

Exploration of Theoretical Research and Practical Approaches in Library Promotion Work

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Abstract: The digital wave has reshaped the landscape of information dissemination. Libraries, as core public cultural service providers, now face multiple challenges including information overload, fragmented user attention, and the expansion of service scenarios. Consequently, the strategic value of outreach work has become increasingly prominent. This paper focuses on library outreach as its subject of study. Employing methodologies of literature review, case study, and theoretical analysis, it systematically outlines the core concepts and theoretical foundations of library outreach. By examining typical domestic and international cases to analyze common issues, the paper constructs a comprehensive framework of "theoretical foundation, practical optimization, innovative implementation." It proposes optimization pathways such as targeted content creation, the development of an Omnimedia matrix, and the integrated application of new technologies. The aim is to refine the relevant theoretical framework and provide both theoretical reference and practical guidance for enhancing library service efficacy, expanding cultural influence, and supporting nationwide reading promotion initiatives.

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

The digital age has fundamentally reshaped the patterns of information production, dissemination, and consumption, driving libraries to transition from traditional document-lending institutions into comprehensive platforms for public cultural services. Their service offerings have expanded into diverse areas, including digital resources, cultural events, academic exchanges, and social education, with service models increasingly characterized by the integration of online and offline channels. However, the information explosion on the internet has plunged users into a predicament of information filtering, making attention a scarce resource. Consequently, high-quality library resources and services often struggle to reach their intended audiences. Factors such as information overload and media fragmentation impose higher demands on the precision, innovation, and systematic nature of library outreach efforts^[1].

On a theoretical level, research on library outreach within the domestic context has predominantly

focused on summarizing practical experiences. There remains a relative weakness in constructing a robust theoretical framework and a notable insufficiency in interdisciplinary analysis. This study aims to integrate theories from multiple disciplines to clearly define the core conceptualization and operational mechanisms of library outreach. By doing so, it seeks to enrich the theoretical foundation of library publicity studies and highlight research achievements in the promotion of public cultural services.

On a practical level, effective outreach serves as a crucial bridge connecting libraries with their users. It enhances resource utilization, fosters a positive institutional brand image, and facilitates a shift in service philosophy from a "passive" to a "proactive" mode. The optimized pathways proposed in this paper, which synthesize technological innovations and user needs, are designed for strong operational applicability. They are intended to provide actionable guidance for outreach initiatives across libraries at various levels, thereby contributing to the enhanced efficacy of public cultural services.

1.2. Current Research Status

Research on library outreach internationally commenced earlier and has evolved into a more mature and multifaceted system of inquiry. Theoretically, scholars often draw upon theories from communication studies and marketing. Examples include applying Lasswell's 5W model to analyze service communication and construct a complete transmission chain or utilizing services marketing theory to emphasize user needs as the core for optimizing strategies. On the practical front, research focuses on the application of new media technologies, summarizing effective approaches such as interactive outreach and targeted messaging. There is a strong emphasis on the quantitative evaluation of outreach effectiveness through multi-dimensional indicator systems, alongside an examination of the synergistic relationship between outreach activities and brand building^[2].

Research within the Chinese context began in the 1990s and gained momentum alongside the push for digital transformation. It has primarily focused on practical case studies, leading to the identification of models like online-offline integration. Theoretically, it has largely involved introducing and examining the applicability of foreign theories, yet several notable shortcomings persist: an underdeveloped theoretical framework and a lack of localized models; practical studies often confined to well-known libraries with insufficient extraction of generalizable patterns; and weak research on the application of new technologies and the quantitative assessment of their effectiveness.

In summary, while existing research from both domestic and international sources provides valuable insights, it is characterized by issues such as theoretical underdevelopment, fragmented practical analyses, and inadequate integration of new technologies. Building upon this foundation, this paper integrates existing theories with analyses of typical cases to construct a systematic theoretical framework. It seeks to explore optimized pathways for library outreach that are well-suited to the digital era, thereby contributing to the enrichment of theoretical discourse in this field.

1.3. Research Content

The core objectives of this study are to construct a robust theoretical framework for library outreach, clarifying its theoretical underpinnings and operational mechanisms; to analyze existing challenges through practical case studies; and to propose optimized pathways that are both theoretically grounded and practically actionable, thereby providing support for enhancing the quality of outreach efforts and amplifying service impact.

The research primarily encompasses three key areas. First, theoretical framework development, which involves defining the conceptual dimensions and core elements of library outreach, integrating multidisciplinary theories to establish an analytical framework, and elucidating the connection

between theory and practice. Second, analysis of current practices, which entails examining the outreach strategies and outcomes of representative libraries both domestically and internationally as case studies, to identify common issues and their underlying causes. Third, exploration of optimization pathways, which combines the theoretical framework, identified problems, and emerging technology trends to propose strategies such as targeted content creation and design corresponding implementation plans.

2. Theoretical Foundations of Library Outreach

2.1. Concept and Conceptual Dimensions of Library Outreach

Defining the concept of library outreach requires consideration of its public cultural service attributes and the characteristics of communication in the digital era. This paper posits that library outreach is a systematic communication activity undertaken by the library as the primary actor. Its core objective is to disseminate information about its resources, services, and cultural values. By designing targeted content based on audience needs and media characteristics, and utilizing multiple channels for information delivery, it guides users to recognize and utilize library resources and services, thereby shaping the library's brand image and expanding its cultural influence.

Its conceptual dimensions encompass four key characteristics: First, public service orientation, which is guided by the public interest, adheres to non-profit and inclusive principles, and aims to promote equitable access to public cultural services. Second, systematicity, involving a coordinated process that covers all stages from audience targeting and content design to dissemination and evaluation. Third, integration, demonstrated through the blending of online and offline channels, multiple media forms, and multidisciplinary theories, leveraging the strengths of both traditional and new media models. Fourth, targeted Ness, which involves precise messaging based on the differing needs of various audience segments, utilizing user profiling for accurate reach.

The core elements consist of four dimensions: The outreach agent is the library, whose mission and resources determine the direction of outreach. The target audience, comprising both existing and potential users, serves as the central guide for outreach efforts. The outreach content is designed around resources, services, and cultural values, balancing utility with appeal. The communication channels encompass both traditional and new media, requiring coordinated synergy across multiple platforms.

2.2. Relevant Theoretical Underpinnings

Library outreach requires support from multidisciplinary theories. This paper integrates theories from communication studies, library and information science, and others to construct a systematic analytical framework, providing a basis for practical optimization.

Communication theories serve as the core foundation, with Lasswell's 5W Model and the Uses and Gratifications Theory being particularly relevant. The 5W model breaks down communication into five components: communicator, message, channel, receiver, and effect. Correspondingly, library outreach must clarify its institutional positioning, design precise content, select appropriate channels, accurately define target groups, and establish a scientific evaluation system. This model aids in identifying key nodes and achieving synergistic optimization. The Uses and Gratifications Theory emphasize audience agency, requiring outreach to move beyond one-way messaging. It advocates for content design rooted in user needs—for instance, promoting academic resources to university students, or offering guidance on physical material loans and digital device use for senior citizens—thereby enhancing relevance.

The User-Centered Service Theory from library and information science provides a value

orientation. Its core principle of "user-centeredness" aligns with the goals of outreach, as outreach is essentially an extension of user services. This principle should permeate outreach efforts, simplifying messaging, optimizing online channel processes, and utilizing user profiles to move beyond a one-size-fits-all approach towards segmented communication.

Services Marketing and Brand Image Theories offer supplementary perspectives. The 4C Marketing Theory (Customer, Cost, Convenience, Communication) directs focus to user needs, reducing access costs, ensuring convenience, and strengthening interactive communication. Brand Image Theory emphasizes the consistent communication of cultural values through sustained and unified outreach to shape a distinctive brand and enhance user identification. The integration of these multidisciplinary theories provides comprehensive support for library outreach, highlighting its interdisciplinary nature^[3].

3. Analysis of Current Practices in Library Outreach

3.1. Case Studies of Representative Models

To comprehensively understand the current state of practice in library outreach, this study selects two representative cases: the National Library of China and The New York Public Library. It conducts an in-depth analysis from the dimensions of outreach strategy, implementation pathways, and effectiveness, aiming to extract transferable insights. Domestically, the National Library of China serves as a benchmark. Leveraging its abundant resources and established brand, it has constructed a diversified outreach system. In terms of content, it focuses on core resources such as ancient texts and digital collections, cultural activities like demonstrations of ancient book restoration and distinguished lectures, and distinctive services including online borrowing and remote consultations. This creates outreach content that balances academic rigor with public accessibility, catering to diverse user groups. Regarding channels, it has established a "traditional and new media" omnichannel matrix. Traditional channels, such as physical bulletin boards and on-site exhibitions, enhance contextual reach, while various new media platforms are strategically utilized: the WeChat Official Account publishes in-depth articles, short-video platforms attract followers with engaging content, and Weibo focuses on user interaction, forming a synergistic communication landscape. In terms of innovation, emphasis is placed on developing cultural IPs and applying new technologies. Initiatives like the "Revitalizing Ancient Books" series and cross-sector collaborations have significantly boosted brand recognition and resource utilization. Its online platforms have amassed over ten million followers, effectively promoting high-quality cultural resources^{[4][5]}.

Internationally, The New York Public Library (NYPL) represents a mature outreach model centered on a "user-oriented" approach. Its content is designed in layers, delivering differentiated activity and service promotions targeted at specific demographics such as youth, adults, and seniors, ensuring precise reach. On channels, it deeply engages with social media, utilizing platforms like Facebook and Twitter for information dissemination and interaction, while also partnering with local media outlets, schools, and communities to broaden its impact. For evaluation, NYPL employs a comprehensive quantitative assessment system, using metrics like follower growth, event participation rates, and circulation data to measure effectiveness and dynamically adjust strategies. Serving as a model for urban public cultural service, its practices in segmented outreach and outcome evaluation hold significant reference value^{[6][7]}.

In summary, key common insights from both libraries are threefold: First, outreach content must be anchored to core resources and user needs, balancing diversity with specificity. Second, communication channels should promote deep integration of online and offline efforts, building a coordinated omnichannel matrix. Third, innovation and cross-sector collaboration should be strengthened, leveraging new technologies and resource partnerships to amplify the impact of

outreach.

3.2. Summary of Existing Challenges

Based on the analysis of representative cases and a review of current research, while library outreach efforts in China have achieved certain results, several common issues persist across the sector. These challenges are concentrated in four key dimensions: outreach content, communication channels, effective evaluation, and technology application.

Homogenized and Insufficiently Targeted Outreach Content. The content promoted by most libraries tends to focus heavily on routine borrowing services and basic activities, with insufficient exploration of unique resources and specialized services. This results in a lack of distinctiveness and competitive advantage. Furthermore, outreach often fails to utilize precise research, defaulting to a "one-size-fits-all" approach due to an absence of segmented content design. Consequently, content frequently misaligns with specific user needs. The formats employed are also relatively monotonous, predominantly relying on text and static images, while lacking engaging, lightweight interactive content such as short videos or HTML5 microsites, which diminishes overall appeal.

Inadequate Channel Integration and Weak Synergistic Effects. Many libraries remain overly dependent on traditional channels, underutilizing new media or managing social media accounts in a sporadic manner, thus failing to leverage their full communication potential. A disconnect often exists between online and offline channels, with no coordinated mechanisms in place, leading to suboptimal outreach outcomes. Additionally, identical content is frequently replicated across different new media platforms without adaptation to each platform's specific features and user expectations, resulting in low communication efficiency.

Incomplete Evaluation Systems and Lack of Feedback Mechanisms. Assessment of outreach effectiveness is often superficial, relying primarily on surface-level metrics (e.g., page views) while lacking in-depth analysis of core indicators such as user awareness and conversion rates. Robust channels for gathering user feedback are generally absent, making it difficult to obtain timely input and potentially leading to a cycle of misguided outreach initiatives. Moreover, evaluation findings are seldom systematically linked to strategy refinement or resource allocation, undermining their practical utility for guiding improvements.

Lagging Adoption of New Technologies and Insufficient Innovative Capacity. The application of emerging technologies, such as VR/AR and big data analytics, remains in its nascent stages for most libraries, with smaller institutions scarcely engaging in such practices. When technologies are adopted, their use often lacks innovation, typically involving simple imitation without personalized scenario design tailored to the library's context. This gap is exacerbated by a shortage of specialized outreach personnel and a general insufficiency in the comprehensive skill sets of existing staff, which hinders the deep integration and effective application of new technologies.

4. Optimizing the Promotional Efforts of Libraries

4.1. Strategy Design under Theoretical Guidance

Building upon the theoretical framework and identified challenges discussed earlier, this section proposes optimized strategies for library outreach, guided by theory, across three core dimensions: content, channels, and audience. These strategies aim to facilitate a systematic enhancement of outreach practices.

Guided by the Uses and Gratifications Theory, promote segmented content production and develop distinctive intellectual property (IP). This approach begins with a foundation of nuanced audience understanding, leveraging empirical data to construct detailed user profiles. Content strategy should

then be tailored to key demographic segments, such as youth, adults, seniors, and professional researchers with a focus on delivering distinct value propositions aligned with their theorized gratifications, ranging from interactive engagement and practical utility to accessibility and scholarly depth. Concurrently, libraries should deeply explore their unique resources to create IP. For instance, libraries rich in ancient texts could develop a "Revitalizing Ancient Books" IP, while academic libraries might build an "Academic Empowerment" IP, thereby breaking free from homogeneous content. Diversifying content formats to include short videos, H5 microsites, and other lightweight, visual forms will enhance the appeal of outreach materials.

Relying on Lasswell's 5W Model, construct an integrated omnichannel matrix to strengthen synergistic effects. This involves the strategic integration of online and offline channels based on the principle of aligning channel properties with content attributes and intended audience reach. A key consideration is the strategic adaptation of content format and messaging to fit the unique affordances and user expectations of each platform, thereby optimizing dissemination efficiency and engagement. Simultaneously, physical spaces should be leveraged to create meaningful in-person experiences. Crucially, mechanisms for fostering synergy between online and offline touchpoints must be established to facilitate integrated event promotion, cross-channel guidance, and resource sharing, thereby amplifying the collective impact.

Directed by User-Centered Service Theory and Brand Image Theory, enhance audience interaction and cultivate a distinctive brand identity. It is imperative to transition from a unidirectional dissemination model towards fostering participatory and collaborative engagement.

Libraries can implement a variety of interactive initiatives to enhance community engagement. These initiatives can include launching user-generated content (UGC) campaigns, hosting online quizzes with prizes, and establishing open feedback channels. Subsequent strategies should be dynamically adjusted based on user responses, which helps increase engagement and foster long-term loyalty. Furthermore, library administrators must cultivate a cohesive brand identity by ensuring strategic alignment in all outreach content, visual design, and linguistic style. This process involves developing unified visual markers (e.g., logos) and slogans that consistently communicate core brand values, thereby reinforcing brand recognition and institutional trust.

4.2. Recommendations for Practical Innovation

Integrating trends in digital technology with the evolving needs of library services, this paper proposes four key recommendations for practical innovation. These are designed to facilitate the implementation of the optimization strategies and to enhance both the innovativeness and operational feasibility of library outreach efforts.

Deepen the Application of New Technologies to Create Immersive Experiences. Libraries should explore personalized applications of VR/AR, big data, and artificial intelligence, tailored to their specific resource profiles and institutional missions. Potential applications include VR virtual tours, AR-enhanced interactive book explorations, big data-driven personalized content, and intelligent customer service or voice-guided navigation. To address the common challenge of limited technical resources in small and medium-sized libraries, forming consortia and sharing resources can reduce the costs associated with adopting new technologies, enabling collaborative development.

Strategic thematic initiatives should be planned to establish a long-term mechanism. Leveraging key occasions such as "Library Publicity Month" and "National Reading Day," integrated online and offline promotional activities should be organized to generate concentrated publicity impact. Simultaneously, publicity efforts should be embedded into routine services, exemplified by the regular rollout of monthly reading themes and quarterly featured exhibitions, thereby avoiding one-off campaign-style promotions. Furthermore, specialized activities tailored for distinct groups,

including adolescents, senior citizens, and individuals with disabilities, should be implemented to broaden inclusive coverage.

Refining the Evaluation System and Establishing a Dynamic Adjustment Mechanism. A comprehensive quantitative and qualitative evaluation system should be established to assess the effectiveness of outreach initiatives. Quantitative metrics include reach, conversion, and retention rates, while qualitative indicators encompass user satisfaction, brand identity, and social reputation. The evaluation process must be standardized, leveraging big data analytics and user surveys for data collection. Evaluation results should be systematically linked to strategy optimization, resource allocation, and staff performance reviews, forming a self-improving cycle that ensures continuous enhancement of outreach efforts.

Strengthening Professional Capacity Building and Talent Development. It is essential to build a multidisciplinary team proficient in library science, communication studies, new media operations, and technological applications. Existing staff should receive targeted training through specialized workshops and courses. Additionally, professional expertise may be supplemented through strategic recruitment and part-time collaborations. To foster innovation and motivation, an incentive mechanism should be implemented to reward creative outreach formats and enhance staff engagement.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Research Findings

This study focuses on the publicity practices of libraries, employing theoretical analysis, case studies, and problem diagnosis to construct a theoretical framework and propose targeted optimization pathways. The core findings are as follows.

First, library publicity is a communication activity characterized by public welfare nature, systematicity, integration, and specificity. Its core components include stakeholders, audiences, content, and channels, which should be underpinned by Lasswell's 5W model, Uses and Gratifications Theory, and User Service Theory, while integrating service marketing and brand image theories to form an interdisciplinary framework. Second, although exemplary cases and practical experiences exist in China, library publicity still faces challenges such as content homogenization, insufficient channel integration, imperfect evaluation systems, and lagging adoption of new technologies, which constrain the enhancement of service efficacy. Third, optimization requires combining theory and practice, centering on differentiated content strategies, omni-channel dissemination, and enhanced audience interaction as core strategies. These should be supported by complementary measures including technology integration, thematic activities, evaluation mechanisms, and talent development to achieve systematic upgrading.

This research enriches the theoretical foundation of library publicity and offers actionable pathways tailored to libraries at various levels, ultimately contributing to the improvement of public cultural service effectiveness.

5.2. Future Research Directions

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the selection of cases primarily focuses on large, well-known domestic and international libraries, paying insufficient attention to small and medium-sized libraries, specialized libraries, and academic libraries. This limits the generalizability of the findings, which requires further validation. Second, the research on publicity effectiveness assessment remains at the stage of constructing an indicator system; it lacks empirical analysis using quantitative models and robust data support. Third, the discussion concerning the application of new technologies is relatively macro-level, failing to delve into

implementation details or cost-control analyses.

Based on these limitations, future research should explore the following three aspects: expanding the scope of case studies to include various types and scales of libraries for empirical research, thereby improving the generalizability of conclusions; deepening assessment research by constructing quantitative models and conducting empirical validation; and focusing on the application of new technologies, analyzing specific scenarios, implementation difficulties, and cost control to promote deeper integration. Furthermore, future studies could explore the synergistic mechanisms between library publicity and nationwide reading initiatives as well as social cultural construction, thereby expanding the research's depth and implications.

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