UGC Sponsored Two-Day National Conference

Social Media and Libraries

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Libraries and Online Social Networks: A Close Look at the Possibilities of the Online Forums for the Libraries

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Abstract.

Author discusses the evolution of Social Networks on the Internet. The change of web 2.0 tools to social interaction has changed the way people make use of the Internet. Author also discusses the role of librarians and libraries in promoting the use of Social networking sites. A brief introduction to the threats involved also is discussed.

Keywords

Libraries, Social Networks, Web 2.0, Facebook

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Social Media and Libraries

1. Introduction

As we all know the online Social Networks like Facebook and Twitter have made us online citizens or netizens and the present generation cannot think of a life without these forums. The access to such networks anywhere anytime using mobile devices have made them so popular and integral part of our life. More and more interaction happens on a wider level between persons and groups. They exchange ideas and information in all possible formats through them. Politicians and marketing companies are making use of these platforms to reach their voters and clientele very effectively. They have identified online networks as the places where they can market their leaders and products and they have engaged professionals to manage their web presence very effectively. The 2014 parliament election was in fact, influenced to a great extent by the interactions of politicians on Social Networks. Agitations against corruption and other negative practices were initiated and fought effectively on Social Networks. As such, Social Networks have become an integral part of our life and its effect on our daily life cannot be ignored at all.

In its full meaning, an online Social Network is a digital space that enables users to register, create personal profiles, select whom to connect within the community, and communicate with and share content with online friends. The very best example is Facebook, where users create online identities to communicate with friends, family and other members of the online social world. Social Networks are often confused with Social Media. Social Media are digital tools which help us to share the digital content. YouTube and Flickr are the best example for Social Media tools where people upload and share videos and photos. Users can comment on the content uploaded by others, but the main purpose of the media remains content sharing. So we can differentiate social media from social networks by the bidirectional communication that happens in the Social Networks and the unidirectional communication in Social Media. But these are not water tight definitions for both and often overlaps occur in their functioning.

Libraries are social institutions engaged in information dissemination and the influence of Social Networks on them has been a topic of serious discussion among professionals. Can libraries make use of Social Networking in extending their services? If yes, what are all the possibilities for librarians? "Facebook. Flickr. Google+. Pinterest. Tumblr. Twitter. Yelp. The list of social
networking sites is almost endless, bringing huge potential (and some headaches) to librarians nationwide. Will libraries continue to be able to keep up with the rapid—almost instantaneous—changes in technology and social networking?" (ALA, 2014)

"Libraries have been technology leaders for decades—not in being first adopters, but in being early users of effective technologies," (Crawford, 2014) and further Crawford adds that "Good public libraries stay in touch with their communities; as their communities use new technologies and networks."

The apprehensions of librarians about how these technological developments will affect the libraries are discussed in this article.

2. Web 2.0 tools: the beginning

Libraries are the institutions which had effectively used the advances in technology to serve its objectives by customizing the technology to suit them. From the static web pages to customized OPACs and then from there to the Web Scale Discovery Tools, it has been a tremendous revolution which happened in libraries. Libraries started using web 2.0 tools such as blogs and tagging for interactivity and to extend their services. Blogs from libraries provided information about the library services and new additions. Sometimes they provided book reviews to attract the users. The tagging facility allowed in OPAC helped readers to comment on the quality of a document available in the library.

3. Social Networks

There are many Social Networking platforms available on the net, of which Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, LinkedIn etc., are the predominant ones. These sites allow us to create an account of our own with a detailed profile. Then it allows the user to add friends, post their status, photos and videos. This will reflect in the time lines of his or her friends, to which they can respond by providing their comments and likes. It is funny that the popularity on the network is measured in term of the likes and shares that you get for your posting. Many business enterprises have utilized this facility of the Social Networking sites to advertise and expand their
Social Media and Libraries

business. Likewise libraries all over the world have started showing their presence in Social Networking sites to outreach their user community.

Libraries were always there in the forefront to adopt technology but it does not mean that we have to be present everywhere and adopt everything. However, if the effective use of such platforms can bring more utility to the library resources it is recommended that we should use them by all means. However we have to use clear criterion to select the tool that provides you the maximum potential use.

3.1 Multiple channels and choices

The user community especially the present generation of students use an array of social networks and Information and Communication Technologies and for them the library websites are not the frequently visited or used sites. In the ocean of free online resources, if your website has to get attention of the users who are online, librarians have to use multiple online tools to promote their services and collections. Those who are not willing to become friends of teachers and librarians in Social networks will join library pages on the Facebook and other Social Networking sites. This makes organization Social Network pages better tools for providing basic library contact information, information about the forthcoming programs of the library, information about the new additions and other acquisitions and more.

The young generation uses mobile devices as information sources and hence the libraries have to develop applications that will work on such devices like Android Apps for the library website and other databases of the library.

3.2 Updating and maintenance

Once you select the channels and tools to connect with users on the Social Networks, it is again your duty to keep it updated and maintained properly. Many library websites have links to blogs and Facebook pages, which remain unattended for long. If the information contained in them does not get updated frequently how we can expect the users to come and visit them. Librarians should be willing to be flexible to adapt to the changes in technology that users prefer. They can study the way users prefer the technology and make changes. It is a very simple marketing rule that people use a service more frequently if they are reminded about it.
Social Media and Libraries

regularly. Frequent messages about the library resources, especially the e-resources will increase their use. Social Networks are an important media for this type of communication and library marketing.

3.3 Providing Access to stay connected

It is very important for all of us to maintain constant contact, specifically electronic contact with close friends and relatives. But it is unlikely that majority of us do not want to be in touch with our librarians. But the libraries have a role in enabling the users to remain connected to the people in their own personal networks. Particularly for those people who cannot afford to have access or cannot get access due to technology glitches, it is the library which has to help them gaining the access. Unfortunately in many of our academic institutions social networking tools are blocked thinking that they are wasting their time. In fact the use of social networking sites helps the users in developing good communication and information practices. Hence libraries should promote the use of Social Networking tools and make library a happening place. Librarians should become advocates for the users in providing more information about the benefits of social networking to the parents and teachers and other stake holders. Advocacy can take the form of writing about their experiences and success stories by using Social Networking tools.

3.4 Keep track of the changes

As we are aware the entry of Facebook in the Social Networking scene all over the world has toppled the otherwise leading social networking giant the Orkut from Google. The ease of use and other several features brought down the Orkut and ultimately it ended with Google closing the services. This can happen to any such services. Hence it becomes mandatory for librarians to keep track of the changes happening around in the online media with open eyes and ears. Regular surveys and feedbacks from the users will help in attaining this goal.

In similar terms the librarians also should get acquainted with the latest technologies. The best way to do this is to be a member among the users in Social Networks and feel the pulse.
4. Role of librarians in Social Network literacy

We have seen digital literacy, media literacy and many others. While getting involved in Social networking tool one has to keep in mind certain basic principles and policies. The knowledge about these can be generally termed as "Social Network Literacy". There are certain threats that we can expect in the usage of Social Networks. Users should be made aware of these. Librarians can provide training sessions to the users to make them aware of these threats. Cyber bullying\(^1\) is a major form of threat that can affect the users of Social Networks. There are also threats of privacy and security. Libraries are the places where the users can be given proper guidance in managing such negative situations in social networks.

5. Conclusion

The format of our libraries must change as user needs and behaviour changes and it is the same with our service delivery modes. Electronic library services and services through social networks should complement but not replace the traditional library services.

References


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\(^1\)The use of electronic communication to bully a person, typically by sending messages of an intimidating or threatening nature.