STUDY OF CHANGING TREND OF THE LANDING WEB PAGE OF SELECT LEADING SOCIAL SCIENCE ONLINE INFORMATION SERVICE PROVIDERS (OISPs) DURING 2005 TO 2010

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ABSTRACT

The use of online information services has increased dramatically over the last decade, as consumers seek easier and more convenient access to information on the Internet. Historically, these OISPs also known as access providers sold their services to individual users, and it was to their competitive advantage to get as many users as possible. The present paper is a part of a PhD research which is based on the objective to find out the change in the pattern of the products and services of the Online Information Service Providers (OISPs) over a specific period of time and to trace statistically about the existing trend pointing towards future direction in this present research paper the objective of study has been limited to five major OISPS namely Ebsco, LexisNexis, ProQuest, Gale and JSTOR. This study has tried to compare these five OISPs from their historical perspective as reflected in their websites in that period of time considering select attributes like change in logo, features of design, specific tag line, product description, links to other services, and remarks on any other specific development on that particular year. The research is based on analytical study of primary level of data collected in the form of website logs capturing product evolution of select OISPs. The landing page of these leading OISPs historically demonstrated enough indications that prove their transition to what they are today is through a gradual process and not a sudden change.

General Terms: Online Database; Online Information Service Providers

Keywords: Online Database, Ebsco, ProQuest, Gale, LexisNexis, JSTOR, Trend Analysis, Libraries,

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INTRODUCTION

There is a paradigm shift in the format of the libraries; from standalone libraries to library and information networks; from printed publication to digital documents; from ownership to access; from just-in case to just-in-time; from 9x5 to 24x7; from intermediation to disintermediation; and from library as a place to library as a concept. The prevailing of electronic resources makes the library collection have more electronic materials than physical items.

Online databases and services from the OISPs, thus have become an integral part of the modern library resources. OISPs provide the services from remotely located databases through interactive communication with the help of Internet connectivity and compatible devices. These databases can be accessed directly or via a vendor (supplier of online services). Searching online databases has been available ever since the early 1970's. Early database providers such as BRS and DIALOG had rudimentary form of gateway in the mode of menus in which databases could be grouped and from which one or more could be selected for searching. The early 1980's, Compuserve started utilizing a text-based interface. Other text based online services followed such as Delphi online service, and GEnie.

The use of online information services has increased dramatically over the last decade, as consumers seek easier and more convenient access to information on the Internet. According to an IntelliQuest survey, the online subscriber base worldwide in July 1997 was 51 million, as compared to 35 million reported in July 1996 (Picarelle 1997), and grew annually at the rate of 55 percent (Deck 1997). However, there has been little evidence of brand loyalty in this industry, with many subscribers switching to competitors' services or discontinuing their subscription altogether. An Inteco survey found that in August 1995, the total number of service cancellations among five leading online service firms was 9.4 million, compared to 8.1 million active users at that time (Carl 1995). These numbers have grown in all possible means and are many fold as of today showing a steady and stiff growth path.

Historically, access providers sold their services to individual users, and it was to their competitive advantage to get as many users as possible. This was particularly useful in selling companies on the notion of universal access, as it would expand their user base. But today providers find greater profit in selling to large organizations, such as corporations or universities. When these are the providers' clients, the needs of individual users become negligible. For example, some noteworthy small operators have circumvented big media to report on stories that were otherwise going uncovered. But as the Internet becomes a more lucrative market, these small players are being swallowed up or drowned out by the large commercial interests. While some use technology to circumvent controls on information, the gatekeepers reinforce their ownership and control through the use of more manipulative technologies. Thus at the one hand market forces and consumer needs pushed these vendors to bring in various changes in their product and services; on the other hand the innovations and generation of economies of scale through radical changes in ICT tools and techniques pulled a lot of new category products and services. The present study aim to capture both the sides to obtain a complete trend pattern of the changes

Objective:

The present paper is a part of a PhD research which is based on the objective to find out the change in the pattern of the products and services of the Online Information Service Providers (OISPs) over a specific period of time and to trace statistically about the existing trend pointing towards future direction. The bigger study would try to cover the factors and aspects of changes from suppliers side as well as from the need base generated through the demand of the patrons.Here in this present research paper the objective of study has been limited to five major OISPS namely Ebsco (Ebscohost & Ebsco Information Services), LexisNexis, ProQuest, Gale and JSTOR. This study has tried to compare these five OISPs from their historical perspective as reflected in their landing page of their websites in that period of time considering select attributes like change in logo, features of design, specific tag line, product description, links to other services, and remarks on any other specific development on that particular year

Methodology:

The research is based on analytical study of primary level of data collected in the form of website logs capturing product evolution of select OISPs. Data collection has been done through historical analysis of their portals. The research sample consisted of in-depth study of the product evolution of select Online Information Service Providers. The primary set would consist of the following vendors –
1.   Ebsco Host
2.   ProQuest
3.   JSTOR
4.   LexisNexis
5.   Gale Online

Online information services (OIS) involve the services from remotely located databases through interactive communication with the help of computers and communication channels. The users can access the databases directly or via a vendor (Supplier of online services). Generally, OISs are available through networks. Searching online databases has been available ever since the early 1970's. As mentioned in Das and Jana (2006) about the genre of online services, they started becoming popular the early 1980's.It enabled libraries to start listing the electronic resources to which they subscribed or web pages, thus providing users with ready information. "As the web's popularity increased throughout the nineties, most of the vendors converted their user interfaces into web-based format and made online databases web accessible".(Das,2006). How deep the information is under the menu options has impact on information searching as well. Menu content organized in two levels of depths resulted in fewer searching problems than three levels regardless of breadth, and the layout as well as the labeling of the web content played a role (Larson & Czerwinski, 1998).

Increased e-journals through e services on the web has made the OISP more effective and appealing, and has help them to achieve higher levels of user satisfaction and retention But there has been a need for web designers to understand user and for academic researchers to evaluate the internet and provide an appropriate framework. However, little research has been done on the quality determinants of e-service of the OISP. On the question of online determinants, Dholakia and Rego (1998) suggested a listof features that they considered to be important for effective web sites. They were:

- frequency of changes:
- number of links to and from the Web site; complexity and extensiveness;
- number of pictures (especially clickable pictures);
- enhancements (for example, Java applet . and gif animations); and
- number of advertising banners of other firms.

In the same context Abels et al. (1999) proposed six operational definitions of user criteria:

- use;
- content;
- structure;
- linkage;
- search; and
- appearance.

Another approach proposed by Santos, Jessica (2003) the 'Incubative Dimension' which is defined as the proper design of a web site, how technology has been used to provide consumers with easy access, understanding and attractions of a web site. These include:

- ease of use;
- appearance;
- linkage;
- structure and layout; and
- content.

The development of OISPs need to be considered in the context of trends, strategies and technical issues within the overall information environment as depicted in their website between 2005 to 2010. These include, for instance, electronic library developments within particular sectors, metadata initiatives, and organisational issues such as the convergence or integration of libraries with knowledge management or consortium structures.

Observations:

To start with the past/historical data of the initial landing page which serves as the entry point for a website or a particular section of OISPs website, has been observed, examined and analysed.

Changing in Trend in Logo:

Entrepreneurial firms, organisations, and institutions use brand names, logos, slogans, and advertising to increase brand awareness as part of their external branding efforts. Schecter (1993) defines logos as "the official visual representation of a corporate or brand name, and the essential component of all corporate and brand identity programs." Logo is an important part of the brand as it signals brand character through a stylized treatment of the company or brand name. "It is like a signature of a person. Its main function is to remind the brand and make sure that it remains at the forefront of the audience's

thoughts" (Herskovits and Crystal, 2010).Brand logos as seen in the select OISP web pages are also seen on their promotion materials, product catalogues, annual reports, and business cards. These logos which are part of their external branding strategies and tactics help these OISPs build their corporate identity. These logos help create their brand persona and brand loyalty to differentiate them from the competition. Thus in the given table the change in the logo of the respective OISPs are depicted between 2005 to 2010.

Table: 1 CHANGE IN LOGOFROM 2005 TO 2010						
Accessed Year	**Ebsco Host**	**Ebsco Information Services**	**Lexis Nexis**	**ProQuest**	**Gale**	**JSTOR**
Pre 2000	Old Logo	Old Logo	Old Logo	Old Logo	Old Logo	Old Logo is the original JSTOR logo that has become the identity and remained unchanged
2005	Changed to new logo	Changed new logo	Changed new – red colour logo	Changed new – ProQuest logo is visible	Thomson Gale Logo	Logo same
2006	Changed to new logo	Same as previous	Same as previous	Same as previous	Logo same Thomson Gale Logo	Logo same
2007	Same as previous	Same as previous	Same as previous	Change in Logo	Gale Cengage or Gale Logo	Logo same
2008	No Data Found	Same as previous	Same as previous	Same as previous	Logo same	Logo same
2009	Changed to new logo	Changed, New Logo of Ebsco host added	Same as previous	Same as previous	Logo same	Logo same
2010	Same as previous	Same as previous	Same as previous	Same as previous	Logo same	Logo same

The data in the table is further analysed and is illustrated in the following diagram.
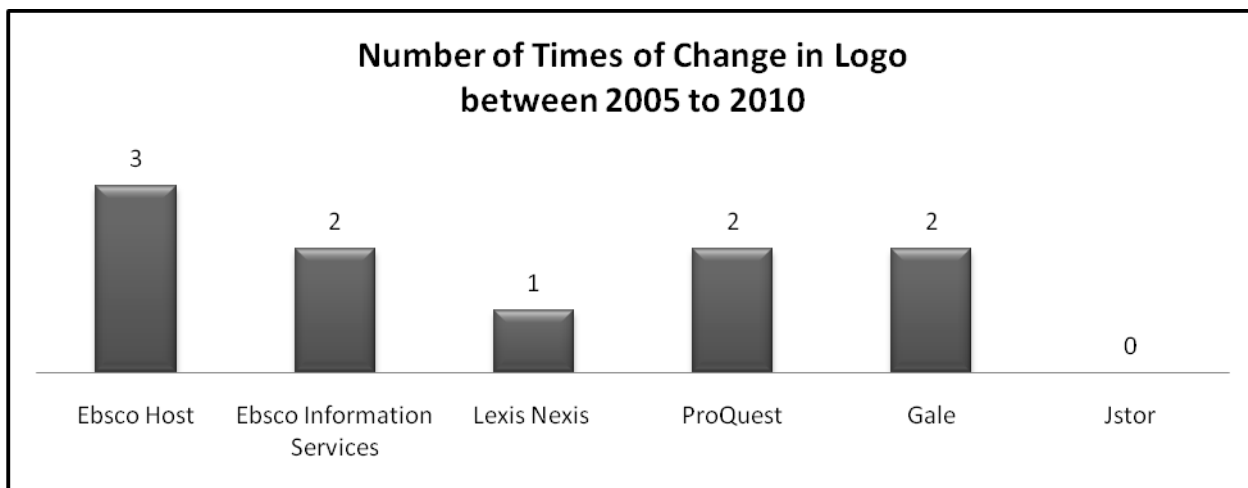
Figure : 1

The above figure shows that Ebsco Host have changed its logo thrice while Ebsco Information Services, ProQuest, Gale twice and Lexis Nexis once. JSTOR has not changed its logo between 2005 and 2010. There is a critical symbiotic relationship between brand logos and brand extensions. First, brand logos can offer an important strategic advantage that facilitates the success of extending a brand name to other product or service categories. Once successfully introduced, brand extensions make brand logos more visible and prominent, reinforcing the brand's key benefits. Indeed, our research findings indicate that the positive effects of brand logos on customer commitment and company performance are stronger when companies extend their brands with the same logos. In the present case of OISPs their services are categorically characterised by the changes in their product bundle and addition of new services and databases. Their Logos help them to keep the brand intact amongst consumers. Libraries always look for Ebsco or ProQuest logo to indentify any particular journal or article. Thus gradual stabilization of their logos is visible in the time line.

Changing Trend in Design

Design of websites implies creation and planning and also updating of websites. Although the meaning of "design" is perceived solely as a visual aspect but this involves combination of various features like website structure, information architecture, navigation ergonomics, user interface, website layout, colours, contrasts, fonts as well as icons or logo design. In reality design also includes abstract elements such as usability, ergonomics, layout traditions, user habits, navigation logic and other things that simplify the using of websites and help to find information faster.

Table: 2 CHANGE IN FEATURES OF DESIGNFROM 2005 TO 2010						
Accessed Year	**Ebsco Host**	**Ebsco Information Services**	**Lexis Nexis**	**ProQuest**	**Gale**	**JSTOR**
Pre 2000	Only Basic Information given in the first screen. User -Id and Pass Word	Very crude and Basic	Tag line - it's all you need to know	Exists but still under UMI and proquest direct.	Only Basic Information Given in the First Screen	Only Basic Information Given in the First Screen
2005	Same as previous	Tag line given – Customer focused , content driven	Same as previous	Exists.Website changed and looks quite modern and compact	New and very feature rich design	Same as previous

2006	Yes new consolidated display	Same as previous	Tag line - LexisNexis - It's how you know	Exists. Same Tag Line Information and Learning	Same as previous with updated sections	Same as previous
2007	Same as previous	Same as previous	Same as previous	Exists with additional products and services	Same as previous with updated sections	Same as previous
2008	No Data Found	Exist but display different and no tag line	Same as previous	Exists but display different with new iconic buttons	Exists new enhanced and detailed display	Exists but new consolidated display
2009	Exists but new consolidated display	Exists but new tagline "Information to inspiration" added	Exists but display different and no tag line	Same as previous	Same as previous	Same as previous
2010	Same as previous	Exists but overall look changed	Exists but new consolidated display	Same as previous	Exists but another round of change and updation	Exists but another round of change and updation

In the above table it is observed that Ebsco Information Services, Lexis Nexis and ProQuest have changed their tag lines quite a few times between 2005 and 2010. Here a tagline may be defined as a short text of few words which intend to expose, to express, to clarify a thought and or is designed to create dramatic effect. Taglines are being created by OISPs and are intended to leave a lasting effect during a short visit of the landing page by the user. It is formed with an intention to capture that the overall benefit of what is being advertised, whether it's a product, service or idea. This tagline offers information by OISPs that can be easily remembered.

Regarding design all started with a very basic except Lexis Nexis website that was quite advanced even before 2000. A major changes in designs of the OISPs website is observed during 2005 and 2006. Another round change is observed around 2010.

Changing Trend in Product Description

A product description is important as it describes the features and benefits of a product to a user. The goal of the product description by the OISPs is to provide the patron with enough information to influence them to wish for the database immediately.

A well-written product description has the power to move the user through the product funnel. By introducing creativity in describing various benefits of different database subsets, the OISP site is likely to convert the casual browser into a definitive selection tool. While most libraries make their decision on the database through background consultation with faculty and experts, the product description helps fill in the gaps to determine whether or not the database is the right fit for the institute. By educating potential users on the key features, unique value proposition, and offering a solution to a frustrating problem, OISP's product description can help train institute and individual users and build trust.

A product description of any OISP is the copy that describes the features and benefits of a database or other product information to help potential users to want to use the product immediately. The descriptions of these article databases or e-book aggregations or archival services actually help a faculty to understand the thrust subject area and coverage of the database, it also helps to identify duplicate journals and books. These are actually the crucial information that converts a potential user to a genuine customer. These product description thus provides basic answers to management decision making questions like unique selling point, unique features, what are the strengths and thrust subject areas and similar other things of any OISPs and help institutes to make knowledgeable and informative choices.

Table: 3 CHANGE IN ANY OTHER PRODUCT DESCRIPTIONFROM 2005 TO 2010						
Accessed Year	**Ebsco Host**	**Ebsco Information Services**	**Lexis Nexis**	**ProQuest**	**Gale**	**JSTOR**
Pre 2000	No	Available	Available	Available	Exists but very basic	No Demo link given
2005	No	Available	Available	Available	Existsvery Detailed product range available	Same as previous
2006	Available	Available	Available	Available with updates	Same as previous with new sections for new products and services	Same as previous
2007	Available	Available	Available	Available	Same as previous with new sections for new products and services	Same as previous
2008	No Data Found	Available in a more elaborative way	Available in a more elaborative way	Available in a more elaborative way	Available, in different style and order	Available, in different style and order
2009	Available	Same as previous	Available	Available	Same as previous	Same as previous
2010	Available	Existsbut with social media presence, twitter handle added	Available	Available	Available, browse list in main screen	Available, browse list in main screen

In the above table it is observed that Gale has added new sections for new products and services both in 2006 and 2007. Major changes in the available product and services of almost all OISPs website except Ebsco Host (the data is missing for that year) is observed in 2008.In 2010 Ebsco Information Services has brought product and services with social media presence and twitter handle.

Changing Trend in Links to Other Services

An insertion of an obvious link to the product page will not let the visitors to probably exit website when they're finished reading the landing page. One needs to give them the next best link to click when they're done with the home page.

Second, without an obvious link, the website visitors must work harder and longer to complete the task they came for, and that is to research on OISPs products and services so that they could make a purchase decision. If their research efforts don't produce results in a matter of seconds, most visitors will leave OISP website. There are basically two popular methods that can help identify the traffic movement. The first one is Google Analytics: the Bounce Rate report is one way of finding about the users stay on the particular page.

Apart from this there are additional Search Engine Optimization benefits to linking to internal web pages from the landing page. Patrons are forced to find the product themselves, either by using the site search, or by figuring out how product categories are organized.

To improve OISP website's lead generation capabilities, landing page always include links to other relevant parts of their website.

Table: 4 CHANGE IN LINKS TO OTHER SERVICES FROM 2005 TO 2010						
Accessed Year	Ebsco Host	Ebsco Information Services	Lexis Nexis	ProQuest	Gale	JSTOR
Pre 2000	No	Given	Given	Given	Link to browse	Link to browse journals provided
2005	No	Given	Given	Given	Existsbut things like Power Search and Virtual reference Library are present	Same as previous
2006	Given	Given	Given	Given with new style icons	Exists but with additional links to new services	Same as previous
2007	Given	Given	Given	Given /Same	Exists but with additional links to new services like Literary Criticism Online	Same as previous
2008	No Data Found	Given	Given	Given	Given, with news and other update information	Given, with news and other update info

2009	Given	Same as previous	Given	Given	Same as previous	Same as previous
2010	Given	Given	Given	Given	Given with content update section	Given with content update section

In the above table it is observed Gale has added Power Search and Virtual reference Library is worth mentioning because at 2005 no one had such features. Again in 2007 they have offered additional links to new services like Literary Criticism Online. Although JSTOR and ProQuest have made some changes but in this section Gale is leading.

Inference

Ebsco Host: For Ebsco Host between 2005 and 2010 the major changes that have been observed are in 2005 they had log in screen with help and Athens login and in 2006 there was first appearance of modern website with all major facilities and diversification. In 2009 Discovery services had been introduced and in 2010 Net library had been introduced, free medical database and ExPub had been introduced.

Ebsco Information Services: For Ebsco Information Services between 2005 and 2010 the major changes that have been observed are in 2005 they had links to print subscription, biblio databases, e-resources access and books. In 2007 more services link like EBSCO Net, Scholarly Stats, E-Select, and E-Journal package acquisition had been added. In 2009 price projections had been added. In 2010 Discovery Services had been given the central focus.

Lexis-Nexis: For Lexis - Nexis even pre 2000 era they were quite advanced as per 1999 scenario, covered legal, business, government and academic. At that time they had provided source locator and also maintained distributive database structure. They had developed a search/query language for more accurate results. In 2005 they had added Risk Management diversification. In 2006 Risk Management became a part of the categories. In 2008 they had changed their look with more of mobile display style with continuous flow. In 2010 it was made tab ipad friendly design and lexis for ms office was introduced.

ProQuest: For ProQuest even in pre 2000 era they were quite sophisticated with respect to time. They still had info on microforms and showing them as one of their prominent products along with CD-ROMs. "Digital Vault Initiative" was also present. In 2005 they had added RSS Feed type services there was mentions of about their digitization effort. In 2006 there was prominent blurb on 'Customer Message', 'Product News' and 'Spotlight Heading'. In 2008 they had introduced enhanced ways to search and browse product information. Historical news papers, entrepreneurship study etc was added.

Gale: Although Gale in pre 2000 era had very initial information in rudimentary form but looked more feature rich in comparison with other OISPs site of that time. In 2005 they were very advanced and ahead of time. The same website can be termed as contemporary even today. In 2006 there was AccessMyLibrary.com that provided a whole new idea of searching and saving the metadata. In 2007 there was earlier indication of Thomson Corporation to wholly divest the Thomson Learning division was visible. In 2008 they were first major change in their web site noticed and enhanced importance on Reference Resources was given. In 2009 Contemporary Authors' Literary Series were one of the most remarkable reference tools for Literature students and was made available online.

JSTOR: JSTOR was synonymous to journal article aggregator with search interface. For JSTOR between 2005 and 2010 the major changes that have been observed are in 2005 they had log in screen with help and Athens login. In 2008 first major change was noticed since inception on in 1995. Multilingual site information was added and they called themselves archive.

Conclusion:

The landing page of these leading OISPs historically should demonstrate enough indications that prove their transition to what they are today is through a gradual process not a sudden change. So that in the broader research a trend pattern of these developments can be established leading to a future modification indication. The primary sign that these crucial 5 years carry is change in their pattern leading to a mobile/tab friendly design. Mobile friendly means that the existing site grows and shrinks with the size of the device it's displayed on, which is called responsive design. Initially OISPs may had a separate mobile version of their website, but gradually they all moved to a responsive site because it is believed to be better for search

engine optimization. In a few years, responsive design will be the standard architecture for all websites, but for now people are still trying to catch up with the times.

Just like a store changes its window display every month, these major OISPs frequently offer fresh content through their landing pages. Users don't want to see the same thing over and over. Driving customers to one's homepage are great, but directing them to landing pages that drill down deeper into the site is much more valuable. Thus most OISPs offer a variety of products and services and gradually separate landing pages for each category of products and services.

Finally to conclude we would use quotes of Tim Collins, Founder CEO of EBSCO Information Services from one of his interviews with Barbara Brynko, Editor-in-Chief of Information Today, on March 11, 2011; accessed from Ebsco Archive. He said, "I would say that our mission has broadened in recent years. We still have the mission of being an online research service serving institutions, but we've expanded it to encompass additional types and sources of content." Collins admitted that EBSCO was primarily a research service, but its offerings gradually included different types of content in areas where EBSCO had never searched before. And then, there were ebooks. With the acquisition of NetLibrary in 2010, EBSCOhost added a full range of ebooks and audiobooks to its offerings.

Collins called EBSCO's business strategy "consistent and methodical in expanding its footprint," as it had been for a long time. "We are very fundamental in our approach," he said. "We look to improve our products and then we methodically try to grow by adding new product lines that are extensions of our EBSCOhost platform."As libraries weathered the economic downturn during the past few years, EBSCO looked for creative ways to provide content and add value. So was the trend visible in the changing landscape of the landing pages of other OISPs. Finally, the conclusion is again a quote from Collins's interview which holds good for all other OISPs - "We're not satisfied with the status quo," said Collins. "We're really pushing to grow and to realize our potential. There's a lot of opportunity out there." None of the OISPs are maintaining the status quo and they are changing with the advent of time and change in technology and demand of their clientele.

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