

Chapter 16

Impact of Social Media on Information Professionals: Prospects and Challenges

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ABSTRACT

Social Media has opened new platforms for information professionals. It has provided diversified channels of information generation, dissemination, and collaboration. Increased user expectations place pressure on information professionals to acknowledge this trend and consider adopting these new channels of service provision. The main objective of the chapter is to discuss the impact of Social Media on information professionals. The specific objectives are to determine the new prospects and opportunities from the emergence of Social Media, identify the major challenges associated with it, reveal the emerging roles of 21st century information professional, and to establish new skills and competencies for the information professionals. Finally, the chapter puts forward recommendations on how Social Media can be utilized to its optimal potential in order to deliver enhanced library services to user community. The chapter is based on an in-depth review of literature and the author's own points of view.

1. INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, information professionals as librarians were located in a building (library, archive, record centers) carrying out functions such as, acquiring, organizing, preserving the printed documents and helping the readers in locating the information needed by them. Due to the fast changing information and communication technologies, the profession has changed drastically in the last two decades. Libraries have transformed

from print collection to online and e-resources, quiet areas of learning to knowledge commons and learning commons, bibliographic instruction to information literacy and life-long learning, and, information management to knowledge management. The library's physical building is taken over by a virtual space/cyber space. Accordingly, the roles of information professionals have changed radically in all types of libraries. Adoption of the latest technologies is no more an option for information professionals, but the only way out to

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survive and thrive in this digital age when information seekers have numerous options to satisfy their information needs. Libraries have shifted from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 and now Web 2.0 applications in form of Social Media are the most popular applications. The 21st century libraries are characterized with collective knowledge creation and enabling technologies and a more dynamic, two-way communicational network environment described by open access, content creation, collaborative and participatory social space (Ezeani & Igwesi, 2012). Social Media provides a range of opportunities to information professionals and the user community to interact using various platforms. Hence, Social Media and Social Networks have grown amazingly over the past few years and it has changed the fundamental roles and culture of information professionals. Increasingly, all types of libraries are moving towards Social Media and Social Networking using various platforms; Blogs, Facebook, YouTube Twitter, Myspace, Pinterest, Google Plus, Instagram, Mashup, Flickr, LinkedIn, Wikis. Social Media has greatly impacted on the role of information professionals, prospects and challenges. This paper is motivated in the above context.

Aim and Objectives

The main aim of this paper is to deliberate on the impact of Social Media on information professionals. To accomplish this purpose, the objectives are:

- Determine and discuss the new prospects and opportunities with the emergence of Social Media;
- Identify the major challenges associated with Social Media;
- Reveal the emerging roles of 21st century information professional;
- Establish the new skills and competencies; and,
- Recommend a way forward to utilize Social Media to its optimal potential.

Methodology

This paper is based on an in-depth desk-top review of literature and the author's own points of view. The literature review is mostly limited to the past 5 years (2009-2013). This limitation was to understand and appreciate the recent trends and impact of Social Media on librarians and information professionals.

Limitation

The limitation of this paper is that it does not focus on any particular type of library. It discusses the impact of Social Media on the role of information professionals in general, who might be working in any type of library or information centers.

2. CONCEPT OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Social Media has several definitions. Oxford Dictionary (2013) defines Social Media as “websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in Social Networking”. According to Bradley (2012) the term Social Media refers to the use of web-based and mobile technologies to turn communication into an interactive dialogue. Kaplan & Haenlein (2010: 61) have illustrated Social Media as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content”. Brian Solis, one of the most published authors in new media, defines Social Media as “the democratization of information, transforming people from content readers into publishers. It is the shift from a broadcast mechanism, one-to-many, to a many-to-many model, rooted in conversations between authors, people, and peers” (Solis, 2010). Social Media is being used for several purposes within librar-

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