

Social Media: A Case Study of Adding New Wings for Promoting Library Services at Shanghai University Library

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Abstract:

As the most popular social media in China today, WeChat brings powerful opportunities as well as challenges to academic libraries. This paper describes a case study that how Shanghai University Library implemented a WeChat app for promoting library services. The results show the benefits that the WeChat app brings to the end users with more convenient, easy and quick access to library collections and other services. It also brings the benefits to the Library through creating a new channel for branding and marketing, managing online competitions and exhibitions. The results demonstrate that WeChat has become a new powerful platform for marketing library services and providing online references. It has become a mobile library on users' palms, an important channel for library to maintain relationship with patrons. And it appears as a new growth pole for library innovation.

Keywords: Social Media, WeChat, Shanghai University, Academic Library, Promotion

1.Introduction

Social media has become an important part of daily lives for all human-beings, especially for millennials. It is very common now that people use social media to exchange information and share their experiences and ideas. WeChat and Microblog in China are the platforms equivalent to Whatapp, Twitter and Facebook in the United States, and they play an important role in Chinese people's daily lives. What is worth mentioning is that WeChat has already become a global social media within less than 5 years.

WeChat was released by Tencent in January of 2011. As of May, 2016, there are about 1 billion accounts in the world, among which over 500 million are active and 70 million are outside China (Tencent, 2016). It provides instant messaging service, and it also supports voice, image, video and even location sharing. Users can also post their photos on their timelines and let other people leave their comments or share. In China, more and more government agencies, enterprises and non-profit institutions pay more attention on this app and begin to utilize it for posting information and/or providing service with WeChat.

In 2014, Professor Jianhua Xu from Nankai University (Xu, 2015) conducted a survey on how academic libraries utilized WeChat. The survey was designed for the top 39 Chinese university libraries who already provided such service. The responses indicated that about one third of them were using WeChat as a marketing tool to promote library collections and services to their patrons, but most libraries were still at fundamental and starting stage in using WeChat and developing applications.

We have observed a great progress made in the past several years. More and more academic libraries in China have launched WeChat service programs and developed WeChat service as a mobile library portal such as Nanjing University Library and New York University, Shanghai (Pun,2015; Sun, 2015).

By describing how we implemented the WeChat service developed by Shanghai University Library, this paper shows that WeChat can be an essential innovative channel for academic libraries for promoting services. It also becomes an additional platform for libraries to provide resources, advertise library services, and retain patrons other than library webpages. This case also discusses the importance of team work, customer orientation, techniques including using web slang works in WeChat services implementation and promotion.

2.About Shanghai University

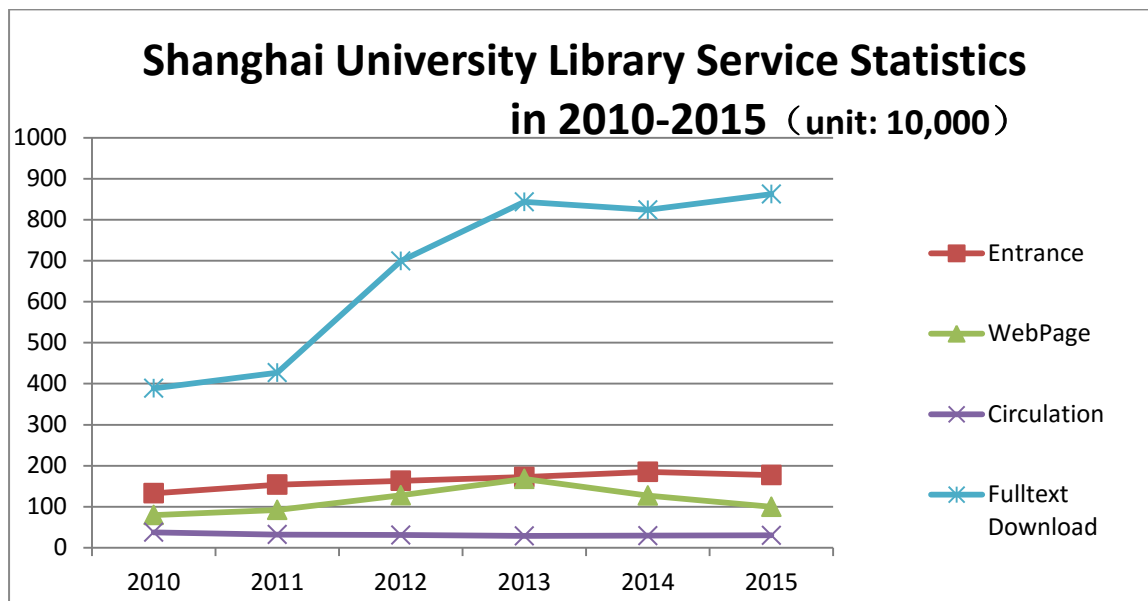
Shanghai University was founded in 1994. It is a key municipal university, and it is ranked as the 36th among all the universities in China, and the 69th among the best Asian universities by 2016 British QS. It is well known for its programs such as engineering, science, human and art subjects, and it has 22,000 undergraduate students, 12,000 graduate students, 3,800 international students and 3,000 faculty members. Furthermore, it has collaborations in academic exchange and education with 150 institutions in 41 countries in the rest of the world. It is becoming a diversified international comprehensive research university (SHU, 2016). The main campus is located in northwestern Shanghai and put into operation in 1999.

Shanghai University library (SHULib)'s building was built up in June 2000. The Library provides self-check services for patrons through the internet by implementing self-check machines and RFID technologies. Patrons can know the location of every item by checking the online collection map. SHULib has a collection of 4 million physical items. More and more emerging library technologies have been used by the library. However, the emphasis of the library collection development has shifted from print recourses to electronic and digital resources. The library purchased and/or subscribed to 68 commercial databases, including resources in

English such as Elsevier, JohnWiley, Web of Science, Springer and Ei , therefore providing 24/7 online access services.

3. Shanghai University Library Social Media Program

Academic library patrons are more and more relying on electronic and digital resources for their teaching, research and learning because of quick and easy access. By analyzing our circulation data, we found that although the purchase of print materials in our library has kept steadily by 50,000 items per year over the past 5 years, the library loans had no increase and even decreased. Another interesting finding is although the downloads of e-resources have been increasing while the visits of the library webpages have been decreasing. Less web visits could result in a negative impact on the promotion of new collection and service. It seems traditional webpages are becoming less tractive to patrons, particularly to millennials. (Chart 1, below)



(Chart 1)

To deal with the challenges caused by emerging IT technologies, collection development and patrons preference, the Library decided to launch a social media program. The program goal is to provide better online service, improve user experience and retain patrons as possible as we can.

Shanghai University library first released its Microblog service in 2012. The Library used it to provide new collection information, events and newsletter. The Microblog is operated by a young and active team. So far it has over 4,200 followers and serves as an online window of the Library.

Due to the fact that the visit of traditional library webpage has decreased, on the other hand, the successful implementation of the Microblog encouraged the Library to launch a WeChat service program in 2014 to promote the Library services, enhance communications with patrons and respond user feedback as soon as possible. Two WeChat official accounts were created. One is a service account and the other is a subscription account, mainly for providing online services and publishing of news releases. The difference between the two accounts is that the service account can release four pages up to thirty-two threads per month and interact with

followers while the subscription account can publish news every day.

3.1 The WeChat Program

The Shanghai University library WeChat account is a service account, the WeChat ID is shu_library. The logo is our beautiful library building.

The WeChat code is put in a spot which is easy to be noticed on our webpage. We have also embedded the library account function into the university WeChat accounts list so that the faculty members and students can access their library accounts easier with their mobile devices through WeChat.

Patrons can scan our two-dimension WeChat code to subscribe or they can add the ID---shu_library to subscribe. After subscribing, a welcome window called “Thank you to follow Shanghai University library” will pop up on patrons’ WeChat page.

Then by clicking into the official account, clients can see three category menus which are:

1. Collection & Facility: retrieval, reservation, new database, new book, available seats, etc.
2. Events: lectures, promotion events, competitions, newsletter, etc.
3. My library: a list of loan, renewal, overdue and bill.

When subscribers first click “My library”, the account will ask them to link their university ID in order to use this function.

3.2 Operation and Management

Four young librarians were assigned to form a team to be in charge of the daily development, implementation and operation. One is responsible for IT, two for providing content, and one for online services. Due to the dramatically increasing needs of the service, two more librarians joined the group and assist in online services in 2016. The workflow is the content librarians edit collection information or promotion news and provide to the IT person, and the IT person releases the content on to the WeChat platform through a third party content release software.

3.3 WeChat Features and Services

3.3.1 Collection Retrieval

We incorporated the OPAC retrieval function into the WeChat service through WeChat API. The feature supports collection retrieval including all fields such as keywords, titles, authors, keyword, press, ISSN/ISBN, call numbers, “My library” login, book renewal, e-mail change and text message. The subscribers can send messages back to the server. These features are fundamental but more practical. They attract more subscribers. The user visits have greatly increased.

3.3.2 New Book Recommendation and Exhibition

The IT developer also incorporated Duxiu, a Chinese ebook database, into WeChat. This feature allows patrons to access new books by showing book covers, greatly promotes new collections and increases checkouts.

3.3.3 Message Notification

Through a backend management of WeChat and a third-party editing software, single or multiple messages can be sent to patrons and notify the subscribers. There are three or four notifications per month on average. At the beginning, this account only released information

about the latest resources, library open and close time, and other routine information. Later we added more information. The messages cover more areas including newly digitized resources, the best book newsletter, events, lectures and seminars, the best welcome book ranking, open hours, and other library issues.

3.3.4 Advising and Interaction

The customer service feature was added to the WeChat platform on January 8th, 2015, providing patrons a new way to send their feedback to the library. Patrons can ask various kinds of questions about the library service to the customer assistants through chatting in WeChat. The Customer assistants stay online during business days and mostly respond within four hours. Each of the assistants answers questions for 10 patrons on average per day. Most of the questions are very common and routine, such as “Why I am unable to find the book although the system says it is available” and “What is the operating hours during the holiday break and is there any air-conditioner?” Our customer assistants respond patrons’ requests and questions in a professional way. As a result, the misunderstandings and conflicts between the Library and patrons have decreased significantly, and so do the complaints to the Dean of the Library. This feature demonstrated the WeChat service works as an excellent way for librarians to communicate with patrons. It acts as SHULib’s mobile online reference platform now.

4. Promotion and marketing ——Combined Online and Offline Service

We promote this service particularly on the World Book and Copyright Day, April 23rd every year. The Library launched a “Reading Promotion Month” event from 20th April to 20th May in 2016, and initiated “No Overdue Penalty Day”, “My Slow and Pleasant Reading”, “Inspiration of Reading”, “SHU Library Book Ranking 2015” and many other activities.

The “Reading Promotion Month” in each spring has become an influential event on the campus, cultivating students in a strong atmosphere of reading. This activity is meant to help students develop good reading habits and to guide them what and how to read. The event “No Overdue Penalty Day” is learned from American academic libraries. On April 22-23, the patrons won’t be charged at all. It is warmly welcomed by the faculty and students. The volumes of check-in books increased sharply in the two days.

Another welcome event is logo competition. To make “Reading Promotion Month” into a brand activity, we utilize the WeChat account to invite students to create logos for the theme of “Innovation, personality, enthusiasm and vigor”. This turned the students’ interest in reading into the creation of beauty, and let their divergent thinking into play. Therefore, the idea and service of the Library would be understood by more and more people, and the Library would attract and interact with more students.

There were 20 pieces of logos submitted by students. The competitors were from academic colleges and graduate schools, indicating the activity attracted not only Art students but also students from all other disciplines. The web slang words and symbols make these works look lively and impressive. We exhibited these creative works and launched the web vote via the WeChat platform and let students decide which one would be the most welcome logo. The top three works were selected as the official logos for our “Reading Promotion Month” program.

5. Impacts and Assessment

As of June, 2016, the official WeChat account has over 4,700 subscribers, which is about 10% of all faculty members and students. More and more subscribers start to use their smart phones to access the Library services without physically being showing up in the library. The

WeChat App makes it easier for them to communicate with the Library and save much of their time.

With the two-year effort, we have formed these columns on the WeChat platform: new digital resources, new book newsletter, events, lectures and seminars, posters, holidays, reading reviews, and library highlights. There are a total of 189 records released. And a total of 1,120 online reference requests were addressed. The WeChat online reference has partly replaced the web online reference services. This service allows users to send their comments and/or complaints immediately to the Library and online service librarians respond in a timely manner, that results in the complaints emailed to the Dean of the Library greatly decreased. Patrons feel more comfortable since they get responses instantly. The WeChat service has become a mobile reference service platform to the Library.

In June 2016, we launched a survey to students and faculties for feedback to our WeChat service. There are 383 followers read the news of the survey. Among them, 113 followers completed and submitted the survey. The results are fairly encouraging. Among all the features we provide, 53.1% of the respondents rated “Collection Retrieval” as “the most welcomed” one, followed by “My Library” rated by 51.33% of the respondents, and “Facility” (Seats/Rooms Availability), rated by 46.9%. The survey reconfirmed our finding that WeChat has become the most welcomed channel to accessing to the Library, succeeding the other three channels –Library Webpage, printed poster and microblog. The survey results will encourage us to make better use of the WeChat channel and add more functions to its service.

6. Future Development

The implementation of the WeChat program with the service account encouraged us to make deep exploration. We decide to add more librarians to the team, provide more information and resources, and develop more features.

The plan has three steps. Firstly, we will release more information and news each day via the subscription account, which can fill the gap of the service account. We plan to include the ID of subscription account in each of the news released from the service account, encouraging patrons to follow it.

Secondly, we are expanding the team to 10 members since the needs from patrons on the WeChat service is increasing. Those members will be from various departments and student assistants. Different task forces will be formed to handle software development, project management, content edit, interface design and enhancement, and customer service. We will publish more contents to attract more subscribers.

Thirdly, we are about to add some new features such as multiple menus by using API to provide more services such as study room reservation, purchase recommendation, ILL, and document delivery. The following chart shows our vision. The central is the WeChat logo. The left three features were already implemented. The right three features are planning to be implemented in the future.



(Chart 2)

From the fall 2016, the fresh students will be recommended to follow our WeChat service account during their orientations. Through the WeChat app, the Library is re-building a closer relationship with patrons by providing better user experience and more convenient and improved services.

As a conclusion, WeChat is our new wing for promotion and marketing. We will make our WeChat app into the most powerful mobile online portal other than our webpage.

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