Chapter 6
Is Anybody Out There?
Using Application Statistics and Web Analytics to Assess Social Media Reach

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ABSTRACT

This chapter will explore how social media assessment is used for library marketing. It will build upon existing literature on how other libraries quantify social media impact in promoting their services. This includes methods on how libraries can gather native application statistics from popular platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram. An exploration into web analytics will also be explored as evidence of social media impact. The chapter will use case-studies of the Ursula C. Schwerin Library of the New York City College of Technology (City Tech), CUNY, and how social media platforms are used to advertise library events and disseminate news.

INTRODUCTION

In the last few years, social media has made impacts in culture, politics, and most notably, libraries. Libraries and librarians are known as early technology adopters, with over 1,300 libraries possessing Twitter accounts (Emery & Schifeling, 2015). After observing 6 Midwest academic libraries, Harisson et al., make the claim that libraries "must use social media in order to retain legitimacy in today's college environment (2017)." This make sense as 68% of Americans use Facebook accessing the service on a daily basis (Smith & Anderson, 2018). As libraries utilize social media it is important to analyze if these networks are making an impact in providing their services.

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BACKGROUND

There has been an enormous amount of literature related to the development of social media in libraries in the last few years. As of this writing, there are over 7,400 articles related to social media in the Library & Information Science Source electronic database. 86% of public libraries are using social media to connect with users (Dowd, 2013). It can be used for collaborative work and opens opportunities for advertising library services (Delaney & Bates, 2015). Social media tools can be a "useful discovery tool for scanning and finding users' comments" of an organization (Koontz & Mon, 2014).

Social media is useful as it can help build an online community around the library. Montana State University utilized its Twitter feed to creating more interactive postings by developing an internal social media guide, developing plans to focus on the audience, and intentional and frequent posting (Young & Rossman, 2015). Facebook was used to specifically cater to a community of young adults, by promoting materials, programming, and services, for those particular patrons (Philips, 2015). In China, libraries specifically target users of the WeChat app, a popular social media mobile chat platform, to boost and promote library services (Xu et al. 2014).

Although there is an abundance of scholarly literature on social media, there is a gap in focusing specifically on social media assessment in libraries. There are, however, articles in the larger literature that do touch upon it. Burclaff notes that when assessing social media it is important to create a strategy that identifies goals so quantifiable metrics, like click-throughs and student feedback, can be measured (2014). Libraries can also use influence, the amount of sway an organization has on its followers, or engagement, the amount of conversation a post generates, to measure the effectiveness of social media (Blowers, 2012).

MAIN FOCUS OF THE CHAPTER

The City Tech Library uses multiple social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Flickr, and Pinterest. Each of these platforms has their own form of built-in statistics. This ranges from the complex, such as Facebook's page insights or Twitter's built-in analytics tools, to the more the simplistic like Instagram's number of likes. This chapter will look specifically at Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

Facebook

Facebook is a social media platform that allows its users to share information between one another, groups, and online communities. It offers a wide variety of statistics on followers visiting a library's Facebook page, using an analytics tool called Facebook Insights (see Figure 1). Administrators can access Insights through the top menu of the Facebook page.

Statistics such as page views, likes, reach, recommendations, engagements, and more are displayed. Information can be cross-referenced by date (today, yesterday, past week, and past 28 days) for comparison. There are several different metrics that Insights uses. Page views are self-explanatory. Likes indicates how many people have "liked" your page. It also displays posts from your page that appear in the user's feed that are liked. Reach is the number of people who have seen posts from your page (see Figure 2).

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