In their own words: Why do patrons use libraries less or more in the digital age? Implications for future library services

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Future of Libraries: What will content and services be in 2030?
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Outline

- A brief background
- This study
- Findings
- Implications for future library services
Background

An increasingly digital information environment
Libraries stay relevant in an information-rich society

• Recent surveys show
  • broad support for public libraries (Becker et al., 2010; Rainie, 2013),
  • changed dynamics within the library user population and the ways of how they use libraries (Zickuhr, Rainie, Purcell, & Madden, 2013)
    • 25% of respondents indicated a decreased use
    • 16% reported an increased use during the same period (Zickuhr, Rainie, Purcell, & Madden, 2013)
**Gap and this study**

- Lack of research on current public library users, whether and how the user base is changing, and what the reasons are behind these changes.
- This study aims to contribute to an understanding of why public library use habits are changing.
- Data utilized by the study are from a national survey by the Pew Research Center.
  - the open-ended responses from participants regarding the reasons behind their changing library use have never been analysed and reported.
- This study qualitatively examines the direct responses in an attempt to understand library use changes from the users’ perspectives, in their own words.
Sample and data

- A national survey about library services conducted by the Pew Research Center between October 15 and November 10, 2012

- The data set was made available for other scholars to conduct secondary analysis at its website (http://www.pewInternet.org/datasets/).

- The sample included
  - diverse demographic, social, and economic backgrounds from distributed geographical locations and community types in the United States;
  - people’s recent public library use
  - 639 responses to two open-ended questions regarding users’ reasons for the changes (increase or decrease) in public library use
    - 291 on reasons for decreased use of library services
    - 348 on reasons for increased use of library services
Data processing and analysis

- The source survey data in SPSS format were downloaded.
- The data from the two open-ended questions were imported into *SPSS Text Analytics for Surveys*, v4.0, for qualitative analysis.
- All responses were coded and categorized by two authors independently, with assistance of the software’s automated categorization process to uncover themes and patterns.
- Differences were discussed and resolved through three rounds of independent work and subsequent review sessions until both authors agreed on all categorizations.
What do users say about their reasons for a decrease in library use? (1)

Word cloud of responses reasons for decrease in library use
What do users say about their reasons for a decrease in library use? (2)

“Basically [with] new technology, I have everything I need at home. I can access information right from my computer.”

“I have gotten older and there doesn’t seem to be that much use anymore,”

“Becoming an over road truck driver not at home as much.”

Those in the “books” category indicated that they were reading less, had adopted e-books, or preferred to buy books now.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme category</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Internet/technology</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>34.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Lifestyle</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Books</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>11.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. School</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Access</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Less need</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Child</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Time</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Resource/service</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Gadget</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Work</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Computer</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What do users say about their reasons for an increase in library use? (1)
What do users say about their reasons for an increase in library use? (2)

Users cited children or grandchildren as the primary reason for their increased use of the library.

“I like the selection of music and consumer reports to get updates,”

Interestingly, access was another reason cited for both increased and decreased use of public libraries.

The public library’s free services were what kept them returning to the library and making use of its services.

### Theme categories of reasons for increased library use (n = 348)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme category</th>
<th>Number of responses</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Child/family member</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>24.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Resource/service</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>19.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Books</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>18.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Reading</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. School</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Research</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Access</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Borrow</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Lifestyle</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Internet</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Cost/economic factor</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Computer/technology</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Learning</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Time</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Jobs</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusion and Implications (1)

- Library use is clearly more than just the borrowing of books and other resources

- Instead, public libraries appear to serve as:
  - agents of socialization,
  - places of learning,
  - sources for entertainment,
  - driving forces to enhance childhood reading habits, and
  - community centers for the use of technology and the Internet.
Conclusion and Implications (2)

• Public library use depends on user needs, their life situations and circumstances.

• Changes in public library uses depend on complex and dynamic user needs, their life situations and circumstances that can’t be simply measured and known by demographics or socio-economic status.

• Public libraries definitely have their place in their users’ lives, and help increase the quality of life of their users.
Conclusion and Implications (3)

- Public libraries must keep up with changing technologies if they want to keep up with users’ changing lifestyles.

- The categories of use related to the Internet, technology, computer, and gadgets attest to this conclusion.

- Serve underserved populations
Thanks!

Questions?