

Design and Development of a Virtual Library for Social Science and Management

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ABSTRACT

In this information age, it is a worthwhile task to update oneself with not only conventional sources of knowledge but also with the web resources. There is abundant information available on the web but it remains a question as how to make the best use of them. This paper presents the outcome of a project that sought to organise the links of the freely available resources like directories, e-books, e-journals and so on in the field of social science and management and provide a single-point access to such resources. This paper describes the methodology adopted to design and develop the virtual library for social science and management. This could serve as a pointer for aspiring content developers in the field and will also enable library science professionals undertaking similar initiatives to compare notes.

Keywords: Virtual library, free or open access resources, directories, gateways

1. INTRODUCTION

Information and communication technology (ICT) has facilitated information explosion and knowledge boom in all disciplines. Digital media and internet have revolutionised operations in a knowledge society and is a boon to every field, particularly to the academic community. World wide web helps to organise the information distributed on the internet.

The greatest advantage of the Web is the simplicity that it lends to the information and communication facilities on the internet. The web is the universal medium for exchanging data, information and communication. Millions of web sites provide services that facilitate sharing resources¹.

Web is an excellent medium of sharing information. Electronic resources (e-resources) are one of the key elements of information resources. The very nature of web makes it easy to publish information. Publishing information on the web is cheaper than the conventional printing. World wide web has revolutionised the sharing of information².

In this era of knowledge explosion, online resources will continue to grow and be the major source of information, contributing to the rapid growth in the usage of internet and web.

2. RESEARCH PROJECT

This project entitled 'Virtual Library for Social Science and Management' was developed to provide a single window access to the teaching and learning community to the wealth of free-access web resources, namely, portals, e-books, e-journals, and other resources in social science and management. This website was designed to cater to the needs of users seeking to harness a 'Directory', 'Subject Portal', 'Gateway' or a 'Subjects Guide'. This virtual library is a compilation of free-access online resources in the field of social science and management.

In this Knowledge society, sharing knowledge among the people across the globe, freely and instantly is of great gain. Open access initiatives in the electronic environment facilitate worldwide access to knowledge freely. Apparently, it is a great source of information for the academic community and particularly for the researchers.

There are various websites providing free services to search for books, articles, etc., on various subjects. The use of such resources depends on many factors like (a) information need and (b) availability of resources. As regards the first factor, it is needless to say that teachers, students, research scholars, and other users will have various information needs and web resources can cater to

5.2 Arrangement of Web Resources

Though the internet is full of search engines and web directories, all the search engines/web directories combined have not been able to catalog the whole web⁹. World wide web includes many subject gateways/portals, e-books, e-journals and others. The resources were arranged category/subject-wise in this study. Generally, Portals include resources for many subjects; hence they were arranged separately under the heading Gateways/Portals. Websites for e-books also include many subjects. So they were given under the separate heading 'e-books'. E-journals and other resources are subject-specific. Hence they were arranged subject-wise. The resources were arranged under 12 subjects, namely, Commerce, Economics, Education, Law, Political Science, Psychology, Research, Sociology, Social Work, Management, and Human Resource Management. Important organisations at National and International levels were arranged as a separate resource but subject-wise. Website link was given to each resource along with their descriptions like authority, coverage and year of starting, etc.

5.3 Domain Name and Web Space

To make the organised resources available on the web and to give global access, one GB web space was purchased for five years and the domain name was registered as www.mssw-virtuallibrary.org. This website includes links for:

- Home
- About Us
- Resources

- FAQ
- Feedback
- Users' Guide
- Contact Us
- Search Options

Website included the compatibility browsers, suitable metatags for search engine crawling, Google Analytics, site compatibility, flash banner, optimised high quality images, editable content and images, subcategories, and admin control. It is a 'dynamic' website with the database support and includes features like homepage (Fig. 1), PHP pages, Flash, Seo crawling, website compatibility, Front-end PHP, and back-end Mysql.

6. RESOURCES

The resources collected and used with their description and hyperlink are:

- Categories for resources' listing
 - ✓ Directories/subject gateways
 - ✓ Subject-Wise resources
 - ✓ E-books
 - ✓ Theses
 - ✓ Important organisations

Some of the content of the resources are given as Appendix A. To make the users understand the arrangement and to guide them for choosing a right way of searching the resources for getting the maximum benefit, the following guidelines are given.



Figure 1. Screen shot of homepage.

- Efforts are underway to submit the site to many open directories to make known about this website to a large number of people.
- Postgraduate students and research scholars who join the institution are given an orientation during the first year and demonstration during the second year. This helps them to understand the coverage of various links and the way to download materials for their review of literature and other academic uses.
- Write-up about the website has been published in the college journal.

8. EVALUATION

Since this initiative is mainly for academic usage, evaluation is to be done with students, research scholars, and faculty members. Evaluation can be done based on usefulness and the number of visitors to the project. Kassim & Kochtanek¹⁰ performed usability studies of an educational digital library in order to understand user needs, find problems, identify desired features, and assess overall user satisfaction. Jeng¹¹, in her usability study on evaluating two academic library websites (Rutgers University Libraries website and the Queens College website) concluded that usability is a multidimensional construct. She further proposed an evaluation model for assessment of the usability of digital libraries by examining their effectiveness, efficiency, satisfaction, and learnability. User satisfaction covers ease of use, organisation of information, labeling, visual appearance, content, and error correction.

Website of this initiative has had 2350 visitors so far. There is a link for feedback in the website itself. Hence, the users can click the link and send their feedback directly. Some feed backs have been received from the comments and concerns given by the users are:

- Some resources are repeated under both general and subject
- Few resources are not scholarly
- Some links are not working
- More publicity for the website and a training session to download the resources will help in using this virtual library effectively.

Some users have recommended some links to be included. Hence, working on the comments and concerns of the users are being worked on and hence it is a continuous project.

9. LIMITATIONS

Like any other study or project, this project also has some limitations:

- Some links are found mentioned in more than one or two directories
- Some links also have some non-academic resources like holidays, travel and so on along with some academic subjects
- Paucity of free scholarly resources for certain subjects like commerce
- As the links may expire or move to some other address, it would be a great challenge for the researcher to keep track of the changes for updating.

10. CONCLUSIONS

Web resources will continue as an integral component of the teaching-learning material. Number of resources available electronically and their usage is constantly growing. Academic community needs to be abreast with latest developments and knowledge in their own field. For this each one has to read the research reports, journals and other resources in his/her own subject. Reading becomes boundary less in the 'virtual' and 'digital' world. Thanks to the open access initiative worldwide as this makes knowledge sharing easier. Hence, this serves as a single-point gateway to the open access scholarly materials for the subjects under social science and management. This study needs to be done as an ongoing project to keep pace with the changing needs and new resources.

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List of Directories/Gateways

<http://www.vl-site.org/sciences/index.html>

Keeps track of online information as part of the world-wide web virtual library. It provides lists of directories and data archives, social sciences e-journals and various resources.

<http://www.socsciresearch.com/>

Includes resources for sociology, anthropology, economics, demography, political science, law, women's studies and so on.

<http://www.openj-gate.com/Search/QuickSearch.aspx>

Includes 4816 open access journals and 2634 peer-reviewed journal articles in the area of anthropology, psychology, gender studies, political science, public administration, sociology, business economics and management along with other subjects.

<http://www.lii.org/>

Include current events and issues, helpful tools for information users, human interest, and more.

<http://www.cessda.org/index.html>

CESSDA catalogue enables users to locate datasets, as well as questions or variables within datasets, stored at CESSDA archives throughout Europe. It provides common interface for many of the social science data archives in Europe.

<http://www.oaister.org/>

OAister is a union catalog of digital resources. It includes subjects like sociology, anthropology, economics and so on. OAister can be searched by title, author/creator, subject, language or entire record. Searches can also be limited by resource type (text, image, audio, video, dataset) and sorted by title, author, date and hit frequency.

<http://www.ssrn.com/>

Social Science Research Network (SSRN) disseminates social science research and is composed of a number of specialised research networks in each of the social sciences.

<http://infomine.ucr.edu/>

Provides scholarly internet resource collections for many subjects like sociology, social work, law, commerce, education, economics, political science, etc.

<http://bubl.ac.uk/>

Provides selected internet resources covering all academic subject areas like generalities, philosophy and psychology, religion, social sciences, language, science and mathematics, technology, arts, literature and rhetoric, geography, and history.

<http://coombs.anu.edu.au/WWWVL-AsianStudies.html>

The Asian Studies WWW Virtual Library is a large scale online information system. It acts as hypertext guide and a access tool to the networked scholarly information resources dealing with the Asian continent as a whole as well as with its individual regions and countries.

<http://www.intute.ac.uk/socialsciences/>

It is a free online service providing access to web resources for education and research, evaluated and selected by a network of subject specialists. It includes various subjects like anthropology

<http://www.duke.edu/~myhan/s-sk.html>

Hosted by the Asian Studies www Virtual Library, it provides resources on various subjects like societies, science, technology environment, politics, public policies, media, law, language, literature, etc.

<http://www.questia.com/Index.jsp>

A full-text online library of over 2 million articles on subjects like psychology, education, law, sociology, anthropology, political science, and economics and so on. It also includes 70,000 full-text books in various subjects.

