

Chapter 2

The Potential and Utilization of Social Media in Library and Information Centres

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ABSTRACT

The chapter discusses the significance of social media as an emerging tool in library and information management and/or service. As the trend in higher institutions of learning today gives academic libraries the mandate to develop, create, maintain, and promote institutional repositories and scholarship, the chapter perceives social media platforms as offering the opportunities to fulfill the mandate. The chapter attempts to highlight the potential of some of the social media platforms that can be utilized in the provision of library and information service and resources in today's information saturated world, examines the challenges inherent in the use of the platforms leading to ethical considerations in the use of social media, and some possible solutions. It throws up a challenge for the Libraries and Library Schools on whether or not the graduates and youth are being prepared to use information and navigate today's and tomorrow's increasingly complex information landscape. It concludes by offering some recommendations.

INTRODUCTION

For reasons of its resourcefulness, adaptability and expediency, social media has become an integral part of modern world. Social Media constitutes a very dynamic aspect of the mass media that has not only grown in popularity, but has also become the mainstream. Social media provides its numerous users with profound and rich experience in interaction, partnership and collaboration. With

its alluring magnetic appeal, social media has the capacity to glue its unsuspecting users to it all day long. It constitutes one of the technological tools the modern society has bequeathed to humanity to help shrink the world into what has aptly been described as global village. Social media is a product of technologies of the Internet and the Web helping to restructure where, when, and from whom we learn. In providing the context to his discourse on social media, Curtis (2011)

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describes social media as Internet sites where people interact freely, sharing and discussing information about each other and their lives, using a multimedia mix of personal words, pictures, videos and audio. Chapman (2009) subscribes to this in his submission on the history and evolution of social media when he observes that there are niche sites for virtually every special interest out there, noting that there are sites to share photos, videos, status updates, sites for meeting new people and sites to connect with old friends. Chapman asserts that it seems there are social solutions to just about every need.

Social media is varied and appears in different forms and shapes. A number of authors have attempted to categorize social media into some groupings. Gu and Widen-Wulff (2010), for example, classify social media tools for scholarly communication into eight slightly different categories, namely: blogs, mini blogs, RSS, wikis, tagging, social networks, multimedia sharing, and online documents. Curtis (2013) also notes that social media can be seen in blogs and microblogs, forums and message boards, social networks, wikis, virtual worlds, social bookmarking, tagging and news, writing communities, digital storytelling and scrapbooking, and data, content, image and video sharing, podcast portals, and collective intelligence. Banday and Mattoo (2013) on the other hand affirm that social media can be classified into the following four categories:

1. **Online Networks and Ecosystems:** E.g. Facebook LinkedIn, MySpace and Twitter;
2. **Online Publications:** E.g. YouTube, Flickr, RSS, SlideShare and Twitter;
3. **Online Collaborative Platforms:** E.g. Wikis like MediaWiki, blogs like Wordpress or Blogger, and collaborative office solutions like Office- 365, Google Docs, MS Lync, Debategraph, Teamwork or WorkSpot; and
4. **Online Feedback Systems:** E.g. voting and debating, rating and commenting, surveys, polls, blogs, etc. Irrespective of the form the

categorization may take, what is indisputable is that social media is impacting people of varying age and professional persuasion all over the world.

As highlighted above, some of the most popular sites of social media include Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Flickr, MySpace, SlideShare, LinkedIn, RSS, Wikipedia, Blogger, Del.icio.us, Wetpaint, Reddit, Friendfeed, Windows Live Spaces, Orkut, Wikidot, Hi5, Revver, Digg, Posterous and others.

The social media technologies can be seen as part of the family of those now called emerging technologies. Johnson et al. (2011) in a report note that the New Media Consortium (eNMC) regards emerging technologies as those that are “likely to have a large impact on teaching, learning, research or creative expression within education around the globe” within a time span of one to five years. Similarly, in their discourse on emerging technologies, Siemens and Tittenberger (2009) allude to Facebook, Skype, Wikis, etc as emerging technologies and that each tool possesses multiple affordances. In order to buttress this assertion, they cite the example of blogs being used for personal reflection and at the same time for interaction. Gachago et al (2013) observe the multiple affordances as the potential created by specific features of technologies, such as the potential of social software to provide emergent learning paths through interaction with peers. Siemens and Tittenberger succinctly note that social networks tools are effective for the formation of learning and social networks, adding that matching affordances of a particular tool with learning activities is an important design and teaching activity.

Writing further on the use of social media in education, Mutula (2012) in a presentation cited O’Brien (2012) who has articulated several uses. These include: Creating learning / training materials, sharing learning materials amongst professors on blogs and networking sites; online distance education; collaborative scholarship; platform

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