



THE USE OF SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

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Abstract:

Social networking technologies have many positive uses in academic libraries. They are an ideal environment for youngsters to share what they are learning or to build something together online. Social networking technologies create a sense of community (as do the physical libraries) and in this way are already aligned with the services and programs at the library. Social networking sites (SNS) are helpful for build up interactions among users. The number of libraries which adopt SNSs is increasing. However, user engagement is low on many libraries' SNSs. This exploratory research aimed to contribute towards understanding academic librarians' utilizations of social networking tools. A review of the literature illustrates the potentials and, advantages of applying social networking tools in academic libraries, such as promoting library services and getting in touch with student users. This study contributes to the literature that illustrates how academic libraries use different social networking tools, leading to relevant implications for further usage. Social networking is a social structure that lets the user interact and work collaboratively with other users, including the ability to browse, search, invite friends to connect and interact with web world. Social software in the web 2.0 world not only enhances the practical usability in the library but also helps the diminishing librarians add value to their profession, given the value or potential of librarian being questioned in the information landscape. In this paper, the author has intended to describe the possible implications of social networking technologies in the field of library and information services in the web 2.0 milieu. In addition, an attempt has been made to illustrate different social software tools and their effective utilization in the social networking environment. Finally, the author has cited some stunning examples of library being run in the world using the web 2.0 technologies, besides making an endeavor to highlight the role of information professionals to carry out the same in the digital library environment.



KEYWORDS: social networking, academic libraries, MySpace, Facebook, Twitter, instant messaging, Social Media, Social Networking, Academic Libraries, SNS.

INTRODUCTION

Social media is key to 21st century communication with library users, and enables the academic library to pursue its mission and goals online, while promoting library resources and services. As Johnson and Burclaff note in their 2013 ACRL conference paper, "Making Social Media Meaningful: Connecting Missions and Policies", 94% of academic libraries have a social media presence, mainly on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, but only 2% of those surveyed have a library-specific policy for social media. They also stress the importance of linking the academic library social media policy to the library's mission statement, stating, "Mission-based goals and actions are particularly valuable in areas

of rapid change, like social media... The library mission should drive the library's activities and should therefore be present in these guiding policies." The World Wide Web enables people to gain access to information, create content and disseminate ideas more efficiently. Social networking sites first emerged for Internet users to find long-lost friends and classmates, link with each other and share profiles. Social networking service is a platform to build social networks or social relations among people who share interests, activities, backgrounds, or real-life connections. Social networking sites allow users to share ideas, pictures, posts, activities, events, and interests with people in their network. Users can create their own profiles, make friends, participate in chat rooms, and hold private conversations. An increasing number of individuals have become members of one or more social networking sites leading to soaring membership numbers, largely because these sites are free and easy to use. The wide application of social networking in different contexts appears to have included universities and libraries as well. It has been suggested that academic libraries could take the opportunity of using these social networking tools to disseminate information, market services and promote new releases.

Social networking sites (SNS) provide an innovative and effective way of connecting users. Features of SNS enable users to generate interpersonal connections based on common grounds. SNSs, such as Friendster, LinkedIn, MySpace and Facebook, set up personal communities, allow users to make persistent comments on the profiles of their friends and send private messages. These features make SNSs excellent in initiating interaction among users and the number of libraries which adopt SNSs is increasing. Information and Communication Technology (ICTs) has ushered in a historic change in the realm of information communication in the recent time. New change that has been crept into the field of information technology following the impact of emerging technologies and global economy has revolutionized the process of reformation among all organizations and their operational set up. As organizations worldwide thrive on modern technologies, the application of web 2.0 domain in the field of Library information and communication has no exception. The web 2.0 domain has been introduced as an experimental field to be accepted and implemented for rendering virtual digital library services to patron. Social Software is quite lucrative before librarian 2.0 to accept, analyze and apply this new booming technology for the maximum benefit of the user 2.0. Professional competency needs to be developed among library professionals to be readily equipped with these social networking tools such as RSS, Wiki, Blogger, flicker, Library Think, Elf and so on. With the introduction of this domain, the credibility and value of librarians will get a boost. For this, the user needs to be empowered over web 2.0 technologies and services which can be applied for life long learning in the scenario of information landscape.

The social and communication pattern of our society are being shifted by the influx of Social media products and services such as Twitter, Face book, YouTube, Flicker, Bloggers Word Press, Delicious etc. Undeniably, this development has direct impact on various aspects of library and information services; starting from how we find information online, to the ways libraries reach out and relate with their clientele. This chapter considers social media as an enhancement of library services, library outreach and librarians' collaboration. It presents social media as an effective tool in information management that is capable of creating futures -prospects, opportunities, hope for library users and information and library professionals Social media is a powerful new form of communication and the number of users on popular social media sites is growing at exponential rates. Millions of people are using social media tools as part of their everyday lives for work, studies and play because of its ubiquity. Academic libraries abroad have found the use of social media as an effective communication tools to interact with faculty staff and students in new ways. The following can be used by academic libraries to spread the word about different events, services that they offer and the marketing of new library products, initiatives, new addition to library collections, links to articles, videos, community information, solicit feedbacks, respond to people, talk to people, give instructions, link wherever possible. In addition to marketing, the simple act of having conversations and creating relationships with patrons is immediately useful. Through conversations on social media, libraries can gain insight into what their users want and needs.

DEFINITION OF SOCIAL NETWORKING

According to Computing Dictionary (2011), "Social networking site as any website designed to allow multiple users to publish content of them. The information may be on any subject and may be for consumption by friends, mates, employers, employees just to mention a few". Boyd and Ellison (2007) define "Social networking sites as web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, to view and navigate their list of connections and those made by others within the system". Powell (2009) defines "Social networking as a community in which individuals are somehow connected through friendship, values, working relationships, idea and so on".

OBJECTIVES OF SOCIAL NETWORKING

1. To promote events;
2. To promote library services;
3. To promote resources/collections at the library;
4. To update on library refurbishments;
5. To promote new acquisitions;
6. To promote library guides, exhibition guides;
7. To connect with new students joining the university;
8. To engage with the academic community;
9. To connect with the wider community beyond the university e.g. the town in which the institution is based;
10. To connect with distance learners;
11. As a customer services tool- complaints, suggestions, enquiries, feedback;
12. To highlight subject specific information;
13. To connect with potential students;
14. As a teaching tool to promote information literacy, technology and writing tips (not library based);
15. To promote courses;
16. As a research tool to locate official documents and studies.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Various definitions of social networking websites/tools exist. For instance, Alexander (2006) offered a broad definition: social networking can encompass almost all collaborative environments employing Web 2.0 technologies. The promise of Web 2.0 technologies is that they foster collaboration among users, which generates new thinking and strategies to meet the demands of the changing society (Chu and Kennedy 2011).

In particular, social networking websites allow users to share interests and communicate with others (Burroughs 2010). Barsky and Purdon (2006) emphasized that social networking websites collect data about members, store and share user profiles. These websites are free and allow users to easily create personal pages filled with content in the form of images, music, and videos. Such websites function as a social network because members are able to share web pages with friends and search for new friends who have similar interests. In the social exchange theory, Homans (1974) proposed that in real-life social networks, people establish ties with others to exchange valued resources, and relationships formed depend on payoffs to both parties over time.

Sites such as YouTube and Flickr allow users to construct profiles and share connections; they have been identified to be primarily for sharing videos and images, rather than for social networking (Hoffman 2009). While the use of social media has been suggested to be all about sharing, learning, ability to have conversations and giving (Burkhardt 2010), sites such as Flickr and YouTube are focused on content-sharing with limited social networking potentials. Similarly, Slideshare, Issuu and blogs are also content-sharing tools with limited potential for conversations between users. As such, this study adopted a relatively narrow definition of social networking tools, referring to those that are not primarily for content sharing (Boyd and Ellison 2007; Burkhardt 2010; Hoffman 2009). Nevertheless,

tools that do not fall under this narrow definition but were mentioned by participants in this study were reported.

REASONS FOR USING SOCIAL MEDIA:

Librarians have several objectives that they are using social media to help them achieve, which can be summarized as follows:

- To seek opinion on the library and its services for self-evaluation purposes, to encourage debate and to instigate an opportunity to respond to library user feedback;
- To reach library users in their homes or 'virtual spaces' as today's modern online library is no longer solely relying on its physical space as an access point;
- To publicize events, services, news and presence;
- To encourage collaboration, for example through collection development and building repositories of collaborative content specific to certain user groups;
- To increase usage of library collections by promoting new and existing content;
- To connect with other librarians and keep abreast of industry news;
- To build a sense of community with both users and also with other institutions and industry contacts

Advantages of using social media:

Advantages and benefits for librarians and libraries when using social media are seen to be:

- Financially the costs of using social media are perceived to be low
- It requires little training
- It promotes library services and disseminates news quickly, delivering this information more directly to library users
- It increases engagement and interactions with library users
- It helps gather feedback to enhance user services
- The promotion of library holdings via social media can help increase usage of content
- It enhances communication both within the library and with other departments
- It can be used for outreach activities through onward sharing, well beyond the institution itself, helping build connections and reputation more broadly.

Challenges of using social media:

Challenges associated with using social media in libraries include the following:

- Social media can require considerable time commitment from library staff
- Social media can require technological expertise, for example customizing applications to provide access to online catalogs
- It can be a challenge for librarians to use an informal but presentable tone, or deliver social media content in a bilingual or multilingual region
- Levels of interest in and skills with using social media vary enormously across library staff
- There are limited funds to support more advanced social media usage/ features and the training that would be required to enable this
- A library needs to work hard to maintain engagement with library users and attract popularity (followers, likes and so on)
- It can be difficult to maintain library branding for content/resources made accessible via social media
- There are potential copyright issues when using social media such as YouTube to build collections
- External factors such as Internet connectivity, technological infrastructure and government restrictions on the use of social media may restrict access.

Social Networking: A Conceptual Approach

The term "Social Networking" refers to a range of web-enabled/it-enabled software programs that allow users to interact and work collaboratively with other users. It includes ability to browse, search, invite friends to connect and interact, share film reviews, comments, blog entries, favorites, discussions, events, videos, ratings, music, classified ads, tag and classified information and more. A social network allows individual to join and create a personal profile, then formally connect with other users of the systems as social friend. It can be expressed as social connecting sites among the social user in web 2.0 domain. information seeking and sharing from the more specialist web 2.0 sites. Social network sites as web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system.

Features of Social Networking

Services Social networking in the field of information landscape can be great contributor to the field of information poor society. It has several unique features that can serve the user community where availability of resource is a great challenge to library field. Library should experiment and come forward to accept this new budding technology. It has some major features like social collaboration, easy surfing, more participation, private messaging can be easily possible by communicating thousands networks, discussion forums, events management, blogging and commenting, media uploading, multimedia enabled, interactive and collaborative learning are some of the important features that you can see in social networking. Social networking helps librarian to share information with patrons and students in the easiest way for digital library environment. Librarian can use in three broad activities in library and information services.

Potential of Social Networking

Social networking can be relevant to information seeking and sharing on information retrieval perspective by providing speed and quick information to the information community by connecting and collecting digital information required by the user. Social networking sites like MySpace, FaceBook represent a new and powerful service through web 2.0. User can connect to other user from various part of internet domain by applying social networking tools for information communication, organization and information distribution. The idea behind the social networks is that they operate on many levels, right from the family level up to the level of the nations. They have come to play a very important role in determining how problems are solved, how organizations are run, and the efficiency with which individuals succeed in achieving their goals. Social networking websites function like an online community of internet users. Depending on the website in question, many of these online community members share a common interest such as hobbies, religion, or politics. Once you are granted access to a social networking website you can begin to socialize.

Social Networking Sites

Social networking sites are web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system. Social networking sites allow librarians to adopt a new role by placing themselves into a social realm with users. By reading blogs, group postings, and message boards, the librarian becomes an active participant, who is able to anticipate and advise patrons as needs arise. Linking to patron profiles also keeps the library within the consciousness of users,

Facebook: most popular now because it is librarian- friendly, with many application like JSTOR search, World Cat, and much more. Librarians can interact with users to know their information need. Libraries try to link some of these specialized library applications to Facebook.

MySpace: In Academic institutions where the students are; libraries have taken advantage of this site to post, calendar, custom catalog search tools, and blog features to improve their presence.

Ning: Librarians can get connected with users, library associations, and more. The Nigerian Library Association (NLA) utilizes this platform to discuss topical issues among the members.

Blogs: Here, librarians can periodically post messages; share information on a particular subject or issue, and allow users to contribute to content. They can write articles, news on topical issues and expect an instant reaction from their users.

Wikis: is a free online encyclopedia that gives a background knowledge and definition of concepts. It offers a platform for users to access, edit and contribute to content. This is a collaborative web page for developing web content.

LinkedIn: Librarians can get patrons connected with specialists in their particular field of interest via LinkedIn. Librarians can use this platform to render specialized services such as Strategic Dissemination of Information (SDI).

Twitter: a micro blogging application, to keep staff and patrons updated on daily activities, like frequently updated collections. Users can utilize this platform to type in short messages or status update.

YouTube: In institutions in Nigeria, events such as important highlights of inaugural lectures, conferences and workshops are disseminated via the YouTube.

Flickr: Librarians can use this tool to share and distribute new images of library collections. Cover page of new arrivals of both books and journals can be disseminated to users via Flickr.

Library Thing: A tool that enriches the library OPAC. Once an account is created, a list of books with ISBNs is sent to Library Thing which sends back a piece of code which is pasted into the footer of the Library OPAC. Librarians can utilize this to send a list of current publications to users.

Teacher Tube: Teacher Tube, which is a YouTube for teachers, presents an excellent opportunity for instructor-librarian collaboration. Instructors can guide students to helpful library resources, and vice versa.

Use of Social Media In Library

When setting up a social media account it is important to personalize it. No matter which social media service your library decides on, there are a few things that your account should include. Foremost, a link to your library Web site is necessary.

Library news and events:

If you are going to host a gaming night in the library, social media is the perfect place to tell people about it. If your Web site is going to be down for repairs, let people know via your social media accounts. Social media is great for updating people on what is going on.

New additions to your collection:

Got some new books? Have a great new bibliographic citation management tool? People might not know about additions to your collection unless you tell them. Social media can be helpful for informing patrons about new resources.

Links to articles, videos, etc.:

If you come across Web content that would be relevant or helpful to your patrons, post it. Not everything you post has to be directly related to your library. Do not lose sight of why you started using this tool in the first place, but a variety of postings keep things fresh.

Community information:

You can also pass along information of significance to your community via your social media channels. The library is the heart of a college campus. It is natural that it should be a place where people go to get information about the community.

Solicit feedback:

Social networking is built for conversations, so feel free to ask questions of your fans or followers. Questions also often get the most response. Ask interesting things that you actually want to know, such as, "Why do you use the library?" When people answer, continue the conversation with your patrons

CONCLUSION:

Social networking tools were perceived to be helpful in promoting library services and interacting with students. Moreover, the tools were also reported to be helpful for internal staff communication. Although social networking tools hold great promises for academic libraries, it may take time for these tools to be fully utilized by libraries. Perhaps the idea of social networking tools may still be new for some libraries, as a result, it may take time for libraries to establish consistent views of these tools and their functions, and be able to make the most out of the potential benefits. However, the implementation of these tools by library staff was found to be challenged by limited time and perceived inadequacy of the staff to keep pace with the development of technology. Provision of training for staff users was found to be inadequate, and this indicates a component that needs to be addressed by organizations that intend to launch social networking platforms effectively. Academic Library Users Social networking sites could be effectively used to disseminate information and promote pleasant professional relationship among librarians and library users. It encourages academic collaboration. Social networking site should be introduced to attract them to the library environment. Social networking sites would help establish a cordial relationship between librarians and patrons; market the library's services.

Social media is used by libraries to deliver a blend of user service, news and updates, content/collection promotion, dissemination of the institutions' research output, provision of educational tools and resources and for building relationships both within and outside of the institution. A wide range of social media channels are used, but as yet there is limited differentiation between how they are used. Facebook, Twitter remains dominant, but visual channels such as YouTube is rapidly on the rise. It is clear that while the sophistication of social networking tools used and the frequency of updates are important factors in presenting a strong online presence, many agree that it is rather the quality and type of content posted, the defined goals and plans, and an alignment of the needs and expectations of the library users that leads to successful engagement. Social networking sites help library science professional to chunk information with colleagues and students in the easiest way for digital library environment. Library professionals can use in three broad categories in the field of library science services.

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