

Social Media and its Application in Academic Libraries: Brief Review of the Related Literature

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Abstract

Social media has become an effective communication tool over the last decade. Social media is very useful for libraries as it provides several opportunities to interact with library users, promote libraries, and develop library services. This study aims to review related literature on social media and library marketing. By doing so, it is hoped to enhance the understanding of social media, highlight the roles of social media, explore how adoption and use of social media in academic libraries.

Keywords: Social Media, Social Networking, Academic Libraries, Library Services, Library Marketing

Introduction

Library is an important part of any university, contributes directly to the university's academic mission. An academic library is administered to meet information needs of its students, faculties, and staff. This can be achieved by acquiring information resources to support curriculum and research projects of the faculties, then organizing those information resources in a manner that permits easy access. However, the way people access and consume information has changed dramatically in the 21st century. The development and the expanding usage of the Internet has caused information to be easily accessible. Therefore, to survive in the digital age, libraries need to be innovative and must continually demonstrate their value. Libraries should appear where the users are to remind them of library existence and all services libraries can provide.

Social media is a communication tool that allows its users to communicate, create, edit, and share contents. There are billions social media users worldwide, this number is only growing. Social media provides many opportunities for libraries to reach, interact, and communicate with library users. Thereby, libraries can have a complete understanding of what users want from the library or library services, and more importantly, serve users better.

Discussion

What is Social Media?

Social media is used to refer to the tools used for a new type of communication including different services and ways of interacting. Social media was first known in 1979, when Tom Truscott and Jim Ellis from Duke University created the Usenet, a worldwide discussion system that allowed Internet users to post public messages; and also when Bruce and Susan Abelson founded "Open Diary" in 1998. Open Diary was an early social networking site in which members of a certain community shared their daily diary online and the word "blog" was first used at the same time (as cited in Gina Mowafy, 2018).

There are various definitions of social media but still remains a lack of a formal definition. The oft-cited definition by Andreas M. Kaplan and Michael Haenlein, "Social media is a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content" (Andreas M. Kaplan,

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Michael Haenlein, 2010, p. 61). Bobbi K. Lewis, an associate professor in the School of Media & Strategic Communications, described more precisely. She noted social media simply serve as a “label for digital technologies that allow people to connect, interact, produce and share content” (Bobbi K. Lewis, 2010, p. 2). These definitions refer to digital technologies emphasizing user-generated content or interaction.

David M. Scott (2015), an American online marketing strategist, offered a more complex definition of social media. He defined “Social media provides the way people share ideas, content, thoughts, and relationships online. Social media differs from so called mainstream media in that anyone can create, comment on, and add to social media content. Social media can take the form of text, audio, video, images, and communities” (David M. Scott, 2015, p. 56).

According to Michael L. Kent, a professor of Public Relations at University of New South Wales, social media as “any interactive communication channel that allows for two-way interaction and feedback,” further specifying modern social media are characterized by their “potential for real-time interaction, reduced anonymity, a sense of propinquity, short response times, and the ability to ‘time shift,’ or engage the social network whenever suits each particular member” (Michael L. Kent, 2010, p. 645). This definition has defined social media by describing differences between social media and traditional media.

In general, social media can be defined as a group of Internet-based applications that built on the ideological and technological of Web 2.0, that allow users to communicate, create, edit, and share contents. The contents can be text, photo, video or sound, or a mixture of all these. At present, social media has come an important part of people’s lives. People now access social media several times per day, and nearly every social media user shares personal updates, posts contents, interacts with others. Shweta Sharma and H. V. Verma classified social media by the basis of their primary purpose. They defined social media encompasses a gamut of platforms such as social networking site, blog, discussion forum, video sharing, content sharing, social bookmarking, podcast, and wiki (Sharma, S. & Verma, H. V., 2018, pp. 24-25). Among them, social networking site is one of the stronger ones of social media, comprising a multitude of different

sites (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn).

What are the Roles of Social Media in Academic Libraries?

Researches on the needs for social media in academic libraries have been conducted by academics, practitioners, and experts in the field of Library science. For example, David L. King revealed reasons of using social media by the library are listening to the community, connecting the library with users, getting responses from users, taking advantage the use of mobile technology, and extending reach of users (David Lee King, 2015). Shakeel A. Khan and Rubina Bhatti stated that the increasing use of social media has been offering challenges for libraries to keep their image alive in virtual environment (Shakeel Ahmad Khan & Rubina Bhatti, 2012). Besides, social media gives users a chance to interact librarians without having to come physically to the library. Another study conducted by C. Penzhorn and H. Pienaar at the University of Pretoria Library revealed that the non-use of social media by reference librarians had a negative impact on the quality of services. As a result the library management implemented social media for reference services since they noted that these tools could go a long way in terms of improving their services (Penzhorn, C. & Pienaar, H., 2009).

Based on those findings, we can conclude that social media is playing significant roles in libraries. They are:

– Social media helps libraries to:

- Attract users: Social media can reach millions people around the world, so that they are very important for libraries to be available in all the locations where people are. Libraries also can let them know the unique roles of libraries, provide information about information resources, products, services, events in libraries, etc. By doing that libraries will attract people come to libraries, built the library brand on a small budget;
- Satisfy user needs: Characteristics of social media are interactions, high accessibility which help libraries divide users into different groups, determine their information needs, develop new and more effective library products and services to meet the needs of users;

- Cost savings: Social media is free for everyone to use. Therefore, social media helps libraries save their money on marketing or improving the quality of services.
- Social media helps users to:
- Access, select library products and services easier: social media allows users quickly update all information about libraries, information resources, products, and services. Thus, users can decide how to use libraries, products or services suitable to their needs;
 - Provide feedback to the library more convenient: there are several ways to leave feedback on social media. Therefore, users can send their questions or comments to libraries any time and anywhere if they have internet connection.

In short, social media is considered as a powerful tool for libraries to stay relevant and meet the needs of their users. Especially, social media provides a two-way dialogue. It is important to bring users closer to the library through a direct connection between them.

How do Academic Libraries Use Social Media?

Social media has gone from a fringe activity for library to one that is seen as central to library outreach and promotion efforts. In 2006, a survey of 126 academic librarians concerning their perspectives toward Facebook was conducted. This survey found that just 3% of the libraries surveyed had a Facebook account, and 19% of the librarians surveyed had never heard of Facebook (Charnigo & Barnett-Ellis, 2007, pp. 27-28). Another survey of library directors, which was conducted by the Online Computer Library Center, found similar results: just 14% of library directors saw a role for social media in libraries. Most of the library directors believed that “the library is for learning and did not see the connection with social media and libraries” (OCLC, 2007). However, in the recent years, librarians’ attitudes toward social media have reversed, having a presence on social media is especially important for academic libraries.

An exploratory study investigating the use of social media in 140 academic libraries from Asia, North America, and Europe showed that Facebook and Twitter were the most

commonly adopted tools in academic libraries. Instant messaging, LinkedIn, Blogs, Wikis, YouTube, Flickr, Slideshare, and Delicious were also reportedly used by libraries (Fig. 1).

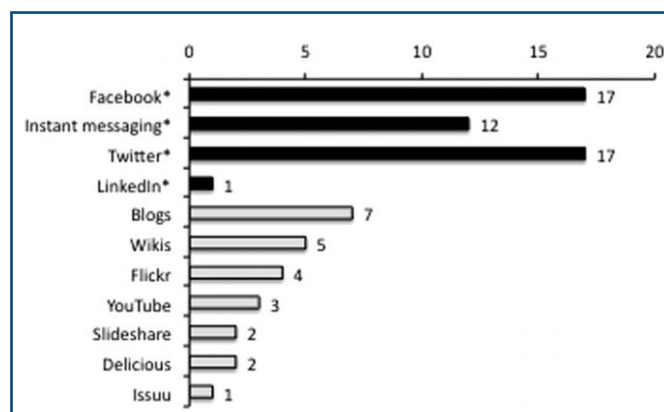


Fig. 1. Social Media Tools Used by Academic Libraries (Samuel Kai-Wah Chu, Helen S. Du, 2012)

At present, academic libraries are using social media in different ways. The most popular trends in the use of social media are explored below:

Communicating to Identify Information Needs of Users

The student population of academic libraries, 18 to 24 year olds, is already intimately familiar with social media; they already know how to interact with the library in that setting (Jennifer Wright Joe, 2015). A study from Western Oregon University’s Hammersley Library showed that students said they were “likely” to follow the library on Instagram, Twitter, and Pinterest. It means that “students expect, and are interested in the information from libraries on social media” (Elizabeth Brookbank, 2015). Besides, faculty’s members also use social media for personal as well as professional use. Therefore, academic libraries are increasingly engaged on social media in order to connect with diverse community groups and move beyond the traditional bounds of the library.

Nowadays, academic libraries are using social media to identify information needs of users through their interactions on library’s social media platforms such as like, share, comment, etc. Besides, libraries also use social media for online surveys about library use, perceptions of current library services or the needs for new services. These surveys

can be embedded directly on Facebook, or shared as a link to online questionnaires on social media platforms.

Providing Online Information Services

The provision of information services to satisfy the needs of users is one of the primary responsibilities of any library. At present, students tend to be very active on social media, and librarians have embraced popular platforms as a way of communicating with users to provide information services, as well as networking with other libraries for this purpose.

Information Dissemination Service

The use of social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter for dissemination of information on new books, new programs to users is increasingly gaining popularity and recognition. Moreover, librarians in academic libraries often work with faculties or program coordinators to develop web contents to support study programs. Thus, social bookmarking is a useful tool for this task. Social bookmarking is a type of social media that allows users to keep, annotate, and manage favorite web pages while searching on the Internet to glean applicable information resources. Therefore, academic libraries can use social bookmarking to collect, organize, and share online resources for their users. Some libraries such as University of Pennsylvania Library, Duke University Libraries, Harvard Law School are using the most popular social bookmarking sites such as Delicious, Connotea, LibraryThing to enhance subject guides, develop collections of resources by topic for their users.

Reference Service

Traditionally, when a user has question about how to find specific information or how to use library resources/services, reference librarian at the reference desk will provide an answer or refer the inquirer to a knowledgeable source. Currently, information and communications technologies have changed the approaches of providing reference service in the libraries. Nowadays, libraries offer to users “digital reference service” – a reference service requested and provided over the Internet, usually via e-mail, instant messaging, or Web-based submission forms.

Social networking sites, where people can do direct

messaging with Instant messaging, are using for digital reference service. Instant messaging allows libraries now respond to information requests from users in real time and synchronically, as both the sender and the receiver are present at the same time. Furthermore, most Instant messaging systems allow users to exchange data files, send images or video, so that libraries can meet all information needs of users, including answering substantive questions, instructing finding information, conducting searches on behalf of the user, assisting in the evaluation of information, referring users to resources outside the library when appropriate, etc.

It is notable that the traditional reference service continues to be the most popular means of getting help in the library. However, digital reference service has become more attractive because users always want to satisfy their needs in a cheap, convenient and efficient way.

Instruction Service

Using social media for instructional purpose is nothing new. Academic libraries offer online instructional programs in the use of library resources to support the learning, teaching and research needs of the university communities. In particularly, academic libraries support the academic achievement of students by partnering with faculties to increase students’ information literacy abilities to find, use, and evaluate information. Libraries also provide instructions in the use of particular resources (usually an online catalog or bibliographic database), resources needed in specific disciplines or subject areas. Below are some examples:

Virtual tour via videos explain what is offered to visitors and information seekers. These videos go through the specialized materials available at the library, including special collections. After that, libraries post videos to YouTube and hosts them on their own site. In many freshmen orientation sessions there are training sessions on how to use the library. Libraries often combine videos added to YouTube with training service. For example, Williams College Library did exactly that with the video entitled “The library mystery tour”. Valdosta State University also made visual guide to the reference desk, video “How to find the reference desk” started at the entrance of the library and followed through to the reference desk, etc.

In addition, libraries have already been taking advantage of YouTube for education and developing information literacy skills. An analyze of 800 retrieved videos, using the keyword “information literacy” on YouTube, were conducted by S. Majid and others. It showed that a majority of the YouTube videos covered three information literacy skills, i.e. information seeking strategies, information location and access, and information use skills (Majid S., et al., 2012, p. 147). Those instructional videos are very helpful to students enrolled in distance education courses who may be unable to come to the library for instruction.

Promoting Library and Its Services

In the past, libraries did not need to promote their services. However, in today’s society, libraries have been placed in a competitive market with bookstores and other commercial entities (Rogers, Curtis R., 2009, p. 3). Moreover, students have grown up with Google and feel that they can find any information they need (Jennifer Wright Joe, 2015). In order to stay relevant, academic libraries must market themselves and their values.

As a part of online promotion, social media promotion is a perception tool for reaching new customers and build brand awareness through social media. Social media offers libraries a way to promote library and its services directly to online users, and convince online users to choose them instead of waiting for users to seek out the library. The most popular forms of social media promotion for libraries are as below:

Promoting via Photo and Video

Libraries in the United States are employing communications resources such as YouTube in growing numbers. Some libraries such as Harper College Library in Palatine, Illinois (since December 2007), the Allen County Public Library in Fort Wayne, Indiana (since August 2006), the United States Library of Congress (since June 2007), and the South Carolina State Library (since October 2007) have been using YouTube and other similar online video social media platforms to promote library services, introduce resources that are available in the library (Rogers, Curtis R., 2009, p. 4).

Besides YouTube, Flickr is used with the same purpose. Flickr is considered as a digital image collections host, and helps libraries to promote themselves by sharing photos of library events, exhibits, unique books, etc. Libraries also ask users to share what they think or know about these photos, so that libraries could be able to identify which collections users found more interesting. It also offers an opportunity for librarians to engage actively with users, thus creating a new level of outreach.

Promoting via Blog, Social Networking Site

F. Boateng and Y. Quan Liu (2014) found that most of the academic libraries they surveyed maintained at least one blog. The majority of the blogs surveyed focused on one or more of the following content types: general information, book reviews/discussions, or research tips. Nearly half of the surveyed libraries had blogs about information literacy or lists of new books. To a lesser extent, blogs were used to list new e-journals and databases or provide information about library hours and holidays (Boateng, F. & Quan Liu, Y., 2014).

Another survey librarians across the United States, United Kingdom and Australia indicated that libraries used social networking sites to promote library resources, the popular services, library events (e.g. exhibitions, competitions, talks, seminars, workshops). Some libraries also used social networking sites to promote things that did not fall under these categories, such as catalogue search, new book list, library videos, user surveys/polls, and links to useful websites. Specially, some librarians had very specific rules for how often to post (e.g., daily, as needed), when to post (e.g., after school hours), and how to post (e.g., management tools, in-house schedule) (Abigail L. Phillips, 2015).

Conclusion

An analysis of the related literature showed that academic libraries have taken advantages of social media to disseminate the presence of libraries to numerous users. Social media is considered as a powerful communication tools for libraries to transmit news, announcements and events. Social media also helps libraries conduct online

services, introduce libraries, etc. If used properly, social media can be a core tool providing the primary means to bring libraries and their users closer together.

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