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Gururaj S. Hadagali Dr

Karnatak University, gururajhadagali123@gmail.com

Anand Y. Kenchakkanavar Dr.

Karnatak University, Dharwad, anand.3661@gmail.com

Prahlad G. Tadasad Prof.

Akkamahadevi Women's University, Vijayapur, pgtadasad@gmail.com

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Social Media Platforms: Effective tools to provide innovative library services in a university environment

**Dr. Gururaj S. Hadagali¹, Dr. Anand Y. Kenchakkanavar² and
Dr. Prahlad G. Tadasad³**

¹Assistant Professor, Department of Library and Information Science, Karnatak University, Dharwad – 580003, Karnataka State, INDIA,
E-mail Id: gururajhadagali123@gmail.com

² Department of Library and Information Science, Karnatak University, Dharwad – 580003, Karnataka State, INDIA,
E-mail Id: anand.3661@gmail.com

³Professor and Chairman, Department of Library and Information Science, Karnataka State Women's University, Vijayapura – 586108, Karnataka State, INDIA,
E-mail Id: pgtadasad@gmail.com

Abstract

The paper presents how social media platforms can be used as effective tools to provide innovative library services in a university environment. The data was collected from both the central and state universities' websites especially to focus on the readiness of the university libraries. It is ascertained that how university libraries integrate these technologies to provide effective library services to the end users. For the present study, the Global Alexa rankings were considered as the source for the selection of popular social media platforms. Each of these platforms is further analyzed to know how these could be used to facilitate information or provide library services to enhance the quality of the services. The outcome of the study reveals that the usage of social media in the university libraries in India is still in the formative stage and needs to gear up to meet the growing expectations of the users.

Keywords: Blog, Facebook, Social media, Social media platforms, Social media sites and Web 2.0 tools

INTRODUCTION

The Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has radically revolutionized the way people communicate and interact. At present, the android based cell phones and smart phones have become so popular that these are changing the very style of communication. A survey of 12,365 students of 1,739 schools across India was undertaken which was popularly known as the TCS Gen Y survey (2014-2015) conducted from July to November 2014 on the digital perceptions of students of class 8 - 12. Out of 12,365 respondents studied, 72 % own smart phones. The respondents opined that social media is more useful for communication especially keeping in touch with their peers and family members. The students also opined that the social media platforms are not useful for studies. The outcomes of the survey indicate that 9 out of 10 have Facebook accounts, 6 out of 10 use WhatsApp and 65 % have Google+ accounts etc. The survey reveals that the youngsters are the avid users of social media platforms.

Many consider social media as a viable tool to cater to the needs of the tech-savvy users (Farkas, 2007a; Miller and Jensen, 2007). These applications have been emerging as 'powerful tools for libraries' (Gupta et al., 2014). Libraries and the library professionals are experimenting a lot for the enhancement of library services (Secker, 2008). Hence, there is a need to adopt these new technologies to satisfy the growing demands of the web savvy users (Mercun and Zumer, 2011). Most of the libraries across the globe have hooked themselves to either of the social media platforms in order to remain relevant with the contemporary users.

Some of the authors fail to distinguish between social media and that of social networking and use these terms synonymously in a different context. However, Dina (2011) differentiates between social media and social networking via LinkedIn Group (Freelance Editing Network). Social media (noun) is the 'tool' and social networking (verb) is what you do with that tool and how you use it.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

A literature search on LISA, LISTA and www.emeraldinsight.com reveals that quite a good number of studies have been reported in the related literature on the various aspects of social media. Many studies have also been reported on the use of social media services by the academic community mainly used for academic purposes (Nandez and Borrego, 2013). Libraries across the globe are using these tools effectively to provide library services as these can be used as tools to promote library services (Tella et al, 2013) and have become viable tools and new avenues to deliver the library services (Hadagali and Kenchakkanavar, 2016; Kenchakkanavar and Hadagali, 2016). The professionals can communicate with potential library users by offering services using these tools (Suraweere et al. 2011). The social media can be used in libraries for marketing the library services and products, for sharing the library news and events, video conferencing, advertisement and research work (Islam and Habiba, 2015). The study conducted by Alkindi and Al-Suqri (2013) reveals that the use of social networking sites is a new way to enhance the services in any library.

Much research has also been carried out by the authors on the benefits of individual social media sites and their use at the university environment. The study conducted by Harinarayana and Vasantha Raju (2010) explores the application of library 2.0 and web 2.0 technologies in the university library web sites. Baro et al., (2013) found that the librarians of the university libraries in Nigeria use social networking sites especially for providing online reference services, sharing of information related to library events, orientation, images and videos and bookmarking. The same views are also expressed by Baro et al. (2014). The findings of Wyatt and Hahn (2011) indicate that libraries utilize the RSS feeds, twitter and blogs to keep users updated about library collection, services, arrivals of new books and news / events etc. Jacobson (2011) points out that Facebook can be used as a tool for the announcements of library events / news and used for rendering information alerting services. Farkas (2007b)

explains that the Facebook page can be used as a portal to the library. It is also used as a tool for resource discovery and the articulation of one's information need (Scale, 2008). Loving and Ochoa (2011) examine that the Facebook can be used for providing online courses. Twitter enables the libraries to provide Instant messaging and alerting services to the users (Kim and Abbas, 2010). WhatsApp, an Instant Messaging allows users to reach out to the libraries (Patil et al., 2015). WhatsApp is further used to post information on library events, videos on library orientation, information alerting services etc. A study conducted by Kenchakkanavar and Hadagali (2015) on the use of WhatsApp reveals that most of the research scholars use it to share the academic related information especially to share photos, notifications, university circulars etc. Another study on the applications of blogs reveals the various uses of blogs in the libraries that include collection, providing reference services, alerting services etc. (Mandal, 2011).

FEASIBILITY OF DESIGNING SERVICES

The application of social media in libraries is extensive viz. providing information to the users' fraternity, creating awareness about library events / news, new arrivals of books, providing services, users orientation programmes, library tour, connecting with other libraries and librarians, feedback about the library sources and services (Gupta et al., 2014). Hence, in this web driven society, it is imperative for libraries to adopt these technologies to offer better services to their clients.

The table 1 reveals the top twenty countries with the highest number of internet users. It reveals that China ranked first (1,415,045,928) in terms of population, followed by India (1,354,051,854), USA (326,766,748), Indonesia (266,794,980) and Brazil (210,867,954) ranked second to fifth respectively. In terms of number of internet users China ranked first (772,000,000), followed by India (462,124,989) and USA (312,322,257) ranked second to third respectively. In terms of the percentage of population penetration one could see the variations in the results. Bangladesh has occupied the first position (80,383 % growth) in

terms of growth in the Internet users for the period 2000-2017, followed by Nigeria (49,095 %), Vietnam (31,900 %), Iran (22,800 %) and India (9,142 %) ranked second to fifth respectively. There is an exponential growth of internet users every year in almost all these countries. The drastic change in the growth in Internet users reveals that people are becoming computer literates and using internet for one or the other reason.

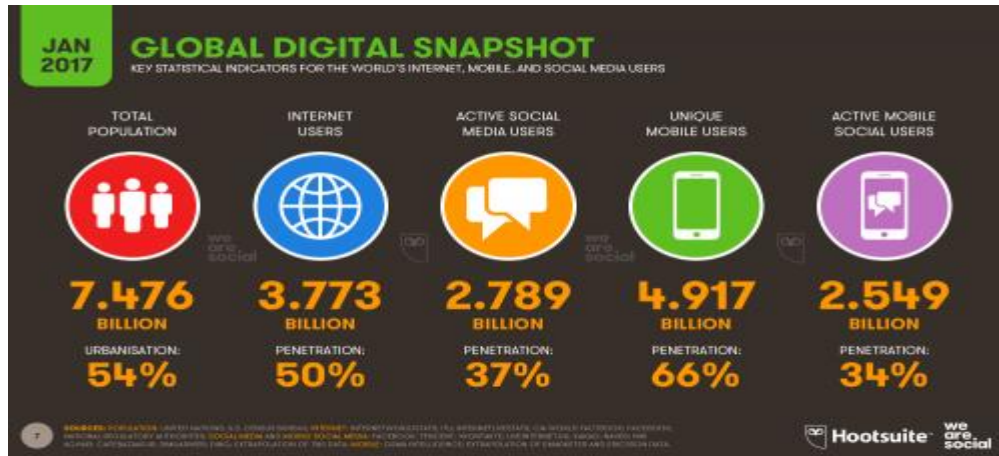
Table – 1: Top 20 countries with the highest number of Internet users
(As on 31st December, 2017)

Sl. No.	Country	Population 2018 Est.	Internet Users	Internet Growth
1	China	1,415,045,928	772,000,000	3,331 %
2	India	1,354,051,854	462,124,989	9,142 %
3	United States	326,766,748	312,322,257	227 %
4	Brazil	210,867,954	149,057,635	2,881 %
5	Indonesia	266,794,980	143,260,000	7,063 %
6	Japan	127,185,332	118,626,672	152 %
7	Russia	143,964,709	109,552,842	3,434 %
8	Nigeria	195,875,237	98,391,456	49,095 %
9	Mexico	130,759,074	85,000,000	3,033 %
10	Bangladesh	166,368,149	80,483,000	80,383 %
11	Germany	82,293,457	79,127,551	229 %
12	Philippines	106,512,074	67,000,000	3,250 %
13	Vietnam	96,491,146	64,000,000	31,900 %
14	United Kingdom	66,573,504	63,061,419	309 %
15	France	65,233,271	60,421,689	610 %
16	Thailand	69,183,173	57,000,000	2,378 %
17	Iran	82,011,735	56,700,000	22,850 %
18	Turkey	81,916,871	56,000,000	2,700 %
19	Italy	59,290,969	54,798,299	315 %
20	Egypt	99,375,741	48,211,493	10,613 %
Top 20 countries		5,146,561,906	2,937,139,302	1,068 %
Rest of World		2,488,196,522	1,219,792,838	1,012 %

(Source: <https://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm>)



Source: We Are Social (<https://wearesocial.com/special-reports/digital-in-2016>)



Source: We Are Social (<https://wearesocial.com/blog/2018/01/global-digital-report-2017>)



Source: We Are Social (<https://wearesocial.com/blog/2018/01/global-digital-report-2018>)

The figures 1, 2 and 3 report an impressive growth of internet, mobile internet and mobile social media users across the globe. There were 3.419 billion internet users (As on January 2016), equaling 46 % of the world's penetration (total population of the world was 7.395 billion); 2.307 billion social media users with 31 % global penetration; 1.967 billion mobile social media users, representing 27 % global penetration. The figure 3 depicts the digital around the World in 2018 (up to January). It indicates that the number of internet users have increased by 9 % compared to the statistics of 2016 (up to January) producing 602 million; the number of reported social media users was up by 11 %, an increase of 889 million; and that of mobile social media users leapt 12 % adding 990 million new users. The statistics reveal somewhat astonishing result considering that the global internet penetration has already surpassed 55 % and that of active mobile social users is approaching 40 %. It can be inferred from the figures that there is a drastic growth in the number of internet and mobile social users and increasing in an exceptional manner.

SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS AND POSSIBLE SERVICES

Popular social media platforms were considered based on their popularity. Global Alexa was used as the guide for selection of top most social media platforms which can be used for delivering library services. Each Social Media platform is discussed in detail in the successive paragraphs.

Blog or Weblog

Blog is a website, usually maintained by an individual, with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics, or videos. Entries are commonly displayed in reverse chronological order (Wikipedia.org). Boxen (2008) defines a Blog as a webpage consisting of user-supplied content in reverse chronological order. The Web publishing has become easy because of its simplicity in publishing the contents and record the comments by the other persons. The Dickson and Holley's (2010) study shows that Blogs

have several potential uses of academic libraries and are being used to promote the library services.

The following library services may be rendered to the users using Blog or Weblog.

- Blogs enable user interaction which further allows students to provide feedback on the services provided by the Librarians.
- Librarians can flash the news about the library events / programmes / activities which take place at the library.
- Blogs allow Librarians to create different subject guides to fulfill the demands of the students and teaching fraternity which will in turn can be easily updated.
- Librarians can create blog detailing the programmes of the projects undertaken on the renovations occurring at the library.
- Blog or Weblog can be used to interact with users offering their own choice of contributions like debate and interaction. It encourages staff and users to participate in blog writing.
- Librarians and users can get current information about various subjects (through alerting services) in general to specific through weblogs or blogs.
- Blog could also be used to market library services.
- Blogs can be used as vehicles for knowledge management initiatives (Ojala, 2005).
- Reference blogs can serve the right information in right time by providing reference services which are up-to-date.
- Blogs help the librarians to promote library events. Setting up RSS feed in the library blogs alert the member community what is up at the library.

Facebook

Facebook is a for-profit corporation and online social media service founded by Mark Zuckerberg during February, 2004. Facebook has numerous

pedagogical advantages for academic community (Munoz and Towner, 2009). Facebook allows its users to create online profile, hoard friends and enable them to post and view each other's profiles (Ellison et al., 2007). Facebook is one of the widely used social media platforms used mainly for interaction and sharing. Because of this characteristic, the librarians are reluctant to use it (Vassilakaki and Garoufallou, 2014).

Using Facebook applications following services may be provided to the end users.

- Facebook applications enable the librarians to access the contents of library catalogue without actually going to the library and visiting the library's web site (Farkas, 2007a).
- Facebook can be used as a Content Management Software (CMS) in an academic setting, especially for providing information literacy programmes / orientation (Loving and Ochoa, 2011).
- Facebook enables the librarians to provide information to the users on the events, activities and programmes, new arrivals of books (through posting videos and providing links) (National Library of Australia, 2014).
- Facebook links the users to online tutorials on how to use a device, education programmes, etc.
- It helps to advertise library events and create online library study groups for the users.
- Facebook facilitates access to Question paper bank, wherein the user can make use of the question papers without geographical limitations.
- Facebook is used as a tool for finding resources and lucid of users needs and requirements (Scale, 2008).

Flickr

Flickr, known for image sharing application which is being widely used to share images within the groups or communities. Flickr is popularly known as photosharing application which also enables users to post videos (Dickson and

Holley, 2010). Garoufallou and Charitopoulou (2011) study reveals that Flickr was the second most preferred Web 2.0 tools by the students.

- Flickr allows the librarians to upload and share images of the library events / programmes / activities. Further, it enables to tag images with keywords. These tags will further be useful for locating the relevant images (Angus et al., 2008).
- Librarians can create discussion groups and post academic / subject related photographs.
- It enables the librarians to post videos on the virtual tour of the library.

Really Simple Syndication (RSS)

The Internet provides a wealth of information nowadays. Hence, the selective elimination of information has become the hurdle for the professionals out of this abundance of information (Harinarayana and Vasantha Raju, 2010). Really Simple Syndication (RSS) not only manages information but also reduces the information overload. It is a simple light weight XML format to share content of websites (Celikbas, 2014).

- The RSS allows the librarians to have a single, customized library page that syndicates all the library content eliminating irrelevant information (Chand et al., 2008).
- The RSS enables the librarians to alert users through feeds about library events / activities, exhibitions and so forth (Chand et al., 2008)
- The RSS helps the librarians to speed up the process of aggregated current awareness services such as Table of Contents (TOC) for academic journals(Celikbas, 2014).
- The RSS, a new internet tool which allows the librarians to disseminate information on library news, current alerts, current arrivals of reading materials.

WhatsApp

WhatsApp is an Instant Messaging service for smartphones or android based cell phones founded by Brian Acton and Jan Koum in the year 2009. It allows users to send text messages, images, videos, etc. to each other for free. The WhatsApp also allows to attach files viz. world, PDF, PPT etc.

- The WhatsApp allows the users to stay updated on library events.
- The WhatsApp enables the librarians to post news about the library, images and videos of the library orientation programme and library events.
- It also allows librarians to interact with the users through discussion groups, image tagging, receive comments and feedback and suggestions to improve the Library services.
- It allows the librarians to provide the most important services i.e. ‘Ask a Librarian’ without having to physically go the library.

You Tube

YouTube, a popular web 2.0 tool which has been seen as a potential tool for delivering information literacy programmes to the users fraternity. Most of the libraries nowadays use You Tube for sharing videos on events, lectures, special talks, library tours etc. The study conducted by Garoufallou and Charitopoulou (2011) points out that You Tube is widely used social media platforms by the students.

- You Tube helps the librarians to post videos on conferences, workshops, library events, library tour or bibliographic instruction for the benefit of users (Kroski, 2007).
- User education / bibliographic instruction videos can be shown during the class hours on how to use a test, tool, database, search engine, formula etc.
- You Tube allows the librarians to save favourite subject related videos and also enables them to create a play list and share them among the users (Buckley, 2008).

READINESS OF UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES IN INDIA

In India (as on 16th August, 2018), there were forty seven central universities (a university established or incorporated by a Central Act) and 389 state universities (a university established or incorporated by a Provincial Act or by a State Act). In this regard, the websites of each of these universities (both central and state) were visited to ascertain the number of university libraries that have adopted social media technologies and to know whether these libraries provide services using social media platforms. The official website of the University Grants Commission (UGC) (www.ugc.ac.in) was visited to know the number of central and state universities in India. All the central universities (47) and state universities' (389) websites were visited separately and individually.

Based on the data collected from 436 universities (both central and state) as well as university library websites the study has been considered to find out how the libraries have integrated these technologies in the library websites. Out of the forty seven central universities, 24 (51.06 %) universities do not use social media sites either on the main page of the website or on the library page of the website. Sixteen (34.04 %) universities were using social media sites on main page of the university websites mainly for communication or providing information to the end users using Facebook, Twitter, Google+, You Tube, Blogs, Flickr etc. Only six (12.76 %) universities were providing library services using social media sites like Facebook, You Tube, Twitter, etc.

Out of 389 state universities, only 95 (24.42 %) universities used social media sites on the university main page. It is observed that no library of these state universities has an independent library website. Most of the universities have used social media sites like Facebook, RSS feeds, Blogs, to communicate and to render the general information of the universities. Out of 389 state universities, only 57 (14.65 %) universities used social media sites like Facebook, You Tube, Flickr, Twitter, Blogs etc. in the library main page and providing various services to the end users. The study reveals that the number of social media users are

increasing day by day and youngsters are passionate to use these tools effectively. But the adoption of such technologies in universities in India is sluggish. On the other hand, the usage of social media sites in most of the central and state universities considered for the study is still in the formative stage and needs to gear up to meet the growing expectations of the tech-savvy users.

CONCLUSION

Social media platforms enable the library professionals to create multimedia profiles with the goal of encouraging interaction between librarians and users. They provide a new platform for reaching users virtually without leaving the comfort of the websites they use the most. The statistics presented in this study in the form of table and figures show that there is a drastic growth in the number of internet, mobile internet and mobile social media users and increasing in an exceptional manner.

A total of 436 universities (both central (47) and state (389)) were analysed on how these university libraries integrate social media platforms to provide valuable services to the users. The situation is somewhat discouraging in university set up in India. It is observed from the table, figures and the studies conducted by the professionals that youngsters are the frequent users of these tools. On the other hand, university libraries in India are not coping with the changing technology. The adoption and integration of these technologies should be accelerated at least from now onwards. The library professionals working in universities need to be proactive to use these platforms to provide possible services to the users. Miller (2005) had warned that librarians in developing countries must act fast to reap the potentials of library 2.0. The study conducted by Baro et al. (2013) also reveals that the Library professionals in the university libraries in India need to embrace social media platforms for effective delivery of service. The present study clearly indicates that the adoption of social media platforms and their use at university libraries is still in the formative stage and the

situation is ripe for the library professionals in India to act as facilitators and intermediaries between the information and the users.

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