

Digital Information Behavior and its Influence on Public Library Engagement

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Abstract: *Digital transformation has significantly changed the ways individuals seek, evaluate, access, share, and use information. Public libraries, traditionally associated with print collections and physical spaces, are increasingly required to respond to changing information behavior shaped by smartphones, search engines, social media, online databases, e-books, digital repositories, and other networked information services. Digital information behavior refers to the processes through which individuals recognize information needs, formulate search strategies, select information sources, evaluate information quality, and use digital information for educational, professional, social, and personal purposes..*

Keywords: Digital Information Behavior, Public Libraries, Library Engagement, Information Access, Online Resources

I. INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of digital technologies has transformed the information environment in which individuals live, study, work, and communicate. People can now access enormous quantities of information through smartphones, search engines, social networking platforms, online databases, video-sharing platforms, electronic books, institutional repositories, and other digital resources. These developments have changed not only the availability of information but also the ways in which individuals identify information needs, search for information, judge its credibility, and apply the information obtained.

Public libraries operate within this changing environment and must increasingly understand digital information behavior if they are to remain relevant to their communities. Traditionally, library engagement was often associated with physical visits, borrowing printed books, reading newspapers, participating in library programmes, or consulting librarians. However, contemporary engagement can also occur through online catalogues, digital collections, electronic resources, virtual reference services, library websites, social media, online learning resources, and digital literacy programmes.

Digital information behavior encompasses the activities individuals undertake when interacting with information in digital environments. It includes recognizing an information need, selecting a source, constructing search queries, browsing results, evaluating information, saving or sharing information, and using the information to achieve a particular objective. These behaviors are influenced by age, education, technological familiarity, socioeconomic conditions, information literacy, access to digital devices, internet connectivity, and previous experiences with information systems. Consequently, different groups may demonstrate substantially different patterns of digital information seeking. For public libraries, understanding these patterns is important because users increasingly expect information services to be immediate, convenient, personalized, and accessible across multiple devices.

The growth of digital information does not necessarily make public libraries less important. Instead, it changes the nature of their role. Public libraries can provide trusted information resources, assistance with information evaluation, access to digital technologies, support for digitally excluded groups, and opportunities for lifelong learning. Libraries

can also help users move beyond simple information retrieval toward effective information evaluation and responsible information use. Therefore, digital information behavior should be understood not simply as a challenge to traditional library use but as an opportunity for public libraries to redesign services around contemporary community needs.

CONCEPT OF DIGITAL INFORMATION BEHAVIOR

Digital information behavior refers broadly to the ways people interact with information through digital technologies. It begins with an information need and continues through information searching, selection, evaluation, acquisition, use, and sometimes sharing. In a public library context, users may search an online catalogue for books, access digital newspapers, use electronic databases, download e-books, search the internet for employment information, participate in online educational programmes, or seek assistance from librarians through digital channels. These activities demonstrate that library engagement can occur without a physical visit.

One important characteristic of digital information behavior is the preference for convenience and speed. Users frequently begin their searches with general search engines because they provide immediate access to large quantities of information. This behavior can create both opportunities and challenges for public libraries. On one hand, libraries can connect their resources to users' existing digital practices. On the other hand, users may not recognize the value of specialized library databases or professionally curated resources if general search engines appear easier to use. Public libraries therefore need to communicate their distinctive value in terms of reliability, accessibility, expertise, and community support.

CHANGING PATTERNS OF INFORMATION SEEKING

Digital environments have encouraged users to adopt more flexible and nonlinear approaches to information seeking. Instead of following a systematic search process, many users begin with broad keywords, examine the first few results, follow hyperlinks, use suggested searches, and move rapidly between different sources. Search behavior may also be influenced by social media recommendations, online reviews, video content, and algorithmically generated results.

These developments have implications for public libraries. Users may visit a library website only when they specifically require a library resource, while routine information needs may be satisfied through commercial or social platforms. Libraries must therefore ensure that their digital services are easy to discover and navigate. Search interfaces, mobile accessibility, clear categorization, personalized recommendations, and responsive assistance can influence whether digital users remain engaged with library services.

DIGITAL INFORMATION BEHAVIOR AND LIBRARY ENGAGEMENT

Library engagement refers to the extent and manner in which individuals interact with library resources, services, staff, spaces, and programmes. In the digital age, engagement should not be measured exclusively through physical attendance or book circulation. Online catalogue searches, downloads, database use, website visits, virtual consultations, participation in online programmes, and interactions through social media can also represent meaningful forms of engagement.

The relationship between digital information behavior and library engagement can be understood as reciprocal. Users' digital habits influence how libraries design services, while library services can influence users' information practices. When libraries provide resources that correspond with users' digital expectations, engagement may increase. Conversely, complicated websites, limited digital collections, poor search functions, restricted access, or inadequate technical support may discourage engagement. Thus, digital usability has become an important dimension of public library service quality.

INFORMATION LITERACY AND EVALUATION OF DIGITAL INFORMATION

The abundance of digital information creates an important role for public libraries in developing information literacy. Users must increasingly distinguish between reliable and unreliable information, identify sources, compare evidence,

recognize misleading content, and understand how digital platforms influence information exposure. Simply providing access to information is therefore insufficient.

Public librarians can support communities by offering information-literacy workshops, digital-skills training, source-evaluation guidance, research assistance, and individual consultations. Such services can strengthen users' ability to make informed judgments about online information. Libraries can also guide users toward authoritative databases, government information, educational resources, open-access materials, and other credible sources.

DIGITAL DIVIDE AND UNEQUAL LIBRARY ENGAGEMENT

Digital information behavior is strongly influenced by unequal access to technology. Not all community members have reliable internet connectivity, suitable devices, sufficient digital skills, or the confidence required to use online information services. Economic conditions, geographical location, disability, age, education, and technological experience may contribute to these differences.

Public libraries can help address these inequalities by providing computers, internet access, Wi-Fi, digital training, accessible technologies, and assistance from trained staff. In this respect, public libraries can function as community-based digital inclusion institutions. Their contribution extends beyond information provision to enabling individuals to participate more effectively in digital society.

ROLE OF MOBILE TECHNOLOGY

Smartphones have become an important gateway to digital information. Users increasingly expect services to function effectively on mobile devices. Public libraries can respond by developing mobile-friendly websites, responsive catalogues, digital lending systems, electronic resources, mobile notifications, and online reference services.

Mobile access may also attract users who rarely visit physical library buildings. For students, workers, older adults, and other community members with limited time, remote access can make library services more convenient. Consequently, mobile technology can extend the geographical and temporal boundaries of public library engagement.

DIGITAL RESOURCES AND USER PREFERENCES

The availability of e-books, e-journals, online newspapers, databases, audiobooks, educational resources, and digital archives has expanded the range of materials that public libraries can provide. Users may value these resources because they can be accessed from home, workplaces, educational institutions, or other locations.

However, preferences for digital and physical resources differ among individuals. Some users may prefer electronic resources because of portability and convenience, while others may continue to value printed books and physical library environments. Public libraries therefore need to maintain a balanced service model rather than assuming that digital resources will completely replace traditional collections.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Social media provides public libraries with additional channels for communicating with users. Libraries can use social platforms to announce programmes, promote new resources, share educational information, highlight community activities, and communicate with users. Such interaction can make libraries more visible within users' everyday digital environments.

Social media engagement can also help libraries understand community interests. Comments, questions, reactions, and shared content can provide useful indications of what users value. Nevertheless, libraries need to maintain professional standards and ensure that digital communication supports reliable information and inclusive community participation.

BARRIERS TO DIGITAL LIBRARY ENGAGEMENT

Several barriers may prevent individuals from using public library digital services. These include limited awareness of available resources, inadequate digital skills, poor internet connectivity, lack of suitable devices, complicated

interfaces, privacy concerns, authentication difficulties, language barriers, and perceptions that library resources are less convenient than commercial information services.

Another important barrier is the gap between the services libraries provide and the services users actually need. A technically advanced digital library may still have limited engagement if users cannot easily identify its benefits. Understanding community information behavior is therefore essential for designing relevant digital services.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INFORMATION BEHAVIOR AND PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICES

The relationship can be summarized as a progression from information need → digital search behavior → source selection → information evaluation → information use → library interaction. At each stage, public libraries can provide support. Libraries can help users identify appropriate sources, formulate effective searches, evaluate information quality, access specialized resources, and apply information responsibly.

This perspective suggests that public libraries should move from a collection-centred approach toward a user-centred information-service model. Rather than simply asking what resources a library owns, service planning should consider how community members actually search for and use information.

S. No.	Dimension of Digital Information Behavior	Common User Behavior	Influence on Public Library Engagement	Library Response
1	Information Need Recognition	Users identify educational, professional, social, or personal information needs	Determines whether users seek library support	Need-based services and community surveys
2	Search Behavior	Users rely on search engines, websites, databases, and social media	May increase or decrease library resource use	Improved discovery systems
3	Source Selection	Users select sources based on convenience, relevance, authority, or popularity	Influences trust in library resources	Curated and authoritative collections
4	Information Evaluation	Users assess credibility and usefulness of digital information	Creates demand for information-literacy support	Digital literacy programmes
5	Mobile Information Use	Users search through smartphones and tablets	Encourages remote library engagement	Mobile-friendly services
6	Digital Resource Use	Users access e-books, databases, journals, and online newspapers	Expands engagement beyond physical visits	Electronic collections
7	Social Media Use	Users discover and share information through social platforms	Creates new communication channels	Social media outreach

8	Information Sharing	Users forward, post, save, or discuss information	Can increase community interaction	Digital community programmes
9	Digital Literacy	Users differ in technical and information skills	Influences ability to use library services	Training and user support
10	Digital Access	Users have unequal access to devices and internet	Creates differences in library participation	Computers, Wi-Fi, and inclusive access
11	Privacy Awareness	Users may be concerned about data collection and online privacy	Can affect willingness to use digital services	Privacy-conscious systems
12	Convenience Preference	Users prefer fast and easy information access	Can shift use away from traditional library services	Simple interfaces and remote access
13	Virtual Assistance	Users seek help through digital channels	Creates opportunities for remote engagement	Online reference services
14	Lifelong Learning	Users use digital information for continuous learning	Supports sustained library engagement	Online courses and learning resources
15	Community Participation	Users interact with library programmes and online communities	Strengthens social engagement with libraries	Participatory digital services

DISCUSSION

The reviewed dimensions demonstrate that digital information behavior has a complex relationship with public library engagement. Digital technologies can reduce the necessity of physical library visits for some information needs, but they simultaneously create new possibilities for remote engagement. The key issue is not whether digital information will replace public libraries, but whether libraries can adapt their services to users' changing information practices.

Public libraries can remain relevant by integrating digital and traditional services. For example, a user may discover a library resource through a search engine, access an electronic database from home, consult a librarian through an online service, and later visit the physical library for additional assistance. This demonstrates that digital and physical engagement can complement one another rather than existing as mutually exclusive forms of library use.

The findings also highlight the importance of user-centred service design. Libraries should regularly investigate how different community groups search for, evaluate, and use information. Such knowledge can guide decisions about digital collections, website design, mobile services, information-literacy programmes, and community outreach. Special attention should be given to users who experience technological, economic, linguistic, or accessibility barriers.

Public libraries should conduct regular assessments of community digital information behavior to understand changing information needs. Digital collections should be developed according to demonstrated community requirements, while physical collections should continue to support users who prefer traditional formats. Library websites and catalogues should be simple, mobile-friendly, accessible, and easy to search. Information-literacy programmes should focus not only on technical skills but also on source evaluation, privacy awareness, responsible information use, and critical thinking. Libraries should expand virtual reference and remote-access services so that users can obtain assistance

without always visiting library buildings. Partnerships with educational institutions, community organizations, and local authorities can further support digital inclusion. Public libraries should also evaluate user feedback regularly and use it to improve digital services.

II. CONCLUSION

Digital information behavior has become an important factor shaping contemporary public library engagement. Users increasingly expect information to be accessible quickly, conveniently, remotely, and across multiple digital platforms. These expectations can challenge traditional library service models, but they also provide opportunities for public libraries to expand their reach and strengthen their community role. Effective digital engagement requires libraries to understand how users search for information, choose sources, evaluate credibility, use digital resources, and communicate online. Public libraries can respond through accessible digital collections, mobile-friendly services, virtual reference assistance, information-literacy education, digital inclusion initiatives, and user-centred service design. The continuing relevance of public libraries therefore depends not simply on increasing the amount of digital content they provide, but on connecting that content and related services with the actual information behaviors of diverse community members. By adapting to changing digital practices while maintaining their traditional commitments to equitable access, trusted information, lifelong learning, and community development, public libraries can continue to serve as important information institutions in the digital age.

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