Digital Libraries as Boundary Objects Across Social and Information Worlds: A Preliminary Theoretical Framework

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Digital libraries should be well-integrated with the social groups, communities, and worlds that use them within and across their boundaries. This poster presents a preliminary theoretical framework for conceiving of digital libraries as boundary objects (Star & Griesemer, 1989), examining such integration through the twin lenses of Strauss's (1978) social worlds perspective and Burnett and Jaeger's (2008; Jaeger & Burnett, 2010) theory of information worlds.

Boundary object theory indicates digital libraries, as boundary objects, will succeed if they reconcile the meanings and understandings of the multiple communities that use them, allowing users to collaborate, interact, and build a broader community around the digital library. Through the lens of the theory of information worlds, digital libraries should support the emergence of localized and common social norms, social types, information value, and information behaviors that are shared—to varying and overlapping extents—by the different information worlds that use them. Through the lens of the social worlds perspective, digital libraries should act as common sites and technologies for users to engage in information-based activities. Digital libraries, social worlds, and information worlds mutually influence each other, evolving and changing throughout the lifecycles of each.

Continuing research will further develop and test this framework; synthesize it with previous work based around communities of practice and social network analysis (Worrall, 2010); and apply it to a full examination of the social, community, and collaborative contexts of digital libraries as boundary objects within and across social worlds, information worlds, and communities.

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