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Postprint: A Study on Factors Influencing University Library Participation in Public Cultural Service System

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Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] To construct a model of influencing factors for university library participation in the public cultural service system, providing theoretical and practical references for the development of public cultural services in university libraries. [Method/Process] Through in-depth interviews with 26 participants from 10 universities, and adopting the grounded theory method, this study conducts exploratory research on the influencing factors of university library participation in the public cultural service system, and constructs a grounded theory model. [Results/Conclusions] The influencing factors of university library participation in the public cultural service system mainly include four main categories: university and its library attribution, government agency attribution, public user attribution, and other attribution. Among these, university and its library attribution is the dominant factor, government agency attribution is the supporting factor, public user attribution is the driving factor, and other attribution is the constraining factor. On this basis, strategies for university libraries to deeply participate in the public cultural service system are proposed.

Full Text

Preamble

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Research on Influencing Factors of University Libraries' Participation in Public Cultural Service Systems

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Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] This study constructs a model of influencing factors for university libraries' participation in public cultural service systems, providing theoretical and practical references for the development of university libraries' public cultural services. **[Method/Process]** Through in-depth interviews with 26 participants from 10 universities, this exploratory research employs grounded theory methodology to investigate the influencing factors of university libraries' participation in public cultural service systems and constructs a grounded theory model. **[Result/Conclusion]** The influencing factors primarily comprise four main categories: university and library attribution, government institution attribution, public user attribution, and other attributions. Among these, university and library attribution represents the dominant factor, government institution attribution serves as the guarantee factor, public user attribution acts as the driving factor, and other attribution functions as the restrictive factor. Based on these findings, strategies for university libraries' deep participation in public cultural service systems are proposed.

Keywords: university library; public cultural service; grounded theory; influencing factors

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Introduction

Public cultural services constitute an essential component of government public services, referring to the institutional and systematic provision of public cultural products and services by public sectors, primarily government agencies, aimed at safeguarding citizens' fundamental cultural rights [1]. As a primary institution providing public cultural services, libraries serve the functions of preserving cultural resources and disseminating social civilization, bearing the important mission of protecting citizens' basic cultural rights and promoting social and cultural development. The public cultural service system exhibits characteristics of integrity and collaborative division of labor; without effective integration of various types of libraries, a single library type would struggle to meet public information needs across a nation or region [2]. As a vital component of the library public cultural service system, university libraries should leverage their advantages in information resources, equipment technology, and professional talent to contribute to public cultural service development.

In developed countries, practices in this area began relatively early. Since the 1860s, American university libraries have participated in public cultural services, with most providing borrowing services to off-campus readers, allowing them to use library resources and facilities, and offering diverse cultural service programs to the public. Japan's university libraries have deeply embedded the concept of public cultural services, achieving remarkable results in knowledge innovation, cultural dissemination, and improving national quality. University

libraries in Germany, the United Kingdom, Australia, and other countries have also conducted in-depth cultural services to the public in various forms. By contrast, domestic university libraries in China started later. Currently, some university libraries in economically developed regions have begun opening to the public. For example, the Capital Library Alliance, formed by 34 university libraries in Beijing, offered free access to the public in 2012; over a dozen university libraries in Shanghai have reached agreements with Shanghai Library for mutual use of library cards; all 10 university libraries in Guangzhou Higher Education Mega Center issue library cards to residents with valid identification; and multiple university libraries in Wuhan initiated the “Wuhan Regional Library Alliance” to achieve co-construction and sharing of regional library resources, providing more convenient and high-quality library services to citizens [3]. However, these services remain limited to issuing library cards to social readers, managing access through deposits, and specifying borrowing periods, quantities, and permissions. Public awareness and participation remain generally low. Evidently, domestic university libraries maintain a cautious attitude toward participating in public cultural service systems, with slow progress and low service levels and scope, leaving considerable room for improvement compared to international counterparts. Therefore, how to normalize participation in public cultural service systems and promote social cultural construction and development has become an important issue facing university library development in China.

In this context, domestic scholars have conducted relevant research on university libraries’ participation in public cultural service systems. For instance, Pang Lichuan and Zhang Peng explored innovative approaches for university libraries’ involvement in public cultural service system construction [4]; Li Yuchang studied the positioning and implementation strategies of university libraries within public cultural service systems [3]; Shen Guangliang explored delegation mechanisms for university libraries’ participation in public cultural services [5]; Liu Shixin examined the necessity, advantages, and approaches for university libraries’ involvement in public cultural services [6]; and Guo Qi, Du Pingping, and others analyzed practical and innovative models of university libraries serving local culture, using Xuzhou university libraries as a case study [7]. Comprehensive analysis of existing literature reveals that most research focuses on the connotation, positioning, implementation strategies, and models of university libraries’ participation in public cultural service systems. However, no scholars have yet conducted empirical research from the perspective of librarians—the primary implementers and providers of these services—and their willingness to participate, attitudes, and suggestions regarding off-campus public cultural services, factors that directly affect service implementation and advancement. This study addresses this gap by interviewing relevant university library personnel, employing grounded theory to analyze influencing factors of university libraries’ participation in public cultural service systems, and proposing targeted improvement strategies to provide theoretical and practical references for public cultural service development.

1. Research Method and Data Collection

1.1 Research Method

Grounded theory is an empirical research method that systematically constructs theoretical models from the bottom up based on original data [8]. Its core principle involves immersing in extensive materials (including interview data, research literature, and secondary data), applying standardized procedures to conduct coding operations on the research problem, and then analyzing and inducing a systematic and scientific conceptual system and theoretical model [9].

This study adopts grounded theory methodology, selecting university library directors and relevant staff as research subjects. Through open questionnaires and in-depth interviews, the research focuses interview content on the central theme, establishing participatory dialogue between interviewers and interviewees. Interview content was recorded through audio and shorthand notes, then subjected to three levels of coding—open, axial, and selective—to construct a theoretical model of influencing factors for university libraries' participation in public cultural service systems. Throughout the research process, interview data were repeatedly compared and analyzed, with new categories continuously refined to modify existing theory until no new categories emerged, achieving theoretical saturation.

1.2 Data Collection

This study employed open-ended interview questionnaires to conduct in-depth interviews with key university library personnel. Interview questions were designed as follows: (1) Do you believe university libraries should participate in external public cultural services? Why? (2) Has your library currently participated in external public cultural services? If so, what are the outcomes? (3) What problems do you think university libraries face in participating in external public cultural services? Why? (4) What additional ideas and suggestions do you have regarding university libraries' participation in external public cultural services?

During data collection, theoretical sampling was used to select specific interview subjects. Based on requirements for theoretical understanding among qualitative research participants, this study ultimately selected 26 interviewees familiar with or possessing some understanding of the interview topic, including 8 directors and 18 general staff members, primarily from 10 local university libraries across six regions: Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Foshan, Dongguan, Zhongshan, and Wuhan. Among these, five were general undergraduate institutions and five were vocational colleges. Specific respondent demographics were as follows: 9 males (35%) and 17 females (65%); 6 under 30 years old (24%), 10 aged 31-40 (38%), and 10 over 40 (38%); 3 with below-bachelor degrees (12%), 15 with bachelor's degrees (58%), and 8 with master's degrees or above (30%); 2 assistant librarians (7%), 8 librarians (31%), and 16 associate research librarians or

above (62%).

Data collection proceeded in three stages: First, interview outlines were sent to respondents via QQ, WeChat, or email before formal interviews to schedule interview times. Second, 21 respondents from eight libraries in Guangdong Province were interviewed in depth, with each interview lasting approximately 2-3 hours, followed by three-level coding and category extraction of the recorded data. Third, five respondents from two libraries in Wuhan were interviewed to conduct saturation testing on concepts, categories, and relationships developed in the second stage.

2. Empirical Analysis

2.1 Open Coding

This process primarily involved organizing original interview data and conducting sentence-by-sentence analysis, while labeling conceptualized statements with tags to extract new concepts from respondents' original expressions. Through operations including segmenting, classifying, conceptualizing, and recombining original data, 498 original statements were obtained. Through further refinement and screening, repetitive, overlapping, and low-frequency statements were eliminated, resulting in 12 categories, as shown in Table 1 (due to space limitations, only selected statements, initial concepts, and categories are displayed to illustrate the open coding process).

2.2 Axial Coding

Building upon open coding, this stage clarified relationships among extracted concepts and further refined, merged, and induced conceptual categories. By deeply mining relationships among categories, main categories with higher levels of abstraction were integrated. This study extracted four main categories from the 12 initial codes: university and library attribution, government institution attribution, public user attribution, and other attribution. Table 2 presents the connotations of each main category and their corresponding relationships with categories formed from initial codes.

2.3 Selective Coding

In the selective coding stage, continuous excavation of main categories developed through axial coding progressively raised the level of conceptual abstraction to develop a core category that 统领 all categories, incorporating various associated variables into a concise and compact theoretical model through a “storyline” [10]. After 逐级编码, it was discovered that all main categories revolve around university libraries' participation in public cultural service systems. Therefore, “influencing factors of university libraries' participation in public cultural service systems” was defined as the core category, with the storyline: university and library attribution → government institution attribution → public user at-

tribution → other attribution. Table 3 presents the relational structures among main categories and representative statements from interviewees.

2.4 Theoretical Model Construction

Based on the “storyline” obtained through three-level coding and the typical relational structures generated through selective coding, this study constructs an influencing factors model for university libraries’ participation in public cultural service systems (see Figure 1 [Figure 1: see original paper]). The model comprises four main categories—university and library attribution, government institution attribution, public user attribution, and other attribution—that significantly influence university libraries’ participation. University and library attribution represents the dominant factor, including participation attitude, university support, participation constraints, participation models, and promotion; government institution attribution serves as the guarantee factor, including government support, government measures, and institutional collaboration; public user attribution functions as the driving factor, including user needs and user perception; and other attribution operates as the restrictive factor, including institutional and mechanism barriers, and legal and positioning barriers.

2.5 Theoretical Saturation

When additional data analysis cannot produce new categories or theories, theoretical saturation is achieved. This study used five interview records from the third stage for saturation testing, which did not generate or refine any new concepts or categories, indicating that category formation in the theory is relatively complete and coding reliability is good. Therefore, the theoretical model and derived category codes can be considered theoretically saturated.

3. Strategies for University Libraries’ Deep Participation in Public Cultural Services

3.1 Government Should Provide Promotion and Guarantee from Organizational, Institutional, and Legal Perspectives

Currently, government institutions at all levels remain the primary responsible entities and important promoters of social public cultural services. Therefore, first, government leaders should attach sufficient importance to promoting public cultural service reform and development. Only with adequate leadership attention can effective human, material, and financial resources be concentrated from a holistic perspective to efficiently and quickly achieve goals. Second, governments must break through constraints of existing management systems, liberating library development from traditional administrative limitations through top-down macro guidance, overall planning, and resource allocation, establishing operational mechanisms featuring collaborative division of labor, co-construction, and sharing, and promoting horizontal exchanges and alliance cooperation for university libraries both within and outside the system.

Third, governments at all levels should actively promote legislation for university libraries through legal procedures, promulgating relevant laws, regulations, or systems to advance university libraries' participation in public cultural service systems, ensuring their services are law-based and regulation-guided. The reason foreign university libraries can standardize public services lies in their complete, sound, and standardized legal systems [11].

3.2 University Libraries Should Transform Concepts and Update Positioning to Achieve Cultural Co-construction

Under the current management system, university libraries seeking deep participation in public cultural service systems should transform service concepts, update functional positioning, and devote themselves to public cultural construction, contributing to social and cultural development. On one hand, they should establish from top to bottom a sense of responsibility for contributing to local development, consciously integrating themselves into the public cultural service system construction environment, taking serving the public and improving national literacy as their mission, and utilizing their advantages to explore innovation for better service to local economic and cultural development. On the other hand, university libraries should abandon closed traditional library management concepts, expanding their functional positioning from solely serving teaching and research to social services, undertaking public cultural quality cultivation and education functions. While meeting the literature and information service needs of faculty and students, they should break free from constraints, step out of the university "ivory tower," strengthen exchanges, cooperation, and alliances with other public cultural service institutions, achieve strong alliances with complementary advantages and cultural co-construction, and demonstrate their status and role in social and cultural construction.

3.3 University Libraries Must Strengthen Self-construction to Enhance Public Service Effectiveness

To better conduct public cultural services, university libraries must strengthen self-construction, create favorable service environments, improve service capabilities, and enhance public service effectiveness: (1) Strengthen characteristic resource construction—libraries need to adjust collection structures, collect and organize local characteristic documents, and independently build resource databases with local industrial, economic, and cultural features; they should also enrich collection content through resource co-construction and sharing models that integrate different resource types. (2) Establish and improve relevant service mechanisms, reduce social service restrictions, and create favorable information service conditions and environments for public users. (3) Strengthen librarian team building, focus on cultivating librarians' social service spirit, and vigorously improve their comprehensive service levels to enhance library attractiveness to public users. (4) Innovate service forms and deepen service connotations, exploring diversified public service models suitable for different user

groups based on individual library conditions and characteristics.

3.4 Increase Promotion to Enhance Public Awareness of University Libraries

For the general public, university libraries' initiatives to provide public cultural services represent a new development. The public knows little about the service advantages and characteristics that university libraries possess compared to general public libraries. Therefore, besides working diligently, greater efforts should be made in promotion. Through multi-level promotional design and implementation by governments, universities, and libraries, more of the public can approach and understand university libraries. Through service experiences and perceptions, users' cognition and familiarity with the positive service image of university libraries can be strengthened, thereby encouraging more users to participate in library service programs. The greater the public's demand for cultural and information services, the stronger the driving force for university libraries to develop public services. "Good wine needs no bush"—with adequate promotion and strong service capabilities, university libraries' path in public cultural services will undoubtedly broaden.

4. Research Significance and Limitations

This study employs grounded theory methodology to conduct exploratory research on influencing factors of university libraries' participation in public cultural service systems, deriving a theoretical model of these influencing factors, analyzing the action paths of various factors on university libraries' participation, and discussing development strategies for deep participation. This lays a foundation for future theoretical and empirical research and points out directions for further promoting university libraries' participation in public cultural service systems.

This study has several limitations. First, the selected samples have limitations in quantity and geographical scope, and the theoretical model's reliability and validity have not been tested with large-sample data. Future research should expand sample size and geographical range for further analysis and refinement. Second, grounded theory requires researchers to maintain high theoretical sensitivity, and subjective assumptions may inevitably occur during the three-level coding process, affecting theoretical accuracy [12]. Future research will improve result reliability and validity through repeated theoretical verification or consultation with domain experts.

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Author Contributions

Cao Guofeng: Proposed the research topic, designed the overall research framework and approach, drafted and revised the manuscript.

Jia Xiaoyan: Collected and analyzed data.

Zhang Li: Revised parts of the manuscript.

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Abstract: [Purpose/significance] This paper aims to construct an influencing factors model of university libraries' participation in public cultural service system, and provide theoretical and practical reference for the development of university libraries' public cultural service. [Method/process] Through in-depth interviews with 26 interviewees from 10 universities, this paper explores the influencing factors of university libraries' participation in public cultural ser-

vice system using grounded theory method, and constructs its grounded theory model. [Result/conclusion] The influencing factors of university libraries' participation in public cultural service system mainly include four main categories: the attribution of university and its library, the attribution of government institutions, the attribution of public users, and other attribution. The attribution of university and its library is the dominant factor, the attribution of government institutions is the guarantee factor, the attribution of public users is the driving factor, and other attribution is the restrictive factor. On this basis, the strategy for university libraries' deep participation in public cultural service system is proposed.

Keywords: university library; public cultural service; grounded theory; influence factor

Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

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