FOOTFALL A MEASURE FOR LIBRARIES : AN OBSERVOMETRICS STUDY

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"People are not good at expressing their unhappiness. The best way to listen to the customer is through metrics."
(Chris Hughes)

Abstract

People do feel libraries are amazing places for learning. With constant applications of technologies and various applications many libraries are doing commendable jobs in reaching the users at the right time at the right place with the right information. The article is an observo metrics study about footfall as an indicator derived with an example comparing physical and digital footfall.

Key words : ***Footfall, Physical footfall, Digital Footfall***

1. Introduction :

Day by day libraries are faced with new challenges to get people to use the library and Library services. With constant applications of technologies and various applications many libraries are doing commendable jobs in reaching the users at the right time at the right place with the right information. People do feel libraries are amazing places for learning. However decreasing footfalls at the libraries and the impact there off, do need retrospection. Here in the context of this paper, footfall is collectively used as a measure library utilization in terms of visits, borrowings, downloads and hits to the website.

2. Context :

Libraries once stood as the primary repository of entire information of the institution. Most academic purchases went through the libraries. However the information procurement is now democratized. It is possible that all staff and students can maintain a library as big as the physical library, albeit primarily digital in nature. Students often have material that is now never found in the libraries, but useful for their studies. On one side is an individual who collects and disseminates the material out of pure passion. On the other side, there is an established library that has a building, a set of racks, rooms, digital subscriptions, and dedicated staff and so on. When so big is the establishment of a library, then why is the footfall of the most academic libraries coming down?

The answers can be found to some extent by analyzing the metrics. The factors that cause change in the behavior of the student community need to be measured and analyzed. The metrics that help us quantify the behavioural changes, the metrics that were never measured but now of relevance and significance can shed lights on the trend going on. The measurement and analysis can help libraries to quickly adapt to the changes and there by maintain or increase the footfall.

3. Method of Measure :

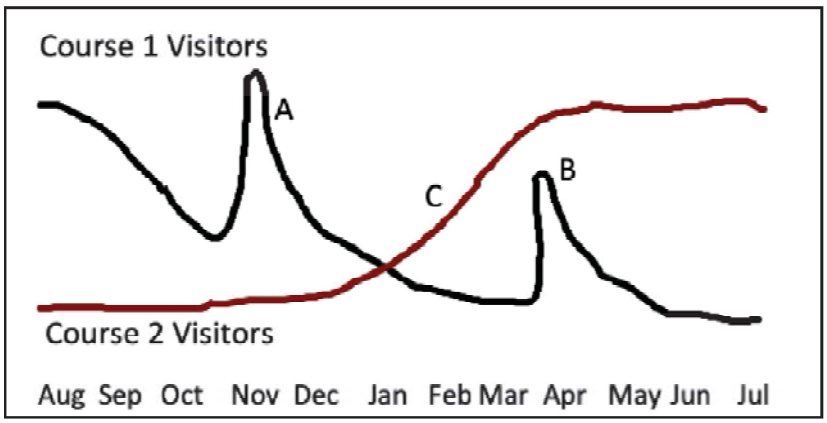
This article assumes that you are already measuring the usage of the library in terms of – visits to the library; number of borrowings, number of downloads and number of visits to the OPAC. It sheds light on the identification of points of significance by plotting the graphs of the footfall and going deeper into the analysis.

3.1. Observe Change points in Library visit by each class or each department or gender etc

Here in the metrics, you measure the physical and digital footfall to the library, plot the graph comparing different course branches or departments



and then try to find points of interest. In the below graph, you see that footfall of Course 2 visitors is going up whereas that of Course 1 is generally going down except for two events. Then you would analyze such points of interest to identify the root causes of the points that are occurring at your library. The following graph illustrates such a phenomenon.



Fig, No. 1 - Visitors to the library. Comparison of two class students.

The analysis yields to below inferences and questions

Seq.	Observation	Inference and Questions to be asked
1	Point A and B where in library footfall suddenly increased and then reduced for students of Course 1	● Was there any initiative like issue of books through book banks taken up? ● · Did any Professor recommend a case study for their assignment?· ● Was there any specific event that was conducted in the library?

2	Significant increase in footfall of Course 2 students in the months of January and March.	● What caused the increase ? How can it be replicated ?
3	Overall reduction in library visitor count for the year for Course 1 students	● What is causing this ? What can be done ?

Additional analysis on the footfall is required to be done by

- Gender
- By class or Course
- By student type

Quite often, when we analyze the numbers at a generic level, it is possible that increase in one segment is offset by decrease in another segment. Therefore it is necessary that we slice and dice data by maximum segments and then analyze more. When we analyze such points of interest, we have an opportunity to come up with reasons that are causing such a point.

3.2 Change points in Library visits by individuals

Here you measure the sudden drop or increase in the number of visits to the library at an individual's level. You take the trend of one year to four years visits average and then see how this has fallen out in the last one-month. When you compare these two data points, you have the opportunity to see significant changes and analyze further.

Table No. 1 : Library usage of individuals – Average monthly logins

Seq	Student Id	In last 12 months	Last One Month	Change
1	21EAC065	24	2 ·	● 92%
2	21EAC012	20	18 ·	● 10%
3	21EAC014	16	18	+ 12.5%
4	21EAC092	2	10	+ 500%
5	21EAC034	10	10	0%

3.3 Questions and Inferences

- If you observe closely, student 21EAC065 used to visit the library almost every working day. i.e. 24 days out of 30 days in a month. However in the last one month, he has visited only twice. What does it communicate? The questions to be asked are - Has he completed his course? What made him come to the library every day earlier? What made him suddenly stop coming ?

- In contrast, the student 21EAC092 who used to visit only twice a month has come to the library 10 times in the last one month. What caused the number of visits to dramatically increase? What is it that he is finding so attractive in the library? Can we make it so attractive to other students as well ?

One can do a generic inference on any change in the foot fall. But will that suffice? Only an in depth analysis on a case by case by case basis or a set of similar cases can help us find reasons for such a change.

4. Comparison between digital footfall and physical footpath

Here you compare digital footfall with the physical footfall and group the students into different buckets. A further analysis of this, gives ability to ask more questions.

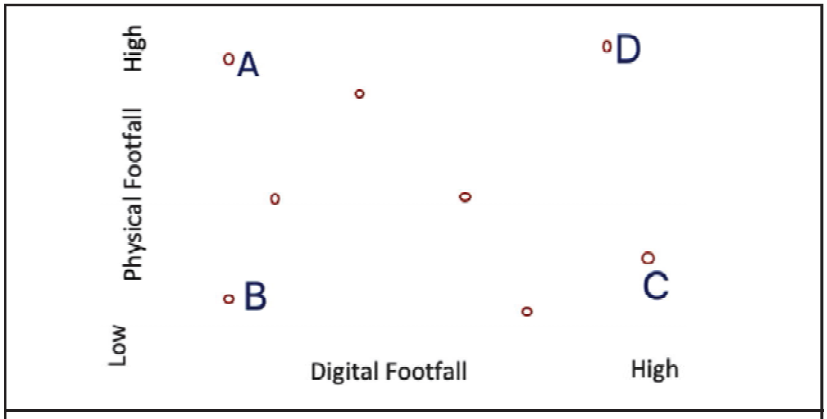


Fig. No. 2 : Physical Library vs. Digital Library Usage Comparison

Seq.	Observation	Inference and Questions to be asked
A	High physical library usage but low digital library usage	● Are our digital subscriptions up to date? ● Are the students not aware of digital facilities offered by the library ? ● Do the students have login ids and passwords ? ● Have we subscribed to the right material ? ● What needs to be done to increase awareness ? ● Are the students to the physical library coming for studies or is there some other underlying reason behind the visits ?
B	Low physical library as well as low digital library usage	● Are the students not finding library services useful at all ? ● Is our attitude attractive enough to encourage students to visit the library ? ● Are the students getting what they want ? ● Are you conducting library satisfaction surveys ? ● Do you see any shift in the trend ?
C	High digital library usage but low physical library usage	● What students are finding very well in digital library ? ● Is the digital library usage really genuine ? ● What is preventing them from visiting physical library ? ● Are there any specific trends that can be seen by class, gender, year of admission etc. ? ● Is the temperature of the room comfortable?
D	High digital library and high physical library usage	● What are the best practices followed by this class of students ? ● What are the things their teachers are doing differently ? ● If the trend more sustained or only temporary innature?

Asking these questions can help you find answers to the compelling questions of falling footfall to the libraries and take necessary action to increase the usage.

5. College average to class average of digital footfall

Here you would draw a comparative graph between overall digital visits to the library subscriptions at the college level and compare it at a class level. When there is a significant change, it means the class is either performing exceedingly well or the Professors are not guiding students to read the library material.

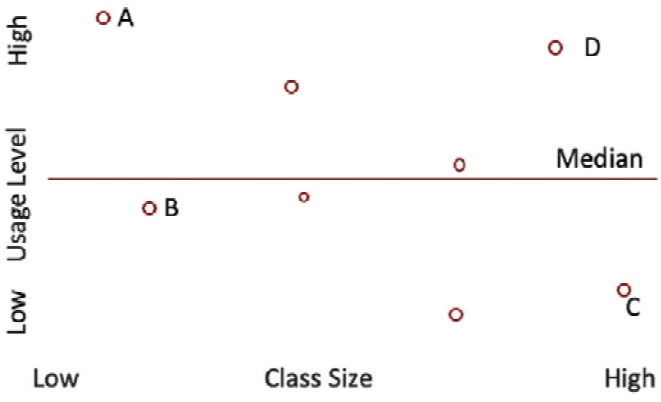


Fig. No. 3 : Library usage of each class in comparison to overall usage

It raises the following questions

Seq.	Observation	Inference and Questions to be asked
A	Small class but high library usage	● What is driving the usage up ?
B	Small class but low library usage	● What is driving the usage low ? ● Can an individualized survey be performed ?
C	Large class but low library usage	● What is driving the usage low ? ● Should we do a sample survey ? ● How was the trend last year ? ● Are there any changes like syllabus change ? ● Do we have relevant material ?
D	Large class withhigh library	● What are the best practices followed by this class of students ? ● What are the things their teachers are doing differently ? ● If the trend more sustained or only temporary in nature ? ● How can this be replicated across all classes ?

5. More data points

As we analyze more and more data points, we come across more and more questions. Only documenting those questions, asking those questions honestly, providing blunt feedback to the concerned people can help bring improvement in the library usage.

Some more additional analysis that would need to be performed can be as below.



1. How many students maintain their own digital library? How many professors maintain their own digital library? How often do they share the material among friends and students? Is there any scope to bring all that material onto the library?

2. How many students came to college on a certain day? How many of them visited the library? What is the percentage attendance among the ones who came to college that day? Are we seeing any trend?

3. How many journals do you subscribe to that have zero hits in the last one month? Is it justified that you subscribe to those journals?

4. How many extra copies of the same book do you have in the library that is covering the space which otherwise could be used to make the reading area much bigger?

5. What is the temperature difference between the physical library and one in the comfortable zone? Is the aeration sufficient? Is the lighting ok?

6. When was the last time you heard the students for their feedback? How often do students not get what they want? Have you been measuring zero result searches on OPAC?

and many more

Conclusion:

Measuring the data is only the beginning and a prerequisite. Real benefits are obtained only when further analysis, research and root cause analysis of the changes are done.

The flow can be summarized as

- Measurement of data points helps us identify patterns and points of change
- The patterns and change points help us ask right questions
- Right questions help us do surveys and get answers

And it is possible that one of those answers contain silver bullets that help us make library service more valuable. The more valuable library services are, the more students we can expect at the library, both physically and digitally.

It all starts with measurement of the footfall and then a candid retrospection of the same.

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