Facing Our Future: Social Media Takeover, Coexistence or Resistance? The Integration of Social Media and Reference Services

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Abstract:

Academic libraries around the globe have adopted a range of digital technologies to deliver enquiry and reference services. The use of social media by university libraries to communicate with staff and students is now as pervasive as traditional online reference services, such as email. Some libraries use these services in conjunction with each other, but for others there appears to be no interrelation. Is social media the future for reference services or a passing fad?

This paper will examine the use of social media by academic libraries in the world's top 100 universities. This will include the integration of social media with reference services, satisfaction with the use of social media in comparison with other digital reference services, the need for a social media strategy (or not) and the factors determining whether social media is successful.

The authors will formulate the benefits of streamlining digital enquiry initiatives and services with the aim of providing the "one stop online shop".

Keywords: social media, reference services, integration, academic libraries

1   INTRODUCTION

Technology has had a significant impact on the delivery of library enquiry and reference services, from the introduction of first generation technologies such as email and chat to second generation technologies such as Facebook and Twitter. This paper examines the use of social media by academic libraries in the world's top 100 universities, and in particular the extent to which social media is integrated with reference services, through two main methods of enquiry. Firstly, through an analysis of how libraries are using the popular social media

tools Facebook and Twitter to provide library services, and secondly via a survey of libraries situated in the world's top 100 universities. Finally the paper evaluates whether social media is taking over, coexisting or resisting integration with library services.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This history of the transition of reference and enquiry services from face to face delivery to the provisioning of early digital technologies to the more recent phenomena of the use of social media technologies is discussed elsewhere (McLoughlin and Benn, 2013; Ayra and Mishra, 2011).

There is now widespread adoption of social media tools within academic libraries (Chu and Du, 2012 and Hosny and Fatima, 2012). Facebook, however, wasn't initially completely embraced by academic libraries. A 2007 survey of 126 academic libraries reported that "While some librarians were excited about the possibilities of Facebook, the majority surveyed appeared to consider Facebook outside the purview of professional librarianship" (Charnigo and Barnett-Ellis, 2007, 23). Similarly Graham, Faix and Hartman (2007) report on a survey of 100 academic libraries which showed that 52% of respondents were using Facebook, and when asked about success of its use, 27.5% of respondents "reported feeling ambiguous in regards to whether or not having a profile on Facebook actually accomplished anything" (Graham, Faix and Hartman, 2007, 233). In addition an OCLC report published in 2007 reported concerns about library use of social networking (De Rosa, et al., 2007, 6). Despite this a number of authors publishing around this time, including Charnigo and Barnett-Ellis (2007) and Chad and Miller (2005) saw great potential in providing library services via social media.

Many authors outline the benefits of adopting and integrating social media, or Web 2.0, technologies with library services which include increased engagement with users and transition from one-directional communication to more collaborative user involvement (McLoughlin and Benn, 2013). McManus (2009) says that librarians and libraries "need to be mindful of and work to integrate these technologies into their services, it is simply because they have to, library services would be made useless otherwise." Sachs et al (2011, 37) state that, "academic libraries have always extended themselves beyond their physical buildings and collections by increasing access to online resources" and that "it makes perfect sense…that libraries have utilized newer communication modalities".

Sachs et al (2011) surveyed students to measure the effectiveness of Facebook as a marketing, reference, and instruction tool. In this survey more than 90% of the undergraduates surveyed felt that Facebook was a good way for libraries to communicate with students. 63% of respondents indicated that they were very or somewhat comfortable seeking research assistance via Facebook. However, only 4 of the respondents had actually asked a librarian a question via Facebook indicating that users are "unlikely to use Facebook to actively request assistance from the Library" (Sachs et al, 2011, 43). Similarly Connell (2009) surveyed students about librarians using Facebook and MySpace as outreach tools and recommends libraries create a library presence on social media sites rather than "invite" students to be their "friend". In this survey, "students made it clear…that they do not want their time wasted. Superfluous e-mail or wall messages will be seen as spam and may even cause students to defriend the library. Status updated are easier to scan and are generally

shorter but should not be used in excess to avoid irritation" (Connell, 2009). This demonstrates the importance of useful, engaging, carefully crafted content.

Wan (2011) undertook an analysis of Facebook usage of Association of Research Libraries (ARL) members. This study reported that 90.4% of responding libraries had at least one Facebook page. Wan found that the numbers of 'Fans' "were not impressive" with 67.2% of libraries with less than 200 Fans. Wan's analysis showed that libraries did not post on their pages very often (1 to 5 posts a month) and 19.5% did not post anything in the month studied. Wan also found that the there was not necessarily a correlation between the amount of activity and the number of fans. Wan concluded that libraries were struggling to engage clients on Facebook which could be due to the relatively short history of the technology and infrequent updating of content. Wan predicted that "more and more academic libraries will take advantage of Facebook to reach their users".

Steiner (2012), in her book *Strategic planning for social media in libraries*, comments positively on the progress that libraries have made in increasing their participation in social media. Interestingly she found that the planning stage for this stream of activity is often neglected which is unusual when this is undertaken for the majority of other services offered. Without plans to focus, maximise or assess the activity a lack of return on investment is perceived and Steiner has seen this reflected in recent literature. Planning was viewed as irrelevant and standing in the way of innovation in an ever changing landscape. Steiner feels though that the tide may be turning and that planning (or strategy) is now perceived as helping to change from a "culture of confusion and last minute reactivity to a culture of agility and proactivity". Steiner illustrates how a strategy can be developed appropriate to the organisations needs and audience and be broad enough to be able to set priorities and incorporate new media as necessary.

3 ANALYSIS OF FACEBOOK AND TWITTER USE BY LIBRARIES IN THE WORLD'S TOP 100 UNIVERSITIES

3.1. Methodology
The aim of the analysis of Facebook and Twitter use by libraries situated in the world's top 100 universities (according to the Academic Ranking of World Universities 2012 list) was to determine:
- the number of libraries with an official Facebook and Twitter profile
- the level of activity and popularity of these tools, and
- the integration of these tools with other services, including reference services.

The Academic Ranking of World Universities (Shanghai Jiao Tong) 2012 list (http://www.shanghairanking.com/ARWU2012.html) was used for the analysis, as well as the survey described later in this paper. The authors chose this list in order to identify a subset of the world's top universities to analyse and survey. The social media tools Facebook and Twitter were chosen due to their popularity and widespread adoption in the academic library sector.

3.2. Findings

3.2.1. Usage
The analysis showed that adoption of the tools was high with 83% of the libraries within the world's top 100 universities having at least one Facebook page and 73% of libraries having at least one Twitter account.

Posting was quite active with 90% of libraries posting to Facebook and 81% of libraries posting a tweet on Twitter in the last seven days. There were a few pages or accounts which had not been updated in the last month (5% for Facebook and 9.5% for Twitter). For the number of 'likes' or 'follows' there was a wide variance as would expect given that different universities have different staff and student numbers. As of the 29th April 2013, Yale University Library had the most 'likes' on Facebook (5503) and Harvard University Library had the most 'followers' on Twitter (8488). The academic libraries with the highest numbers of likes and follows had, mostly, updated their accounts in the last 24 hours and had posted regularly over the last seven days. The tables below show the activity for the ten most liked and followed libraries.

	'Likes'	Days since last post	Posts in last 7 days
Yale University	5503	<1	16
University of Melbourne	5478	<1	5
Stanford University	4251	<1	13
University of Southern California	2860	2	8
University of Washington	2798	<1	10
Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)	2698	<1	4
Stockholm University	2591	<1	1
University of Oxford	2550	<1	5
Princeton University	2524	1	4
University of Sydney	2400	16	0

Table 1: Most 'liked' libraries on Facebook from the world's top 100 universities as at 29th April 2013

	'Followers'	Days since last tweet	Tweets in last 7 days
Harvard University	8488	<1	24
Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)	6847	4	7
University of Cambridge	6125	7	6
University of Southern California	5659	3	25
University of Manchester	5287	3	18
University of Texas at Austin	3996	<1	28
University of Toronto	3253	<1	13
Michigan State University	3161	<1	11
University of British Columbia	2954	2	26
Yale University	2637	7	6

Table 2: Most 'followed' libraries on Twitter from the world's top 100 universities as at 29th April 2013

3.2.2. Integration

Most of the libraries analysed had fairly prominent links to their Facebook or Twitter presence on their library website home page. Others make their social media presence more difficult to locate with no obvious link provided. The majority of libraries analysed have their Facebook and Twitter links separate from their other contact services (email, phone, chat, in person). Links to traditional contact services are usually at the top of the page with links to Facebook and Twitter (commonly icons) at the bottom of the page. A small number of libraries include links to Facebook and Twitter alongside their other services (Ask a Librarian, Email, Chat). For most libraries there is no obvious interconnection between these services.

Many libraries have multiple Facebook and Twitter feeds. A number of universities including Duke University, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and University of Maryland College Park have brought all of their social media profiles together in one web page. Finally, some libraries have set up a reference service via Twitter (see for example Duke University (https://twitter.com/DukeLibrarian), however there is little evidence of reference interactions with students.

4   SURVEY OF THE WORLD'S TOP 100 UNIVERSITIES

4.1. Methodology

The aim of the survey was to gather feedback from libraries situated in the world's top 100 universities (according to the Academic Ranking of World Universities 2012 list) to determine:

- the tools and technologies being used to provide online enquiry services,
- the use, satisfaction and effectiveness of the tools and technologies,
- the development of staff expertise in delivering online enquiry services,
- tools and technologies no longer in use, and
- The integration of social media with more traditional online reference tools.

An online survey was designed in the software programme Qualtrics, licensed by the University of Western Australia. Individuals within libraries at a senior level were contacted via email and asked to respond to the survey, with contact details being sourced from university websites. There were 34 valid responses to the survey; with six responses elicited from the same institution, resulting in a response rate of 29%. The six responses from the same institution have been included in the analysis of the survey results as they operate as separate entities with their own provision of services. In a number of cases staff email addresses were not available and a web form was used for making contact with the institution which was a less successful way of initiating responses.

The majority of responding institutions (68%) were based in the United States (US). This is not surprising given 51 of the top 100 universities are located in the US. Seven responding institutions were located in the UK and Europe with the remainder located in Australia, Canada, Japan and Israel. 23 of the 34 respondents (68%) agreed to be contacted for more information and follow up emails were sent to these institutions.

4.2. Findings

4.2.1. Use of Technologies

Respondents were asked which technologies are used for a) client enquiries and feedback and b) promotion, news and notifications. For client enquiries and feedback all 34 respondents used email and 68% of the libraries surveyed used chat or instant messaging. Fifteen respondents (44%) said they used Facebook and Twitter for client enquiries and feedback. Seven respondents (20%) used an inquiry management system. Other technologies mentioned for client enquiries and feedback included Libraryh3lp, LibAnswers, text messaging, GeoLocation and screen sharing.

For promotion, news and notifications 85% of respondents used email, followed by Facebook (76%), Twitter (74%) and Blogs (53%). This confirms that generally the respondents see social media tools, such as Facebook and Twitter, as a vehicle for promotion and news rather than a tool for client enquiries and feedback. Other technologies mentioned for promotion, news and notifications included digital signage, Flickr, Tumblr, newsletters, Adobe Connect, websites, Foursquare and Google+.

When asked how satisfied they were with the technologies they used, all respondents indicated that they were satisfied or very satisfied with email (4.38 out of 5). Respondents were less satisfied with Twitter (3.78) and Facebook (3.58). An email was sent to respondents who had agreed to be contacted to ask the reasons provided for the level of satisfaction, particularly in relation to the lower rating for social media. A number of respondents reported that low take up or usage by students contributed to the ratings for social media. Comments included: "We haven't had much success with our twitter feed and twitter hashtag, but we also have put very little effort into promoting them", "We have come to the realization that it [Facebook] works well as a marketing tool, but it requires regular and frequent updating…to keep it fresh and interesting" and "Early on we hoped that [Facebook] would provide more interaction with our students but beyond liking our posts we have found that our library patrons don't tend to comment".

One respondent said that they were very satisfied with Facebook and Twitter because both systems brought in direct reference questions and also allowed them to turn a user post or tweet into a reference question and answer.

4.2.2. Integration

The majority of respondents (82%) said that there was some integration between online and face to face reference services. Respondents were asked to describe the nature of this integration and this varied widely for example "Part of a system of providing reference services – we advertise all of our methods of communication and record statistics online", "The same staff answer both of these questions. They are bundled under the brand 'Ask Us'", and "Same people, combined statistics".

On the other hand only eight respondents (24%) reported that there was integration between traditional forms of digital reference (eg. email, chat) with social media (eg. Facebook, Twitter). Respondents described this integration in the following ways: "You use our library chat from within Facebook", "Links in email signatures, main web site" and "Questions that come to us via social media may get forwarded to email or chat so that the correct person can respond".

Survey respondents were asked about the perceived or actual benefits of integrating more traditional forms of reference with newer ones. The responses included: "Better able to reach students who regularly / very comfortably use social media", "More options for patrons, better responses from the library", and "It gives students an easy way to reach us since they rarely start at the library's home page but are on their social media a lot".

4.2.3. Success and Abandonment

Of the factors that make initiatives successful the highest ranked response was adequate staff support with thirteen responses (38%) ranking it the most important, followed by promotion and marketing (21%) and policy and strategy with 5 responses (15%). Continuous review and improvement of systems was ranked very low by the majority of participants.

A number of respondents reported that they had abandoned technologies, including chat / instant messaging (12%), blogs (12%) and wikis (12%). One of the respondents had retired Twitter. The main reasons supplied were insufficient activity and impact.

4.2.4. Staff Training and Development

Staff support was rated by respondents as key to success and when asked if staff expertise was actively developed it was variable. Chat / instant messaging and email were the areas where expertise was most actively developed. The methods included log reviews and discussion of best practice, workshops, and mentoring. A few institutions said they were actively developing expertise in Facebook and Twitter through the 23 Things programme and via a small working group of early adopters.

4.2.5. Strategy

Finally, respondents were asked whether their institution had a strategy for digital reference services (including social media). 14 of the respondents (41%) answered positively, however of those respondents many said that they were currently developing, or have plans to develop, a strategy. An email was sent to respondents who had agreed to be contacted to determine whether there was a draft strategy which could be shared. No institution was at the point that they could share any documented strategy. A number of survey respondents said they had a social media policy or social media guidelines (either at a library or university level). Some examples of these are:

University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center Library -
http://aklaconference2011.pbworks.com/f/UTSouthwesternLibrarySocialMediaPolicy_LLT_
Final.pdf
University of Maryland Libraries - http://www.lib.umd.edu/about/social-media-guidelines
Duke University - http://newsoffice.duke.edu/duke_resources/social-media-guidelines-
communicators
McGill University - http://www.mcgill.ca/newsroom/socialmedia/guidelines
University of Florida - http://hr.ufl.edu/emp_relations/policy/social_media.asp
University of Utah Health Sciences Library -
http://library.med.utah.edu/lib/EHSL_SocialMediaPolicy.pdf

5   DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1. Takeover, Coexistence or Resistance?
The analysis and the survey described above demonstrate that there is widespread adoption of Facebook and Twitter. Facebook and Twitter are now used alongside a suite of other technologies so in that sense there is little evidence of resistance to the technology. What is less clear is the extent to which social media and reference services are integrated. There is certainly some evidence that there is integration or potential integration however it is unlikely that social media will takeover the role played by other digital reference services. The main reasons could be that Facebook and Twitter are relatively open forums and it's unlikely every student would like to submit their query so publicly and short, sharp queries are suited to Facebook and Twitter while, longer queries are more likely to be submitted via other means. At this stage in most university libraries Facebook and Twitter are coexisting alongside other reference services with little scope for takeover.

5.2. Integration, Interrelation, Interaction and the One Stop Online Shop
The analysis and survey show a few examples of integration between reference services and Facebook and Twitter however this is certainly not widespread. There are a lot of examples of interrelation, that is, promotion of reference and other information services on social media (and presumably vice versa).

The academic libraries analysed showed that pages and profiles are being kept up to date with new posts very frequently with only 5% of libraries not updating their Facebook page in the last month. Conversely Wan's study (2011) found that 19.5% of libraries had not posted in the last month. This has possibly has led to increased engagement (the number of 'likes' which has also risen substantially since Wan's study and potentially shows that libraries recognise the importance of ongoing development.

With Facebook and Twitter coexisting alongside a number of other online services there are a myriad of ways in which contact can be made with libraries. The survey results clearly indicate that there are a number of technologies being employed for the purpose of digital reference creating a number of different virtual "service points". It remains to be seen whether there will be a rationalisation of digital service points to provide converged assistance in one place as has been witnessed with physical library service points, often referred to as a "one stop shop". The examples given previously of Duke University, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and University of Maryland College Park who have brought all of their social media profiles together in one web page could be seen as a

first step in providing a virtual one stop shop. A number of Universities have also linked up their social media and recycled information from on to another to increase its exposure.

5.3. Planning for the Future: Strategy for Social Media and Reference Services
Creating a social media presence is quick and easy. It requires very little technical availability or skills. The more difficult part is keeping it up to date with engaging content, using it to provide value to users and thinking about how it intersects with other services. In a sense, the strategy behind the use of social media, or even about communication and engagement more generally where social media is the vehicle to provide this.

Based on the survey and subsequent contact with responding institutions, no documented strategies were sighted. This is aligned with the findings of Steiner (2012). However a number of responding institutions indicated that they are in the process of developing strategies so in future this may be more commonplace. This is certainly the case at the University of Western Australia where a social media strategy is being drafted.

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