Chapter 8

Social Media and Special Collections:
Exploring Presence, Prevalence, and Practices in Academic Libraries

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ABSTRACT

Studying social media's presence and prevalence of use in a specific context can be challenging to researchers who may need a comprehensive data collection strategy and sizable amount of resources. Using a population of university libraries' special collections websites based on purposive sampling strategy, the researchers want to find out how social media is used or integrated in the delivery of special collections services. The findings provided an opportunity for researchers to discuss the importance of creating a model for designing an expanded study, and for generating preliminary ideas pertaining to development of policies relevant to the integration of social media particularly in special collections, and in academic libraries as a whole.

INTRODUCTION

Interactions between individuals have drastically changed with the abundance of current and new technologies. Face-to-face interactions have been supplanted with technology gadgets and applications. Socializing with others takes place much more beyond the four walls of a classroom or an office and now, happens in virtual spaces. New online tools and applications identified as social media have become the means to connect with others in order to create, share, exchange and collaborate in generating information and ideas (Joosten, 2012; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Libraries as institutions where both physical and intellectual information are stored and accessed have been impacted by technological changes. Researchers have examined the use of specific social media tools, e.g., Twitter (Aharony, 2010), Facebook (Phillips, 2011), and Pinterest and Historypin (Baggett & Gibbs, 2014). At the Smithsonian Institute, Kalfatovic, Kapsalis, Spiess, Camp, & Edson (2008) examined how placing curated content into a Flickr environment increases its accessibility. Further, Anwyll, Chawner, & Tarulli (2013) studied the role of social media in activities related to readers' advisory. However, Chu & Du (2013) found that although academic librarians had positive perceptions of social media's potential, they often displayed hesitancy in putting social media tools to use.

The ability of libraries to serve its users has expanded beyond the building; many users avail of library services without leaving home and 24/7. The Internet made this possible with a complementary of tools and applications with many of them categorized as social media. As ubiquitous tools or applications of choice, social media provides multiple ways of making one's online presence known as well as accessing sources of information especially those found in the libraries. The abundance of user generated online content including texts, images and videos makes social media the right vehicle for information delivery across multiple platforms. Social media tools or applications are popularly known as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Instagram, and YouTube, and can also include wikis and blogs.

The diversity of features and functionalities make it possible for social media to find acceptance beyond the library and into other contexts, such as

- Business (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011; Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Walters, Burnett, Lamm, & Lucas, 2009)
- Communications (Weeks & Holbert, 2013)
- Education (Haight, Quan-Hasse, & Corbett, 2014; Junco, Heiberger, & Loken, 2011)
- Health care (Koskan, Klasko, Davis, Gwede, Wells, Kumar, & Meade, 2014; Moorhead, Hazlett, Harrison, Carroll, Irwin, & Hoving, 2013; Southwell

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