

From the viewpoints of people's demand of information and social activities to discuss the difference between public library and Internet

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Introduction. This paper aims to discuss the difference and the similarities between the public library and the Internet service and discovered some helpful techniques from the Internet, which could be derived to develop the system used in the public library.

Methods. This study applied comparative research method to elicit the difference between the public library and Internet service.

Results. Based on the following viewpoints, the characteristics of people's daily life, people's needs for information and social interaction, and types of resources, this paper elucidated the difference between public libraries and Internet service.

Conclusions. This paper suggests that the public library could examine the information defined by the user and know its application in daily life to recognize its method of application in service designs.

Introduction

The Internet has completely changed the lifestyle of many people. Networking has become so much a part of their daily lives. It has influenced their choices and had unexpectedly affected some sectors in society, like for example, the library. The usage rate of libraries has decreased because of the Internet. According to the study by Griffiths and Brophy (2005), 45% of students use Google as the first portal to search for information, while only 10% use the library's index. The Internet has also contributed to the change in people's reading style and their method for searching information. Searching for information is more fun now, unlike before when one had to search from various references in the library before he could get the information he wanted. Search engines have made it easier to get the information (Search story, 2008).

This paper will discuss the change brought about by the Internet and the reason people use it more than the library. The writer believes that the popularity of the Internet and the search engines comes from the fact that they respond to the people's demand for information, entertainment, and social activities. The Internet understands the people's daily life, demand characteristics, and the characteristics of the information required. It knows when people use the search engines and how they use them and continuously look for ways to further meet the people's need for social activities. Libraries are inadequate in these aspects. However, libraries have unique features, too, which could not possibly be found in search engines. These features should be maintained. The Internet may be of help in finding new ways to improve the library systems.

This paper starts from the demand for information and social activities in people's daily life (people's demand for social activities could be seen from the popularity of social activity websites) and then

discusses the services of public libraries and the Internet, which satisfy the users' demand for information and social activities. It then gives recommendations on how to operate public libraries in the future.

The demand for information and social activities in daily life

1. Characteristics of daily life

In the past, the concept of "daily life" was rarely talked about in the academic circle, especially because of the principle that "science should be rational and should pursue objective facts beyond experiences", thus, it was regarded by most scholars as not worthy of study. It emerged only in the 1930s in the French social society. However, does history not comprise of the lives of groups of people? Because historical records are the results of the choices made by historians (the history's managers with the right to record), so many "ordinary people" are neglected. We can say that the attention paid to "daily life" is the attention paid to these "ordinary people". Moreover, an extraordinary force is brewing under the plain and tedious daily life (Lefebvre, 2002). These extraordinary forces and their presentation are often neglected.

When presenting the concept of "life world", Husserl (1997) also pointed out that "people always live in the life world, which is rarely studied as a general topic. Activities in the relevant working environment become major fields of study. The working world is anyhow in the life world. Likewise, all creative works of people or all theory and discovery of scientists do not only originate from the life world but also apply to it. Hence, people should examine the original façade of the life world and let it become a general topic in science (Husserl, 1997, pp. 1084-9)."

Besides Husserl, Schutz (1973) also thinks that the life world is the region of reality. In this region, people are committed and reality is changed depending on the operation of organic bodies. In the daily life world, people adopt a common-sense attitude and take the world for granted. As a result, they regard everything they have experienced as doubtless, without further notice. Because of this attitude, it becomes real to individuals. Life world is not the world of individuals, but of "inter-subjective". Therefore, individuals could understand the life experiences of the people around them. Moreover, life world explains that the natural attitude expressed in daily life originates from practical motive. Based on my personal past experience, it is the so-called schema, the understanding and interpretation of the world. Moreover, because of this, the life world has a subjective background and is dominated by the interests of individuals (Schutz & Luckmann, 1973).

There is a saying that goes "daily life is everything" (Scheibe, 2001). Life is comprised of daily practice. Such practice includes activities that may or may not be related to work. According to Simmel (1997, p. 109), daily life must be regarded as the collection of interactions, network, and force in social life. Daily life must be regarded as the social totality vividly revealed from the inside. Hence, we can find that the façade of daily life is comprised of a network of people groups, interaction of network members, and accompanying force.

2. Demand for information and social activities in daily life

This paragraph describes the characteristics of information needed by people in daily life. Decisions of general social services are made based on the concept of “homogeneous people” (i.e., common people), and neglect the special or disadvantaged group (such as minorities, new immigrants, or immigrant workers). As to the services made by the early libraries, the distribution of budget for the purchase of books, service target, and method are decided also under such a concept. The Internet is just the opposite. It breaks down the border between classes and demonstrates true democratic features. Hence, the second part in this paragraph illustrates resources related to disadvantaged groups in the Internet. Finally, it discusses the information search techniques of ordinary people. The preceding third paragraph describes the services of public libraries and the Internet, which satisfy the users’ demand for information. It also explains their differences.

(1) Characteristics of information need

As pointed out by Machlup (1962), people need the five types of knowledge in their daily lives: (a). Practical knowledge: helpful to their work, decision making and action, such as professional knowledge, working knowledge, political knowledge, and so on. (b). Knowledge to reflect upon: to meet the curiosity in thinking, such as general studies, philosophy and humanity training, and so on (c). Knowledge to chat and kill time with: to kill the time or provoke mood, such as novels, jokes, games, and so on (d). Belief-type knowledge: related to religious belief; (e). Undesired knowledge: knowledge obtained accidentally out of their own interests.

According to Berger and Luckmann (1990), people’s daily lives are controlled by practical motives. Hence, practical knowledge, such as solving problems, is of great importance to an individual’s knowledge stock. Moreover, people’s role, interest, and habit influence their demand for information. As far as practical knowledge is concerned, or from problems people encounter, most problems will not exert great influence on individuals (such as lethal risks). Information needed by people is quite simple and teaches people what to do. Most of them do not need to be complete, or are theoretical knowledge, such as theories and principles.

Moreover, de Certeau (1984) puts forward the concept of bricolage of daily life, which means that people find ways to get themselves out of the dilemma, like craft-man picking up handy tools to repair something. The use of information is also like this. People use scattered information to get out of the dilemma in daily life. It reflects people’s initiatives. People are good at responding to changes with tools. Information is the tool used by people to respond to changes. Such thoughts smash “rationalization” and concepts in manual books. It is a big blow on libraries, which are accustomed to systemizing their resources of books and to their advocacy that users should use resources skillfully.

The use of library also reflects this feature. For example, in the 1920s and 1930s, 70%~80% of books borrowed from public libraries were novels (Harris, 1975). In the 1990s, 75% of books circulated in most public libraries in USA were still novels (Wiegand, 1999). This fact leads us to think whether the library could satisfy the people’s demand for practical knowledge. Could they only get novels to satisfy their demand for recreation and entertainment? Or should the library really cater to the people’s demand?

(2) Consider the demand of different groups

In recent years, multi-culturalism has been gaining interest. It emphasizes the respect given to differences that result from different identities; disadvantaged groups are also being paid attention to gradually. In reality, disadvantaged groups need more attention because their living conditions are inferior to ordinary people. Subjectivity of some groups is neglected and is attached with “unordinary” labels. For example, Lefebvre (2002) noticed that women are exposed to great pressures in daily life. They are subjective and also victims in daily life. Because of their ambiguity, they are unaware of their position in daily life.

Such concepts are slowly developing in public libraries. Libraries have begun to pay attention to the role of diversified workers, their role in diversified academic environment, and how they could provide ethnic balance and cater to diversified issues in expanding the book collection (Yeh, 2004). However, such efforts are not enough. The network could reflect the democracy and respect the existence and demand of ethnic groups. Websites are also set up for the needs of women and Indian human right. They are very active in the network. The network is also changing their lives (Gautlett, 2000). In this organizational structure of virtual community, the social network has also replaced the traditional social community and has formed a de-centering of place, which attracts different types of people to use this network.

(3) Ordinary people’s information search techniques

Most people, if they are without training, could not understand the organizational method of library resources, such as the classification method or index method. On the contrary, the network’s search engine uses the natural language index method where users could search using only the word they could think of. The information needed in daily life tends to be easy and general, and users do not need exact information. The threshold in searching for data on the network is quite low to most people.

If examined according to the nature of resources, libraries collect mostly books. Books are sorted. The author and writer provide some architecture. A network resource does not have such features. Although the network could enable the user to search existing information rapidly, the user decides the relationship between network resources. If the user cannot use his own system to establish the resource structure and satisfy his demand for information, it is possible that he would plunge blindly into the ocean of networks (Hao, 2005). Therefore, obtaining information from a network needs high-class training and understanding of different languages, a wide range of interests, and use of many words, which imply that the knowledge extent should be adequate (Hao, 2007). In daily life, people do not need a systematized and wide knowledge unless they are learning one subject or are interested in knowledge. Otherwise, they need only short and practical answers to daily problems.

(4) The demand for entertainment and social activities in daily life

People are social animals. Interaction is the basic need of mankind. Mauss (2001) described the mutual benefit of gift exchange in ancient society in his book “Gift”. He used “gift” as the topic to

explain that people form a group with the demand of feeling. Similarly, the greatest contribution of Durkheim (1967) was also to put forward the concept of “mutual benefits”. He had an incisive paper about this concept in a book describing the basic religious forms of mankind. During people’s interactive and mutual-beneficial activities, sharing is an important phenomenon. Besides sharing of materials, people also share information and reach the aim of having social activities by information search. With the emergence of the Web 2.0 concept, the popularity of social activity websites satisfies the primary demand of society. People use the network not only as a tool. We have discovered from previous surveys that some library users are actually using the space in the libraries to meet some friends. It is based on social capacity and satisfies the needs for having social activities.

Based on the survey, more than 114,147,000 users above the age of 15 visited MySpace.com in June 2007, and 52,167,000 users visited Facebook.com (<http://www.comscore.com/press/release.asp?press=1555> search date: 2008/8/25). Half of the users are adults above the age of 35 (<http://www.comscore.com/press/release.asp?press=1019> search date: 2008/8/25). The numbers demonstrate their popularity.

At present, hot social network services could be divided into the following categories (Mr. Wednesday, 2008):

- (1). Social activity network: for example Facebook and LinkedIn;
- (2). Web log: such as Wordpress, Blogger, and Wretch
- (3). Micro web log: such as Twitter and Jaiku
- (4). Social news gathering: such as Digg and FunP,
- (5). Social bookmarks, such as Del.icio.us.

In the future, there will surely be other services. Networks will become more interesting and more network services will incorporate the elements of socialization. As of now, a number of network services are developed with new patterns. Even the Blog of Social Networking Collection & Research appears (<http://socialnetwork.mmdays.com/>) (Mr. Wednesday, 2008).

The community formed by a group of people who interact through social networking is called the network community. Rheingold (2000) has pointed out that the network community is a network of interpersonal relationships formed within a group of people who are engaged in public discussion on the platform of the network. As time passed, these people have established firm relationships with each other. In addition to communication and information sharing, the members of the community can together construct and collect the information, and through continual interaction, establish mutually trusted partner relationships, which is more crucial (Mr. Wednesday, 2008).

Hagal and Armstrong (1997) divide the network community into the following types from the perspective of the user:

- (1) Community of Transaction: it focuses on the transactions, such as <http://tw.bid.yahoo.com/>, a network for barter, and so on. The emergence of online transaction communities has changed the consuming habit of people in daily life a lot. The prevalence of e-business is a good example, including the rising m-commerce.
- (2) Community of Interest: it refers to the community formed by people with common interests and

hobbies, such as caste and tourism community network, computer communication technology forum, and other community networks formed by various resources.

(3) Community of Imagination: a group formed collaboratively through the different roles played by members. Example: community of online game and MUD.

(4) Community of Relationship: a community, the objective of which is to establish relationships, such as dating network, political, and religious network. MSN's and Yahoo's immediate message all belong to this type of community.

Komito (1998) divides the network community into five types:

(1) Ethical community: Members in this community respect the common ethical system and rules in interacting with each other. Komito further explains that this community is not the protogenetic community on the network, but is transferred from offline to online and uses the network as the characteristics of seeking public unity, such as the website of religious groups.

(2) Standard community: Similar to ethical community. It is a combination of common values or connotation system, such as doctors' or women's groups.

(3) Interest community: Members in this community have common interests or shared experiences and love to share information online. They do not have much private interaction among them. An example is the BBS in the past or Discussion Board and blog nowadays.

(4) Proximity community: It is started by several members that build the website. They get some members to join in, who, in turn, get new members. Through this, an interpersonal network is built. An example is the school's class website.

(5) Collection community: It is like the community in a collection society. Members often hunt for resources and obtain immediate payback. Some examples are the BT network resource community and Emule network resource community.

No matter what kind of social community is involved, member interaction helps obtain the information needed. It indicates the importance of people's demand for interaction and information. Google seems to satisfy two demands at the same time. Some people think that Google is a good resource for getting information and finding friends. Some Chinese people describe Google thus: "I see a market and then find its rules to explore the market. My business is growing. I have got all of my resources of friends". (Google, my resource and my friends, 2006). Google does not only help individuals find their life partners (people could find social activity websites and dates, or even find information about their dates through Google), it also completely reveals people's privacy. It plays some functions for social targets in the life or monitoring of staff in the working place (USA—Trend of Danger: Social Popularity "Google", Others' Privacy, 2006). The search engine indeed ensures people's right of obtaining information (Self-search and right to know, 2006).

Differences between public library and Internet service in satisfying the user's demand for information and social activities

Some people think that networking is a part of modern life. It provides super-strong opportunities for knowledge and entertainment. Some think that the success of networking is equal to daily life. The author think public library and the Internet both provide information needed by people. However, they do have some differences:

1. Resource type

The library has been based on rational thinking for quite a long period of time and has somehow neglected the demand for practical information. Most collections which libraries preserve are professional, which are guided by the role of educating people. But, for most people, what they need is practical information which could help them resolve daily life problems or satisfy their curiosity about something. Libraries should be oriented toward serving the elite or public.

Regards of practical information, maybe Internet is a convenient resource channel. The rich information on the Internet results from people's sharing of their daily life experience. Although Internet is a wonderful route to obtain information, we also need to notice that not everything is available on the Internet and another limitation of its distributing information is that not everyone can access to the Internet. For example, the people do not have English skills, computer literacy and information literacy.

2. Demand for information in daily life appears along with the demand for social activities

We have mentioned that the demand for information in daily life appears along with the demand for social activities. To most people, surfing the Internet and searching for data are not purely meant for obtaining information alone but also for entertainment. The network mechanism, such as hyperlinks, often stores up many unexpected happiness and give people the opportunity to experience happiness. Some people love to search for practical information on the network. Some love to enjoy easy moments of wandering around the world while at home. Some citizens use "I search and I have a splendid life" to describe such phenomenon. Network gives people unlimited space for imagination and opportunities for self-demonstration. All people could find splendid information they want and their distance is bridged by the search function of the network. Consequently, their life becomes more splendid and colorful. This is the charm of Internet search (I love search: Happy Search and Enjoy Life, 2006).

3. Understand people's demand in daily life

The success of the Internet is attributed to its understanding of the people's demand in daily life. Even in designing the Web 2.0 webpage, the understanding of the significance of the tag used is emphasized, and the scenario clue resulted from the significance. All users should know this clue in order to communicate (Lin, 2007). In this aspect, it is obvious that libraries could learn the network's sensitiveness to the demands of users.

Libraries have also found that they could learn from the Internet's practice or use Internet features to give way to library functions or improve their user ratio. Here is one example:

As MySpace.com is a network often visited by the teenagers, Denver Public Library makes it like this: focus on the place where the teenagers often visit, how to be involved into their demands of services, prompt them to know and use the library. In this way, it becomes a member of MySpace.com (see http://www.myspace.com/denver_evolver). On this website, they list the information of the top ten

books and provide services for the teenagers, and they realize that through this website, the utilization rate of the library has increased by 41%. Many teenagers say they like to search for the collections of the library and connect to its service via MySpace.com. As mentioned by Gauder (2008), many teenagers have anxiety neurosis against the library. They do not consider the library as a resource and service provider. In his opinion, we should ask ourselves this question "Why not go to the place where the teenagers often visit to tell them what are found in the library and how the library can help them?" This might change their attitudes toward the library and make them realize that the library is a comfortable place. Owing to the popularity of social networking, OCLC WorldCat.org adds Social Functionality (Storey, 2008). Both of these sites are examples of the application of social network to intensify and expand the public service of the library.

The library can also adopt the concept of the Web2.0 through division of work focusing on different kinds of resources to establish the platform for each kind of resource. The role played by the librarian is like that of the administrator of a blog, who actively manages the resource related to the topic. However, he should not only provide the involved web links, but also add values to the resource, like providing related comments or summaries, and to put forward the topic-related subjects in order to attract users who are interested in the topic to take part into the discussion. Through discussion boards, the popularity of a blog can be lifted, and the resource provided can be the reference for the users to state. Thus, perhaps the user who is an expert in this topic is willing to present the related information he has, and even joins in the comment of the resource. The library acts as a platform, and the users are just like the volunteers in the library. They form a group with same interest, collect resources, and make discussions on resource-related topics. This is how virtual communication comes into being. The library indirectly applies the spirit of Web2.0 to carry out the marketing for the library information service, since the information on the blog contains the most precious opinions of readers. However, the library does not need to pay any fees (Yeh, 2008).

Conclusion and recommendation

The development of the Internet transcends the original function of data search. People invent some technology based on their imagination or needs, and find that this certain technology can be used in other applications. Such application is invented or extended because the inventor understands the people's demand in life. This is worthy of consideration by library operators. After all, the library's reputation does not come from itself. Of course, libraries should return to its original function and role in order to break through their operating mode. We need to examine: whether such an orientation should be revised in the information epoch, or else we will go back to what libraries have neglected in the past. As a conclusion, this paper stresses again that the public library should examine the information defined by the user, the application of information in daily life, and its method of application. We believe that many people still love libraries, this ancient and traditional institute in our memories. We do not want to see them fade away. Let us work together and embrace another spring season for libraries.

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Nei-Ching Yeh is an assistant professor of the Department of Information and Communications in Shih-Hsin University. She received her Ph.D. degree in Department of Library and Information Science from National Taiwan University in December 2003. Her research focuses on the issue of user study, especially user's information behavior, and takes qualitative approach to explore user's information practice activities in daily life. Recent years, studies conducted in the field have focused on Taiwanese aboriginals, senior citizens, foreign brides in Taiwan, and homosexuals' information behavior, with social constructive viewpoint on their information behavior. Besides, she is interested in the following research topics, library and information service, information society, and web studies. Her publications include about three books and 40 articles published in national and international forums and in journals, such as Information Research and Information Seeking in Context (ISIC) conference. She also served on the conference program committee and a reviewer for national journal.