Role Shifting of University Liaison Librarians in the Trend of MOOCs: Take the Example of Jianghan University Library

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Abstract. This paper focuses on the role orientation and transformation of university liaison librarians under the background of the MOOC movement. In an attempt to spearhead the trendy MOOCs, the multiple roles of liaison librarians have been evolving into information literacy educators by means of MOOCs, copyright liquidators in the productive process of MOOCs, and innovative service channel explorers on the platform of MOOCs.

Introduction

The remit of university liaison librarians has been enormously extended by the flourishing academic movement of MOOCs. The conventional orientation for liaison librarians is lagging behind as a result. This paper is an attempt to shed light on the role shifting process of university liaison librarians striving to spearhead the trendy MOOCs. The multiple roles of liaison librarians have been evolving into information literacy educators by means of MOOCs, copyright liquidators in the productive process of MOOCs, and innovative service channel explorers on the platform of MOOCs.

Role Orientation of Liaison Librarians

The MOOC movement (Massive Open Online Course) stems from the OER (Open Educational Resources) available online launched by MIT as early as 2001. Nowadays, the most influential MOOC platforms worldwide are Udacity and Coursera by Stanford University, edX by Harvard University and MIT[1]. Coursera turns out to be more pervasive than the other two platforms in China, with more convenient access on the Internet. In recent years, the development of domestic university MOOCs is striving to keep pace with the compelling tide. The first Chinese MOOC platform “Academy Online” is the brainchild of Tsinghua University faculty modelled on the blueprint of edX. “Academy Online” is not only aimed at promoting domestic MOOCs, but also committed to the localization of oversea MOOCs on edX as well[2].

American Library Association defines liaison librarians as a kind of librarians with specialized training and extensive knowledge, responsible for literature screening, organization and evaluation on a certain discipline, providing information services through diversified pathways[3].With the revolutionary transformation of information technology, information resources have seen an exponential explosive growth; simultaneously teaching modality and academic research are going through dramatic changes. The priorities of university libraries are shifting from the conventional information resources construction to an integrated workflow of information consultation, literacy education and personalized tutorials. As a result, the remit of university liaison librarians has been enormously extended. The phase III liaison librarians training courses by CALIS branched out into the following areas: promoting the information resources and service of university libraries; getting involved in the process of teaching and academic research; providing personalized information services including traditional literacy education on multiple platforms[4]. The flourishing MOOC development presents liaison librarians with enormous challenges and imposes urgent demands for role-shifting.
Role Evolution of Liaison Librarians

Information Literacy Educators

Information literacy education has long been a fundamental service provided by university libraries. The rising trend of MOOCs has established a brand-new platform for the cultivation of information literacy. Liaison librarians are supposed to be skilled at the employment of MOOC production equipment, proficient at the application of the latest multimedia editing software. University libraries are on the frontline of producing MOOCs in regard of information literary education targeting university students at different academic levels, ranging from freshmen orientation lectures to “Literature Retrieval Course”. These online courses could be integrated in the discipline service section on the homepage of university libraries. In that case, students and faculty members are free to choose any convenient time and comfortable place when it comes to attending information literacy MOOCs tailored for specific departments. For example, the ACS lectures for the School of Chemical and Environmental Engineering and New Oriental Courses for the Foreign Language Department.

Figure 1. Workflow of University Liaison Librarians in MOOCs.

To search for materials and retrieve information are merely the primary requirements of information literacy education; to analyze and make full use of information are more advanced requirements. Keeping pace with the booming “Internet Plus” tide, to harness the “big data” for pre-assessment and late-analysis of teaching and academic research reflects a prospective outlook of data mining application in the field of university libraries. Hence, the conventional information literacy education can be escalated to a new level. The fundamental differences between MOOCs and traditional classroom courses lie in its unprecedented large-scale network and online openness. MOOCs make massive enrollment possible, giving rise to large amounts of learning behavior data. Based on a wealth of data generated in the process of online learning, utilizing the updated data analysis techniques to improve teaching quality casts promising prospects ahead. At present, the research on the analysis of MOOC data in domestic universities relatively lags behind; on the other hand, data mining in terms of MOOCs by university libraries is likely to be a potential breakthrough when university libraries are making great efforts to explore innovative approaches of information services.

The concept of information literacy is keeping up with the Information Era. The boundaries of the definition continue to be expanded, including data literacy, media literacy and visual literacy skills. Therefore, the information literacy education on the MOOC platform is supposed to be updated constantly [5].

Copyright Liquidators

In an attempt to embed information services into the teaching process, liaison librarians endeavor to support MOOC teachers by means of providing huge amounts of rich media materials, guiding students to easy access of paper and electronic resources, exploring the reservoir of open access information as well. Their work turns out to be highly instrumental in terms of achieving pre-course reading tasks and accomplishing assignments and research projects afterwards. However, the
acquisition of online resources is still subject to many restrictions of copyrights. In 2016, the Resource Construction Team of Jianghan University Library, in particular, added several databases featuring videos and photos to its annual purchase proposal out of the concern of providing more diverse copyrighted materials for the purpose of MOOC production.

Regardless of the differences among legal systems, the private and exclusive nature of Intellectual Property Rights contradicts the core concepts of openness and sharing of MOOCs to a great extent. According to the relevant statistics, on Coursera platform, a single MOOC takes an average of 380 hours on copyright clearance [6]. Dealing with copyright infringements is a tedious and time-consuming task for understaffed liaison librarians; meanwhile, it also requires liaison librarians to be equipped with related IP (Intellectual Property) laws. In the Chinese Copyright Act, Article 22 defines 12 kinds of fair use, whose key point is about the non-profit utilization of copyright materials within a given proportion[7]. In the early stage of getting involved in MOOC production, foreign university libraries came up with a universal instruction manual concerning the fair use of rich media materials in MOOC production. Guidelines of this kind succeed in minimizing potential copyright infringements effectively. Duke University Library sets an excellent example in this regard. The paradigm for the fair use of information resources includes how to obtain specific permissions to certain resources by copyright negotiation between the owner and the library, and how to search for alternative resources in public domains via open access, etc. [8]. Domestic university libraries could follow suit to avoid legal disputes.

Innovative Service Channel Explorers

Cloud computing, cross-search systems, open source software and social networking all collaborate to influence the operation and development of academic libraries. Liaison librarians are increasingly dependent on data analysis tools for providing information services to academic researchers, which is in high demand of proficiency in the application of cutting-edge information technologies. In a bid to branch into more service sections, libraries have been endeavoring to keep updated to technological developments relentlessly. Modern digital libraries have integrated the mobile library service with the mature functions of WeChat, Twitter and blogs etc., trying to weave the ubiquitous coverage of information network into the pervasive Internet.

Liaison Librarians of Jianghan University have established several information service teams targeting key disciplines by utilizing convenient social networking tools at hand such as QQ, MSN and Skype. The prominent MOOC “Literature Retrieval” launched by Wuhan University also goes with the establishment of certain QQ study groups online, in order to facilitate communications among students and get prompt guidance from professors and teaching assistants. In the process of online consultation, liaison librarians play an indispensable intermediary role similar to conventional teaching assistants. QQ study groups, compared to the early online forums such as BBS or any other social networking tool, is way more flexible and diverse in functions, with an unparalleled massive user base in China [9].

For the sake of promoting information services in the trend of MOOCs, the trailblazers of university libraries strive to open up new frontiers of information services via a popular smartphone app called WeChat. From the viewpoint of the hierarchical modeling, this app featuring division of the subscribers into groups, makes the separated release of differential information possible. Taking advantage of the clustering feature, MOOC learners with varying academic backgrounds are able to receive tailored reading materials on the same study platform, which will minimize the possibility of online-course dropouts as a result[10]. In Jianghan University, during the practice of College English teaching, students are divided into four groups of ABCD in the first place. On the platform of WeChat, the information pushing function makes it feasible to release layered MOOC coursewares and assignments to the digital terminals of different students respectively. What’s more, the peer pressure and cooperation generated within the online study teams compensate for the absence of tutors’ supervision to some extent.

In the meantime, such traditional offline activities as lectures and seminars, serve as a supplementary part to MOOCs. MOOCs have been evolving into a new teaching modality called
SPOC (Small Private Online Course), which is a blended teaching solution for smaller target study groups; to be more specific, SPOC is the perfect combination of traditional classroom lectures and updated MOOCs. In the so-called Flipped Classroom, liaison librarians will serve as an indispensable intermedium linking the virtual MOOCs and the real-life classrooms.

Conclusion
University Libraries should seize the momentum in the wave of information technology. Giving full play to the emerging platform of MOOCs, university libraries are empowered to do a more supportive job in teaching and academic research, assuming a dual role of information navigator and research cooperator, during which university libraries will be gaining in influence consequently. In the continuous evolution from MOOCs to MOOR (Massive Open Online Research), liaison libraries are bound to embrace more challenges in the face of role-shifting. In short, university liaison librarians need to be committed to life-long study, and more fresh blood should be injected to the professional teams at the same time, so as to keep pace with the constant innovation of the Information Era.

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