



Application of Symbolic Interaction, Social Exchange, and Dramaturgical Theories in Librarians' Interpersonal Communication to Improve Digital Library Information Services

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ABSTRACT

The development of digital services has transformed the pattern of interaction between librarians and library users, shifting from face-to-face communication to technology-based communication. This transformation creates new challenges in maintaining interpersonal closeness and the quality of information services. This study aims to analyze the application of Symbolic Interaction Theory, Social Exchange Theory, and Dramaturgical Theory in understanding the dynamics of librarians' interpersonal communication in the digital library environment. This research employs a literature review method with a qualitative analytical approach. Data sources were obtained from research findings, journal articles, and relevant scholarly books published between 2018 and 2025. The analysis was conducted through the stages of identification, classification, and synthesis of literature findings, focusing on the application of the main concepts of the three social theories within the context of digital library services. The results indicate that the three social theories provide complementary conceptual frameworks. Symbolic Interaction Theory explains how the meaning of services is constructed through symbols and digital language; Social Exchange Theory highlights the reciprocal balance between librarians and library users in the process of information sharing; while Dramaturgical Theory describes the role strategies of librarians in presenting a professional image in the digital environment. The integration of these three theories strengthens the understanding of the importance of interpersonal communication based on empathy, trust, and professionalism in building effective and humanistic information services in the digital era. This research contributes to the development of a theoretical framework in the study of library communication and provides a conceptual basis for enhancing the interpersonal competencies of digital librarians in the future.

KATA KUNCI

Komunikasi Interpersonal
Teori Sosial
Interaksi Simbolik
Pertukaran Sosial
Teori Dramaturgi
Layanan Perpustakaan digital

ABSTRAK

Perkembangan layanan digital telah mengubah pola interaksi antara pustakawan dan pemustaka, dari komunikasi tatap muka menjadi komunikasi berbasis teknologi. Perubahan ini menimbulkan tantangan baru dalam menjaga kedekatan interpersonal dan kualitas pelayanan informasi. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis penerapan teori interaksi simbolik, teori pertukaran sosial, dan teori dramaturgi dalam memahami dinamika komunikasi interpersonal pustakawan di lingkungan perpustakaan digital. Penelitian menggunakan metode literature review dengan pendekatan kualitatif analitis. Sumber data diperoleh dari hasil penelitian, artikel jurnal, dan buku ilmiah yang relevan pada periode 2018–2025. Analisis dilakukan melalui tahapan identifikasi, klasifikasi, dan



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sintesis terhadap temuan literatur dengan fokus pada penerapan konsep-konsep utama dari ketiga teori sosial tersebut dalam konteks layanan digital. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa ketiga teori sosial memberikan kerangka konseptual yang saling melengkapi. Teori interaksi simbolik menjelaskan bagaimana makna layanan dibangun melalui simbol dan bahasa digital; teori pertukaran sosial menyoroti keseimbangan timbal balik antara pustakawan dan pemustaka dalam proses berbagi informasi; sedangkan teori dramaturgi menggambarkan strategi peran pustakawan dalam menampilkan citra profesional di ruang digital. Integrasi ketiga teori ini memperkuat pemahaman tentang pentingnya komunikasi interpersonal berbasis empati, kepercayaan, dan profesionalitas dalam membangun layanan informasi yang efektif dan humanis di era digital. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada pengembangan kerangka teoretis dalam kajian komunikasi kepustakawanan, serta memberikan dasar konseptual bagi peningkatan kompetensi interpersonal pustakawan digital di masa depan.

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1. Introduction

Advances in information technology have driven the transformation of library services from conventional systems to digital libraries (Nurhayati, 2018). These changes require more intensive interpersonal communication between librarians and library users, particularly in bridging increasingly complex information needs (Bhatti, 2009). Social theories, such as symbolic interactionism, social exchange theory and dramaturgical theory, provide a strong conceptual framework for understanding how interactions between librarians and users can improve the quality of information services (Saracevic, 1997).

Information services in interpersonal communication are a fundamental element of social interaction that play an important role in various fields, including information services in libraries (Mustofa, et al., 2023). In a library environment, interpersonal communication is not limited to the process of conveying information from librarians to library users, but also involves efforts to build good relationships, mutual understanding, and provide valuable information experiences (Mustofa et al., 2024). The application of social theory in interpersonal communication provides a solid conceptual basis for understanding how interactions between librarians and patrons can result in more efficient services that focus on the needs of patrons (Pradifta, 2012).

The needs of library users faced by digital library services today focus on efforts to improve the quality of interaction between library users and librarians, even though this interaction can occur both in the virtual world and in the real world (Ajani et al., 2024). Often, easy digital access actually creates distance, where library users feel overwhelmed by information or hesitate to seek help because online interactions feel rigid and impersonal. Librarians need to change their approach from simply providing links to becoming facilitators and mentors, integrating the principles of social relationships into the digital communication between librarians and library users (Singh, 2024). Although facilitated by technology, these interactions must retain a personal element in order to optimally meet information needs.

Although a number of studies have highlighted the importance of interpersonal communication in library services (Bhatti, 2009; Mustofa et al., 2024), Most studies still focus on face-to-face service contexts and have not yet thoroughly examined the dynamics of interpersonal communication in digital environments. Existing studies generally emphasise aspects of technology, information system efficiency, and user satisfaction, but have not yet integrated a social theory approach to explain the dimensions of human interaction in an increasingly complex digital context. Furthermore, there is still limited research that comprehensively discusses how symbolic interaction theory, social exchange theory, and dramaturgical theory can be applied simultaneously to understand the relationship between librarians and library users in the digital library ecosystem. This gap highlights the need for research that bridges

technological and social aspects so that digital services do not lose the humanistic touch that characterises the librarian profession.

Therefore, this study aims to analyse how the role of librarians in digital library services and the application of social theories, such as symbolic interaction theory, social exchange theory and dramaturgy theory, can explain the interpersonal communication process between librarians and library users in digital library information services. In practical terms, this research is expected to benefit librarians in designing more effective communication strategies, improving service quality, and creating more humanistic relationships with library users. Academically, this research contributes to the development of communication studies and library science by integrating social theory into digital service practices.

This study was conducted to explore and systematically map out how social theory can be applied in interpersonal communication between librarians and library users in digital library services, identifying supporting and inhibiting factors and assessing the impact on user satisfaction. The research was conducted using qualitative methods through a literature review approach to valid and reliable primary studies. The aim is to generate theoretical understanding and practical recommendations so that digital library information services become more communicative and responsive.

2. Literature Review

Several previous studies have examined aspects of interpersonal communication in library services, although most still focus on physical or hybrid services, rather than fully digital ones. Research on 'The Relationship between Interpersonal Communication and Libraries: A Systematic Literature Review' by [Mustofa dkk \(2023\)](#) shows that librarians interpersonal communication has a positive impact on user comfort and library service satisfaction.

Libraries are vital centres of access to information and knowledge. With the passage of time, the way people access learning resources and share information has shifted to digital platforms. Innovations in library services have emerged in response to the needs of a society that is increasingly connected in the digital age ([Nafsi & Octavia, 2024](#)). The quality of contact between librarians and library users also determines how good the digital library service is. In other words, technology is merely a tool; personal interaction continues to play a major role in generating user satisfaction ([Andrian, 2025](#)). Connecting digital systems with users' social and emotional needs relies heavily on individual communication. By showing empathy, communicating clearly, being open and responsive, librarians can create a more humanised service experience, even when conducted in a virtual environment.

The growth of digital information services has inspired libraries to not only focus on providing resources, but also to increase the level of personal engagement between librarians and patrons. [Usman \(2025\)](#) states that effective communication service innovations in digital libraries can increase user participation through more human engagement in the information sharing process. This statement is consistent with research [Zareef & Jabeen \(2025\)](#) which emphasises the need for interpersonal skills combined with digital curatorial services. This encourages librarians to make services more accessible and relevant.

Another study by [Hu dkk \(2025\)](#) shows that good interpersonal communication, both face-to-face and via electronic platforms, can meet consumers' social needs and strengthen bonds in the context of digital services. Therefore, the theory of the need for 'ownership' in interpersonal communication can serve as a theoretical basis for increasing user satisfaction when using digital libraries. On the other hand, a study by [Chen dkk \(2025\)](#) linking the loss of personal and social resources to a decline in mental health among young people who are neither working nor attending school. This highlights the need for interpersonal communication-based digital information services to help bridge the information access gap and improve social welfare. This perspective reinforces the claim that social theory can be applied in the daily activities of librarians to offer more comprehensive services.

From a social theory perspective, research by [Klimczuk dkk \(2025\)](#) highlighting the importance of co-creation in social services, where individual contact is necessary, to produce more participatory digital service solutions, basic

elements are required. In a library environment, this model will help readers and librarians build a collaborative service ecosystem. [Dunsmore dkk \(2025\)](#) emphasising how closely this is linked to communication barriers between service providers and users, thereby affecting the quality of service received. Good interpersonal communication helps bridge this gap in digital library services. This statement is important because digital libraries not only serve as information providers, but also as venues for technical-based social contact.

Therefore, findings from previous studies indicate that human communication based on sociological concepts (such as the need for interaction, symbolism, and joint production) plays an important role in improving the quality of digital library information services. This study plays a crucial role in strengthening theoretical arguments while providing practical support for the development of interactive library services that are more humanistic, cooperative, and efficient. By integrating social theory perspectives, this study seeks to emphasise that the effectiveness of digital services depends not only on technological sophistication, but also on the ability of librarians to build meaningful relationships with library users. This approach is expected to strengthen a new paradigm in digital library services that places people at the centre of interaction and information experiences, while enriching the literature on interpersonal communication between librarians and users in the digital age.

In line with this, this study aims to analyse how the role of librarians in digital library services and the application of social theories such as symbolic interaction theory, social exchange theory, and dramaturgical theory can explain the process of interpersonal communication between librarians and library users in digital library information services. In practical terms, this research is expected to benefit librarians in designing more effective communication strategies, improving service quality, and creating more humanistic relationships with library users. Academically, this research contributes to the development of communication studies and library science by integrating social theory into digital service practices.

3. Research Methodology

This study utilised a qualitative method with a narrative literature review approach. This approach was chosen because the study aimed to understand, interpret, and synthesise theoretical concepts, particularly Symbolic Interaction Theory, Social Exchange Theory, and Dramaturgical Theory, in explaining the interpersonal communication process between librarians and library users in the context of digital library information services. Narrative literature reviews enable researchers to conduct in-depth conceptual explorations and construct analytical frameworks based on social theory, without being constrained by the strict quantification procedures used in [\(Creswell & Poth, 2016; Page et al., 2021; Snyder, 2019\)](#)

The data sources were obtained from reputable scientific databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and DOAJ, as well as accredited national journal portals. Literature searches were conducted using keywords such as digital library services, librarian interpersonal communication, symbolic interactionism, social exchange theory, and dramaturgy, in both Indonesian and English. Publication restrictions are set for the period 2018–2025 to ensure relevance to developments in digital library services and technology-based communication transformation.

The data analysis stages are carried out operationally through several steps, namely:

- 3.1. identification and selection of literature based on topic relevance and source credibility;
- 3.2. thematic classification of articles and books into the categories of symbolic interaction theory, social exchange, and dramaturgy;
- 3.3. content analysis to examine concepts, interaction patterns, and the role of librarians in digital service communication; and
- 3.4. conceptual synthesis, which involves linking findings from the literature with the context of digital library information services to produce a comprehensive and argumentative theoretical understanding. This process enables research to explain how these social theories function as analytical lenses in understanding the dynamics of interpersonal communication among librarians in a digital environment.

4. Results and Discussion

Research findings on the application of social theory in interpersonal communication to improve digital library information services show that interpersonal communication is very important in planning the utilisation of library services. In this case, libraries have undergone a major transformation from physical institutions to digital libraries, where access to information is no longer bound by location and time constraints (Onunka et al., 2023). This transformation brings new challenges, particularly in maintaining the quality of information services that remain confidential and effective even when conducted through virtual platforms. Essentially, the relationship between librarians and users, whether direct, such as through live chat, or indirect, is a complex interpersonal communication process.

Even in a digital context, the success of information services is greatly influenced by social understanding and interactions between individuals. Therefore, this study argues that the social theory framework is highly relevant and significant for analysing and improving these services. Particularly in the context of vital institutions such as libraries, this is not merely a series of mechanical procedures, but rather a complex and meaningful social interaction. To understand the depth and effectiveness of this service, this study focuses on two main pillars: the role of librarians in digital library services and the implementation of social theory in interpersonal communication among librarians in digital libraries.

To strengthen the analytical contribution of this study and avoid a purely normative reading, the results of the conceptual review were synthesised into an integrative framework. This synthesis is presented in the form of tables and conceptual models to systematically summarise the role of each social theory in improving the quality of digital library information services.

Table 1. Synthesis of the Role of Social Theory in Interpersonal Communication among Librarians in Digital Library Services

Social Theory	Key Analysis Focus	Contribution to Interpersonal Communication	Impact on Digital Library Services
Symbolic Interaction	The formation and negotiation of meaning through digital symbols	Assisting librarians in interpreting the language, icons, emoticons, and style of messages from library users in context	Improving clarity of communication, reducing misunderstandings, and accelerating the fulfilment of information needs
Social Exchange	Calculation of costs and rewards in service interactions	Encourage librarians to minimise the burden on library users (time, effort, stress) and maximise the value of services	Enhancing user satisfaction, trust, and loyalty towards digital services
Dramaturgy	Impression management and service professionalism	Guiding librarians in distinguishing between the front and back stages of digital services	Building a professional, reliable, and convincing service image despite being virtual-based
Symbolic Interaction	The formation and negotiation of meaning through digital symbols	Assisting librarians in interpreting the language, icons, emoticons, and style of messages from library users in context	Improving clarity of communication, reducing misunderstandings, and accelerating the fulfilment of information needs

Social Exchange	Calculation of costs and rewards in service interactions	Encourage librarians to minimise the burden on library users (time, effort, stress) and maximise the value of services	Enhancing user satisfaction, trust, and loyalty towards digital services
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This table shows that the three theories do not stand alone, but rather complement each other in shaping the quality of digital library information services. Based on the synthesis in Table 1, this study further elaborates on two main focuses, namely the role of librarians in digital library services and the implementation of social theory in interpersonal communication among librarians, which are explained in detail in the following subsections.

4.1. *The Role of Librarians in Digital Library Services*

Advances in information and communication technology have brought the world into a new era where access to information is free from spatial and temporal limitations. Since the emergence of the concept of digital libraries, the form of library services has changed fundamentally. Amidst this shift, the role of librarians has also evolved. They have evolved from being known simply as book shelf keepers or physical collection managers to becoming designers of digital information ecosystems and intellectual partners for libraries (UNUSA, 2025). These changes require librarians to be proactive and flexible in improving their digital skills in order to meet current challenges.

The role of librarians in providing rapidly changing digital library services can be divided into three main categories: digital content creators, digital literacy educators, and digital community builders. These three elements are interconnected, forming a complex yet balanced network of roles. Thirdly, modern librarians act as builders and bridges to the digital world. In the age of social media, creativity is a key component for reaching a wider audience. Librarians are expected to be creative, for example by launching bold book clubs that provide areas for interaction with the community. In this role, librarians become a positive influence in the world of knowledge, reviving the spirit of reading and learning in the digital environment. The important role of librarians in the digital age, apart from managing technology, is that they play a significant role in the digital library system. They are the ones who bring together the needs of library users, digital content, and information technology. As the front line in providing high-quality services, librarians ensure that library technology and systems are truly capable of providing a meaningful experience for library users. Although technology can expand access, libraries remain crucial to ensuring that the information available is accurate, easy to understand, and relevant to needs. Libraries act as filters that separate accurate information from false knowledge (misinformation) and excessive information. Without them, digital libraries could function as unorganised document repositories containing a lot of information but little meaning.

Librarians act as managers and organisers of digital materials, carefully arranging thousands of electronic resources, including e-books, e-journals, and databases, to ensure they remain accessible, reliable, and relevant to users' needs (Iqbal & Jumino, 2024). They also have an ethical responsibility to ensure that copyright is respected and that the information is original. In practice, for example, university librarians manage Institutional Repositories (IR) by compiling metadata, ensuring system interoperability, and curating research data in accordance with the principles of open science (Nashihuddin & Trianggoro, 2018). Their role appears to be strategic in maintaining the quality and enthusiasm of learning, not merely administrative.

Librarians act as instructors and providers of assistance for digital information literacy (DIL). Amidst the flood of digital information, librarians serve as guides who enable readers to navigate the sea of knowledge. They teach not only how to find and access information, but also how to engage critically with and use that information (Hardianty et al., 2024). Many librarians today, for example, often hold seminars or webinars on Scopus or EBSCO database search techniques for scientific literature. They also help to understand the principles of ethics in scientific writing and to detect plagiarism. This role highlights that librarians are not only providers of knowledge but also developers of integrity and academic literacy.

Modern librarians act as developers and bridges for digital communities. In the era of social media, innovation is the main driver for reaching a wider audience. Librarians are expected to innovate, for example by producing podcasts on literacy, video tutorials on navigating digital collections, or provocative book club discussions, spaces for interaction with the community (Jamridafrizal, Fitri, et al., 2024). At this point, librarians have become a positive influence in the world of knowledge, reigniting the spirit of reading and learning in the digital age. The important role of librarians in the digital age goes beyond simply managing technology; librarians play a vital role in digital library systems, serving as the intersection between user needs, digital content, and information technology.

As the front line in providing quality services, librarians ensure that library technology and systems truly provide a meaningful experience for users. Although technology can help reach more people, libraries are essential in ensuring that the information available is accurate, easy to understand, and relevant to users' needs (Jamridafrizal, Zulfitri, et al., 2024). Libraries act as filters that distinguish between knowledge and inaccurate information, i.e. misinformation. Digital libraries can function without them as random repositories containing papers with lots of data but little significance.

However, librarians must continue to improve their skills to fulfil this strategic role. The increasing demand for digital skills includes mastery of library software such as SLiMS and KOHA, knowledge of metadata systems, and the capacity to manage research data professionally (Nashihuddin & Trianggoro, 2018). Equally important, good digital communication skills are essential for librarians to serve users quickly, courteously and effectively through various channels, including email, chat and social media.

Ultimately, librarians remain at the heart of libraries themselves, despite the relentless advancement of technology. They serve as mediators between people and knowledge, as well as information managers. Librarians transform digital libraries into more than just repositories of information; they make them places that support a culture of learning through skill, compassion and innovation.

4.2. Implementation of Social Theory in Interpersonal Communication Among Librarians in Digital Libraries.

The application of social theory in communication between librarians in digital libraries can be explained through three main theories: symbolic interaction theory, social exchange theory, and dramaturgical theory. The use of these theories helps us understand the dynamics of interaction, motivation, and how librarians shape their self-image within the framework of information services dominated by digital technology.

4.2.1. Symbolic Interactionism Theory

Symbolic Interaction Theory, pioneered by George Herbert Mead and developed by Herbert Blumer, emphasises how people create meaning through the interpretation of symbols and interaction (Blumer, 1986). The context of interpersonal communication underpins the fundamental assumptions of this theory. According to Herbert Blumer's symbolic interaction theory, there are three main premises: first, humans act based on the meaning of an object. Secondly, meaning is derived from repeated social interactions. Thirdly, meaning is renewed by individual experiences.

According to symbolic interaction theory, social reality is constantly evolving and shaped by interpersonal interactions through symbols, through negotiation, individuals with diverse values and contexts define symbolic meaning, the way people act is influenced by their sense of self, which includes emotions, values, beliefs, and reflections on the past. However, humans cannot live alone; they need other people to interpret symbols and consider their own identities.

Humans utilise symbols in social interactions to understand the actions of others and convey ideas. From personal experiences in their social environment, the process of understanding symbols emerges. Interactions between humans and society give meaning to symbols. Symbols are social creations whose meanings are expressed by those who use them, through real objects, language, and actions. This hypothesis is used in social information and literature research (Ahmadi, 2008).

In terms of interaction, people apply ideas to see other people's points of view, language and social symbols help express ideas and feelings, human beings develop from childhood to adulthood through the process of communication and information distribution, enabling them to know themselves and understand how they should behave in various social environments (Laksmi, 2017). This proves that meaning can vary depending on a person's environment and time frame.

This theory emphasises the need for involvement in shaping individual behaviour and producing symbolic systems that underlie social relations in general. Humans must use what they know in everyday life to understand the changes and ambiguities of the world. This idea also applies in the field of library and information science, where symbolic understanding is very important.

This idea is particularly important in the context of digital libraries, as information services are no longer provided directly, but through mediated interactions (chat, email, video conferencing), where understanding of meaning is highly dependent on digital symbols. The application of theory in digital librarian communication, using symbolic interaction within the digital library environment, is a process in which librarians and users collaborate to create and explain digital symbols in order to achieve good understanding and effective service.

The meaning given to digital symbols and digital communication, elements such as symbols (e.g. icons, emoticons, or even font types and message duration) become crucial. Librarians' actions will depend on the meaning they give to messages from library users, and vice versa.

Example of Implementation: Librarian interprets: A patron sends a message saying, 'Please find this now 🙏.' The librarian will interpret the use of the word 'now' and the pleading emoticon (🙏) as a sign that the patron is in an urgent situation. This interpretation prompted librarians to immediately prioritise the request, as the meaning of the digital symbol was urgent.

4.2.1.1. Self-Presentation of Librarians

Librarians in digital libraries must consciously manage their self-presentation. Librarians build a professional, supportive, and friendly 'self' through the language, tone, and responses used in digital media.

Example of Implementation: Adopting Erving Goffman's dramaturgy approach, librarians act on the 'front stage' when serving patrons via live chat. To increase trust (service quality), librarians may consistently use formal greetings, very polite language, and respond within seconds. These actions create a strong 'symbolic' impression of professionalism and availability for library users, which directly improves the quality of information services.

4.2.1.2. Joint Negotiation and Interpretation.

The effectiveness of digital information services depends on the negotiation of meaning between librarians and users, as users' initial requests for information are often ambiguous. Librarians must use a series of symbolic messages (clarifying questions) to achieve a common understanding (definition of the situation).

Example of Meaning Negotiation Dialogue Implementation.

Reader: 'I need data about social media.'

Librarian: 'Right, are you referring to the definition, user statistics, or social impact? Please provide a specific year range.'

Reader: 'Oh, I need statistics on Twitter user growth in Southeast Asia for 2023.'

Through this exchange of verbal symbols, both parties successfully aligned the meaning of the phrase 'data about social media' into a clear and fulfilable request for information, thereby making the service effective. This process demonstrates how meaning is constructed dynamically in interaction.

Overall, symbolic interaction theory helps researchers understand that service quality in digital libraries is not merely a matter of technological availability, but lies in the quality of interaction and symbolic interpretation between librarians and library users.

4.2.1.3. Social Exchange Theory

In the context of digital library services, interactions between librarians and library users are not merely exchanges of messages, but rather social transactions that can be analysed in depth using the perspective of Social Exchange Theory. This theory states that every social interaction is essentially an effort to optimise benefits (rewards) and reduce expenditure (costs). In the fast-paced digital world, the success of information services greatly depends on the ability of library users to perform mental calculations (Davlembayeva & Alamanos, 2025), (Anam, 2025).

The rationality of librarians and library users who utilise digital services (such as assistance via chat, email, or video conferencing) incurs a number of mental and time costs, including time spent waiting for answers, effort to formulate complex questions, or frustration when dealing with difficult interfaces. What they want is accurate, fast, and relevant information with minimal effort.

Librarians also play a role in calculating costs and benefits. The costs that librarians must bear include the energy used to empathise, the time invested in finding appropriate resources, and the pressure to provide ideal answers. The rewards received by librarians include job satisfaction, recognition of their profession, and positive feedback from service users.

To improve the quality of service in digital libraries, librarians need to deliberately act as parties who seek to maximise benefits for library users while minimising costs. Good communication between individuals is very important in this strategy. Improving rewards through clarity and quality, librarians must ensure that every answer given is not only correct, but also conveyed in clear and easily understandable language (low processing costs). Quality (rewards) is enhanced by providing resources that exceed user expectations (Hapsari et al., 2025).

Reducing expenditure through good interpersonal skills, interpersonal elements such as empathy, kindness, and availability (positivity) serve as important emotional rewards. When librarians provide emotional support in digital interactions, this can reduce the psychological burden (such as stress or confusion) that users may experience. A responsive librarian can also reduce waiting times for library users.

Building Good Expectations Comparison Level: When users receive consistently excellent service from digital librarians, they will increase their comparison level, i.e., what they expect from the service in the future. The higher this comparison level, the greater the sense of 'bonding' that library users feel towards library services, because they are confident that these services will consistently provide greater benefits than their costs.

Example of Practical Implementation: a student searches for rare journal references through a digital librarian chat service.

Librarian A (Failed in Social Exchange): Responded quickly, but only directed students to the database home page and asked them to search for it themselves. The cost to library users is high because they have to search for it themselves, and the reward is low because there is no immediate solution. Students may feel disappointed and choose not to use the chat service anymore (discontinue interaction).

Librarian B (Successful in Social Interaction): Responded with understanding ('I understand that this journal is difficult to find') and immediately shared a direct link to the journal, as well as including two additional references that might be useful. The cost to the user was very affordable, and the reward was substantial. Students will feel satisfied, receive more than they anticipated, and be more likely to return to use the librarian chat service in the future.

Thus, the application of social exchange theory in interpersonal communication interactions ensures that digital librarians do not merely convey information, but also proactively manage relationships by emphasising a balance between costs and rewards to generate sustainable satisfaction and user loyalty.

4.2.1.4. Dramaturgy Theory

Dramaturgical theory, introduced by Erving Goffman, provides a very interesting framework for understanding interpersonal communication between librarians, especially in the context of increasingly developed digital library services. This theory views social interaction as a theatrical performance, in which individuals, consciously or unconsciously, play roles to create the desired impression in front of their audience, namely the readers. Librarians, in this context, play the role of actors (Wongkar et al., 2025).

The front stage refers to the area where librarians interact directly with users, either through virtual face-to-face meetings (such as video calls or live chats) or in public text formats such as FAQs or service posts on social media (Andini et al., 2018). On this stage, librarians must maintain a performance that is appropriate to their professional position. This appearance includes chat interface settings, virtual backgrounds during video calls, personal appearance, use of formal language, appropriate terminology, and timeliness in responding, as well as professional interaction, empathy reflected in words, and politeness. The aim is to assure library users that they are a reliable, trustworthy source of information and are always ready to help, even though they can only be accessed online.

An example of front-of-house use: when a user asks a question via the live chat feature about how to access a paid journal, the librarian immediately responds in a formal but friendly manner. Librarians use their names and professional titles (Personal Front) and provide clear and organised steps, avoiding the use of abbreviations or colloquial language. The quality of these responses serves as an effort by the team to assure users (the audience) that the digital library information service is carried out efficiently and professionally.

Example of backstage, preparation and relaxation. Conversely, Backstage is an area where librarians take a break from their public roles and prepare for their next performance. In the context of digital libraries, this is a moment when librarians communicate with colleagues (fellow staff members), discuss technical issues, search for complex databases, or even briefly express their frustration in internal chat groups. Here, formal appearance norms can be disregarded. This backstage area is very important because it is where team unity and technical preparation (system understanding, database, and problem solving) are practised, which will ultimately improve the quality of the performance on stage.

Example of Backstage Application. A librarian received a very specific and technical question from a patron. Before providing answers in live chat (Front Stage), librarians will first switch to internal communication channels (Back Stage) to verify information with librarians who are experts in reference. This internal discussion may use more informal language or technical terms that would not be used in front of readers. After obtaining a verified solution, the librarian returns to the front stage and delivers the answer as a single, professional and integrated response, as if the process of finding the solution was instantaneous and easy.

By utilising Dramaturgical Theory, the success of digital library information services is largely determined by the librarian's ability to manage the distinction between visible and invisible areas. Good interpersonal communication in digital services involves not only answering questions, but also conveying services in a manner that appears trustworthy and convincing, supported by strong coordination and technical preparation behind the scenes.

Conceptually, the results of this study can be formulated into an integrative model of librarians' interpersonal communication in digital library services. This model places librarians as key actors at the intersection of digital technology, user needs, and social interaction. In this model:

4.2.1.4.1. Symbolic Interaction Theory serves as the foundation of meaning, explaining how digital symbols (text, icons, time responses) are interpreted dynamically in librarian–user interactions.

4.2.1.4.2. Social Exchange Theory acts as a relational mechanism, regulating the balance between costs and rewards in the digital information service process.

4.2.1.4.3. Dramaturgical theory serves as a performative framework, guiding librarians in managing their professional image through the separation of the front stage (service interactions) and the back stage (internal coordination).

These three theories interact simultaneously and form an effective digital information service cycle, in which meaningful interpersonal communication results in user satisfaction, trust in the service, and continued use of the digital library. Thus, the quality of information services is not solely determined by technological sophistication, but by the success of librarians in integrating meaning, social relations, and professional performance in digital communication.

5. Conclusion

Based on the results of the research that has been conducted, the conclusion is that the application of social theories such as symbolic interaction theory, social exchange theory, and dramaturgy theory is very important in improving the quality and effectiveness of interpersonal communication between librarians and library users in digital library services. These three theories complement each other in understanding the dynamics of interaction, building shared meaning, and presenting the professional image of librarians digitally. The application of aspects such as digital symbols and language, mutual balance in information exchange, and professional image display strategies can strengthen humanistic relationships and trust, while ensuring responsive, efficient, and reliable services. Thus, the integration of this social theory greatly assists librarians in designing and implementing digital information services that are not only technically sound but also retain the human touch that characterises the librarian profession.

5.1. Recommendations

Based on research results that emphasise the importance of applying social theories, particularly symbolic interaction theory, social exchange theory, and dramaturgical theory, in improving interpersonal communication in the era of digital library services, it is recommended that librarians not only rely on technological sophistication, but also actively develop their competence in understanding the social and emotional dynamics of library users. Librarians must be able to utilise the principles of social theory to build more meaningful and authentic relationships through empathetic, mutually understanding, and responsive communication, so that digital interactions do not solely focus on conveying information but also create a human and enjoyable experience. Furthermore, the development of communication strategies based on social theory must be supported by ongoing training and the implementation of internal policies that prioritise social sensitivity, trust, and active collaboration with library users. Thus, digital library services are not only a medium for storing and distributing information, but also a social vehicle that strengthens the relationship between librarians and library users, prioritises the human aspect in every interaction, and improves the overall quality and acceptability of services.

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Henky Ahmad Rihal: Drafting of the original manuscript. Ideas; formulation or development of the overall research objectives and goals. **Anis Masruri:** Supervision. Provision of resources.

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