

Reconstruction of Library Resource Construction and Service Model Based on Omnichannel Theory (Post-print)

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Abstract

[Objective/Significance] As the new wave of information technology revolution deepens, omni-channel user groups are emerging, transforming patterns of information consumption and utilization. Omni-channel strategies have expanded from purely commercial dimensions to social dimensions, enabling libraries to leverage omni-channel concepts and methods to reconstruct resource development and service models, thereby better adapting to changes in user groups and meeting user needs.

[Method/Process] This study introduces omni-channel theory, discusses the applicability of omni-channel concepts and strategies in library resource development and services, and proposes relevant implementation recommendations accordingly.

[Result/Conclusion] The introduction of omni-channel strategies in libraries can better identify different service stages and methods, integrate various service entities, and thus provide more comprehensive services to users.

Full Text

Preamble

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Reconstructing Library Resource Development and Service Models Based on Omnichannel Theory

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Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] With the deepening of the new information technology revolution, omnichannel user groups have emerged, fundamentally transforming information consumption and utilization patterns. Omnichannel strategies have expanded from purely commercial domains to the social sphere. Libraries can leverage omnichannel concepts and methods to reconstruct their resource development and service models, thereby better adapting to evolving user populations and meeting their needs. **[Method/Process]** This paper introduces omnichannel theory, discusses its applicability to library resource development and services, and proposes relevant implementation recommendations. **[Result/Conclusion]** Adopting omnichannel strategies enables libraries to better identify different service stages and methods while integrating various service entities, ultimately providing comprehensive, user-centered services.

Keywords: omnichannel theory; resource development; service model; user services

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Introduction

As the new information technology revolution—marked by the rise of the internet and big data—continues to deepen, the user groups that libraries serve are undergoing significant changes. Among these, “omnichannel” attributes represent the most prominent characteristic. When searching for, accessing, and utilizing information services, omnichannel users no longer remain loyal to or confined within a single channel as in the past. Instead, they seamlessly integrate, alternate between, and switch across online and offline channels to satisfy their information needs and complete their tasks. For libraries, adopting a “channel” and “omnichannel” theoretical perspective and strategic approach carries profound significance.

From a channel perspective, discussions about libraries’ survival and status essentially concern channel positioning. The competitive and cooperative relationships between libraries and institutions such as bookstores, database vendors, publishers, and internet companies reflect inter-channel collaboration, integration, competition, and game-playing. Meanwhile, libraries’ efforts to improve their resource development and service models essentially represent channel integration and optimization.

Currently, the very concept and form of “channels” from the commercial sector are undergoing major transformations, evolving from single-channel to multi-channel, cross-channel, and ultimately omnichannel models. This paper introduces omnichannel theory and strategies, analyzes their driving forces and applicability within library services, and finally proposes strategies for reconstructing library resource development and service models based on omnichannel theory.

2. Evolution of Library User Behavior in Open Environments

2.1 Behavioral Transformation of Library Users in Open Environments

The most distinguishing feature of modern libraries compared to ancient ones is their greater emphasis on document utilization [1], which intimately links library resource development and services to the characteristics of user populations and usage scenarios. Against the backdrop of the “Internet Plus” era, networks—spanning from traditional PC and web-based internet to mobile internet based on smartphones—are dismantling barriers and boundaries across many traditional domains. In the field of information exchange and dissemination, the open-source movement has given rise to flourishing developments in open scientific information, open government data, open data initiatives, and open patents in the commercial sector, continuously accumulating and expanding massive public information resources and profoundly shaping a new open knowledge environment. Within this open knowledge environment, users no longer overly focus on or deliberately distinguish the attributes and characteristics of information sources [2]. Instead, they concentrate on their own information usage scenarios, seeking to rapidly or even instantaneously formulate high-knowledge-content “solutions” from multi-source, heterogeneous, and massive information streams. Libraries are no longer users’ sole information source channels, necessitating that library information organization work increasingly transform into user-goal-driven knowledge services [3]. The shift from “collection-centered” to “user-centered” approaches [4] has become a shared understanding among libraries, particularly research libraries.

2.2 Empowerment of Library Users in New Technology Environments

From an ecological perspective, library users constitute the terminal link in the information exchange ecosystem. Libraries serve as mid-stream information consumers and decomposers, while publishers occupy the upstream position responsible for information production and transmission. In today’s commercially influenced publishing landscape, publishers transfer information to libraries through sales, and libraries purchase and subsequently distribute this information to users [5]. Thus, with libraries as intermediaries, the upstream follows a “procurement-consumption” business model, while the downstream adheres to a universal, equitable, and public service model. In traditional information exchange and dissemination, publishers in the upstream ecological niche held advantageous rights regarding content, technology, and pricing. However, in the new technology environment, these advantages are shifting and even being displaced. As intermediaries, libraries must confront this transformation in their resource development work.

From the retail sector perspective, scholars have divided the past 150 years of retail development into three waves: the first wave (1850-1950) was a production-

driven era where producers held power; the second wave (1950-2000) was a marketing-driven era characterized by oversupply and channel dominance, with market power beginning to shift from sellers to buyers; the third wave (2000-present) represents an absolute buyer's market stage marked by product surplus and a new information revolution, entering an era of consumer empowerment [6].

From the library's positioning standpoint, while focusing on downstream public welfare services, libraries must also attend to changes in this upstream sales environment. This 150-year retrospective of retail development can serve as a temporal coordinate for libraries examining upstream information product supply conditions. Modern libraries, born approximately 150 years ago in the mid-19th century, have witnessed the rise and growth of the publishing market and the power shift in information utilization and consumption. With the development of mobile intelligence and internet technologies, library user groups now exhibit pronounced SoLoMo (Social, Local, Mobile) characteristics. Today, common scenarios include: library users obtaining book recommendations from WeChat public accounts, then purchasing physical copies from e-commerce platforms, downloading electronic versions to e-readers, borrowing books from libraries, or even transcending traditional "reading" by accessing audio versions on platforms to "read" with their ears. This new round of information technology development has enabled unprecedented diversification in work versions, formats, and dissemination channels. In this environment, characterized by explosive growth in information and knowledge products on one hand and users' limited time, energy, and attention on the other, the power of selection and control has clearly shifted toward users. The most direct manifestation of user empowerment in the new technology environment is that library users can now obtain needed information or other knowledge services and products anytime, anywhere, and through any channel in whatever manner they desire.

At this point, the very concept of library users will be redefined. They are no longer merely on-site users or cardholders, nor even just users with digital library access rights, but rather all members of society who can access library services. This will bring new challenges to libraries' traditional resource acquisition models.

3. Proposal and Connotation of Omnichannel Theory

This paper introduces an "omnichannel" perspective to analyze strategies for reconstructing library resource development and service models. The omnichannel concept originates from the retail sector, emerging around 2009, gaining prominence in 2011, and seeing substantially increased usage after 2012 to describe major transformations in marketing and retail. In 2011, D. Rigby, head of innovation and retail at the globally renowned Bain & Company, published "The Future of Shopping" in the *Harvard Business Review*, comprehensively articulating omnichannel's connotation: in the digital retail environment, retailers interact with customers through multiple channels, including websites, physical

stores, service terminals, direct mail, catalogs, call centers, social media, mobile devices, door-to-door services, and more [7-8].

Following its proposal, omnichannel theory generated strong responses in business and other social sectors, with understanding expanding from a business decision perspective to a social perspective, as the theory reflects changes in social production and consumption behaviors under the information technology revolution. Omnichannel's essence can be understood as: in digital consumption environments, users are no longer loyal to single channels but appear interchangeably across omnichannels—online stores, mobile clients, social network nodes, physical stores—expecting seamless integration experiences across channels. These changes in user behavior require product and service providers to integrate previously independently operating channels to provide users with differentiated yet consistently excellent services. In omnichannel strategies, the focus is not on optimizing or strengthening a single channel but on achieving high synergy and integration among all channels.

4. Applicability of Omnichannel Theory to Library Resource Development and Services

As previously discussed, library users have expanded to encompass broader populations in the digital society, substantially overlapping with the consumer groups that omnichannel theory addresses. In user-centered collection development models, libraries can leverage an omnichannel perspective to monitor changes in user groups and explore omnichannel strategy applications in reconstructing library resource acquisition models.

4.1 New Needs and Behaviors of Omnichannel Users

Some scholars argue that “consumer changes driven by technology” cause omnichannel phenomena. Historically, retail transformation followed the trajectory “technological change → production change → retail change → customer change.” Today, this has become “technological change → customer change → retail change → production change” [13], demonstrating that customers and users have moved from the end of the transformation chain to its beginning as triggers of channel change.

From an information perspective, contemporary consumer behavior in obtaining goods or services primarily involves information collection, processing, comparison, and decision-making, as well as information reception and feedback. Consequently, product and service circulation channels increasingly resemble information exchange and communication channels. The era of omnichannel information transmission inevitably leads to the rise of omnichannel consumer groups [8].

For omnichannel users, numerous channels are available and may 交错 appear throughout a complete product or service acquisition process for information

searching, comparison, ordering, delivery, receipt, and service consultation. Users do not perceive obvious switching or differences between channels. Omnichannel users have become the most dynamic and influential consumer groups in the current market, affecting not only omnichannel purchasing and consumption but also upstream and downstream industry chains—for instance, participating in product design and production omnichannel, and conducting evaluations, feedback, and dissemination omnichannel.

For libraries, through long-term development and exploration, they have accumulated considerable channel advantages. On one hand, various library physical facilities, service spaces, and outlets (such as self-service libraries) provide offline channels unmatched by other information service providers. On the other hand, with the development of digital, mobile, and smart libraries, libraries have gradually established robust online channels including websites, Weibo, WeChat accounts, and apps. Although further integration and connectivity among these different channels are needed, the foundation for omnichannel has been formed. More importantly, libraries' adherence to universal, equitable, and inclusive public service standards and concepts lowers the barrier for broad user access to omnichannels, truly enabling omnichannel strategies to extend from commercial domains to the social sphere and enhancing the efficiency of social information resource allocation and social welfare.

4.2 Redefinition and Reconstruction of Channels

In omnichannel environments, “channel identity precedes brand identity” has become the norm [9]. Particularly in the information service ecosystem where libraries operate, users typically generate information and knowledge needs within daily learning, living, and working scenarios. When deciding to acquire certain knowledge content, they first select and access channel entry points (such as through search engines, e-commerce bibliographies, library catalogs, or social networks and acquaintances), then obtain the most context-appropriate knowledge provision methods and solutions through suitable channels, rather than traditionally obtaining fixed-format physical documents through single channels. Channel richness can trigger more user needs, gradually making users' dependence on and preference for channels outweigh their preference for brands and products, forming a new “channel generates demand” model. For example, users browsing e-commerce book product information can generate new purchasing needs through related book recommendations on product pages, or use book reviews on social networks to help determine whether a book is worth acquiring.

Simultaneously, the characteristics of information products and service channels that libraries face lie in the fact that information forms can exist independently of physical entities [15], which inevitably intensifies the separation and differentiation of traditional single channels. To effectively explain this phenomenon, we can still use the most traditional consumption scenario as an example: in single-channel models, user activities such as product searching, comparison, observation, consultation, negotiation, payment, and acquisition all occur within a

single channel (like a store counter). In traditional library service channels, this single-channel model is even more typical: readers search for and obtain bibliographic information within library physical spaces, locate and retrieve books from shelves, and complete borrowing at library counters or directly read in reading spaces—all information behaviors occur almost entirely within the single channel of the library’s physical space.

In omnichannel models, however, library user behavior has shown significant separation, as illustrated in Figure 1 [Figure 1: see original paper].

Figure 1 Separation of Library User Behaviors in Multi-channel Mode

When traditional library user behaviors were confined within a single channel, libraries’ understanding and perception of channels might not have been particularly evident. However, in the multi-channel mode shown in Figure 1, libraries must leverage relevant theories to 重新认识 and reconstruct the concept of “channels.”

The term “channel” in commerce originates from marketing concepts, traditionally referring to the organizational structures through which products transfer from producers to consumers. Under new technological conditions, the pathways for products and services between producers and consumers have been greatly shortened in length while expanding in breadth and width, as shown in Table 1 .

Table 1 Changes in Channel Connotation

Dimension	Description
Channel Length	Number of intermediary links in product/service transfer from producer to consumer
Channel Width	Number of intermediaries available at the same channel level in the same region
Channel Breadth	Number of channels available and applicable

Therefore, current channel connotation primarily refers to the paths or processes through which products transfer from producers to consumers [8]. Additionally, changes in channel connotation in the new technology environment involve the content circulated by channel providers: expanding from mere product ownership to encompassing all product-related information, capital, and even user group flows [10]. This provides several insights for libraries: (1) acknowledge the differentiation of library service channels and establish omnichannel thinking and decision-making horizons to accurately delineate library service stages and develop targeted service strategies; (2) identify other participants within channels to formulate competitive and cooperative strategies for libraries within the

omnichannel information service ecosystem; (3) fundamentally, clearly recognize changes on the user end—namely, the rise of omnichannel user groups—and design library business processes and services from the omnichannel user perspective.

4.3 Formation, Evolution, and Development Strategies of Omnichannel

Omnichannel model formation does not occur overnight but evolves through multiple stages. In the English term “Omnichannel,” “Omni” means “all, total, multiple,” contrasting with traditional single-channel, multi-channel, and cross-channel models, as shown in Figure 2 [Figure 2: see original paper].

Figure 2 The Formation Process of Omnichannel

The greatest difference between omnichannel and the three traditional models (single-channel, multi-channel, cross-channel) is its user-centered approach. In single-channel, multi-channel, and cross-channel models, service providers design services from their own perspectives, fragmenting users—i.e., treating the same user as different users across different channels. In omnichannel models, however, users receive consistent and seamless service experiences regardless of which channel they use, without perceiving channel barriers. For libraries, this requires designing and coordinating multiple service channel combinations around unified user identities with users at the center.

5. Re-examining Resource Development and Service Models Through an Omnichannel Lens

5.1 Foundation and Key to Library Omnichannel Construction—Users as the Center

Traditional library resource acquisition processes primarily involve procurement, cataloging, and shelving. Print book acquisition typically requires numerous steps including purchasing, inspection, stamping, magnetic strip insertion, classification and cataloging, barcode and label attachment, and collection allocation [11]. Consequently, new books generally require 1-2 months to reach circulation, with the cycle extending even further when including cumbersome budget approval and procurement processes. In the internet era that pursues “speed and swiftness,” such cycles undoubtedly render library information supply efficiency inferior to other channels.

Due to differences in institutional attributes, operational models, and logistics, traditional libraries and physical bookstores lag behind internet-based applications and services in responding to user information needs, information transmission, and presentation. Libraries and bookstores are no longer users’ preferred channels for obtaining information and knowledge. However, from an ecological perspective, libraries can leverage their unique niche advantages without engaging in “either-or” competition with internet information services, instead

seeking to reconstruct resource acquisition models based on network information technology.

Since around 2010, Patron-Driven Acquisition (PDA) began scaling in overseas libraries. The PDA procurement model itself represents a shift of power toward users, making reader demand the dominant factor and placing partial acquisition decision-making authority in readers' hands. PDA transforms readers from recipients and terminals of resource development into initiators and starting points, making them decision-makers in document resource construction [12]. However, PDA continues to face controversies regarding users' limited book-selection capabilities, conflicts with collection development purposes, and impacts on academic publishing [13].

Some scholars view PDA as a direct application of modern information technology and e-commerce in library operations [14]. As discussed previously, since 2010, the technological and commercial environments facing libraries have been undergoing a new round of changes led by mobile and intelligent technologies. Both the new technology revolution and the "user empowerment" wave are pushing user-centered library resource procurement models toward deeper implementation, calling for new theories to guide and support practice.

Based on this, this paper proposes an omnichannel-based library resource development and service framework (see Figure 3 [Figure 3: see original paper]). The figure presents different channels supporting user groups, primarily including bookstores and e-commerce platforms selling print books, electronic resource producers (providers), third-party logistics companies, and libraries. With users at the center and libraries as the leading coordinators, designing combinations around these different channels constitutes the main content of omnichannel-based library resource development and service model reconstruction.

Figure 3 Omnichannel-Based Library Resource Development and Service Framework

5.2 Elements of Business Process Transformation Based on Omnichannel

To achieve omnichannel standards, the key lies in user-centered integration across channels, which requires process transformation. Specifically, addressing the characteristics of library resource development and service needs and scenarios, process transformation focuses on three aspects: print books, electronic resources, and circulation.

(1) Print Book Process Transformation. Readers can query library collections anytime via mobile devices according to their needs. If the collection is unavailable or additional copies are permitted, readers can directly "borrow" from partner bookstores or e-commerce platforms, with libraries subsequently settling accounts with these partners (this print book category primarily includes titles suitable for direct user purchase). For books serving knowledge

preservation purposes, procurement remains the direct responsibility of library acquisition departments.

In current practice, some libraries implement periodic openings, such as during April Reading Month activities, while others maintain it as a long-term reader service but with restrictions on book types, total purchase amounts, and user permissions.

(2) Electronic Resources Process Transformation. Currently, libraries maintain numerous and diverse electronic resource databases. However, many databases experience low usage frequency with very high per-use costs, making electronic resource process reconstruction particularly important. In an omnichannel-based electronic resource development and service process, readers can access any partner electronic resource database through any method according to their knowledge needs, authenticate via reader ID, and “borrow” e-books, e-journals, articles, videos, and other electronic resources for personal use. These resources simultaneously enter the library’s electronic collection platform, enabling subsequent readers to download them directly through the library platform. Usage fees can be settled periodically between libraries and database producers based on standard parameters such as download counts and reading frequency. Thus, libraries no longer need to purchase entire database systems or pay for sporadic clicks on an annual basis, instead paying according to actual reader usage. In future omnichannel models, libraries can cooperate directly with content producers such as publishers, magazines, and authors, eliminating intermediary providers and potentially bringing positive impacts to knowledge circulation and fiscal efficiency.

(3) Circulation Process Transformation. In traditional single-channel models, library collection circulation required physical library mediation. In omnichannel models, however, print book circulation need not undergo actual borrowing and returning processes but can be realized through robust logistics systems. Reader borrowing and returning can be accomplished directly via courier services, and inter-reader circulation can similarly be achieved through courier-based book transfers.

5.3 Key Technologies and Issues for Omnichannel Resource Development and Services

In the commercial sector, omnichannel construction and improvement rely heavily on robust e-commerce system support. Considering library realities, this paper argues that constructing omnichannel resource development and service models requires ten major systems: user management systems, print collection systems, electronic resource systems, bookstore (e-commerce) docking systems, database docking systems, resource location systems, interactive communication systems, settlement systems, and backend management and statistical systems. Among these, three aspects are most critical: collection and bookstore system integration, book location tracking, and courier dispatch.

(1) Collection and Bookstore System Integration. In omnichannel models, integrating bookstore management systems with library collection systems represents the most critical link. Currently, library collection systems lack standardization, and libraries typically purchase third-party systems requiring vendor support for business modifications and adjustments. Bookstores also have their own management systems. System integration requires technical cooperation from both parties and custom business logic programming based on integration requirements—a cumbersome process demanding familiarity with library, bookstore, and system operations. Therefore, for this model, enabling open library collection systems will be a crucial step for advancing omnichannel strategies.

(2) Book Location Technology. In omnichannel models, inter-reader transfers rely on logistics. If readers share their locations, book location can be indirectly tracked through reader positioning. If books themselves can be located, including their precise positions on library shelves, shelving and inter-reader transfers will become more intelligent and convenient.

(3) Courier Dispatch Selection. In public libraries, omnichannel logistics systems complete circulation through partnerships with third-party courier companies. In academic libraries, campus logistics can utilize student work-study programs for courier borrowing, supplemented by corresponding courier dispatch platforms. Key aspects include order dispatching, personnel recruitment and selection, and settlement methods—critical components of omnichannel logistics systems that can 借鉴 mature technologies from existing intra-city courier and ride-hailing dispatch systems.

(4) Settlement System Security and Real-Time Capability. Omnichannel models require libraries to conduct real-time online settlements with bookstores, e-commerce platforms, database providers, and logistics companies, challenging current financial approval processes and demanding higher system security. Therefore, simplifying financial approval procedures and designing secure settlement systems become crucial components.

5.4 Potential Issues in Omnichannel Models

Like other innovative models, omnichannel models may encounter numerous obstacles and controversies during implementation. This section analyzes typical potential issues.

(1) Rising Procurement Costs. In traditional library procurement, bulk purchasing receives larger discounts than 零散 purchases. In omnichannel models, books purchased by readers involve single-copy 零散 procurement, increasing costs and reducing the total number of books purchasable with the same budget. However, this is not absolute and depends on cooperation agreements with bookstores. Although costs may increase, better meeting reader needs and improving circulation rates holds greater significance for libraries' knowledge dissemination functions.

(2) Timeliness, Accuracy, and Completeness of Cataloging. In omnichannel models, the greatest challenge following reader purchases is ensuring cataloging timeliness and accuracy. If cataloging data is not updated promptly, readers cannot locate these purchased books in queries, hindering subsequent circulation. If using bookstore-provided metadata, incomplete or inaccurate fields may 混乱 the collection retrieval system, also impeding reader search and identification. Therefore, guaranteeing cataloging timeliness and accuracy is essential.

(3) Integration with Third-Party Logistics. Since libraries lack their own logistics systems, they must rely on third-party logistics companies, requiring integration of reader information, circulation information, and logistics company systems. This integration requires optimizing third-party logistics systems and platforms and necessitates logistics company support. Progress may be limited when business models and revenues remain unconfirmed.

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The Reconstruction of Library Resource Development and Service Models Based on Omnichannel Theory

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Abstract: [Purpose/Significance] With the development of the new information technology revolution, omnichannel users have emerged, changing information consumption and utilization patterns. The omnichannel strategy has expanded from the business level to the social level. Libraries could introduce omnichannel concepts and methods to design and reconstruct resource development and service models to better meet user needs. [Method/Process] This paper analyzed the adaptability of omnichannel theory in reconstructing library resource development and service models and made relative suggestions. [Result/Conclusion] Omnichannel helps libraries identify different service stages and methods, as well as integrate service bodies to support users' central position.

Keywords: omnichannel; resource development; service model; user service

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