes in the library services more openly than coworkers in other academic departments of the university.

Ghaphery and White (2012) made a study of 99 American University ARL (Association of Research Libraries) libraries to determine the prevalence and general characteristics of their subject-based research guides. They found that all 99 libraries offered research guides that were easy to find from library homepage and concluded that research guides were a core component of academic library web services.

Niauraite (2011) studied the case of creation of an open educational information literacy website in Vilnius University library. He found that e-learning could be an integrated part of library activities and the teaching of information literacy could be provided in attractive way.

Emde, Morris, and Claassen-Wilson (2009) studied the redesigning the website of University of Kansas libraries. The new look of the website contained the introduction of new features in website navigation, inclusion of a quick search box, research subject pages and a federated search tool was introduced. They found in the study that the students and faculty members had not shown interest in using the new discovery tools.

These studies showed, in America and Europe, libraries were using the websites very effectively in providing state of the art services to its users. Middle East and subcontinent were far way behind in providing such services and trying to reach the benchmarks set by American and European university libraries' websites.

## **5. Research Methods**

A survey research approach was used in this study. A questionnaire of containing 79 questions was prepared. Current status of the university library websites was reported against the questions rose in the questionnaire. Higher Education Commission's (HEC) website was consulted to find the name and

URL of website for both public and private sectors universities and degree awarding institutions (DAI), whose degrees were recognized and attested by HEC. Help from search engines was also taken whenever URL of university was not found on the HEC website. HEC was recognizing 139 universities from all over the Pakistan, from both public and private sectors. The following criteria were used for the selection of the library websites:

- Only the websites of main or central libraries of the universities/ DAIs were analyzed and seminar, departmental or faculty libraries were not included in the study.
- Library website having at least one webpage was analyzed.

Information about name and URL of the parent institutions, URL of library website and source of information of university website was also reported. Each website of the parent institution was visited and then library website or library page(s) were accessed and analyzed in detail to collect the comprehensive and in depth information about it.

## 6. Results and discussion

### Library websites

Higher Education Commission, Pakistan has recognized 139 universities on its website and has categorized the universities in terms of public and private sector and further categorized the universities chartered by the federal government, provincial governments and Government of Azad Jammu & Kashmir. Table 1 shows the analysis of the library websites.

*Table 1 Library websites exist*

Chartered by	Public universities			Private universities		
	N	exist	%	N	exist	%
Pakistan (federal govt.)	22	15	68.18	6	2	33.33
Punjab	18	13	72.22	20	10	50.00
Sindh	14	10	71.43	24	12	50.00
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	15	9	60.00	10	2	20.00
Balochistan	5	4	80.00	1		0.00
Azad Jammu & Kashmir	2	2	100.00	2	1	50.00

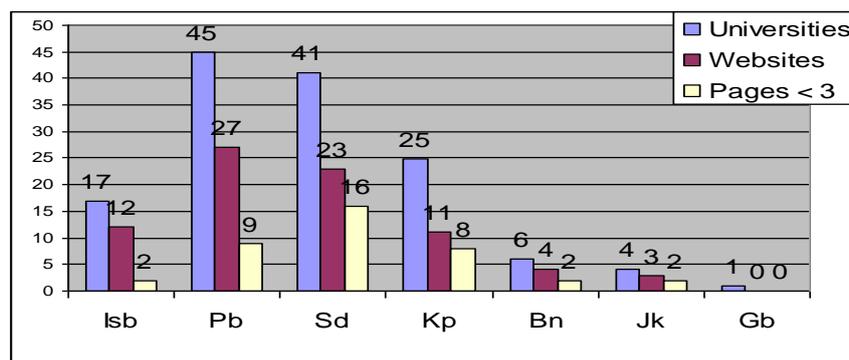
The number of public sector universities having library websites was almost twice than private sector universities with library websites. Percentage of private sector universities with out web presence for their libraries was almost double than that of public sector universities. Overall trend in the public sector was much better than private sector of having libraries' websites. The number of

libraries with websites was 80 (57.6%), including the library websites with less than three webpages.

**Website having less than three webpages**

Percentage of library websites in Pakistani universities was low and the quality and coverage were not up to mark. Many websites contained one or two pages only. Situation in Punjab province was much better than other regions of the countries which had high number of library websites and number of websites, with less than three webpages, was low Figure 1.

**Figure 1 Library websites & websites having less than three pages**



**Legend:** Isb (Islamabad), Pb (Punjab), Sd (Sindh), Kp (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa), Bn (Balochistan), Jk (Azad Jammu & Kashmir), Gb (Gilgil-Baltistan)

**Accessibility and speed**

The trend in the table 2 below showed that the libraries were not the priority area in the universities. Almost half of the library websites had a direct link to its parent website and this ratio was about four times in public sector universities than private sector. Most of the library (55%) websites were found under some other heading, like facilities, students services etc.

**Table 2 Accessibility and speed (N=80)**

	F	Pub	Pvt	%
link on parent site homepage	36	28	8	45.0%
in-direct link under other main heading	44	26	18	55.0%
library page(s) with 3 click on parent site	40	24	16	50.0%
page loaded with 8 seconds of click	78	52	26	97.5%
Are there dead links	8	4	4	10.0%

'How much quickly a webpage loaded' provided comfort and ease while browsing a website. Most of the library webpages were loaded within 8 seconds of click (97.5%). A few websites had dead links on its pages.

### **Navigation**

Professional websites were designed with easy navigation and self-explanatory pages. Self-explanatory pages and logical hierarchy of the websites helped users to reach their required pages quickly and without wasting time. That was provided by giving navigational bars and 'page location in the site structure' which informed the user at what level in hierarchical order he was now. More than 70% of the library websites had provided the navigational bars, either at the top or left side of the page. Professional websites provide text-only version, in case, a user is facing slow connection. No library website had provided this facility.

**Table 3 Navigation (N=80)**

	<b>F</b>	<b>Pub</b>	<b>Pvt</b>	<b>%</b>
Page title appears in the top window bar	44	30	14	55.0%
Page location in site structure	12	8	4	15.0%
Navigation bar (top or left)	59	34	25	73.8%
Text-only version	0	0	0	0.0%

### **Currency**

'How old is the information on the website' could be found by viewing its last update date and the copyright statement.

**Table 4 Currency (N=80)**

	<b>F</b>	<b>Pub</b>	<b>Pvt</b>	<b>%</b>
Copyright information	62	40	22	77.5%
Web site last updating date	16	8	8	20.0%

Only one-fifth of the library websites had provided the last update date and in case of copyright statement situation was better, as three-fourth of the websites had given copyright information on their webpages.

### **Web site aids and tools**

These aids and tools help the users to find their required information quickly and with ease. From these tools, website search facility was very important and helped the user to find its required information in an easy way.

**Table 5 Website aids and tools (N=80)**

	<b>F</b>	<b>Pub</b>	<b>Pvt</b>	<b>%</b>
website feedback form/e-mail link	16	13	3	20.0%
Web site search	36	26	10	45.0%
Frequently Asked Questions	5	3	2	6.3%
Site map	23	14	9	28.8%
Web site index	1	0	1	1.3%
Link to webmaster	18	14	4	22.5%

Website content and its navigation could be improved by getting the feedback from the users and building a website according to the needs and navigation routes of the users. Only one-fifth of the library websites had provided the option to users to give their feedback.

**General information about library**

General information about library, its building, collection, hours of operations, directory of staff etc. was useful to get a picture of the library’s strengths, services and degree of coverage of information resources.

**Table 6 General information about library (N=80)**

	<b>Pub</b>	<b>Pvt</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>%</b>
Library introduction	43	11	54	67.5%
Library collections	34	8	42	52.5%
Introduction to library services	32	7	39	48.8%
Introduction to library sources	23	3	26	32.5%
Hours of operation	24	7	31	38.8%
Mission statement or objectives	14	2	16	20.0%
Library policies and procedures	21	4	25	31.3%
Mailto facility to librarian/staff	22	9	31	38.8%
Information about membership	22	5	27	33.8%
Library department’s information	8	1	9	11.3%
Instructions or tutorials about library use	1	3	4	5.0%
Staff directory	25	8	33	41.3%
Information about the library building	8	2	10	12.5%
Info about branches of library(if any)	8	1	9	11.3%

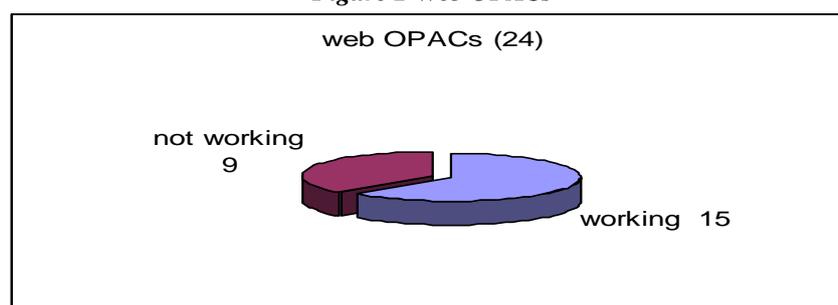
Chat with librarian	2	2	4	5.0%
Information about library committees	4	0	4	5.0%
Newsletter	2	0	2	2.5%
Ongoing projects	2	0	2	2.5%
Annual reports/statistics	1	0	1	1.3%

It was assumed that the private sector was more efficient and vigilant in producing websites and services, but this trend was not visible in the general information about the libraries, indicating a very low profile had been given to the libraries in the private sector. Only eleven library websites had given the library introduction in private sector, and this number was almost four times in public sector universities. Similarly, more universities in the public sector had provided information about introduction to library services & sources, hours of operation, mission statement or objectives, library collections, information about different departments of the library, library policies and procedures, mailto facility to librarian/staff and information about membership.

### Web OPAC

Catalogue is the basic tool to locate and find the library material. Many libraries are now using integrated library systems to computerize their library functions and are providing OPACs to their users to facilitate in searching their required books and other material.

*Figure 2 Web OPACs*



Only twenty four (30%) library websites had provided links to web OPACs and about one-third of the OPACs were not working.

### Library resources

Libraries provide links to useful internet resources as a part of their reference services. Indexing is a useful tool for researchers to find current material for their research studies from newspapers and journals. Only three libraries, which all were from the public sector had provided newspapers' index on their

websites. Only fifteen percent of the websites contained links to libraries' selected internet resources for their users.

**Table 7 Library resources (N=80)**

	Pub	Pvt	F	%
Other reference sources (dictionaries, encyclopedias, style guides etc)	5	1	6	7.5%
Library selected Internet sources	10	2	12	15.0%
Links to branch libraries' OPACs	2	0	2	2.5%
Links to other libraries online catalogues	4	0	4	5.0%
Newspaper index	3	0	3	3.8%

### Library services & technical services

Libraries use internet to provide reference service to its users, which is a very effective when researchers could not come to the library.

**Table 8 Library services & technical services (N=80)**

	Pub	Pvt	F	%
Reference queries "Ask a librarian"	6	2	8	10.0%
Info about classification/cataloguing	4	1	5	6.3%
Acquisition department	5	0	5	6.3%
Purchase suggestions	1	1	2	2.5%
Fine accrued	9	2	11	13.8%

Only eight university libraries in Pakistan were answering reference queries by providing a link 'Ask a librarian'. Other services like purchase suggestions through email or a web form were also very limited.

### Electronic resources

Higher Education Commission (HEC), Pakistan is providing free access to valued databases and electronic books to the universities and degree awarding institutions of Pakistan. HEC is providing access to databases and ebooks to 134 universities (96.4%).

**Table 9 Electronic resources (N=80)**

	Pub	Pvt	F	%
Other databases (other than HEC)	13	6	19	23.8%
Links to e-journals	5	2	7	8.8%
Links to e-books	6	7	13	16.3%

Professional journals/literature	5	2	7	8.8%
Theses List / catalogue	8	1	9	11.3%
Internal sources	6	1	7	8.8%

Many libraries had subscribed to other databases and had provided access to its members. These were valued resources of research and helped to increase the research output of the institution. Only nine university libraries had provided information about their theses, either through list of theses or web based catalogues.

### Language

All the websites were built in English and no website was found that was built in a local language. Only one public sector university had provided facility to translate its website in other languages, through google translate facility.

### Value added services

Libraries provide information about new material arrived in the library by displaying it on new arrival shelves and provide lists to faculty, research scholars and students. Internet is very effective in this regard, as it not only saves time but also resources to provide this service effectively and smoothly. Only few websites had provided new-arrival information on their websites.

*Table 10 Value added services (N=80)*

	Pub	Pvt	F	%
New-arrival section	7	4	11	13.8%
Library "news alerts"	4	1	5	6.3%
Web 2.0	7	8	15	18.8%

Web 2.0 includes the use of social media like facebook, youtube, twitter and RSS feed for communicating with their customers and marketing their services. Only few libraries (19%) were using these tools, both in public and private sectors.

## 7. Conclusion & recommendations

The analysis of websites of university libraries showed that libraries in Pakistan were not using this effective tool of website very effectively for marketing their services and products. Although it was assumed that the private sector put more energy to compete in the market and get more customers, but the situation in the public universities was better than private sector for building library websites. This can be concluded that the libraries and their web presence are not on the priority list of the higher management in private sector. HEC digital library is playing a great role in catering the needs of the research scholars electronically. It can be both an opportunity and challenge for Library and Information Science

professionals to raise the status both for themselves and for the profession, to come forward, improve their web authoring skills and make their libraries accessible through the web.

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