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Library Community in Social Media: Exploration of Past Studies

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LIBRARY COMMUNITY IN SOCIAL MEDIA: EXPLORATION OF PAST STUDIES

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Abstract

This article explores the concept of a library through social media platforms, resulting in forming a community that offers support, knowledge exchange, research, and networking opportunities. Articles review was taken between the publication year 2006 until 2021. Libraries can also utilize social media to share specific resources and collections and educate and market what is available. Creating content is one of the virtues for libraries to create awareness among their users and followers on social media platforms. Past researchers of the study are discussed exponentially to provide a holistic view on this matter. Challenges faced by the libraries in using social media platforms are also mentioned in this paper.

Keywords: social media literacy, libraries in social media, social media agility, social media community, library community

INTRODUCTION

Much of the literature advises libraries on how to use social media as a marketing tool. The research presented here reframes the conversation to investigate the role of social media in community building. It is essential to establish what is included within the term "social media". The term has been used interchangeably with Web 2.0 technologies, including instant messaging, streaming media, blogs, wikis, social networks, tagging, RSS feeds, and mashups (Maness, 2006). Social media and the use of social networking sites can be defined as web-based services that allow an individual to construct a public or semi-public profile with a list of users with whom that person has a standard connection (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). Therefore, social media denote communication through the Internet that enables social interaction (Xie and Stevenson, 2014). Within this interaction is an exchange of a wide variety of media content, including videos, photos, text, audio files, and how the members of a social network are both the suppliers and the consumers of content (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). With the growing use of social media, web technologies have become more about building relationships than providing community resources (Hofschire, 2014). One interesting point is how all the different social media platforms interact with each other. Each form of social media also has a presence on several other platforms.

Pinterest is an active registered user on several other social media sites including Facebook, Google Plus, Twitter, YouTube, GitHub, and Flickr. It considers these as community. Snapchat is on Twitter, Flickr is on Tumblr, Facebook, Twitter and Google Plus. There is no one social networking platform that is stand-alone in providing information to everyone; rather they work through each other by conveying information in a different form to a target group of users.

LIBRARIES IN SOCIAL MEDIA

There is a need for libraries to be present wherever their users are (Canty, 2012; Maness, 2006). Because of this need, a growing number of libraries and librarians are creating a presence for themselves within social networking sites (American Library Association, 2012; Vassilakaki and Garoufallou, 2014; Wetta, 2014). This presence on social media can be used to maintain a connection with current users (American Library Association, 2012; Cowden, 2014; Wetta, 2014), as well as play an essential role in customer service (Espersen, 2015; Li and Li, 2013) and marketing (Phillips, 2015; Young and Rossman, 2015; Li and Li, 2013). The core of the work of librarians is to share information, and they're therefore in a unique position to use social media to their advantage (Canty, 2012). With this, libraries need to share news and promote communication on an alternate platform (Glazer, 2009; Maness, 2006; Phillips, 2015) and offer options to their users' technology preferences and information-seeking behaviours (Hofschire, 2014). While social media can be helpful in marketing (Jacobson, 2011; Young and Rossman, 2015; Li and Li, 2013), they also provide an excellent way to improve customer service (Canty, 2012). Through social media, the library has the opportunity to see what is being said about them and respond to the feedback in a timely and positive way (American Library Association, 2012; Canty, 2012; Li and Li, 2013).

Through responsiveness and listening to users, an online community can be created. By inviting users to engage with the library, they can help shape services to fit the community's needs (Smeaton, 2014). There is a need for libraries to overcome the access boundaries, encourage users to leave comments, and create a human personality for the library and its users (American Library Association, 2012; Canty, 2012). With the creation and maintenance of a virtual presence, technology can reach the community (Lankes, 2016). Many librarians now believe that the use of social media supports the core missions of the library—including that of creating communities (Lankes, 2016; Smeaton 2014), connecting with existing users and reaching out to new users while opening lines of communication between the library and its users (Smeaton, 2014). According to Phillips (2015), 88% of surveyed librarians felt that they perceived social media as an effective tool in promoting library materials, and 94% felt that social media use was beneficial in promoting available services. All of the librarians surveyed felt that social media was a useful and valuable tool for the library.

LIBRARY CONTENT CREATION IN SOCIAL MEDIA

Although social media provide the tools to share information, the library still has to provide the content (Li and Li, 2013). When considering what information to share and post, it is essential to set the right tone for each channel (Canty, 2012). It is also

necessary to keep things simple, short (Hofschire, 2014), create an engaging personality (Li and Li, 2013; Young and Rossman, 2015), be witty (Glazer, 2012; King, 2015) and use humour (Hofschire, 2014; King, 2015). Libraries that use social media to share events (American Library Association, 2014; Phillips, 2015; Li and Li, 2013) and show users what has been happening at the library with a selection of high-quality images are likely to succeed in engaging with people (Canty, 2012). Sharing a video, for example, can make the library seem alive by showing how it looks inside (King, 2015). The challenge is always to create excellent and valuable content because users will connect with you if you share good content (King, 2015). A post's content can convey a helpful message about the library or services (Phillips, 2015; Li and Li, 2013). They can incorporate summer reading programs to unify a set of posts (Hofschire, 2014; Phillips, 2015). All of this can be accomplished without seeming promotional (Sörensen, 2015). Sharing exciting bits of information, asking questions or presenting behind-the-scenes stories from authors (Dowd, 2013; Phillips, 2015). Other possibilities include running contests and quizzes, offering prizes, and talking about adding variety (Glazer, 2012).

Public institutions in Iceland, for example, have had limited use of social media. There is no original content, and posts tend to be linked to government events and sites (Einarsson and Gunnlaugsdóttir, 2014). To use the media effectively, there needs to be planning involved (Li and Li, 2013). When unsure of what to post, think about your users' interests (Glazer, 2012) and choose a post accordingly. When someone comments on a post, be sure to respond promptly (Glazer, 2012). By responding to and interacting with members, you create a sense of community (Young and Rossman, 2015). It is also helpful to keep a content schedule (Fredrick, 2012) to keep track of what has already been posted and provide ideas (Hofschire, 2014). Less than half of the public institutions in Iceland are using social media, and those that are, do not have any defined goals or guidelines (Einarsson and Gunnlaugsdóttir, 2014). It is essential to promote a library's use of social media to attract new users (Canty, 2012). Having social media buttons on the homepage shows that the library is active and seeking to engage new users (Xie and Stevenson, 2014); if the links are embedded on every page as a header or a footer, their exposure increases (Canty, 2012). Since we do not know when a user will need to share content from the website with social media, the website design should provide social media icons to encourage interaction (Xie and Stevenson, 2014). While social media are relatively easy to set up and free to start up, the fact remains that they are not free of cost. Good social media engagement requires considerable staff time—and management commitment is essential to ensure good content that enhances the library in the user's eyes (Li and Li, 2013). Social media can only promote the content that has been provided (Canty, 2012). With that in mind, almost every librarian's goal is to save time and money, so some might feel there is enough to do without setting up and maintaining yet another venue (Fredrick, 2012).

LIBRARY RESEARCH IN SOCIAL MEDIA APPLICATION

Library research has long provided a critical examination of social media's value, purpose, and practical application. "Clever outreach or costly diversion?" Glazer wondered about library Facebook usage, gave a more developed take on Facebook metrics and the nature of online engagement three years later. While there has been no comparative study done in Iceland when considering the forms of social media

being used within libraries, it is helpful to look at the results from a study done by the Colorado State Library's Library Research Service, which examined whether the libraries had accounts on any of these nine social media networks: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr, Foursquare, Tumblr, Pinterest, Google+, and Vimeo (Hofschire, 2014). It was found that the majority of libraries in all population groups had at least one social media account. It was not a surprise to find that libraries are most likely to be on Facebook, but other commonly used networks include Twitter, YouTube and Flickr (Hofschire, 2014). Facebook and Twitter have proven themselves as valuable tools in publicizing the availability of online collections and building relationships with users (American Library Association, 2012). While institutions are using social media to convey current information related to their library (Xie and Stevenson, 2014; Li and Li, 2013), they still an inconsistent use of the platforms amongst public libraries, with some trying to use all available forms of social media and others just focusing on a few (Canty, 2012). Libraries need to choose the channels that work best within their communities (Dowd, 2013) while considering that the platforms are constantly changing, and librarians need to be prepared and keep up with changing technologies (Li and Li, 2013). Facebook is one of the most widely used social media networks (Jacobson, 2011; McLellan, 2013) and therefore has the largest audience when relaying information to large groups of people (Bergsson, 2014) and building communities (Palmer, 2014). Facebook was started in 2004 and was only for Harvard students, but then became open to other university students and slowly, after that, to the public (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). Many libraries are already using Facebook (Jacobson, 2011; King, 2015), as are many public institutions in Iceland (Einarsson and Gunnlaugsdóttir, 2014). It makes sense since most of their customers are already using it themselves (King, 2015). As Librarian Adrienne Canty says, a Facebook presence is a progressive move that helps explode persistent myths about libraries as "old dusty houses full of books" (Hall, 2007).

While several how-to articles are explicitly written for libraries on how to use Facebook (Romero, 2011), librarians should not become too attached to this form of social media as the Internet is constantly changing. All their hard work may have to be left behind to move on to the next big thing (Jacobson, 2011). Facebook has a feature designed for institutions and businesses called "Pages" (Fredrick, 2012). Administrators of the page then post information for their institution, and after a Facebook user has "liked" the page, that post will appear in the user's newsfeed (McLellan, 2013; Xie and Stevenson, 2014). As an administrator, it is possible to see the number of "impressions" for each post (Glazer, 2012). In deciding what to post on Facebook, you may consider updates on new resources available, library events, links to author's profiles (Mozdzer, 2008) or even an excerpt of a good book (Fredrick, 2012). Phillips (2014) describes how librarians have found Facebook helpful in promoting support services, study areas, fundraising and advocacy. It is relatively easy to connect your library's accounts on other forms of social media to the Facebook page, allowing for updates on YouTube, Flickr, Twitter, and blogs to also be shared via Facebook status updates (Fredrick, 2012; Glazer, 2012). Fans of your page can show that they are interested in the content posted by "liking" the post or by interacting by offering comments (Glazer, 2012). It is recommended that libraries update their Facebook pages since there has been a positive connection found between the number of fans a page has and the number of posts it has (Jacobson, 2011). While, institutions that post frequently are more successful in reaching out and encouraging interaction with users (Xie and Stevenson, 2014). Giving your Facebook fans the

content they want will start interacting and become advocates for the library (King, 2011).

Microblogging is a type of social networking that has become very popular (Aharony, 2012). Twitter is a microblogging site set up in 2006 (Procter, Vis, and Voss, 2013) that aims as positive power to strengthen the community (Twitter, 2021) with 140 characters or less (Procter, Vis, and Voss, 2013). "Followers" are members of the Twitter user base and "tweets" are messages to the community. This open platform has a more directed and nonreciprocal model that allows users to follow whomever they want and their tweets become visible in their timeline (Procter, Vis, and Voss, 2013). The more people you have following you, the better chance you have of your posts being seen (Dowd, 2013). To interact on Twitter, users can reply to a tweet or "favourite" a tweet, meaning that they like it and "retweet" by sharing someone else's tweet (Young and Rossman, 2015) by pressing retweet or typing RT in front of it (Procter, Vis, and Voss, 2013). Twitter also uses a concept called "Hashtag", meaning that by setting a hashtag in front of a string of text you are labelling it and this allows anyone searching for this hashtag to see what everyone else has been saying about it (Mies, 2015; Procter, Vis, and Voss, 2013). Hashtags were started by Twitter but are now supported by Facebook, Instagram, and Google+ (Mies, 2015). Another Twitter feature is Twitpic, which allows users to upload or link images to their tweets (Procter, Vis, and Voss, 2013). Twitter has become a popular tool for libraries to communicate with their users (American Library Association, 2012; Phillips, 2015) and is particularly useful in events and when timely updates of information are needed to be relayed to the community (Canty, 2012; King, 2015; Palmer, 2014; Xie and Stevenson, 2014). Examples of this can include breaking news in world events (King, 2015), information on power outages, messages about possibly needing to close early because of a storm (Xie and Stevenson, 2014), reader's advisory, reference questions or technology tips (Cavanagh, 2016; Shiri & Rathi, 2013). Other tweets can include professional interests (Aharony, 2012), tweeting an entire book, using one tweet a day (Canty, 2012) or writing a story one small piece at a time on Twitter (McLellan, 2013).

While Twitter is only one of many forms of social media available, it is particularly well suited to library use for sharing information and connecting with other users on Twitter (Cavanagh, 2016). Shiri and Rathi (2013) categorized the tweets of public libraries into main groups, including news, library operations, information sharing, informal conversation, feedback-seeking, events, announcements, opinions, queries, recommendations/suggestions, requests, acknowledgements and advisory services. Thompson, Martin, Gee, and Geurin (2016) mentioned that social media is an important instrument that the library can use. Several types of social media are now being utilised in the libraries, their future goals for social media, and how these types of social media are being utilised.

RECENT CHALLENGES OF LIBRARY IN SOCIAL MEDIA

To provide valuable information services through social media, librarians need relevant theories as well as practical, operational models. Efforts have been made to develop valuable introductions to social media platforms for librarians and optimization guides to the social media presence (e.g., Solomon, 2011). Researchers and library and information science practitioners have developed theories and best practices to provide practical information services in traditional settings (Bopp and Smith, 2011).

However, it is not clear whether these theories and best practices are directly applicable to virtual library services provided through social media platforms in general and microblogging platforms such as Twitter in particular. More research is needed to determine effective models for the provision of library communication and services for each large social media platform. It includes understanding what library services a particular social media platform is most suitable for and how those services can be provided effectively using the platform. Furthermore, examining the current practices of Twitter use by libraries, the subject repertoire, and the factors that make library tweets effective can inform the development of library programs and services and library staff training in the use of social media platforms. Finally, developing low-cost, automatable representations of microblog post usefulness and value is essential for enabling the effective and scalable search and ranking of microblogging content.

CONCLUSION

Best practices in public relations call for setting objectives, goals, and planning. Planning is a constant in public relations circles. Libraries develop content strategies with defined target groups, purposes or tonality. Many comments focus on the lack of a strategy and the desire to define strategy in the future. Content strategy is a term widely used among web developers as well as public relations and marketing practitioners. Halverson (2006) offers a concise, clear, and readable definition written for a user experience audience but applies to all digital content: Content strategy plans for creating, publication, and governance of valuable, usable content. Necessarily, the content strategist must work to define not only which content will be published but why we're publishing it in the first place. Otherwise, content strategy isn't a strategy at all. At its best, a content strategy defines: key themes and messages, recommended topics, content purpose or content gap analysis, metadata frameworks and related content attributes, Search Engine Optimization (SEO), and etc. Social media functionality, infrastructure, and even privacy policies may require libraries to adapt to ongoing changes or updates. Libraries may find it challenging to take use of the "latest and greatest" features without starting over or making considerable changes to policies and processes in some circumstances.

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