

Exploring the Innovation of Social Media Service Model in China's University Libraries

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ABSTRACT

Social media has become widely used in people's learning and daily lives in today's society. Social media applications in university libraries have become a significant research hotspot in library science. The service model of Chinese university libraries has undergone four stages of change. With today's internet connectivity promotion, it is worthwhile to explore how Chinese university libraries can develop innovative new service models through social media. This paper employs the methods of literature survey, network survey, and comparative data analysis to select 11 university libraries in northern China as the research subjects. Through the analysis of the functional data from their WeChat official account, we find that the development of social media in northern university libraries in China is uneven, and innovative functions and personalized services are lacking. It is recommended that Chinese university libraries prioritize innovation in information service functions, focus on user needs, expand functional innovation platforms, and explore the development of new information service models.

INTRODUCTION

Information Service Model

The service model refers to service methods with specific paradigms (Fei et al., 2022). Specifically, the information service model proactively provides users with the information and services they may need based on their specific information needs or through analysis of their personality and usage habits. Today, information services utilize modern information technology to serve society, making more timely, effective, and comprehensive use of information to enhance the living standards of human society. The range of information services is comprehensive, encompassing library and archives, intelligence collection, retrieval and collation, and consulting services, all of which are considered information services. However, with the growth of information technology and the increasing popularity of social networking, the information

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service model is undergoing a significant transformation. The literature review will provide an in-depth introduction to the proposal and transformation of information service models.

University Libraries

A university library is a library or library system established and managed by a university to collect and organize a wide range of literature that meets the needs of its students and staff for teaching and research purposes. The university library is the heart of the university, not only because its architectural image is a vital landmark of the university but also because it provides a constant flow of information and knowledge to its users (Tian Lei, 2022). With the times' development, the functions of university libraries have also changed. Based on information preservation and services, they gradually assume responsibilities such as academic exchange, knowledge processing, cultural education, and information literacy education (Chen Jin & Guo Jing, 2018). University classroom education has limitations that cannot be fully compensated for, and university libraries have unique, extended educational functions compared to classroom education, effectively serving as a second classroom. At the same time, they can also provide scientific research services with their information, personnel, and tools (Zhao Dazhi, 2013).

Social Media

A virtual community is created by people who share similar interests and activities, providing various services for users to connect and communicate, typically based on the Internet, such as email, real-time messaging services, file sharing, and discussion groups. It includes hardware, software, services, and website applications, covering three levels of social networking services: software, websites. This reveals that social media includes, but is not limited to, WeChat, Weibo, Tencent and TikTok (Liu et al., 2019). Library social media is the product of extensive connections between Internet applications and library services. Khan and Bhatti (2021) proposed that library social media, as part of promoting libraries, can attract potential users and provide additional services for libraries and their readers. Huang Sujun (2016) proposed that by integrating with social media, libraries can strengthen their knowledge service functions, provide convenience for serving users, and adapt to user reading scenarios; Wang et al. (2016) believe that the integration of libraries and social media has innovated new situations and constructed a new service format of social libraries.

Innovation

Innovation combines technology and economics to introduce a new combination of production factors into the production system, including a range of activities from generating new ideas to product design, pilot production, production, marketing and marketability (Management Science & Technology Terminology, 2016). The innovation mentioned in this study refers to library information services changing the traditional model and maximizing the use of social media applications in China's university libraries through functional innovation and model innovation, which will help develop library services, enable library marketing, and clarify the opportunities and challenges faced (Li Mingrui, 2019).

From the definition and analysis of the above concepts, we can see that the survival and development of university libraries are closely linked to the needs and behaviour of their users. Users are facing significant new changes in their needs and behaviors as they face the digital online environment, social media, mobile reading and other products of the times, which will also introduce new directions to the university library information service model (Wang Rui, 2014). In China, government financial security, adequate staffing and the public interest nature are the strengths of university libraries, but this has led to insufficient awareness of proactive service change, poor social media operations and ineffective functional innovation (Wang Qiong & Chen Wei, 2019).

This paper aims to address a research gap by conducting a literature analysis that examines how university libraries can adapt to evolving social changes and technological advancements. It examines how

libraries can effectively integrate social media, innovate their services, and chart future directions for growth and development. Social media has the potential to enhance student accessibility and engagement with library resources. Vovk and Malesa (2024) support this view, noting that social media can raise awareness within university communities, enrich the educational environment, improve information literacy, and meet users' information needs—especially in China. Given that WeChat is the most widely used social media platform in China, this study focuses on its role within university settings through both literature and network analysis. This article makes a significant contribution to the field of information science by providing insights into how university libraries can navigate digital transformation. It also highlights how higher education institutions are embracing modern teaching and learning approaches through platforms like WeChat.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Evolution of the Library Information Service Model

In China, the ancient collection was the genesis of the modern library. The philosophy of ancient collections prior to the twentieth century emphasized the overuse of collections (Feng Aiguo & Cui Xiaojian, 2008). They have preserved a large number of early Chinese documentary resources, making an indelible contribution to the transmission of Chinese civilization. Over time, different models of information services have emerged at various stages of library development. Initially, it was an offline, closed-service model based on lending paper resources, where librarians provided literature services such as consultation, retrieval, or borrowing to users in a passive service mode (Li Mingrui, 2019). In the second phase, the open-shelf lending-based self-selection service model, libraries break through the closure of documentary resources. Users can access the collection, engage with it, and select literature. The third stage is the network service model, which began with the widespread use of computers, transforming information service methods from manual to computer-based networks and contributing to the large-scale expansion of information resources from paper documents to electronic ones. The fourth stage is the interactive, personalized service model represented using tools such as social media. Social media platforms like WeChat, Weibo, and Facebook represent a new trend in advancing information services.

The development of networked social media in China

Social media has become as essential to people's daily lives as food and clothing. The changes in internet information technology have revolutionized the traditional concept of social interaction, leading to a significant shift in the scale and form of internet-based social interaction. The development of networked social media in China began in May 1994 with the creation of the Shuguang BBS forum by the Institute of Computing Technology of the Chinese Academy of Sciences. Since then, it has experienced the alternate and multiple co-existence of forums, review sites, QQ, blogs, online videos, SNS, Q&A encyclopedias, microblogs, WeChat, Tik Tok and other forms (Xiao Lin, Xu Shenghua, Wang Qi, 2016).

Since the emergence of Weibo in China in May 2007, it has undergone three phases: entry, plateau, and development. The full-scale development period began in August 2009 with the launch of Sina Weibo, which became a prominent representative of microblogging in China due to its rapid growth. It has led to the emergence of various microblogging sites, and even state-owned telecom operators and TV stations have ventured into the microblogging business. It can be said that after 2009, China entered a period of microblogging glory, and today, microblogs, represented by Sina Weibo, occupy a significant place in social media. This was followed by the rise of WeChat after 2011, which began to lead the way in social media and gradually formed a "hypermedia" ecosystem. With its strong financial strength and robust technical support, Tencent has achieved WeChat's "big media" feature and "super media" ecosystem. The advantages of WeChat are evident: compared to SMS, WeChat utilizes network traffic instead of charging separately per message; compared to QQ, WeChat offers voice functionality and is more flexible; compared to Weibo, WeChat enables instant communication. As a social media tool, WeChat supports users in generating personalized and original content and text, images, video, and language. More importantly, it is

a true 'big media', with its free means of communication, utilizing various communication methods, including mass communication, group communication, and organizational communication. WeChat is gradually evolving towards commercialization, with the addition of WeChat Pay, WeChat Shopping and the docking of open platforms with merchants, making WeChat far more than a single medium in itself, making it look more like a mash-up of social media, social networking services and mobile business applications, highlighting its attributes and advantages as a platform, and achieving dominance in the domestic social sector, forming a "hypermedia" ecosystem.

Weibo and WeChat represent and epitomize social media in China. The current development is that social media is co-existing in multiple forms and becoming increasingly complex. Large Chinese companies continue exploring new models for connecting users with commercialization (Xuan Wen, 2021). An increasing number of social media applications have been integrated into the lives of ordinary people, and awareness of social media is growing. Driven by the massive market in China, social media is developing with both foreign technology and its characteristics. China's unique volume of online users and consumption characteristics provide a highly suitable venue for the development of social media while also allowing for a broader research space for the integration and innovation of social media in China.

The state of social media integration research in libraries

Integrating social media and university libraries has also garnered increasing attention from scholars worldwide.

Foreign libraries

Statistics on current papers in the field of library marketing services abroad indicate that the most frequent keyword is social media (Du Jie & Wu Ming, 2019). The IFLA Library Marketing Award has the highest volume of awards for utilizing new technology, primarily through various social media platforms for user services (Du Jie & Wu Ming, 2018). University libraries serve the most dynamic university students and the most innovative teaching and research staff, and there is a greater need to use social media to deliver relevant services. Scholars have researched social media use in university libraries, and representative research results include Womack (2017), who analyzed the various forms of university library extension services and noted that social media is a new approach to marketing libraries. Palmer (2014) researched the use of Facebook and Twitter for services in Australian university libraries. Webb et al. (2015) assessed the use of social media platforms in an Australian university through a questionnaire survey of social media users. Kong et al. (2016) found, through an analysis of social media logs from Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, that a gap exists in the use of social media in libraries compared to other commercial organizations. They proposed strategies for utilizing social media in libraries.

Domestic libraries

Shen Yanshu (2018) notes that libraries in a comprehensive media environment should develop media attention models tailored to different user groups and foster effective communication with users. Ding Jingda and Li Hui (2016) conducted a comprehensive review of the current situation of social media applications in domestic libraries through in-depth research, proposing countermeasures to optimize social media applications in libraries in five key aspects, including strengthening interactive communication. Ge Mengrui et al. (2016) investigated the use of social media in US state libraries and suggested implications for our libraries. Liu Jing et al. (2019) studied the use of social media in libraries abroad, noting that the primary topics of media posting content include marketing and promotion, user interaction, and provision of digital resources. Wang Qiong et al. (2019) point out that social libraries are a new way of organizing and disseminating knowledge and will facilitate the sharing of library information resources. Liang Shijin (2017) conducted a SWOT analysis of mobile social media applications in university libraries and proposed strategies for university libraries to utilize mobile social media to enhance their services. Both domestic

and international attention has been paid to the use of social media in university libraries. Hence, integrating university libraries and social media is an inevitable trend.

Social Media among Universities' Libraries Worldwide: Comparison Trends

University libraries around the world have also begun to leverage social media usage to enhance library services and support user engagement. Effective social media strategies should be implemented to enhance the use of library services today. Poplavskyi (2024) states that social media can enhance user engagement and foster a stronger relationship between libraries and their users, thereby creating a more inclusive and supportive environment. Various universities have adopted social media platforms to modernize their library services. In Australia, the University of Melbourne's library has engaged with and shared information with users through social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter (Nguyen, 2023). The role of university libraries in delivering information to universities is significantly important in encouraging the dissemination of accurate information. In the Philippines, university libraries, such as the Polytechnic University of the Philippines, also utilize social media to effectively market library resources and services, thereby enhancing user satisfaction (Altarejos, Pareja, and Reye, 2019).

In Germany, university libraries utilize social media in various ways. For example, the Freiburg University Library and the Technical Information Library (TIB) utilize social media for user interaction and content diversity; however, the University Library in Dresden faces difficulties due to limited resources (Athukorala, 2024). Some universities face shortages in library services due to a lack of financial resources. Similar cases in Nigeria occur when universities' libraries utilize social media platforms such as Facebook, X, YouTube, and Flickr for the effective implementation of library services but face difficulties due to inadequate power and supply, security concerns, privacy issues, and high internet costs (Makeri et al., 2024). Meanwhile, in Kuwait, the university library has a positive perception of the use of social media in marketing strategies; however, its management is suboptimal (AlAwadhi & Al-Daihani, 2019). Meanwhile, Silva (2024) notes that university libraries in India, particularly those in Sri Lanka, have utilized Facebook, a widely recognized social media platform, to disseminate information about libraries, services, programs, and institutions. Through the comparison of trends in social media usage within university libraries, it is evident that social media platforms are powerful tools for enhancing library services, promoting user engagement, marketing library resources, and facilitating information sharing within the institution.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper employs a combination of survey methods, including a literature review, online survey, and comparative data analysis, to gather more comprehensive information about social media usage among university communities (comprising staff, lecturers, and students) in Chinese university libraries.

Literature survey method

A comprehensive analysis of the literature reveals that the principal keywords underpinning this study are *university libraries*, *social media*, and *service models*. To investigate the scholarly discourse surrounding these concepts, the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), a leading and authoritative academic database in China, was employed as the primary research tool. An initial advanced search was conducted using the combined keywords "university libraries" and "social media." The findings indicate that the majority of relevant publications are concentrated between 2013 and 2022, suggesting a growing scholarly focus on integrating digital communication platforms within the context of academic library services during this period. A subsequent advanced search was performed using the keywords "university libraries" and "service models." This search yielded a substantially larger corpus of over 1,700 articles, encompassing a broad temporal range and reflecting diverse research trajectories. The volume and breadth of this literature underscore the dynamic and multifaceted nature of service model development within university libraries. By systematically reviewing and synthesizing these scholarly contributions, this

study traces the evolution of service models in academic libraries and highlights the transformative impact of social media since 2013. As noted by Mo Yanghai (2020), social media has increasingly influenced the functional value and strategic orientation of university library service models, marking a significant shift in how these institutions engage with their academic communities.

Network survey method

The process for conducting a social media network survey of university libraries, with an explicit focus on the WeChat platform, involves several systematic steps. First, the "Search Official Account" function within the WeChat mobile application is utilized. Researchers input either the full name or the commonly used abbreviation of each sample university, followed by the term "library," to locate the corresponding institutional account. Once the search results are generated, it is then determined whether the university library in question has established an official WeChat account. For libraries that maintain a verified WeChat account, researchers can follow it by selecting the "Follow Official Account" option within the WeChat app. Following this, a detailed extraction and analysis of relevant account information is conducted. This includes examining authentication status, the structure and organization of the account's content (i.e., column settings), the thematic focus and frequency of article publications, and other related elements. By analyzing the historical posts and content published by these library accounts, the study can assess the current state of content development and communication strategies employed by university libraries through the WeChat platform. This methodological approach facilitates a comprehensive understanding of how university libraries utilize social media, particularly WeChat, as a tool for outreach, service delivery, and information dissemination within academic communities.

Sample Selection and Biases

This article presents a comprehensive overview of the literature and network-based surveys conducted among university communities in China, specifically utilizing the authoritative China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) literature information database. The study closely examines the role of WeChat public accounts operated by university communities, focusing on how these platforms interact with literature information databases. Through this analysis, the researcher aims to explore innovative strategies that university libraries can adopt in response to evolving societal dynamics and rapid technological advancements. In particular, the article examines how libraries can effectively utilize social media platforms to enhance their services, expand their reach, and redefine their institutional roles. The ultimate goal is to identify future pathways for the sustainable development and modernization of university libraries. The findings and conclusions are drawn from statistical data extracted directly from the CNKI database, ensuring the research remains objective and free from bias.

Data comparison analysis method

Data analysis refers to the use of appropriate statistical analysis methods to analyze a large amount of collected data, summarize, understand, and interpret them in order to maximize the development of data functions and utilize the data effectively (Tao Wan, 2017). The comparative analysis of data during the research process aims to extract useful information and form conclusions by conducting detailed research and summarizing data from selected sample libraries.

We use Excel spreadsheet tools to create, edit, and analyze data collected through online surveys. By analyzing the data from the research projects concerned, such as the opening of the WeChat official account, the number of information service projects, the number of original articles, and other relevant data, we identify common regularities and new findings.

INVESTIGATION AND ANALYSIS

China's university library users are very active users of mobile web technology. *The Q1 2022 Mobile Internet Industry Data Research Report*, released in April 2022, showed that the number of apps installed per mobile internet user in China reached 66, up 4.76% year-over-year. Additionally, the number of apps installed per user aged 25 and below, including university students, reached 77, up 6.94% year-over-year.

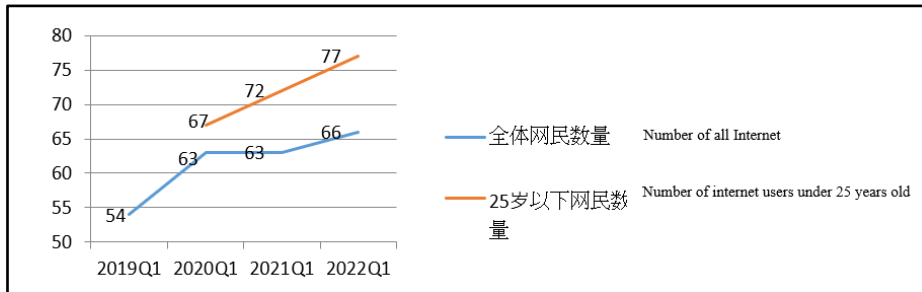


Figure 1. Number of APPs installed per mobile phone for Chinese mobile internet users, 2019-2021

Considering the actual situation faced by China's university libraries, mobile network technology products such as APPs and social media are penetrating all aspects of university teaching and research in a "pervasive" and "omnipotent" manner and have entirely changed the behaviour, lifestyle, communication, organization and information dissemination mode of university teachers and students, becoming the driving force for university libraries to innovate in the new era.



Figure 2. Tsinghua University Library's WeChat official account

In Chinese geography, the line between the Qinling and Huaihe rivers is generally used as the boundary between the north and the south. The libraries of 11 "double class" universities, named after provinces in northern China, were selected for this study. Some studies have shown (Ge Qingqing, 2020) that among

the social media platforms used by university libraries in China, WeChat is the most active and influential. According to the 2016 China University Campus Media Development Report (2017), over 90% of universities have established official WeChat accounts. The use of university WeChat official accounts has surpassed the use of social media platforms, including websites, microblogs, and forums. It has become the most active and influential media platform on university campuses. Therefore, this paper will utilize WeChat as a public platform for social media research.

Firstly, a web survey was conducted to identify and verify whether 11 university libraries had launched WeChat public websites. The second step used data statistics to count the number of services, the number of original articles, and the number of tweets sent within one month for libraries that had launched WeChat public websites as of July 15, 2022. The third step uses the comparative analysis method to compare the information service functions of the WeChat public websites of 11 university libraries and analyze the shortcomings and innovation tendencies of the social media functions of university libraries.

Table 1. Data Table of WeChat Public Numbers of Some Double-Class Universities in Northern China

No.	School Name	City	Whether to open a WeChat public number	Services Quantity	Original Article Quantity	No. of tweets in 1 month
1	Peking University	Bei Jing	√	10	329	8
2	Jilin University	Chang Chun	√	8	16	6
3	Liaoning University	Shen Yang	√	12	-	0
4	Inner Mongolia University	Hohhot	√	5	122	33
5	Xinjiang University	Urumqi	√	12	26	12
6	Qinghai University	Xin Ning	√	1	23	3
7	Ningxia University	Yin Chuan	√	3	31	9
8	Shanxi University	Tai Yuan	√	10	63	8
9	Henan University	Kai Feng	√	13	57	4
10	Tianjin University	Tian Jin	√	11	162	25
11	Shandong University	Ji Nan	√	13	43	22

STUDY FINDINGS

The information security perspective developed in this article highlights issues related to corporate information sources, the needs of information users, and the corporate guidelines that permeate the entire life of the organization. The variables involved in creating safe behaviour for the information user, as well as information security from the perspective of human resource management, were briefly described. Thus, it was concluded that the importance of education and organizational learning in information security issues is fundamental. While information technology departments drive many information security initiatives, the

real reasons for the failures continue to pervade the entire organization. People are present everywhere, whether as users or developers of information systems, and it is up to them to be aware of and adhere to organizational policies and guidelines designed to maintain security. It is up to the organization and its management body to make such policies and guidelines known and to value their adoption.

Such dissemination occurs within and outside the organization, as other business partner companies and their employees have access to confidential information from third parties. It was concluded that the “people” element is a critical variable in information security management in organizations. Information policies should be accessible to employees and enforceable. Regarding technology, investment continuity is valid, but it must be balanced with the development of informal controls (involving people) and formal controls (involving policies and processes) for effective information security management.

Launch of WeChat public website

The validation results suggest that all 11 university libraries studied have launched WeChat public websites. This demonstrates that China’s university libraries have recognized the importance of WeChat in their information services. They are trying to integrate social media into their information services, transforming the traditional and outdated service model and staying current with the latest trends in information service development. Whether it is active innovation or passive trend-following, it is evident that social media, represented by the WeChat official account, is comprehensively influencing the service mode of university libraries, laying the foundation for further innovation.

Number of information service projects

According to the statistics, the number of university libraries offering ten or more services on WeChat public websites has reached 7. The highest number was in the libraries of Henan University and Shandong University, while the lowest number was in the library of Qinghai University, with only one item and no further breakdown available. The number of information services represents the type and breadth of information services that libraries can provide. There are still variations between libraries. From this, it can be observed that the development of social media in university libraries is uneven, and innovation in information services is only the beginning, without forming a mature model or achieving a prosperous scene of simultaneous development. There is still much work to be done in innovating information service models.

No. of original articles

An original article is an initial creative text of 300 Chinese characters published on the WeChat public platform, which will be accompanied by the original logo after the initial creator application is approved. The number of original articles reflects WeChat's ability to innovate information content. Three universities have more than 100 original articles: Peking University, Tianjin University, and Inner Mongolia University. Peking University has the highest number, with 329 articles, while Liaoning University has the lowest number, with no original articles detected. The statistical data shows significant differences in the number of libraries in the 11 universities. The widespread lack of high-quality original articles indicates that innovation in information services requires more excellent personnel, funding, and technological investment. Innovation requires the combined action of broader factors.

No. of tweets in 1 month

The number of tweets represents the activity level of the WeChat public website. The statistics show that three universities had more than 20 tweets in one month, and seven universities had fewer than ten tweets. The highest number is Inner Mongolia University, and the lowest is Liaoning University, which has not had any new tweets for over two (2) months. The low number of tweets in one month may be related to the successive entry of schools into the summer holidays.

Information Services Functional Content

First, the essential functions account for many of the functional settings of university libraries' WeChat public websites, with few innovative functions and serious functional homogenization. The development and launch of personalized services were disappointing, with few notable features and highlights in the developed projects. As a result, users were mainly dissatisfied with the functional innovation of the library's WeChat public website (Chen Liyao, 2021). Secondly, the interactivity of social media is not fully utilized, and the effectiveness of interaction between libraries and users, as well as among library users, is low (Zhang Liming, 2020). Once again, university libraries are working in isolation, with insufficient awareness of cooperation and innovation and little integration and linkage of services.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The paradigm shift in information services requires functional innovations.

In the Digital era, social media is now widely used by many university students and faculty members. Social media, represented by WeChat, has driven changes to the traditional service model of libraries. Each university library's WeChat public account requires functional innovation to meet users' needs for obtaining, disseminating, and interacting with information, which is crucial for the survival and development of university libraries in the future.

User-centric and interactive services

Expand the forms of interaction with users, develop new interactive features and motivate them to interact. Many university libraries are experimenting with this. For example, Jilin University and Shanxi University have established separate video platforms where users can upload their videos and comment on each other's work. Henan University has a reading booth where users can upload their readings for evaluation and exchange them with each other. Engaging users with interactive features fosters a virtual community that evolves from functional interaction to one that incorporates information and emotional engagement.

Full sharing and collaboration to expand the innovation platform

In the era of network interconnection, the boundaries between organizations are gradually fading, and university libraries' WeChat public websites should also be committed to cross-border integration and explore the road of diversified cooperation. Many university libraries' WeChat public accounts tend to focus solely on information about their libraries, thereby narrowing the space for collaboration and innovation. For university libraries, functional innovation should not only focus on themselves but also be considered a broader platform. The first step is to leverage its resource advantages and develop new functions by creating project brands and reconfiguring business operations. The second is to form a collective new media platform, "Carrier", by uniting other WeChat public accounts of the University, integrating their scattered services with blurred boundaries and providing services in a unified group. The third is to strengthen the integration and division of roles within the industry between different school libraries and between different types of libraries, thereby maximizing the advantages of the collection resources and information services offered by various libraries. This will provide a larger platform and more possibilities for functional innovation.

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