PUBLIC LIBRARIES FUNCTION AS REPOSITORIES OF CULTURAL AND DIGITAL CAPITAL: A STUDY

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ABSTRACT: Investing in public libraries is one of the most effective ways for the state to combat inequality. Public library digitisation previously received a lot of attention from scholars, but the proof of its impact on cultural skills and knowledge and social mobility and the conceptual understanding of ties between digitalisation and cultural capital and social stratification are still lacking. " An analysis of cultural capital and stratification and studies on digital differences are combined in this piece. Cultural and digital capital in public libraries were examined to connect these two fields of study. Two-step cluster analysis and multinomial regression models were used to examine the differing profiles of current library users from the UK Taking Part Survey (2016–17). Traditional, Active, Family and Tech Access are four unique user groups with various cultural and digital capital levels, varied demographic profiles, and diverse ways to benefit from digital libraries. Libraries' involvement in decreasing socioeconomic inequality depends on tailoring their digital services to the unique needs of each user group. Digitalisation and (in)equality in other cultural organisations can also be studied using this framework.

KEYWORDS: Cultural wealth, Digital assets, The digital and analogue worlds, Libraries, Internet

INTRODUCTION: Cultural and digital materials can be acquired via public libraries, which may be one of the most powerful ways for the state to address inequality. The function of libraries in many countries around the world is unique, giving support from birth to death and spaces for study and empowerment for individuals who lack possibilities in their own communities. It is possible to think of library use and its benefits as an upper-class culture, but this is not the case for public libraries. The role of libraries in bridging the digital gap, offering hardware, software, and internet access, as well as empowering residents to better their living conditions, is recognised by scholars and policymakers alike.. But in a time of widening social and economic disparities, tightening budgets, and mounting demands on public services, libraries must make difficult choices about which programmes to promote. This may include deciding whether to invest in more physical copies of books, prioritise investment in remote digital access to library resources, or enhance access to digital technology and the Internet at the library location. It is crucial to have a strong research basis that shows which programmes can positively impact reducing social inequality.

It focuses on cultural practices' significance in re-enforcing class distinctions and their relationship to power (Savage et al., 2015). A powerful tool for analysing cultural institutions, including libraries,' capacity to alleviate inequity is provided by this method. As a result, cultural class analysis has thus far focused mostly on the function of culture in maintaining social differences rather than how this role may be changing owing to digitalisation (Brennen & Kreiss, 2016). Researchers concerned with the digital divide continue to point out that social uses of digital technology continue to be unequally distributed. Even if all the obstacles to entry are removed, there will still be disparities in terms of digital media literacy and the benefits that persons from various socioeconomic backgrounds can reap (e.g. Hargittai, 2002; Van Deursen, Helsper, Eynon, & van Dijk, 2017). Scholars and policymakers concerned with racial inequality and cultural participation should pay close attention to the topic of who benefits from digitisation in public libraries.

RESEARCH STATEMENT: Research shows that libraries are important as cultural and digital capital stores, but it also shows that different kinds of users will gain from digital libraries in different ways. In certain cases, public library digital services may perpetuate inequality since they are largely used by those who are already culturally and digital advantaged, while other digital services may perform a redistributive role, lowering inequality by being used by those who are less fortunate. This has ramifications for cultural policy and funding allocation for specific services. In order to develop appropriate policies and allocate resources for

various digital services, it is important to have an evidence-based overview of different social groups and their diverse uses of digital libraries, as well as an understanding of how these groups and uses relate to existing forms of social inequality.. This is particularly critical at a time when public service funding is on the decline. Which digital services in modern libraries should be prioritised if the goal is to alleviate inequality?

Research on cultural class analysis and the concept of cultural capital is used to help answer these difficult questions. It is also linked to discussions about digital divides and the concept of digital capital, and both are applied to the study of public libraries' potential role in reducing social inequity. The researchers used a two-step cluster analysis and a multinomial regression model to investigate the differing profiles of modern library users. To be more precise, the following three issues were investigated:

RQ1: To what extent are English public libraries being used today, both in-person and online, and what does this tell us about the libraries' ability to both replicate and redistribute cultural and digital wealth in this country?
RQ2: What is the age, gender, ethnicity, and occupation class of current library users?
Specifically, how might they use digital capital as a 'bridge' to gain other forms of capital?

LITERATURE SURVEY: Cultural capital is a term coined by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1984) to describe the interplay between a person's way of life and their social class. To put it another way, capitals are a form of transferable power that individuals can use to gain specific advantages and, in the long run, turn into new economic chances. Over time, they build up and determine an individual's chances of success and distinction in a particular field or setting (Bourdieu, 1984). There are three types of cultural capital: "embodied," "institutionalised," and "objectified." "Embedded" cultural capital refers to the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to access cultural products, while "institutionalised" cultural capital refers to educational qualifications and the cultural products themselves. It is possible to indicate one's social position and prestige by the use of various cultural assets, or types of cultural capital together (Bourdieu, 1984).

The mechanisms of social advantage generation and reproduction through technological means have been examined in recent accounts of class formations that incorporate ICTs into cultural and life trajectory accounts (Leguina, Arancibia-Carvajal, & Widdop, 2017; Leguina and Downey, in press; Mihelj, Leguina, & Downey, 2019; Van Deursen et al., 2017; Yates, Kirby, & Lockley, 2015). Bourdieu's theory is combined with the digital divide approach in these kinds of endeavours. There are three distinct types of digital divides, each resulting from inequalities in the material access to technology (the first digital divide), inequalities in the skills or knowledge (the second digital divide), and in the accumulated benefits derived from the use of digital technologies (the third digital divide) (DiMaggio & Hargittai, 2001; DiMaggio, Hargittai, Celeste, & Shafer, 2004; Mihelj et al., 2019). It's important to note that little has been done to examine the relationship between digital divides and cultural capital, especially for cultural practices (such as using a public library) that have existed long before the widespread adoption of digital technologies (see also Leguina et al., 2017).

Digital capital has helped bridge the gap between academics and the general public. "Digital capital" here refers to the acquisition of digital skills and technologies (Leguina & Downey, 2021, 3). There are a variety of ways in which digital capital can be acquired over time, transferred across various life stages and exchanged for social and economic advantages. The term "bridge capital" used to describe digital capital is particularly relevant in this context since it describes how individuals might use digital means to acquire money or transform one kind of capital into another. To be more specific, individuals can increase their social, cultural, and economic capital through online activities and the accumulation of digital capital (e.g., a better job, a larger social network, etc.). (Leguina & Downey, 2021; Ragnedda & Ruiu, 2020). To put it another way, digital capital is an element that "bridges" the offline and online spheres of activity by utilising digital advantages and disadvantages and then exchanging them for social, cultural and ecological benefits that eventually contribute to strengthening social positions (Bourdieu, 1984; Halford & Savage, 2010).

METHODOLOGY:
Annually, the English Taking Part Survey (TPS) collects a representative sample of the country's population aged 16 or older (Department for Digital, Media, Culture and Sports, 2018). The TPS questionnaire has a wide range of fixed and rotating questions on cultural involvement that encompass primarily fine arts, performing arts, sports, leisure and free time use, and expanding diversity of media and digital activities.. Participation in libraries is the focus of this study, which draws on data from 2016/17. (wave 12). When it comes to library

use in the last year, only wave 12 of the survey asks about 18 dichotomous variables (yes/no), including borrowing books, using login details, and accessing journal articles outside of the library. Various other factors are taken into accounts, such as sex, age, ethnicity, long-term illness, the presence of children in the home, and region (North/Midlands/South/East). The NS-SEC occupational class (higher managerial, administrative, and professional occupations, intermediate, semi-routine, and routine occupations, students, never workers, and long-term unemployed/ot are also considered.) Internet connectivity at home (including mobile devices) was utilised by researchers as an indicator of digital access and hence an indicator of the first digital divide despite the fact that TPS does not provide enough information to operationalise digital capital more thoroughly. Available data on cultural capital is heavily weighted toward its institutionalised form, as evidenced by one's level of education (university degree, post-secondary education, elementary education, or none at all). TPS Wave 12 (2016/17) had a total sample size of 9352 respondents. However, the study focused on 3460 respondents who had utilised public libraries at least once in the previous year.

APPROACHES TO PROBLEM SOLVING:

RQ1 is answered in the first section of the analysis, which examines trends in physical library visits and the use of library websites. As a starting point, it is possible to identify the most common types of library customers and then analyse whether or not library resources are distributed evenly among them. Two-step cluster analysis was used for this. Based on their similarity or 'distance' to one other, cluster analysis can be used to classify individuals into a limited number of categories (Kaufman & Rousseeuw, 1990). Cluster analysis algorithms' exploratory nature allows data to show individuals' 'natural' grouping based on observable patterns and trends. As a result of its desirable characteristics—particularly in terms of flexibility in handling categorical variables and adaptability for big datasets—the two-step cluster approach (SPSS Inc, 2001) was selected. According to Schwarz Bayesian Criterion, which analyses the technique to split the sample across all potential solutions, and cluster silhouette values, which ensure cohesiveness and separation within and between groups, the optimal number of groups is established. Alternative approaches for classifying dichotomic variables (multiple correlation analysis and hierarchical cluster) were used to validate the number of clusters and the membership of clusters, and similar findings were discovered.

Library users' demographics and their financial resources were employed as predictors of their cluster membership via multinomial logistic regression (Agresti, 2013). When the dependent variable is categorical, this model is a component of the generalised linear model family and can be used in situations where there are three or more distinct categories. Many statistical procedures estimate the log chances (the logarithm transformation of the likelihood that an individual belongs to a specific group) as a linear combination of the independent variables, and binomial logistic regression is one of them. The multinomial regression analysis is utilised in this study to examine if library users' demographic information and cultural and digital capital may predict whether they belong to a cluster (the outcome of the two-step cluster analysis). The latter are categorical variables that fall into one or more of the following categories.

FINDINGS: For the full set of indicators for libraries, see Fig. 1, which provides in-depth insight into a range of possible benefits deriving from (digital) library use in 2016 and 2017. Despite the fact that the majority of library users (n = 3460) still use libraries to borrow or browse books, the usage of in-house digital capabilities is also a popular activity. For example, borrowing books or taking children to library events can be viewed as a cultural capital indicator. Digital capital, on the other hand, can be measured by the usage of a computer, printing capabilities, and free Wi-Fi. Remote library access and electronic resource borrowing bring together digital and cultural capital in one convenient package.

Naturally, the crucial question is: Who utilises these diverse services, and how do they differ in terms of demographics? There were four distinct types of library users based on the results of the two-step cluster analysis: "Traditional," "Active," "Family," and "tech access." Fig. 2 shows that borrowing books is still a significant way for people to interact with libraries. In fact, 27.5 percent of library users only utilise them in this fashion, enough to constitute them a distinct class in their own right. Since they are only interested in using libraries as book reserves, this group has been dubbed "Traditional." On the other hand, 'Active' users are more likely to interact with the site.
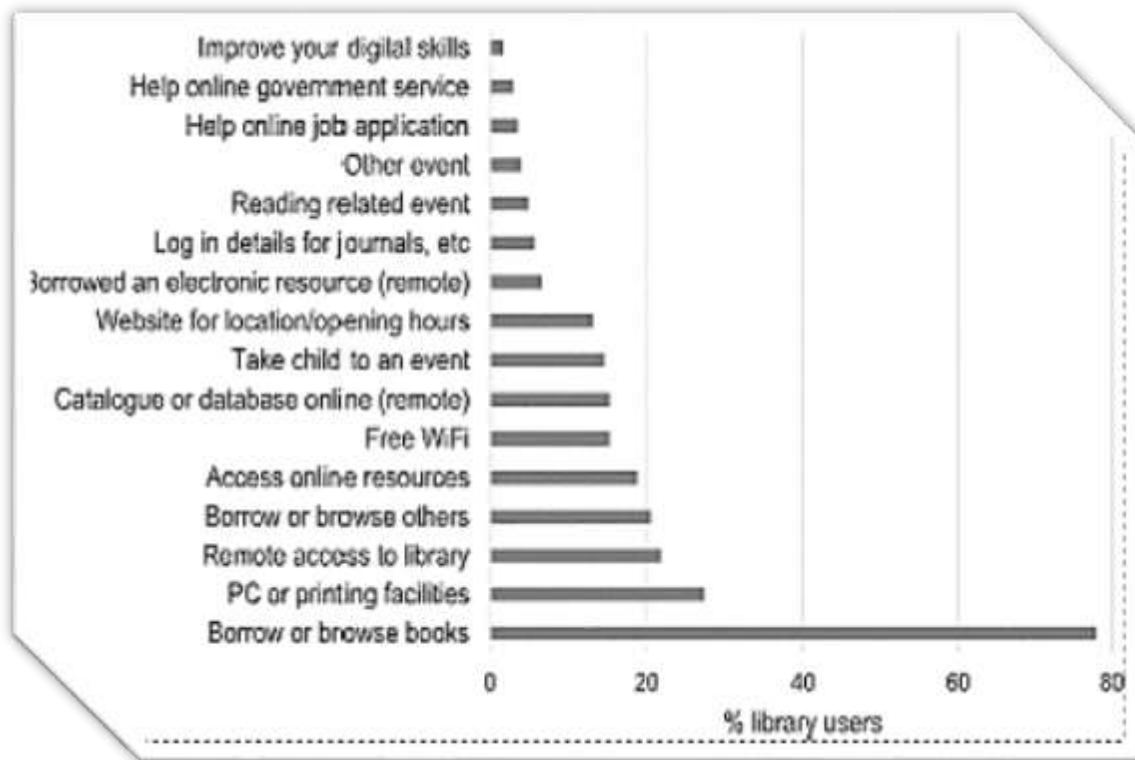
Figure 1: Detailed library usage breakdown for 2016/17 Taking Part Survey.
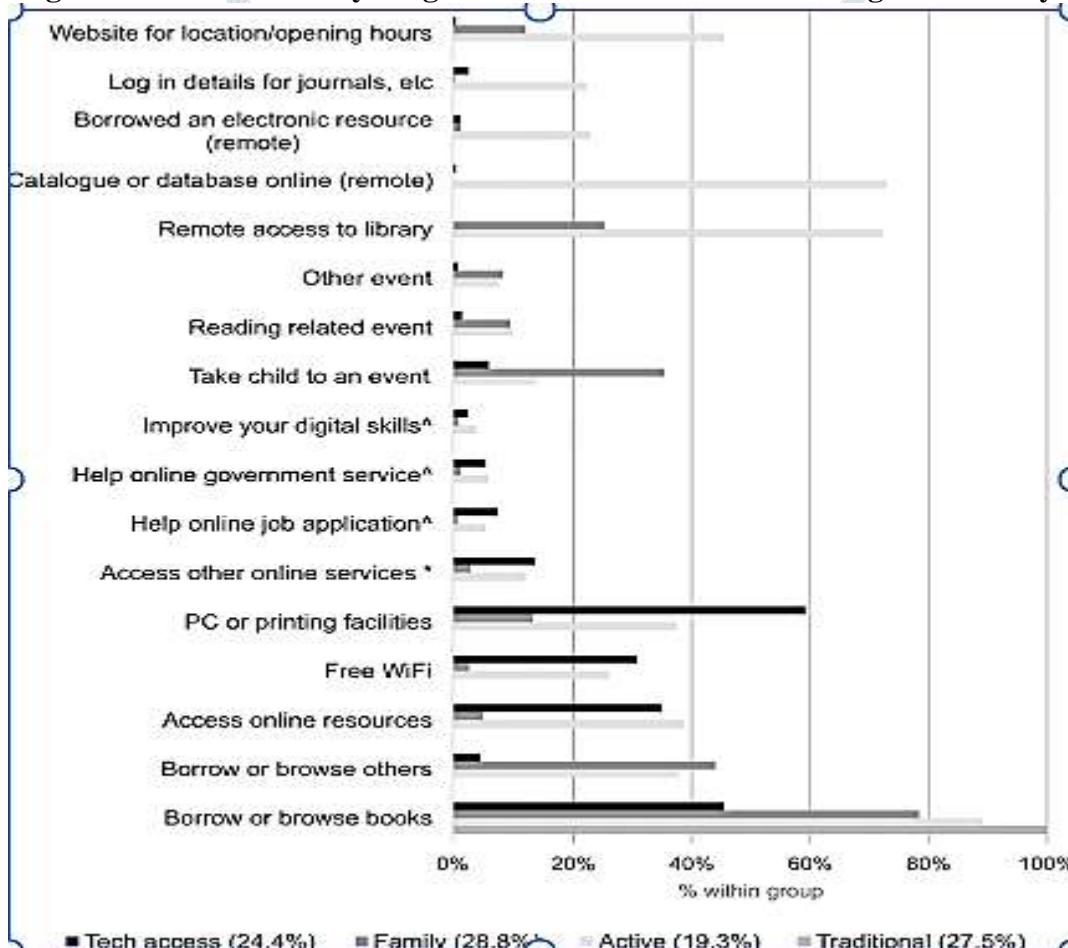

Figure 2: Types of library uses among the four identified clusters.

DISCUSSION: RQ1 and RQ2 examined how different types of library users differ in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, and class of employment, as well as basic metrics of cultural and digital capital, in the English community today (RQ3). According to the exploratory investigation, there are distinct user groups with varying demographics and levels of cultural and digital capital.

Priority number one for all four groups of library users is access to (print) books despite urgent calls for modernisation and digitalisation (Libraries Taskforce, 2016). According to Summers & Buchanan (2018), public libraries continue to provide 'analogue' services despite a drop in library issues and visits between 2006 and 2017 (O'Bryan, 2018). Perhaps the decline in library issues and visits is not simply a reflection of dwindling demand for traditional library services but was to an important extent driven by library closures, shortened opening hours, and reductions in paid staff, all resulting from budget cuts and open hours.

It should also be noted that 'tech access' group members have access to online services such as job applications and government services that are not significantly greater than those of 'active' individuals. Members of the "tech access" category may be unable to use particular gadgets and may not have the necessary skills or knowledge to benefit from more and more digital services (see also Robinson, 2009, 2011; Leguina & Downey, 2021). Members of "active" groups are more likely to realise the benefits of digital libraries and use them to their advantage, even if they aren't part of the community that needs these services the most. To put it another way, while the 'active' group, which has more digital and financial resources, is able to use advanced digital services to access cultural resources on their own, the 'tech access' group may need assistance from library staff in order to use this technology effectively as a means of acquiring other forms of resources or capital (see also Strover, 2019).

English public libraries can assist bridge the digital gap and serve as digital capital reservoirs while providing cultural and social services. As Ragnedda and Ruiu (2020) and Leguina & Downey (2019) argue, the three forms of access that are least popular among library users (online job applications, government services, and improved digital skills) are the ones that could have the most value for those who are disadvantaged, as they involve the mobilisation of digital capital for the purpose of improving one's economic, social, or cultural capital (2021). It's a concern that austerity measures in English libraries have disproportionately affected people in the direst need. More than ever, volunteer staff is needed to assist with digital technologies and the soft skills required for the conversion of electronic resources into cultural resources (Cas-selden et al., 2019).

CONCLUSION:

Both funding cuts and digitalisation are putting a strain on public libraries worldwide, including in the United Kingdom. Prioritising library resources now and in the future requires that policymakers consider the needs of various user groups and the role libraries play in promoting equity in economic, cultural, and technological spheres. Many countries' cultural policymakers may benefit from the findings of this study, even if it was limited to English public libraries. There is a tendency for scientists to focus on cultural capital and the digital divide in isolation, and this study sought to break that pattern by focusing on both simultaneously. This allowed the study to make a theoretical addition to both sociology of the consumer and the sociology of media. When the majority of people use digital technology to access and benefit from cultural resources, it's important to include both cultural and digital capital as potentially complementary types of capital to consider.

The issues discussed here suggest a slew of new ones that merit further investigation in the future. To determine whether diverse library usage promotes social mobility and alleviates inequality, additional research into the long-term interactions between various forms of digital and cultural capital is required. Consider how rapidly changing technology, such as quicker networks and an increasing reliance on mobile devices to access a wide range of services, may affect the library's ability to employ digitalisation to combat inequality as another crucial consideration effectively. Changing circumstances may lead to novel uses for digital library services and, as a result, a new group of ideal-typical library customers from the ones described in this article. In the future, more research should focus on the needs of those who do not already utilise public libraries and the barriers they face and the benefits they could derive from doing so. Researchers believe that their work will inspire other scholars to conduct comparable research using important concepts from cultural class analysis to examine other cultural organisations, regardless of whether they are privately or publicly supported.

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