

BOOK REVIEW / CRITIQUE DE LIVRE

Farney T. **Using digital analytics for smart assessment**. Chicago: ALA Editions; 2018. Softcover: 168 p. ISBN: 978-0-8389-1598-1. Price US\$65. Available from: <https://www.alastore.ala.org/content/using-digital-analytics-smart-assessment>

When library users interact with digital interfaces for services and resources, they generate a lot of data. How to access and assess this data is the focus of *Using Digital Analytics for Smart Assessment* by Tabatha Farney. This book aims to provide an introduction to the topic of digital analytics, an outline of the tools available, and a discussion of the challenges and successes in applying analytical assessment to library services.

Farney is the Director of Web Services and Emerging Technologies for the Kraemer Family Library at the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs, and she is the co-author of *Web Analytics Strategies for Information Professionals: A LITA Guide*, published in 2013.

In *Using Digital Analytics for Smart Assessment*, Farney defines digital analytics as “the digital data describing the use and users of online content. For libraries, digital data includes, but is not limited to, use from various library websites, electronic resources, online collections, and even social media” (pg. ix).

The book is broken down into two sections: the first, authored by Farney, provides an understanding of the various digital analytics available and how to implement and use them. In the second section, contributed chapters provide an overview by multiple librarians on the various projects they have initiated using digital analytics. These topics include library websites, collections, and social media; which all together provide a wide range of practical ways to implement the use of analytics in library services. Farney states that “regardless of your job title, accessing and analyzing digital data is essential for assessing library services in the online and offline world. This book is written for anyone interested in analytics” (pg. x).

In the first section of the book, Farney presents some definitions to help understand the types of analytics tools available and the terminology associated with them. Most importantly, though, she raises some key questions about why librarians should use analytics; these include understanding how the library’s online presence contributes to the organization’s goals, how users navigate online resources and suggestions for improvement, and the value of a library’s social media presence. She notes that there are challenges with using analytics: the quality of data available; staffing challenges with analyzing data; and user privacy, a key issue as libraries are user privacy advocates. Farney presents multiple technological options for different types of analytics gathering. This is a well-balanced and unbiased approach, showing the strengths and weaknesses of different tools. She provides descriptions of each, and includes step-by-step guides for how these tools work, often with accompanying screenshots. The end of each chapter includes further references, should readers want to expand their knowledge or find more advanced help.

In the second half of the book, contributing authors look at different topics relating to digital analytics that they have put into practice. One notable chapter is “Ensuring Data Privacy in a Library Learning Analytics Database” (Chapter 7, p.95-106), by Michael D. Doran. With the most in-depth technological perspective, this chapter looks at server security of MySQL databases and scripting for data anonymization. While probably a bit “high-tech” for most public service library staff, this chapter is important to consider when speaking to technology staff in understanding the fundamentals of user privacy.

Other key chapters include Marissa C. Ball and Melissa Del Castillo’s look at “The Myth of the Declining Reference Statistic” (Chapter 9, p.117-125). They note how analytics can be used, both digitally and in-person, to identify gaps in reference services. This gives libraries an opportunity to develop new services, such as online tutorials and FAQs, to help meet user needs. Chapter 10 by Joan Tonyan is on

“Using Digital Analytics to Assess your Social Media Marketing Efforts” (p.127-139). This chapter looks at how multiple analytics tools can be used together to create marketing campaigns. For example, aligning social media metrics with Google Analytics’ Campaigns and LibGuides’ analytics helps to show how users are learning about resources and whether or not they are engaging with these resources on the library’s website.

The overall takeaway from this book is that there are a lot of tools available using digital analytics to assess library services. This book is helpful for librarians beginning to look into digital analytics or for those with experience using a few tools and wanting to expand their knowledge. Advanced users may be inspired by some of the ideas but will probably find the content a bit basic. What would have increased the practicality of the book would be more examples of changes to library services implemented after reviewing and assessing analytics. The topic of re-assessment would have been beneficial, as most libraries are already using Google Analytics for web

traffic and may be looking for next-level approaches. Also, Farney did not look at the topic of content management systems (CMS) for online information literacy learning, and the analytical data those provide. With the push for e-learning at many universities and colleges, this was a missed opportunity for reflection, as CMS often can (literally and figuratively) link learning outcomes directly to library online collections.

I would recommend this book to librarians wanting an overview of the potential of digital analytics and what we can, and should, be doing in library systems. Since libraries have strong web presences, including websites, social media accounts, and online resources, this book shows us how we can maximize user feedback by analyzing what library users are doing online. Digital analytics are a great way to provide user-centered services with data that users are generating every day.

Statement of Competing Interests

No competing interests declared.

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