

Qualitative Assessment of Scholarly Literature Under e-journal Consortium: A Case Study of CH. Charan Singh University, Meerut

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Abstract

The paper discusses about qualitative assessment taken at Ch. Charan Singh University, Meerut. The qualitative assessment could be done in duration of three month. The paper highlights need of qualitative assessment in university environment and discusses the results as well.

Keywords: Qualitative Assessment, e-journals and Databases, User Focus Group.

1. Introduction

Publication of information content has been one of the areas to benefit most from the emergence of the Internet. A scholarly publication, as an information good, can easily be delivered electronically to the end user. Academic users already have the necessary equipment and skills to access the material in their normal work environment, and have been forerunners in the use of the Internet for communication. The present information ambience reflects that the users worldwide have access to most of the texts they read over the World Wide Web. In addition to traditional publications there are many other ways in which academic communities are using information technology and the Internet to enhance their communication and collaboration processes, such as e-mail discussion lists, databases of observation data, the sharing of models and programming code etc.

2. Qualitative Assessment

Qualitative assessment is a hot topic in information services today. There are as many definitions of assessment as there are authors, but essentially it is the process of determining how well an information system functions and improving parts of it as necessary [1]. Most often the term refers to "outcomes assessment," which tries to answer three questions: "(1) What should users access?; (2) How well are they accessing it?; and (3) How does the library know?"^[2] Only, recently, however, have libraries come to have a place in these assessment programs. [3] The need for information literacy, the ability to retrieve, manage, and evaluate information, has come to the forefront as technology has made information a commodity in the modern world.

- ◆ The qualitative assessment of scholarly publication begins with resource values.
- ◆ Qualitative assessment is most effective when it reflects an understanding of information sources as multidimensional, integrated, and revealed in usage over time.
- ◆ Qualitative assessment requires attention to outcomes but also and equally to the experiences that lead to those outcomes.
- ◆ Qualitative assessment works best when it is ongoing, not episodic.

- ◆ Qualitative assessment fosters wider improvement when representatives from across the educational community are involved.
- ◆ Qualitative assessment makes a difference when it begins with issues of use and illuminates questions that users care about [4].
- ◆ Qualitative assessment is most likely to lead to improvement when it is part of a larger set of conditions that promote change.
- ◆ Through qualitative assessment librarians meet responsibilities to users.

3. Objectives

E-journal consortium is providing access to scholarly literature to the academic community of Ch. Charan Singh University, Meerut. In order to understand the futuristic demands of users it is inevitable to assess the usage of these online information resources. Qualitative assessment has been done keeping following aspects in mind such as choosing electronic information, user preference, user satisfaction, and ease of administration. To determine how faculty and users in the university are using information for their research and teaching activities, the university conducted focus group sessions structured around following areas:

- ◆ How academic community is identifying, obtaining and using information for research and teaching activities.
- ◆ What are the ways academic community would ideally wish to access information; they need and why?

4. Scope and Methodology

The qualitative assessment of online information sources requires both expertise and objectivity. Even the graduate students are neither expert nor objective, and assessment methods that rely heavily on their perceptions are likely to be inadequate in several respects. Their needs are not necessarily consistent with their preferences, for example, and the limited experiences of most of them give only a partial understanding of online information collections and services. Although user surveys provide valuable information about patrons' perceptions, that information is no substitute for objective standards based on professional knowledge. This assessment has taken into consideration Post Graduate (PG), M. Phil. and Ph. D. students of the campus. The general in take of students at M. Phil level (all subjects) is 10 and at M.A/M. Sc. level is 20. The following tables reflect the status of respondents. The survey was done among the discussed population. The no. of respondents and their share in the population is clear from the tables. Qualitative methods focus on the opinions of information users regardless of their academic status. They test for understanding rather than asking, "deep" rather than "surface". Using qualitative methods, assessment can be "developmental," judging where users are in their understanding, or "ecological," focus groups in

which users are asked about accessing and using scholarly literature, attitudes, methods of accessing used, etc.

Data Analysis and Findings: Various Aspects Concentrated During Qualitative Assessment

1. Status of respondents

Faculties and Departments	MA	MSc	M. Phil.	PhD
Faculty of Agriculture				
1. Department of Genetics and Plant Breeding		17	10	
2. Department of Plant Protection		15	10	
3. Department of Food Science & Technology		12	06	
4. Department of Seed Science & Technology		16	09	
5. Department of Horticulture		10	07	
Total		70	42	26
Faculty of Arts				
1. Department of Economics	15		07	
2. Department of English	13		06	
3. Department of Hindi	02			
4. Department of Urdu	01			
5. Department of History	10		04	
6. Department of Journalism & Mass communication	09		01	
7. Department of Political Science	17		05	
8. Department of Psychology	14		04	
9. Department of Physical Education & Yoga	03			
10. Department of Sociology	16		06	
11. Department of Sanskrit /Jyotish				
12. Department of Russian Language	03			
Total	103		33	64
Faculty of Education	18			08
Faculty of Science				
1. Department of Biotechnology		16	08	
2. Department of Botany		17	06	
3. Department of Chemistry		18		
4. Department of Environmental Science		09	06	
5. Department of Mathematics		18	05	
6. Department of Computer Science		18	04	

7. Department of Microbiology		20	09	
8. Department of Physics		15	05	
9. Department of Zoology		19	04	
10. Department of Statistics		12	07	
Total		162	54	78

Table-1

Categories	Total no. of respondents
MA	103
M. Sc.	232
M. Phil.	128
Ph. D.	176
Total population	639

Table-2

The table reflects the respondents of various programs. There are 103 respondents from arts P.G., more than 200 respondents are M. Sc. students of various subjects. About 128 M. Phil students are from arts and science faculties. More than 150 PhD students are respondents for this qualitative assessment.

2. Use of the library's physical facilities and website

Frequency of use of the library's physical facilities and website			
Daily	Thrice a week	Once a week	Fortnightly/monthly
305	172	78	84

Table: 3

It is quite evident from the data that most of users use library's physical facilities and website daily. While a little less users visit library's physical facilities and website thrice a week. Very few users visit either once a week or fortnightly/monthly.

3. What type of help do you prefer?

Formal		Less formal		Method	
Training	295	directional	215	direct	447
cross - training	164	reference referral	192	indirect	98
cross-orientation	180	reference	232	incidental	94

Table- 4

While looking in to the help requirement of the users it is obvious from the table 4 that most of the users required formal training as well as direct method. Some the users required directional help in a less formal manner. Some of them preferred cross - training and cross-orientation. It is also reflected that the reference manner is also popular among the users who seek help to use the resources under the consortium.

4. Feed back form the users

	Comments from users	Response
1.	forms at desk/s (Information Desk),	120
2.	online forms	483
3.	informally in conversations; monitored closely	335

Table -5

While receiving the feed back from the users regarding the help they sought out is taken in forms at desk/s (Information Desk), online forms and informally in conversations; monitored closely. It is found that most of the users prefer to provide to feed back informally in conversations when monitored closely.

5. Focus Groups- Usability Study

Aspect	Daily	Weekly	Fortnightly	Monthly
electronic database usage	133	63	27	23
e-journal usage	172	109	51	61

Table -6

While studying the database and e-journal usage, it is found that most of the users use database and e-journal daily. It is also visible that few of the users use these resources on fortnightly and monthly.

5.1 Location of accessing the e-journals and databases

Location	Always	Frequently	Occasionally	Rare
In the library	97	88	79	66
Outside the library	89	86	78	54

Table -7

Most of the users access the e-journals and databases coming to the library while the same number of users access from their labs of classrooms.

5.2 Purpose of use

Purpose of use	Response
Academic research	419
Sponsored research,	34
Any other	186

Table -8

While discussing the purpose of accessing the e-journals and databases it is found that majority of users access them for academic research. Very few of them access for funded research (sponsored projects etc.). A comparatively low proportion of population accesses it for purposes other than academic or funded research.

5.3 Wide features of e-journals and databases and pattern of suitability

	Features	Are admired	Are flexible and supporting information retrieval	Sometimes problematic	Need to be modified / improvement
1.	Storage mechanism for the papers and the metadata (static Web pages vs. database)	261	276	34	68
2.	Format of the papers (HTML, PDF etc.)	274	281	32	52
3.	Treatment of graphics and hypermedia content	219	214	35	71
4.	Indexing and linking to external publications	229	234	72	104
5.	Alerting and personalization services for readers	264	278	31	66
6.	Information on readings, citations etc.,	213	231	56	139

Table-9

The information technology infrastructure of electronic peer-reviewed journals includes a wide spectrum of different features. While studying the impact of these features on the respondents, it is found that features such as storage mechanism for the papers and the metadata (static Web pages vs. database) and format of the papers (HTML, PDF etc.) are popular among them. The treatment of graphics and hypermedia content is also satisfactory. While indexing and linking to external publications and statistics on readings, citations etc., for authors require little more improvement. The alerting and personalisation services for readers are also admired.

5.4 Usability Pattern

	Usability Pattern	Response
1.	Sticking to a fixed pattern of searching	336
2.	Sticking to use particular databases/journals	315
3.	Frequently changing the preferences of searching	303
4.	Frequently changing the journals/databases	324
5.	Pattern of usage can be said to be frequently varying	324
6.	Finding the e-journal/databases interface comfortable	414
7.	It is easy to use the portal	412
8.	The individual publisher-wise interface is easy to use	389
9.	You think that you have successfully used these resource	503

Table -10

It is found that sticking to a fixed pattern of searching and sticking to use particular databases/journals is found equal to frequently changing the preferences of searching and changing the journals/databases. So the users can say that their pattern of usage can be said to be frequently varying. Most of the users find the e-journal/databases interface comfortable and it is easy to use the portal.

5.5 User needs and expectations

	User needs and expectations	Response
1.	The collection of e-resources is suitable to your needs	489
2.	There is no need to see outside these resources	392
3.	These resources fulfill almost all the information requirements	392
4.	These resources cater current as well as retrospective needs	492
5.	The bundle of resources is expected to cope with the information requirements in near future also	410
6.	The pattern of journals delineates the pattern of research at other places.	429
7.	I give priority to the information available through these resources	410

8.	The e-journals/databases under the consortium are preferred	419
9.	I use these resources as well other world wide web resources as well	210
10.	While logging into the system first I use search engine instead of e-journal/databases portal	189
11.	The e-journals/databases are well indexed.	384
12.	I was well information-literate to use these resources	162
13.	I needed little help to use these resources properly	362
14.	I was new to such kind of environment	115
15.	I prefer discussing the searching/using these resources with my subject professionals	394
16.	I prefer discussing the searching/using these resources with library professionals	245

It is found that the collection of e-resources is suitable to most of the users' needs and there is no need to see outside these resources and these resources fulfill almost all the information requirements. These resources are found to cater current as well as retrospective needs of the users. A significant number of users are of view that the bundle of resources is expected to cope with the information requirements in near future also. The users are satisfied with the pattern of journals delineates the pattern of research at other places. Most of them give priority to the information available through these resources and the e-journals/databases under the consortium are preferred. A good number of users have shown their interest in these resources as well other World Wide Web resources as well. Most of the users have declared that while logging into the system first they use search engine instead of e-journal/databases portal. They have found that the e-journals/databases are well indexed. Some of the users were well information-literate to use these resources while most of the users needed little help to use these resources properly. Comparatively small number of respondents declared that they were new to such kind of environment. It is also found that most of the users prefer discussing the searching/using these resources with their subject professionals not with library professionals.

5.6 Satisfaction Study

	Aspects	Agreed	N	Disagreed
1.	Satisfied with the current available information sources	429	89	121
2.	Satisfied with the kind of availability of information such as full text/only abstract/bibliographic databases	389	34	216
3.	your kind of research indicate the need to include some other journals/databases under the consortium	219	54	366

Table -12

The above table shows that most of the users are satisfied with the current available information sources and satisfied with the kind of availability of information such as full text/only abstract/bibliographic databases. While a significant number of users are of view that their kind of research indicate the need to include some other journals/databases under the consortium

6. Quality

One of the main aims of the Information Environment is to provide a managed quality resource for staff and students in higher and further education. During discussions with various users involved with the system it became clear that common definitions of what is meant by quality electronic resources could not be assumed. Therefore, during testing, participants were asked to indicate what quality meant to them in terms of information available through electronic services, but they were not asked to relate their responses to any one particular service. Following criteria were presented to them, with which they could either agree or disagree. They were also asked to add any additional criteria that were important to them.

	Criteria	Response
1.	Reliable	639
2.	Current	419
3.	Accurate	432
4.	Refereed	319
5.	Links to related areas	294
6.	Understanding language used	498
7.	Resources relevant	532
8.	Speed of response	421
9.	Resources useful	531
10.	Resources valuable	533
11.	Clear information	531
12.	Source	523
13.	Accessible	432
14.	Timeliness	319
15.	Presentation	294
16.	References	498

Table-13

6. Discussion

The qualitative assessment gives an acquaintance into the reasons to subscription and in-future continuity of e-journal consortia. These are as following:

- a. Choosing electronic information: The user community finds it more convenient to use online information.
- b. User preference: Users like to access e-journals for some specific reasons such as research.
- c. User satisfaction: Due to 24 hours availability and fast access, the users are satisfied with the e-journals. Since the most of the subjects are covered in this consortium so the literature-hunt ends here. But some language & literature information searcher are disappointed.
- d. Need to include some other journals/databases: The users have reflected to provide more full text information than the current state.
- e. Better browsing, better indexing at a single platform: Need to have a single window which could index all the journals of different publishers on a particular subject though journals are listed yet they do not lead to central place.
- f. Coordination of consortium: There is a need to discern the requirements of users and there should be coordination among various other consortiums running in the country so that all the users could have access to information dealing with a particular subject regardless of type of institution or governing body especially in the field of S&T.

7. Impact On Library Services

- ◆ Providing multiple choice of resources at a fast pace.
- ◆ Enhancing the usage of information resources
- ◆ Increasing the options for information searching (print as well electronic)
- ◆ Easing the information search from national as well international information sources
- ◆ Reaching to quality scholarly publication

8. Need Of a Ccmmon Platform

There should be a platform such as a portal or management software which can:

- ◆ Share contact information
- ◆ Handle IP's (additions, deletions, changes, check overlapping)
- ◆ Use a tool for handling e-journal lists (coming)
- ◆ Send emails to members of consortia
- ◆ Check libraries' subscriptions

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- ◆ Recent developments
 - ◆ Enrolment to resource (database) consortia
 - ◆ Produce downloadable lists
 - ◆ automatically (from e-resources that are subscribed only partly, that is not the full package)
 - ◆ Development and the future of consortium
 - ◆ Compare e-resources (contents) and members of consortia in consecutive years
 - ◆ Improve the user interface
 - ◆ Add new reports
 - ◆ Add new utilities on the basis of library feedback
 - ◆ Continue automating straightforward procedures

9. The Future

In planning for the future of qualitative assessment for library, the role of the users receives a good deal of attention. Using focus groups, advisory groups, etc., to propose additions or recommendations for changes in information sources is yet another way to assess programs of library. Librarians will have to take a long, hard look at their instructional programs, to offer orientation that will be of use to the librarian in preparing for the library of the future. If the job of the librarian is changing in response to changes in technology, so, too, should library education change. Newly graduated librarians know a great deal about computers, technology, and databases, but many know nothing about teaching patrons to use those same tools. Instruction librarians, without proper preparation, find the continuation or implementation of instructional programs to be difficult and, often, the work is done badly or not at all. Librarians already active in library instruction need continuing education in pedagogy and assessment techniques. There needs to be greater cooperation between librarians and other teaching faculty in the provision of information use instruction that goes beyond just library skills. There should also be some way to prove or disprove the value of library resources. This fulfills one of the goals spoken of earlier in this paper; that of ongoing e-journals consortium and qualitative assessment.

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