



Taylor & Francis Group
an **informa** business



Use of social media by the library

current practices and future opportunities

A white paper from Taylor & Francis



OCTOBER 2014



Why study social media in the library?

Social media has the potential to facilitate much **closer relationships** between libraries and their patrons – wherever users are based, and however they choose to learn about and access library services and resources. Current usage of social media by the library community generally remains ad hoc and somewhat experimental, but the uptake of these tools is accelerating, and they will likely play an **increasingly important role** in library service provision and outreach in the future.

This white paper has been researched and compiled by Taylor & Francis to provide an overview of current practices relating to the use by libraries of social media, from a world-wide perspective, against which individual institutions can benchmark their own activities and be inspired to try new approaches. **This white paper is just a start** – we plan to build from this a central web-based resource on social media for the library community that will provide ongoing updates, in-depth case studies and best practice guides. We hope this will become a valuable, **developing resource** that librarians will access and contribute to, so the entire community benefits from sharing ideas and experiences.

Please contact us at **communications@tandf.co.uk** to be alerted when we launch our social media information site for libraries later in 2014.

About Taylor & Francis Group

Taylor & Francis Group partners with researchers, scholarly societies, universities and libraries worldwide to bring knowledge to life. Our content spans all areas of Humanities, Social Sciences, Behavioral Sciences, Science, Technology and Medicine, and we are one of the world's leading publishers of scholarly journals, books, eBooks, text books and reference works.

Our network of offices has grown to include representatives in Oxford, New York, Philadelphia, Boca Raton, Boston, Melbourne, Singapore, Beijing, Tokyo, Kuala Lumpur, Stockholm, New Delhi and Johannesburg. This has enabled Taylor & Francis Group staff to provide local expertise and support to our editors, societies and authors, as well as tailored, efficient customer service to our library colleagues in institutions around the world.

We are dedicated to meeting the needs of the library community, and believe there is much to be gained by working together to navigate the ever-changing landscape of scholarly communication in all its forms.

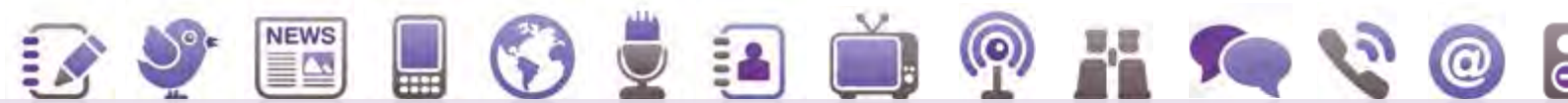
Research methodology

Our research program comprised of three focus groups (one held with UK-based librarians, one with librarians based in India, and one with US-based librarians); ten individual in-depth phone interviews; a Twitter party; an online survey (distributed in July 2014 with 497 responses); and desk research to identify relevant studies and commentary articles.



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1 Executive Summary

Just a decade ago, social media was seen by many as having little relevance for use in a professional context by librarians. In recent years there has been a sea change in attitudes. Social media is now widely used by librarians to fulfil a variety of objectives.

Taylor & Francis has collated a range of opinion and data within this white paper to provide an overview of how social media is currently used by librarians, for what purposes, and to what effect. Our research program comprised focus groups in the UK, USA and India; ten telephone interviews with thought-leaders from the library community; a Twitter party; an online survey (with 497 responses) and desk research to reference other relevant studies.

Uptake and frequency of use

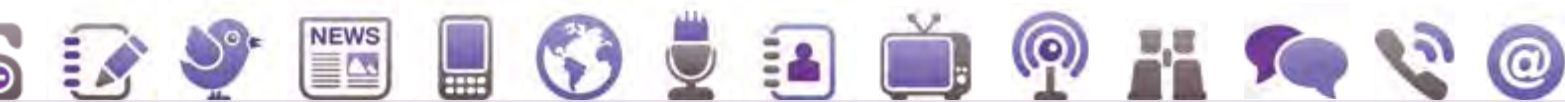
From our survey, over **70% of libraries are using social media tools**, and 60% have had a social media account for three years or longer. **30% of librarians are posting at least daily**. Facebook and Twitter remain the most popular channels currently, but the range of channels being used is expanding rapidly; there is a particular acceleration of interest in visual channels such as YouTube, Pinterest and Snapchat. Specialist research networking sites such as ResearchGate and Academia.edu are seen as having potential, but their perceived disconnect with publishers and the library community is a barrier. Currently there is limited differentiation in how social media channels are used; similar objectives and tactics apply across all social media tools, but it is envisaged that this will change rapidly with strategies becoming increasingly channel-specific.



Social media objectives

Libraries use social media to fulfil a range of objectives, with most focused on **promotion** (visibility for and usage of the library service and resources). However, broadcast/informational communications are increasingly being supplemented with two-way communications designed to solicit feedback (e.g. for collection development), offer real-time customer service and build engagement with users. Social media is also increasingly being seen as a **collection management tool**, offering flexible ways to present resources (e.g. YouTube for video delivery) and categorize them (e.g. folksonomies). **Outreach** is also seen as important – for example, helping librarians increase their visibility and connections within the broader library community; also, for assisting in the promotion of the work of their faculty. Use of social media for enhancing **teaching and learning** is currently a lower priority, but this will likely become an important activity in the near future, and librarians with their growing experience of using social media tools are well-placed to help develop institutional capabilities.





Opportunities and challenges

The main opportunities associated with libraries using social media are seen to be related to its **low cost**, its ability to take the library service to users in their preferred spaces, the opportunity to build a sense of **community** between the library and its users, to support co-development of collections and help keep librarians updated on industry news and initiatives. Challenges are the considerable time that is required to maintain an active social media presence, the pressure to respond instantly to service queries, the **variability of skills** across library staff for using social media effectively, striking the right tone between professional and personal, coordinating activities across the institution to avoid duplication, **maintaining visibility** for the library brand and copyright issues relating to hosting library resources on social media sites.

Policies and management

Librarians are divided on the benefits of introducing formalized social media policies and plans. About a third of libraries responding to the Taylor & Francis survey had a policy in place, but over 40% had no plans to introduce one. There are some clear differences of opinion across librarians in how much social media can or should be centrally controlled. Some believe that representing the library as a professional function with a consistent tone is the priority, while others believe that a more **human approach** is important, with individual staff free to bring their own ideas and personalities to social media activities. Those in larger institutions are finding that a level of organization and scheduling is required to avoid duplication and ensure a reasonably constant flow of communications and interaction is maintained. Generally, it's felt that libraries should concentrate on **best practice and guidelines** rather than overly-prescriptive plans and policies.

Effectiveness and assessment

There is limited information available on the overall effectiveness of social media within the library in terms of achieving **specific measureable goals**. Some case study-based reports have been able to demonstrate increased borrowings from the library, and many of the librarians we spoke with cited ad hoc examples of success. Frequency of postings and responsiveness have also been linked in several studies to high user engagement. All librarians we spoke with agreed that it was difficult to prove **return on effort** and that the time required to do this was a major barrier to more comprehensive analysis of impact. Some libraries are beginning to use social media management and reporting tools like Hootsuite to assist with this, but the lack of any common framework for evaluating social media impact in the library in a more structured way means that benchmarking opportunities are limited. Several recently published studies have begun to propose a **framework for evaluation**, so it is likely that assessment against commonly agreed metrics will become an increasingly important part of social media activity within the library in the near future.

The future for social media in the library

In general terms, there is agreement that it is difficult to predict how social media and its use will evolve, so the priority for most of the librarians we spoke with is to remain experimental and flexible. There is little doubt that use of social media is well on its way to becoming an integral part of how people communicate with each other in the 21st century. A more integrated future is imagined, with library services and collections becoming more deeply embedded with external sites. Some librarians see their role becoming one of helping users find paths through complex content, and directing them towards making useful connections as efficiently as possible – potentially by merging smart applications and human crowdsourcing, with the smart component drawing on the human element by using social sources to retrieve information that is personalized and relevant to a specific user. Not surprisingly, an **overwhelming 88% of respondents** to our survey felt that social media would become more important to the library in the future.





2 Current Social Media Practices

2.1 Overview

In this section we examine current practices and preferences relating to library usage of social media. Our research highlights there is currently a high degree of experimentation and variation in how social media is currently being used by the library community; not surprising, as these channels are evolving all the time and gathering information on the impact of social media activities remains challenging (see section 4.0).

2.1.1 Early experiments with social media

In a study from the mid 2000s (Cantrell and Havens¹), most library directors in the US when questioned about social media said they did not think that libraries had a role in social networking. Early experiments with Facebook and MySpace however were beginning to show promise by 2008, as outlined in an article by Chu and Nalani-Meulemans², which showed that librarians displaying their online status as 'on' or 'off' helped users identify and connect with them. In another article from 2007 (Charnigo and Barnett-Ellis³), the Kimbel Library was highlighted as providing a range of services through Facebook, such as library tours and promotion of resources. The same article reported an additional and unexpected benefit was that these activities also helped forge closer working relationships between staff, simply by virtue of getting to know each other on a more personal level through their social media accounts.

2.1.2 Social media becomes mainstream

A more recent study from 2012 (Kai-Wah Chu and Du⁴) shows how use of social media by the library has now become mainstream. In this survey of libraries in Asia, North America and Europe, **71% were found to be using social media** tools with a further 13% saying they planned to use them. Facebook and Twitter were the most commonly used tools.

This relatively high level of uptake is very much reflected in the research we have undertaken at Taylor & Francis. In our own survey with the international library community, conducted in July 2014 and for which we received 497 responses, **over 70% of librarians now feel that the use of social media is important**. Most libraries (68%) were managing between one and four social media accounts, with only 10% saying they had none. Frequency of usage is relatively high as well, with our survey showing that almost a third of libraries (30%) post to social media at least once a day. Our survey also highlights that librarians have been experimenting with this media for some time, with 61% having had a social media account for three years or longer.





2.1.3 Reasons for using social media

Librarians have several objectives that they are using social media to help them achieve, which can be summarized as follows:

- To seek opinion on the library and its services for self-evaluation purposes, to encourage debate and to instigate an opportunity to respond to library user feedback;
- To reach library users in their homes or 'virtual spaces' as today's modern online library is no longer solely relying on its physical space as an access point;
- To publicize events, services, news and presence;
- To encourage collaboration, for example through collection development and building repositories of collaborative content specific to certain user groups;
- To increase usage of library collections by promoting new and existing content;
- To connect with other librarians and keep abreast of industry news;
- To build a sense of community with both users and also with other institutions and industry contacts.

2.1.4 Advantages of using social media

Advantages and benefits for librarians and libraries when using social media are seen to be:

- Financially the costs of using social media are perceived to be low;
- It requires little training;
- It promotes library services and disseminates news quickly, delivering this information more directly to library users;
- It increases engagement and interactions with library users;
- It helps gather feedback to enhance user services;
- The promotion of library holdings via social media can help increase usage of content;
- It enhances communication both within the library and with other departments;
- It can be used for outreach activities through onward sharing, well beyond the institution itself, helping build connections and reputation more broadly.

In our survey, when asked to rate a number of opportunities relating to use of social media by the library, the most significant opportunity amongst those presented was seen to be: (a) to raise the professional profile of the library (**72%** felt this was an opportunity), (b) followed by the freedom to connect regularly with users (**64%** felt this was an opportunity) and (c) the opportunity to collaborate with other departments within the organization (**57%** felt this was an opportunity).

¹ De Rosa C, Cantrell J, Havens A et al. (2007). Sharing, privacy and trust in our networked world: A report to the OCLC membership, Dublin, OH: OCLC Online Computer Library Center.

² Chu M and Nalini-Meulemans Y (2008) The problems and potential of MySpace and Facebook usage in academic libraries. *Internet Reference Services Quarterly* 13(1): 69–85.

³ Charnigo L and Barnett-Ellis P (2007) Checking out Facebook.com: The impact of a digital trend on academic libraries. *Information Technology and Libraries* 26(1): 23–34.

⁴ Kai-Wah Chu, S. & Du, H. S. (2012) Social Networking Tools for Academic Libraries. *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*, 45 (1), pp. 64-75.



2.1.5 Challenges of using social media

Challenges associated with using social media in libraries include the following:

- Social media can require considerable time commitment from library staff;
- Social media can require technological expertise, for example customizing applications to provide access to online catalogs;
- It can be a challenge for librarians to use an informal but presentable tone, or deliver social media content in a bilingual or multilingual region;
- Levels of interest in and skills with using social media vary enormously across library staff;
- There are limited funds to support more advanced social media usage/features and the training that would be required to enable this;
- A library needs to work hard to maintain engagement with library users and attract popularity (followers, likes and so on);
- It can be difficult to maintain library branding for content/resources made accessible via social media;
- There are potential copyright issues when using social media such as YouTube to build collections;
- External factors such as Internet connectivity, technological infrastructure and government restrictions on the use of social media may restrict access.

In the Taylor & Francis survey, when asked to rate a number of challenges relating to use of social media by the library, the most significant challenge was seen to be: (a) **time/resource** (67% felt this was a challenge), followed by (b) judging an **appropriate tone** for communications (formal v. informal; 64% felt this was a challenge), and (c) **making people aware** of the library's social media activities (61% felt this was a challenge).

On the subject of an appropriate tone for social media communications, most participants in our focus groups agreed that while it was important to maintain a professional tone, it was equally important to show a fun side at appropriate moments too, enabling the library to **connect with its users** in a human and engaging way, to supplement more formalized communications.

From UK focus group:

"We are very approachable via social media ... doesn't have to be deliberately fun, but if entertaining, people might be more willing to follow you."

Some of the librarians we spoke with raised the challenge of the increasingly international nature of their user-base, not only in language terms but also location; social media announcements had to be scheduled to deal with a variety of time zones.

From US focus group:

"When we post in French, we post really early in the morning so it's hitting people where the most French speakers are, in another hemisphere, either in Africa or in Europe. If we post early, then we get really high response rates for those, but if we post in what for them is the middle of the night, crickets are chirping."



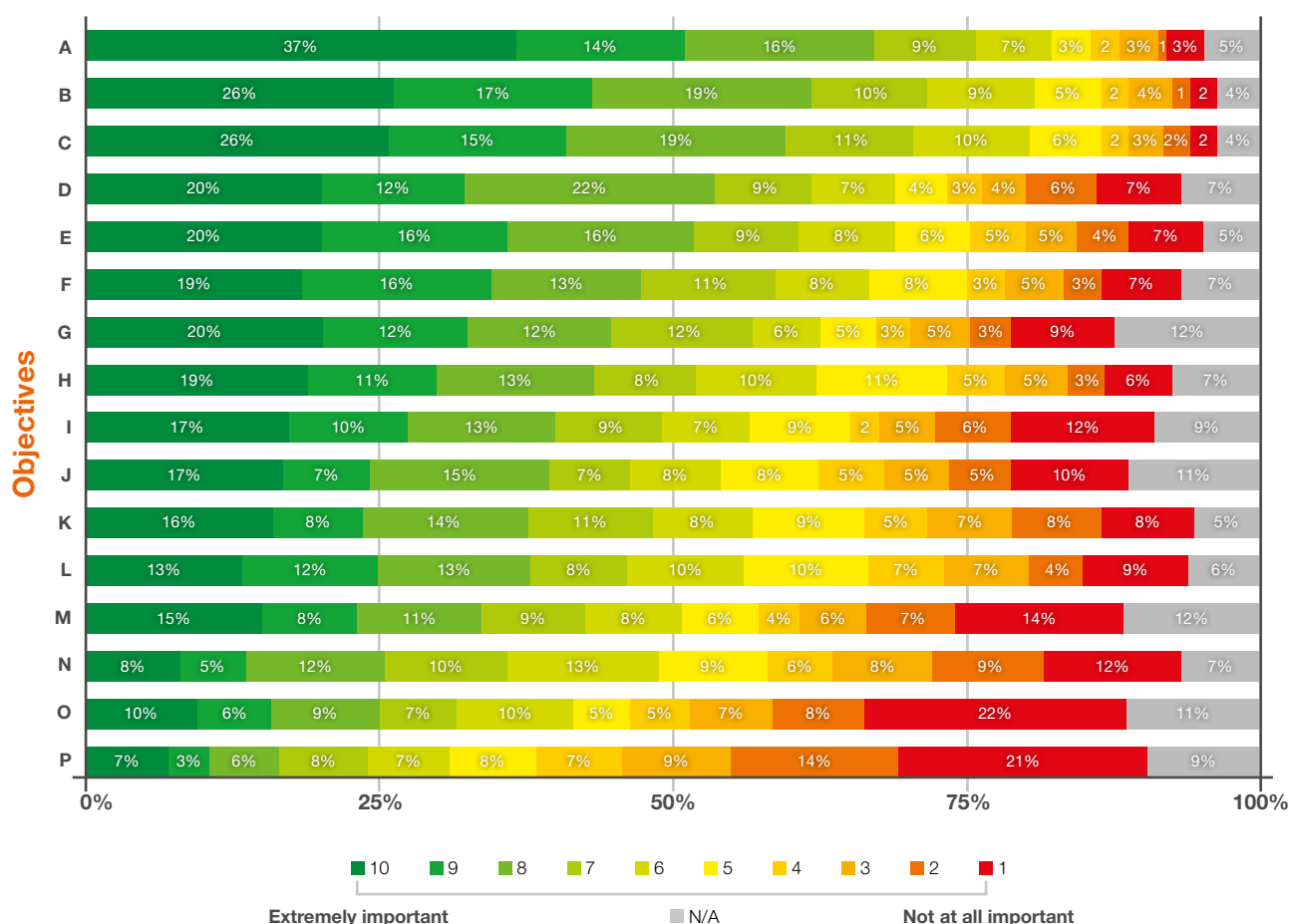




2.2 Social Media Objectives

In our survey we asked librarians to rate a range of objectives that usage of social media could support.

In your opinion, please rate how important Social Media is to achieve each of the following objectives in your library, where 1 is not important at all and 10 is extremely important.



Objectives

- | | |
|--|--|
| A To promote events | J To connect with distance learners |
| B To promote library services | K As a customer services tool- complaints, suggestions, enquiries, feedback |
| C To promote resources/collections at the library | L To highlight subject specific information |
| D To update on library refurbishments | M To connect with potential students |
| E To promote new acquisitions | N As a teaching tool to promote information literacy, technology and writing tips (not library based) |
| F To promote library guides, exhibition guides | O To promote courses |
| G To connect with new students joining the university | P As a research tool to locate official documents and studies |
| H To engage with the academic community | |
| I To connect with the wider community beyond the university e.g. the town in which the institution is based | |



According to our survey, the top three objectives are to: (a) promote events, (b) promote library resources/collections and (c) promote library services. The results of this survey therefore indicate that social media is primarily being used by libraries currently to **fulfil marketing objectives**. Engagement with faculty and students is not far behind in terms of priorities. Using social media in a teaching or learning capacity is a much lower priority currently; the three lowest scoring objectives were: (a) using social media as a teaching tool, (b) as a tool for promoting courses, and (c) as a research/discovery tool to find relevant materials – perhaps reflecting that these objectives are less core to the traditional role of a library.

In a subsequent question in the Taylor & Francis survey, we asked which social media channels were used to fulfil which objectives. There was very little variation by objective when it came to which channels were being used – indicating that although there is recognition that different social media tools might be used in different ways, the reality is that at the moment, most activities via social media are relatively generic across channels.

Facebook dominates for being used to deliver multiple objectives, followed by Twitter and then blogs. The only notable variations that showed more specificity are a tendency for services like ResearchGate to be used solely as a research/discovery tool and for Pinterest to be used mostly for promoting new acquisitions and library resources. But even here, ResearchGate and Pinterest lagged behind Facebook, Twitter and blogs as a tool for achieving those same objectives. We might anticipate that in the near future we will see more channel-specific strategies emerging as librarians build experience in terms of which tools are best for which purposes.

Librarians are divided on whether social media should be used primarily as a tool to **‘take the library to the user’**, as opposed to promoting the library as a physical entity to bring users to the building. Some regional differences emerged here in our focus groups, with librarians in India feeling a stronger inclination towards the latter objective, and the US/UK librarians, the former.

From India-based focus group:

“We use social media to bring users back to the physical library.”

From UK-based focus group:

“The library is a programme, not just a building.”

However, the idea of moving into a completely virtual relationship with users was not seen as desirable.

From a US-based librarian interview:

“The librarian’s role of content curator remains the same as it was fifty or a hundred years ago where we select, acquire and disseminate our collections and information services to patrons. The only difference is that the scale of digital resources has evolved to a point where we need to find a balance between the two worlds.”





2.3 Channel preferences

2.3.1 Popular social media channels

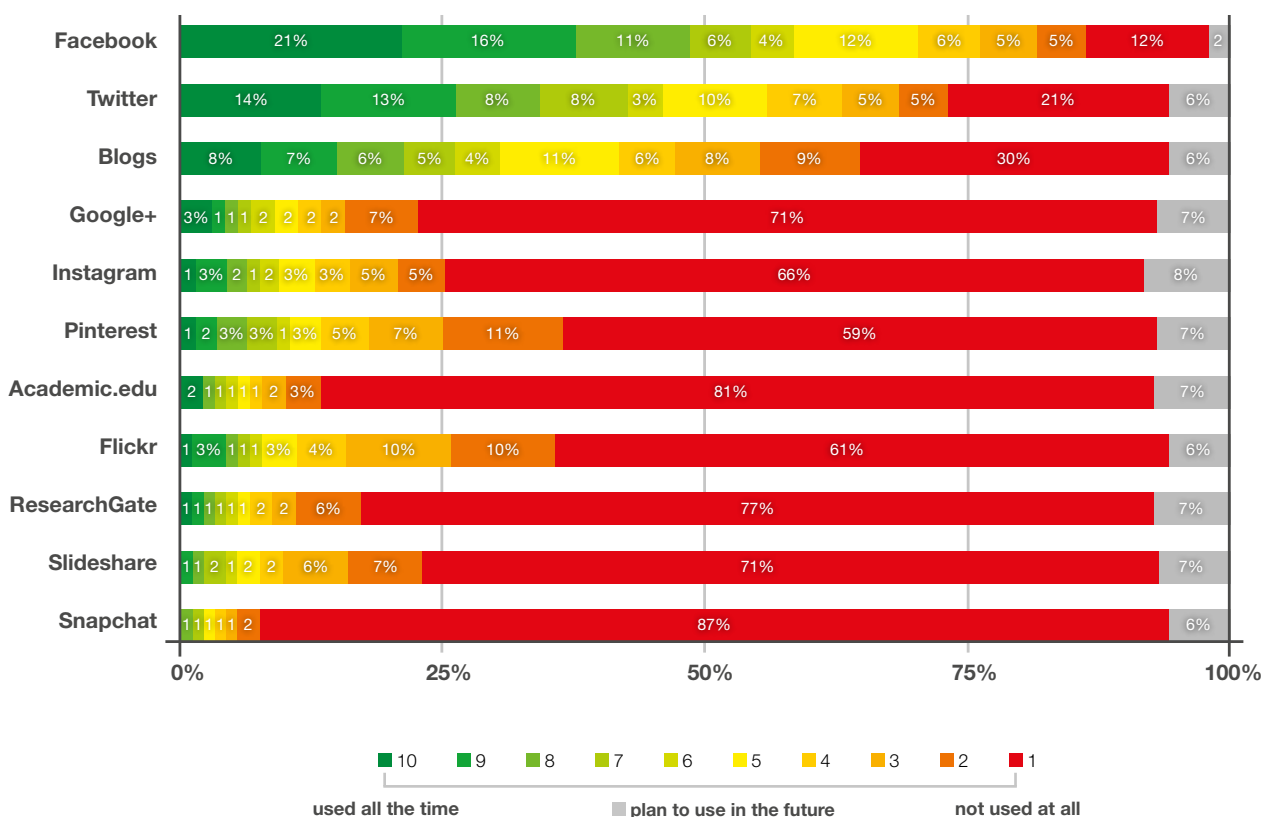
Studies in recent years have placed Twitter and Facebook as the most used social media tools in academic libraries. In a survey of public libraries in the US, Facebook was most used (Dowd 2013⁵). A recent study (Gauntner Witte 2014⁶) has shown that libraries are primarily using Twitter and Facebook to market the library with content generated to promote library news and information; they are less used for linking to external sources or for sharing content. In a survey from this same study, the content of Facebook posts was analyzed, with most posts falling into a 'miscellaneous' category – suggesting that librarians are still exploring which types of posts are most appropriate and effective.

From US focus group:

“Our main channels are Twitter and Facebook ... but we're also on Slideshare, YouTube and Tumblr.”

Through the Taylor & Francis survey we identified a range of social media channels in use by librarians. The following graph summarizes their popularity.

Please rate how often you use the following Social Media channels in the library on a scale of 1-10 where 1 is not used at all and 10 is used all the time



⁵ Dowd, N. (May 2013) Social Media: Libraries Are Posting, but Is Anyone Listening? Library Journal. <http://lj.libraryjournal.com/2013/05/marketing/social-media-libraries-are-posting-but-is-anyone-listening/#>

⁶ Gauntner Witte, G. (2014) Content Generation and Social Network Interaction within Academic Library Facebook Pages. Journal of Electronic Resources Librarianship, 26 (2), pp. 89-100.



As with other studies, Facebook and Twitter dominate, followed by blogs. The social media channels most frequently mentioned by our focus groups and in our phone interviews were also Twitter and Facebook, with the latter particularly key for engaging with students. Twitter is felt to be more effective for communicating with researchers and other institutions. Blogs are used for sharing information and news.

From UK focus group:

“We Tweet first and then use Facebook. Institutions follow us on Twitter but students follow us on Facebook.”

“If you give a link to a YouTube video [users] can just watch the YouTube video of how to use the catalog.”

In our interviews and focus groups, librarians said that YouTube is used for providing instructional information (e.g. how to use the library catalog) and for collection management.

From a US-based librarian interview:

“As a collection management tool, YouTube is unparalleled. [We] made a switch from Content DM to YouTube because [we] realized [our] digital video collections were not accessible to the common user ... It became clear that a social media platform such as YouTube was the key to unlocking the great collections that we have online for our future audiences.”

Current research-focused social networking sites such as Academia.edu and ResearchGate are seen as being of interest, but their lack of connectivity with libraries and publishers is seen as a problem – particularly where copyright is being broken.

From US focus group:

“There might be a way to tie in with sites that are like academic networking sites where research is being posted, but not at this time yet, necessarily connecting to those libraries or the source of that publication.”

Librarians appreciate the need to remain experimental and flexible when deciding which social media channels to use, adding or dropping media based on user popularity.

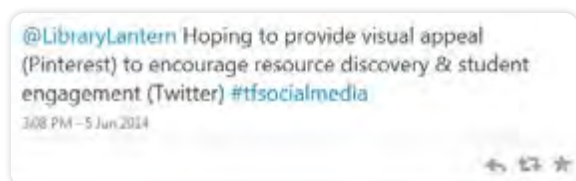


2.3.2 Rise of visual channels

In our focus groups and interviews librarians reported an accelerating uptake of visual channels, such as Slideshare, YouTube, Pinterest, Flickr, and Instagram. YouTube is being used for educational purposes, Pinterest for showcasing new acquisitions, and Flickr for posting photos of library activities such as a refurbishment.

“We use Pinterest for new acquisitions in the last 6 months, with a new board each month.”

From T&F Twitter party:



Part of the rise of the usage of more visual channels seemed to be reflecting changes in the way in which people are responding to visual over verbal messages.

Multiple sources⁷ report that in social media marketing, visual postings attract higher levels of engagement.

We're able to **process images 60,000 times faster** than text, so part of this preference may be reflective of a growing preference as the volume of information that we're exposed to every day continues to grow.

From US-based focus group:

“School librarians are saying children search by image first.”

In addition, images can resonate quickly and easily on an emotional level. In 1986, a 3M-sponsored study at the University of Minnesota School of Management (Vogel, Dickson, Lehman⁸) found that presenters who use visual aids are **43% more effective** in persuading audience members to take a desired course of action than presenters who don't use visuals.

With information overload continuing to be a problem, a continued move towards greater use of image-based social media channels by librarians is highly likely.





2.3.3 Channel strategies

There is a growing recognition amongst the librarians that we spoke with of the need to develop more strategic approaches to using social media. It is widely acknowledged that different services have different strengths and weaknesses, and also different user groups.

From US-based focus group:





“We’ve really carefully looked at the different platforms ... We’re just trying to be a lot more targeted, just looking at other universities that have just jumped on a lot of different things and then they don’t go well, and rather than pulling them we just are trying to take it a step at a time.”

“Our users ... want information via Twitter, but they want social, visual things on Facebook.”

From India-based focus group:

“The point being made is having groups specified to the social media relevance ... otherwise that’s a lot of people getting a lot of information and not knowing what to do with it.”

The following table illustrates some of the ways commonly used social media tools are being used by librarians:

SOCIAL MEDIA	USES
Twitter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Distribute library news and information ■ Provide customer service ■ Build connections with researchers ■ Build connections with other librarians and institutions
Facebook 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Distribute library news and information ■ More social and less formal than Twitter – share photographs and run competitions ■ Arrange events including tracking RSVPs and sending event updates ■ Engagement with students
Pinterest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Promote general library collections, digital and archive special collections and information literacy ■ Set up of online repositories for students to pin researched references as part of collaborative group work ■ Display book titles to save time browsing and promote new titles ■ Provide an arena for students and course leaders to pin reviewed and recommended reading for a particular topic ■ Develop communities with other online libraries
YouTube 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Streaming film collections ■ Instructional ‘how to’ videos teaching information literacy skills and how to use library services and resources

There are also a number of other social media products that are being used by librarians that reflect regional preferences and the need for the specific functions offered by niche applications.

⁷ <http://blog.hubspot.com/blog/tabid/6307/bid/33423/19-Reasons-You-Should-Include-Visual-Content-in-Your-Marketing-Data.aspx>

⁸ Vogel, D. R. Dickson, G. W. Lehman, J.A. (1986) Persuasion and the Role of Visual Presentation Support: The UM/3M Study. <http://misrc.umn.edu/workingpapers/fullpapers/1986/8611.pdf>



2.4 Channel applications

As highlighted earlier in section 2.2, social media is currently used by librarians to help fulfil a range of objectives. These can be loosely grouped into a number of key areas, ranging from customer service provision through to collection development and outreach.

2.4.1 Customer service

One of the most common uses of social media currently is to provide customer service to library patrons. Twitter in particular is used for this purpose.

From the T&F Twitter party:



A key challenge relating to customer service provision via social media is responding in a timely fashion, as users expect quick answers to their questions.

From India-based focus group:

“At times there are so many postings and because of other commitments we are not able to reply as fast as we ought to.”

Institutions in our focus groups reported **declining usage of websites** for accessing library service information, with some suggesting that these pages were now used primarily by external audiences. However, librarians were still putting effort into maintaining current information on them. It was felt that social media – because of its immediacy and transient nature – was a better way to provide ongoing updates of information that was changing with any degree of frequency. Emails are still used for important reminders.

From UK-based focus group:

“The website was at its peak three years ago. Now, for example if there is snow closure, the last place they would look is the website; but it is the first place my colleagues would go to update information.”

2.4.2 User engagement

One of the benefits of social media frequently mentioned in our focus groups was its potential to help create and build **strongly connected communities**.

From India-based focus group:

“So I think this is a find in social media that I’m slowly very well connected; I feel I’m connected and then people know what you’re doing.”

One institution in our UK focus group was using polling software (GoSoapBox) to encourage interaction with students – adding a button to Blackboard to enable users to post ideas, which could then be voted on, and the information discussed on a monthly basis by senior managers. Not only was this felt to increase interaction, but also that it encouraged a sense of co-responsibility/ownership of issues and opportunities with library users.

From US-based focus group:

“One of the opportunities with social media is listening to your community ... I think that’s primarily why we have a Twitter account, and we have also claimed our Foursquare location, so we kind of can listen and monitor and do that kind of work, so that’s yielded some pretty positive reviews and results.”





2.4.3 Collection usage and discovery

Librarians in our focus groups were using social media to encourage more usage of their collections – particularly core databases – but current activities here were diverse and ad hoc. In section 2.2, we highlighted that, from the results of our survey, promoting the library's collection was within the top three objectives that a library has for using social media.

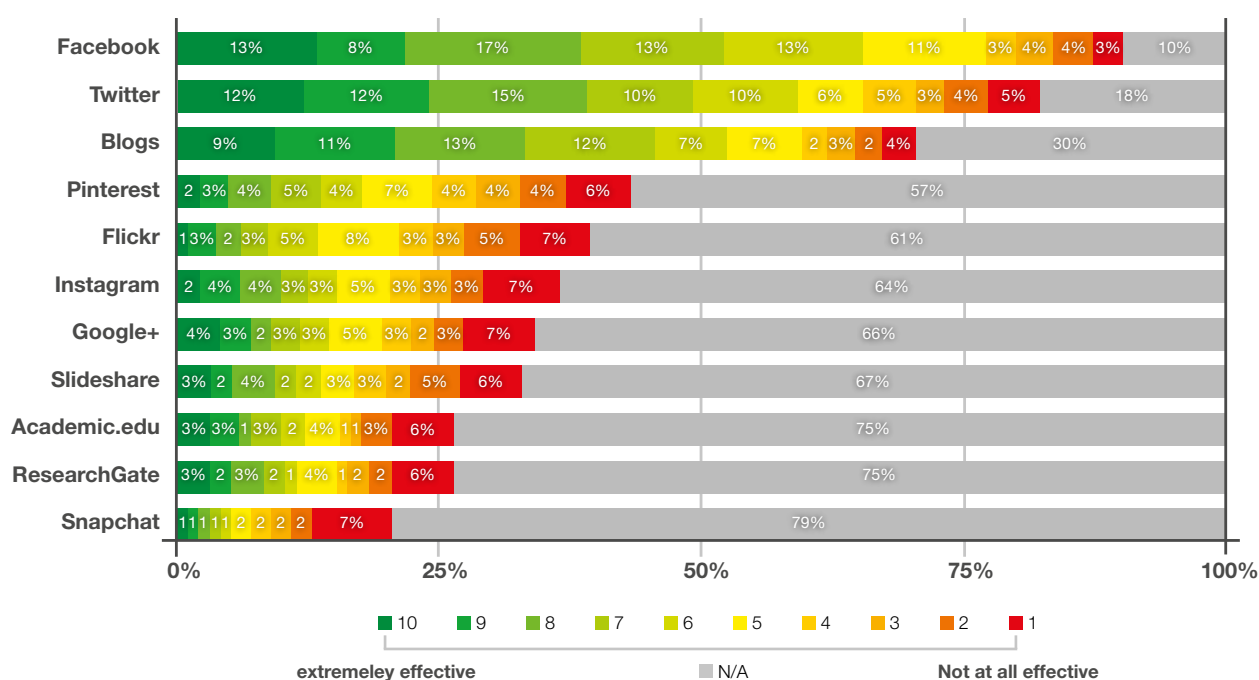
From India-based focus group:

“The library can promote the best of its catalog and the content of the catalog.”

The key challenge in using social media to promote library resources was felt to be the niche interests of users, making it difficult for the library to serve up tailored communications. One suggestion was for the library to work more closely with subject experts in using social media to help engage users with highly relevant content.

In the Taylor & Francis survey, we asked how effective a range of social media channels are for increasing the discoverability of library resources. The following graph shows how the various channels are rated for effectiveness, with a score of 10 indicating extremely effective, and a score of 1 indicating not effective at all.

In your opinion, please rate how effective each of the following Social Media channels are in making information more discoverable in the library on a scale of 1-10 where 1 is not at all effective and 10 is extremely effective.



This chart illustrates the spread of social media channels being used to enhance discoverability of library resources, with most being rated as effective. It is interesting to compare this to frequency of use of social media channels by librarians (2.3.1) – where Facebook, Twitter and blogs scored most highly; ResearchGate, Academia.edu and Snapchat were amongst the lesser-used channels (usage rates in our survey were 3% of librarians using ResearchGate to promote library resources and 0.3% using Snapchat). Perhaps this indicates that there is a belief that these services could be effective (or are effective for peer-to-peer social media activities), but at the moment they aren't highly used by librarians.

The main social media channels currently used to promote library resources, according to our survey, are: (a) Facebook (71% use this channel), (b) Twitter (55%), (c) blogs (42%) and (d) Pinterest (13%).

Several librarians we spoke with highlighted the growing usage of social media as a research tool.

From US-based librarian interview:

“People do not normally use Facebook, Twitter, or Pinterest for research, but once they are shown how to do so, they are amazed at what they can find – government documents, links to research studies, historical images and more.”



2.4.4. Collection development and management

The power of social media for encouraging dialogue with users was frequently referred to in our discussions with librarians, creating for example opportunities for cooperative collection development. Listening was felt to be as important as broadcasting communications.

From US-based focus group:

"I'm continually hearing from faculty and students [via social media] about books they love and that maybe we don't have yet and that I should order, or that weren't even on my radar."

"We use Goodreads and Pinterest a good bit to highlight our new books ... It's cool because when I'm connected with our user community on Goodreads, I also see the reviews they're posting on books, which is awesome for collection development purposes."

Social media was also cited by several of the librarians that we spoke with as a potentially powerful collection management tool – both for hosting institutional resources (e.g. videos on YouTube) and also for transforming digital cataloguing.

From a US-based librarian phone interview:

"YouTube as a social media tool allowed for me to do a complete reworking of the way digital cataloguing takes place. We moved from a rigid taxonomy to a folksonomy."

2.4.5 Teaching and learning

As highlighted earlier in section 2.2, the Taylor & Francis survey shows that the use of social media as a teaching and learning tool isn't currently a high priority for librarians. Social media is currently used as a channel for communicating about educational resources rather than delivering them – other tools such as Moodles were more typically used for educational purposes.

From UK-based focus group:

"A lot of our tools are Web based, hosted on our website, and then we advertise these on social media."

However, some librarians we spoke with cited some progressive approaches to using social media for learning purposes, with an emphasis on collaboration.

From US-based librarian interview:

"The trend in education now is to create environments that foster collaborative learning. Faculty have ditched textbooks and course management systems in exchange for a Facebook page for their class, or a wiki, or a blog. These online environments are fun; students already know how to use them and are more motivated to comment, discuss and share in these environments than a dry CMS."

Social media sites that support video and webcasting are felt to be the most effective for educational services.

From US focus group:

"One of the projects that the liaison librarians are working on, part of outreach and part of teaching is their getting more knowledge about ... screencasting. So they can work on developing particular tutorials, or just small bites of information about their collections."

Some libraries were using social media to instruct their users in information literacy skills, building critical appraisal of resources through examining a wide range of channels with information on a particular topic.

From US-based focus group:

"We purposefully include assignments which require the students to use social media to do research about artists that they're going to see in performance or research ... We talk about the efficacy of what you see ... and how one needs to think about what you're seeing in this age of things being digitized, and being a smart user of information."

This is likely to be an area of significant change over the coming years. In a report produced by The Education Foundation⁹ (2013), and sponsored by Facebook, social media is presented as a tool for supporting traditional classroom learning, enabling 'out of hours' learning, facilitation communication between educators, students and parents, and enhancing digital skills and citizenship.



2.4.6 Outreach

Librarians in our focus groups are actively using social media for outreach, generally focused on two key objectives: (a) promoting the work of faculty; and (b) connecting with the broader library community.

In terms of promoting research output, several librarians were using social media to ensure that the work of their faculty is made available as widely as possible, both through using the library's own channels and also through research-focused services such as Mendeley.

From US focus group:

"We have a page where we list all the recent publications by faculty in that department and a list of all the publications by alumni and faculty over the years that we do link out to our catalog again and it would be the same thing that wouldn't get it, but the information would be there. I'm trying to think of ways to get that more widely broadcast."

"[As a research institution] we're more concerned about, are we getting our researchers materials out to scholarly platforms? ... Our materials can be found in Mendeley so they can be added to different collections and whatnot ... we will create thematic groups with their papers ... The groups will allow a homepage where researchers are talking, so we put a high priority on getting our researchers into these groups and getting them to engage with us there."

Social media is also seen as an important way for an institution to grow its connections externally, particularly with the broader library community.

From US-based focus group:

"I find Tumblr and Twitter very useful in engaging with the larger library world, just getting in touch and knowing other librarians are sharing ideas and hearing each other."

⁹ Fordham, I. (2013) Facebook Guide for Educators: a tool for teaching and learning, The Education Foundation <http://www.ednfoundation.org/2013/06/21/facebook-guide-for-educators/>



3 Social media policies and management

Within most of the institutions represented, the librarians have been early pioneers in using social media. Uptake by other staff groups within Universities has been accelerating – sometimes leading to conflict over the differing philosophies of central control versus a more distributed and informal approach.

From US-based focus group:

“We have representations of most of the different social media tools out there ... departmental libraries have Twitter feeds or Facebook pages, websites, we have different blogs ... there doesn't seem to be a smooth way to collaborate....”

As social media usage increases, librarians are increasingly introducing policies to assist in the management of timing, tone and content. It can be difficult to get the balance right between centralised control and individual freedom.

From a US-based librarian interview:

“The pros of the social media policy are that they remind us that we are posting as the institution, not the individual. The cons are that some people perceive that it restricts creativity and spontaneity.”

In our survey, **28% of libraries** had already implemented a social media policy and 30% were planning to. However, a substantial proportion (42%) had no plans for introducing a policy – perhaps indicative of the relatively early stage that libraries are still at with experimenting with social media, making it difficult to establish firm guidelines. Some links to examples of library social media policies are provided by CUNY Academic Commons, together with examples and case studies of how libraries are using social media¹⁰.

The requirement for a level of scheduling is becoming more urgent, as with more staff using these channels, lack of centralized management is leading to duplication of messages – particularly relating to blogs where several institutions aggregate decentralized blogs into one central resource.

From UK-based focus group:

“In our department they have policies in place for social media – who can have official channels, so channels don't spring up everywhere and no one knows who's in charge of them...”

“Consistency in kind of tone as well I think is important to maintain.”

Also, without some form of plan, librarians fear that nothing will get done: a rota is an effective way to ensure that social media activities are built into the institutional workflow. However, in a blog entry¹¹ from 2012 by Troy Swanson (Department Chair and Teaching & Learning Librarian at Moraine Valley Community College) on the subject of social media planning, Swanson warns of ‘over thinking’ social media and encourages libraries to avoid creating detailed social media plans (which can be very time-consuming) and instead concentrate on defining policies, workflows, best practice and guidelines. Consensus seems to be that this is an experimental process that should be guided by a loose framework and set of principles with **flexible goals**.

In our survey, only 25% of librarians said that they currently schedule social media activities; 17% following a monthly or weekly plan and 8% an annual plan. The remaining 75% said activities were ad hoc.

One of the challenges raised in our UK focus group was the **varying skills and ability** relating to the use of social media within the library team.

¹⁰ http://commons.gc.cuny.edu/wiki/index.php/Best_Practices_in_Social_Media_for_Academic_Libraries#Examples_of_academic_library-specific_policies

¹¹ Swanson, T. (11th December 2012). Your library does not need a social plan. *Tame the Web*. <http://tametheweb.com/2012/12/11/your-library-does-not-need-a-social-media-plan/>

**From UK-based focus group:**

"Before I came on, the reference librarians were the only ones doing the social media, so everybody kind of had this diffused responsibility for it, which meant that sometimes people were posting a lot and some people weren't posting at all, and some people were posting terrible things, some people were really good ..."

Increasingly, librarians are considering creating specialist roles to assist with social media usage, to ensure it is used effectively.

From US-based focus group:

"I have a position coming open ... and I'm thinking about making it a marketing specialist in collection development."

This view was backed up in our survey, with 73% of respondents stating that they believed **more roles dedicated to social media** would appear in the library in the future.

At the same time, it was acknowledged that all key library staff needed to maintain a level of activity/presence to ensure they were personally available to their users, rather than delegating social media activities to administrative staff. To assist with this, more training was envisaged to embed skills deep within the community.

From India-based focus group:

"The librarian should be the social administrator."

"Social media ... should be part of the curriculum of the library schools today."

In our survey, we asked librarians how many people within the library looked after social media accounts. Almost half of those that answered (44%) said three or more members of their team were involved; only 22% had delegated this to a single role. Some libraries divide social media activities by topic, and then appoint topic experts to comment on these regularly.

The blurring of professional and personal boundaries was frequently mentioned by librarians using social media accounts for both purposes.

From US-based focus group:

"A lot of my personal networks get meshed in with these social networks for the library, and the line gets a little blurred on Tumblr, on Facebook, on Twitter – it's all fuzzy."

Social media has to be used carefully, and responsibly – relevance of information and not abusing the ease of communication that social media brings with it are key.

From US-based focus group:

"Students want you to be where you are, but not too much. They said we'll be friends with you on Facebook, we'll follow you on Twitter, but just like don't post too much, because then I will get rid of you."

The importance of having a clear strategy with well-defined objectives was raised in our focus group discussions and interviews.

From India-based focus group:

"I'm just wondering if there is clarity on the goal? When a certain library decides that we want Facebook ... what are the key things that you are trying to do?"







4 Effectiveness of social media

Publically available information on the effectiveness of social media in helping a library engage its users is not conclusive, although the majority of studies and anecdotal evidence shows that librarians have achieved this to some extent, in some cases very effectively. However, there is a general feeling of scepticism as to whether library users reciprocate attempts by librarians to engage them. One study even suggests that librarians might be misjudging the technical capabilities of library users' knowledge on how to use social media (Collins and Quan-Hasse 2012¹²). Another study found that students preferred to use email over Facebook when seeking research assistance (Riza Ayu and Abrizah 2011¹³).

One article explains that a library's social media initiatives will only be as successful as the research they do into **social media usage** within their library user group (Hagman 2012¹⁴). For example, does the geographical location, age and ethnic profile of library users match those who use tend to use social media often? If so then it is likely that social media initiatives have the potential to be effective.

The González-Fernández-Villavicencio 2014 study¹⁵ developed and implemented social media plans and goals for 3 institutions. The results from these promotions exceeded expectation and increased borrowing at the library.

Several studies emphasize the importance of regular social media activity being critical for ensuring user engagement. One such study (Riza Ayu and Abrizah 2011¹³) highlighted that prompt responses to queries via social media are important to ensure continued use of that service. The same study also found that libraries that updated their status daily had the **highest user engagement** (likes and follows).

In a study of 20 American academic libraries it was found that most user comments came from institution employees or alumni rather than current students (Gauntner Witte 2014¹⁶). The (Gauntner Witte 2014) study

interestingly demonstrates that library user response on social media was inversely proportional to the type of content most frequently posted by librarians. Although posts from librarians that shared links and content from other Facebook users were the least frequently posted type of content, library users responded to these more than they did to the posts about library information, which the librarians posted about the most.

Tracking of social media activity by libraries varies enormously, with some librarians maintaining detailed reports and others relying on channel-specific archives. Many libraries are waiting until they have a significant number of users before developing assessment plans for social media.

From US-based focus group:

"We produce 6 monthly reports for the library management team on social media usage."

Measurement of impact is generally ad hoc, but some institutions were beginning to analyze results more closely using tools such as Hootsuite and SumAll and also the basic report available from Twitter and Facebook. The experimental nature of communications and the relative newness of the channels make **benchmarking** very difficult.

¹² Collins, G. & Quan-Haase, A. (2012) Social Media and Academic Libraries: Current Trends and Future Challenges. Asist 2012 Conference. <https://www.asis.org/asist2012/proceedings/Submissions/272.pdf>

¹³ Riza Ayu, A. R. & Abrizah, A. (2011) Do you Facebook? Usage and applications of Facebook page among academic libraries in Malaysia. The International Information & Library Review, 43 (4), pp. 239-249. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10572317.2011.10762906#.U96BDaM0hXo>

¹⁴ Hagman, J. (2012) Joining the Twitter Conversation. Public Services Quarterly, 8 (1), pp. 78-85.

¹⁵ González-Fernández-Villavicencio, N. (2014) The Profitability of Libraries Using Social Media - Dissertation

¹⁶ Gauntner Witte, G. (2014) Content Generation and Social Network Interaction within Academic Library Facebook Pages. Journal of Electronic Resources Librarianship, 26 (2), pp. 89-100.



From US focus group:

"I not only like to look at the number of likes or users, on a particular social media platform. We use Hootsuite to manage mainly the Twitter and our Facebook accounts, and that's nice because you can do analysis on your click-throughs."

"I use Hootsuite and IFTTT [If This Then That]."

In our survey we asked librarians which tools they used to manage social media activities and report on their effectiveness. For management, Hootsuite was widely used (44% of respondents were using this tool), followed by Tweetdeck (23%) then Feedly (12%). For measuring impact, Google analytics was most commonly used (27%) followed by Facebook's own statistics (25%), surveys (15%), tracking numbers of followers (11%), and Twitter's own statistics (5%).

Generally, in our focus group discussion it was not felt to be a priority to devote significant resource to trying to measure impact – questions about social media effectiveness were generally included in broader library service surveys and ad hoc analysis was undertaken to present as case studies.

From UK focus group:

"We do it for the annual report, capture a few screenshots, look at how it is being used at its best to give a story."

In the US focus group, **qualitative information on impact** was also felt to be important, with screenshots of positive interactions used to illustrate success. One institution had used Storify to aggregate feedback on the library to provide a overview of user endorsements. When social media activities are particularly successful, these are often then used as models for repeating.

From UK focus group:

"We keep track of something particularly successful, then we redo the campaign 6 months later."

From UK focus group:

"We did a referencing video on YouTube – we had over 1,000 views in a very short time."

Libraries reported differing levels of success with various social media channels, but much of this seems dependent on whether the channels are being used to their best effect for an appropriate audience. Those achieving most success were taking time to use the tools to their full capabilities.

**From US focus group:**

"We have very few interactions with anyone on our Twitter feed."

"Twitter is definitely the best platform, because we hashtag all of our posts with the keyword of the publication, and so for the academic audience, once they click it's going to pull up all of the similar publications under that topic."

So we found out we'd get far more re-tweets or favouriting with our posts on Twitter."

There would clearly be benefits in the library community working together to assess the effectiveness of social media in a more structured way – defining a framework and collecting data across a range of institutions to help evaluate impact.

From US-based librarian interview:

"While there have been case studies on YouTube's popularity as a video platform, there is an absence of theoretical frameworks to examine YouTube's value as a pedagogical tool within Higher Education. My use of YouTube is very much a research tool I am trying to examine."

The evolving way in which social media activities are planned and goals are set can make it hard to define and measure an initiative in terms of its success.

Librarians are however using social media reports to analyse responses and **gain insight into library user activities** in order to further refine and inform their social media presence. There currently appears to be little consensus on how the two could be aligned.

Standardized metrics proposed by González-Fernández-Villavicencio's 2014 study¹⁵ suggests a method by which libraries could compare the success of their social media campaigns within their institution and with libraries at others. All of the libraries in this study used Google Analytics to measure referred web traffic from posts and suggested that Impact on Relationship (IOR) measuring tools such as Klout and Social Mention should also be used to measure their social brand.

In our survey, we explored reasons for why a library would undertake assessment of its social media activities. However, 53% placed a value on this for **demonstrating return on effort** – clearly acknowledging the amount of time that is required to maintain a social media presence. Our survey highlighted that attitudes are changing, with 71% of respondents saying that they envisaged spending more time in the future on measuring the impact of social media.



5 Promoting library social media channels

In our focus groups and interviews we explored how libraries promoted their social media channels. There is widespread recognition that significant effort is required to promote these resources and services, or they won't be used.





The most popular way of promoting library social media channels currently is through links from the library website. Posters and Google groups are also popular, together with postings to listservs. Some librarians had promoted their social media presence via QR codes placed in the library building and in print catalogs, but these had low usage. An app-based approach was more successful for one institution.

From US-based focus group:

"We started the whole mobile app idea. Campus have caught up on it, registered and added lots of icons. Now through your phone you can book a computer or a room."

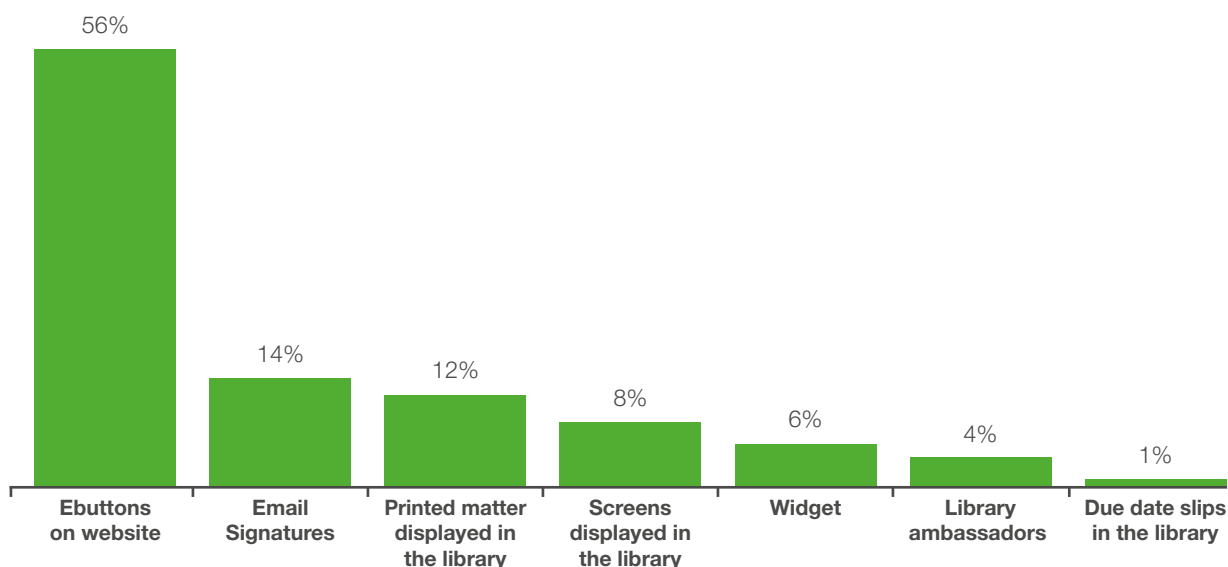
Other more personal approaches were mentioned such as word of mouth, and adding links to email signatures. Cross-promotion of social media services was also frequently used, (e.g. across other library and institutional channels) with links to Twitter from a library social bookmarking (e.g. Delicious) site.

From UK focus group:

"We retweet each other to encourage new followers."

In our survey, we explored in more detail how librarians were promoting their social media sites. The following graph lays out key methods:

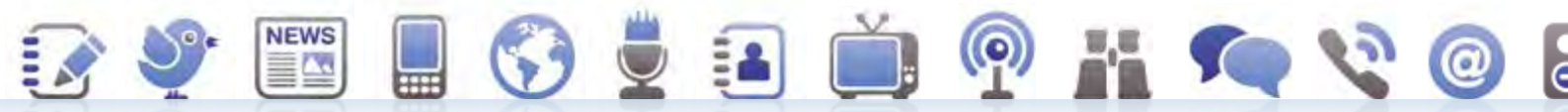
How do you promote your Social Networking Sites? (Please select the option you use the most)



The survey findings are consistent with feedback received in our focus groups and interviews. Utilizing the library website (through ebuttons) is by far the most frequently used method for promoting awareness of library social media activities, followed by email signatures. This likely is a result of the limited budget a library has available for resources such as printed materials, but may also reflect that the website and email signatures are also more likely to be seen by sizeable audiences. For those with budget for print materials, typical promotions include postcards and postcards advertising the library's Facebook page and/or Twitter handle.

Examples of print promotional materials from the University of British Columbia, in Canada:





6 The future for social media in the library

The shift of provision of library resources online has also brought about a huge shift in the role of the librarian – with this role becoming more integrated into the user communities within the institution. Feedback in our focus groups and interviews indicated that social media is seen as an important support tool for transitioning into this new role.

From US focus group:

"We're calling [librarians] liaisons, so they're liaising with the faculty more. So part of that outreach, social media is a big part of it ... So creating more of that community and going out there and really meeting the students and the faculty has really changed how they view the library and it's been a great experience."

"Not all of our patrons need a physical space. Some need it more than others and some at different times, and so ... our goal is not to get everyone into the library, but to provide a space that's conducive to those who do need it, when they need it, and to provide the online services that mean they don't have to come into the library to get access to our resources."

In general terms, there is agreement that it is difficult to predict how social media and its use will evolve, so the priority for most of the librarians we spoke with is to remain experimental and flexible. There was little doubt amongst the librarians that we spoke with that use of social media was well on its way to becoming an integral part of how people communicate with each other in the 21st century.

From UK-based focus group:

"It is difficult to predict where this is going ... so many applications, people move from one app to another ... social media is becoming the primary means for communication."

However, there are challenges ahead, as humans are limited in how much information and content we can consume. There was a sense that the volume of information being consumed through social media was already becoming challenging, and that its continual presence in our lives could make us less effective.

From US-based focus group:

"It's overwhelming, the amount of stuff, and the fact that there's not divisions, clear divisions between what's personal, what's professional, and what's your area of expertise, and what's just general-of-interest in news stories. Somehow, I think that social media, to be useful and not just a distraction, needs to become more compartmentalized, so that it can be more useful to people on an individual basis instead of just this massive amount of information that you're filtering through."

Some librarians see their role becoming one of helping users find paths through complex content, and directing them towards making useful connections as efficiently as possible – potentially by merging smart applications and human crowdsourcing, with the smart component drawing on the human element by using social sources to retrieve information that is personalized and relevant to a specific user.

Some librarians highlight the value which can be added by providing a human element to complex content; providing a guide to users enabling them to make fast connections between multiple channels and information sources.



From US-based focus group:

"It's like why you'll spend 6 hours on CNN when you went to read one story, because they create such great bunny trails, and I think that's the responsibility of the librarians, to tag information and whatnot, in such a fashion that, I'm reading this, it says "you might be interested in this and this..."

One delegate at the US-based focus group referenced a publication: "The Circle" by Dave Eggers, which paints a picture of a merged landscape of social media channels controlled by a minority, manipulating our moods and controlling information flow in a '1984-style' scenario.

Certainly, a more integrated future is imagined, with library services and collections becoming more deeply embedded with external sites.

From US-based focus group:

"There's also a lot that could be done with integrating our discovery platforms with social media. We have some discovery services that will let you like or share something from there, but how do we get people to those discovery platforms from Facebook or other places? Can we get widgets to pop into our homepage on Facebook, for example? I think there's just a lot more that could be done there, and we should keep talking with our discovery providers about that."

Not surprisingly, an **overwhelming 88% of respondents** to our survey felt that social media would become more important to the library in the future.





7 Summary and conclusions

Across our survey, focus group and interviews we found much common ground. Most librarians feel strongly positive about the potential for social media to help increase engagement between users and library staff and services. Social media is also seen as an effective outreach tool, helping librarians promote the work of their faculty and connect more deeply with the broader library community.

Social media is used by libraries to deliver a blend of customer service, news and updates, content/collection promotion, dissemination of the institutions' research output, provision of educational tools and resources and for building relationships both within and outside of the institution. A wide range of social media channels are used, but as yet there is limited differentiation between how they are used. Facebook and Twitter remain dominant, but visual channels such as YouTube and Pinterest are rapidly on the rise. We anticipate that in the near future more channel-specific strategies will emerge.

Whilst there is a drive for librarians to use social media within the library setting, it has been acknowledged that this is still an evolving process with many librarians experimenting with what works or not, and how it can benefit the library. More widespread publically available studies are needed to show how successful libraries are doing this and how they are measuring their successes. Relating to this, a commonly agreed framework of assessment is also required, so that libraries can begin to benchmark the impact of their activities against a range of objectives.

It is clear that while the sophistication of social networking tools used and the frequency of updates are important factors in presenting a strong online presence, many agree that it is rather the quality and type of content posted, the defined goals and plans, and an alignment of the needs and expectations of the library users that leads to successful engagement.

Recently there seems to have been a shift from using social media as the voice of the institution to being the voice of a librarian within the institution. This 'humanisation' of libraries using social media is seen by some as key to utilising social media effectively (Gauntner Witte 2014¹⁷).



¹⁷ Gauntner Witte, G. (2014) Content Generation and Social Network Interaction within Academic Library Facebook Pages. *Journal of Electronic Resources Librarianship*, 26 (2), pp. 89-100.



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Acknowledgements

We are indebted to the input of a large number of individuals without whom this paper would not have been possible to produce.

Our thanks is extended to the participants who contributed to the survey, Twitter party, focus groups, and telephone interviews, with apologies that we are not able to list all individuals here. Particular thanks are offered to Michael A. Arthur, Maria Atilano, Eric Bellmore, Allan Cho, Georgina Cronin, Sally Faith, Roisin Gwyer, Jessica Hagman, Jade Kelsall, Alison McNab, Helen Monagle, Danielle Saloman, David Trefas, Graham Walton and Jessica Woolman.

All research was conducted on behalf of Taylor & Francis by Aalia Oosman, with support from Elyse Profera and Shafina Segon. All results were compiled and presented by Will Frass. This white paper was authored by TBI Communications with contributions from Aalia Oosman, Jennifer McMillan, and Jodie Bell.



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