Introduction

- Digital libraries are inherently social organizations and environments that must support and build the communities that use them through both content and services.
- However, many digital libraries were and are not designed or developed with social contexts in mind, and often do not support these well.
- They should improve this support of social interactions to integrate better with, cross the boundaries of, and build their user communities.
- This poster reports on ongoing research on this important problem:
  - Development and piloting of a survey instrument measuring and evaluating the support for community-building, as judged by users, in digital libraries.
  - LibraryThing (librarything.com) was used as a test case.

Research Question

What level of support for community-building does LibraryThing provide, as judged by the users and communities that use its content and services?

Theoretical Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interaction frequency</th>
<th>Discussion frequency</th>
<th>Closeness of ties</th>
<th>Perception of support</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Method(s) of interaction</td>
<td>How relationships started</td>
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Communities of Practice

(Lave & Wenger, Brown & Duguid)
- Groups who share a particular practice, profession, or task, as well as related concerns.
- Networks of practice: Broader groups or social networks that still have a practice in common, but work less closely together across organizational boundaries.

Social Network Analysis

(Garton, Haythornthwaite, & Wellman)
- Describes network of social relations, passage of information through them.
- Of particular note are measures of range and density.
- Rarely used in digital library research, but high face validity here.

Boundary Objects

(Star)
- Cross between multiple worlds and adapt to many of them to support translation between communities.
- Digital libraries should act as successful boundary objects to build the social worlds and communities that use them.

Pilot Findings

- Low support for community-building provided:
  - Range and density of social networks was low.
  - Low frequency of interaction and discussion.
  - Lack of close ties, relationships via LibraryThing.
  - Low usage of most methods of interaction.
  - Perceptions more reasonable, but not strong.
- Parallels literature on communities, interaction:
  - Close ties
  - Tie strength relies not just on depth, but also time in relationship (Marsden & Campbell, 1984).
  - In one case, closeness due to time, not frequency.
  - Backed up by other responses, literature.
- Community-building was observed, but without support from LibraryThing.
  - Failure by LibraryThing to act as a successful boundary object, integrate users’ social networks.

Further Research

- Full mixed-method case study of LibraryThing:
  - Larger sample.
  - Broader population.
  - Open-ended questions.
- Exploration of motivations for use/non-use of social features of LibraryThing.
- Multiple case studies comparing community-building across similar digital libraries, other social systems.

Method

Developed survey
- Six dimensions from concepts, theory.

Identified pilot population
- LIS doctoral students at research university.

Solicited volunteers
- Eight student volunteers via e-mail list.

Sent out online survey
- Five anonymous responses returned.

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