

SOCIAL NETWORKING TOOLS FOR ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

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Abstract

Social media is key to 21st century communication with library users, and enables the academic library to pursue its mission and goals online, while promoting library resources and services. As Johnson and Burclaff note in their 2013 ACRL conference paper, “Making Social Media Meaningful: Connecting Missions and Policies”, 94% of academic libraries have a social media presence, mainly on Face book, Twitter, and YouTube, but only 2% of those surveyed have a library-specific policy for social media. They also stress the importance of linking the academic library social media policy to the library’s mission statement, stating, “Mission-based goals and actions are particularly valuable in areas of rapid change, like social media... The library mission should drive the library’s activities and should therefore be present in these guiding policies.”

Keywords: Social Media, Social Networking, Academic Libraries, SNS

Introduction

The social and communication pattern of our society are being shifted by the influx of Social media products and services such as Twitter, Face book, YouTube, Flicker, Bloggers Word Press, Delicious etc. Undeniably, this development has direct impact on various aspects of library and information services; starting from how we find information online, to the ways libraries a reach out and relate with their clientele. This chapter considers social media as an enhancement of library services, library outreach and librarians’ collaboration. It presents social media as an effective tool in information management that is capable of creating futures -prospects, opportunities, hope for library users and information and library professionals.

Social media is a powerful new form of communication and the number of users on popular social media sites is growing at exponential rates. Millions of people are using social media tools as part of their everyday lives for work, studies and play because of its ubiquity. Academic libraries abroad have found the use of social media as an effective communication tools to interact with faculty staff and students in new ways. The following can be used by academic libraries to spread the word about different events, services that they offer and the marketing of new library products, initiatives, new addition to library collections, links to articles, videos, community information, solicit feedbacks, respond to people, talk to people,

give instructions, link wherever possible. In addition to marketing, the simple act of having conversations and creating relationships with patrons is immediately useful. Through conversations on social media, libraries can gain insight into what their users want and needs

Definition of Social Networking

According to Computing Dictionary (2011), “Social networking site as any website designed to allow multiple users to publish content of them. The information may be on any subject and may be for consumption by friends, mates, employers, employees just to mention a few”.

Boyd and Ellison (2007) define “Social networking sites as web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, to view and navigate their list of connections and those made by others within the system”.

Powell (2009) defines “Social networking as a community in which individuals are somehow connected through friendship, values, working relationships, idea and so on”.

Objectives of Social Networking

1. To promote events;
2. To promote library services;
3. To promote resources/collections at the library;
4. To update on library refurbishments;

5. To promote new acquisitions;
6. To promote library guides, exhibition guides;
7. To connect with new students joining the university;
8. To engage with the academic community;
9. To connect with the wider community beyond the university e.g. the town in which the institution is based;
10. To connect with distance learners;
11. As a customer services tool- complaints, suggestions, enquiries, feedback;
12. To highlight subject specific information;
13. To connect with potential students;
14. As a teaching tool to promote information literacy, technology and writing tips (not library based);
15. To promote courses;
16. As a research tool to locate official documents and studies.

Social Networking Sites

Social networking sites are web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system. Social networking sites allow librarians to adopt a new role by placing themselves into a social realm with users. By reading blogs, group postings, and message boards, the librarian becomes an active participant, who is able

to anticipate and advise patrons as needs arise. Linking to patron profiles also keeps the library within the consciousness of users,

- ❖ **Facebook:** most popular now because it is librarian- friendly, with many application like JSTOR search, World Cat, and much more. Librarians can interact with users to know their information need. Libraries try to link some of these specialized library applications to Facebook.
- ❖ **MySpace:** In Academic institutions where the students are; libraries have taken advantage of this site to post, calendar, custom catalog search tools, and blog features to improve their presence.
- ❖ **Ning:** Librarians can get connected with users, library associations, and more. The Nigerian Library Association (NLA) utilizes this platform to discuss topical issues among the members.
- ❖ **Blogs:** Here, librarians can periodically post messages; share information on a particular subject or issue, and allow users to contribute to content. They can write articles, news on topical issues and expect an instant reaction from their users.
- ❖ **Wikis:** is a free online encyclopedia that gives a background knowledge and definition of concepts. It offers a platform for users to access, edit and contribute to content. This is a collaborative web page for developing web content.

- ❖ **LinkedIn:** Librarians can get patrons connected with specialists in their particular field of interest via LinkedIn. Librarians can use this platform to render specialized services such as Strategic Dissemination of Information (SDI).
- ❖ **Twitter:** a micro blogging application, to keep staff and patrons updated on daily activities, like frequently updated collections. Users can utilize this platform to type in short messages or status update.
- ❖ **YouTube:** In institutions in Nigeria, events such as important highlights of inaugural lectures, conferences and workshops are disseminated via the YouTube.
- ❖ **Flickr:** Librarians can use this tool to share and distribute new images of library collections. Cover page of new arrivals of both books and journals can be disseminated to users via Flickr.
- ❖ **Library Thing:** A tool that enriches the library OPAC. Once an account is created, a list of books with ISBNs is sent to Library Thing which sends back a piece of code which is pasted into the footer of the Library OPAC. Librarians can utilize this to send a list of current publications to users.
- ❖ **Teacher Tube:** Teacher Tube, which is a YouTube for teachers, presents an excellent opportunity for instructor-librarian collaboration. Instructors can guide students to helpful library resources, and vice versa.
- ❖ **Second Life:** On Second Life, you can create a virtual library with streamed media, discussions, classes, and more.

- ❖ **Wikipedia:** Wikipedia is an online encyclopedia updated by users. You can use this tool to share your knowledge by editing, or simply point library patrons in the right direction. You can also host your library websites on wiki software like PB Wiki.
- ❖ **PB wiki:** PB wiki is the world's largest provider of hosted business and educational wikis. It encourages collaboration from students.
- ❖ **Footnote:** On Footnote, you'll get access to original historical documents, and can update them with your own content and insights. You can even find personal anecdotes and experiences you won't find in reference books.
- ❖ **Community Walk:** Community Walk offers a geographical way to interpret text and events. You can use it for instruction, such as showing someone where to find a book, or walk them through a historical and geographical timeline.
- ❖ **SlideShare:** Encourage faculty, staff, and students to share their slideshow presentations for the greater community to access on SlideShare. It's a great way to disseminate information among research community to the field of research and development (R&D) activities.
- ❖ **Digg:** Digg is a great way to find useful content that you wouldn't come across in traditional ways. Find stories here, then share them with others using Digg's blog function.
- ❖ **Stumble Upon:** Another way to find great content is with Stumble Upon. You can channel surf the Internet to find useful content, research tools, and more.

❖ **Daft Doggy:** If you've found a particularly good resource, you can use Daft Doggy to create a website tour with instructions, pointing out useful references and items of note.

Use of Social Media In Library

When setting up a social media account it is important to personalize it. No matter which social media service your library decides on, there are a few things that your account should include. Foremost, a link to your library Web site is necessary.

- **Library news and events:** If you are going to host a gaming night in the library, social media is the perfect place to tell people about it. If your Web site is going to be down for repairs, let people know via your social media accounts. Social media is great for updating people on what is going on.
- **New additions to your collection:** Got some new books? Have a great new bibliographic citation management tool? People might not know about additions to your collection unless you tell them. Social media can be helpful for informing patrons about new resources.
- **Links to articles, videos, etc.:** If you come across Web content that would be relevant or helpful to your patrons, post it. Not everything you post has to be directly related to your library. Do not lose sight of why you started using this tool in the first place, but a variety of postings keep things fresh.

- **Community information:** You can also pass along information of significance to your community via your social media channels. The library is the heart of a college campus. It is natural that it should be a place where people go to get information about the community.
- **Solicit feedback:** Social networking is built for conversations, so feel free to ask questions of your fans or followers. Questions also often get the most response. Ask interesting things that you actually want to know, such as, “Why do you use the library?” When people answer, continue the conversation with your patrons.
- **Respond to people:** Acknowledge compliments to your library gracefully. Reply to negative feedback by addressing the problem people are having and staying positive.
- **Pictures**—Both Twitter and Facebook allow you, without much hassle, to post or link to pictures. Text can get boring after a while. Enhance your posts by including a picture. For example, if you have an event where an author is on campus, include a picture of him talking to students and tell people to stop by.
- **Anything else**—Get creative with your posts. Do not limit yourself to this list. You know your community. Ask yourself, “What would be interesting or useful to them,” and then post that.

Benefits of Social Networking Service

There is evidence of a broad range of benefits to young people associated with the use of SNS.

- Media Literacy,
- Formal Educational Outcomes,
- Informal Education and Learning,
- Creativity,
- Individual Identity and Self-Expression,
- Strengthening Social Relationships,
- Belonging and Collective Identity,
- Building and Strengthening Communities,
- Civic and Political Participation,
- Self-Efficacy and Wellbeing.

Challenges of Using Social Media in Libraries

Challenges associated with using social media in libraries include the following:

- **Lack of Awareness:** Most librarians in the developing countries are not aware of social networking services, even the few that are aware are still struggling to find out the productive uses of these sites for library services.

- **Bandwidth problem:** Most institutions have limited bandwidth to support this practice. Poor connectivity can frustrate effective online participation.
- **Technophobia:** Many librarians and users are afraid of handling computers. They make the traditional library services their comfort zone and are not eager to embrace change.
- **Lack of maintenance culture:** Maintenance culture is seriously lacking in most institutions in developing countries. The few available technologies are in dying conditions that may not support remote access to information.
- **Unreliable power supply:** The low supply of electricity discourage people from participating in the online forum.
- **Lack of training of staff:** Most librarians lack the 21st century skills that could be required to adopt the social networking tools for effective library services.
- **Government intervention:** There is little or no intervention of the government in the area of ICT.
- **Copyright Issue:** The free access to information where people copy, paste and edit without acknowledging the authority is a serious challenge to copyright management.
- Social media can require considerable time commitment from library staff;

- **Technological expertise:** Social media can require technological expertise, for example customizing applications to provide access to online catalogs;
- **Social media content:** It can be a challenge for librarians to use an informal but presentable tone, or deliver social media content in a bilingual or multilingual region;
- **Limited fund:** There are limited funds to support more advanced social media usage/features and the training that would be required to enable this;
- **Work hard:** library needs to work hard to maintain engagement with library users and attract popularity;
- It can be difficult to maintain library branding for content/resources made accessible via social media;
- **External factors** such as Internet connectivity, technological infrastructure and government restrictions on the use of social media may restrict access

Conclusion

Academic Library Users Social networking sites could be effectively used to disseminate information and promote pleasant professional relationship among librarians and library users. It encourages academic collaboration. Social networking site should be introduced to attract them to the library environment. Social networking sites would help establish a cordial relationship between librarians and patrons; market the library's services.

Social networking website provides great opportunities for Library professionals to interact with their users as it places them in the digital social space of their users. Library professionals can get first hand information about the user through interacting with them. They can then understand the behavior of the user and design services to meet the needs accordingly. Social networks are a great way to test your commitment to open communication.

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