The Roles of Digital Libraries as Boundary Objects Within and Across Social and Information Worlds

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Purpose

- Improve understanding of the social contexts of digital libraries and their roles in users’ information behavior
- Digital libraries must support and construct the communities they serve, akin to physical library environments serving as inherently social spaces
- Many have contributed to this problem, but further theoretical, practical research is necessary to assess digital libraries’ roles in, support for existing and emerging communities and collaborations

RQs

What role(s) do LibraryThing and Goodreads play, as boundary objects, in the translation and coherence between the existing social and information worlds they are used within, and the coherence and convergence of new social and information worlds around their use?

Methods

1. Qualitative content analysis
   - Sequential, mixed methods design
   - Two case studies
   - LibraryThing
     - Digital libraries and Web sites for readers and lovers of books, related media
   - Goodreads
     - Digital library for readers and lovers of books, related media

2. Online survey
   - 519 messages
   - 5 LT groups
   - 4 GR groups
   - 163 users from the 9 groups
   - Likert scaled questions

3. Semi-structured qualitative interviews
   - At least 15 users
   - Critical incidents

Findings

1. CONTENT ANALYSIS
   - Three roles played in cohering and converging communities

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Values</th>
<th>LT Social Ties</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>STRONG</td>
<td>Values cohere/converge, but occasional divergences take place, are accepted</td>
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<tr>
<td>MODERATE</td>
<td>Social typing, off-topic discussions common</td>
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<tr>
<td>WEAK</td>
<td>Less tied to DL as venue for info behavior &amp; activities</td>
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Implications

- Digital library designs, services should support establishing structure, sharing common values, forming social ties
  - Should help increase coherence / convergence of information value judgments, social typing
  - Consider other contextual factors such as age, Internet use, and use of other sites and services
- The digital library does not exist in a vacuum, and must consider the context of users’ social information behavior and the coherence and convergence of communities
- Further analysis of survey and data from ongoing interviews will confirm and extend these implications for digital library designs and services; users’ information behavior; and research in digital libraries, social informatics, and online communities.

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