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New trends in information services for parliament librarians: reflections and challenges

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Dr. Vitaliey Chifwepa

University of Zambia

Introduction

Library services have undergone several levels of transformation over the years. The evolution has been due to a number of both push and pull factors. Some of the push factors are as a result of growing and increasingly complex needs of the people being served. With respect to parliament, Africa has seen growing and varieties of democratic dispensations. Among the pull factors are new discoveries in information management techniques as well as technological advancements. Library services have, therefore, evolved from traditional service delivery to stages of virtual service delivery. This paper aims at sparking discussion and reflections on the trends in the library service with particular reference to parliament libraries and librarians in East and Southern Africa.

Parliament library services

Traditionally and broadly, libraries have been categorised into academic, public, school and special, depending on who is funding and who they are serving. Parliament libraries are in an interesting situation because, although they seem to be among special libraries serving a specialised group of users, they tend to be of service to ranges of users including citizens. This openness, however, may not be universal depending on the parliamentary systems in the various countries. The main target, in almost all cases, is members of parliament or legislators. In addition, most parliaments are based on representative systems of governance in which the members have constituents whom they represent. The kinds of governance systems have a bearing on the information needs and information seeking behaviours of the members of parliament. Library services, therefore, aim at satisfying the needs and providing services as per the needs thereof. Prudently, the services should be tailored to the needs of the members in accordance with the parliamentary systems of the states in which they are established. It is tempting to assume that all parliament libraries are the same, however, typical of special libraries, there are bound to be some unique services based on the specific cultures and types of parliamentary systems. On the other hand, it is also safe to assume that similar parliamentary systems are likely to have similar operations and, therefore, information services.

Information needs and seeking behaviours

The legislators want to be informed on the issues that they debate and to make informed decisions on behalf of and for their constituents. In Kuwait, Mansour and Alkhurairej (2011) reveal that Members of the Kuwaiti Parliament (MKPs) were seeking for information mainly to make a decision, make a parliamentary request/inquiry and to be in line with current events " (p 677). This is the case in most parliamentary systems.

In terms of information seeking behaviours, Shailendra and Prakash (2008) in India found that Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) "prefer non-documentary sources of information over documentary sources " (p 167). Mansour and Alkhurairej (2011) found that in Kuwaiti, where the MKPs were of an average educational level of a Bachelor's degree "the most important sources of information the MKPs were seeking for were mass media. networks and databases, minutes of sessions, and personal letters, it was also found that MKPs preferred printed formats, with a very good use of the internet and computers." (p 678). Presumably, their levels of education made it possible for the members to use this format of information sources.

It appears that, unlike most of the academic libraries, there is a big shift from the conventional textual and book source of information. The library services also need to adapt. For example, in the United Kingdom,

> MPs used a wide range of information sources, in each instance on a relatively infrequent basis. These cases demonstrate the importance of flexibility in approach to information seeking, as well as the need for MPs and/or their staff to filter effectively the information available, in order to reach both a usable mass and to focus upon reliable and valid sources " (Orton, Marcella and Baxter, G , p. 215)

The Library services for Parliamentarians

The thrust of this paper is to cause reflections on what library services would be apt and desirable for the parliament library users. It is evident from a lot of literature that the traditional book based services and expecting the members to travel to spend time in the library would not be appropriate. Some of the reasons or factors are : time, information illiteracy, distances and attitudes.

In India it was found that only a few MLAs were aware about the usefulness of library/information services. They depended on non-documentary sources of information. They were not fully satisfied with the system of information gathering, where they had to devote more time and energy (Shailendra and Prakash (2008). The two authors found that the reasons were:

. distance of library from the residence of MLAs;

lack of library orientation programme;

non-availability of services in library;

. non-availability of information in the library; and

. busy schedule of MLAs (lack of time) (p 169)

In Kuwait, Mansour and Alkhurainej (2011) found that "the shortage of the library's role to deliver information, the currency of information and the use of foreign languages were the most significant problems encountered by MKPs when they were seeking for information." (p. 680) The "surprise" to librarians does not limit itself to Asia, Middle East or Africa. In Switzerland, it was found that "political decision makers have very little time to deal with the reports (and other sources of information). Reporting has to be as up to date as possible" (Brun and Siegel (2006), p. 495). The reason for the members not "fully" desiring the reports was the packaging or manner of reporting by the reporters

There seems to be a mixture of factors that affect the use of traditional library services Other than time, distance and attitudes could be ability to use the library services due to library or information literacy and/or ability to read. Mostert (2004) discovered that not all MPs may know how to use library services.

The librarians of modern times need to be proactive and provide services that take information to the users other than waiting for the users to travel or move to the libraries to look for information. Librarians need to develop repackaging skills in order to provide information in addition to information services

Information technologies, a solution?

The world has seen a technological revolution over the years especially since the beginning of the 1990s with the advent of internet The internet as it is known today has a whole world of technologies and services. There are many internet based databases and information services There are various electronic information resources that make it possible for library and information managers to deliver information to the users in various flexible formats. Information can be delivered to the offices or home of the users using ranges of technologies In addition, internet makes it possible to facilitate information sharing among the users Williamson (2013) advocates the use of social media for parliamentarians as a means to share not only among themselves but for the parliamentarians to keep in touch with their constituents. The Author cites the use of the social media in the United States of America and says that "The US House of Representatives lets visitors download video and audio from their own parliamentary video channel or embed direct links to clips " (p 25) Williamson (2013) states that " the UK Parliament makes extensive use of YouTube, where it has its own customized channel that is cross-linked to other web and social media assets " (p. 25). Similar uses of internet services were reported in Korea and Brazil by the same author. Williamson (2013). "As part of the National Assembly of the Republic of Korea's e-Parliament strategy, designed to create an open and accessible parliament, new social media services have been introduced, managed by the media team of the Secretariat" (p.26).

The use of internet, together with other modern technologies, makes it possible for information to be provided in the very flexible and efficient manner. However, their use requires skill and positive attitudes among the potential users. In the absence of meeting these conditions would be apathy and underutilisation. In India, for example it was found that "The most disappointing finding of this analysis is that MLAs are reluctant to use electronic sources. Only 50 per cent of MLAs said that they use IT sources, with the help of their IT assistant/personal assistant" (Shailendra and Prakash, p 167)

The challenge for librarians

The ultimate goal and motive that all librarians and information providers have is to provide information and facilitate the use of the information. This goal calls for much more than passive provision of space and shelves of books and other reading materials. It calls for high levels of user studies and establishment of services that are appropriate to ensure that the legislators and all other users are empowered with skill to access and use information.

The tasks include: provision of non documentary information sources and systems, skilling and reskilling of users to enable them to navigate and use electronic information resources. The task includes repackaging information into formats and media that the users appreciate. Just as Shailendra and Prakash (2008) say, "there is a strong need to build an electronic based interactive information handling system for MLAs of Delhi to fulfil their information needs in as short possible a time a possible so they can serve society more efficiently in return." (p. 174) As Joint (2005) said, it is time is now to:

> create an eLiterate population of politicians and electors that is competently engaged with social and political debate through the new media. This is of course something to be pursued without miring ourselves in party politics. And if we succeed in this role, then the promotion of skills by disinterested information professionals will have shown its real social potential: to help deliver the democratic potential of the internet (p. 84)

The Librarian that is able to provide all these types of services has to be heavily engaged in information literacy, information service and delivery and teaching as well as training. The challenge now and ahead is on the shoulders of both librarian and the trainers of the librarians. Munatsi (2011) says "The resultant e-skills development, on-line networks and the ability to participate in these have also brought about invaluable benefits to African Parliaments." (p 6)

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Marketing of Legislative and Parliamentary Library Services
By Benson Njobvu
Lecturer
The University of Zambia
Department of Library and Information Services

Benson njobvu@gmail com

Abstract

This paper will explain the importance of marketing legislative and parliamentary libraries. Components of a marketing plan will be outlined The article will further highlight the methods which legislative libraries would use to market their services Finally challenges and solutions encountered in marketing of libraries services will be outlined

Definitions

The parliamentary library's mission is to support and facilitate parliamentary activities and make available all useful sources of information to its users. Thus, a parliamentary library is a specialized library from the point of view of the collection's coverage and of patrons for whom it is intended (Priano, 2000) in (Galluzzi, 20110). The American Marketing Association (2013) defines Marketing as a set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners and society at large The definition by (Adcok, Halborg and Ross: 2) say that 'marketing is the study of exchange processes especially those associated with the provision of goods and services. It is therefore very important for legislative and parliamentary libraries to market there services to their clients in order for such libraries to contribute significantly to the parliamentary work

Why Market Parliamentary Libraries

Marketing of legislative and parliamentary library services help in the promotion of the use of information resources; it creates perception of information need and thereby creating demand as well as ensuring that there is optimum use of information Madhusudhan (2008) argues that marketing of library services improve the image and status of the library professionals. Further librarians should market library and Information services because.

- It helps in tackling the problems of rising costs of reading materials, journals, and databases;
- It helps to cope with the information explosion
- It assists in introducing cutting-edge information technology systems in library services;
- Helps staff to balance shrinking funds·
- Marketing saves libraries from declining reader-support;

James (2010) posits that libraries should aim at "providing high quality information and analyse and advise parliamentarians in support of their parliamentary and representational roles." It is important to also note that parliamentary libraries serve different categories of users who include, the first time parliamentarians who are not experienced in their work as

well as medium experienced and more experienced parliamentarians. All these have different information needs at any given time

Role of the parliamentary library

(Blagniene 1998; Pare 2001; Salterova 1998) in Mostert (2004) say that In general, parliamentary libraries serve a very limited clientele, consisting mainly of individuals connected with Parliament, and can include individual parliamentarians, parliamentary committees, associations and delegations, parliamentary staff of individual parliamentarians and party caucuses. Further, they say that in some cases services are offered to a wider clientele, including clients from governmental departments, the courts, regional executive bodies, legal information centres, accredited representatives of the press and other media, foreign embassy staff, librarians from other institutions and in some cases even the general public. The major clientele therefore seem to be attached to parliamentary institutions, and as such Laundy (1980) in Mostert (2004) advocates that, in order for the parliamentary library to fulfil' its role as information provider with maximum effectiveness, this group should be guaranteed priority at all times According to Bannenberg (1994) in Mostert (2004), parliamentarians have a seemingly inexhaustible appetite for information, since their survival can depend on their ability to access and utilise the right information at the right time

The modern parliamentarian is now expected to know something about everything. Not only do they need to be able to solve local constituency problems, but indeed that of the nation and the world It has been concluded that Information is thus needed on a wide range of subjects ranging from economics, health, social welfare, transport, environmental issues, agriculture, housing, transport, technology, education, communication, etc. in order to satisfy their information needs, parliamentarians do not always perceive the parliamentary library as their sole information provider Ximena and Marialyse (1994) in Mostert (20040 point out that other than the library, parliamentarians also make use of external study groups, political think tanks, the academic world and personal contacts with experts in particular fields of interest. Added to this list is the growing utilisation of electronic sources, notably the Internet, by the growing number of younger and technologically literate parliamentarians
According to Bannenberg (1994)in Mostert (20040 it does not matter to them who supplies it, as long as their need is fulfilled promptly, accurately and appropriately.

The parliamentarian's indifference to the type of source from which the information is found poses a big challenge to parliamentary libraries to prove their viability Bannenberg (1994:2) in Mostert (20040 points out that: "there is no reason why the principle of 'compete or perish' should be any less applicable to parliamentary libraries than to other businesses or service organisations".

Developing Market Plans for Libraries

It is often said that failing to planning is planning to fail. Parliament and legislative libraries should therefore develop marketing plans which should guide them in the marketing process Njobvu (2008) outlines the components of a marketing plan for any library as follws

Executive Summary: This include a brief introduction of the parliamentary library and what services it offers. The mission of the library as well as the mother body should be included.

Describe the current situation: Define where the legislative and parliamentary library is at the moment, and where you want it to be in future. Outline the current users, the services being offered, the size of the collection including e-resources and the current budget.

Market audit: The competitor analysis is outlined in this section The strength, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the library as compared to other sources of information for parliamentarians are defined An environmental analysis including political, economical, and technological of the area where the parliament library is situated has to be stipulated here

Marketing objectives: It must be clear from here whether the aim is to introduce a new service or improve on the existing service. The time frame of when the introduction or improvement of a new service would be done should be clear

Market strategy: outlines the approach that will be used to achieve the plan's objectives Here the 4Ps which include product, price, promotion and place in relation to the services are discussed in detail.

The action Plan: Specific programs and activities are outlined here are designed to meet the objectives, with timelines and assignment of tasks.

Budget All activities outlined should be budgeted for Details of any financial constraints or profits are explained

Evaluation. This section provides measures of assessment and feedback.

Methods of Marketing services of a parliamentary Library

Orientation programmes to new parliamentarians

Joining the parliament can be an overwhelming experience for the new parliamentarian who is from totally a different environment In Zambia, the current trend is that when voting preference is given to candidates who live with the people 'This practice means that some new parliamentarians come from far remote places in the country where the acquisition of information literacy skills may not have been a priority This good practice has an implication which needs to be addressed by the parliamentary librarian. The new parliamentarian is only learning parliamentary processes and requirements of their new role but also setting up a new office, finding their way around a new work environment and coming to terms with the services available to them as a Member of Parliament (MP) James (2010) recommends that establishing some contact with the new MP at this point is vital to begin building a relationship The Library orientation should focuses on two aspects The first is to provide a training seminar or workshop on the use of the library. This gives an early awareness of the service and is generally undertaken in the first few months of them being in parliament. Secondly, all new Members of Parliament should be provided with a "contact library officer who should specifically look into their information need This will ensure that the service is personalised to an individual as some Parliamentarians would not want their inadequacies to be noticed by other in a group

Provision of ICT Skill to parliamentarians

Parliamentary libraries could use the competitive advantage ICTs provide by training parliamentarians on how they could use ICTs in accessing information for their use. An ICT literate parliamentarian is more likely to access more up to date information than those who are not ICT literate. The training here could include the use of social media, surfing the Internet effectively as well as the use of cellular phones in generating storing, accessing and disseminating information. The use of ICTs could promote access to e-resources in the library and elsewhere without necessarily users visiting libraries ICTs improve communication amongst stakeholders and promote collaboration between users and providers of services. Further ICTs increase information exchange with customers as well as give users superior access to information

Added to this, legislative and parliamentary librarians should take keen interest in using websites for the purposes of marketing library services. Parliamentary library websites should be kept up to date for such to act as effective marketing tools. Such website would bring about visibility of the library

Other methods of promoting parliamentary library services

Legislative and parliamentary libraries should not ignore the traditional methods of marketing services which include advertising through print and electronic media Librarians should be able to give radio as well as television programmes to let the users know what they offer.

Discussion forum have been used by some libraries in marketing libraries In this method. talks on topical issues concerning legislation and parliament are organised by libraries and users invited. Experts on the subject are invited to give talks Other library services are then marked in the process.

Challenges

Lack of marketing skills among librarians

The issue of information being critical to all is not debatable However it is believed that Librarians and information professionals in developing countries do not understand or have an outdated notion of marketing and most of them do not have sufficient marketing skills. Mchomvu. (1991) and Nawe. (1993). as a result library services and resources are underutilized or they are completely unknown to the surrounding community. This situation is however changing as more and more library schools in Universities are introducing marketing of information resources courses.

Inadequate funds

Most libraries face declining budgets This means that the standard of services they provide is becoming poorer and poorer as time goes on This therefore has an implication of users losing interest in library services Lack of funds mean that libraries have little resources to spend on marketing activities which in most cases is considered as a less important

Though lack of funds could be considered one of the major factors inhibiting marketing. libraries. should take blame for not being creative in coming up with activities which may not need money to undertake. Activities such as face to face marketing within the premises for a special library such as

the legislative or parliamentary library There are many other activities which libraries could undertake with little or no funds.

Attitude of library users

(Mchomvu, (1991) in Nthulo and Otike () argue that one of the biggest challenges faced by librarians is to create a positive image as most users hold negative attitudes towards librarians. They further say that for decades. people thought of librarians as trained or skilled but not necessarily as professionals and have no idea about the qualifications or training requirements. In most developing countries librarians are seen as simply retrieval clerks or have low social status, so users may consider themselves more competent and more knowledgeable than library staff and regard it unnecessary to approach a librarian for help. Therefore, the librarians need to demonstrate that they have got both qualifications and a variety of skills including good customer care and how to deal with such difficult customers. This may be the same in legislative and parliamentary libraries where users may underrate libraries and librarians

Myth that libraries do not need to be marketed

There is a belief that libraries do not need to be marketed in any special way because their importance to society should be known to all Most libraries do not market their libraries because they say that libraries already have defined segments of users who do not need to be informed about the library services This has led to some of the library services being underutilised or even not used at all Most legislative libraries are deserted in most cases because of this myth

Conclusion

Legislative and parliamentary Librarians should realise that they no longer have a monopoly of providing information services and that marketing is a vital tool for them to remain relevant Librarians should develop marketing plans for their libraries where they should clearly outline their marketing strategies It is also critical for librarians to overcome the barriers which may exist in marketing the services

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An Exploratory Study of the Usage of Parliamentary Websites as an Engaging Tool: A Case of Selected African Parliamentary Websites

Akakandelwa Akakandelwa

Abstract

Parliamentary websites offer great benefits to citizens and governments Parliamentary websites play the role of tool for archiving parliamentary documents (repositories), communicating and educating citizens. Consequently, websites are seen as tools for enhancing democracy, transparency and openness However, in order for these roles to be effectively and efficiently fulfilled, parliamentary websites must be well designed As parliamentary websites are increasingly being regarded as the only media which truly enables the public to engage with the legislative process, it is therefore worth assessing this tool in order to determine its effectiveness and impact. This paper presents an exploratory study to investigate the usability of parliamentary websites of selected countries in Central, Eastern and Southern Africa Using mixed research methods (webometrics and feature investigation method); the study has evaluated ten parliamentary websites of the eastern, central and southern African countries, according to several perspectives including design layout, navigation, and legal policies It is hoped that the evaluation results will motivate the respective parliamentary staff to improve their websites to international standards Furthermore, it is hoped that this study will stimulate more research in this area

Keywords: Websites, e-government, web usability, APLESA

Background

The increasing use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in particular the Internet has become prominent and has essentially changed how organizations work (La Porte et al., 2001) The Internet and the World Wide Web provide an opportunity for governments to offer efficient and effective services to their citizens via websites. Furthermore, government websites are increasingly being seen as a useful tool to enhance transparency and democracy because they enable citizens to easily interact with their governments. Heeks (2006 p 4) defines e-government as "the use of information technologies (ICTs) by public sector organizations" This use of ICTs by governments is usually referred to as electronic government (E-government). It includes the provision of electronic services such as electronic procurement (eProcurement), electronic petitioning (ePetitioning) and electronic voting (eVoting)

Kaaya (2004) observes that the development of government websites passes through four phases, namely. (1) website creation, (2) initial two-way interaction, (3) online transactions and (4) comprehensive government portals The first phase involves development of government websites to provide information to citizens The second phase focuses on building a platform for interaction between citizens and the government. Tools such as electronic submission forms and discussion forums are created at this phase. The third phase involves the development of web tools for facilitating transactions of government services, such as electronic procurement The last phase involves the integration of government systems to share resources. Usability issues of government websites are particularly relevant to phases one and two of the implementation of government websites.

The International Organization for Standards (ISO) defines usability as the extent to which a product, for example software or a website. can be used by particular users to achieve specified goals effectively, efficiently and satisfactorily in a specified context of use (ISO, 1998). Usability of website is vital to an organization because unusable website reduce the effectiveness of communication between users and the organizations. Web usability generally means that websites are clear, simple, consistent and easy to use (Cappel & Huang, 2007)

Ivory and Chevalier (2002) observe that despite the importance of government websites in government-citizen relationship, many government websites are seldom used Because accessibility is an element of web usability (Henry. 2002), accessibility problem of government websites therefore reduce their usability and this in turn hampers the role government websites would play in delivering services to citizens.

Very few studies have examined the issue of e-government in developing countries such as Africa (Asiiwmi & Lim, 2010; Heeks, 2002, Schuppan, 2009). Heeks (2002) investigated the development of e-government in Africa in relation economic and administrative characteristics of the continent. This study investigates usability aspects of selected parliamentary websites in Eastern, Central and Southern Africa

Study objectives

The objective of this paper is to examine the usability of parliamentary websites in Eastern, Central and Southern Arica The specific objectives of the study are
1 The Design layout of websites
2. Navigation of websites
3. Legal policies of websites
4 Type of web content information being offered
5. Number of websites linking in the parliamentary websites
6. Usage of Social networking tools
7. Usage of the websites

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Methodology

This study used a mixed research approach to assess the accessibility and usability of nine African parliamentary websites. Ten parliamentary websites were selected because the library professionals of these parliamentary websites belong to APLSEA (Table 1) Four categories of ten website features were examined, namely: design layout, navigation, legal policies, and types of services being offered. The features were adapted from the E-Government Toolkit for Developing Countries (Verma & Ornager, 2005) and Web Content Accessibility Guidelines version two (WCAG 2.0). The e-government toolkit was prepared by National Informatics Centre (NIC) and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to guide e-government implementers in developing countries The WCAG 2 0 standard is a set of guidelines that covers a wide range of recommendations for making web content accessible

Table 1: Parliamentary websites surveyed in the study

Name of Parliament	URL
1. Botswana Parliament	www parliament gov bw
2 Kenya Parliament	www parliament go ke
3. Lesotho Parliament	www parliament ls
4. Malawi Parliament	www parliament.gov mw
5 Namibian Parliament	www.parliament.gov.na
6 South African Parliament	www.parliament.gov.za
7 Tanzania Parliament	www parliament go tz
8 Uganda Parliament	www.parliament.go.ug
9 Zambian Parliament	www parliament gov zm
10. Zimbabwean Parliament	www parliament gov zw

The websites were examined for the following communication features were evaluated in this category:

1   *Design consistency in web pages* Web pages of a website should be consistent. For example, the design layout and colors should be the same for all web pages

2   *Feedback/inquiry forms and other interactive tools* These are tools that support faster and efficient communication between the government and citizens and among citizens themselves.

3   *Page content sharing tools:* These are tools that enable users to easily share or obtain content of a webpage as a separate computer file. Examples are print, download/save, fax and email options.

4. *Zoom options* These are tools that allow users to customize content by resizing it These tools help users especially those who are vision-impaired read the text on web pages.

5　*Audio content* Audio content refers to presentation of web content in form of voice This feature is highly recommended by international usability and accessibility guidelines such as WCAG to facilitate vision-impaired users

6　*Website address (Universal Resource Locator) clarity* Every online website has an address that uniquely identifies it. The address should portray the name of the institution and should be easy to memorize in relation to what the institution does

7　*Main menu and other links* Links connect web pages and documents within the website to each other and to other external websites. Links should not be broken and should have names that correspond to the linked information.

8.　*Sitemap* A sitemap is a collection of links for all main web pages on a website It helps users find specific information under a certain section of the website.

9.　*Search tool* This is a tool for searching information within a website without browsing through web pages It is an important tool because it facilitates fast information retrieval

10　*Help/FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) pages.* These pages provide useful information to users when the users need help. Frequently asked questions are based on the common queries raised by users.

11　*Privacy policies* Privacy refers to the right of a user over certain information Privacy policies guarantee users ownership over information they are entitled to

12　*Terms and conditions of use* These are protocols that govern how information should be accessed and used on the website and how services offered by the website are carried out

13　*Copyright/disclaimer information* Copyright and disclaimer are legal notifications that proclaim the organization as the rightful owner of the website

Alexa.com was used to establish various web metrics of the websites such as Alexa Rank. number of sites linking in the websites, daily bounce rate, daily average page view. and average daily time on site. Alexa Rank is the rank of a website at global level. The PageRank of a particular page is roughly based upon the quantity of inbound links as well as the PageRank of the pages providing the links The algorithm also includes other factors, such as the size of a page, the number of changes, the time since the page was updated. the text in headlines and the text in hyperlinked anchor texts. Bounce rate the percentage of visitors leaving the website The daily page views are the number of people who visit a particular website the number of pages they view

Limitations of the study

Some measures used in this study such as design consistency are prone to subjectivity, particularly considering that only one expert was involved in the study However, use of one expert was economical and considering the amount of time that made available before submission of the paper. The study also only considered nine websites in one African region, thus limiting the generalibility of the study to most African parliamentary websites It is

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therefore recommended that feature research should be extended to other African regions and a mixed research approach be adopted.

Results

Nine African parliamentary websites were evaluated, namely. South African Parliament. Uganda Parliament, Namibian Parliament, Zambian Parliament. Kenya Parliament. Tanzania Parliament, Lesotho Parliament. Botswana Parliament, Malawi Parliament, and Zimbabwean Parliament (Table 2) The oldest website, South African Parliament Website, was 16 years old while the youngest website, Zimbabwean Parliament Website, was 4 years old The average age of the websites was 10 1 years.

Accessibility of Websites

Evaluation results of the four parliamentary websites are summarized in Table 2 All the nine websites had website addresses, main menu and other links, search tools, help/FAQ pages, and copyright/disclaimer information, and some kind of feedback/inquiry forms Only Uganda and Namibia had no sitemaps. Only a Botswana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, and South African websites had some kind of zoom options. Only Botswana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, and South African websites had some kind of page content sharing tools. Only Botswana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, South Africa, and Tanzania had audio content

Table 2 Evaluation results for website features of parliamentary websites

#	Features	Botswana	Kenya	Lesotho	Malawi	Namibia	South Africa	Tanzania	Uganda	Zambia	Zimbabwe
	Category 1: Design Layout										
1	Feedback/inquiry forms and other interactive tools	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
2	Zoom options	√	√	√	√	X	√	X	X	X	X
3	Page content sharing tools	√	√	√	√	X	√	X	X	X	X
4	Audio content	√	√	√	√	X	√	√	X	X	X
	Category 2: Navigation										
1	Website address (URL) clarity	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
2	Main menu and other links	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
3	Sitemap	√	√	√	√	X	√	√	x	√	√
4	Search tool	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
5	Help/FAQ page	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
6	Privacy policies	√	√	√	√	x	x	x	x	x	x
7	Terms and conditions of use	√	√	√	√	X	√	√	x	√	x
8	Copyright/disclaimer information	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√

Key: √=Present X=Not present

Web content

All the websites evaluated had pdf documents South African Parliament had the largest number of pdf documents (6990), followed by Zimbabwean Parliament Website (648) and the Namibian

Parliament Website (Table 4) Kenya Parliament Website had the smallest number of pdf documents (9) The South African Website had the largest number of word (doc) documents (9790), followed by Uganda Parliamentary Website (1620) and Tanzania Parliament Website Namibian. Lesotho, and Kenya Parliamentary websites had no word documents Only three websites had ppt documents, namely the South African Parliament website (34), Zimbabwean Parliamentary website (4), and Botswana Parliamentary website (1)

Table 4 Rich content of Parliamentary websites

Name of Parliament	pdf	doc	ppt
South African Parliament	6990	9790	34
Zimbabwean Parliament	648	2	4
Namibian Parliament	621	0	0
Tanzania Parliament	338	51	0
Zambian Parliament	228	9	0
Botswana Parliament	164	2	1
Malawi Parliament	94	40	0
Uganda Parliament	33	1620	0
Lesotho Parliament	32	0	0
Kenya Parliament	9	0	0

Number of sites linking in

Websites were evaluated to establish the extent to other websites link to them Table 5 shows that the South African Parliamentary website had the largest number (408) of sites linking in to it. It was followed by Malawi Parliamentary website (335), Uganda Parliamentary website (252), Tanzania Parliamentary website (142), Zambian Parliamentary website (130), and Namibian Parliamentary website (106). Botswana Parliamentary website (17), Lesotho Parliamentary website (10), and Zimbabwean Parliamentary website (4) had the smallest number of sites linking in, respectively.

Table 5 total number of sites linking in

Name of Parliament	#sites linking in
South African Parliament	408
Malawi Parliament	355
Uganda Parliament	252
Tanzania Parliament	187
Kenya Parliament	142
Zambian Parliament	130
Namibian Parliament	106
Botswana Parliament	17
Lesotho Parliament	10
Zimbabwean Parliament	4

Furthermore analysis was conducted to establish the sites which linked to the African parliamentary websites. Table 6 below shows the top 25 sites which link to the parliamentary websites, among which were Wikepedia org. Securesever net, bbc co uk, blogespot.ru, yahoo com, and sourceforge net. These websites can be grouped into commercial websites (com), information websites (.net). organizational websites (org), and a few academic websites (.edu or ac). There was only one governmental website (loc.gov)

Table 6 Top sites linking to parliamentary website

		Count
1	Wikipedia org	9
2	Secureserver net	7
3	bbc co uk	6
4	blogspot ru	3
5	yahoo com	3
6	sourceforge net	2
7	academic ru	1
8	answers com	1
9	archive org	1
10	capitalis.com	1
11	classhaber net	1
12	cnn com	1
13	colorado edu	1
14	keele ac uk	1
15	loc gov	1
16	microsft com	1
17	ox ac uk	1
18	quickiwiki com	1
19	reddit com	1
20	sigma-orionis com	1
21	sobranie mk	1
22	ubuntu org zw	1
23	wikimedia org	1
24	wn com	1
25	ynet co il	1

Use of Social Media

The researcher wanted to find out the extent to which African parliaments use social networking tools to increase their communication to citizens Table below shows that only three parliaments have a presence on social media, namely Botswana, Uganda and South Africa. These parliaments use Facebook, Twitter. Youtube, and News Feeds to increase their communications to the citizens and the general public (Table 7)

Table 7 Use of social media

Name of Parliament	Facebook	Twitter	Youtube	News Feeds
Botswana Parliament	√	√		√
Kenya Parliament	x	x	x	x
Lesotho Parliament				
Malawi Parliament	x	x	x	x
Namibian Parliament	X	X	X	X
South African Parliament	√	√		√
Tanzania Parliament	x	x	x	x
Uganda Parliament	√	√	√	√
Zambian Parliament	x	x	x	x
Zimbabwean Parliament	x	x	x	x

A Glance at the Usage of the Websites

The results further show the extent to which the websites were visited by the public and the amount of time the visitors spent on the websites on average (Table 8) The daily page views ranged (i e. the number of people who visit this site and the number of pages they view) from 1-7, with Zimbabwe recording the highest daily page views The average amount of time visitors spend on the site ranged from 1-7 21 minutes, with Zimbabwe recording the highest daily time on site and Botswana recording the least daily time on site. The study further sought to establish the daily bounce rate of the websites (the percentage of visitors who come to a website and exiting from that page). The daily bounce rate ranged from 27 30% to 58 30% with the Zambian Parliamentary website recording the lowest bounce rate while the Malawian Parliamentary website recorded the highest High bounce rates are an indication that visitors are not finding what they need and have no confidence that they can quickly find it on your site