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# *How Academic Libraries Can Leverage Social Networking to Popularize Their Services: An Empirical Study\**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Social media is commonly used in academic libraries to market services, products, and events to users. A thorough review of the extant literature revealed that few libraries have incorporated a social networking strategy into their broader marketing strategy. Users of an academic library in an urban Midwestern university were surveyed to reveal how they use social networking sites. Respondents were asked the importance of libraries using social networking sites. Although the majority of users thought it was important for libraries to use social networking sites, their preferred method of communication with the libraries was flyers in the library. Library users below the age of 35 preferred to get information from the library webpage. Based on the results of this study, we recommend suitable social networking strategies for academic libraries.

**KEY WORDS** Social Networking for Libraries; Social Networking Strategy for Libraries; Social Media Plan for Libraries; Social Media Strategy for Libraries

Libraries of all types have embraced the use of social networking sites to communicate with users of their services. This is line with the rich tradition of libraries using innovative yet cost-effective technologies (e.g., social networking sites) to enhance the quality of their services to users. Unfortunately, many libraries do not implement the new technologies as part of an overall strategic marketing plan. The excitement of using

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new technology can overpower the logic or exploration on whether the new technology should be used. If the new innovation is not based on specific marketing objectives (e.g., to effectively communicate with teenagers, to increase the hit rate of the library website), it often fails to deliver the desired results. Specifically for the social networking sites, libraries may want to know which social networking sites are more effective in reaching their users, what the preferred media of communication for their users for library-related information is, and how to ensure that users do not feel intruded upon by the communications from their library. Unfortunately, few studies have shed light on these important strategic issues faced by academic libraries today.<sup>1</sup> Our paper will address these critical issues. We will also outline social networking strategies that libraries can use to maximize their marketing efforts.

We will first review the extant literature on how libraries, specifically academic libraries, use social networking sites to communicate with their users. Next, we will describe the methodology we used to collect and analyze data. This will be followed by a detailed description of the results. We will then discuss the implications of the research findings to libraries with respect to their social networking strategies. In conclusion, we will outline the limitations of our study and describe a set of critical success factors for academic libraries in using social networking sites to communicate with their users.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Many librarians have written about their experiences of using social networks as an outreach tool. It is not uncommon for libraries to use Facebook and Twitter to communicate with their users (Chen, Chu, and Xu 2012; Del Bosque, Leif, and Skarl 2012). What is missing from the conversation is an approach to develop a systematic social networking strategy. One approach taken by librarians is to use Facebook to reach students with their personal accounts instead of the library's Facebook account (Lawson 2007; Mathews 2008). Both Matthews (2008) and Lawson (2007) used Facebook to contact students individually within a particular major to inform them of the library services. Lawson wrote about the difficulties that arose when she tried to contact 140 East Asian Studies majors. After she had sent out 12 personal messages to students within eight minutes, Facebook sent her a warning that her activity could be in violation of Facebook's privacy terms (Lawson 2007). Even today, Facebook does not specify the number of identical messages that one person can send; however, Facebook states that spamming is a violation of its "community standards" and that "spam can involve contacting people with unwanted content or requests. This includes sending bulk messages, excessively posting links or images to people's timelines and sending friend requests to people you don't know personally" (Facebook Help Center: Spam 2012). Taking this into account, librarians must carefully consider how to reach students through social networking sites in order not to violate any privacy terms.

Even though outreach efforts have been attempted on a personal level from librarians, the question must be answered: Do students even want to be "friends" with their librarians and/or educators on social networking sites? To "friend" someone on

Facebook is to accept their request to view information, such as pictures and updates. Although privacy settings allow users to control the amount of information one person can see, what are students' perceptions of being friends with librarians and libraries? Connell (2009) surveyed 366 incoming freshmen at Valparaiso University in Indiana on their thoughts about the library using Facebook and MySpace to reach students. Many of the students were receptive to the idea. Facebook was the focal point of the article because of its popularity. Fifty-seven percent of students said that although they would not proactively seek out the library on Facebook or MySpace, if the library sent a "friend" request, they would accept it (Connell 2009:31). A smaller percentage (17 percent) would actively search for the library on Facebook or MySpace, while 25 percent would not accept the request or search for the library's page. This information is useful for libraries. Although most students would not mind the presence of the library on Facebook, they may not actively seek information from the library. In a similar study on the use of social media by libraries, Breeding (2007) noted that it is unrealistic to presume that a large number of undergraduate students would like to count libraries among their Facebook friends.

Compared to students, faculty members have a different perception about social networking with libraries. Roblyer et al. (2010) found that students were more receptive to using Facebook for schoolwork than were faculty. They also found that although neither the faculty nor students were "particularly warm toward the possibility" of using Facebook for educational purposes (Roblyer et al. 2010:138), the faculty, in particular, did not think that Facebook should be used for educational purposes. Although students tended to check e-mail and Facebook equally, the faculty were more prone to check their e-mail than Facebook. If this trend is found to be uniform across many campuses, it calls for a distinct social networking strategy to target the faculty. For example, Facebook would not be the desired outlet for the libraries to reach faculty members. Libraries should investigate marketing strategies using e-mail or other social networking sites (e.g., LinkedIn) to target the faculty.

Although faculty do not think Facebook should be used for educational purposes and tend to check e-mail more, Facebook groups whose membership had more faculty and staff were more active. Successful Facebook groups are those that have frequent discussions and activity. Groups with more faculty and staff membership are more successful than student Facebook groups (Xia, 2009). Xia (2009) suggests that faculty and staff "are more interested" in knowing the latest changes and operations of the library, which may explain their being more active in the library groups (Xia 2009:476). Students reported that they hardly participate in discussions or talk with people within groups through social networking sites (Pempek, Yermolayeva, and Calvert, 2009). This does not, however, indicate that students are not seeing and paying attention to what is being said through Facebook groups, even if they are not active in the discussion. Hence, it is still worthwhile to market library services to students through various social networking sites.

According to researchers such as Teclehaimanot and Hickman (2011) and Junco (2012), students' activity on social networking sites positively influences their campus

involvement, although students' overall behaviors are passive. Passive behaviors are described as "reading through another's profile information, viewing photos, or watching videos—the performer is looking at what another user has posted" (Tecelehaimanot and Hickman 2011:21). Students think that passive behaviors are more appropriate on Facebook from both the faculty and students. For example, students were uncomfortable with the thought of professors commenting on their pages and being active participants in their social networking lives, and they thought it was inappropriate for them as students to actively engage their professors on Facebook (Tecelehaimanot and Hickman 2011). When students were asked how much passive activity they did on Facebook, many (44.57 percent) reported "quite a bit," while 19.57 percent reported "a whole lot" (Pempek, Yermolayeva, and Calvert 2009:235). The top-reported activities on Facebook were mostly passive: (1) reading other people's profiles; (2) looking at photos; (3) reading their own news feeds; (4) reading posts on their own walls; and (5) reading posts on others' walls. The study by Tecelehaimanot and Hickman (2011) was limited because four classes from the College of Education at the University of Toledo were selected and generated a sample of 52 students—25 undergraduate and 27 graduate students (Tecelehaimanot and Hickman 2011:22). The sample is small and is limited to students from the College of Education only. Students majoring in education may have a different outlook on student-teacher interactions than students of other majors. The authors did, however, state that their study was limited because students answered questions with their current professor with that class in mind (Tecelehaimanot and Hickman 2011). This, of course, could skew the results depending on the students' relationships with the teacher, the teacher's age, and even gender; however, the study gives libraries something to think about. Should libraries expect students to actively respond to social networking posts submitted by librarians? If students find passive behaviors as being appropriate, then libraries should take this into consideration when creating social network accounts. Guidelines should be put in place to make sure that students' desired boundaries are put in place.

Although the bulk of the literature is written about Facebook, the use of Twitter in libraries has been explored as well. In one of the most comprehensive studies in this field, Del Bosque, Leif, and Skarl (2012) reported findings based on a random sample of 296 academic libraries. Out of 296 libraries surveyed, 101 libraries (34 percent) had Twitter accounts. Most of the libraries' primary use of Twitter was to promote various library resources, and the secondary use to promote library events. Library Twitter accounts that are very active (i.e., have a large number of tweets) also enjoy followers. Del Bosque and colleagues reported that libraries that promoted Twitter on their webpage had 43 percent more followers than libraries that did not. In addition, accounts that were connected to their official institution had "an average number of followers 3,485 percent higher than schools that were not listed at all" (p. 211). Del Bosque et al. suggest that libraries thank users when they retweet something from their account. Welcoming new users and recognizing users' comments are effective ways to help make a Twitter account more inviting. Fields (2010) highlighted a distinctive way to use Twitter. The Koerner HSS

library at the University of British Columbia would tweet reference questions that they received by using #refdesk. The focus of Twitter use was not on marketing the library but on demonstrating the types of research that were being conducted.

Cassidy et al. (2011) conducted a survey of 702 students at Sam Houston State University about their utilization of and preference for popular Internet and communication technologies. The survey revealed that a low percentage of respondents used Twitter and even fewer were interested in using Twitter. Respondents indicated that they would rather “like” the library’s Facebook page than “follow” the library’s Twitter account (p. 388). Valerie Forrestal (2009), a Twitter expert and blogger, made the same observation with Twitter but thought that even if students are not on Twitter, there is still a benefit to the library using it. A library having an RSS (Rich Site Summary) feed would allow tweets to be displayed on the webpage.

The interest in receiving information about the library on Facebook somewhat surprised Cassidy et al. (2011). Earlier research indicated that students would view Facebook as personal space for recreation and that the thought of having an educational unit as a “friend” would be unappealing. They found the opposite, however, and it is thought that this may be because of the changes in Facebook pages for organizations. Currently on Facebook, an individual can “like” an organization’s page without the organization knowing any personal information about the individual. Previously, an organization’s page was just like an individual’s page and all content, statuses, and the like were made public to that organization (Cassidy et al. 2011:389). Almost half (48 percent) of students stated that they had an interest in library services being marketed through social networking sites. YouTube and library blogs were also of interest for library services. Students expressed an interest in learning about the library through YouTube. The library already had instruction videos placed on YouTube, but they were not utilized very much. This becomes a visibility issue. The authors suggest that having a YouTube channel would aid in more videos being used. The argument is that students are already on YouTube searching other things, and if the library had a YouTube channel and students subscribed to it, the students would be exposed to the various videos created by the library. Overall, students thought that the library should concentrate on only a few emerging technologies because “without excellent core services, a flashy library presence in the Web 2.0 world adds little value to the user experience” (Cassidy et al. 2011:380).

The evidence of the effectiveness of social networking sites to communicate with library users is not conclusive. For example, do full-time students prefer social networking sites more than do part-time students? Do younger students prefer communicating with their libraries through social networking sites more than do older students? Do students prefer Facebook to Twitter for communicating with the library? The purpose of our study is to shed further light on these questions by analyzing new data

collected through a survey, and to recommend suitable social networking strategies based on our research findings.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Data were collected during spring and summer semesters of 2012 from 164 library users at a Midwestern university in an urban location. We decided to collect the data at the library for several reasons. First, our library facilities are used not only by students but also by community members, many of whom are senior citizens. For example, 10 percent of 164 people surveyed were senior citizens (55-plus age category). It is important to capture their feedback on social media usage. Unfortunately, it is difficult to reach this group for an online survey in absence of a reliable e-mail listserv. Second, the purpose of this study is to popularize the library services to not just online users but *all* users. Hence, it was necessary to administer the survey at the library to capture the responses from a wide spectrum of library users.<sup>2</sup>

Table 1 outlines the sample demographics. Of the respondents, 35.5 percent were male and 64.5 percent female; 62 percent of respondents were below the age of 35. A majority (61.5 percent) of respondents were African American, followed by white (15.4 percent). Of 164 respondents, 138 were students, 16 were staff, and 10 were community members. Among all students, 80 percent were full-time and the rest were part-time. Participants volunteered to take a paper-and-pencil survey and were given an incentive for their participation (food and drink). The survey was advertised through flyers and also by e-mail. Participants were reminded to be anonymous and were asked not to put their names on the survey. Library users were surveyed on their satisfaction level for certain social networking sites, how often they used social networking sites, whether they thought it was important for the library to market through social networking sites, and where they wanted to see information from the library.

## **RESULTS**

### *Membership on Social Networking Sites*

Table 2 shows the social networking sites that library users belonged to. Participants were asked which social networking sites they belonged to rather than which social networking sites they used. Although only the membership figure is shown, the information is useful for the library to determine which social networking sites to use to get the maximum exposure to their patrons. Facebook is the most popular social networking site, followed by YouTube and Twitter.

### *Frequency of Use*

Table 3 shows the frequency of use of social networking sites for library patrons. Targeting how often and how many ways users access social networking sites will help

the library determine how to develop marketing strategies. Facebook was the most frequently used social networking site, followed by YouTube and Twitter. Wikis and LinkedIn were the least used social networking sites according to participants. Combining the results outlined in Tables 2 and 3, we find that Facebook not only enjoyed the maximum number of members among survey participants but also was most frequently used by them. YouTube followed Facebook in second place, in both membership and frequency of use.

**Table 1. Sample Demographics**

Gender	Percentage
Male	35.5%
Female	64.5%
Age	
17–25	40%
26–34	22%
35–54	28%
55–64	9%
65 and over	1%
Ethnicity	
White	15.4%
African American	61.5%
Hispanic	11%
Asian	3.3%
Other	8.8%

**Table 2. Membership on Social Networking Sites**

Social Media Site	Percentage
Facebook	86.0%
YouTube	41.5%
Twitter	40.9%
LinkedIn	9.1%
None	9.1%
Other	6.7%
Blogs	6.1%
Wikis	1.2%



**Table 3. Frequency of Social Networking Site Use**

	Twitter	Facebook	YouTube	Blogs	Wikis	LinkedIn
Daily	21%	60%	24%	3%	1%	2%
2–3 Times per Week	4%	13%	18%	2%	5%	1%
Once per Week	5%	5%	12%	3%	1%	1%
2–3 Times per Month	4%	5%	6%	2%	2%	2%
Once per Month	1%	1%	4%	3%	2%	2%
Less Than Once per Month	7%	3%	2%	4%	1%	4%
Never	58%	13%	34%	81%	87%	87%

*Importance of Social Networking Sites to Libraries*

Eighty-six percent of library users thought it was important (from somewhat important to extremely important) for the library to use social networking sites to market its services (see Table 4). Although the majority of participants thought that it was important for the library to be on social networking sites, they do not prefer to receive library related information through social networking sites.

**Table 4. Importance of Library Using Social Networking Sites**

Extremely Important	27%
Very Important	26%
Somewhat Important	33%
Neither Important nor Unimportant	9%
Somewhat Unimportant	0%
Very Unimportant	2%
Not at all Important	1%

*Preferred Mode of Communication with Libraries*

Library users ranked *flyers in the library* as the most preferred mode of communication (Table 5). This was followed by the library website and a newsletter, which tied for second place. Text messages ranked third, followed by social networking sites and then e-mail, which ranked last.

**Table 5. Preferred Mode of Communication**

Mode of Communication	Average
E-mail	3.15
Flyers in Library	3.78
Social Networking	3.23
Text Messaging	3.5
Library Website	3.72
Newsletter	3.72

Even though flyers ranked first for all library users as the preferred method of communication, they ranked last (tied with e-mail) for users under the age of 35 (see Table 6 for more details). The library webpage ranked as the number-one preference for users under the age of 35. What this tells us is that users under the age of 35 prefer to receive information online, and their first place to look for any updates from the library would be through the library webpage.

**Table 6. Preferred Method of Communication for Library Users under Age 35**

Mode of Marketing	Average
Library Webpage	3.89
Newsletter	3.77
Social Networking Sites	3.32
Text Messages	3.21
Flyers in the Library	3.19
E-mail	3.19

Social networking sites ranked third amongst this group. Even so, social networking sites can still be used for marketing purposes but should not be the priority for marketing efforts. With the expectation of libraries to provide more electronic resources, the library webpage will probably be the initial point that users under 35 will encounter; thus, marketing to this group may not be very different from marketing to the online students.

#### *Satisfaction with Social Networking Sites*

As far as satisfaction with social networking sites is concerned, it is evident that respondents are most satisfied by YouTube, followed by Blogs, Facebook, and Twitter

(Table 7). This result is not surprising, because YouTube is very user-friendly when it comes to searching for and watching videos of choice.

**Table 7. Satisfaction with Social Media**

Twitter	2.43
Facebook	2.4
YouTube	1.9
Blogs	2.39
Wikis	2.54
LinkedIn	3.5

*Note:* 1 = Most satisfied; 7 = Least satisfied.

## DISCUSSION

The results of the survey found that our library users' memberships on social networking sites somewhat differs from other published reports. Facebook is the most popular networking site in general (Duggan and Brenner 2013; Nielsen Company 2012), and the same is the case with our users. For example, Duggan and Brenner (2013) report that 67 percent of online adult users are on Facebook; 86 percent of library participants reported the same. The most significant difference is with Twitter: 40 percent of our users stated that they belonged to Twitter, compared to 16 percent of online users from the Pew Research Center's Internet and American Life Project (see <http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2013/Social-media-users.aspx> for more details). LinkedIn showed the greatest disparity, with only 9.1 percent of library users reporting membership but 20 percent of online adult users reporting membership (Duggan and Brenner 2013). These results show that the demographic of library users at this academic library is different from the national demographic of online adult users.

Findings from our research have distinct strategic implications for academic libraries. For example, although the majority of participants thought that it was important for the library to be on social networking sites, *social media* ranked next to last, right above e-mail (Table 5). What does this say about the library users? We found that flyers posted in the library are the most preferred mode of communication for the survey respondents. This result is not surprising, because only students who physically visited the library were surveyed. What about students who take online classes and rarely or never come to the library? Flyers, of course, would not reach these students, whose initial contact with the library would most likely be the library's website. With this information, specific strategies can be developed for the user who will visit the library versus the user who is mostly online. The library can look at the products and services offered to determine which is best to market to patrons who are entering the physical space. Information such as café specials and special events would be useful information to provide in the physical space.

It is important for libraries to develop an online presence, not necessarily for users who visit the library, but for the online user. Because online students are disconnected from the physical facets of the campus, it is important to create a welcoming online experience in which the user knows that almost anything that he or she needs will be available through online communication with the library. This is a different strategy from marketing to users who come to the library. Library users who visit the library are aware of the people and the culture of the space, so it is worthwhile to advertise within the space. Online users, in contrast, may not know the culture or dynamics of the library, and that's where social networking sites can help. According to a study conducted by the Nielson Company (2012), Facebook is the most popular social networking site. Hence, Facebook can be used to create and demonstrate the culture of the library. Facebook should not be used solely to market services and products but can also be used to express the library's culture. This would allow the online user to experience the library even without being within the physical space. This can be achieved by taking photographs of staff, of special events, and of students using the space. Posting videos on YouTube or Facebook can help the online users experience what it is like in the library. Users who come to the library do not need this, and therefore, marketing to them within the physical space could be sufficient. Facebook can also be used to let the online user know where to go for different services and can provide helpful tips to assist online users with research. Facebook can be the online space where users will want to visit and, while they are there, receive useful information. This is much like the approach with the physical space of the library.

#### *Facebook versus Twitter*

Not as many library patrons use Twitter as Facebook (Table 3); however, based on the literature review, Twitter can definitely play a specific role. Twitter would not be used to recreate an online library environment but could be used to market to certain groups. For instance, the Koerner HSS library at the University of British Columbia does not use Twitter to market library services but uses it to list reference questions received by using the #refdesk tag (Fields 2010). Twitter could also be used as a tool to communicate with various departments and groups on campus, especially those that use the library quite heavily. Each department can have its own hashtag, where followers are free to ask questions, make comments, and get the help they need. Because each group would have its own hashtag, content could be searched by persons within that department. Also, if a product or particular service is available for a certain department, these products can be marketed directly so that they receive only the relevant information that applies to them. Instead of being used as a general marketing tool, Twitter can be specialized to market to a target audience using hashtags.

#### *YouTube*

Library users were most satisfied with YouTube as a social networking site (Table 7). Participants were asked to check all of the social networking sites listed to which they

belonged. YouTube has many users watching every day, but these users may not necessarily have accounts. Although 41.5 percent of participants checked that they belonged to YouTube, this may not be representative of the users who actually use YouTube. Because participants are mostly satisfied with YouTube, libraries can find ways to market their services to their users using videos. Libraries are already using YouTube in a variety of ways for marketing and educational purposes (Colburn and Haines 2012; Islam and Porter 2008; Majekodunmi and Murnaghan 2012). Videos can be marketed to users in the library by having users scan a QR code that would send visitors to a video that would briefly tell them about the area they are in, guide them through the library, or even give them brief fun facts. The strategy would be slightly different for the online user. Users navigating the library webpage can have a link to instruct them how to use a resource or to give them quick specific tips on what to do on that webpage.

#### *Usage Pattern for Wikis, Blogs, and LinkedIn*

Usage for wikis, blogs and LinkedIn were the lowest of all the social networking sites amongst library users (Table 3). Very few library users have a LinkedIn account; therefore, it appears that the library should not focus on LinkedIn as an outreach tool. The survey was given only to library users on one campus and did not look into how alumni use social networking. It is possible that LinkedIn is used more by alumni than by students and could be a tool to reach alumni. Ninety-one percent of the library users who took the survey were students. Alumni may not visit the library as often, and further study is needed to investigate marketing approaches for alumni. The survey usage percentage indicated from the survey for wikis and blogs may not be representative of actual use. For instance, Wikipedia is a very popular site and could be heavily used by library users. According to Wikimedia (2013), Wikipedia's English website receives almost 12 million views per hour. Users may not view Wikipedia as a wiki or a social networking site. This would alter the results. Library users also may frequent blogs without knowing. Websites such as Wordpress allow blogs to look more like websites, and users may unknowingly use blogs for information, believing them to be websites. This limits the study because membership is not required for blogs and wikis, and users may use them only for informational purposes. Further investigation is needed to determine if these tools should be used for marketing library services. Possible uses for wikis could be to display the libraries' policies, but this would not be a social tool. Further research can be done to determine best uses for these tools. This study also did not look into the type of information that users want from the library.

#### *Template for a Social Media Marketing Plan for Academic Libraries<sup>3</sup>*

It is evident from the above discussion that different social networking sites have unique capabilities. To leverage the strengths of social networking sites, a comprehensive social networking plan is essential. In Table 8, we present a template for such a plan for academic libraries.

The National Library of Australia (2013) summarizes the primary goals of academic libraries:

1. Generate awareness of library services and activities
2. Manage library's reputation and build the brand
3. Build relationship with users through engagement
4. Provide user support to improve user satisfaction
5. Encourage users to provide feedback on library services

#### *Generate Awareness of Library Services and Activities*

This goal can be achieved through a combination of all five social networking sites outlined in Table 8. Information on upcoming events should be regularly posted on Facebook because it is the most popular social network. The content should be relevant and engaging for Facebook users. For example, photos and web links related to all library events should be included.

LinkedIn is a dominant business-to-business social network ideal for the library to connect with the suppliers such as publishers, database providers, and IT service providers. It can also be effectively used to network with users. The landing page should be used to announce job openings and new positions to encourage students to visit the site regularly. All library employees should be encouraged to open LinkedIn accounts and to invite their contacts, past customers, and colleagues to join the library LinkedIn group. Libraries should do well to include applications such as SlideShare to add useful content and to link to articles on the public domain.

As for using Twitter, it is useful to send out a Tweet whenever a new activity is organized or new items such as new books, periodicals, or databases are added to the library collection. It is also advisable to send regular tweets about existing services.

If the library uses a regular blog, upcoming events and activities should be announced through it. To make the most of YouTube, the second most popular social network, authentic videos with real library users should be created and posted to make the videos more persuasive. Also, the links of YouTube videos should be included on all other social networks including Facebook and Twitter.

#### *Manage the Library's Reputation and Build the Brand*

It is critical to monitor users' comments—both positive and negative—about the library's service on all social networks. All negative comments must be responded to promptly. To ensure this, it is important to have a social network reputation-management plan. Employees should be identified and trained on how to use the social network within the guidelines.

**Table 8. Template for a Social Media Plan for an Academic Library**

Objective	Social Networking Site				
	Facebook	LinkedIn	Twitter	Blog	YouTube
<b>Create awareness of services and activities</b>	Post information on upcoming event; include photos and web links	Announce job openings and new positions to attract students; use SlideShare to add useful content	Send out a tweet to announce new activity; send regular tweets about existing services	Announce events and activities	Post videos outlining services; cross-promote videos through other social media sites
<b>Build brand strength</b>	Find mentions about the library; monitor how many positive/negative stories are posted	Seek recommendations from current and past students, users, and expert librarians	Use tweets for public relations	Keep blogs focused to build brand	Actively comment on others' videos on Higher Ed to demonstrate expertise
<b>Build relationship with users through engagement</b>	Engage with other Facebook channels	Participate regularly in online discussions on student and faculty related issues; use in-mails to ask users to stay connected with the library	Comment, retweet, follow users; thank users for participation on events or activities	Encourage users to post comments on articles and news items	E-mail video links to users; feature user-submitted videos on library website
<b>Provide user support</b>	Cross-promote useful instructional videos/articles	Use answers feature to provide valuable feedback to users' questions	Respond to tweets/comments promptly		Post instructional videos about library services
<b>Get user feedback</b>	Encourage users to post comments on events and activities		Invite tweets from users about library services; ask for new ideas	Invite comments on blog posts	

For brand building on the social network, a library has to depend on what users say about it rather than on what it says about itself; hence, users' comments and feedback on all social networks are critical. Library employees can also have a major effect on the brand image. For example, reviews of new books and displays by employees can help build the image of the library.

### *Build Relationships with Users through Engagement*

Social networks can help libraries a great deal in building relationships with users. A useful model to understand the levels of online engagement for nonprofits is the Engagement Pyramid, developed by Groundwire (see [www.groundwire.com](http://www.groundwire.com) for a detailed description of the model). According to the Engagement Pyramid, there are five levels of engagement for nonprofit supporters: casual observer, follower, endorser, contributor and owner/leader (Table 9). For an academic library, it is more difficult to engage with users at the higher level (owner/leader and contributor) through online means alone (Bandyopadhyay and Dayton 2013). However, it is quite possible to achieve lower levels of engagement (casual observer, follower and endorser) through an effective social media strategy. For example, Facebook can be used to engage with users on the library's Facebook page. This can be achieved by providing useful information, actively seeking feedback on library services, and answering questions. Similarly, library personnel should actively participate in online discussion groups on libraries, new pedagogical techniques, or higher education, in general. On Twitter, comments and retweets should be used regularly. Twitter can also be utilized to thank users for participating in library-sponsored events and activities. Users should be encouraged to post comments on articles and news items posted on the library blog. A few of the interesting comments may be posted on the library web page to encourage other users to participate as well. Similarly, libraries should include links to user-submitted videos on interesting educational matters on the library website. Links for interesting YouTube videos may also be sent directly to users via e-mail.

### *Provide User Support*

Social networking sites can be effectively used to provide many types of support to library users. For example, students can benefit from access to resource material that helps them with their research projects. Faculty will appreciate receiving information on and access to research databases. Staff will benefit from information on financial literacy, investment, and health care advice. Facebook can be used to cross-promote useful informational or instructional videos and articles available on specialized blogs and YouTube channels. Useful videos available on the public domain such as *Ted Talks* (see [www.ted.com/talks](http://www.ted.com/talks)). Useful features such as *Answers* on LinkedIn can be very effective in answering specific questions from users.



**Table 9. Nonprofit Engagement Levels**

Engagement Level	Supporter's Behavior	Goal for this supporter
Owner/Leader	Frequent deep involvement; demonstrates acts of leadership	Show this supporter how he or she "owns" the mission and his or her responsibility in achieving it
Contributor	Active involvement in the organization's mission	Deepen this supporter's commitment to the organization's mission and values
Endorser	Impulsive involvement to few individual engagements	Earn enough of this supporter's trust for him or her to feel confident supporting the organization
Follower	Regular communication	Offer "value" to this supporter and expand proactive communication
Casual Observer	Occasional indirect communication	Inspire this individual to look deeper into the organization's mission

*Source:* [www.groundwire.com](http://www.groundwire.com)

### *Get User Feedback*

Feedback from users helps service facilities understand their strengths and weaknesses. Academic libraries are no exception. They must provide every opportunity to their users to provide feedback, both positive and negative. Users should be encouraged to make constructive comments on library services through Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, and on blog posts. Like profit-making organizations, libraries can run contests that reward (e.g., with Amazon gift cards) those users who make the most constructive comments on different social networks.

### **CONCLUSION**

Like other empirical studies, our study has several limitations. First, we surveyed people who used the physical facility of the library. We did not survey strictly online students or people who rarely visit the library. As mentioned in the Methodology section, this survey procedure was necessary to get the feedback from a variety of library users, including part-time students, community members, and senior citizens; however, this prevented us from collecting a larger sample through online survey tools. Second, very few respondents in our survey use LinkedIn, wikis, and blogs; hence, we cannot reliably ascertain the satisfaction levels for these social networking sites. Finally, the sample size

(n = 164) is not large enough to undertake statistical testing of group differences (e.g., African Americans vs. whites; older students vs. younger students).

Social networking sites are an integral part of people's lives. This influence will only continue to grow (Bandyopadhyay and Dayton 2013). Social media provide libraries with many opportunities to communicate and market without much capital needed. For social networking to be truly successful, however, a strategy must be created to give information relevant to users in a short period of time. Even if users do not communicate with the library and start conversations on online chats, if the "likes" and "followers" are growing, the word is getting out. Use of every social networking site should have a purpose and should not be started without careful planning and consideration. Libraries should consider the following questions before beginning to use social networking sites.

1. How much time/labor will this take?
2. Is this the best approach to reach users?
3. Who do we want to target?
4. Is there a better way to market the library?

Social media are useful tools that can be used by libraries; however, social networking sites should not be approached as a one-size-fits-all approach. Users and purpose must be taken into consideration. According to our survey, library users in general think it is important for the library to use social media, but they also see the benefit of being marketed to within the physical space. Hence, libraries, like other organizations, need to consider all forms of marketing to get maximum exposure to a wide range of users.

## **ENDNOTES**

1. Although the focus of our study is on academic libraries, we have used the term "library" in place of "academic library" throughout the manuscript for the sake of simplicity.
2. We thank an anonymous reviewer for encouraging us to elaborate on the rationale of our data-collection procedure.
3. We thank an anonymous reviewer for suggesting the inclusion of a template for a social media plan for academic libraries.

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