

Chapter 8

The Social Library: Integrating Social Networking into Library Reference Services

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ABSTRACT

This chapter discusses how to transform libraries into a social library by integrating social networking tools into library reference services. Social networking/media tools enable Reference Librarians to communicate, network, and share documents with many library clients regardless of location, and at little or no expense. Reference Librarians can build relationships and keep up to date with library clients. Social networking media, however, open up new forms of collaboration that are not so bounded by time, place, and access to funding. This chapter looks at the following: needs and purpose of reference services, social responsibility of library, social networking in library reference services, challenges and prospects of integrating social networking into reference services, social media platforms, and ways to improve the use of social networking in library reference services in the future.

INTRODUCTION

The library can be considered as a service institution and its services fall into two main categories: information-in-anticipation and information-on-demand. Information-in-anticipation relates to the current awareness/selective dissemination of information service. The information-on-demand

relates to the past information sought by a user and for which there is the provision of reference and information service known as ‘retrospective searching’. The provision of information-in-anticipation aims to keep the users well-informed and up-to-date in their fields of specializations and related subjects. The service-in-anticipation can be divided into three broad categories: technical

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-7415-8.ch008

services, public services and public relation and extension services. Technical services are vital for all other services offered by a library. A library would find it impossible to provide public service for their clients without the work performed in “the backroom” by technical staff. The Card Catalogue or in a modern library, online public access catalogue (OPAC) is the result of the library technical services. Other technical work includes classification, preparation of shelf list, preparation of various other kinds of guides and so on.

In the time past, the reference service is differentiated from that of information service, but, in reality, there is no distinction between the two. The two services cannot be differentiated based on whether the librarian is referring the user to the sources of information or he is directly providing the information to the user. Even, if he is referring the user to the sources of information, this may serve the function of information service for a particular user. The emergence of web has further changed the scenario entirely; now the reference and information service go side by side and they can no longer be differentiated as it was done earlier. However, attempt to differentiate the two would only result into treating the information service as an extended form of reference service. Moreover, information service is a relatively new term for reference service.

Characteristically, information service denotes the ultimate existence of the reference work to all kinds of answers to questions which are based on all sources and which requires the service of the library staff. However, the library services can be differentiated into service-on-demand and service-in-anticipation based on the user’s approach. In case of service-on-demand, the staff waits for the users to approach and make a request, thereafter; the users get the answers to their specific inquiries exactly as they want it, exhaustively and comprehensively. In the reference and information service-in-anticipation, the staff goes to the user and the user waits for the staff/document/information. The information provided is of general type mostly referred to the document rather than providing exact information.

Historically, reference services concept has become common among American librarians since 1876 (Tajer, 2009). Reference services theories appeared in 20th Century and there are three known types of reference services theories presented by James Wyer In 1930. These are Conservative Theory, Liberal Theory and Moderate Theory. Conservative theory persists on education and guidance instead of boundless help. This theory states that reference work is limited to use the ready reference sources to help the users. Liberal theory focuses on the maximum help and according to this theory, reference librarians must apply any approach to retrieve the information that users need. In fact reference librarians carry out the whole job and reference work takes a long time in many cases. The average of conservative theory and liberal theory is moderate theory which most of reference librarians prefer. In fact this theory results in high costs but the reference librarians can serve more readers (Moradi, 1973 cited by Tajer, 2009). Besides Wyer, other librarianship scientists had presented various reference services theories but, most of them tried to identify the reference services in libraries.

According to Ranganathan quoted by Barman (2011), reference service is personal service to each reader in helping him to find the document answering his interest at the moment when he needs it, exhaustively and expeditiously. It is the process of establishing the right contact between the right reader and right book at the right time and in the right personal way. Reference work is that part of library administration which deals with the assistance given to readers in their use of the resources of the library. This definition is too narrow because in recent time, the reference librarian assists the readers to use resources outside his/her own library. Reference service is also the phase of library work which is directly concerned with assistance to readers in securing information and using the resources of the library in their studies and researches.

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