

Newspapers in the Digital Age: A Case Study in How Public Library Patrons Read the News

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Introduction

Presentation outline:

1. Cambridge, Massachusetts (USA)
2. Cambridge Public Library
3. The Purpose of the Study
4. Previous Newspaper Studies
5. Methodology
6. Findings
7. Conclusion

Background:

Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA

- “University City”
- Biotech, software, and engineering industries
- Population 105,000
- Ethnic makeup
 - 67% white
 - 12% black
 - 15% Asian;
 - 8% Hispanic
 - 6% American Indian, Pacific Islander, or two or more races in combination
- Education
 - 94% high school graduates
 - 74.3% college graduates
- Economic
 - 45,000 households with a median income of \$72,225

Background:

Cambridge Public Library

- Library System
 - Main library and six branches
 - Serves over 700,000 patrons each year
 - Circulates over 1.4 million books annually
 - Diverse patron base

Purpose of the Study

- Six-week Newspaper Use Study, April 1 to May 15, 2014
 - Sample newspaper use in a public library
 - Discover who is using newspapers in public libraries
 - Determine how newspapers are consumed in the digital age
 - Understand how different points of access foster different kinds of use
- Cambridge Chronicle (founded in 1846)
 - Print edition (main library and branches)
 - Paid subscription database (2005 – current)
 - Microfilm (1846 - 2013)
 - Historic Cambridge Newspaper Collection (1846 – 1922)

Previous Newspaper Use Studies

- Few in the U.S.
- Even fewer conducted by public libraries
- Most conducted by academic libraries
- Public Libraries
 - Different challenges and opportunities
 - Different acquisition strategies
 - Serve diverse populations with different needs

Methodology

Study was designed to:

- Be short-term
- Require no additional funding or staff to implement
- Encourage public libraries to conduct similar studies
- Encourage library's archives and special collections to participate

Methodology

Different methods for each format tracked:

- Microfilm
 - Sweep Method
 - 30 recorded uses
- Print Newspapers
 - Observation Method
 - 299 observations

Methodology

Different methods for each format tracked (continued):

- Databases
- Statistics provided by vendors
- 6 databases recorded
 - Historical New York Times (1851 – 2011)
 - Historic Cambridge Newspaper Collection (1846 – 1922)
 - » Includes Cambridge Chronicle (1846 – 1922)
 - Boston Globe (1980 – Current)
 - Boston Herald (1991 – Current)
 - New York Times (1985 – Current)
 - Cambridge Chronicle (2005 - Current)
- Standardize terminology
 - Sessions
 - Page views/article retrievals

Methodology

Surveys

- Librarian Survey
 - 9 research librarians and 6 branch managers
- Online Patron Survey
 - Posted to the library's social media sites
 - Available on the Historic Cambridge Newspaper Collection website
 - 59 respondents

Findings

Database Use at the Cambridge Public Library between April 1 and May 15, 2014

Title	Sessions	Page Views/Article Retrievals
Historic Cambridge Newspaper Collection (1846 – 1922)	11,209	40,359
New York Times (1985 - Current)	803	2,393
Boston Globe (1980 - Current)	1,161	1,197
Historical New York Times (1851 - 2011)	166	347
Cambridge Chronicle (2005 - Current)	n/a	22
Boston Herald (1991 - Current)	n/a	5

Findings

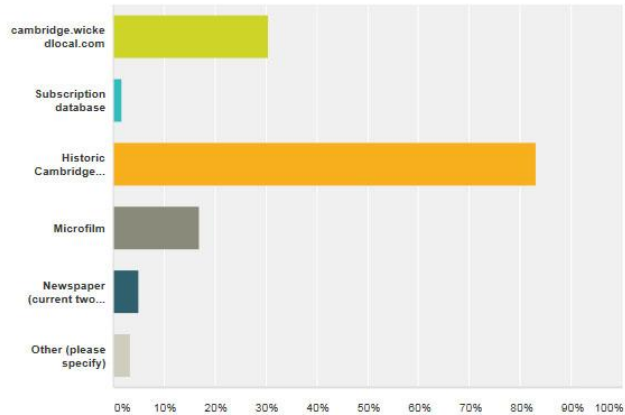
Number of Database Sessions Accessed at the Cambridge Public Library from January 2011 to June 2014

Title	2011	2012	2013	2014	Total
Historic Cambridge Newspaper Collection (1846 - 1922)	n/a	6,472	80,529	45,803	132,804
Boston Globe (1980 - Current)	295	1,026	7,085	4,799	13,205
New York Times (1985 - Current)	2,805	3,064	3,508	3,194	12,571
Historical New York Times (1851 - 2011)	714	1,559	1,310	638	4,221
Cambridge Chronicle (2005 - Current)	276	380	449	236	1,341
Boston Herald (1991 - Current)	463	354	187	27	1,031

Findings

The Cambridge Public Library makes the Cambridge Chronicle available in several ways. Which of these formats have you used? (Check all that apply.)

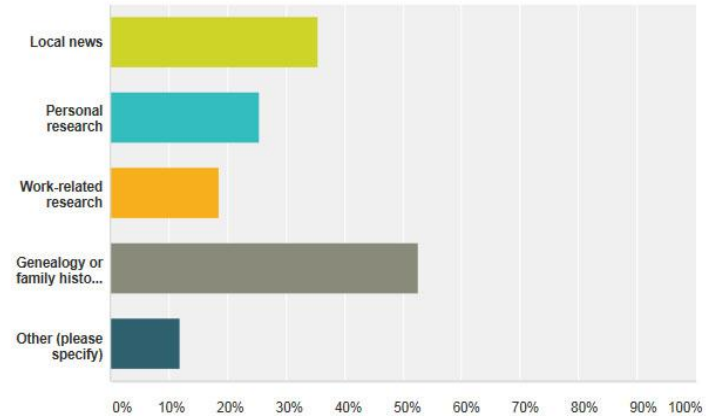
Answered: 59 Skipped: 0



Answer Choices	Responses
cambridge.wickedlocal.com	30.51% 18
Subscription database	1.69% 1
Historic Cambridge Newspaper Collection	83.05% 49
Microfilm	16.95% 10
Newspaper (current two years)	5.08% 3
Other (please specify)	3.39% 2
Responses	
Total Respondents: 59	

Why do you read the Cambridge Chronicle? (Check all that apply.)

Answered: 59 Skipped: 0



Answer Choices	Responses
Local news	35.59% 21
Personal research	25.42% 15
Work-related research	18.64% 11
Genealogy or family history research	52.54% 31
Other (please specify)	11.86% 7
Responses	
Total Respondents: 59	

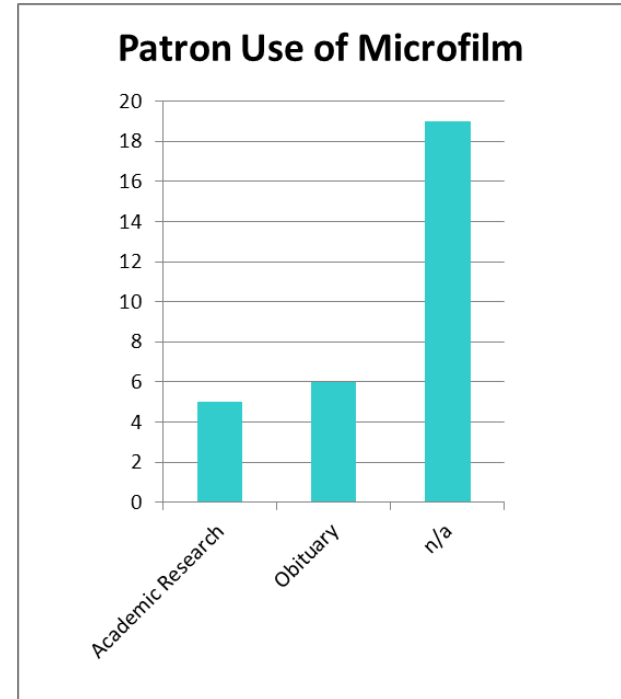
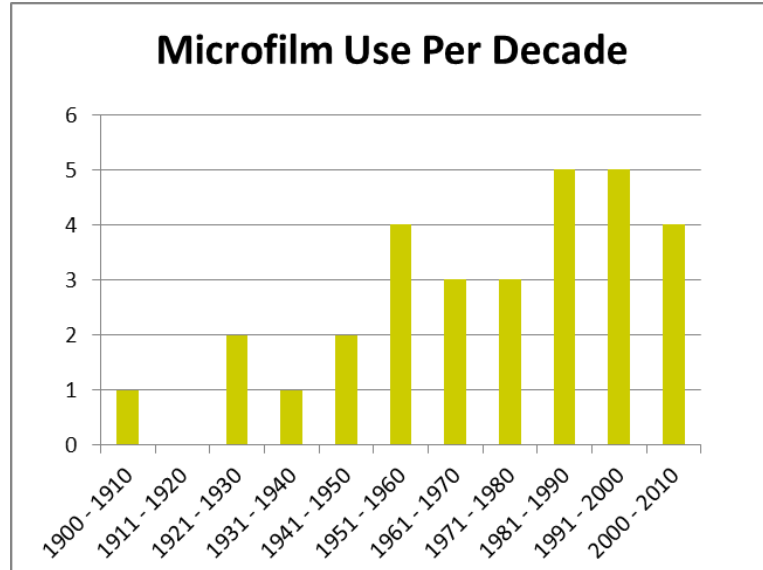
Findings

Patrons search for:

- Genealogy and Obituary Research
- Police reports – fires, accidents, and crime
- Current political news (reports on the city council and school committee)
- Historical research (society blurbs, local political campaigns, major political events)
- Primary sources (i.e., American Civil War and sinking of the Titanic)

Findings

Microfilm Use of the Cambridge Chronicle per Decade and Patron use of Microfilm at the Cambridge Public Library between April 1 and May 15, 2014



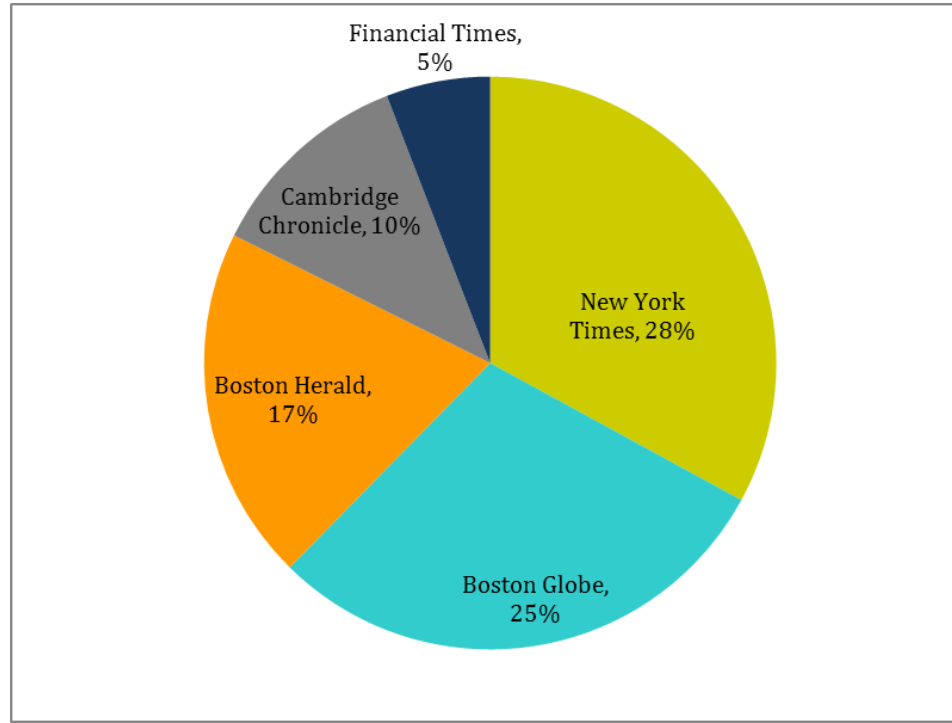
Findings

“The crowd is hungry for news. People come to the library to sit, read, relax, and have the luxury of turning the physical page.”

“Of the group of 20 waiting each morning to get into the library, at least half of them go straight to the newspapers.”

Findings

Top Five Print Newspapers: Total Percentage of Newspapers Observed being Read by Patrons at the Cambridge Public Library between April 1 and May 15, 2014



Findings

“Patrons always want print, but maybe there will be a huge shift in the future. People will always read the *Cambridge Chronicle*, but what version they use in another issue.”

Conclusions

- Free and universal access to newspapers encourages reading and research
- The lowest barriers to access encourage the highest use
- Public libraries must continue to fund these resources

Conclusions

- Newspaper use in digital and print editions may be increasing in public libraries
- Print serves an older demographic who read the dailies
- Digital editions are used for research
- Local, historical news has value well beyond its community and its original intention.

Conclusions

- High use of newspapers in public libraries contradicts the low usage in academic libraries.
- More public libraries in the USA need to participate in newspaper user studies.

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