.

Portraits of Success: Building Personas from Scholarly Reading Patterns

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Abstract: Personas are frequently used in marketing and system designs to illustrate a specific demographic, attitude and/or behaviour, and their use can be translated into the academic and library setting. The academic readership surveys conducted at universities in the United Kingdom in 2011 create a picture of the reading patterns of successful academic staff members. These surveys build upon surveys conducted by Tenopir & King since 1977 at US and international universities. Through the use of quantitative and qualitative techniques analyzing the participants' most recent scholarly reading, such as where they obtain the material, the principal purpose of the reading, the value of the reading to the purpose, and how many articles and books they read, we can see not only how frequently they are accessing the library material but also the outcomes and values of the reading and how the library collections contribute to their work. Successful faculty/academic staff members, for example those who published more journal articles and/or won awards in the past two years, read more scholarly material on average. By analyzing the survey results, we can find behavioral patterns based on different demographic variables. Thereby, we can create personas illustrating reading patterns and qualities of successful academic staff, and can show how the library plays a crucial role in their success.

Keywords: library assessment, academic libraries, qualitative research, quantitative research, research methods, user studies, persona , value of libraries

1. Introduction

Personas are fictional characters built on actual user data. They are valuable tools to represent an institution's target audience based on research and interviews, and are often used in marketing and business as a way of 'capturing' the ideal client or identifying unifying characteristics of users. They put a face on the customer; remove the tendency to think of oneself as the user, and help guide the assessment process.

The same principles can be applied in the academic world, as a way to personify quantitative and qualitative research on assessing the value of academic

libraries.   A 2011 United Kingdom academic reading survey examines the reading patterns of academics. In the surveys, we found shared characteristics among successful academics, defined as having received an award or recognition for work and producing more than average (mean) of seven publications in the past two years. The personas of successful academics allow the library, university, or other stakeholders to assess in what areas they meet the needs of successful academics and determine how their resources can better encourage academic success.

2. Past Studies and Methodology

The 2011 *Scholarly Reading and the Value of Library Resources* project in the United Kingdom, funded by JISC Collections, measures the value and outcomes of academic staff members from access to scholarly publications. The surveys build upon reading surveys conducted by Carol Tenopir and Donald W. King in the United States since 1977 (Tenopir and King, 2000) and in Australia and Finland in 2005 and 2006 (Tenopir et al. 2010). Reading patterns of science and non-science academic staff through the 1990s are summarized in Tenopir and King (2000) and King and Tenopir (2001). These two sources provide extensive literature review and serve as background for the data presented in this paper.

The personas are based on survey findings of reading patterns over a period of time, last incident of article and book readings, and demographic data. A full report of the U.K. survey results can be found at: http://lib-value.org or http://www.jisc-collections.ac.uk/Reports/ukscholarlyreadingreport/ from JISC Collections. Quantitative results of combined reading and the role of library collections in the U.K. can be found in Tenopir, et al. (2012).

While user-centered design and persona development have only rarely been applied to an academic library setting, it is a valuable tool for libraries to assess the needs of its users. Persona development in user-centered design started in 1998 with Alan Cooper's *The Inmates are Running the Asylum,* as a way to vividly represent the target users. Each persona represents a group of people with shared behavioral characteristics, and embodies behaviors of that group. This takes the emphasis off the library and onto the user (Zsuzsa, 2010). Personas are considered to be valuable as a design technique because they combine the benefits of quantitative and qualitative methods in an engaging and user-centric technique (Pruitt and Grudin, 2003). Pruitt (2006), Maness et al. (2008), and Lage (2011) provide extensive literature reviews and serve as background for this report. Studies at the University of Washington (2009), University of Colorado (Maness, 2008), and Cornell University (2007) introduce the persona to the academic library. Personas allow the library to take data and create accessible information.

Personas are only one way of understanding users, but they are sometimes seen as too subjective (Miaskiewicz, 2008) or are based on a sample size that is not statistically significant (McGinn and Kotamraju, 2008). The best personas are created directly from research data and are tied directly to user research findings

(Goodwin). We overcame these potential shortcomings by establishing our personas from quantitative and qualitative data of over 2,000 respondents in the United Kingdom. By basing the personas on quantitative data as well as open-ended comments, we have established a more representative sample size, and the findings from the survey support the personas.

3. The Persona Development Process

The personas were developed from the findings of the 2011 U.K. readership surveys through a combination of the multiple choice and open-ended questions. Our personas support the key findings from the U.K. study. The process involved:

- Separating the respondents into groups based on similar demographic characteristics, e.g. discipline, gender, age, award-winning.
- Analyzing the data by group and noting patterns in accessing, obtaining, and reading scholarly material.
- Further dividing the groups by similar patterns of scholarly reading, which became the main basis of each persona.
- Populating each persona with real world examples from the open-ended comments.

For this paper we focus on the personas of successful academics in humanities/social sciences and in the sciences. We also included a persona of a young academic staff member who is still in the beginnings of her career and who is looking to achieve success. For both the successful and the young academics, the library and scholarly reading plays a role in their academic achievements. Through the use of personas, we can assess the value and impact of the library and scholarly reading on their reading patterns.

4. Persona: Successful Humanist/Social Scientist

Sally Fitzgerald is one of fictional characters based on the personas we developed. She is a fifty-one year old professor of cultural anthropology. She specializes in African tribal culture, and she spent the past summer in the field with the Hadzabe tribe in Tanzania, studying how society is impacting their native culture. Sally recently received the Lucy Mair Medal from the Royal Anthropology Institute for her work to preserve and document native culture in Africa. She has two print subscriptions as part of membership to the Royal Anthropology Institute.

She is currently teaching two undergraduate and one postgraduate courses, and serves on advisory boards for two anthropology journals. She spends the majority of her work time on research and teaching, and the remainder of her time on administrative duties, service to the community, and advising her students. In the past two years she has published seven articles, two book chapters, and three conference proceedings. While she has not published a book, she is currently writing a book about the Hadzabe tribe, which should be published within the next year.

As part of her research and other work activities, Sally reads a lot of scholarly material. On average, she read thirty articles and fifteen books or book chapters per month. She reads more articles and books than her colleagues who have not been as successful in the past two years. She sometimes refers to other types of material, such as government documents, trade journals, and magazines, but she does not read them on a regular basis. She reads many of the articles with great care only to parts of the article, and a typical article reading is about ten minutes, but it is not surprising for her to spend an hour or more per article reading. She typically spends more time per book reading, approximately an hour, and she reads the book on at least two occasions. If she reads another type of publication, it is usually something she is given by a publisher, and she does not spend much time on these readings, approximately five to twenty minutes. She does not consider other publication readings to be important to her work. In an average month, Sally spends twenty hours on scholarly reading.

Articles and books, on the other hand, are essential to her work. She says, "My research and teaching cannot exist without them." She uses the library's online search tools to become aware of relevant articles and books, but she also depends on her colleagues to refer her to relevant material. She obtains articles almost solely from the library's e-journal collections, and she says, "I could not do without them, and not finding them right away (not being able to follow up a reference immediately) is heavily disruptive on my work." It is important for her to be able to access articles from a variety of locations, and she often reads in the office, home, or while traveling. She mainly reads articles in their first year of publication, but she also wants access to older articles. Even though she obtains the articles from an electronic source, she dislikes reading from the computer screen. Most of her articles are downloaded and printed, and she worries about the cost of printing. While the library is a principal source of her article readings, she often finds the library has a limited selection of books in her field. As a result, she tends to purchase copies or receives them from the publisher. She does note, "The role of the librarian is critical in accessing hard to find pieces."

She reads articles and books primarily for her research and writing because it is important to see what is going on in her field. Books are also useful for her teaching duties. She occasionally participates in blogs, podcasts, and online videos as part of her work, but she does not consider them a main part of her work activities. Rarely does she create any social media content, but she has posted on a blog and made a podcast of a lecture in the past. She notes, "Electronic resources are absolutely essential to our work—we constantly need wider access." Sally depends on the library's e-collections for her research and teaching, and the wide-range of scholarly articles has improved the quality of her work.

5. Successful Scientist

Akrum Patel is thirty-seven years old, and received his PhD in physics four years ago. He was recently promoted to associate professor. His current research is on the effects of naturally occurring radiation in material. He rarely has problems finding funding, and his current research is funded by a research council grant. Last year he received an excellence award for best young researcher, and he published ten refereed journal articles and two papers in conference proceedings in the past two years. He spends most of his work time on research at the radiation laboratory, and about twenty percent on teaching duties. He spends approximately fifty to sixty hours a week at his office and lab. He only has one personal subscription, which contains a print and electronic version; however, he rarely has time to read it.

He reads more than many of his colleagues, approximately twenty articles, three books or book chapters, and three other publications each month. He read a variety of other publications—magazines, government documents, trade journals, and conference proceedings. Typically he spends about thirty minutes per article or book reading, and he only spends ten minutes per other publication reading. He does not consider them as important to his work as articles or books. He reads articles with great care because he considers them the "main source of information, used for teaching, research, and proposal development." In an average month, Akrum spends twelve hours reading scholarly material.

He tends to read only the most recent publications because his field is constantly evolving and he needs the most up-to-date information. Akrum says, "I would not be able to do my research without the access to the latest technologies and developments." He also wants access to older key works and formative theories. He says, "I would like my library to have subscriptions to more journals and for longer periods into the past."

Akrum becomes aware of articles from a variety of methods—searching, browsing, citations, word-of-mouth, but however he finds the articles, he nearly always obtains them from the library's electronic subscriptions. He likes full-text journals, and databases that provide citation data. He stays very busy in the lab, and he likes that he can find and obtain library-provided material from the lab. He usually reads from the computer screen, either saving it or from online. His book readings are found through word of mouth and citations, and most of the books he reads are seminal to the physics field. They are books he refers to over and over again, many times books he purchased when he was a student. As a result, he rarely obtains them from the library's collections. He usually obtains other publications from a publisher or from a website.

He primarily relies on articles for his research, and he uses books for teaching activities. He considered his last book reading a "standard teaching text." Other publication readings maintain his current awareness or support his research. Akrum also participates in blogs, online videos, and user comments in articles, but he never creates any social media content. He does not think social media is intended for scholarly communication, and he says, "The only academic currency is peer reviewed journal publications in archive journals. None of the

other stuff matters a lot. Electronic ephemera are essentially a waste of time and aren't used by my community at all." Akrum values the high-quality articles provided by the library to keep him up-to-date in his research, and currently the library meets his needs.

6. The Young Researcher

Kelly Cho is twenty-nine years old. Last year she graduated with her PhD in power engineering, and she is in her first year as a research associate for a large UK research-university.   She works as part of a team investigating the architecture and operations of future power systems. The project is funded under EPSRC (engineering and physical sciences research council) grant. She spends nearly all her work time (90-100%) on research, but every once in a while she performs some administration duties, service to community, or presentations.

Since Kelly is at the beginning of her career, she has not authored many publications, but last year she was a co-author on a refereed journal article. She also has not received an award. Unlike some of her older colleagues, Kelly does not have any personal subscriptions. She finds that the library provides all the journals she needs, and she is not a member of a professional society, where a subscription would come as part of the membership.

While Kelly considers journal articles and other scholarly readings to be "absolutely essential for defining context of work and guiding ideas for new research," she does not read as much as some of her more successful colleagues. She reads from approximately fifteen articles, two book/book chapters, and one other publication (government document, conference proceeding, etc.) each month. While she read from two books last month, she does not refer to books on a regular basis and next month she may not read any. While she reads fewer publications, Kelly spends longer per article or book reading, approximately an hour. She reads with great care to all or parts of the article because she is often reading about new information and is concerned about understanding the content in order to "provide specific data on research directly related to own project." In an average month, she spends seventeen hours reading scholarly material.

Kelly reads a lot of older articles as she familiarizes herself with the field. It is important for her to have access to older, fundamental articles and books in her field in addition to recent publications. She finds the articles in a variety of different ways, and unlike some of her more established colleagues who have a preferred method, she does not have a particular method she usually uses. She often relies on citations, her colleagues, and the library's discovery search tools to become aware of articles. However, regardless of how she finds an article, she obtains it from the library's e-journals, unless a colleague provides it. She loves that the university library can be accessed from the lab because it saves her considerable time. She can find, obtain, and read articles without leaving her office or laboratory. She rarely brings her work home with her, and so

having off-site access is not as much a concern for her as some of her colleagues.

The library is also important to her for book readings. Unlike her older colleagues, she usually obtains books from the library because the library saves her money; she has a smaller personal collection, and she is less likely to receive a book for free from the publisher. The library is also essential for helping her become aware of relevant books and recognizing the core books in her field.

She obtains other publications including government documents, conference proceedings, and magazines from a colleague, publisher, or library. Often she does not obtain the other publications from the library because she is not aware the library has the desired material. She spends about twenty minutes per other publication reading, and considers them less important than article or book readings.

She almost entirely reads to support her research, and she considers all of her readings to be important for her work. Books tend to be considered more important because they are often the foundation of field. She says the readings are important because they inspire new thinking and are "important sources of information for validation of methods and implementation of new techniques."

Overall, Kelly wants access to a wide-range of journal subscriptions and a larger book collection through the library. Cost is a major factor for her, and she depends heavily on the library and her colleagues to keep costs down.

7. Conclusions

Our personas show scholarly reading is a vital part of the academic endeavor. Scholarly reading supports academic success because it is used in all aspects of the academic's work, in particular, with publications and awards. The personas exemplify the data collected from the 2011 U.K. academic reading survey, where we found that successful academics, those who received an award and published more in the past two years, read more. By creating personas of the successful academics, we are able to see how libraries can meet their needs and hopefully create further success at their universities. Beyond the role of scholarly reading in academic success, the personas also illustrate the vital importance of the library's e-journal collections, and the emphasis academics place on being able to quickly find and obtain information from their office or home.

The library is also critical for the development of younger academics. They have more restrictions on their budgets, and the library is a great place for them to obtain information. They are less likely to have their own copies or receive material for free from publishers. Therefore the library's book collections, in addition to its e-collections, are vital to helping young academics achieve success.

Regardless of the level of success, most academics consider reading essential for producing high-quality research and staying current in their field. The personas show how academics are interacting with the library collections and

how much of their work time is spent on scholarly reading. They illustrate the value of scholarly reading for academic success.

8. Acknowledgements

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