



Hybrid gatekeeping framework for value-added information services[☆]

Suhyeon Yoo^a, Ji-Hong Park^{b,*}

^a Korea Institute of Science and Technology Information, 66, Hoegi-ro, Dongdaemun-gu, Seoul 02456, Republic of Korea

^b Department of Library and Information Science, Yonsei University, 50 Yonsei-ro Seodaemun-gu, Seoul 03722, Republic of Korea



ABSTRACT

Information control processes designed to prioritize the most relevant information are important for enhancing the service experience of users. Gatekeeping is the process of filtering and disseminating information in online information services. This study investigates the effects of gatekeeping activities on information services and the resulting impact on the value of such services from a user's perspective in an information service environment characterized by online and offline transactions. Various hybrid gatekeeping activities are derived through focus group interviews with information services planners. A survey of information service users reveals values that could be obtained from the information services. The results of these two data gathering tools suggest an information service framework for hybrid environments. The findings enable the development of value-added information services for users through efficient information control in hybrid online and offline environments.

1. Introduction

According to the guidelines of the [Reference and User Service Association \(1990\)](#), information services in libraries take a variety of forms that include “direct personal assistance, directories, signs, exchange of information culled from reference sources, reader's advisory service, dissemination of information in anticipation of user needs or interests, and access to electronic information”.

The selection of appropriate information is essential for effective information services. Information services entail culling information from a wide array of resources and using various editing processes to develop more useful information. The term “gatekeeping” is used to describe the various information-filtering processes that occur throughout the entire process of transmitting information from the sender to the receiver. [Barzilai-Nahon \(2008\)](#) defined gatekeeping as the process of “controlling information as it moves through a gate (p. 1496).”

For the purposes of this research, online communication is defined as information flow and control online and offline communication is defined as information flow and control exercised in scenarios where the Internet is not connected; it includes mass communication and face-to-face communication. With the development of information and communications technologies (ICT), current information services frequently link online and offline transactions. For example, an article posted on an online community is often introduced to traditional mass media, such as TV or newspapers, after becoming an issue among netizens. A person can obtain information about a book, such as

information about the author, an abstract or contents summary, or information about related books, by scanning the quick response (QR) code on the physical book with a mobile phone.

2. Problem statement

Although extensive literature has been published on information control in information services, there are no models that describe information services where online and offline connections are integrated. An appropriate model of these systems would enable information service planners to plan and evaluate information services connecting online and offline environments. Information control strategies that consider such a hybrid environment would provide users with more relevant information services, thereby improving the customer experience.

The objective of this study is to investigate the effect of gatekeeping activities on information services, and the resulting effect on the service's value to users in an information service environment characterized by online and offline transactions.

To that end, the following research questions are posed:

RQ1. How do gatekeeping activities correspond to the specific characteristics of information service environments in which online and offline links are connected?

RQ2. What specific information service items add value for their users?

The findings will enable the development of information services

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* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: yoosu@kisti.re.kr (S. Yoo), jihongpark@yonsei.ac.kr (J.-H. Park).

that add value for users through efficient information controls in hybrid online and offline environments.

3. Literature review

3.1. Gatekeeping in information science

Much scholarly work has been devoted to the topic of gatekeeping in information science. According to Shoemaker and Vos (2009), gatekeeping is “the process of culling and crafting countless bits of information into the limited number of messages that reach people each day” (p. 1). Donohue, Tichenor, and Olien (1972) provide a broader definition of gatekeeping as all processes involved in information control, extending the definition to include the processes of withholding, transmission, shaping, manipulation, display, repetition, and timing.

Some studies have regarded editorial and reviewing processes as gatekeeping activities (Braun & Dióspatonyi, 2005; Cabanac, 2012; Glogoff, 1988). These studies refer to referees as editorial gatekeepers because the referees decide what is allowed in and what is kept out of their fields, controlling the flow of new ideas or knowledge within the academic discourse. Other studies have investigated the roles of information technology (IT) professionals as technological gatekeepers in controlling information flow (Cronin, 1982; Klobas & McGill, 1995). Technological gatekeeper here refers to the role these individuals play as boundary spanners, in which they engage in processes that filter and channel external technology and information into their respective organizations (Katz & Tushman, 1979). IT professionals are involved in planning for, designing, implementing, and developing information systems and IT projects; they are considered as facilitators of communication in the production and use of information.

Information intermediaries have been studied as gatekeepers (Agada, 1999; Sturges, 2001). Libraries and librarians provide access to information and knowledge, and thus, they play the role of information intermediaries. Oyelude and Bamigbola (2012) suggest that libraries and librarians should be considered as gateways to the knowledge environment.

Barzilai-Nahon (2004) advocated for a new network gatekeeping model in the information and network context. She differentiated the gatekeeping concept into 13 activities: selection, addition, withholding, display, channeling, shaping, manipulation, repetition, timing, localization, integration, disregard, and deletion. She argued that the definition of gatekeeping should not be confined to the processes of choice, distribution, and intermediation of information; rather, she adopted a more comprehensive concept of information control, as it is affected by the network.

Studies on gatekeeping with respect to news suggest that the function of gatekeeping has now moved out from the newsroom with the emergence of new technologies. Bro and Wallberg (2015) maintained that the function of gatekeeping is now performed by people outside newsrooms. Lazaroiu (2011) focused on citizens as news producers. Pearson and Kosicki (2017) specified five key areas of change to support the transition from the traditional gatekeeping model to a way-finding model via search engines or social media: the increased capacity for storing and publishing news, new tools for news creation, the rise of aggregators and gatewatchers, competition on a story-by-story basis, and immediate audience feedback.

3.2. Value-added model

Information services provide value to users through various gatekeeping activities. These services can be executed through offline face-to-face communication as well as online. Taylor (1986) presented one of the best-known value-added models for information services. His model consists of basic elements such as the user, interface, and system. The user is defined as an agent who actively searches for information in the information system to achieve a certain goal. The user chooses a

system based on six criteria: ease of use, noise reduction, quality, adaptability, time-saving, and cost-saving. The interface provides values added by the system to help the user's selection processes, thus serving as a negotiation space between the system and the user. Taylor presented 23 values, which include those that can be physically observed such as index terms and classification systems, and those that cannot physically be observed, such as accuracy and reliability. For example, the processes of quality control, editing, updating, and analysis add value to the accuracy, comprehensiveness, currency, reliability, and validity of the service, all of which enhance the quality of the service to the user, who may use these criteria to select the most useful service. This model provides a framework focused on the users' needs and preferences to design and evaluate the information system with the objective of satisfying the users' needs.

Twenty years after Taylor's model was first presented, Eisenberg and Dirks (2008) confirmed that this model remained applicable and valuable as a research tool, but suggested some improvements based on the intervening years of information system development. They renamed the basic element terms—user, interface, and system—to user criteria, value added, and system process, thereby clarifying the relationships among the elements. Further, they added more specific elements to the user selection criteria, values that completely satisfy the user selection criteria, and they also added system processes necessary to deliver such values. For example, Taylor presented time-saving and cost-saving as user criteria, whereas Eisenberg and Dirks integrated these two criteria into the single criterion of performance. Eisenberg and Dirks also added a new user criterion called pleasing, and listed aesthetics, entertaining, reward, and engaging as values that satisfy this criterion.

Based on this work, the later TEDS framework (Scholl, Eisenberg, Dirks, & Carlson, 2011) for assessing information systems encompassed the TEDS model and a 13-step procedure which extended the original Taylor model from the 1980s. The improved model can evaluate highly interactive and networked information system and information technology (IS/IT) artifacts. The values were amended and clarified, and new values were introduced to cover major aspects and characteristics of modern IS/IT artifacts. For example, values such as transaction, trust, feedback, community and social networking, and individualization were introduced in the adaptability criteria. These new values pertain to the characteristics of interactive and networked IS/IT artifacts. The TEDS model introduced new dimensions of scenarios and personae into the overall framework. Scholl and Carlson (2012) conducted an empirical study using the TEDS framework. They evaluated the websites of sports teams and found the TEDS framework to be an effective tool for systematically analyzing, evaluating, and comparing information artifacts.

Scholl, Ehrlich, Wiesner-Steiner, and Edich (2014) integrated the TEDS framework into the Moodle learning management platform, called TEDS*MOODLE. They adjusted the sub-categories of TEDS and offered clear specifications for making them both self-explanatory and flexible in the context of the Moodle learning platform. The TEDS*MOODLE system allows individual target groups to assess learning scenarios and course rooms. It has significance in that it is a flexibly designed evaluation system that can be used in a wide range of other contexts and for all kinds of other information artifacts. An empirical study of TEDS*MOODLE to evaluate the Moodle course rooms was conducted (Scholl, 2015). This study demonstrated the functionality and limitations of the application for different types of information artifacts.

Studies on the evaluation of information services have focused on online information services such as web sites. Little attention has been paid to planning and evaluating hybrid information services.

4. Framework

Gatekeeping in hybrid communications is schematized in Fig. 1. In

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