The Power of Website and People's Tendency towards the Paradigm Shift: The Case of Jimma University, Ethiopia

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Abstract— By the time of drafting this article, it was surprising to learn that the World Wide Web ("WWW'or simply the "web") is only 10158 days old. Given the wide spread influence of this technology, one would make such a naïve presumption about website as a century old phenomenon, at least before the observation. The internet, and ultimately the evolution of websites brought tremendous development to human life around the world in almost all aspects of endeavour such us content delivery, lead capture, and direct selling. The question is however, how quickly people are adapting to this technology to get their presence felt around the world at ease. In Jimma University, for instance, it's hard to find a wide spread use of website attributed to limited understanding of the power of this technology, less tendency for the paradigm shift, limited trust of information on websites, complicated web structure that the organization owns and the likes.

Index Terms— web, website, Jimma University, content delivery, volumes, webmasters, social media

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1 INTRODUCTION

Historically, the invention of the world-wide web(www), leads to Tim Berners-Lee[1], [2], an independent contractor at the European Organization for Nuclear Research, Switzerland, who built the first personal database of people and software models in 1980. The intention of this paper is not to discuss the historical development of the website world. However, it's good to know that the system that rules our modern lives has been around for less than a century [3]. It is difficult to imagine what the 21st century would look like without it. In fact, only those people who lived in these two eras can tell the difference. Jeremy Holt's (Founder, Museum of Computing) speech at the marking of Internet's 40th birthday can say it all [3]:

> "… a lot of the youngsters nowadays have no real idea how primitive things were a few years ago. They've been brought up with the Internet, they can't imagine an age which doesn't have the Internet in there,..."

Nowadays, there is almost nothing you can't do with the World Wide Web and computers; everyone is waiting to see what the next generation of communication and computing devices will look like. Thanks to the near unlimited flexibility a website provides in terms of content delivery, lead capture, and even direct selling, companies can now leverage their print advertisements for a much greater response than even the best copywriters got in the pre-internet days [4], [5]. Having a website is like opening a door and inviting potential customers into a business because sites communicate with prospects and customers 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year [6]. Even when workers aren't at work, a company's website is. Customers can get to know a company/firm and its products through website at their convenience. It can be better than passing out business card to thousands of people, can't it?

The question is however, how quickly people are adapting to the prevalence and development of information technology

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that is knocking at door with such huge capability of easing a day-to-day activity. Are the changes being taken for granted? Do people opt to employ the technology or stubbornly incline to stay with traditional ways of doing things? The second alternative obviously keeps one isolated from the rest of the world.

2   WEBSITE AND JIMMA UNIVERSITY

Jimma University (JU) is one of the leading educational institutions in the country, aspiring to be renown in Africa and recognized in the world. For this scale of vision, the role of website can not be underestimated by any means as it helps to be reached from around the globe in a click. Being aware of this fact, the university has far established a comfortable internet facility in its campuses. However, the presence of this basic infrastructure should be complemented with its wise use by the University community. For example, experience has shown that most staffs and faculties of the University are either obdurate for the paradigm shift or are unaware of the importance of having a content-rich website. It's with hard and hassle that one would gather the necessary information to be used as input for the web. Among the very basic reasons for ignorance of website related issues by the University community are:

Lack of attention for institutional websites: People usually tend to ignore requests for factual data for updates and this has got a lot to do with lack of culture to visiting the web regularly. Hence, it's natural that humans defy to work for something they don't give due attention to. A recent online survey and interview demonstrated that most faculties visit the official website of the University only when referred to (or forced to do so). That is, no one, except few top managements, surf the website frequently looking for updates or new information. For instance, a fraction of JU's website specific to a unit in the university was down for months as result of an unavoidable incident. However, no one from that division of the university noticed and/or reported the inactivity of the site or

they might have turned a blind eye even if they knew.

Lack of awareness of the power of website: The community's limited understanding of the importance of website also contributes to the under-developed site hosted by most institutions these days [7]. This doesn't mean that the appearance of a site has got nothing to do with excellent design parameters the webmasters employ. But the interest, the awareness, the push and the will in providing latest information by the community outweighs the technical aspect of managing the web. In the days before the internet, a company had to squeeze as much information as possible into the limited space provided by a newspaper or flyer. As one can imagine, it's quite challenging to tell a reader everything they need to know about how a company's product/service can improve their lives when the business have only an 8 by 12 inch page (or less!) to work with.

For institutions like JU which aspire to be recognized world-wide, website is an ideal tool because it expands the reach in enabling people from across the street and across the border have access to products and services from the comfort of their own space. Furthermore, today's emerging generation has never known life without a digital world of connection. According to statistics (and who doesn't like statistics!), over 88% of Canada's population is online [8]. Considering the growth of social media to that and it becomes evident that without a credible web presence, institutions don't exist for an expanding segment of their target market.

Trust of information on website: Though the developed world is highly reliant on websites for information feed, the situation in developing countries like Ethiopia appears different. In JU, faculties and staffs sometimes tend to call (visit) concerned offices to confirm the genuinity of a given release on websites. However, there are still some faculties who make use of website for information tunnel; especially, those who had lived in developed countries for sometime. It doesn't appear to most

that a feed to official website is really 'official'. This attributed to the culture of living and information exchange among offices or individuals in the University setting as people think that official statements (information) are those which are released in the form of letters or so.

Limited Regular updates to Web-contents: Above all, it's not enough that one just owns a website. Outdated content can quickly damage website's visibility in search engines and lose the faith of its readership. It's actually better to have no website at all than to have one that makes an institution look bad. A site speaks volumes about organization. It either says, 'Hey, look, we take our business so seriously that we have created this wonderful site for our customers and keep them posted of all our latest activities!' or it screams, 'Hey, look, we let a 15 year old boy design our site before 10 years and it still looks the same. Good luck finding anything!' Even something as fundamental as glancing at the site can evoke gut-wrenching emotions, especially if the site has amassed tens of hundreds of too old pages. Simply put, a website with an outdated content is equivalent to a man who avoids basic hygiene for days; his eyes get smaller, his skin looks older, and people think he is disgusting.

3 LOOKING FORWARD

At JU there are few people who believe in the impact of the official website. Thanks to the diligence and trust these few top managements shouldered on the importance of site, the future looks pretty good that the university will be harvesting the fruit of possessing an appealing web. One result of such activity is the improvement in JU's web ranking as rated by webometric.com in 2014/15; [9] in which the website stood 71st among African Universities, an encouraging achievement when compared to previous year's standing (one of the only two universities from Ethiopia to break in to the top 100). Similarly, the release by 4ICU.com indicated that JU's site ma-

naged to get into the top 100 universities in Africa [10], as it was ranked 100th in 2016. In fact, the two international survey institutions employ different metrics for evaluation: webometrics' parameters are focused on quality content, while 4icu concerns in popularity. This is an indication that among the basic parameters employed for web-ranking are the *number of time the website is visited* and *the quality content* the website encompasses. Nevertheless, the results of these two institutions provide the insight to which aspect of the web improvements are so important to guide the alteration which can escalate the prosperity of the university.

4 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the effort of just the webmaster or the top management only won't bring significant development to the outlook of a website. Every employee should understand the benefits of it and extend their hands. The most devastating issue these days, especially in JU, is that faculty members do not even check their own profile unless referred to. Quite few people like to maintain their pages updated. The response of most faculties to the question of how often they update personal pages was frustrating; as it's found out that on average it takes one and half years. In reality, many people have undergone various developments in the form of publications, academic ranks and positions they assume over a period of one and half years. Hence, a single employee has two different personalities: on the website and the real him/her. What is even worse is that there are some whose profile doesn't exist on website at all; thus the majority of people in the world barely know their existence.

Customers literally expect to be referred to a website in the current age of mass marketing either for personal profiles or institutional whereabouts. Hence, institutions/individuals that fail to deliver on this expectation are in danger of immediately losing a portion of their target audience! To be accessible to

wide range of people/customers so that products/services be reached when necessary, the employement of website is un-questionable.

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