

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ELECTRONIC JOURNAL: LIBRARY PHILOSOPHY AND PRACTICE

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Electronic journal facilitates dissemination of research results in less time, at low cost and offer universal accessibility, flexibility and interactivity. There are a number of journals on the Internet, which are accessible absolutely free. Libraries should select such journals, evaluate them and make them available to their user community through their local websites. Characteristics of one such journal *Library Philosophy and Practice* have been studied. *Library Philosophy and Practice* (<http://www.uidaho.edu/~mbolin/lp&p.htm>) is a peer-reviewed and free electronic journal. The general features of the journal like: format, layout, accessibility, subject coverage, collaboration pattern, usage of illustrations, referencing style, extent to which electronic resources were cited in the text as well as in the references sections, and their categorywise accessibility is documented. The general layout and format of the journal is attractive. Topics covered included technical issues such as collection development, technical services, information technology, information skills, citation analysis, etc. Only two papers were multi-authored, while the remaining 17 papers were single-authored. Out of 52 linked electronic resources in the text 94.2 %, and out of 45 linked electronic resources in the references sections 84.4 % could be accessed. Out of 19 papers studied, 8 papers had a total of 7 figures, 7 tables, 6 appendices, 4 charts, and one slide show presentation in PowerPoint. The electronic resources were categorized according to their contents into home pages, personal papers, emails, documents, electronic journals, local files, exhibits, FAQs, journal lists, press releases, newsletters, catalogues, encyclopedia, help pages, magazines, news service, reports, and syllabi. References in the texts and in the references sections were: (47.4 %) home pages, 21.6 % personal papers and, 31 % belonging to other categories.

KEYWORDS/DESCRIPTORS: Electronic journal; Library philosophy and practice; Accessibility; Subject-coverage; Collaboration pattern; Usage of illustrations; Referencing style; Electronic resources; Electronic links; Cataloguing in publication (CIP)

1 INTRODUCTION

Journals are one of the main vehicles used by researchers for scholarly communication. It plays an important role in the creation and transmission of

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knowledge. Few commercial houses publish majority of the journals [1]. Journals published by societies, on almost non-profit basis, do not have much impact on the library budget.

Librarians have used diverse strategies to cope up with the escalating costs and depleting budgets. In order to rationalize periodical subscriptions they have cancelled subscriptions judiciously, improved interlibrary loan services, and joined together to form consortium to negotiate licenses that provide information access for groups of institutions, which is a fairly recent development especially for electronic journals. Some reputed institutions have confronted this problem by publishing scholarly journals in electronic format only, without the intervention of commercial publishers. Few of these electronic journals are absolutely free (no subscription fee or membership required) and available via the Internet [2]. The number of such scholarly journals is increasing steadily.

According to the 7th edition of Directory of Electronic Journals, Newsletters and Academic Discussion Lists there were over 3400 serial publications. Of these titles, 1,465 are electronic journals and 1,002 were peer-reviewed; 708 charge in some manner for access. Scientific journals constituted 29%, while 14% were from arts and humanities journals, and 28% were from the social sciences [3].

The first peer-reviewed electronic journal, full-text including graphics was the Online Journal of Current Clinical Trials (OJCCT), which commenced its publication in 1993 [4]. There are several high quality, free, scholarly electronic journals emerging recently as an alternative to the 'journal crises' caused by their spiralling subscription rates. Consumers and publishers of electronic journals believe that acceptance and usage of e-journals will increase steadily because of all the merits like ease and speed of publication, enabling instantaneous hyper-linkages among the researchers, documents, publications, websites and other electronic resources [5-6]. Hyperlinking facilitates seamless access to information with minimal barriers [7-11]. Besides, electronic journals are cheaper, though the various pricing models that have emerged are not to the satisfaction of the consumers, mainly the libraries [12-13].

In spite of all the merits, electronic journals do not receive due attention from the user community as well as the publishers of secondary sources. It would be worthwhile to evaluate these free electronic journals [14-15] and make them accessible to their user community through their local websites [16], and even consider archiving the issues [17-18]. There are several electronic journals in the discipline of Library and Information Science, most of which appear on the following sites:

- Index Morganagus
<http://www.sunsite.berkeley.edu/~emorgan/morganagus/index.html>
- Bubl Information Service
<http://bubl.ac.uk>
- Washington Research Library Consortium's Library-Oriented Lists and Electronic Lists
<http://www.wrlc.org/liblists>
- NewJour: Electronic Journals and Newsletters
<http://gort.ucsd.edu/newjour/toc.html>
- Scholarly Electronic Journals
<http://www.library.msu.ac.th/arec/e-journal/nid.html>
- Scholarly e-journals: University of Houston Library
<http://info.lib.uh.edu/wj/webjour.htm>
- Serials in Cyberspace
<http://www.uvm.edu/~bmaclenn>

Two studies on electronic journals in the discipline of Library and Information Science included: a comparison of the characteristics of electronic and print journals [19-20]; and the authorship pattern [21].

Abstract of a study on the *Library Philosophy and Practice* (<http://www.uidaho.edu/~mbolin/lp&p.htm>) was recently published [22]. Present paper is a revised version, highlighting the following objectives.

2 OBJECTIVES

Present study proposes to:

- describe the physical organization and layout of the electronic journal (*Library Philosophy and Practice*);
- study the collaboration pattern;
- comprehend the subject coverage;
- document the presentations through illustrations;
- analyse the characteristics of the electronic journal with regard to style of referencing;
- identify the extent to which authors of the electronic journals cite electronic resources; and
- categorise and evaluate accessibility.

3 MATERIALS AND METHODS

Papers on the applications of theory and philosophy to management of Universe of Knowledge and to the practices in libraries are scattered in various journals and books. *Library Philosophy and Practice* is the only journal dedicated

to bridge philosophy and practices in Library and Information Science. This fact justifies the choice of the study material.

The *Library Philosophy and Practice* (ISSN 1522-0222) is a refereed, free electronic journal available on the Internet since inception in 1998. Two issues (Spring and Fall) are published per volume. All the six issues of the three volumes published during 1998 - 2001 having 19 papers which were downloaded from the site <http://www.uidaho.edu/~mbolin/lp&p.htm> were considered. Each of the electronic sources cited in the texts and the References sections were accessed via the Internet to study its accessibility and the type. If reference is made to both the print as well as electronic medium, the latter is taken into consideration.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Each issue of the *Library Philosophy and Practice* had three papers, except one issue (Vol. 2, No.2) which had four papers. The organization and layout of the journal can be profiled as below.

4.1 The Title Page

The title page of the journal is well laid out stating the title with the ISSN. The subject coverage and scope of the journal is clearly mentioned. The names of the editors along with their email addresses and link to the Home Page of their affiliation is available. Links are provided to the content pages of each volume. The title page also has convenient navigation buttons to the current issue, instructions to authors, contact addresses with their email addresses, editorial board, copyright statement, citation and CIP (Cataloguing In Publication) data.

4.2 The Contents Page

The contents page of each volume is well structured, bearing the title, the ISSN, volume number, issue number and the papers with their respective authors. Links are provided to the full-text papers and also to the email addresses of all the authors. Every contents page provides links to the Home Page.

4.3 Layout of the Individual Paper

The papers can be downloaded in PDF (Portable Document Format), though this is stated from volume 2 number 2 onwards. Since the pages are not overloaded with graphics, the downloading is fast.

There has been a change in the format of the individual papers from volume 3, issue number 2 onwards. This seems to have been done for the betterment of the journals. Previous issues had narrow print column, because of which the paper

ran into more pages than was necessary (length of the longest paper was 28 pages). The present format saves time, paper and facilitates reading. Another improvement is the numbering of pages that has started from this issue. Every page of the paper bears the title of the paper, the author, and the journal details like the journal title, volume number and the issue number and page number. This has been the practice of many scholarly print journals. This is also an improvement over the previous issues.

The papers do not have 'Abstracts' and 'Keywords', which makes it inconvenient to the users to know the contents without browsing through the entire paper. Abstracts and keywords are also helpful to abstractors and indexers who decide for inclusion in secondary sources. There is no search facility to retrieve papers by author, title, keyword or subject.

4.4 Instructions to Authors

Clear instructions are provided to the contributors regarding the length of the papers (2000- 6000 words), the format IBM-compatible word-processing format, or in HTML and the style (MLA) to be used.

4.5 Copyright Statement

The copyright statement indicates that the author being the sole owner of the manuscript, he or she may also publish the paper in any other journal or medium with an inclusion of a statement that the *Library Philosophy and Practice* previously published the manuscript.

4.6 Cataloguing In Publication Data

The *Library Philosophy and Practice* journal gives CIP data, which is seldom given in print journals. This data is useful for inclusion in secondary sources and also to create metadata for electronic resources.

4.7 Content analyses

Content analyses have revealed interesting findings as stated below.

4.7.1 Collaboration Pattern

Two papers (10.5%) had three authors and the remaining seventeen papers (89.5%) were single authored. This conforms to the previous studies that have shown that Library and Information Science is not a very collaborative field [19].

All authors were from United States of America except one author who was from Slovenija. Only this author was affiliated to Public Library, otherwise all the remaining authors were from academic institutions.

It is expected that the Internet would facilitate collaborations by overcoming the barriers of space, time, culture, language, etc. Such collaborations may expedite the endeavour of research and publication enterprise which includes the following: researcher, author, editor, referee, peer-review, revision of manuscripts, quality of publications, knowledge archive, exchange of information in favour of readers and authors by achieving the ideals of enhancing the Internet-accessible knowledgebase (electronic knowledge).

4.7.2 Subject Coverage

Analysis of the topics of the papers showed that a variety of issues were covered like technical issues such as collection development, technical services, information technology, information skills, citation analysis, etc. It includes articles on conventional as well as modern library practices and the philosophy and theory behind these practices. The discussions included topics on oral communication tradition of knowledge transfer, to the symbolic culture in print media, and all pervading global knowledgebase in electronic media transforming globe into a globule.

4.7.3 Footnotes

There was no consistency in the method of including footnotes in the papers. The footnotes have either been listed separately at the end of the paper or included in the references sections. As hyperlinks are used to link footnotes and references, it is very convenient for quick browsing.

4.7.4 Usage of Illustrations

Eight out of nineteen papers had a total of 7 figures, 7 tables, 6 appendices, 4 charts and one slide show presentation in PowerPoint.

4.7.5 Style of Referencing

There was no consistency in the style of referencing. Out of sixteen papers that had references, four papers used author-surname style referencing and twelve used numbering system in referencing. Even in the numbering system, different styles had been used, superscript and with and without the use of brackets. However, referencing style was consistent from volume 3, issue 1, paper 3 onwards using superscript system.

Since the text has links to the references at the end of the paper as well as links to electronic resources directly, it is most convenient to follow the numbering system for references at the end of the paper and word or phrase links for linking electronic resources directly.

It was found that some of the links used to link references from text to the full citation in the References sections were incorrect. Some links in the text were dead links, not leading to the full citation in the references sections or to the websites. Back links from reference to the text were not available. Such flaws are frustrating. However, it can be argued that technical problems, such as seamless navigation through an electronic journal, may improve rapidly as hardware and software become more sophisticated.

4.7.6 Reference to Electronic Resources in the Texts

There were 52 references to electronic resources included in the texts of the papers. These references have been categorized in Table 1 according to their contents.

Table 1. Categorization of electronic resources linked in the texts and their accessibility in the *Library Philosophy and Practice* (1998-2001)

Type of electronic resources	Electronic resources		Accessible electronic resources	
	No.	%	No.	%
Home Page	36	69.23	33	67.35
Local File	4	7.69	4	8.16
Exhibit	3	5.77	3	6.13
Document	2	3.85	2	4.08
Email	2	3.85	2	4.08
Personal Paper	2	3.85	2	4.08
FAQ	1	1.92	1	2.04
Journal List	1	1.92	1	2.04
Press release	1	1.92	1	2.04
Total	52	100.00	49	100.00

Out of 52 electronic resources, 49 (94.2%) could be accessed. Two of the resources were inaccessible with the message "Page not found". The electronic resources were: 36 (73.5%) home pages; four local files; three exhibits; two each of emails, personal papers, documents; and one each of journal list, press release, and FAQ.

4.7.7 Reference to Electronic Resources in the References Sections

Out of 19 papers three had no references. Sixteen papers had 233 references, of which 45 (19.3 %) were to electronic resources. Table 2 documents the distribution of electronic resources among the 19 papers.

Table 2. Distribution of electronic references in the References sections of the *Library Philosophy and Practice* (1998-2001)

No. of references to electronic resources	Number of papers
0	10
1 - 05	6
6 - 10	2
11 - 15	0
16 - 20	1

The distribution of electronic resources is skewed with 39 (86.7%) references appearing in 4 papers.

4.7.8 Accessibility

References to electronic resources in the References sections are categorized and their accessibility revealed in Table 3.

Table 3. Categorization of electronic resources in References sections and their accessibility in 19 papers of the *Library Philosophy and Practice* (1998-2001)

Type of electronic resources	Electronic resources		Accessible electronic resources	
	No.	%	No.	%
Personal paper	19	42.22	15	39.47
Home page	10	22.22	10	26.32
Electronic journal	3	6.68	2	5.27
Newsletter	3	6.68	3	7.90
Document	2	4.44	2	5.26
Catalogue	1	2.22	1	2.63
Encyclopedia	1	2.22	0	0.00
Help page	1	2.22	1	2.63
Magazine	1	2.22	1	2.63
News service	1	2.22	0	0.00
Report	1	2.22	1	2.63
Syllabus	1	2.22	1	2.63
Other	1	2.22	1	2.63
Total	45	100.00	38	100.00

Of the 45 electronic resources 38 (84.4 %) could be accessed. Seven of the resources could not be accessed for the following reasons:

- an online encyclopedia could not be accessed because user ID and Password was required;
- one site could not be accessed because it had moved and new address was not provided;
- access to one site was via telnet;
- access to one site was only to the bibliography and not to the full text;
- two sites resulted in "page cannot be displayed"; and
- one source mentioned had incomplete reference.

Figure 1 depicts types of electronic resources available and their retrievability.

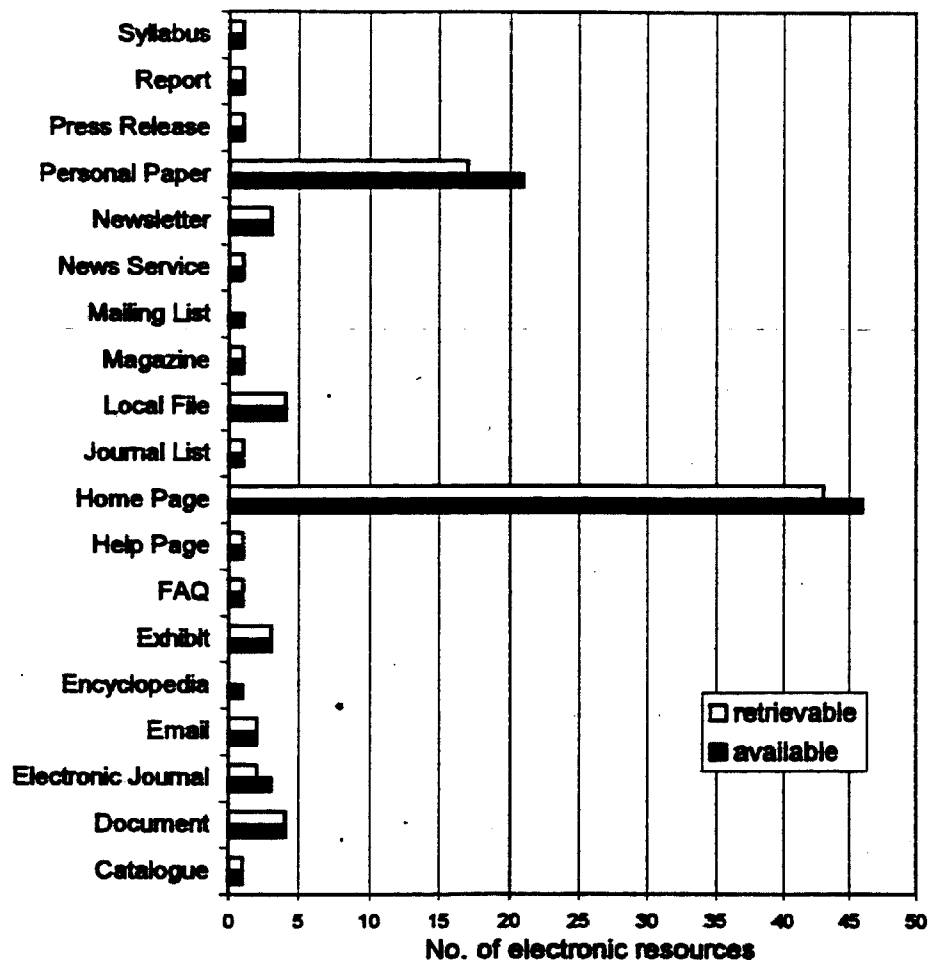


Fig.1: Total electronic resources available and retrievable from 19 papers of *Library Philosophy and Practice* (1998-2001)

4.7.9 Journal Self-citation

Two references were to *Library Philosophy and Practice* as journal self-citations in the years 2000 and 2001.

5 CONCLUSION

Researchers publish in those journals that are highly visible and have wide circulation / viewership. Therefore there is a clamor for space in the top-ranked journals that also happen to have very high subscription rates. Parallel publication of journals in print and electronic media cannot do much to ease the situation. The next best option open to researchers is the electronic journals, which are available absolutely free via the Internet.

There are several high quality, free electronic journals existing currently. These journals are being underused due to lack of publicity, user habits not being accustomed as yet to the electronic media, and low visibility. The libraries would do well to publicise such journals that they find scholarly enough and within the subject scope, providing user initiation and education facilities, and by identifying and matching user need profiles to satisfy their information needs. Librarians may provide access to them through their Home Page and even take the responsibility of archiving them.

Library Philosophy and Practice is unique for its subject coverage. The language and the presentations are good and there are no typographical or formatting errors. There are no major glitches except for a few dead links. The publishers are striving to improve the quality, which is obvious from the changes made in the last few issues, and there is scope for more improvement. Nonetheless, it would be appropriate to say that this is a journal library and information professionals should watch closely.

It would be beneficial to researchers as well library professionals, if such studies are carried out on other electronic journals and give them their due publicity. These studies would also serve as a feedback to the publishers and editors of electronic journals and help them improve their quality, which is very essential if they need to compete with their print counterparts. It would also be a reward for the publishers of these freely available electronic journals for their efforts to reduce the impact of journal crisis.

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