

Chapter 7

The Role of Social Media and Social Networking in Information Service Provision: A Practical View

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ABSTRACT

Social networking is a Web-based service that allows 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, and view and navigate their list of connections and those made by others within the system. No doubt, social media has great potential in taking library operations to the next level. It is in the light of this that this chapter examines the role of social media and social networking in information service provision in libraries. To achieve this objective, the chapter looks at social media as a tool in libraries, advantages of social media in libraries, social media and social networks, and practical examples on the use of social media and social network tools together with how libraries can forge ahead due to the use and application of social media and social networks to their daily operations. Conclusion and recommendations based on these highlights are provided.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of social media is fast growing beyond the extent of a definite definition. Many authors and writers have defined social media in different ways. The most popular is the definition according to Wikipedia 2011 which simply says that Social Media is an Instrument of Communication. Going further, The term social media encompasses

any internet-based or mobile application which operates for the purpose of collaboration, where participants can connect, create, comment, view, share, rate, discover, profile and exchange user-generated content (Bradley & McDonald, 2011; Hanna, Rohm, & Crittenden, 2011; Rheingold, 2002). Social media can be simply seen as the vehicle for communication socially and in other spheres of life.

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According to Kroski (2009), today's new media tools are incredibly powerful communication vehicles that allow organizations to connect and engage with many different audiences. With more than seven million users, Twitter is growing at an annual rate of 1,382 percent, Facebook boasts over 250 million active members, and aspiring writers have started more than 133 million blogs. Social media can give a competitive edge in a time of major technological change and with access to information widely available libraries need to demonstrate the value of their proposition. Social media give librarians a way to reach out to their users who may not have considered the library as a resource for their information needs.

The literature from the library sector suggests that some libraries are using social media tools to develop communities and to personalize interactions between the library and users (Rutherford, 2008; Tiffen & England, 2011). Tools such as Facebook and Twitter are being used to build relationships and rapport with client groups (Mack, Behler, & Rimland, 2007; Phillips, 2011), to promote libraries (Xia, 2009) and to provide information services (Loudon & Hall, 2010). The use of social media tools to communicate and to increase engagement can have powerful and positive effects in the form of repeat library visits, rapport-building, referrals or positive word of mouth (Tiffen & England, 2011). This article examines how social media tools are being used by some major libraries across the world. Case studies of different Libraries attempt in promoting information service provision through various social media tools will also be highlighted in this paper and they will serve as pointers to other information Centre.

The use of online social networks by libraries and information organizations is also increasingly prevalent and a growing tool that is being used to communicate with more potential library users, as well as extending the services provided to individual libraries. The main purpose of writing this paper is to highlight the value/roles of social media tools and the social networks in information service provision.

Fortunately, emerging technologies have opened an entirely new set of professional development options, often at little or no cost, Blogs, wikis, Twitter, LinkedIn, forums, open access journals, open courses, webinars, and a wide variety of social media tools can provide the foundation for building one's personal learning network (PLN). This article will emphasize the roles of social media and social networks amongst Librarians as they share information between themselves for many interesting uses not only for learning and research but for personal development amongst themselves.

In conclusion, it is safe to assume that social media is here to stay and is now a priority for many organizations including Library and Information Centre. The challenge for all organizations particularly acute for Library and Information personnel working in the information industry is how to harness and exploit these communication channels to best effect of its varying degree of Clientele.

Technological advancement and digital information is changing the role of librarians radically: No longer are they to wait for students to ask for assistance in finding information in a place called a library. Their new role makes it imperative for them to provide services and instructions regardless of place, time or format. The introduction and the place of social media and social networking tools is one of the channels to the actualization of these roles. Social media refers to activities, practices, and behaviors among communities of people who gather online to share information, knowledge, and opinions using conversational media (Safko & Blake, 2009).

Different writers have written extensively on the concept of Social media, the term social media encompasses any internet-based or mobile application which operates for the purpose of collaboration, where participants can connect, create, comment, view, share, rate, discover, profile and exchange user-generated content (Bradley & McDonald, 2011; Hanna, Rohm, & Crittenden, 2011; Rheingold, 2002).

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