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Statistical Analysis on 2013 Weibo Services in Public Libraries in China

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Abstract: As a new information transmission platform, Weibo has become a new tool to serve readers. This article analyzes the problems regarding the uses of Weibo and also provides some constructive suggestions on how to serve readers better through the analysis of statistical data from officially registered Weibo accounts by 50 public libraries in China.

According to “The Statistical Report of China Internet Development,” the number of internet users in China had increased to 618 million by December 2013. Of those internet users, 500 million had access through smart-phones, including “196 million who had Weibo accounts through smart-phones.”

Weibo has become a new tool for public libraries to observe societal changes and better serve their readers. So far, the public libraries in China have registered 17,086 Weibo accounts on sina.com and 7,167 on qq.com. In order to further explore this new web tool and to improve its effectiveness, in 2012, Shandong Provincial Public Library began gathering and analyzing data from the usage of Weibo in 50 public libraries and published Monthly Report on Weibo Usage in Public Libraries in which information regarding the quantity of original posts, reposts, censorship, and hot topics were studied. Based on this information along with further data from sina.com and qq.com, this article analyzes the issues regarding Weibo usage in public libraries of China and provides suggestions for improvement.

1. Introduction and development of Weibo in China

Weibo means Microblog, an online service that enables users to post, share and comment on messages, similar to Twitter. In May of 2007, the first Weibo networking started in mainland China. Unfortunately it did not get recognized by Chinese internet users until Sina Weibo was created by Sina.com in July of 2009. By then, Chinese internet users started to pay attention to the application and development of Weibo service.

Although the idea for Weibo from Twitter, even though it is called Chinese Twitter, it has more power and influence in China than Twitter has in the United States. In China, Weibo is more than a social networking site; from a personal idea to commercial to marketing and news, Weibo has become an important channel for users to post ideas, share feelings and obtain information.
2. Weibo service studies in China public libraries

Since 2009, Weibo has gained more and more popularity in public libraries, and research and studies on it had begun. By 2011 and 2012, articles on Weibo mushroomed. It had become a new point of library research. In general, Weibo studies include Weibo current applications, Weibo service format and contents, Weibo application structure and models and Weibo service weakness. College libraries have carried out many more Weibo studies than public libraries have.

3. Summary of Weibo usage by the public libraries in China

3.1 Weibo quantity and distribution

In 2012, Shandong Provincial Public Library began gathering and analyzing Weibo usage by the public libraries in China using data from sina.com and qq.com. Only official and departmental registered accounts were used in the analysis in order to maintain authority and accuracy.

By 2013, the number of public libraries that offered Weibo service had grown from 31 to 50, including three national libraries, twenty-two provincial libraries, twenty-one city libraries and four children's libraries. A list of all public libraries using Weibo is provided in the appendix.

Regional distribution of public libraries offering Weibo service is shown in Figure 1. The Eastern part of China plays the leading role. In particular, Shanghai Public Library has the largest usage of Weibo. In the northwestern region, Xinjiang Public Library is the brightest star; its “Kunlun Assembly” and “Taste of Xinjiang” have attracted many followers through its regional specialty.
3.2 Weibo Fans (粉丝)

Fans (粉丝) are the transliteration of fans from English meaning ardent followers and admirers of sports or movies. Weibo fans are those who follow you closely for your Weibo posts and comments. The more they follow you, the more feedback or comments you get from them; thus, the more fans you have, the more your Weibo posts will get attention. Influential public libraries often make use of Weibo fans to engage in interaction through forwarding and commenting posts. In 2012, there were a total of 503,697 Weibo fans among the 50 public libraries. By the end of 2013, that number had grown to 1,238,065, an increase of 47.52%. The influence of Weibo posts by the public libraries has also grown. The top four libraries that have the largest number of Weibo fans are Hubei Provincial Library, Guizhou Provincial Library, Shanghai Library Information Post, and the National Library. The distribution of Weibo fans is shown in Figure 2.
In 2013, there were 11 public libraries that had over 10,000 Weibo fans. Three of them, Guizhou Provincial Public Library, Shanghai Library Information Post, and Jinan City Public Library, had the fastest increase of fans, an increase of 4,285.81%, 2,466.73%, and 953.62% respectively.

3.3 Weibo transmissions and comments

In terms of the number of Weibo transmission, posts were transmitted 4.26 per day in 2012 and rose to 21.08 per day in 2013, an increase of 394.83%. The number of transmissions in Shanghai Library Information Post, Hunan Provincial Public Library, and Hangzhou Public Library doubled. The transmissions of the activity of “Summer Passion and Green Reading” in Shanghai Library Information Post are 306,195, becoming the highest Weibo transmission amongst all the public libraries. Clearly, the power of communication through Weibo has been enhanced.

In regard to Weibo post comments, there were 11.17 comments per day in 2013. There are 12 public libraries whose Weibo comments are over 1,000 annually, which accounts for 24% of the total comments analyzed as shown in Figure 3. Comments from Shanghai Library Information Post are primarily responsible for this figure; if comments from
Shanghai Library Information Post are taken out, the number of comments are only 2.44 per day.

Figure 3  2013 Ranking of Public Libraries on Weibo Comments over Ten Thousand

3.4 Weibo activity in the public libraries of China

Weibo activity of a public library is mainly measured by the number of posted articles, comments, and topics. In 2013, there were 43,496 posts from the 50 public libraries including 31,493 originals and 12,003 transmissions, which accounted for 72.4% and 27.6% of the total, respectively. But in 2012, there were only 25,053 posts, which implied an increase of 73.61% from 2012 to 2013. Because the number of Weibo posts increased so quickly, public libraries began to pay attention to offering Weibo service to the public.

In 2012, the average number of daily posts stood at 1.37. Hangzhou Public Library was number one with 8.89 daily posts on average. Ten public libraries had two posts per day. In 2013, the average daily posts rose to 2.38 and there were 17 public libraries that had two posts per day. This was an increase of 73.7%. The top five public libraries measured by number of posts were: Wulumuqi Public Library at 12.51; Shanghai Library Information Post at 12.51; Chongqing Public Library at 10.3; Heilongjiang Public Library at 7.73; and the National Public Library at 7.73 (see Figure 4).
In regard to Weibo topics for public libraries, there were a total of 804 topics in 2013. The original posts on the topics stood at 21,014, accounting for 67.03% of total posts. The originality of the posts was relatively high. There were over 200 posts pertaining to 23 topics, accounting for 2.83% of the total number of topics.

Weibo topics are all centered on activities and services. Figure 5 shows the topic distribution of Weibo in public libraries.
Figure 5  2013 Statistical data on Weibo Topics of Public Libraries

As shown in figure 5, library activity and information sharing account for 61.52%. Among them, the posts related to “Activity Reports”, “Life Knowledge”, “Reading Promotion”, “Library Business Express” and “Cultural Appreciation” appear at high frequency. It is basically a reflection of the service features of a public library: Reader’s First and Information Sharing.

4. Performance of Weibo service in the public libraries

4.1 The improvement of information sharing and specialty services of libraries

Public libraries are able to show their specialties in serving readers and conducting most influential services via the Weibo platform. The activities such as “Forum in Capital Library” from the Capital Library, “Daily Classic Reading” from China National Library, and “Weekend Story-Telling Session” from China National Children’s Library have attracted a lot of fans.

4.2 New splendid services of the public libraries have attracted more readers

By taking advantages of Weibo interaction (no limit on participation; it is convenient and fast) public libraries actively develop many new services for readers, which not only provide colorful cultural enjoyment but also capture the public’s attention. For example: “Writing Book Commentaries to Win Gifts” from Hunan Library that posts an activity of writing book commentaries on a specific book through Weibo. Whoever follows and forwards the post and write a book commentary would have a chance to win a special
gift from Hunan Library. "Beijing Books Exchange" from the Capital Library started in 2011 and promotes exchanging books so that all people would be able to enjoy reading without spending extra money. Due to the influence of Weibo, this activity has gone very well. And "Smiling for Good" from Hangzhou Library, when you post your picture with a smiling face in any scenery spot in Hangzhou, you may win a thousand yuan; and if you forward this activity post to three of your good friends, you all have a chance to win another gift and so on. These special activities have drawn more attention of the public and demonstrated the improved function of the library.

4.3 Fast and convenient exchange between libraries using Weibo has made for a win-win development

Each public library has demonstrated its own services via Weibo platform so that other libraries could be inspired and learn from each other. “Book Subway” in Wuhan is one of the role models. It intends to set up 25 self-serve libraries along the subway for the public’s convenience. This kind of mutual promotion and exchange has helped the public libraries advance collaboratively.

5. Problems in the public library Weibo service

5.1 Imbalance in different regions

In 2012, there were thirty-three libraries using Weibo of the total forty-six provincial public libraries, in China, which accounted for 71.73% of usage of Weibo based on the analysis of data from sina.com and qq.com. The leading libraries on Weibo service were in Beijing, Shanghai, Hangzhou and Xinjiang. In 2013, other libraries in Chongqing, Helongjiang, Hunan and Henan topped the list. Besides domestic Weibo service of public libraries, the foreign reader service department had also registered and notarized Weibo service in National Library and Shanghai Library. Shanghai Library Information Post was the best at this new service. Libraries in the eastern part of China had the largest transmission of Weibo service. There remains much more potential for public libraries of China to develop Weibo service, especially in local libraries, which hold a huge potential to fully develop an effective and efficient way to serve the readers better through the Weibo.

5.2 Time-effectiveness of Weibo posts

Weibo services in public libraries were developed only recently late so they do not work smoothly and timely all the time. Sometimes there are no posts in weeks, and other times there are tons of posts in hours. Some even become “empty Weibo”. There are 24 libraries in the data that have less than one post per day in average with slow update.

5.3 Weibo posts are vague in orientation

It is not fully considered that the Weibo users are relatively young with characterized nature. The posts are not well directed, neither delightful nor vivid. Some posts are too random to attract the readers.
5.4 Lack of interactions

Library Weibo posts are mainly a single-item release lacking in feedback and interactions. This produces problems in reading promotion and branded services. In some libraries at some times, the function of library Weibo is not very popular. It is confined to some degree in the range of propagation. From the posts transmitted and commented, there are 5 libraries that post fewer than 100 posts per year, in which two of them even have no posts at all. Timely response on a post is the most efficient way to communicate with the readers. Unfortunately some libraries do not realize the importance of this function, which reduces the effectiveness of the Weibo interaction.

5.5 Lack of regulations

Library Weibo service is intended to improve the overall service, to explore more service fields, and to improve equal-right cultural service. Presently, Weibo service in public libraries of China lacks order and regulations. Some of them are pursuing a big number of fans instead of content development. Some become a certain employee’s personal information platform. These are not beneficial in the long run. The development of library Weibo service depends not only on the enthusiasm of the library employees but also on the setup of policies and regulations.

6. Suggestions on Weibo service

6.1 Regulate Weibo service

Setting up an effective system of management and a set of Weibo regulations are the keys to the success of Weibo service. A special department or a team of Weibo management is necessary in each of the public libraries. Those activities would guarantee the growth of Weibo service in the long run.

6.2 Enforce the interaction of the Weibo services

Interaction is one of the most important elements. It can be enforced through timely and sufficient information exchanges. Public library Weibo should update its usage and add more content to interact with readers. There are some popular Weibo activities such as “Summer Passion and Green Reading” from Shanghai Library Information Post, “Write Good Book Commentaries to Win Gifts” from Hunan Library, “Reading Brighten the Dream-Award Winning Book Recommendation” from Shandong Provincial Library. By offering these activities, fans will be encouraged to post articles, transmit comments and attract more fans to join in. In addition, Weibo posts should be adjusted in the time zone when more readers are online to correspond well and to formalize a good interaction and information exchange.

6.3 Improve the quality of library Weibo

Weibo provides a platform for the public libraries to interact directly with readers. The posts should avoid publishing personal information. The contents of the posts should be reviewed timely and the topic of the posts should be carefully chosen. The topic should
focus on the reader’s concerns and service promotion. It is better to standardize the name of the topic and enforce the consulting and referencing functions of Weibo. Presently most of the posts are kind of reader activities; lectures and notices. There are few public libraries that utilize Weibo to make known their services.

6.4 Promote public library Weibo service function

Weibo service has become one of the basic functions for public libraries. Public libraries can utilize Weibo to actively collect suggestions, comments and requirements to provide more convenient and proficient information and characterize the service and solve practical problems for the readers. Furthermore, Weibo can also improve the interaction and relation between public libraries and their employees to establish a good workforce that can further serve readers better.

Appendix:

List of public libraries using Weibo:

There are three national public libraries: they are the National Library of China; the Digital Sharing Space of the National Library of China and Classical Culture Expanding Program in National Library of China.

There are twenty two provincial public libraries: they are Beijing Capital Library; Heilongjiang Provincial Public Library; Jilin Provincial Public Library; Liaoning Provincial Public Library; Xinjiang Public Library; Gansu Provincial Public Library; Shanxi Provincial Public Library; Chongqing Public Library; Guizhou Provincial Public Library; Yunnan Provincial Public Library; Hebei Provincial Public Library; Shandong Provincial Public Library; Henan Provincial Public Library; Anhui Provincial Public Library; Nanjing Public Library; Zhejiang Provincial Public Library; Shanghai Library Information Post; Hunan Provincial Public Library; Hubei Provincial Public Library; Fujian Provincial Public Library; Guangdong Zhongshan Provincial Public Library and Hainan Provincial Public Library.

There are twenty one city public libraries: they are Haerbin City Public Library; Changchun City Public Library; Dalian City Public Library; Wulumuqi City Public Library; Yinchuan City Public Library; Xian City Public Library; Chengdu City Public Library; Wuhan City Public Library; Changsha City Public Library; Jinan City Public Library; Qingdao City Public Library; Linyi City Public Library; Jinling City Public Library; Taicang City Public Library; Hangzhou City Public Library; Jiaxing City Public Library; Wenzhou
City Public Library; Xiamen City Public Library; Guangzhou City Public Library; Shenzhen City Public Library and Fuoshan City Public Library.

市级公共图书馆 (21 个): 哈尔滨市图书馆，长春市图书馆，大连图书馆，乌鲁木齐市图书馆，银川市图书馆，西安图书馆，成都图书馆，武汉图书馆，长沙图书馆，济南市图书馆，青岛市图书馆，临沂市图书馆，金陵图书馆，太仓市图书馆，杭州图书馆，嘉兴市图书馆，温州市图书馆，厦门市图书馆，广州图书馆，深圳图书馆，佛山市图书馆；

There are four children’s public libraries: they are Children’s Library of National Public Library of China; Shanghai Children’s Public Library; Children’s Audio-Visual Center of Chongqing City Public Library and Xiamen Children’s Public Library.

（少儿馆 4 个）: 国图少儿馆，上海少年儿童图书馆，重图太阳花—少儿视听中心，厦门少图；

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