

Chapter 22

Expanding the Awareness and Use of Library Collections Through Social Media: A Case Study of the Library of Congress International Collections Social Media Program

Anchi Hoh

Library of Congress, USA

ABSTRACT

The Library of Congress houses more than 164 million items in various formats, languages, and subjects. Found among its treasures are the international collections. The Library's four area studies divisions—African and Middle Eastern (AMED), Asian, European, and Hispanic—reading rooms provide access to many of these resources. In 2016, the four area studies divisions launched a collaborative social media program to encourage the use of the library's international collections by domestic and global online audiences. The program adopted the 4 Corners of the World blog and the Library of Congress International Collections Facebook page as interactive social media tools. This chapter will examine the interdivisional initiative through its purpose, target audience, content focus, platform selection, management and operation, audience interaction, and current status. Next, the chapter will discuss challenges and opportunities facing the four divisions. Finally, the chapter will offer recommendations for other libraries that are interested in establishing a similar program.

INTRODUCTION

For nearly 200 years, human communication has experienced several revolutions due to inventions like the telegraph, telephone, computer, and Internet. Between 1990 and 2006, we witnessed the important advent of broadband technology, which allowed for the high-speed, simultaneous Internet transmission

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Expanding the Awareness and Use of Library Collections Through Social Media

of voice, data, and video signals (Britannica Academic, 2018; Dewing, 2010). During the same time, we saw the emergence of social media platforms, including YouTube, WordPress, Facebook, and Twitter.

These developments denote a remarkable milestone with long-lasting impacts in the history of human communication. Social media has changed the way people network and share information. It has permeated all aspects of our daily lives. This translates into an evident marketing opportunity for both public and private organizations that aim to engage the public for commercial or nonprofit purposes (Britannica Academic, 2017.).

In 2014, eMarketer Pro surveyed American organizations with 100 or more employees. Eighty-eight percent of the organizations were using social media to market products or services (Bennett, 2014). Social media and libraries appear to be a natural fit because social media aids libraries in sharing information broadly and easily by reaching “users who may not have considered the library as a resource for their information needs” (Canty, 2012, p. X). According to a special report by the American Library Association (2011):

libraries are also making voracious use of social media ... to connect with patrons and to market programs and services. More than 90 percent of the respondents in a survey of library administrators/managers, librarians and other staff called Web 2.0 tools important for marketing and promoting library services. (p. 6)

According to Mickoleit (2014), in the public sector:

presence and activity on social media is no longer a question of choice for most governments as those new platforms empower individuals and non-traditional interest groups. Politicians were first to react to these changes by using platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and blogs to rally support. Government institutions are slowly catching up and increasingly experiment with social media. (p. 2)

To establish more effective communication and to better serve constituents, members of the U.S. Congress were early adopters of social media. From 2009-2013, more than 78% of individual members had an official Twitter; more than 87% had a Facebook account. By 2016, Congressional committees were using social media extensively (Straus & Glassman, 2016).

The U.S. Federal Government views social networking as an effective means of improving public services through direct interaction with constituents. In April 2010, social media was standardized through an Office of Management and Budget (OMB) memorandum through the Social Media, Web-Based Interactive Technologies, and the Paperwork Reduction Act (U.S. OMB, 2010). The act was based on a 2009 OMB memorandum, M-10-06, titled Open Government Directive. Since then, the Federal Government has developed comprehensive strategies and guidelines for the Executive Branch agencies to address all aspects of its social media practices. These include the adoption of plain language (U.S. GPO, 2010), public participation, performance measurement, and privacy protection.

In early 2007, the Library of Congress made its social media debut. Established in 1800 as part of the Legislative Branch, the Library is the oldest Federal cultural institution. Recognized as the largest library in the world, it has a fast-growing collection of digital resources and more than 164 million items in a variety of formats, languages, and subjects. In addition to acquiring and preserving, its mission aims to provide access to its collections (Library of Congress, n.d., 2010). Through social media, the Library can fulfill its mission of providing access to a considerable audience.

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