

Full Length Research Paper

Marketing of web-based academic library services in Bangladesh

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The purpose of the study is to analyze and describe the current status of academic library websites. It targets public and private university libraries of Bangladesh. A total of 16 library websites were scrutinized based on pre-determined criteria developed from the previous studies. Most of the websites were visited at least two times during the assessment which started by checking the availability of direct and non-direct links from the home page of the parent institution followed by website assessment against the criteria. The study confirmed that academic library websites are not fully utilized for marketing library resources and services. A large majority of libraries did not make any effort to provide online literacy courses, live supports, copyright documents, and online user surveys.

Key words: Academic libraries; internet marketing; worldwide web; Bangladesh; marketing strategy.

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of World Wide Web provides researchers and students with considerably more options. The library website is the primary vehicle used to distribute library information and collections electronically to University students, faculty, and staff. The mission of the library web site, in accordance with the overall mission of the library is to support the educational programs and the curriculum of the University through gathering and organizing both internal and external internet-based resources. In addition, the library web site seeks to provide resources that will teach library users how to evaluate critically and cite correctly, the information retrieved through the web site (Rayan, 2003). Traditionally, library marketing strategies included publicity activities such as display panels, posters, exhibits, bulletins, promotional materials (Ronan, 2003; Kibbee et al., 2002); promotional events; direct mail, newspaper and radio advertisements. The main aim then was to realize the library's mission in support of its parent institution's mission. Marketing

strategies do not just include telling the library clientele what collections and services are being offered, but it also contributes to building a relationship with library customers that begins and ends with awareness of the library's users: their values, their concerns and their needs (Kaur, 2009).

Most academic librarians agree on the necessity of marketing library services. Whether it is called outreach, liaison work, or public relations, many have embraced the need to actively promote library resources and services (Lee, 2005). In the internet age, the academic library has developed dynamic web site to provide information about the library, provide access to information resources and offer web-based services. These technology-based developments are to keep pace with the ever changing user needs that are influenced by the expanding innovations in information creation and dissemination via the internet. As an increasing number of users are turning into solely networked users and rarely visit the library

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in person, it is only viable that libraries begin to view the web site as a marketing and public relation tool. The treat posed by the internet and WWW can be challenged by using the web site to market and promote the library to its community (Kaur, 2009).

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Bangladesh - officially the People's Republic of Bangladesh is a country in South Asia. It is surrounded by India on all sides except for a small border with Myanmar to the far southeast and the Bay of Bengal to the south. Together with the Indian state of West Bengal, it makes up the ethno-linguistic region of Bengal. The name Bangladesh means "Country of Bengal" in the official Bengali language. Bangladesh emerged as an independent and sovereign country in 1971 following a nine month war of liberation. It is one of the largest deltas of the world with a total area of 147,570 sq. km. With a unique communal harmony, Bangladesh has a population of about 142 million, making it one of the densely populated countries of the world. The majority (about 88%) of the people are Muslim. Over 98% of the people speak in Bangla. English, however, is widely spoken. The country is covered with a network of rivers and canals forming a maze of interconnecting channels. Being an active partner, Bangladesh plays vital role in the international and regional forum particularly in the UN, Commonwealth and south Asian Association of Regional Cooperation.

Bangladesh entered into the computer era in 1964 with the installation of an IBM 1620 machine at the Atomic Energy Centre at Dhaka. Institute of Statistical Research and Training (ISRT) installed IBM 101 statistical machine in 1964. Commercial application of computer was initiated by Janata Bank with an IBM 1401 in 1967 followed by Adamjee Jute Mills Ltd. In 1970, The government use of computer began in 1973 with the procurement of an IBM 360/30 machine for the Bureau of statistics. Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) started its computer application in 1968 by offering courses in Numerical Methods and Computer programming acquiring IBM 029 Data Entry Machines. Computer system now has been introduced to several ministries and many other government department and private sector establishments. The internet came late in Bangladesh, with UUCP e-mail beginning in 1993 and IP connectivity in 1996 (Shuva, 2010). Recently Bangladesh government has adopted a national ICT Policy-2009 which includes action items for realizing the goals of national development. Earlier national ICT Policy was published in 2002 aiming at building an ICT driven knowledge based society by the year 2010. National ICT Policy-2009 consists of 10 broad objectives, 56 strategic themes and 306 action items (Shuva and Akter, 2011). The University Grants Commission (UGC) of Bangladesh

is the statutory apex body in the field of higher education in Bangladesh. The primary objectives of the UGC are to supervise, maintain, promote and coordinate university education. It is also responsible for maintaining standard and quality in all the public and private universities in Bangladesh. At present there are 54 private and 31 public universities in the country (UGC, 2010). The university websites in Bangladesh aim at providing up-to-date information and services to students, instructors, academic administrators, and other users in efficient ways (Islam and Tsuji, 2011). Recently, more universities in Bangladesh are creating their own library web pages to create awareness and promoting library and information services for their user community.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The main objective of this paper is to examine and describe the current status of the websites of academic libraries in Bangladesh for marketing activities. In particular, the study has been designed to attain the following objectives:

1. To analyze and examine the academic library websites in Bangladesh;
2. To explore online services and resources available on the academic library websites;
3. To provide recommendations to academic libraries for the improvement of their marketing strategies on the web.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Several researches have been conducted by various researchers on marketing of academic libraries and services on the web throughout the globe (Aziz et al., 2008; Connell, 2008; Detlor and Lewis, 2006; Kaba, 2011; Kaur, 2009; Kennedy, 2011; Kruger et al., 2004; Mi and Nesta, 2006; Ragains, 2001; Rayan, 2003; Sennyey et al., 2009; Shropshire, 2003; Welch, 2005; Xia, 2009). They focused on present status of marketing of academic libraries and information services, academic library websites as a marketing and public relation tool, academic library visibility on the web, networking, information, consultations and comments on the academic library websites (Kaba, 2011; Kiran, 2009; Welch, 2005), future directions for academic library marketing on web (Detlor and Lewis, 2006).

Librarians strongly believe in the necessity of marketing library resources and services (Smykla, 1999; Kaur and Rani, 2008; Xia, 2009). Brower (2004) developed a specific formula for determining obligatory links that should appear on all academic health science libraries web-sites. Similarly, Welch (2005) conducted a survey of 106 academic libraries in the USA to study the placement of marketing and public relations links on the

Table 1. Criteria used to identify marketing strategies.

Criteria	Description
Visibility	Direct link from institutional home page to library web site (Brower, 2004; Detlor and Lewis, 2006; Kiran, 2009). Readability
Networking	Direct links to friends/associates group pages and gifts/donations; Direct links to other libraries (Brower, 2004; Detlor and Lewis, 2006; Kiran, 2009).
Information	Direct links to library news, exhibits, new collections, or "what's new" (Brower, 2004; Detlor and Lewis, 2006; Kiran, 2009).
Consultation Services	Direct links to "Ask-a-librarian", e-mail, or comments pages; Direct links to copyright information (Brower, 2004; Detlor and Lewis, 2006; Kiran, 2009).
Online services	Links to application forms, reservations or interlibrary loans, renewal, request, user education, and user survey (Kaba, 2011).
Online resources	Links to OPAC, e-books, e-journals and multimedia collections (Kaba, 2011).

homepages and used four main categories to analyze the university and library home pages based on primary goals of library marketing and public relations revealed by an ARL study in 1999:

Visibility – direct link from institutional home page to library web site.

Fundraising – direct links to friends/associates group pages and gifts/donations.

Information – direct links to news, exhibits, new collections, or "what's new" pages.

Consultation and comments – direct links to "Ask-a-librarian", e-mail, or comments pages.

King's (1998) findings showed that 44% of 120 ARL libraries could be found in one step, while more than 47% could be found after two or three steps. Astroff (2001) found 24.3% of 109 ARL libraries without direct links from the home pages of parent institutions. Contrary to Astroff's findings, studies by Welch (2005), as well as Gardner et al. (2008), found most of the ARL and non-ARL libraries with direct links to the main institutional home pages. In Malaysia, Kaur (2009) found that academic libraries are lacking in their promotional activities. Library web sites are not fully utilized as a marketing tool and an enabler to reach out to the community for promotion of services and collections. Stephan et al.'s (2006) usability survey results at the University of Mississippi Library allowed them to redesign the library website and gave more prominence to the 'databases' and 'subject guides. Singh (2009) explored the marketing culture of Finnish research libraries. 33 libraries participated in the study. Findings revealed strong, medium and weak marketing cultures of libraries. Kaba (2011) confirmed that academic library websites of United Arab Emirates were not fully utilized for marketing library resources and services. A large majority of libraries did

not make any effort to provide online literacy courses, live supports, copyright documents, and online user surveys. Likewise, more than 80 percent of the websites could not be read in Arabic.

In Bangladesh, researches conducted by Munshi (2001, 2004, 2008), Islam and Islam (2009) on traditional marketing of library and information products and services for academic, public and special libraries. But, no research has done yet for marketing of library services on websites. So, this study is a step towards assessing what efforts have been made by academic libraries over the web to promote and publicize resources and services. The next section describes the methodology and results of a study conducted to examine how Bangladesh university libraries were facing up to the challenge of using the library website as a marketing and public relations tool. The findings are discussed and recommendations for academic libraries are put forth. Finally the paper presents the derived conclusions.

METHODOLOGY

The first step was to determine a list of criteria that would identify marketing strategies via the library's website. Based on the result of literature review, the researchers decided to adapt key features used by Brower (2004), Detlor and Lewis (2006), Kaur (2009), and Kaba (2011). Table 1 reveals the criteria used to identify marketing strategies via the library's website.

The 31 public and 54 private university websites were assessed by the researchers. Most of the websites were visited at least twice during the assessment. Each assessment started by checking the availability of direct and non-direct links from the home page of the parent institution. Next the library homepages were evaluated against the list of assessment criteria. On the other hand, academic library without direct link to the university websites are excluded from this study. Therefore, 16 academic library websites (see Table 2) were examined between 01 October and 30 November, 2011. Changes within this period were considered and incorporated in this paper. Any changes after that have not been incorporated in this

Table 2. List of university libraries in Bangladesh.

S/No.	University	Library
1	Dhaka Universtiy www.univdhaka.edu	Dhaka University Library http://library.du.ac.bd
2	Bangladesh University of Engineering and & Technology www.buet.ac.bd	BUET Central Library http://www.buet.ac.bd/library/
3	Jahangirnagar University www.juniv.edu	Jahangirnagar University Central Library http://www.juniv.edu/library.php
4	Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Agricultural University http://bsmrau.edu.bd	BSMRAU Library http://library.pages.bsmrau.edu.bd
5	Primeasia University www.primeasia.edu.bd	Primeasia University Library http://test.primeasia.edu.bd/library
6	North South University www.northsouth.edu	NSU Library http://library.northsouth.edu
7	East West University www.ewubd.edu	East West University Library http://lib.ewubd.edu
8	Independent University, Bangladesh www.iub.edu.bd	IUB Library http://lib.iub.edu.bd
9	BRAC University http://www.bracuniversity.ac.bd	Ayesha Abed Library http://library.bracu.ac.bd
10	American International University Bangladesh http://www.aiub.edu	AIUB Library http://www.aiub.edu/library
11	Daffodil International University www.daffodilvarsity.edu.bd	Daffodil International University Library http://library.daffodilvarsity.edu.bd/opac/index.php
12	Northern University Bangladesh www.nub.ac.bd	NUB Library http://www.nub.ac.bd/nub-library
13	Southeast University www.seu.ac.bd	SEU Library http://www.seu.ac.bd/Library.html
14	University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh www.ulab.edu.bd	ULAB Library http://www.ulab.edu.bd/Library/My-ULAB/Library/
15	ASA University Bangladesh www.asaub.edu.bd	ASA University Library http://www.asaub.edu.bd/library/
16	Eastern University www.easternuni.edu.bd	Eastern University Library http://www.easternuni.edu.bd:8080/student/_login.aspx

paper.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Visibility of library websites

Visibility is defined as the existence of direct link from the

university website to the library website. Immediate visible links are defined as direct link. Pull-down, pop-up or mouse-over links are not considered as indirect link. Table 3 indicates that fifteen (93.75%) libraries have direct links from the institutions' home page to the library. Only one private university has no direct link from home page and it is available in drop-down list. In that case, the library is seen as a valuable asset and given priority by

Table 3. Visibility of library websites.

Criteria	Description	Public University		Private University		Total	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Links to library from university's main page	Direct link (immediately visible)	4	100	11	91.66	15	93.75
	No direct links (drop down menu, mouse over, second page...)	0	0	1	8.33	1	6.25
	No link at all	0	0	0	0	0	0.0
Language options	English language only	4	100	12	100.0	16	100.0
	English and Bengali language	0	0	0	0	0	0.0
	Bengali language only	0	0	0	0	0	0.0
Direct link to associate groups	Library Association of Bangladesh	0	0	0	0	0	0.0
	Alumni or other library group	2	50	2	16.66	4	25.0
	Local university libraries	0	0	0	0	0	0.0
Direct link to "library news" (tailored message to library users)	Library programs	0	0	3	25.0	3	18.75
	Notice board	2	50	4	33.33	6	37.5
	Library updates/information	0	0	1	8.33	1	6.25
	Photography events	0	0	0	0	0	0.0
	Online bulletin	0	0	0	0	0	0.0

Table 4. Networking of library websites.

Criteria	Description	Public University		Private University		Total	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Direct link to associate groups	Library Association of Bangladesh	0	0	0	0	0	0.0
	Alumni or other library group	2	(50)	2	(16.66)	4	25.0
	Local university libraries	0	0	0	0	0	0.0

the university management. Nearly, all library users would look for a direct link to library from the home page. In this study readability also incorporated in visibility. Bengali is the nation language and English is the second language in Bangladesh. In spite of this, all websites are readable only in English.

Networking of library websites

In national and international level, networking is vital for libraries. But in Bangladesh, the present status of networking and resource sharing is not in a satisfactory level. Some initiatives were taken by different institutions, but it is not materialized LAB (Library Association of Bangladesh) and BALID (Bangladesh Association of Librarians, Information Scientist and Documentalists) are the two leading library associations of Bangladesh. But still they do not have any networking program so that all libraries can keep connection with each other. Out of 16 academic libraries in Bangladesh, only two private and two public libraries (25%) had a link with alumni or other library group. Affiliated association and other local

academic library links were not provided by any libraries (Table 4). It shows lack of commitment to collaboration between academic libraries. Share library links makes users to access and shared resources and lift up use of the library website as a gate way to information.

Information available on library websites

Library and public relation highly depends on information availability. Library notice, library updates, exhibitions, library photography, online bulletin all are part of library news (Table 5). In Bangladesh only 3 private (18.75%) university libraries had library programs announced on the web. A total of 6 libraries (33.33%) had a library notice board where they share all library events and updates. New library collection including books, journal, databases shared by 7 libraries (43.75%). In case of public university still they are absent from such type of publicity. A majority of 12 (75%) libraries have links to internet subject resources. Internet resources encourage students and faculty members to increase usage of library website.

Table 5. Information availability in University libraries

Criteria	Description	Public University		Private University		Total	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Direct link to "library news" (tailored message to library users)	Library programs	0	0	3	25	3	18.75
	Notice board	2	50	4	33.33	6	37.5
	Library updates/information	0	0	1	8.33	1	6.25
	Photography events	0	0	0	0	0	0.0
	Online bulletin	0	0	0	0	0	0.0
New library collections (book/journals/databases)		0	0	7	58.33	7	43.75
Links to internet resources (Subject based resources)		3	75	9	75	12	75.0
Link to newspapers/or press release		0	0	0	0	0	0.0

Table 6. Consultation services through libraries

Criteria	Description	Public University		Private University		Total	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Direct link to "library news" (tailored message to library users)	E-mail	0	0	3	25	3	18.75
	Ask A Librarian (Any think similar to that)	2	50	4	33.33	6	37.5
Library mission statement		0	0	9	75	9	56.25
Links to search engines		0	0	0	0	0	0.0
Copy right information		3	75	7	58.33	10	62.5
Feedback/complains/suggestions		1	25	2	16.66	3	18.75
User survey link		0	0	0	0	0	0.0

Table 7. Online services

Criteria	Public University		Private University		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Application forms	0	0	6	50	6	37.5
Reservation	0	0	1	8.33	1	6.25
Renewal	0	0	1	8.33	1	6.25
Request	0	0	5	41.66	5	31.25
User education	0	0	1	8.33	1	6.25
User survey	0	0	0	0	0	0.0

Consultation services through university library websites

Provide e-mail or a link to the librarian in the web site for contacts is known as Ask-a-Librarian. A total of 13 libraries (81.25%) provided an e-mail address for users to contact the library. Only one private library provides online reference library service called "Virtual library service". Among the libraries, 9 private university libraries (75%) had their library mission on their web site. A total of 75.0% and 58.33% of the libraries provide information about copyright (Table 6).

Online services

This criterion is defined as links to application forms, reservations or interlibrary loans, renewal, request, user education, and user survey (Table 7). A general web page linking to library forms was the first criterion to be examined. It is surprising that no public university libraries of Bangladesh are providing such services on their library websites. But private university libraries of Bangladesh are providing such services in a limited way. Only 37.5% (6 private university libraries) of the surveyed websites were found with online application forms. Several services

Table 8. Online resources

Criteria	Public University		Private University		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
OPAC	3	75	8	66.66	11	68.75
E-books	1	25	7	58.33	8	50.0
E-journals	4	100	10	88.33	14	87.5
Multimedia collections	1	25	6	50.00	7	43.75

related to document delivery or access services were also examined individually. Moreover, the websites of 5 private university libraries (31.25%) of Bangladesh allowed their users for online request form. Besides, the website of only one private university library of Bangladesh has reservation, renewal and user education. But it is noted that for getting better service evaluation, public and private university libraries should provide more online facilities on their websites. Moreover, no website of academic libraries (public and private) allowed their users for survey.

Online resources

This criterion is defined as links to an OPAC, e-books, e-journals, and multimedia collections (Table 8). Of the 16 library websites analyzed, 87.5% had link to electronic journals, 68.75% library websites had link to OPAC, 50% had links to e-books, and 43.75% had multimedia resources available on their home pages.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The investigation reveals practices of web-based academic library marketing and services in Bangladesh. Our results show that 15 libraries have direct links from the institutions' home page to the library. But only one private university has no direct link from home page and it is available in drop-down list. In this case, academic libraries should provide direct link to their respective libraries. Although all the surveyed libraries' websites were found visible and readable in English, but no libraries had their websites in combination of English and Bengali language. In a country like Bangladesh, where Bengali is the national language. Therefore, libraries must offer information not only in English but also in Bengali as well. Certainly, using Bengali and English would enable libraries to attract more visitors, communicate with them and help users to use the site less problems.

Findings revealed that no surveyed academic libraries of Bangladesh have direct links to other libraries and related associations. This finding does not reflect a good culture of networking and resource sharing. In fact it shows that managers of these libraries have limited

knowledge of how to expand and improve library services and resources without cost. It is to be mentioned that networking with other libraries and related associations provide free access to electronic resources. Therefore, it is unacceptable to deny users to provide this privilege. Links to other libraries and related associations allow users to benefit from unlimited information services and resources. As a result, it is indispensable for these libraries to provide links to other libraries and related associations.

Our analysis of 16 academic libraries revealed the availability of basic communication channels for consultation and feedback services. This includes postal address, telephone numbers, emails, and instant messages. However, a total of 13 surveyed academic libraries provide e-mail address to contact with the library. But only one private university library provides online reference library service called "virtual library service". It is surprising that no surveyed academic libraries of Bangladesh offer 'Live Consultation' or 'Online Support'. This kind of online service, through 'chat' or even 'Online forms', is important for attracting visitors to the library website and for providing quality services. Therefore, this study recommends all libraries to offer this user support services on their home pages as soon as possible.

The findings showed that no surveyed academic libraries offer 'Online user education' or 'Online information literacy' programs. Empowering users to determine their information needs identify and utilized needed information resources effectively are essential in marketing of library information resources and services. Therefore, it should be among the priority of the libraries to offer online user education or online information literacy programs.

It is to be mentioned that no public university libraries of Bangladesh are providing online application forms, reservation, renewal, request, and user survey. On the other hand, private university libraries are providing such services in a limited way. Therefore, it is recommended that all the surveyed academic libraries should provide online application forms, reservation, renewal, request and user survey. User survey will be an effective tool for measuring service satisfaction and service quality.

It is important to note that almost 20 to 50% of the surveyed libraries could not offer access to Web OPAC, electronic journals, e-books, and multimedia resources. These libraries need to understand and respect the current needs of library users. We are living in the 21st

century, where the availability of online resource is vital for easy and rapid access to information. Of course, there could be some reasons: such as budget constraints, subscription policies etc., for not providing access to e-books and e-journals, but not Web OPAC. This is because most, if not all, of the library systems are integrated with 'Information Portal' through which their library catalogues are accessible. These libraries must take advantage of this to make their catalogues available online.

Finally, academic libraries of Bangladesh should develop robust user-centered Web-based interfaces that not only provide patrons with access to online catalogs, subscribed resources, and other electronic content, but potentially also create virtual environments which enable patrons to personalize the selection and presentation of these collections, to channel the delivery of value-added services, to engage in two way communication with library staff and, in some cases, to even collaborate with other library users. Robust library websites can include broadcast search tools, electronic reference services (for example, Ask A Librarian), personalization features (for example, customized home pages, virtual bookshelves), and enriched content (for example, author biographies, book reviews, tables of content, book covers). Robust library websites can function as portals or gateways to an integrated and varied collection of information resources and as sophisticated guidance systems which support users across a wide spectrum of information seeking behaviors— from goal-directed search to wayward browsing.

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