

Is there a role for social media in LIS curriculum development process in developing countries?

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Abstract:

LIS curriculum development targets the creation/formulation, implementation, evaluation and review of the LIS curriculum content and its delivery to those on the LIS education programmes. "Developing countries" refers to countries with less developed industrial base and a low Human Development Index (HDI) relative to other countries. Development is retarded by several factors including disease, poverty, debt, access to technology, among others, which individual countries cannot manage alone. Therefore, there is need for collaboration in its various forms. Social Media is a popular information transfer model which could be adapted to LIS curriculum development more cheaply and in massive dimensions. The target is to produce a corps of information professionals to manage the information transfer process targeting political, social and economic development. The aim of this paper is to examine the contribution and implications of social media in developing LIS curriculum in developing countries. The specific objectives are: (i) to examine the process and importance of LIS curricula development; (ii) to identify the potential application of social media in developing LIS curricula in developing countries; (iii) to explore possibilities of collaboration in applying social media in developing LIS curricula in the developing countries; (iv) establish the challenges and solutions to LIS curricula development using social media in developing countries; (v) propose a framework of collaboration using social media among the LIS institutions. Methodology included: critical review of literature and focus group discussions with LIS Educators at the Standing Conference of Eastern, Central and Sothern Africa Librarians (SCECSAL XXIII, April, 2018).

Keywords: LIS Curriculum development, social media, collaboration, challenges, developing countries.

Introduction

Social media is defined as “... web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or a semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system” (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). In addition, it is defined as internet-based applications and tools that provide the creation and exchange of user-generated content including videos, pictures, and written information (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Li & Bernoff, 2008). Social media provides active participation, connectivity, collaboration, and sharing of knowledge and ideas among users (McLoughlin & Lee, 2007).

The Internet has changed the way we communicate, perform research, and streamlines the access people have to learning. Using technology is no longer an option; today’s learners and facilitators must leverage their access and become proficient with the latest tools. This also raises the bar on the methods teachers must use to engage students, to retain, and apply key concepts in a global economy as well as communicating with each other. According to Belardi, (2013), "Studying and communicating effectively and with the right type of technology – is one of the best ways to ensure that academicians succeed; however, focus is the key.

Today, LIS trainers are comfortable in a dynamic, digital, and social world. In fact, their expectations embrace the wide range of ever changing technologies available for their online presence, as well as, in the classroom. To avoid using technology for the sake of technologies existence, educators need to become as savvy as their students. By applying a model of social media interaction, educators can leverage new and social media in their classrooms with six of the largest globally utilized social media tools: Facebook, Pinterest, Instagram, Blogs, Twitter, and Evernote.

Any educator today will tell you that the strategies used in the classroom have evolved and changed with the access everyone has to technology. In a world with constant changes and shifts because of immediate access to information, the way course content is created and delivered must also evolve and adjust to the new ways students and teachers interact.

Engagement of peers and students in course content and reaching learning objectives are the key elements educators strive for in every course. Enter social media networks and the ability to leverage the user activity with these applications in education. Now, educators can create and provide content which engages students and meets learning objectives the way students want to learn without meeting physically. By reviewing social media networks: Facebook, Pinterest, Instagram, Blogs, Twitter, and Evernote, educators can position themselves to be as technology-savvy as today’s students.

Examining the process and importance of LIS curriculum development

What is LIS curriculum development?

LIS curriculum development targets the creation/formulation, implementation, evaluation and review of the LIS curriculum content and its delivery to those on the LIS education programmes. Additionally LIS **curriculum development** could be construed as planned, purposeful, progressive, and systematic process to create positive improvement in the educational system. “Improvement” implies that curriculum development should extend to

catering for change in the LIS fields that demand to be addressed and consequently the change in the content and delivery of the curriculum.

The curriculum development process in LIS

- i. The LIS curriculum process begins with the individual academic staff/ faculty. Faculty is vested with the primary responsibility for the development of new courses and programs and the revision of existing courses and programs. Ultimately the approval of most curriculum proposals rests with the University Senate, which is the highest academic committee in the University. In between, there are five key steps in this process.
- ii. **Planning and Development.** Faculty members initiate proposals for new courses or programs and revisions to existing courses and programs. These proposals and revisions should be discussed with discipline colleagues so that substantive issues regarding appropriateness, content, etc. can be resolved.
- iii. **Creating or Revising the Course Outline.** The faculty member prepares a curriculum proposal. It is important that any faculty member requesting a change in transfer for a course should meet with the Dean or Head of Department during this process. Once the proposal is created, it is then formally submitted to the office of the Dean.
- iv. **Presentation to the Department.** Each department determines the procedure for reviewing curriculum proposals by the Faculty in that division. Departmental review also includes a technical review of the outline. After completion of the review, is approved by the Dean in the Faculty and forwarded to the Office of Academic Services, and the Curriculum Technical Review Committee for review.
- v. **Presentation to the Curriculum Committee.** The faculty proposes, or their Curriculum Committee representative presents the proposal to the full Committee. The Committee takes the proposal under consideration and may request revisions or clarifications to the outline or proposal form. Typically, the proposal is voted on at the next Curriculum Committee meeting after the presentation. Once a proposal is approved by the Curriculum Committee, it will be forwarded to the Office of Instruction and prepared for presentation at the next Board of Trustees meeting. Following approval by the Board, the proposal will be forwarded to the State Chancellor's Office for final approval. At this stage, also, any requested articulations will be submitted by the responsible officer.

a. The importance curriculum development

In regard to curriculum development, the Focus Group Discussions suggested:

- i. The curriculum is what a faculty is. It reflects the diversity of the disciplines that make up any college community, the myriad pedagogical philosophies staff bring to the classroom each day, and the strengths of their education and training. Faculty are vested with the primary responsibility for the development of new courses and programs and the revision of existing courses and programs. The college's course outlines and degree and certificate programs reflect their own academic mission and

philosophy. Central to the curriculum of the college/faculty is the course outline of record. The curriculum serves a number of purposes:

- ii. It forms the basis for a contract among the student, instructor, and institution, identifying the expectations which will serve as the basis of the student's grade and giving the fundamental required components of the course which the student is guaranteed to receive from the instructor and institution.
- iii. It is a document with defined legal standing which is read by many more eyes than just those of the instructor and student.
- iv. It assists faculty in presenting their courses in a format which accurately reflects the quality instruction they are providing.
- v. It states the content and level of rigor for which students across all sections of the course will held accountable.
- vi. It states the prerequisites students need to advance successfully through a series of courses.
- vii. It is used to satisfy the Vice Chancellor's office that all of the required components are present in the course to the required degree of rigor as specified the Curriculum Standards Handbook.
- viii. It serves as the basis for transfer or articulation agreements with individual colleges and universities
- ix. To identify the potential application of social media in developing LIS curricula in developing countries.

Potential application of social media in developing LIS curricula in developing countries

Findings from the focus group suggested that Social Media could be applied to Curriculum Development through the following ways:

- i. Pushing academic/syllabi content to mobile devices may provide or supplement to reach modern members of faculty.
- ii. Twitter and Facebook can be utilized to deliver high yield performance to an educational audience.
- iii. Twitter can help schedule regular tweets and be preloaded to deliver content over a period of time.
- iv. Tweets can be simultaneously posted to Facebook to reach a larger audience and this helps staff to easily get feedback on the curricular development progress.

Possibilities of collaboration in applying Social Media in developing LIS curricula in the developing countries

There are many social networking sites being used in Higher Education in Uganda and elsewhere. According Mather et al.(2016), it was established that some of the most popular social networking sites being used in higher education include: Facebook, Myspace, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc. Previous researchers like Roberts & Rees, (2014) also point out that Facebook, Friendster, LinkedIn, LiveJournal and MySpace are some of the examples of Social Networking Sites. The same social networking sites are also mentioned in Fuchs, (2017) who notes that “The most famous in the world of social networks are Facebook (Facebook.com) and Twitter (Twitter.com) and MySpace (myspace.com) and others.” Similar sentiments are echoed by Roberts & Rees, (2014) that the two most popular social networking sites are Facebook and MySpace.

Researchers like Dennen, & Burner, (2017) claim that Facebook and YouTube are the two most commonly used social media technologies among all students. In addition to the social net-working sites mentioned so far, (Selwyn, 2012), adds Bebo as an example of a Social Networking Site. On the contrary, Dennen, & Burner, (2017)cites NING as a social networking site which is mainly used in academia.

Currently, social media use in the LIS curricula development has a lot of potential and room to grow. Elavsky, Mislán, and Elavsky shared that Twitter has the distinct ability to shape the lines between online and offline communication. By blending face-to-face and online modes of communication into one, educators are free to participate and engage in the process of course development in whichever manner they choose. For example, if an academic member of the team does not feel comfortable speaking in an open discussion, they may post a “Tweet” to contribute to discussion.

Developing LIS curricula using social media platforms in an educational context could be as simple as a modeling of its use as an instructor. For example, a staff could openly share with peers what ideas they have or “follow” via Twitter or a professional Facebook page built to attract individuals to a specific cause.

Another practical way in which social media may be used in the development of LIS curricula is when individuals are physically, financially, or geographically unable to travel to the meeting venues. For example, a professor may invite an expert at a university to advice the faculty team on the curricula but is unable to procure the funding for travel. This issue can be resolved through the use of Skype, which proves to be a satisfactory experience for all parties involved. The use of Skype and similar media may prove useful for educators who are long-distance people or have physical disabilities that render them unable to navigate campus on their own.

Flexible learning and sharing expands choice on what, when, where and how people learn. It supports different styles of learning, including e-learning. Flexibility means anticipating, and responding to, the ever-changing needs and expectations of Vocational Education and Training clients - enterprises learners and communities Flexibility is one of the most attractive elements of online learning in social networking.

Challenges and solutions to LIS curricula development using social media in developing countries.

- i. Farkus, George, et al. (2013) claim that some of the challenges associated with use of Social Networking Sites in LIS curriculum development stem from the risks inherent in user internet usage. They argued that internet exposes users to inappropriate material, un-wanted adult interactions, and bullying from peers. Similar remarks were made by Dennen, & Burner, (2017) that, Web 2.0 was also a source of concern regarding issues such as, privacy, authorship and ownership rights, digital divide in the classroom or time management issues. Additionally, information overload was another challenge and there was lamentation over quality of content to be used in curriculum development as a major concern. Since social networking sites are part of Web 2.0 technologies the challenges raised were also true of social networking sites.
- ii. Further supporting evidence is presented by Farkus, George, et al. (2013) who argued that, popular social networking sites like MySpace, Facebook, and Bebo have received intense criticism from schools which are fearful for the online safety of people using these sites, and also the concern that some people will misuse them during interaction time. On the other hand Farkus, George, et al. [2013] indicate that the major challenges or concerns relating to social networking technologies are loss of control wherein one can receive unsolicited negative comments, time commitment, information overload and anyone can create an “official” account for your university since social networking sites do not perform any kind of background checks on individuals wanting to create an account with a college name.
- iii. An online interaction is very different from a face-to-face interaction (Curtis and Lawson 2001); it lacks the non-verbal cues, which may reduce the extent of the communication that occurs. In conformity, Markus (1994) points out misinterpretation as a negative aspect, due to limited ability of feeling exchanges, deficiency of transmitting the voice tones, gestures, eye contacts, and lack of any other important items used in face-to-face interactions. Arbaugh and Duray (2002) also discuss the disadvantages including the costly high failure rate. Margaryan and Littlejohn (2008) see use of social media as quite limited and mainly restricted to formal learning environments, due to teachers’ choices in institutional educational learning.
- iv. Curtis and Lawson argue that different forms of asynchronous interaction are limited by the capacity of the communication links and only text interaction is accessible and reliable without difficulty. They also discuss that collaboration, as a learning activity, requires considerable time. Although online collaboration has advantages, it may be time consuming due to trying to catch up with everyone and to rely on others, who are responsible for other parts (Curtis & Lawson, 2001). Furthermore, online asynchronous conversations occur with substantial delays in receiving a reply. The issue that may emerge as a limitation in online collaboration is difficulty of interaction with new people, who do not know them well and having to rely on them to complete tasks.

Taking up time

- v. The study also revealed that the amount of time spent by individuals with each other online is long. This has effect on health of individuals, because spending a lot of time browsing these social networks can affect the way the genes operate within the human body, and weakens the immune and hormone levels, and function of arteries. In addition, it also has an impact on mental health. Moreover, the use of social networking in education could cause lack of motivation towards learning and could be boring sitting in front of computer for a long time, especially if the scientific material presented is free of audio and visual effects that would attract learner towards learning.

Miscommunication

Social media communication does not afford the users with the same opportunities of explanation and clarification that occur in face-to-face interaction. Participants face some difficulty through social networking in expressing their views and ideas in writing, as many prefer to express their ideas orally which is the approach they have used for many years through their interactions. While e-education users need to be acquire to writing skills to express their ideas and opinions freely. Face to face allows individuals to perceive physical clues like tone, inflection, body language, in an online environment, these are lacking.

- vi. Dependency on the Internet connection to have access to the data and possibility of Internet disconnection are also negative aspects. Unreliability is an avoidable limitation. When planning for an online meeting and problem with connection or software downsides comes up, the work must be cancelled or postponed. Power failure or fluctuations and losing some hours work on a project or program can be a big risk.

Solutions to the challenges

The following solutions to the above challenges are proposed:

- i. Encouraging and supporting faculty staff to work online.
- ii. Encouraging staff to learn and work through making new connections
- iii. Joint practice development to share experiences of SM and identify practical ways forward
- iv. Support for flexible or online communication
- v. LIS Education Experts should propose a framework of collaboration using social media among the LIS institutions

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