

Chapter 4

The Role of Social Media in Libraries

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ABSTRACT

This chapter assesses the role of social media in libraries. Looking at some literature on the topic, the chapter conducts a survey on some articles that have been written on it and then draws conclusions based on the findings of those papers. The chapter also looks at the various facets of social media, as well as the benefits and challenges faced by social media in libraries. The conclusions drawn in this chapter are as a result of the survey of articles relevant to the topic. Various solutions to overcome the challenges faced by the use of social media in libraries are suggested.

INTRODUCTION

Social media is widely used among people from an array of backgrounds in the 21st century. The majority of these users can be classified as “youths” i.e. young people under 25 years of age are the most active group when it comes to creating, updating and viewing social media (Nielson, 2010c). The social media platforms which are commonly used include Facebook, Myspace, Flickr, Friendster, Hi5, blogs, You Tube, Library Thing, Ning, and LinkedIn. It has been suggested that academic libraries could capitalise on the opportunity presented by these social networking tools by using them to disseminate information, market services and promote new releases (Burkhardt, 2010).

Various people worldwide are engaging in the use of Social Media. The number of people using Social Media keeps on increasing by the day, especially with the ever-dynamic nature of technology. Young people dominate that part of the population which shows a keen interest in the use of social media. The types of social media that different people use depend on their interests and/or what the technology is needed for. Social Media tools have found their ways into libraries and are used for different activities, ranging from communication between library staff and patrons to marketing services by the library. With this development in the use of social media in libraries, it is important to find out what role this technology plays in libraries.

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Social networking sites (SNS) provide an innovative and effective way of connecting users (O'Dell, 2010). Features of SNS enable users to generate interpersonal connections based on common grounds (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009). 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 (Hoffman, 2009). These features make SNSs excellent in initiating interaction among users (Burkhardt, 2010). The number of libraries which adopt SNSs is increasing. In a 2009 survey, researchers found that SNS was only adopted by a few academic libraries (Xu, Ouyang, & Chu, 2009). After no more than 2 years, another survey revealed that Facebook and Twitter have become the most popular Web 2.0 applications in libraries (Mahmood & Richardson, Jr, 2011). However, users' attitudes towards using SNS to enhance and encourage interaction for educational purposes are not very supportive. Students still deem that SNSs are used mainly for communicating with friends (Coyle & Vaughn, 2008). Students do not use Facebook to contact university personnel (Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009); and do not expect to interact with faculty through SNSs (Chu, Meulemans, & Nalani, 2008; Joinson, 2008; Lampe, Ellison, & Steinfield, 2008). User engagement is low on libraries' SNSs. Researchers observed that there were only few responses from users on a number of libraries' fan pages (Jacobson, 2011). Libraries' Twitter accounts only got a few followers (Stuart, 2010). To address this anomaly of engaging users on libraries' SNS and to provide well informed suggestions, this study highlights the roles of Social Media/Social Networking Sites on library activities.

LIBRARY AND SOCIAL MEDIA

According to the Oxford Dictionary, a library can be defined as a building or room where books, periodicals, and sometimes films and recorded

music are kept for the purpose of being borrowed by the public or the members of an institution, for example, a university library. The Macmillan dictionary defines a library as a place where books, documents, CDs and the like are available for people to look at or borrow.

The Free dictionary defines a library as a place in which literary and artistic materials like books, periodicals, newspapers, pamphlets, prints, records, and tapes, are kept for reading, reference, or lending <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/library>. The definitions above on 'library' denote a library as a physical space where people can go to view or borrow materials for their personal, academic or professional use. As will be seen later in this chapter, this definition cannot be regarded as being restrictive as it does not accommodate the role that the advancement in the technology has played, and is still playing in the library setting.

Social media originated as a personal tool that people used for the purpose of interacting with friends and family but which was later adopted by businesses that wanted to take advantage of a popular new communication method to reach out to customers. <http://www.investopedia.com/terms/s/social-media.asp>.

In discussing Social Media, it is important to understand what Social Media is. Social media can be referred to as all the various web-based and mobile apps that give users the ability to create a personal profile, connect with other users and create, publish and respond to content. The services allow one to create personal or business network which are called Social Networking sites. Social Media Sites on the other hand are designed around a form of media, such as video, articles or web pages and allow one to publish, rate or comment. <http://www.rebeccaward-low.com/six-types-of-social-media-sites/>. Various scholars have given some definitions of Social Media. Some of these definitions are stated below:

Social Media is a broad term that covers a wide range of web sites which enable people to interact with other visitors (Khan and Bhatti, 2012). Examples of Social Media are Social news

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