



Do you Facebook? Usage and applications of Facebook pages among academic libraries in Malaysia

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KEYWORDS

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Abstract This paper explores the use and application of Facebook among Malaysian academic libraries in order to provide academic libraries with ideas for best practices in using social networking sites to better profile themselves and communicate effectively with their users. The research questions guiding this study were: (a) What are the extent and nature of institutional Facebook use by Malaysian academic libraries? (b) What information do Malaysian academic libraries deliver through Facebook page? This study employs content analysis to examine current uses of the library Facebook page. A checkpoint was developed to analyze the libraries' usage and application of Facebook page. A total of 14 academic libraries in Malaysia are using Facebook page as part of their services to users. However only three libraries are fully utilizing their Facebook page, and they have been identified as "Skaters" based on the 8-S Framework of Category Development for Facebook user. Most libraries are using their Facebook page for marketing and creating awareness of library services to their users.

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Introduction

As an effort to be a "third place" for their users in the new web order, many academic libraries have created their own library Facebook page to reach students before, during and after their university experience. Facebook is becoming a trend amongst library users that libraries just cannot

ignore (Breeding, 2007). Spomer (2008) opined that "Facebook is certainly something with which librarians ought to be familiar with, if not proficient", and the author further emphasized that Facebook is alive and well in the library profession. The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Research Planning and Review Committee (2010) reported that social networking sites (SNS) such as Facebook are one of the most important technological changes that are affecting academic libraries at present and in the near future.

Facebook defines itself "as a social utility that helps people communicate more efficiently with their friends,

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family and co-workers”(Facebook.com, 2010). Facebook provides users with the ability to personalize profiles with photos and information about activities, interests and location. A profile allows users to update and display personal information (Ganster & Schumacher, 2009). Spomer (2008) reported that when Facebook opened up its services in 2006, librarians immediately began to explore the possibilities to use it for their organizations. However, Facebook shut down all profiles representing libraries and other group entities, as Facebook argued that profiles should represent only individuals, not groups of people or organizations. Librarians were then forced either to create groups or to use their own profiles for the purposes of their libraries. Facebook pages, a hybrid between personal profiles and groups, are the latest option for librarians, and were made available in late 2007. It is a free organizational profile for business, performers, brands/products, public figure and non-profit groups. In this Facebook page, individual users may post comments, engage in discussions, share videos and photos, or merely identify themselves as so-called “fans”(Sokoloff, 2009). Facebook has changed the term “fans” to “people like this” in April 2010. Subsequently, Facebook launched a platform that allows third party programmers to create applications for instance, library-related applications such as JSTOR and WorldCat (Sodt & Summey, 2009).

Facebook is estimated to reach 600 million users in 2011 (Socialbakers.com, 2011a). Time magazine estimated that “one out of every dozen people on the planet has a Facebook account” (Grossman, 2010). In Malaysia, there are 10,075,420 Facebook users (as of January 2011) which is 38.51% of Malaysia total population (Socialbakers.com, 2011b). Statistics by Socialbakers.com shows that Millennials (aged 18–24) are the majority of Malaysian Facebook users (38%). The second largest group is those aged 25–34 years old (33%) followed by 35–44 years old age group (10%). The popularity of Facebook among Malaysians can be seen from Alexa.com, a premier ranking website, which ranked Facebook as number one most visited site among 100 sites in Malaysia (Alexa.com, 2010). Furthermore, Facebook phenomena among Malaysians is prevalence as Malaysia is among top ten growing countries in using Facebook in the last six month of 2010 (Socialbakers.com, 2011a).

This paper reports on an exploratory and descriptive study of Facebook adoption among academic libraries in Malaysia. The research questions guiding this study are as follows: (a) What are the extent and nature of institutional Facebook use by Malaysian academic libraries?; (b) What information that Malaysian academic libraries deliver through Facebook page? To answer these questions, we studied the presence of Malaysian academic libraries in Facebook, and their use and applications of this Web 2.0 technology.

Literature review

Searches done in library and information science (LIS) discipline databases show increasing scholarly articles on Facebook since 2006. These trends in the literature revealed that, scholars have begun to realize Facebook’s

growing significance to the LIS community. Librarians’ perspective in using Facebook in academic libraries can be found in the work of Charnigo and Barnett-Ellis (2007). Some librarians in their study viewed Facebook as a tool in delivering library services and communicating with patrons. Other respondents perceived it as a distraction and addiction that is outside the scope of a librarian’s job. Another study on uses of Facebook among 72 librarians Hendrix, Chiarella, Hasman, Murphy, and Zafron (2009) found that libraries used Facebook mainly to market the library, push out announcements to library users, post photos, provide chat reference, and have a presence in the social network. The time spent maintaining and updating a library Facebook page ranged from no weekly maintenance to 120 minutes a week. This study revealed that the majority of libraries surveyed (85%) did not have a Facebook page. The two most-cited reasons were the lack of time to set up and maintain a Facebook page and the belief that Facebook demonstrated little to no utility in an academic setting.

A study by Burhanna, Seeholzer, and Salem (2009) showed that Facebook and YouTube are part of students’ campus life and a “must activity” for them. However Harinarayana and Raju (2010) revealed that Facebook is not a popular Web 2.0 application used among academic libraries. In a study of Web 2.0 features among 57 university library web sites worldwide, Harinarayana and Raju (2010) found that only 5 libraries (8.77 percent) were using social networking tools and 3 libraries were using Facebook.

Librarians (Mack, Behler, Roberts, & Rimland, 2007) study found that the majority of reference questions were asked through Facebook compared to e-mails, in person consultation and telephone.. This showed that students must have found the ability to connect with a librarian through Facebook as a convenient and useful method of communication. However Ismail’s (2010) survey found student preference for using e-mail over Facebook when seeking research assistance. She indicated that “when catering to this new user group, the question that should be asked is not which new technologies and services librarians should implement at the library today but what new technologies and services, if any, will be most desired by the Net Gen users”.

Graham, Faix, and Hartman (2009), shared their library’s experiences in using Facebook applications such as group, photo album, discussion board, contact information and links to individual profiles that serve as an “Ask a Librarian” feature. For example, applications in Facebook related to library such as search application from JSTOR and Worldcat, and Visual Bookshelf. The library’s visibility across campus increased after librarian profiles were created and Facebook can be used as a tool to develop a professional relationship.

Secker (2008) explored the following uses of Facebook as a tool for libraries and librarians: JSTOR Search, LibGuides Librarian, Facebook Librarian, Books iRead, Bookshare. There are also various Library Catalogs available for searching from within Facebook including: COPAC Search, European Library Search, World Cat Search and UIUC Library catalog. The author perceived that providing services through a social networking site could have enormous benefits in terms of raising the profile of a library or a specific service. Librarians (Aziz, Boon, & Loh, 2010) study found out that “viral marketing” in Facebook help publicize

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