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Kṛitavedi
Festschrift for Senior Professor Piyadasa Ranasinghe

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2014

A study based on the Departmental websites of the transport sector in Sri Lanka

A. P. Udayangani de Silva

Abstract

At present, information has become an every day necessity of man. Most people are accustomed to getting information easily through internet from anywhere and at any time via websites. These websites are also an important tool for government departments to provide government information and services to citizens online. When the government is providing information to the public through their websites, the website should include features such as accuracy, currency, accessibility, interactivity, transparency &, etc. Without the aforementioned features, the government departments are unable to provide accurate information for public necessities. It is because of these reasons that the study of Departmental Websites of Transport Sector with special reference to department of Sri Lanka Railways, Sri Lanka Transport Board and department of Motor Traffic under Ministry of Transport is conducted.

The objective of this study is to study the departmental website of the Transport Sector. The sample of the study was three departmental websites mentioned above under Ministry of Transport. Observation of the websites was used as method to prove the hypotheses. Namely:

HI- The departmental websites do not provide sufficient information to the public.

The website of the Transport Ministry was evaluated under six features. Namely: appropriateness & relevance, currency, content, accessibility, coverage and interactivity. The primary data was gathered via Internet research. After analyzing the primary data, it was realized that appropriateness and relevance of the information provided by departmental websites are high. These websites try to provide relevant information to the public for their day today life. Through these three websites, Sri Lanka Transport Board gives most updated information than other departments. Content of the Motor Traffic Department is broader than other departments. As well as, all websites of the sample offer their contents in Sinhala, English and Tamil languages also. Not only that, websites provides most of relevant links under interactivity. The sample of this study used a link to Government Information Centre. The Sri Lanka Railways has given six links for other government institutes. It is highly interactive than other websites. By this study, it is realized that, departmental websites should be developed further more.

To fill these discrepancies, some major improvements are suggested. There should be cooperation amongall departments and ministries of the government when they are developing a websites. Meanwhile, the government of Sri Lanka should continuously evolve through learning, investing and developing guidelines and standards to promote successful website design techniques to meet users' expectation. These suggestions have emerged from this study.

Keywords: Internet, Websites, Department websites, Information, Ministerial websites

Introduction

Information needs of the man have been increasing day by day. So people use any media to fulfil their information needs. Among all media, computer and information technology play an important role. At present there is an increasing interest in using internet as a universal show room for any information like commercial, education, personal, political, research etc. As a result, the number of

web sites is increasing rapidly. Most of these web sites try to distribute valuable information to the people. This is the results of the revaluation of information technology. The new trend is that the governmental bodies try to develop websites to bring in modern democracy for citizens. Government provides information to their citizens through websites to facilitate interaction and offer online services for national and international audiences. Because of these reasons, the study was conducted under the topic "Study on departmental websites of Transport Sector: special reference to Department of Sri Lanka Railways, Sri Lanka Transport Board & Department of Motor Traffic under Ministry of Transport."

In this research, the problem discussed is:

- Are the departmental websites able to provide sufficient and qualitative information to the public?

This research was conducted to study these problems. It covers only three departmental websites under the Ministry of Transport. This ministry is very important for public to get information for day to day work. Most people always deal with these websites. So this study is significant in several ways.

- This is a great opportunity for public, because the study is about content and quality of government websites. So that people can avail various kinds of information provided by the government through their websites.

- This study discusses about features and weakness of departmental websites. So this study will help to identify further development of departmental websites.

Objective & hypothesis

The objectives this research is

- To study the departmental website of the Transport Sector

To achieve this objectives, two hypotheses were formulated.

H1- The content and quality of government websites is at a primary level.

H2- The departmental websites are not providing sufficient information to the public.

Literature review

Novljan (2004) has conducted a research on the topic "Web pages of Slovenian public libraries: evolution and guidelines". In this research, the content and quality of 28 Slovenian public library web pages were studied in 2001 and 2002. There, student ability of evaluation had been tested. After data analyzing, results show that libraries had tried to modernize their work, the content of their web pages, and moving from traditional library materials and services.

Latif & Masrek (2010) conducted a research under topic "Accessibility evaluation on Malaysian e- government websites." Under this research, nine e-government websites which are highly accessed by the Malaysian citizens have been chosen for the evaluation. The main purpose of this research is to identify the accessibility of e-government websites based on the World Wide Web Consortium. According to analyzed data, it was revealed that Malaysia e-government websites have most serious problems in accessibility. Not only that, it was realized that frames of websites were very confusing for users. To avoid these problems a few steps were suggested. These are,

- Follow WGAG and proprietary accessibility guidelines.
- Use the ALT attribute to provide equivalent.
- Title each frames/ try to avoid using frames.
- Make it a routine

- Establish formal web accessibility lows and guidelines.

- Training webmasters

- Involve use in testing

Judd, Farrow & Tims (2006) have conducted a research on evaluating public website information: a process and an instrument. This research was focused specifically on the quality of the information provided by public websites. The results show that some websites which are developed by authors themselves were suitable for students.

Pisanski & Zumer (2005) conducted a research under topic "National library web sites in Europe: an analysis." They highlighted the content and design of web pages of the European National libraries. Here researchers have paid attention to concepts, problems and guidelines for design web sites of National libraries. The survey has showed that websites of European national libraries were still not as good as they should be. The highlighted point of this is neglecting the basic things in web developing by libraries and experts of this area.

Xue (2004) reveals that a subject directory of websites is an important tool for distributing electronic government information through his research on web usage statistics and web site evaluation: a case study of a government publications library web site. After analyzing primary data, it was realized that, a subject directory website is an important tool for distributing government information for citizens'needs.

G. Kaisara & Shaun Pather (2009) in South Africa have conducted a research on "E-government in South Africa: e- service quality access and adoption factors."

Data and methodology

According to this research, Ministry of Transport was selected as the sample to achieve the objective. The reason for selecting the Ministry of Transport as sample is because it is highly used by Sri Lankan citizen for their day today needs. Three of organizations were selected as the sample under Ministry of Transport. These are,

- Department of Sri Lanka Railways
- Sri Lanka Transport Board
- Department of Motor Traffic

Internet survey method and observation method were used to gather primary data for the research. Here six features were selected to evaluate websites. They are,

- Appropriateness & relevance
- Currency
- Content
- Accessibility
- Coverage
- Interactivity

When evaluating websites, it was given marks for sub features under above main features. 1-5 rating system was used to give marks for features. 1 is lowest number and 5 is the highest number in the rating system. After that, websites were rated according to the total marks, they acquired.

- Over 25   - excellent
- 24 – 18   - good
- 17 -10   - fair
- Under 10   - poor

Table below shows the sub features under main features of this study.

Appropriateness & relevance

Does the website provide any new information on the topic?

Is the information clearly presented as being factual or opinion, primary or secondary in origin?

Does the website provide most relevant information on the topic?

Content

Is the content related to the users' needs?

Is the document integrated within a broader context or field of knowledge?

Is there a good organizational method?

Are there more links, provided to get more information?

Are there more attachments, related with the topic in the website?

Coverage

Are the topics explored in depth?

Are pictures, text & photographs related with the topics and content?

Are important policies, circulars & acts provided in the website by suitable methods?

Are there practical information, providing by the website for users' needs?

Currency

Is this current information or not?

Is the content current?

Is the site maintained regularly? (last update date)

Is the information sufficiently current to meet the users' needs?

Are there any obvious errors or misleading omissions in the document?

Accessibility

Is it very easy to access the website?

Is it easy to navigate through the website?

Are there any facilities, provided to disabilities?

Is it easy to download any document in any language for any users' needs?

Is there any special knowledge to achieve by users to get information from the website?

Interactivity

Has the website linked to or referenced by a recognized authority?

Is it provided contact detail of the department?

Is the website respondent to the users' requests & users' needs?

Analysis

After gathering primary data by using internet survey method, it was analyzed using Microsoft Excel. This paragraph describes about the research and analysis of information carried out for quality of departmental websites under Ministry of Transport. Here the gathered data is analyzed.

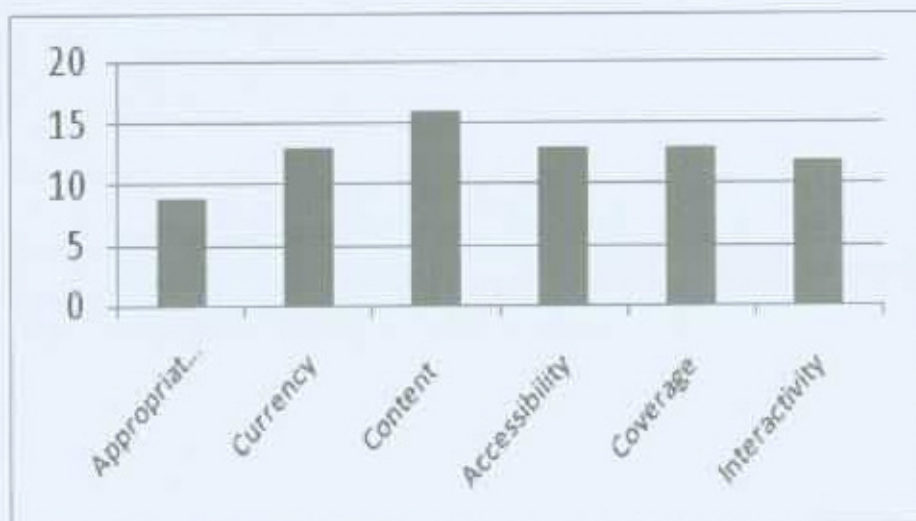Following figures show findings of the research.

Fig. 1: Department of Sri Lanka Railways. Source: field of survey, 2013

Figure 1 shows that, Department of Sri Lanka Railway has earned highest marks for the content. Other criteria are in middle level. The reason is that Railway department is very important sector for public. Not only that, websites of the sample offers their information in Sinhala, English and Tamil languages. The reason for that, main languages of Sri Lanka are Sinhala, English and Tamil. So that government institutes try to provide their information for every people in any language.
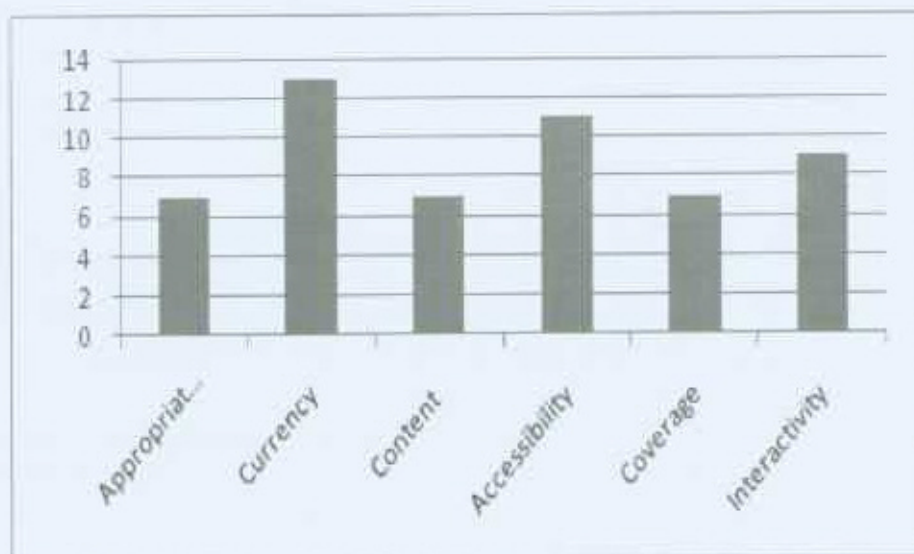

Fig. 2: Department of Sri Lanka Transport Board. Source: field of survey, 2013

As shown in the above figure, Department of Sri Lanka Transport Board gives its priority to provide current information. As well, accessibility also gets high marks. When considering all features, Department of Sri Lanka Transport Board is at highlevel of raqnking than other websites.
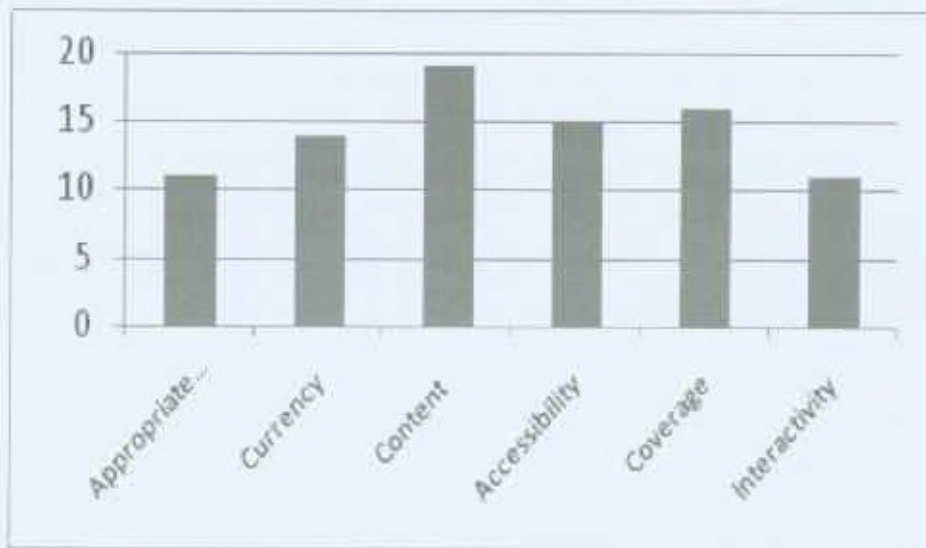
Fig. 3: Department of Motor Traffic. Source: field of survey, 2013

This figure shows that, the content of the website has achieved highest marks for content. This department has given its priority to develop website's content.
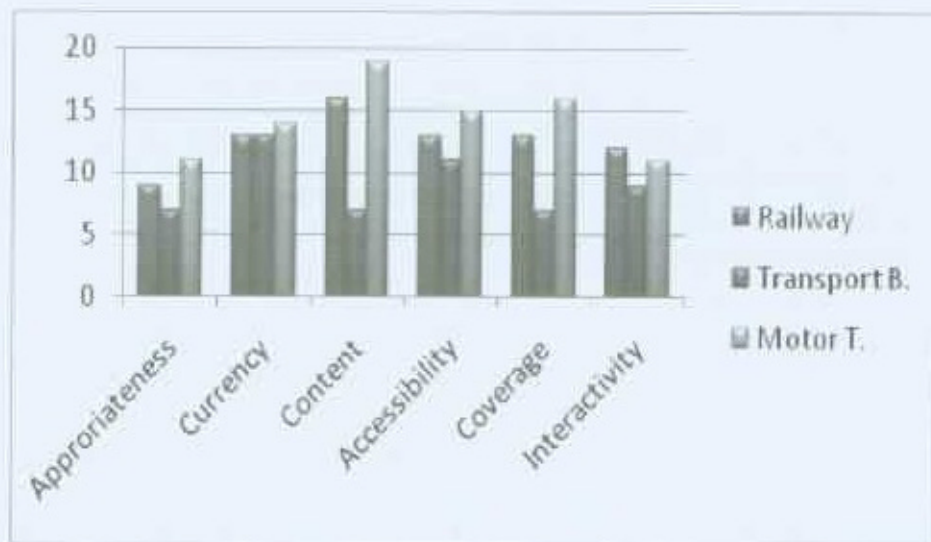

Fig. 4: Quality of the websites. Source: field of survey, 2013

The figure 4 reveals the total marks for qualities of the websites. As shown in above figure, Department of Motor Traffic is achieved high marks for website's qualities. But the website of Motor Traffic is good according to its marks. In several ways Department of Transport Board has achieved poor marks. After analyzing data, it was realized that, qualities of the websites should be developed further when they provide information to the public.

Conclusions and recommendations

Here, the researcher has tried to bring out findings of this overview of the departmental websites under the Ministry of Transport. After analyzing data, it was clear that qualities of departmental websites are at a developing level. Some websites of the sample are unable to provide appropriate information to the public. Not only this, websites of government departments are not regularly updated. So the departments are unable to provide current information to the public. According to the sample, departmental websites are not achieving excellent rank.

According to the above findings, the researcher recommends following suggestions to improve the quality of departmental websites. There should be a good communication between government and all ministries and all departments under government. There should be formulated guidelines or standards for government websites. Formation of consortia for all government institutions is an important remedy to reduce weaknesses of building websites for their institutions. Meanwhile, the government of Sri Lanka should pay attention and continuously evolve through learning, investing and developing guidelines and standards to promote successful website design techniques to meet users' expectation.

Summary and discussion

This is an Overview of the Departmental Websites with special reference to Department of Sri Lanka Railways, Sri Lanka Transport Board and Department of Motor Traffic under Ministry of Transport. By selecting three departmental websites under Transport Ministry as a sample from the 63 ministries of Sri Lanka government, this study was conducted. Some objectives were formulated to conduct this study. To identify the contents and qualities of departmental websites, to examine the ways of providing government information through departmental websites to the public in Sri Lanka and to identify strengths and weaknesses of departmental websites are objectives of the study. By using internet survey method primary data was collected for the study and the researcher tried to prove two hypotheses such as the content and quality of government websites is at a primary level, and the departmental websites do not provide sufficient information to the public. After analyzing data, it was realized that, departmental websites should be developed further.

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