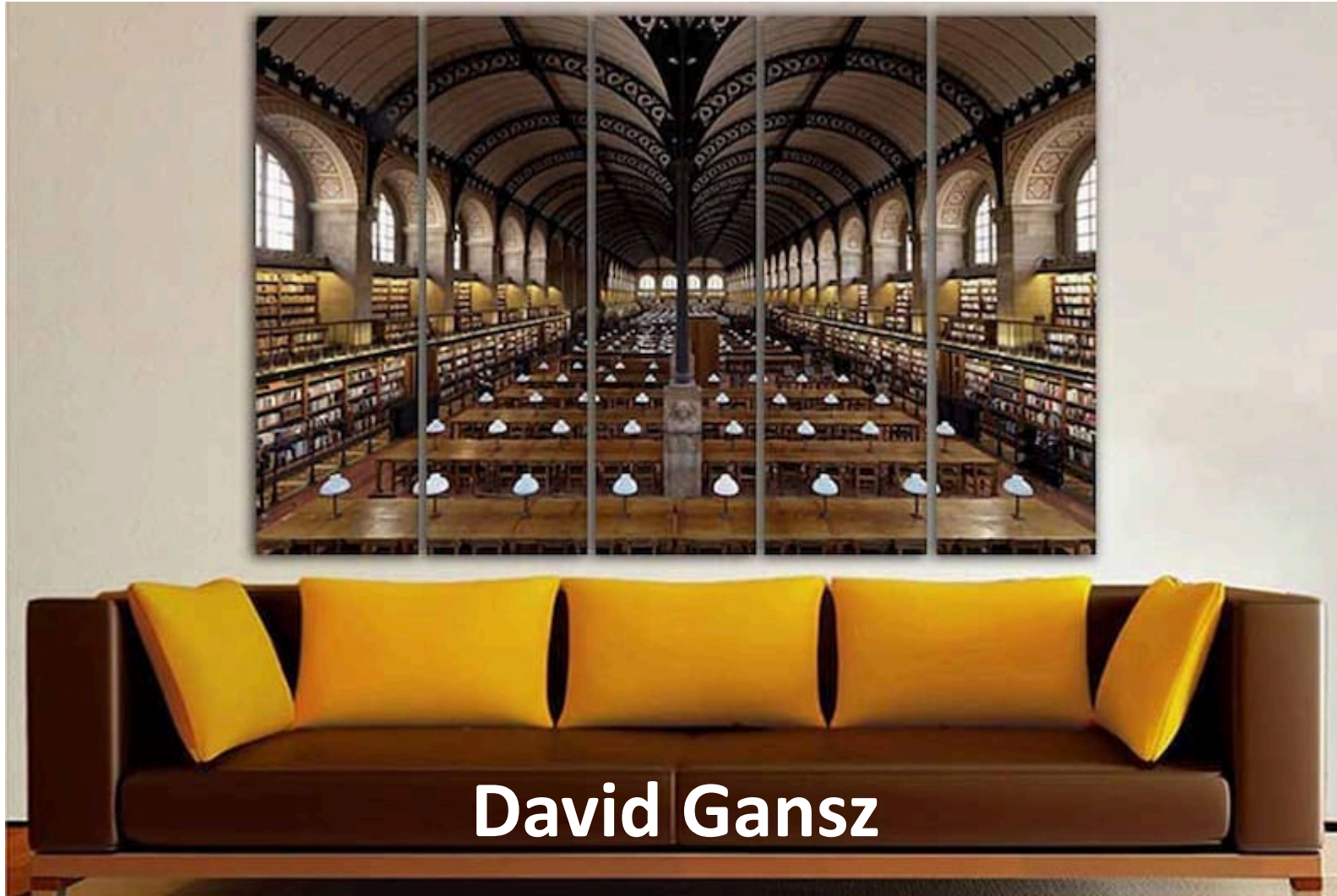# Reframing the Library Image:
Beyond Gatecounts and Checkouts

David Gansz

Disclaimer

The insights, perceptions, and opinions expressed in this presentation are entirely those of the presenter alone, and in no way are to be construed as representative of the presenter's employer or any other institution or organization with which the presenter is affiliated.

The Commoditization of Information

Buchanan, Elizabeth A. (1999). **"An Overview of Information Ethics Issues in a World-Wide Context."**
Ethics and Information Technology. V. 1. Pp. 193-201.

The information society or information age possesses a number of characteristics or qualities, among them… the consideration of information as a major commodity, analogous to the physical goods of the industrial age.

…this intense commoditization of information comprises a the most significant issue facing information professionals today.

MEDIA INFORMATION LITERACY for teachers

UNESCO · DIALOGUE

Organisation des Nations Unies pour l'éducation, la science et la culture · Programme international Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz pour la culture de la paix et le dialogue

Home   Introduction   Modules   Resources   Submit a Resource
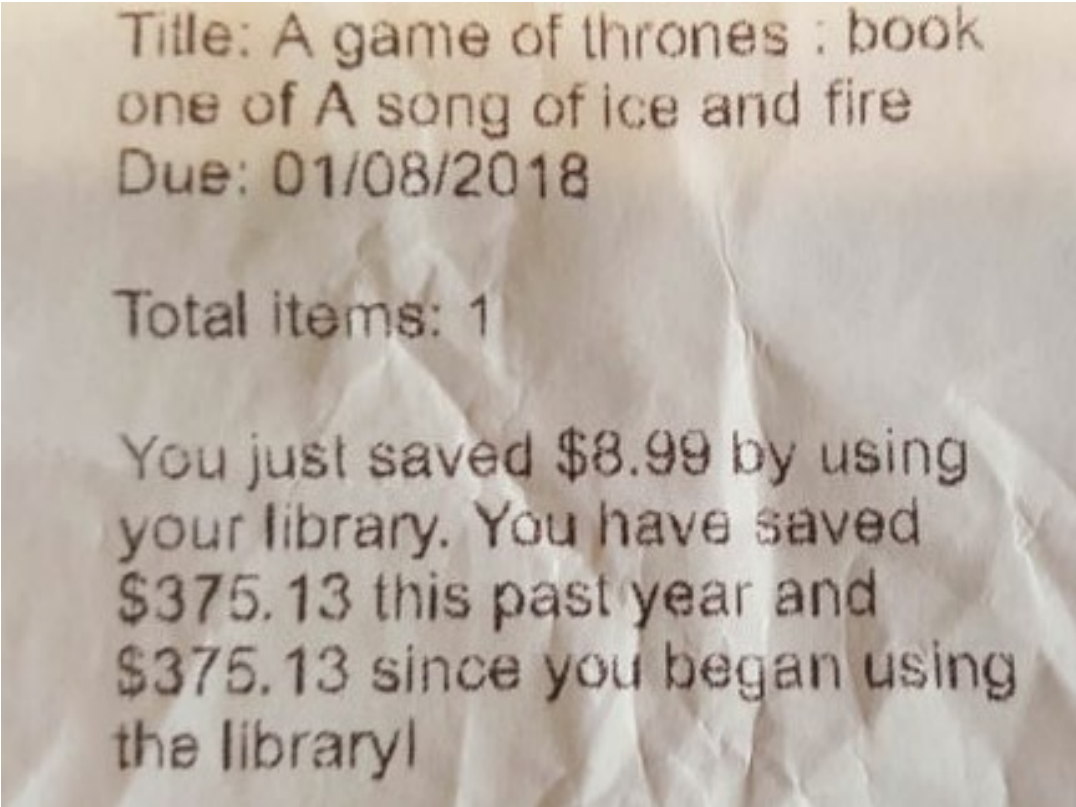
MODULES

Module 11: Media, Technology and the Global Village

Unit 3: Commoditization of Information

🕐 DURATION: 2.5 hours

Commoditized Information Profoundly Impacts Libraries and Librarians

Title: A game of thrones : book one of A song of ice and fire
Due: 01/08/2018

Total items: 1

You just saved $8.99 by using your library. You have saved $375.13 this past year and $375.13 since you began using the library!

- Library patrons see themselves as "customers" (i.e., *information consumers*) who expect to receive "value."

- Library "sponsors" see their Libraries as business-like, and expect a return on investment.

- Libraries measure "value" via quantifiable transactions (gatecounts/checkouts, clicks/downloads).

- Failure to prove an ROI results in slashed budgets, layoffs, and Library closures.

The Barnes & Noble Model
(McInformation)

Here's a "transaction":

Is this a Library or a Bookstore?

Is she swiping a Library Card
or a Credit Card?

Is he a patron/student
or a customer?

When Information Is Commoditized and Consumed, Education Is Commoditized and Consumed

…in the new system knowledge only has a performative rather than a transformative value…

…education becomes a stratified commodity with stratified suppliers providing varying items of quality for different marketing niches and class segments…

Ward, Steven C. (2012). *Neoliberalism and the Global Restructuring of Knowledge and Education.* New York: Routledge. Pp. 112-113.

Performative Information **Transformative Information**

Education Then Perpetuates the Commoditization Paradigm

ALA Presidential Committee on Information Literacy: Final Report, 1989

- "business needs"
- "American businesses"
- "good information for business"

- "how businesses should be conducted"

- "advancement"
- "a good job"
- "economic independence"

- "economic environments"
- "our nation's ability to compete internationally"

…the ACRL Standards…reinforce the notion that students are consumers, and that information and learning are commodities.

Saunders, D. B. (2010). **"Neoliberal Ideology and Public Higher Education in the United States."** *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies*, 8(1), 41-77.

Proprietary Content	Open Access

**…dominant notions of information literacy reinforce and reproduce neoliberal ideology… Neoliberalism is fundamentally anti-democratic and uninterested in social justice…**

Seale, Maura (2013). **"The Neoliberal Library."** *Information Literacy and Social Justice: Radical Professional Praxis*. Library Juice Press. Pp. 39-61.

Commoditization	Democratization

Commoditized information lends itself to marketing, advertising, public relations, and politics.
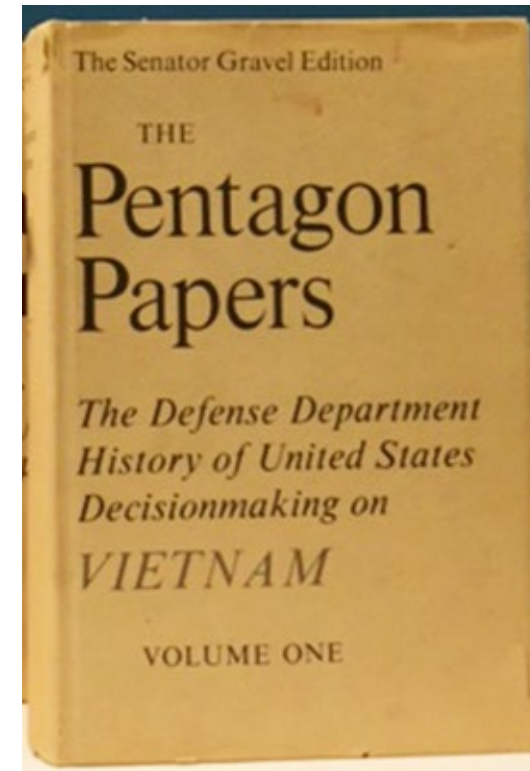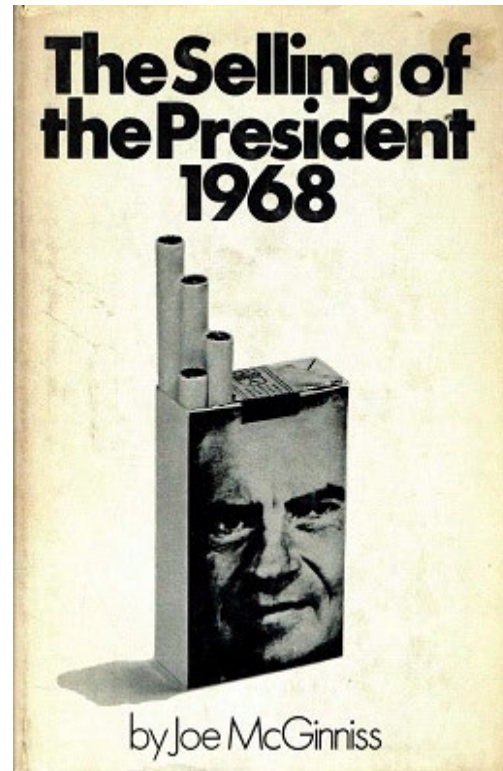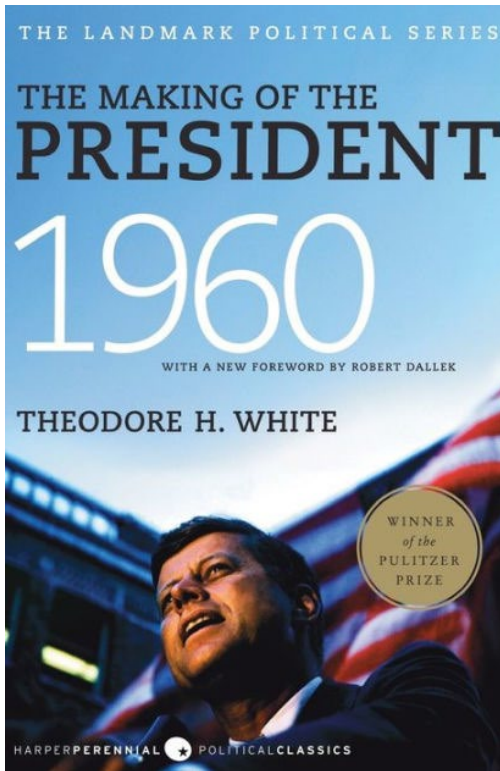
What these problem-solvers have in common with down-to-earth liars is the attempt to get rid of facts, and the confidence that this should be possible because of the inherent contingency of facts.

Arendt, Hannah (1971). *"Lying in Politics: Reflections on the Pentagon Papers."*
The New York Review.

Commoditized facts and statistics can be skewed to "prove" any point.

Confirmation bias.   **Conclusion shopping.**   **Alternative facts.**

**Propaganda suppresses, censors, or eliminates any information
that does not fit the desired conclusion.**

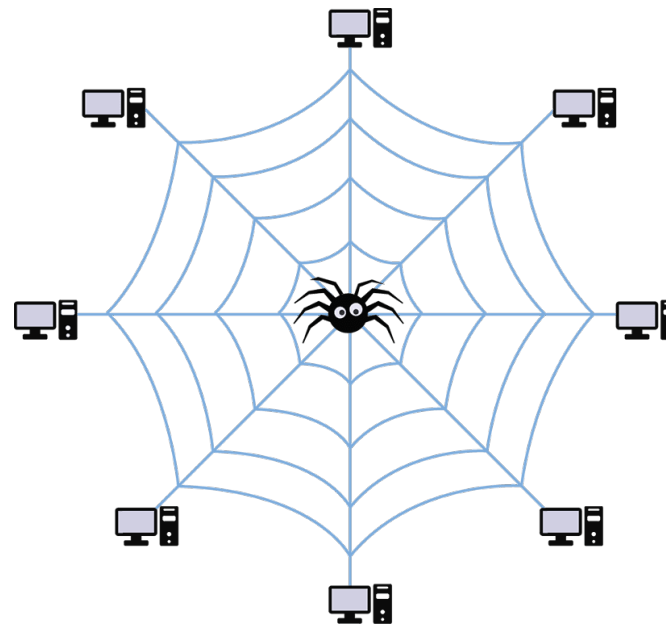**Even more sinister than the commoditization of information is…**

the weaponization of information as "misinformation."   *"dezinformatsiya"*

Propaganda/Censorship/Weaponization   **Scientific Integrity (Peer Review)**

The Web of Deceit

…aggregates prejudices and dresses falsehood with the veneer of respectability…

…it makes all claims look alike….

We now accept the illusion that what we find online is all we need to know….

The original idea of the Web was that it would democratize expertise.
Its unanticipated consequence is that it deflects from curiosity and research
and has made the real expert irrelevant…

Botstein, Leon (2015). **"Are We Still Making Citizens?"**
Democracy: A Journal of Ideas, Issue #36

Information Literacy was far more clear cut under the print paradigm,
when all authors were recognized authorities.

On the web, anybody can be a self-proclaimed author(ity), editor, and publisher.
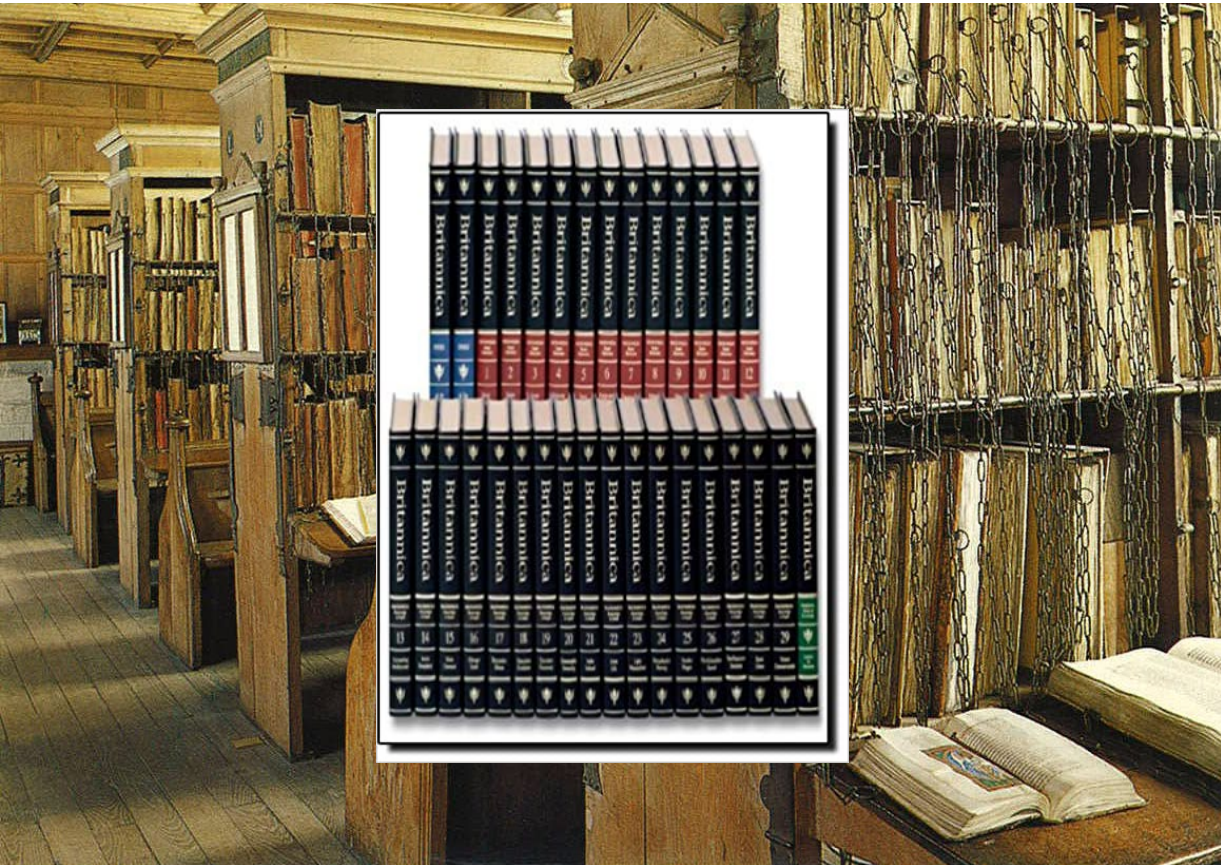
Magical thinking would have us believe that:

- All information has been digitized

- All information is available on the Internet via a quick Google search

- Google makes *everybody* an expert researcher

- All information is free
(This is the ultimate consumer marketing hoodwink.)

Libraries are obsolete.

Indiscriminate information consumption

is to the Second Dark Ages

what illiteracy was to the First.

© 2008

What role, then, do Libraries & Librarians serve in a Post-Truth world of commoditized information?
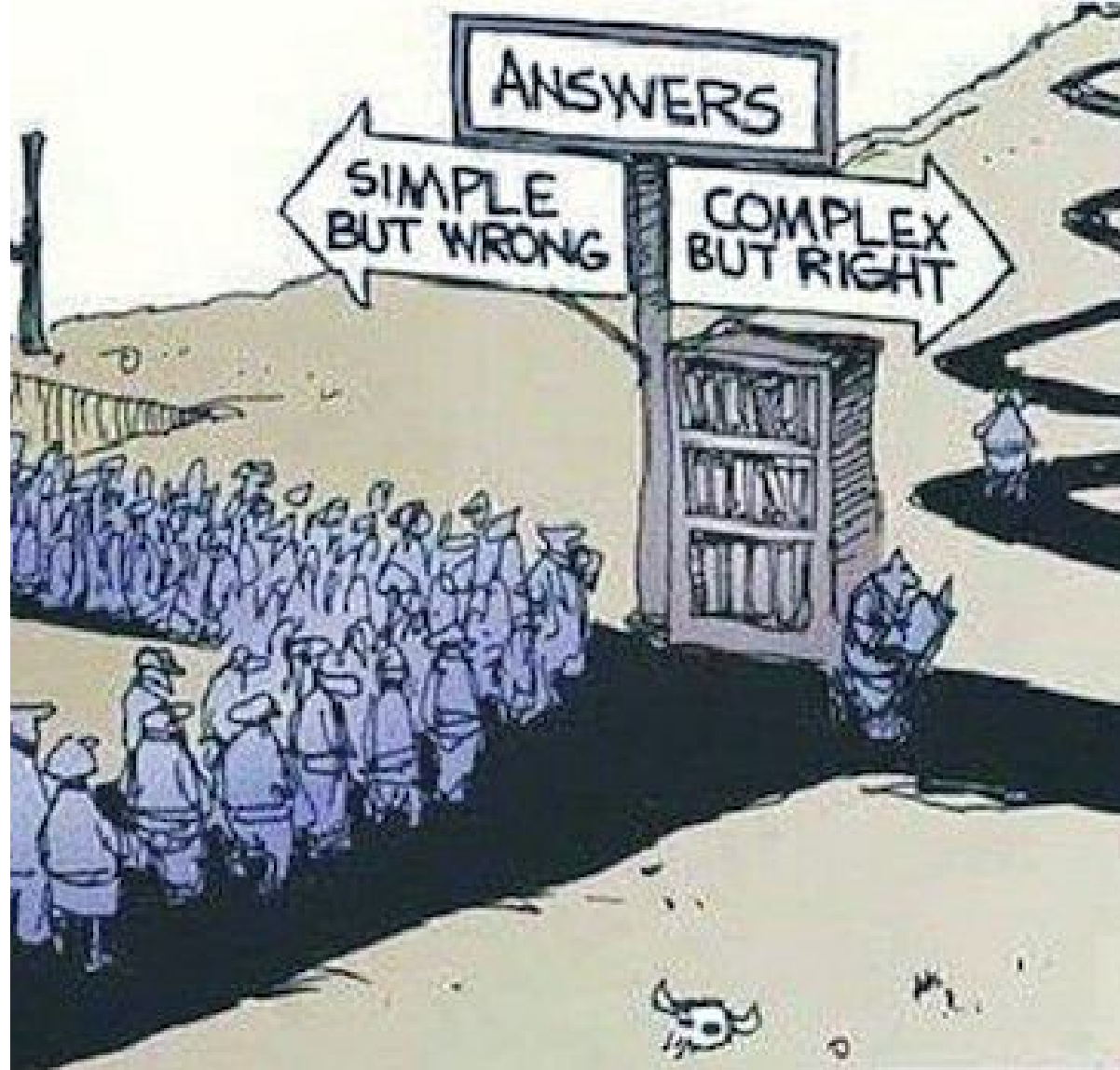
Information is Potentially Transformative

Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?
Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?

— T.S. Eliot, 1934

We have become rich in knowledge but poor in wisdom.

— Carl Jung, 1952

- Information, *per se*, is meaningless.

- Information takes on meaning when it becomes contextualized transformationally by an individual or group coming in contact with it.

- Information becomes transformative as it constellates with additional information to become knowledge.

Chandos Information Professional Series
CP

Transformative Library
and Information Work
Profiles in Social Justice

Stephen Bales and Tina Budzise-Weaver
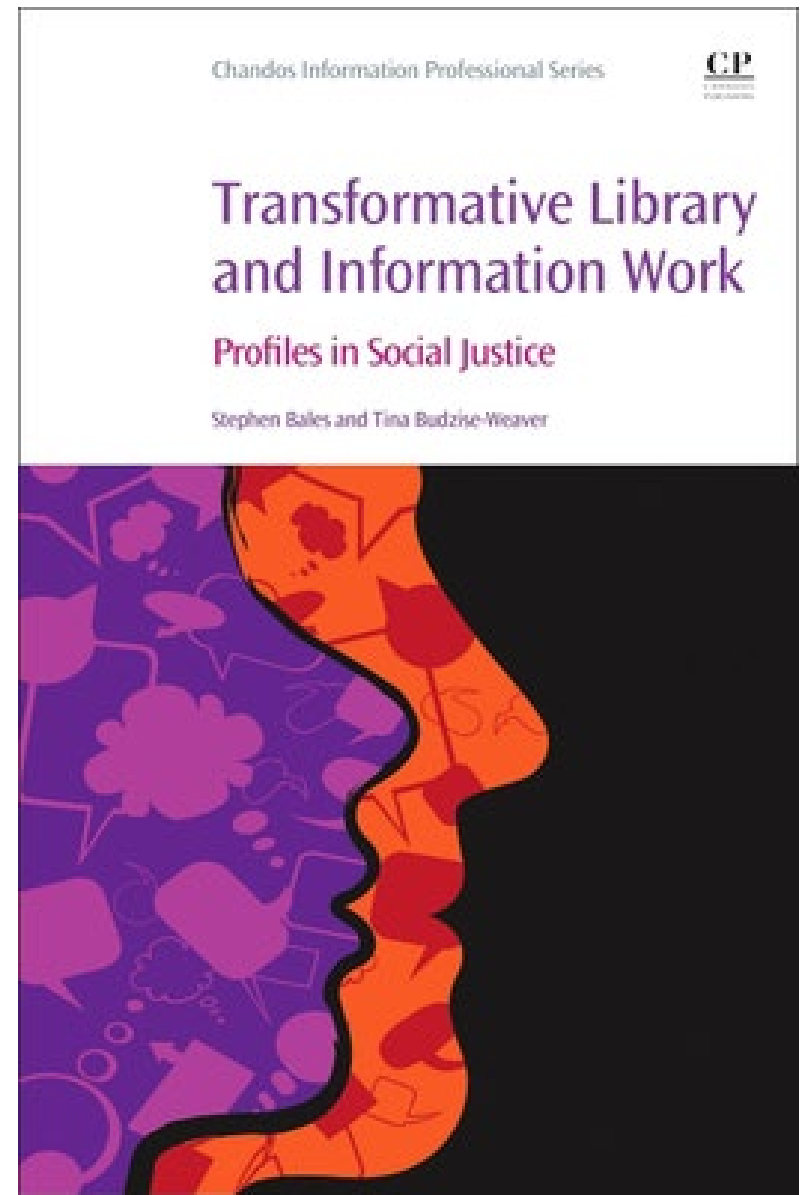
Facts   **Knowledge**

Picture "Research" as a train ride.

If research is a *destination (i.e., a commodity)*…

then Librarians are conductors
(verifying that researchers are traveling in the direction that *they themselves* have chosen).

We merely punch their ticket, in a transactional manner.

If research is a *journey*…

then Librarians are <mark>engineers</mark>
(ensuring that researchers see the scenery and get to the right stops along the way,
in a <mark>transformational</mark> manner).

Transactional   **Transpersonal**

Our Radical Experiment in the Democratization of Information

Librarians know how to:

- Locate and collect data (research)

- Glean information (information literacy)

- Distill knowledge (critical thinking), and

- Arrive at wisdom (lifelong learning).

Information is enhanced with value-added context via our mediation.

Every patron interaction is a "teachable moment."

Re-Stor(y)ing the Quest
to the (Re)Search Question

The refor(mul)ation of a question (or an assignment, thesis, or dissertation topic) may prove to be both groundbreaking and life-altering.

Literally, we become transposed in posing the question.

Is not 'cure' sometimes only a linguistic conversion?

— **James Hillman, *The Myth of Analysis*, 1972**

Librarians:

We don't just lead you to it;

We guide you *through* it.

Patron traffic (gatecounts/clicks) and circulation statistics (checkouts/downloads) don't begin to tell our story.

As Librarians, we know that we can't quantify our value,

because our services are potentially invaluable.

A reference interview can't be assigned a dollar value,

because it can range from 'worthless' to 'life-altering.'

How, then, do we demonstrate our intangible value?

Assessment in Libraries

Marketisation…privileges quantitative, at the expense of genuinely qualitative, educational substance.

Brancaleone, D., & O'Brien, S. (2011). **"Educational Commodification and the (Economic) Sign Value of Learning Outcomes."** *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 32(4). Pp. 501-519.

DOI: 10.1080/01425692.2011.578435

Young, Scott W. H. (2020). **"On the Imperial History of Library Assessment."**

scottwhyoung.com (blog posting)

- **Quantitative bias**,
including standardized measures like LIBQUAL+

Quantitative Assessment	Qualitative Assessment

Minnesota Department of Transportation

2013 MnDOT Library Valuation/Return On Investment (ROI) Study Findings

As we worked through the process of determining the library's value to MnDOT, it became apparent that the library produces two types of ROI: tangible and intangible. The *Tangible ROI* was calculated from dollars and time saved, and indicated that for every $1.00 spent on library staff and materials, $1.90 in benefits were returned to MnDOT.

Intangible ROI refers to things we cannot measure, such as the value library-supplied standards and specifications bring to MnDOT's construction projects, or, what is the value of knowledge gained through the reading of materials supplied by the library to MnDOT's projects, initiatives, and decision-making. Based on customer feedback, the Intangible Value returned to MnDOT is significant.

Sheila Hatchell, Library Director
Email: Sheila.hatchell@state.mn.us

| Monetary "Value" | Quality ("Value Added") |

Lib-Value: Values, Outcomes, and Return on Investment of Academic Libraries, Phase III: ROI of the Syracuse University Library

Bruce Kingma and Kathleen McClure

This study measures the return on investment (ROI) of the Syracuse University library. Faculty and students at Syracuse University were surveyed using contingent valuation methodology to measure their willingness to pay in time and money for the services of the academic library. Their travel time and use of the online library was measured to determine the environmental value of the academic library. The economic and environmental value of the Syracuse University library show an ROI of $4.49 returned to the university for every $1.00 spent each year.

Transactional Valuation (Tangible ROI)   **Contingent Valuation (Intangible ROI)**

Conventional Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are insufficient.

Diminished reference transaction statistics may be indicative of **success** rather than **failure**:
We've done such a good job of instructing researchers in how to mine the resources
that they no longer require our help.

What transcends these traditional assessment measurements of gatecounts and checkouts, clicks and downloads?

National Information Standards Organization (NISO)
Webinar on Meaningful Metrics, May 2021:

**Narrative becomes finally the more important thing to demonstrate value,
rather than measuring output.**

—Marie McVeigh, Clarivate Analytics

Metrics can only do so much. Numbers can only do so much.

What we're after is narrative, is stories.

—Rachel Borchardt, American University

Marsh, Diane E., *et al* (2016). **"==Stories== of Impact: The Role of ==Narrative== in Understanding the Value and Impact of Digital Collections."** *Archival Science*. V. 16. Pp. 327–372.

Current modes of assessing…are limited to metrics or analytics—numeric totals of downloads, clicks, hits, and "likes."

…a failure to account for the centrality of ==stories and storytelling== in impact assessment.

==Better storytelling==…would create…a culture of assessment and evidence-based practice, integrating the data and anecdotal evidence institutions have…

Without developing ==narratives== that contextualize the data, "clicks" and "hits" cannot orient institutions' decisions.

==…systematic collection and collation of stories== might offer institutions a method for conducting and understanding impact assessment.

Typical Research Process:

- Librarians provide materials to a researcher.

- The researcher utilizes the materials.

- The researcher publishes a new work or influences policy decision-making.

- The materials the Librarians provided are cited in the bibliography or are otherwise credited.

- At best, the Library and/or a Librarian receives a passing nod in a preface or introduction.

Additional Steps Necessary to Assess/Demonstrate Impact:

- Follow-up with the researcher.

- Ascertain how the research materials provided to the researcher were utilized.

- Identify any new research 'product' resulting from the research process.

- Ascertain Researcher's perceived Librarian "value."

- Draft an impact narrative as a Library 'case study.'

- Promote/market Library goods/services internally & externally via "storytelling."

Bedford, Denise, *et al* (2015). **"The Role of Librarians in a Knowledge Society: Valuing Our Intellectual Capital Assets."** In *Current Issues in Libraries, Information Science and Related Fields*. Emerald Publishing. V. 39. Pp. 81-108.

…knowledge economy…   …knowledge production and consumption…   … knowledge transactions…

…the primary value of a library in the knowledge society will shift from the library's resource collections to librarians' intellectual capital assets…

…intangible intellectual assets…

Knowledge facilitators (aka future librarians)…tell stories about knowledge...

The culture needs to shift from one that focuses on costs and cost cutting, to one of value creation...

Million, A.J., Sheila M. Hatchell, and Roberto A. Sarmiento (2012). ***Proving Your Library's <mark>Value:</mark>*** ***A Toolkit for*** *Transportation Librarians.* Missouri Department of Transportation.

Libraries must adapt and become better communicators, or they will run the risk of reinforcing a false narrative—that libraries are relics, and everything is online—and suffer the consequences.

<mark>Contingent valuation</mark> allows…a framework from which to ask, not if a library is worth the cost, but what that cost would be if the library did not exist.

<mark>Telling stories</mark> provides an opportunity to emphasize intangibles and highlight user satisfaction.

When funding decisions are being made, <mark>telling effective value stories</mark> is paramount.

To communicate value, <mark>you'll need to tell a story</mark>.

Valuing Federal Libraries.
The LAC Group. White paper [n.d., c. 2018]

…a federal library must focus not solely or even predominantly on demonstrating the financial return on investment (ROI) of the services and information products.

The approach we discuss…crafts a narrative…

…we show the value and importance of the invisible work librarians do…

Actively soliciting feedback from users about how the resources or services helped them creates a compelling narrative that will make the simple numbers more meaningful and memorable.

Librarians and information professionals must be proactive in demonstrating the value of their "invisible" work.

A Little Story About Storytelling

"Once upon a time, when I worked at [an undisclosed organization], we had a director who…
wanted a report on the library and its <mark>value</mark>…

So, I said, look, let's sit down in some focus groups with [the undisclosed organization's] staff members and ask them what the Library means to them…

He said, no, that's not how research is done.

So, then I told him about all the articles that could be found in the *Harvard Business Review* and elsewhere in the business literature on the value and effectiveness of <mark>storytelling</mark> in organizational communications.

He was aghast. He couldn't believe his ears. There was just no way that he would even consider stories as a way to come to an understanding about anything..."

A short while later, they closed the Library.

Proactive Storytelling

- Elevate stories above mere 'anecdotes'

- Write them down

- Aggregate them
- Polish them

- Prep an arsenal of success stories, one for each area of endeavor

- Designate a "primary storyteller"

- "Standardize" a uniform elevator speech for all employees

- Tell these stories to new employees during onboarding and acculturation, and plan to 'bequeath' them to our successors

- Indulge in opportunistic storytelling, to maximize impact