

A comparative study of the British National Museum Website and the Colombo National Museum Website

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Introduction

The main purpose of a museum is to collect, preserve, interpret and display valuable and heritage items for the public. For displaying purposes, most of the museums, galleries and other cultural organizations have been adapted to use the websites as a tool of communication. The main purpose of having a website is to provide information to the public. Results of a survey conducted by Dawson & Mc Kanna (1998) revealed that 38% of museums in UK used websites and 20% planned to develop a website. As well as 86% of National Museums have their own websites for communication purposes. These data proved that the trend to use the websites is at a rich level.

Two problems were identified from the background study conducted before doing this research. They are,

- Are the content and existing information on the museum websites in a perfect level?
- Is the way of presenting information through the websites most appropriate?

Based on these problems, this research was conducted. This study covers only the museum websites of Britain and Sri Lanka. The main reason for selecting the British Museum website is that the Colombo National Museum, the first Museum in Sri Lanka was established under the British period. The founder was Sir William Henry Gregory who was the British Governor of Ceylon in 1877. Most of the institutional processes of Sri Lanka have a close relationship with British institutes. In this manner, the British Museum website and the museum website of Sri Lanka were selected. This study has been most significant in several ways.

- This is a great opportunity for public, because this study talks about content and quality of British museum website and the museum website of Sri Lanka. Then people can recognize various kinds of information, provided by the government through their websites.
- This study talks about features and weaknesses of museum websites. So this study will help to identify further development of museum websites.
- As well as the responsible people in website development of Sri Lanka can use this study as a guide for their development works.

Objectives & Hypothesis

The main purpose of the study was to identify the existing information on the museum websites. Other objectives were built as follows,

- To examine a way to present information through the websites and
- To evaluate museum websites by using website evaluation tools.

To achieve the above objectives of the study, two hypotheses were formulated. They are,

H1-The existing information on the museum website in Sri Lanka is poorer than the information available in the British Museum Website

H2-The way of presenting information for the public is not in the most appropriate way compared to the British museum website

Literature Review

Cunliffe, Kritou and Tudhope (2001) have conducted a research study on usability evaluation for Museum Websites. The main objective of this study is to find out usability problems of the museums. Examined in detail, direct observation, log analysis, online questionnaires and inspection methods were used as evaluation methods for the study. The results of the direct observation method indicated that there are several usability problems in the museum websites. Museum websites could not meet user needs and user subjective impression. Another problem is that museums try to open up their collection on the web for public purposes.

Halilic, Loon, & Woerden (n.d) have done a research on the topic of evaluating the British museum website on usability by means of explorative observational research. The objective of this study is to evaluate the usability of the British museum website, by means of explorative research. This study tried to find out answers for following research questions,

- What are the participants actually doing while exploring the websites?
- To what extent can the user efficiently and without much effort achieve specific tasks?
- To what extent does the design support and stimulate the usability of the system?

Results revealed that exploring tab on the British museum website is not used. The reason for that is unclear and lack of overview. It is significant that most of the users used the visiting tab to collect information from the website. In this study, we tried to evaluate the usability of the British museum website. The British museum has an enormous collection and an equally extensive website. The main purpose of the website, as stated by the Deputy Head Dominic Oldman, is to provide web-access to the collection of the museum. Based on our results, the interface used for this purpose sometimes lacks in overview, consistency, and clear structure. This is a very important study on the British museum website.

Another study was useful in finding about and evaluating museum websites using design patterns by Welie & Klaasse (2004). The purpose of this study was to study the domain of museum sites in order to formulate their common characteristics in a museum site design pattern and to study the extent to which existing pattern collection can be used to analyze museum sites. For the study, three museum websites were used as a sample. In-depth analysis method was used to evaluate three websites. Most of the museum websites include common subject areas such as general information, collection, calendar/ exhibitions, education, news and shops. Analyzed data revealed that there is a high level similarity in the structure and content of the museum websites. The study suggested improving the websites by better alignment with their target audiences and moving towards a virtual museum concept.

Research Methodology

This is a comparative study between the British National Museum (BNM) and Colombo National Museum (CNM). BNM has their own website. But in Sri Lanka there is no separate website for the Colombo National Museum. There is a link to CNM under the department of National museum. The BNM is an extremely mature Museum in the world. At the same time the CNM was established under British rulers. So that BNM was selected to compare with CNM.

For this study qualitative and quantitative methods were used. Evaluation tools were used as the quantitative method. Desk research and Website evaluation tools were used to gather data for the study. Google Page Speed and Hubspot Marketing Grader were used as evaluation tools of the websites.

Data Analysis

This study was used to identify the existing information on the museum websites as the first step. Through desk research, primary data was collected. The following table shows the existing information on the BNM & CNM Websites.

Table 1: Existing information on the Websites

British National Museum	Colombo National Museum
General information	General & Historical information
Contact information & visiting information	Contact Information
Online services/ Online shops	
Programmes	
Research help	
Information for learning purposes	
Services	
Membership details	
Video, audio & image gallery	Image gallery
e- Newsletter sign up	
Text in 9 languages	
Online booking facilities	

FAQs	
Site map	
Link with Face book, Twitter, Google, YouTube, Sound Cloud, Printerest, RSS/RSS, Intagram	Link with Government Information Center, Sri Lanka Cultural Portal, Information & Communication Technology agency of Sri Lanka & Presidential Sectarians
Link to Arabic and Chinese sites	

(Source: Survey data, 2014)

Above table shows that there are various types of information available on the BNM than CNM. General information, contacts and visiting, online services, programmes, research helps, online booking facilities, video, audio and picture galleries are some of information which included on BNM. A serious limitation is that there is no separate website for CNM. The information related to CNM is available under Department of National Museum. Besides, a small amount of information is available on the CNM website.

Evaluated data of BNM & CNM websites are as follows. To check the website loading speed, Google Page Speed Evaluation tool was used. The tool provided fast presentation in different device types like website and mobile phone. Marketing Grader tool described how much popular a museum website is for marketing purposes.

Table 2: Ranking details of BNM & CNM

Evaluation Tools	British National Museum	Colombo National Museum
Marketing Grader	89%	19%
Page speed	Desktop 70% Mobile 57%	Desktop 60% Mobile 52%

(Source: Survey data, 2014)

The above table shows the overall percentage that websites achieved. Unavailable of blogs, RSS feed, linkage between blog and home page, social sharing buttons, social

subscription options, e-mail subscription options are the reasons for low level grade for the website of CNM. Another limitation pointed out by the Marketing Grader is unavailable links to social media as such Twitter, Face book, LinkedIn or Google + on home page of CNM Website. As such Marketing Grader suggested the facebook address for likewise,

- www.facebook.com/colombonationalmuseum for CNM Website

Normally Google Page Speed provides two types of suggestions for the websites. They are should fix and consider fixing. Google Page Speed suggested to reduce the number of bytes of the CNM Website and to produce compression resources on the websites. The tool also identified that there are 9 blocking scripts resources and 5 blocking CSS resources.

Conclusions & Recommendation

Here the researcher tries to bring findings of this study about BNM and CNM websites. After analyzing the data, it was clearly understood that CNM Website is not in a proper level of development in comparison to BNM Website. The most imperative aspect is that a separate website for CNM should be developed in advance. As an individual organization, it should have an individual website to distribute their information to the public. So that responsible authorities of CNM should pay their attention to develop a separate website for CNM. Results of the Marketing Grader are lower than those of the BNM website. As such CNM website must build up links to social media like Face book, Twitter, RSS, and Google etc.

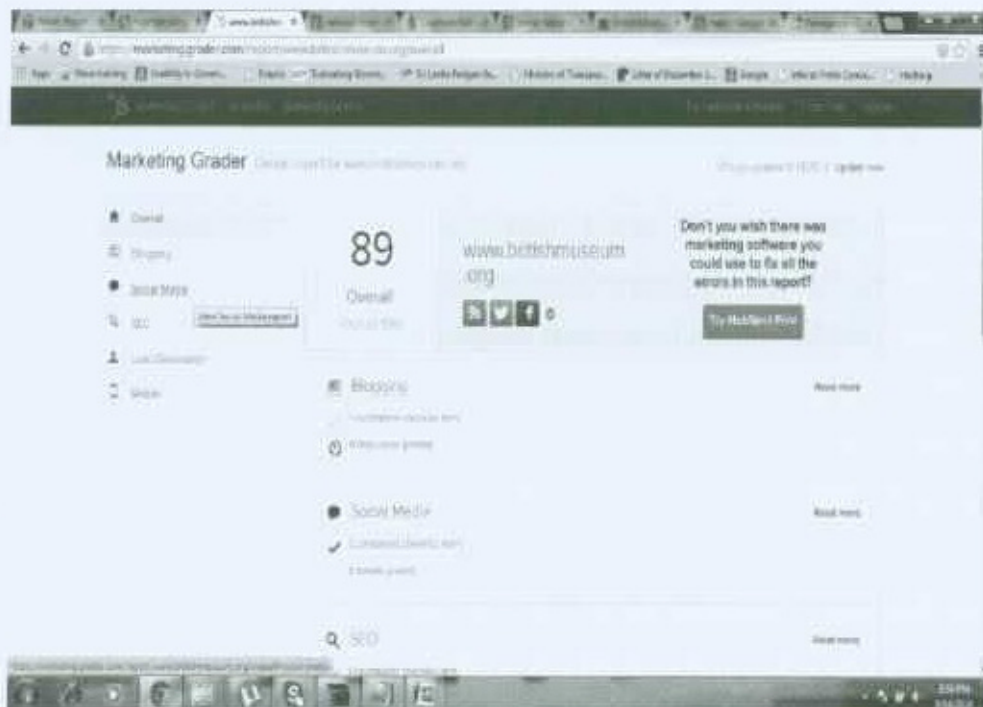
According to the above findings, the researcher recommended following suggestions to improve the quality of the CNM Website. Following WCAG and proprietary accessibility guidelines, establishing formal web accessibility laws and guidelines, upgrading online services for museum websites are most valuable suggestions for the CNM website. Not only that, but a website should be developed with information of services, history, images and video, audio gallery, online booking facilities, important and precious items available at the museum etc. Meanwhile, the government of Sri Lanka should pay their attention and should continuously evolve through learning, investing and developing guidelines and standards to promote successful website design techniques for the museum website to meet users' expectations.

Summary & Discussion

This a comparative study of BNM and CNM websites. Desk research was used to collect existing information on the above websites. The CNM website is empty with information in comparison to the BNM Website. At the same time the CNM website got lower marks through the evaluation tools. So the CNM Website should be developed more. As a government institute website, the CNM Website is not in a position to fulfill users' expectations. When we consider about the BNM website, it is a more perfect website. There is plenty of information available for users on the BNM Website. The CNM website should take the BNM website as an example for its developing process.

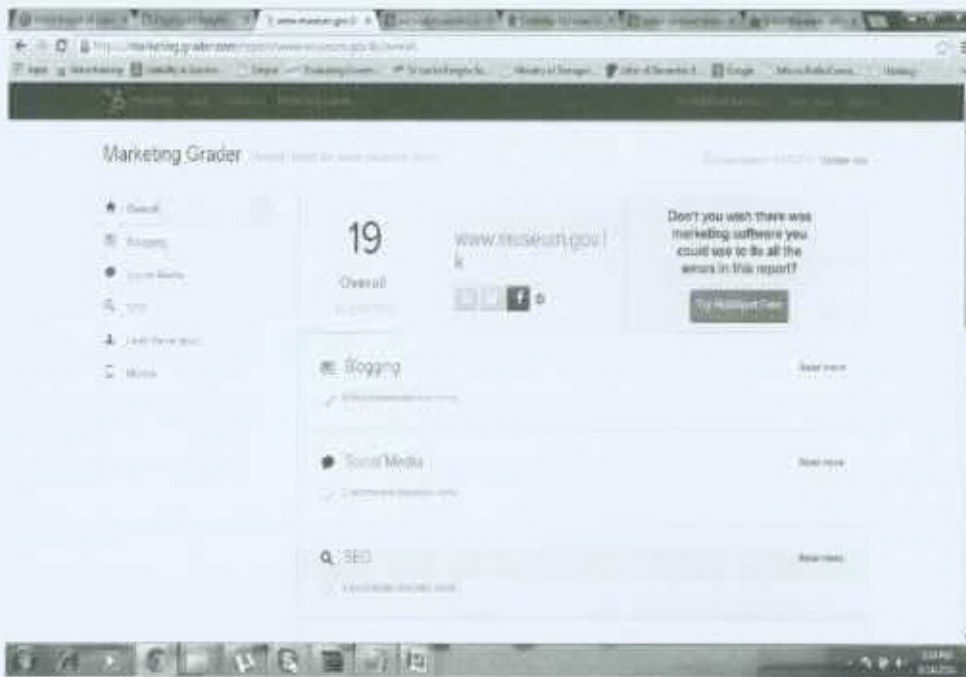
Appendix 1

BNM Website Evaluation through Hubspot Marketing



Appendix 2

CNM Website Evaluation through Hubspot Marketing



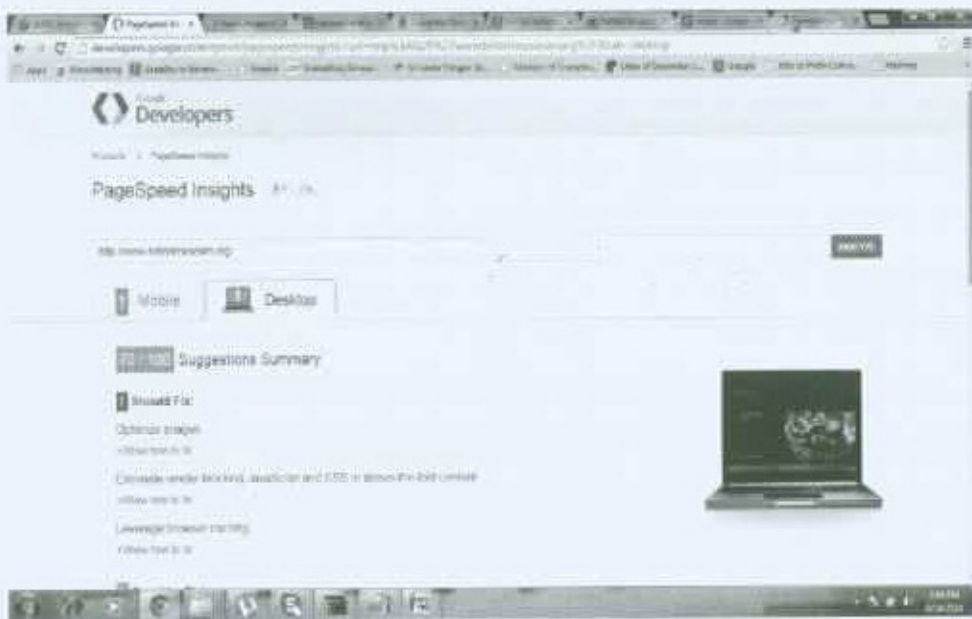
Appendix 3

BNM Website Evaluation through Page Speed Insight



Appendix 4

CNM Website Evaluation through Page Speed Insight



References

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