

Use and Evaluation of Online Public Access Catalogue in the Central Library of Banaras Hindu University: A Study

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Abstract

This paper examines Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) usage by the students, research scholars and members of faculty of Banaras Hindu University Library. A questionnaire-based survey of various categories of users such as faculty members, research scholars, graduate and postgraduate students, covering different disciplines such as Arts, Science, Engineering, Medicine and Agriculture sciences was conducted. The paper discusses various aspects such as awareness, frequency of use, purpose, problems and satisfaction level of users, etc. The results of the study show that only one third of the respondents used OPAC frequently. The study also found that majority of users consulted OPAC to know the availability and location of the requisite documents.

Keywords: Banaras Hindu University Library, Catalogue Use Studies, Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC)

1. Introduction

The Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) books, journals, and audio-visual materials available in a library. The OPAC system requires knowledge and skills for searching required information. Many search options are available in the OPAC such as search by title, keyword, author, subject, publisher name, ISBN etc. The trend toward Web-based OPAC interfaces and the developments in Internet and digital library technologies present fresh opportunities for enhancing the effectiveness of OPACs.

1.1 OPAC

Online Public Access Catalogue is a tool used for searching the collection of the library to check for the availability of documents in the library. The documents could be searched by many access points such as Title, Author, Subject, Publisher, Keywords, etc. These access points could be used individually or in combination using Boolean operators. Web OPACs are accessible via the Internet.

2. Literature Review

Kani-Zabihi, et al. (2008) conducted a study on "User perceptions of online public library catalogues" to seek user suggestions for an OPAC, its features and search facilities.

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Mehtab Alam Ansari and Amita (2008) had conducted a survey under the title "Awareness and use of OPACs in five Delhi libraries".

Kumar and Mallaiah (2008) studied "Changing pattern of user expectations regarding the library catalogue as an information retrieval tool: A case of Mangalore University". The purpose of this study was to assess the awareness of users about the library catalogue and the level of satisfaction with the existing library catalogue.

Rajput, Naidu and Jadon (2008) had conducted the study, "Use of Online Public Access Catalogue in Devi Ahilya University library, Indore" to know the use of Online Public Access Catalogue by the users and the

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existing situation of OPAC facilities in Devi Ahiliya University Library.

3. Objectives of the Study

- To know the awareness and use of OPAC by the users of central University Library;
- To identify the search technique used by the users;
- To find out the place and purpose for using OPAC;
- To find out the problem faced by the users in using OPAC;
- To find out satisfaction level of the user; and
- To collect suggestions of the users regarding the improvement of OPAC service in the Library.

4. Methodology

The survey research method was used in the study. The questionnaire included closed as well as open ended questions. The investigator also made personal visit to observe the existing conditions. Collected data were analysed.

4.1 Data Analysis

200 questionnaires were distributed and 167 filled in questionnaires were received (83% response). While over 70% of the respondents were aware of the OPAC, only a little over half of them used the OPAC frequently. Over a quarter of the respondents were not even aware of OPAC and about 5% of respondents had not made use of the OPAC. Less than a quarter of the respondents had acquired knowledge of using OPACs through library staff are library orientation.

4.2 Purpose of using OPAC

Table 1 shows the purpose of using OPAC. 47.72% of users consulted OPAC to check document availability in the library, 9.84% to find bibliographical details, 8.18% to reserve books, 17.42% to Check location of documents and 6.81% to check number copies of a document.

Table 1. Purpose of using OPAC

Sl. No.	Items	No. of Respondents
1.	To check documents Availability	63 (47.72%)
2.	To find Bibliographical Detail	13 (9.84%)

3.	To Reserve the books	24 (18.18%)
4.	To Check location of documents	23 (17.42%)
5.	To Check number copies of Any Document	9 (6.81%)
	Total	132

Nearly one third of the respondents required assistance from staff to use OPACs. This even though ‘guidelines for using OPAC’ and instructions on the Desktop as also on the library website are available.

4.3 Type of Search Performed by Users

Table 2 shows the searching methods 78.51% users use to simple search method and 21.48% users use to advanced search method. Majority of users use simple search method.

Table 2. Type of search performed by users

Sl. No.	Search Type	No. of respondents
1.	Simple Search	95 (78.51%)
2.	Advanced Search	26 (21.48%)
	Total	121

4.4 Searching Options

Table 3 indicates the access points used in searching the OPAC. Over a third of all searches were subject searches – subject heading, call number or keywords. Interestingly a significant number of respondents looked for specific titles. Over 70 number of the respondents were looking for books (including reference books) and only a small number of respondents indicated that they were looking for other kinds of documents (journals, theses, etc.)

Table 3. Searching options

Sl. No.	Searching options	No. of respondents
1.	By Title Search	53 (30.11%)
2.	By Keyword Search	24 (13.63%)
3.	By Author Search	42 (23.86%)
4.	By Call No. Search	8 (4.54%)
5.	By Subject Search	37 (21.02%)
6.	By ISBN Search	5 (2.84%)

7.	By Publisher Name and Year Search	7 (3.97%)
	Total	176

4.5 Problems while using OPAC

Table 4 indicates the problems users faced while using OPAC. Lack of knowledge of search techniques appeared to be the principal issue. A significant proportion of respondents mentioned that the OPAC “creates confusion”, probably meaning that the OPAC is not easy to use. Interestingly nearly a quarter of the respondents continued using the card catalogue and even more (40%) went directly to shelves to look for documents they needed.

Table 4. Problems while using OPAC

Sl. No.	Problems	No. of Respondent
1.	Creates Confusion	38 (26.95%)
2.	Lack of knowledge of Searching Techniques	45 (31.91%)
3.	Lack of speed of Accessibility	33 (23.40%)
4.	Lack of Bibliographical data on OPAC	12 (8.51%)
5.	Language Problem	9 (6.38%)
6.	Any Other Problem	4 (2.83%)
	Total	141

Over 70% of the respondents were quite satisfied with the response time. Only a little over a quarter of respondents felt that the OPAC is slow in responding. When asked about

4.6 Satisfaction Level of Users

Over 75% of the users were quite satisfied with the OPAC

5. Conclusions and Suggestions

It does appear that many of the users still find it difficult to make effective use of OPAC and that the advanced search

features of the OPAC are hardly used. There could be several contributing factors to this. It is important that the OPACs are made more user-friendly and adequate online help is built into OPACs for their effective use. It is also important for the library to conduct training programmes at the beginning of the academic year for the benefit of freshers.

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