Sustainable Use of Social Media in Libraries

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Abstract

Integrating social media into library programs, both academic and public, has taken a central focus in recent years, resulting in the development of new career tracks for specialists in emerging technologies and social media librarians. Early efforts in outreach and promotion morphed into branding and marketing strategies, and social media was quickly adopted as cost effective and a great tool to target millennials. The charge was led to be on the cutting edge with an organizational presence in social media, particularly Facebook and Twitter. The rapid experimentation and implementation of social media in libraries at times has displaced the formative discussions for carefully considered institutional policy. Educational institutions are wise to consider a balance with respect to issues of free expression and common sense use of university resources. How does online behavior and speech affect the future employment of millennials, if consequences are considered after serious mistakes have already been made? What is the role of libraries to outline and model appropriate online conduct as it assists communities of users in developing employment skills for the job market? Can policy balance with free speech concerns? Many questions associated with sustainable social media implementations in library organizations have not been adequately addressed. The purpose of this research is to provide analysis of issues within the environment of learning and social media, the sustainability of such programs, and to examine policy for marketing libraries through social media.

Keywords: Social Media, Social Media Policies, Libraries, Marketing and Outreach

Introduction: Accelerating Change

Libraries have been valued over centuries for providing a record of civilization, for preserving important collections, and for offering researchers and casual readers the most up-to-date resources necessary for their work and lifelong learning. For much of this time, print and paper reigned as format and focus; it wasn't until the early 1900s that this changed with the advent and distribution of sound recordings. Now print no longer dominates as a preferred format in many disciplines, as new options crowd the scholarly arena.

Libraries have undergone rapid change in recent decades that not only pertain to their holdings, but to services as well. When job descriptions for subject bibliographers became common in the 1990s, the positions were intended to develop expertise in building collections within assigned disciplines. Much of the work was directed toward wise purchasing decisions and staying in touch with departmental faculty for research needs. However, a shift was seen as these roles led more into subject liaison work, with assignments related to an array of tasks in instruction, research consultations, and reference services as well as collection building. Outreach, library promotion, marketing and creating connections to targeted user groups are fairly recent concerns for academic library programs. Budgets grow tighter while we are asked to demonstrate our value. As social media are adopted for the sake of library promotion and outreach, we must also navigate the changing landscape that patrons face in their own ability to create online content across these platforms. All of these concerns are at the forefront of academic libraries as academic librarians constantly strive to demonstrate our value to the academic community.

As light traffic in reference departments became a trend, this translated into concerted outreach efforts to grab the attention of patrons who might need assistance, but were not

approaching the desk. Roving librarians were a part of this outreach development to get outside the reference desk. Particularly targeted were millennials and digital natives, for whom access to the Internet has been readily available and transformative in terms of staying connected to their communities. If a student's self-perception is one of being tech savvy, the resistance to ask and instead figure it out on her own is a common hindrance. Libraries are no longer the first stop for information; instead, search engines such as Google provide patrons with initial search results. This presents problems as search results come up lacking, and the use of library databases becomes a targeted skill one must acquire with a librarian's help. Bridging this information gap is challenging and requires self-promotion. One way librarians are engaging with users is through social media, taking librarians and an institutional presence to the places where the patrons are, bridging the gap, and attempting to start new conversations. Over a few decades, the focus on outreach has consumed a great deal of attention. Social media have provided a quick start on cost effective marketing for libraries and a jumpstart for an online institutional presence.

Literature Review

More than 8,500 scholarly articles related to social media have been indexed in Library and Information Science Source from the past fifteen years alone. As well, other disciplines such as law, communication and business have covered the rapid changes in emerging technologies and social networking sites. However, especially with respect to academic libraries, the issues of policy development remain largely overlooked. Emerging technologies and corresponding opportunities for service delivery were noted as a top trend for libraries impacting budget, staffing, training and instruction services (ACRL Research Planning & Review Committee, 2010). As early adopters of social media, librarians are well positioned to contribute their expertise as institutions struggle with managing liability and balancing concern

for the free exchange of ideas and personal expression. The discussions primarily focus on examining workplace or institutional use of social media, or those individual sites listing professional affiliation, such as job title and place of employment. The overlap of professional roles with informal contact between faculty and students, for example, can become controversial. To illustrate, problems arise managing free speech versus liability if lines of respect and courtesy are crossed; hence the concern for policy development outlining institutional expectations in order to protect and advise employees and students.

Building Connections

A primary goal for investing in social media programs is to engage students and faculty with their library, and develop new connections. Phillips' study (2011) analyzes academic libraries as building rapport with students through official Facebook posts. More than 400 status messages from 17 institutional Facebook pages were mapped by type (services, support, university announcements, etc.), along with fanbase changes over a period of weeks, a relatively small snapshot. Roblyer et. al, (2010), conducted a small scale survey to determine faculty and student perceptions regarding the use of social networking sites for educational purposes. It is particularly important to identify the reasons behind faculty viewpoints and their lack of interest in using social media for academic communication. Understanding this is instrumental in social media policy development at the institutional level. As of yet, the demand for using social media sites as a channel for academic communication is unclear (Cassidy et. al, 2014).

Barriers and Challenges

Issues of sustainability and the financial realities faced, particularly by medium-sized academic libraries, are well mapped in Regazzi's study (2012) of expenditures over a decade. Overall FTE staffing decreases are also reported, particularly with respect to librarian positions

(Regazzi, 2012; Stewart, 2010). Additionally, a survey of 140 university libraries in Asia, North America, and Europe (Chu & Du, 2012) was conducted with 38 libraries responding. The noted challenges to social media implementations included time, staffing and changing technologies.

Project Development

Ganster and Schumacher (20009) outline a Facebook project at the University of Buffalo Libraries, and the opportunities for marketing services, workshops, library hours and a user-friendly image. An overview of ARL libraries and the use of Facebook for outreach is presented by Wan (2011). However, assessment of project success should include more than counting the number of fans as a metric; for example, the user survey conducted at Western Michigan University (Sachs et.al, 2011) provided for detailed responses regarding social media and library patron interactions. The need for quantitative research to establish the effectiveness of social media sites for library outreach (Dickson & Holley, 2010) is still a concern.

Policy

Bodnar and Doshi (2011) call for critical thinking and assessment in social media efforts beyond the recent research describing best practices. They point to a gap in the literature regarding planning and organizational structure, i.e., which library departments should be involved, project coordination, and how posts are managed and kept up to date. Kooy and Steiner (2010) provide extensive coverage of the development of social media policy at Georgia State University, and provide very specific recommendations based on their work with legal counsel. The results of their survey of respondents from more than fifty institutions reveal that 61% had no relevant policy, and an additional 18% were unsure if one existed. Also from that survey, 71% of those tasked with removing objectionable posts had no stated policy backing that decision. Cadell (2013) advises that a good social media policy provides protection, as well as an

explanation for the use of social media.

Benefits of Social Media Implementation

Colleges and universities constantly face budget restraints, and libraries must continually demonstrate their value. Again, social media as cost-effective outreach to student populations proves compelling. As Santamaria and Petrik (2012) describe, social media provides a "common language" from which librarians can work with students; we can even "…confront gaps in their knowledge in a very low-stakes situation," enabling us to meet patrons where they are more effectively. Social media can also be incorporated into information literacy as a tool for discussing Public Domain images, Creative Commons, copyright issues, and ethical research (Dudenhoffer, 2012). Additionally, it assists visual learners, engages multiple cognitive learning techniques, and distributes easily using course management software such as Blackboard. Further, the use of LinkedIn, blogs or a carefully crafted Facebook profile can enhance networking, job searches, and college applications. These social media tools have an impact on students' lives and higher education professionals.

Social media also connects professionals globally. News and data are disseminated as it unfolds in a way that impacts vocations through shared posts, thus widening access to useful information. Librarians can promote library services, events, new acquisitions, and collect feedback. Teaching faculty and staff can connect with students using technology familiar to the students, and librarians can reach wider audiences who might not use the library otherwise. In addition to promoting the library to primary communities, social media allows engagement across institutions. With far-reaching effects, libraries are showcased on an international scale. More locally, it engages student workers and interns who assist librarians with emerging technologies, keeping the social media presence fresh and relevant.

Information Literacy

Social media provides libraries with tools that can be applied to information literacy and library instruction. One example that stands out best is Pinterest: it is a quick and simple way to find and use public domain images. Pinterest boards can be customized to fit the needs of student groups and discipline specific collections. When used to teach information literacy concepts, Pinterest demonstrates how students excel when the concepts they are learning relate directly to their own interests; the social media tool they use as a form of entertainment in spare time is transformed into a medium for critical thinking, classroom discourse, and an understanding of copyright and fair use. Principles for using images ethically are not an abstract concept, but instead become a concrete practice that Pinterest supports (Dudenhoffer, 2012). The site engages students through visual and tactile exercises, and it empowers learners through these multiple learning styles. This in turn promotes more effective classroom discussion and research. In Dudenhoffer's (2012) example,

> Students create a Pinterest account and are asked to select images that related to the term *satire*. Each student is responsible for his or her own pinboard, and is asked to share the board via the course management software… Students are then asked to explain why they chose those images to represent satire, either by in-class presentation or, in the on-line class environment, as a discussion board post. In the next step, students craft their own definition of satire, which is the focus of the first assignment in a scaffolded set of papers completed throughout the semester. (pp.330-331)

Clearly, this social media tool is a powerful, relevant way to reach students. However, with Pinterest, students are working with existing online materials.

Another aspect of information literacy is creating content and participating in publishing materials online. This includes students' own social media accounts. In 2010, the *Washington Post* headlined "70 percent of hiring managers say they reject job applicants because of info they find online" (Kang, 2010). In 2011, Max Drucker, CEO and co-founder of Social Intelligence Corporation, explained that everything gets examined, from comments on message boards, news articles, and photo sharing sites (keyes, 2011). A "social media background check" means that students seeking to enter university, graduate school, or the job market need to know how to keep a professional, reputable online image. This is not something that is at the forefront of a typical 20-year-old's attention. In 2012, Kaplan Test Prep conducted a survey finding that the number of admissions officers discovering online content with a negative impact nearly tripled in recent years, from 12% to 35%.

Libraries responded early to these concerns, offering successful and popular workshops on privacy protection and account settings, appropriate profile content and professionalism, branding oneself using social media, and controlling Google search results. Creating and maintaining a positive online image for potential employers and recruiters is crucial information for students. Once posted online, there is no guaranteed method of removing negative content. The only recourse is to provide a flood of more positive and current information by creating websites, blogs, and tweets that dominate the online search results.

Students often need guidance in cleaning up their online images and branding themselves successfully for the benefit of life after graduation. Typically, undergraduates are not making the connection between their social media accounts and their online images. As potential employers and graduate schools frequently Google a candidate's name and look at results linked to social media accounts, our students need to know that their online image affects their futures. The

Career Crossings office at Saint Mary's College, Notre Dame collaborated with the Cushwa-Leighton Library to offer similar workshops: one specifically for networking using LinkedIn, and another workshop focused on cleaning up your online image, and both of them met with great success. Topics covered included creating positive content online to boost positive search results, separating personal and professional social media accounts with the use of pseudonyms, and branding oneself by using the same profile picture and information across multiple professional social media accounts.

Separating the personal from the professional is the most important aspect of this process. For example, one's personal social media accounts should be under a pseudonym, while one's professional accounts – that is, the accounts which one wants the public to view – should be under that person's real name. Use the same profile picture across platforms, one that is deliberately clear, polished, and professional looking. In this way, one brands herself publicly, offering the best representation possible. Furthermore, list any professional or positive websites across social media platforms. The website(s) should reflect one's passions and demonstrate one's capability to create online content. Students are advised to create blogs about their hobbies or interests, and to include links to their blogs on each of their professional social media accounts.

Information literacy exists beyond classroom assignments. It takes time to recover from negative search results associated with your name. However, by creating as much positive online content as possible, students eventually see these search results boosted to the top of their pages. Additionally, reviewing privacy settings to make the professional image open to the public and the private image nearly impermeable results in more control over the content you create. The tools that social media provide can be used to present the best image of oneself for public

consumption. In this sense, information literacy extends beyond the classroom to more concrete aspects of students' lives.

Sustainability Issues

The classroom from Dudenhoffer's (2012) study accomplished learning objectives through the use of a free social media tool; however, the sustainability of integrating Pinterest is also addressed in the article, which acknowledges that trends in social media can be fleeting (Dudenhoffer, 2012, p. 331). There is a learning curve that occurs when format changes to a website are drastic. Users may abandon the project rather than adapt.

Kai Ryssdal (2012) of NPR Marketplace reported that when Facebook updated their format to the "Timeline" layout, use of the website dropped by 20%. This drop occurred not only with the Timeline overhaul, but with each change Facebook implemented, though not as permanent or as drastic a drop in use. The sustainability of using Pinterest, or any social media, as a learning tool depends upon the website's adherence to consistent format, the user's sustained interest, and the success of a given form of social media that stands the test of time. Social media tools are free to users, but their comfort levels are challenged when personal information is mined in exchange for sponsorship and advertisements. For some, this exchange comes at a very high cost. Pinterest was valued at $1.5 billion in March 2012 (Tam, 2012), and its value continues to rise. Social media sites rely on advertising to generate this revenue, which leads to unsettling trends such as identity theft and exploitation of users' private information. Much is shared across applications; as taken from the Facebook Data Use Policy, social media platforms share access to basic personal data from site to site. Privacy settings must be guarded constantly. Data provided in the "About" section of Facebook can be targeted for advertising. Websites visited, videos viewed, music listened to and other selections are used to create a more

personalized marketing experience. In this light, social media is itself a topic for teaching information literacy in terms of the need for protecting one's online presence.

Moreover, as the ACRL Research Planning and Review Committee (2010) points out, "Technology will continue to change services and required skills" in libraries. Librarians need to be on the bleeding edge of technology now more than ever. This includes knowing about changes in social media platforms and navigating the settings each platform uses. The ACRL Research and Planning Review Committee (2012) observers that "While social networking tools can help libraries go where their users are, many librarians see challenges in determining which tools to use, how many resources to devote, and how to assess effectiveness." Librarians are doubly charged with using social media for marketing and outreach, and for assisting patrons with their own social media accounts:

> The 2012 Horizon Report
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>> …cautions that social networks and new publishing paradigms, such as open content, challenge the library's role as curator and place libraries under pressure to evolve new ways of supporting and curating scholarship. These may include helping students develop digital media literacy skills and creating appropriate metrics for evaluating new scholarly forms of authoring, publishing, and researching. (ACRL Research Planning and Review Committee, 2012, p. 314)

Therefore, librarians are also responsible for assisting students with the scholarly aspects of digital media literacy skills, a challenge that adds to the need to offer resources about the content students themselves create. Since basically anyone can now publish online, determining authors who are scholars from those who are not is yet another skill for which librarians must acquire fluency. We are required to demonstrate our value in a rapidly evolving environment that can

literally change each day. Sustaining these new skills takes time, patience, and intensely critical thinking.

As the ACRL Research Planning and Review Committee (2012) points out, "Libraries usually are not the first source for finding information." This further complicates sustainability "since libraries are now competing for user attention, [and] the current challenge is to provide immediate, seamless access to sources and information in order to remain in the game" (ACRL Research Planning and Review Committee, 2012).

The Downside

While connecting with patrons through social media can be leveraged to one's advantage, other issues arise. One such issue is the ease and vulnerability to hacking. Despite the highest privacy settings, the task of maintaining a social media presence is a time-consuming challenge. There are methods of addressing problems, such as creating a subscribe feature. But hackers are dedicated, and the project requires *constant* review of posts, comments and newly added friends: otherwise, libraries can find that they have damaged their own image or unintentionally exposed their patrons to hackers. Moreover, the time spent monitoring and maintaining each social media presence can become a burden. Having a committee structure to distribute this work to several librarians as a daily responsibility is strongly recommended. Even in this structure, the time investment is significant and has an impact on other priorities.

One major concern with social media implementation in libraries is the time necessary to work with numerous platforms, to set up various social media accounts, to maintain a professional presence daily, and to stay current with trends and news in technology. Social media changes so rapidly that it may be necessary to have several librarians assigned to daily monitoring of the library's Internet presence. While beneficial as an outreach effort, what is the

measurable return on investment? Committee investment will include making time for meetings, reviewing technology shifts and innovation, writing proposals, and communicating the value of these activities to colleagues and administrators.

A written plan for assessing the quality and effectiveness of the online tools is essential, especially as it impacts the research agenda and liaison time for librarians. As more gets done with less year after year, valuable time taken from scholarship and professional engagement will impact new librarians seeking tenure and promotion. Taylor & Francis (2014) note that "Social media can require considerable time commitment from library staff," and their survey of over 600 librarians showed that "when asked to rate a number of challenges relating to use of social media by the library, the most significant challenge was seen to be… time/resource (67% felt this was a challenge)." Rigorous analysis and critique with a review of usage statistics and focus group interviews is a good starting point for establishing return on investment. Certainly, blanket assumptions to extend time consuming projects without justification should be questioned.

In addition to time investments, other factors need to be considered. Discussions of the digital divide reveal socio-economic factors that favor demographic groups and access to technologies. Is one group of patrons more likely to use social media for library contact? While a community of users exists, are members more likely to employ social media as a way to connect with the library, or to be put off by the efforts? If outreach via social media is equated with making reference services convenient and ubiquitous, does this ultimately deliver positive outcomes for the professional image of librarians? Teaching life skills to students involves planning ahead and learning to work around issues of procrastination; many professions do not chase a goal of being on call 24/7. Most libraries are not staffed to accomplish this beyond a few days of extra service hours during exams. There should be hard discussions and critical thinking

in terms of long range solutions, as well as identifying the most pressing priorities.

Problems with Policy

As with any marketing tool, providing a positive and upbeat presence is the intention for libraries using social media. The need to articulate that underlying goal may be overlooked. It seems a given that those who take on building a social media presence would do so to build a positive image through outreach strategies. However, there are some issues to discuss and address at the outset. Even the most careful user can rush into a mistake with an online presence. Having a team who has thought through concrete examples of unacceptable posts and potentially damaging threads will train committee members to avoid offending others. Delaying a hastily worded response and getting a second reviewer for a difficult situation is effective troubleshooting. It may be helpful, especially during start-up, to expect that at least two committee members look over new posts before they go live to reduce the potential for unintended consequences. As well, it is important to outline examples of appropriate content and positive outcomes so that employees and task force members will know what acceptable online behavior is. Define what is wanted from social media transactions and provide sample posts that affect that outcome.

It is difficult to draft a good social media policy that addresses appropriate professional behavior and positive image building without considering how people use social media as self-expression. According to the Taylor & Francis (2014) white paper on the "Use of Social Media by the Library," "Librarians are divided on the benefits of introducing formalized social media policies and plans. About a third of libraries responding to the Taylor & Francis survey had a policy in place, but over 40% had no plans to introduce one." Additionally, "Some believe that representing the library as a professional function with a consistent tone is the priority, while

others believe that a more human approach is important, with individual staff free to bring their own ideas and personalities to social media activities" (Taylor & Francis, 2014).

Then there is the issue of activity on one's own social media accounts. This dual role between the individual and the individual as a representative of the library can result in conflict for the workplace or educational setting. Labor law protects speech with colleagues about working conditions as an effort to improve operations (National Labor Relations Board, n.d.). However, even if the individual's social media profile is considered space for personal and social interaction, simply listing the place of employment or job title within the profile creates a dual presence reflecting one's personal space as well as the institutional or professional setting. While this may not be the intent, the user comments and threads can be associated with the official presence of the employer.

Where institutions address this duality in clearly stated policy with guidelines to separate the personal from professional online presence, the employee is more likely to anticipate an approach to avoid conflict. For example, just as photographs of drunken partiers are unwelcome at the office and are not a great strategy for reputation building, such images do not belong on social media sites that indicate the employer's name or one's official job title. If communication is positive, courteous, respectful and tolerant, many issues can be avoided.

Adhering to confidentiality standards that operate within the workplace, especially regarding students and library patrons, is a given. Complaints about patrons or students (even anonymous) should not be found in rants that can be linked with an institution or employer. Most importantly, if comments and responding threads refer to or condone violence or injury, then immediate action is required and may include legal ramifications or contact with human resources and emergency personnel. Many universities have expectations or a requirement that

employees report bullying or potentially threatening situations, and the online environment is not an exception.

University Guidelines for Social Media

Developing library policy for social media implementation is greatly streamlined when a thoughtful and comprehensive policy exists at the university level. Unfortunately, this is not always the case for librarians as we work with new social media projects. In some instances, the university decision to delay policy development may be intentional, for example to evaluate forthcoming legal interpretation and precedent. Nevertheless, libraries should compose a social media policy of their own until an overarching university policy is in place. This creates equality among those posting to social media sites, and it gives clear guidelines in terms of acceptable and unacceptable online behavior. A review of sample policy statements reveals language that is useful for librarians as they forge proposals to work with social media and address policy gaps and procedural questions.

The University of Texas Austin site for social media guidelines (Know, 2014) discusses in detail a very useful list of topics for consideration and inclusion. There is a distinction made between an official social media presence representing the department or unit as opposed to personal sites. It is clearly stated that the individual "is personally responsible for the content you post on university-managed social media properties," (Know, 2014). A simple online search for social media policies reveals that this is a theme echoed in other universities' well-written policies statements. Also on the University of Texas Austin site are information security office statements for repercussions if content is not appropriately managed, and also an outline explaining academic freedom along with the types of expression that are protected. The site clarifies harassment and defamation, defines these, and explains how to report incidents; it also

outlines copyright, FERPA and other privacy issues. Especially well developed is the section for social media strategy, i.e., having communication goals that are measurable, defining and targeting potential audiences, and resources for content creation. "Be aware of your association with the University of Texas Austin in online social networks. Your profile and content should be consistent in the manner you wish to present yourself to colleagues, students, parents, alumni and others" (Know, 2014, section II, j). The site clearly outlines positive communication, the value of having a project with measurable outcomes, and defines unacceptable online content and behavior as well as repercussions.

Social media guidelines at Brown University are divided into segments for individual use, institutional use and best practices (*Social media @ Brown University,* n.d.). Warnings for HIPAA and FERPA confidentiality and protecting identity are given, as well as compliance with University, federal and NCAA privacy policies ("Guidelines for institutional use," n.d.). It is made clear that the responsibility lies with the individual to understand the ramifications of their actions and social media posts. Again, the theme for comments and posts on individual sites becoming affiliated with the institution is clearly stated. The emphasis areas for best practices are: planning and strategizing for intended audiences; assigning responsibility for tasks; launching promotional information about the social media campaign; staying interactive with the audience; monitoring comments; and measuring use and project success. There is a helpful reference to additional university resources at Brown to further develop social media projects and promote them.

In conclusion, librarians are not always given a perfect set of information with which to develop a sustainable and effective social media presence. If staffing considerations and library program priorities are not balanced with the needs of the campaign, one or the other could soon

suffer from a lack of resources. Social media projects are time-consuming and involve understanding the university environment, its existing policy, and administrative structure. The possibility for negative outcomes is likely if training and clear language do not guide project management. Legal ramifications must be worked through with attention to detail. Appropriate planning, building measurable outcomes, and carefully identifying the target audience are key. Most important to realize is the constant investment that is being made to monitor posts, investigate new technologies, develop and update policy statements and procedures, examine legal precedent, and measure audience response and success. As we face the challenge of demonstrating our value in an environment that is shifting across so many fronts, we must also remain available to our patrons across a number of environments, both physical and technological.

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