



Characterizing University Library Use of Social Media: A Case Study of Twitter and Facebook from Australia



Stuart Palmer*

Deakin University, Victoria, Australia

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 13 May 2014

Accepted 4 August 2014

Available online 27 October 2014

Keywords:

Academic libraries

Social media

Twitter

Facebook

Network analysis

ABSTRACT

The work presented here characterise the engagement of one university library with two social media platforms popular with academic libraries. The collected data are analysed to identify the forms of Twitter and Facebook activity that engage library stakeholders in social media conversations. Associations were observed between: i) directed tweets from the library and mentions of the library by others on Twitter; and ii) comments from the library and comments from others on Facebook. Three broad classes of Twitter user interacting with the library were revealed: i) accounts strongly linked to the library with multiple to/from tweets; ii) those weakly linked to the library with, typically, a single tweet; and iii) those indirectly linked to the library through tweets mentioning the library and sent by other users. Two divergent forms of Facebook interaction with the library were highlighted: i) a library post generating a large sequence of comments, typically in response to a competition/challenge; and ii) a library post with no comments, typically a photo post or a post inviting readers to click a link to find out more about an event/service. The work presented here is an initial investigation that provides useful insights, and offers a methodology for future research.

© 2014 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

INTRODUCTION

Online social media systems have created new ways for individuals to communicate, share information and interact with a wide audience (Aharony, 2012; Lin & Ranjit, 2012; Rees & Hopkins, 2009). For organizations, social media provide new avenues for communication and collaboration with their stakeholders. However, any value created for an organization through social media comes not from any particular platforms, but from how they are used (Busch, 2011; Culnan, McHugh, & Zubillaga, 2010; Dickson & Holley, 2010). While social media may be widely used by individuals and many organizations, their use in higher education generally is still relatively new (Busch, 2011; Forkosh-Baruch & HersHKovitz, 2012). The potential value of social media for academic libraries was recognized comparatively early on, with the term 'Library 2.0' (referring to the application of web 2.0 online tools to library functions) being coined by Casey in 2005 (Harinarayana & Raju, 2010; Mahmood & Richardson, 2011; Nguyen, Partridge, & Edwards, 2012). Following a period of piloting (Rees & Hopkins, 2009), applications of social media systems in library settings are now commonly reported (Chen, Chu, & Xu, 2012; Glazer, 2012; Mahmood & Richardson, 2011; Thornton, 2012). The growing ubiquitous presence and use of social media means that many libraries are using social media to engage their stakeholders in the online environment (Burkhardt, 2010; Collins & Quan-Haase, 2012). Social media offer real-

time channels for information sharing and communication (Aziz, Chia, & Loh, 2010), and venues for interactive dialogue and knowledge exchange (Aharony, 2012; Kim & Abbas, 2010).

Given that students are both a key stakeholder group for libraries, and are a key user group of social media, it is not surprising that many libraries are looking to social media tools as a method for engaging students (Dickson & Holley, 2010; Phillips, 2011). The networked nature of social media systems means that information can flow between librarians and students, but it can also then travel further – from student to student (Mallon, 2012). Beyond being the physical or virtual gatekeepers of, and advisors about, information sources, traditionally, librarians may most directly interact with students in the provision of information literacy instruction. Many have identified social media channels as a modern way to engage students in learning about information literacy (Bobish, 2011; Mawhinney, 2010; Morrow, 2010), and/or see social media as a driver for the re-conception of information literacy as an element of digital literacy (Walstrum, Garcia, & Morisson, 2011). A range of case studies of library use of various social media tools can be found – YouTube (Colburn & Haines, 2012; Collins & Quan-Haase, 2012); Pinterest (Thornton, 2012); and Flickr (Collins & Quan-Haase, 2012). However, the use of Twitter and Facebook seem to be the most commonly observed social media applications for libraries.

One of the most widely-used social media tools employed by organizations is Twitter (twitter.com) (Burkhardt, 2010; Culnan et al., 2010). Twitter is a popular and rapidly growing 'microblogging' service where users can post quick and frequent short messages (up to 140 characters) called 'tweets', which may contain links to other online

* Tel.: +61 3 52272991.

E-mail address: spalm@deakin.edu.au.

material such as photos and websites, to their 'followers' who have subscribed to their Twitter account (Dickson & Holley, 2010; Kim & Abbas, 2010). Tweets can be tagged with a searchable 'hashtag' (for example, an event might publicize a hashtag for participants to use so that tweets associated with the event can be easily collected via a tag search), and a user can 'retweet', to all of their followers, a tweet that they receive from another user (Forkosh-Baruch & Hershkovitz, 2012; Gallagher & Ransbotham, 2010). Tweets can be directed specifically to other named user accounts, or broadcast generally to all followers of the sending account. Except for the content of tweets from protected (private) accounts, all tweets are effectively broadcast to 'the world' and are publicly discoverable via a search. There is a range of third-party applications that provide additional functionality on top of the Twitter platform and/or help manage Twitter content. Facebook (facebook.com) is a similarly popular social media system, with hundreds of millions of users (Aharony, 2012). Facebook has a number of user account types (profiles, groups and pages), and while they are intended for different purposes, they share the same basic features (Forkosh-Baruch & Hershkovitz, 2012) – a library would typically create a Facebook page. Facebook users have a personal profile that allows them to describe themselves and their interests, and through this locate and connect with other users and interest groups (Aharony, 2012). Individual users request to be 'friends' with other users, and if a request is accepted, this connection allows enhanced interactions between the two users. The main communication area in Facebook is a user's 'wall', where they, and generally their friends, can post messages ('posts'), and respond to messages by posting 'comments', and readers can vote for a post or comment by 'liking' it (Forkosh-Baruch & Hershkovitz, 2012). A more recent feature of Facebook is the user 'news feed', which is an updating list of activities from their friends. For example, when a user's friend makes a new friend, likes a page or message, etc., this is noted in the user's news feed, and tends to encourage sharing and liking, and helps to build communities in Facebook (Aziz et al., 2010).

A 2010 study of 100 academic libraries in the USA found that 89 libraries had a presence on Facebook and 85 libraries were using Twitter (Mahmood & Richardson, 2011). A 2011 study of the 21 member libraries of the Ontario Council of University Libraries observed that 62% were using Twitter and 52% were using Facebook – the two most commonly used social media applications (Collins & Quan-Haase, 2012). Libraries report that both Twitter and Facebook are used because the features they provide work in related but different ways. It is indicated that Facebook is used for community building (Chen et al., 2012) and for providing static links to static library resources (Salisbury, Lincz, & Smith, 2012), while Twitter is used for communicating with individuals (Chen et al., 2012) and for timely updates about new resources and current events (Salisbury et al., 2012). The different functions and affordances that Twitter and Facebook offer libraries necessitate good coordination of the two tools to ensure that they are used efficiently (Chen et al., 2012). Libraries have found value in strategically linking their Twitter and Facebook posts to increase the total reach of their social media messages (Thornton, 2012), and it is possible to configure Twitter and Facebook to automatically route updates in one system to the other, and this has been reported as useful for libraries that use both systems concurrently (Saylor, Schnitzer, Allee, & Blumenthal, 2011).

There is general agreement that social media systems are having a significant impact on what librarians, libraries and library users do (Nguyen et al., 2012). However, while academic libraries have strongly embraced social media, comparatively little is known about the nature and impact of its use (Chiu & Lin, 2012). In particular, there has been a call for additional research on the comparative affordances and uses of the various social media systems used by libraries (Aharony, 2012; Kim & Abbas, 2010), and for research that provides quantitative data and metrics which move beyond anecdote, and which provide more reliable measures of the impact of library social media activity (Dickson & Holley, 2010; Glazer, 2012). Research on the use of social media by

higher education institutions in general is still limited, and evaluation of the impact of social media activities is not straightforward (Culnan et al., 2010), as few benchmarks exist and relationships between activity and outcomes are indirect (Busch, 2011). A range of research methodologies are reported in the literature investigating library use of social media, including: literature reviews (Dickson & Holley, 2010; Joint, 2010; Mallon, 2012), descriptive case studies (Aziz et al., 2010; Mawhinney, 2010; Morrow, 2010; Rees & Hopkins, 2009; Saylor et al., 2011; Walstrum et al., 2011), stakeholder interviews (Corrall & Roberts, 2012; Nguyen et al., 2012), harvesting descriptive statistics from sites (Aharony, 2012; Collins & Quan-Haase, 2012; Harinarayana & Raju, 2010; Mahmood & Richardson, 2011; Thornton, 2012), stakeholder surveys (Kim & Abbas, 2010; Lin et al., 2012; Salisbury et al., 2012; Wakeham, Roberts, Shelley, & Wells, 2012), and analysis of social media message content (Aharony, 2012; Chen et al., 2012; Chiu & Lin, 2012; Colburn & Haines, 2012; Phillips, 2011). Another approach to evaluation is network analysis (Culnan et al., 2010). The network data inherently created by social media tools represent the connections between participants as they interact, and can be used to make visible the previously elusive social processes at play, and to identify strategically important components and participants in the social network, and to show the development of the communication links over time (Smith et al., 2009).

The work presented here responds to the identified need for more quantitative research into the ways in which libraries are using social media for communication with their stakeholders. It uses publicly available data for analysis and visualization to characterize the engagement of one university library with two social media platforms currently popular with academic libraries. Both Twitter and Facebook usage are addressed in common and complementary ways that respond to the different functions and modes of use of both systems. The collected data are analyzed both statistically and graphically to identify the forms of Twitter and Facebook activity that engage library stakeholders in social media conversations. The work presented here is an initial investigation that provides useful insights, as well as offering a methodology for future research.

METHODOLOGY

A search was undertaken of Australian university library websites to locate those with an advertised link to Twitter and Facebook accounts specifically associated with the library. An inspection showed that one library in particular was relatively active on both Twitter and Facebook – this library was chosen for the case study documented here. A ruling was obtained from the relevant institutional human research ethics committee that the collection and use of publicly accessible historical Twitter and Facebook records in a manner that does not identify any individual did not require formal ethics approval for research purposes. The NCapture program (QSR International, 2012a) is able to capture all publicly available data (tweets and retweets) originating directly from a specific Twitter account, as well as data arising from a search for tweets originating from other accounts that mention a specific Twitter account. Similarly, NCapture can also capture all publicly available posts made by a specific Facebook account, as well as all follow-up comments associated with an original post.

The functioning of the Twitter system means that a significant (often multi-year) archive of tweets can be extracted directly from an account. However, the results from a search for mentions of an account are typically much more limited in quantity and time period. To build a continuous record of mentions of an account requires the routine capturing and compilation of Twitter search results. Over a six month period from 24 January to 24 July 2013, mentions of the library's Twitter account were systematically captured. At the end of that period, all of the direct Twitter data available from that library account were also captured – representing all tweets and retweets from the library over the period 28 March 2012 to 24 July 2013. So while Twitter activity

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/358281>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/358281>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)