How social is your social media? Managing social media marketing in academic libraries

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Abstract:

This paper explores the use of social media in academic libraries for marketing purposes. It is suggested that, to date, academic libraries' use of social media has focused predominantly on the promotion of library services and resources and that the dialogic potential of social media has not been fully exploited. A review of the LIS literature indicates that although there have been many studies and reports of social media use by libraries, investigations of how libraries can promote engagement with stakeholders through social media are scarce. The paper introduces the Strategic Social Media Marketing Framework (SSMMF) and considers how academic libraries might apply it when considering the management of their social media marketing.

Keywords: Social media marketing, academic libraries, engagement

Introduction

The use of social media for marketing purposes is commonplace in most organisations today (Levesque, 2016) and academic libraries are no exception. Indeed, social media adoption and use by libraries is well documented in the professional and academic library and information studies (LIS) literature. The term "social media" is made up of two words: "media" and

"social". Media is an instrument of communication, for example, radio or television and social media would therefore be an instrument of communication but with a social aspect to it. From this perspective, an organisation's social media activity should not merely supply information but should also provide a forum for individuals to interact with each other and engage with the organisation. Ideally, social media should open up a whole new world of communication where the user is the focus (Wasike, 2013). This paper explores the extent to which academic libraries are using social media to build and maintain positive communications and relationships with students for marketing purposes. It draws on the preliminary results of a PhD study into the use and management of social media marketing by academic libraries and presents selected results of the literature review for that work focusing on social media adoption in libraries and measures to ensure high levels of social media engagement. The definition of the concept of engagement is offered below.

Social media for marketing
Social media is a term that frequently occurs in everyday conversations and news, although it is often mistakenly used as a synonym for social networking sites. Social media is, in fact, a much wider concept as shown in Table 1 which presents a classification of social media types. This classification suggests that a plethora of social media tools is within the reach of librarians for marketing purposes and also indicates that they should give some thought to which would best suit the library and its patron community. It should be noted, however, that social media platforms often have multiple purposes that can make this kind of classification difficult (Vuori, 2011).

Table 1: Social Media Classification

Social Media Tools	Description	Example
Media sharing sites	Allow users to upload, organize and share multimedia materials with people and/or selected communities.	YouTube, Vimeo, Instagram, Flickr
Blogs/Microblogs	Allow authors to post their writings or information on the web, hoping someone will read them	Blogger, Twitter, Plurk, Tumblr, Weibo
Social Bookmarking sites	Allow users to collaboratively use tags to annotate and categorize the web contents they found interesting	Delicious, Pinterest, Digg, Foursquare
Virtual/Online Communities	Allow individuals to share specific information and interests through interactive tools on a website.	Lonely Planet, Yahoo Answers
Social Networking sites	Allow individuals to build social relationships and interests among friends and acquaintances	Facebook, LinkedIn, Google+
Virtual Worlds	Provide computer-simulated environments where people can interact in a virtual world	Second Life, Active World, Onverse

Source: Adapted and modified from Ngai et al. (2015)

Despite the frequent use of the term social media in many contexts, the concept is not always clearly defined in academic discussion (Vuori, 2011). In this paper, we adopt two definitions. According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), social media is a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content. Along similar lines, Kietzmann, Hermkens, Mccarthy and Silvestre (2011) defined social media as applications that employ mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms via which individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content.

Both definitions emphasise interaction, exchange and co-creation and so it seems reasonable to suggest that social media should lead to engagement between those participating, both those generating content and those considered the target for that content.

The capacity of social media to facilitate engagement means that its potential for marketing purposes is strong. If marketing is a societal process by which individuals and groups obtain what they want and need through creating, offering and freely exchanging products and services carrying value (Kotler & Keller, 2012), social media represents a powerful way through which that exchange can be realised. Although discussions of social media marketing often focus predominantly on advertising and branding, social media marketing goes beyond the horizon of promotion to set the stage for a contextual exchange and interaction which facilitate what is referred to today as "engagement", with an emphasis on involvement and participation (Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013). Vivek, Beatty and Morgan (2012, p.127), for example, define 'consumer engagement' as "the intensity of an individual's participation and connection with the organization's offerings and activities initiated by either the customer or the organization". This kind of engagement is vital to successful relationship marketing which aims to establish, maintain, and enhance relationships with customers and other partners so that the objectives of the parties involved are met (Grönroos, 1994). Building a successful relationship partly relies upon good communications including the amount, frequency and quality of information shared between organisations and their customers (Hung & Lin, 2013; Reynolds & Beatty, 1999). Increasingly, this kind of exchange and engagement takes place in an online environment.
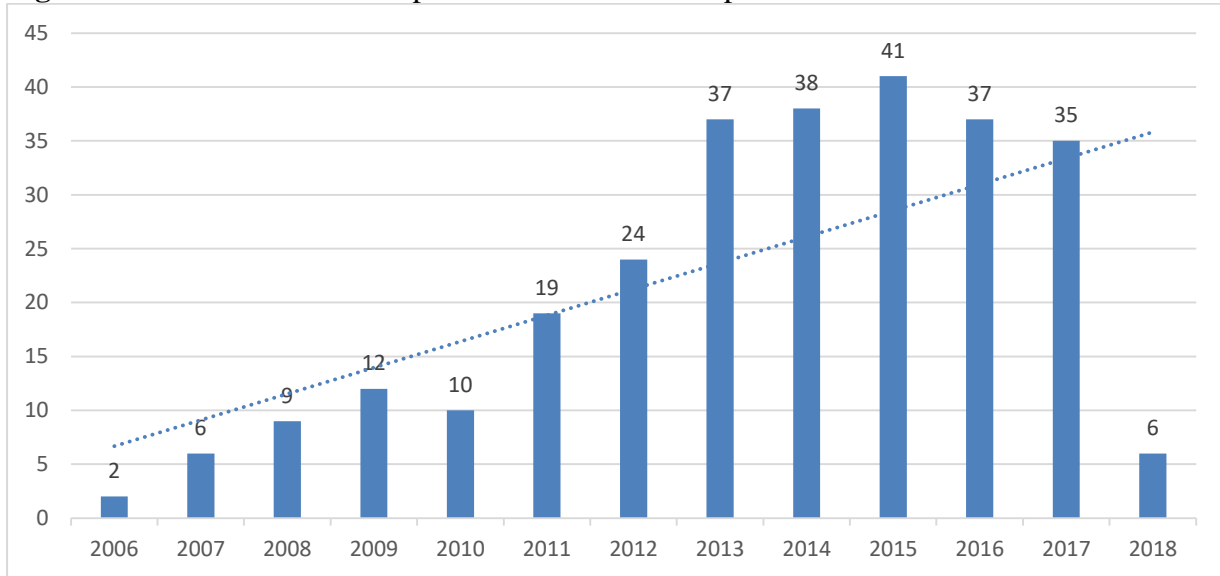
Social media engagement
Engagement through social media platforms, also referred to as online engagement, has been conceptualised in the literature as both active and passive in nature. Khan (2017) views it as comprising behavioural aspects or click-based interactions (participation) as well as simple content viewing and reading (consumption). Men and Tsai (2014) present social media engagement as a hierarchy of activity ranging from passive message consumption to active two-way conversation, participation, and online recommendation. These definitions seem to view passive engagement as involving behavioural activities that are focused on consumption such as views and reads, whereas the active dimension is described as participatory, interactive and dialogic. By dialogic, we mean a form of conversation which is two-way and participatory. Thus, in relation to relationship marketing, the focus of an organisation's social media activity should not just be on simple promotion but should aim to engage and facilitate connections with customers (Xie & Stevenson, 2014). Engagement is vital for community building through social media and can ultimately become a vehicle for relationship building, enabling the participatory creation of knowledge and knowledge sharing in a simple and convenient way (Wasike, 2013).

Libraries could take advantage of the dialogic potential of social media to give them a clearer understanding of the needs of customers and the possible ways of satisfying them. As Fiander (2012, p. 194) asserts, "Social network sites are not broadcast media; they are places to engage in conversations with your community". However, the literature on social media marketing in libraries suggests that the use of social media is primarily focused on broadcasting and promotional activities, such as informing customers of the resources and services available to them or the advertising of library news and events. It would appear that academic libraries are not taking full advantage of the capacity of these tools to engage in meaningful dialogue with students to understand their needs fully and respond appropriately.

Social media use by libraries

As noted in the Introduction, literature on the use of social media by library services is abundant. Figure 1 gives an indication of the incremental growth in scholarly publications (journals and conference proceedings) on social media adoption by libraries obtained by searching using the terms "social media" AND "libraries".

Figure 1: Publications Landscape on Social Media Adoption in Libraries.

Source: ProQuest (search undertaken May 2018)

Jacobson (2011) identified five categories of research relating to the use of Facebook in libraries: how-to-articles relating to best practices as well as ideas for the use of Facebook; library-centred case studies on successful use of Facebook by libraries; student-based research studies examining student opinions about the library on Facebook; research on services provided on Facebook, and perceived use of Facebook by librarians. These categories can conveniently be applied to other social media platforms. To give an indication of research undertaken in the area, we present one example of an empirical study in each of these categories in the order mentioned.

Within the best practice-based research category, Agosto, Purcell, Magee and Forte (2015) conducted a multi-method study of how public and school libraries fit into teens' increasingly online information lives. Data were collected through individual interviews, focus groups, and surveys from a sample of 158 students of 2 U.S. high schools. Their findings show that, contrary to common belief, teens are not just wasting time when using social media; often they are seeking information and sharing what they know with others. Recognising this, the authors recommended that libraries develop policies that support teens' use of social media and should consider providing informational content through these outlets.

Drawing on the lessons learnt by Montana State University Library, Young and Rossmann (2015) reported an account of the success achieved by convening a social media group to guide the library's social media activity. The group developed a guide featuring items such as audience focus, goals, values, activity focus, tone and tenor, posting frequency, posting categories and posting personnel. A two-phase study (pre- and post-guidelines) was undertaken to evaluate the number of followers, categories of posts and the level of

interaction on the library's Twitter account. It was reported that, pre-guidelines, the library lacked a social media presence and personality with, surprisingly, more followers from the business community than among students. Following the introduction of the guidelines, increased interaction was achieved with more student followers as the student user community grew by 366 percent and the rate of interaction with the community grew by 275 percent. This suggests that success in building a community on social media is achievable, especially when undertaken with a strategic direction.

To gain insights into students' opinion on the presence of libraries on social media, Sachs, Eckel and Langan (2011) carried out an electronic survey of 123 student users at Western Michigan University (WMU) to measure the effectiveness of Facebook as a marketing, reference and instructional tool. It also measured user comfort and satisfaction with the library's presence on Facebook. The majority of respondents found Facebook to be a useful and engaging medium to learn about library resources and services. When asked whether they felt that Facebook was a good way for libraries to stay in touch with students, more than 90% of undergraduates said "yes" or "sort of" (Sachs et al., 2011, p. 41).

While investigating services offered using social media, Islam and Habiba (2015) conducted a study to discover the use, purpose, importance and problems faced by library and information professionals in Bangladesh when marketing through social media. They selected 17 Public universities, 24 private universities and 5 special libraries in Bangladesh as a research sample. Of the 46 libraries, 44 were using social media. Findings also show that most of them used the platform for promoting library products and services, for sharing library news and events, video conferencing, advertisements, and research purposes.
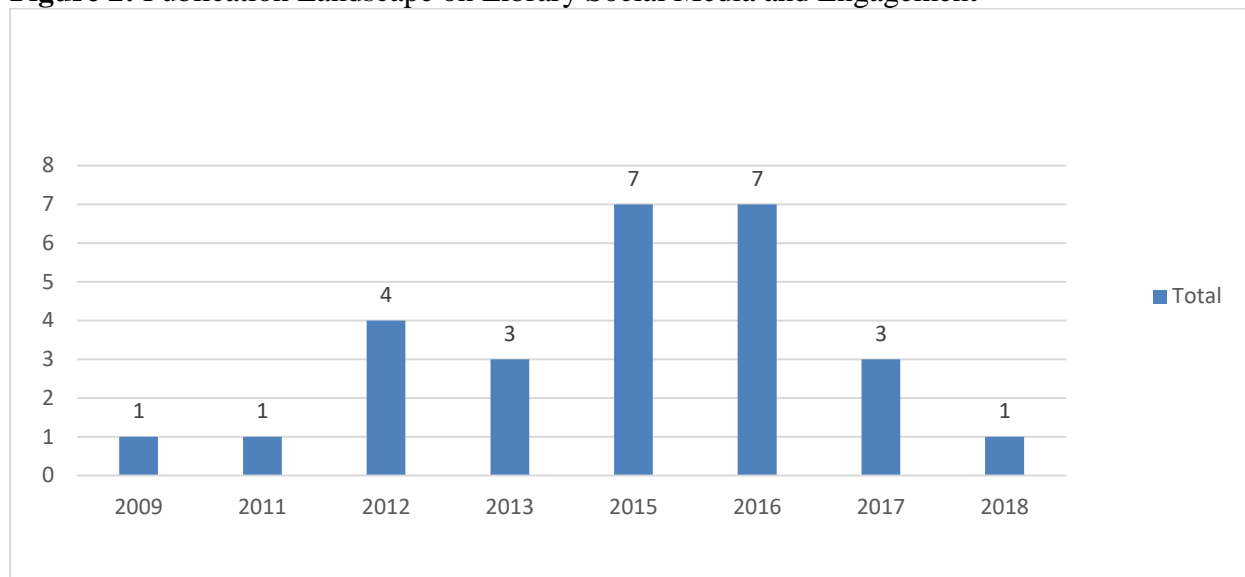
To understand librarians' perceptions of the use of social media, Chu and Du (2012) conducted a survey of 38 academic libraries from North America, Europe and Asia using an online questionnaire with closed and open ended questions. Results revealed that 27 were using social media, 11 were not, 5 planned to and 6 did not plan to. Overall perceived benefits were: it promotes library services, disseminates news quickly and enhances interaction with users. The challenges perceived to social media use related to staff time and costs, the necessity for staff mastery of the media, and a need to attract students to join in on the different platforms. It is important to note that the perception of librarians about using social media in the library have progressed from an initial uncertainty to acceptance in recent times.

Recently, studies examining the content of social media posts alongside the evaluation of metrics such as followers, comments, shares, and likes have also appeared in the literature. We call this content evaluation research. Within this category, Stvilia and Gibradze (2017) explored Twitter use by six large academic libraries in the United States and factors that make library tweets useful. 752 tweets were analysed by topic to develop a subject typology of library tweets. In addition, tweets and Twitter user characteristics were analysed to explore what makes library tweets useful, as measured by the number of retweets and favourites received. Content analysis of the samples of library tweets revealed nine content types (event, resource, community building, operations update, study support, question and answer, survey, staff and club) with the event and resource categories being the most frequent. In addition, the analysis showed that tweets related to study support services, and building and maintaining connections with the library community were the most frequently retweeted and selected as favourites.

Social media and user engagement in libraries

Despite an increasing emphasis on the importance of user engagement for successful social media marketing, very few studies in the LIS field have sought to investigate this phenomenon. The exceptions are Smeaton and Davis (2014) and Jones and Harvey (2016) who focus on the problem of customers' lack of engagement with library social media yet without examining the factors that may facilitate it. Others studies have examined the nature and form of engagement between the library and users on social media (Hager, 2015; Peñaflor, 2018; Winn, Rivosecchi, Bjerke, & Groenendyk, 2017). However, research exploring the factors that facilitate sustainable social media engagement between libraries and their users are scarce, representing a gap in the literature. Figure 2 presents a chart of the publication landscape of social media and user engagement in libraries which indicates a lack of empirical enquiry in this direction, despite its value and importance as highlighted above.

Figure 2: Publication Landscape on Library Social Media and Engagement

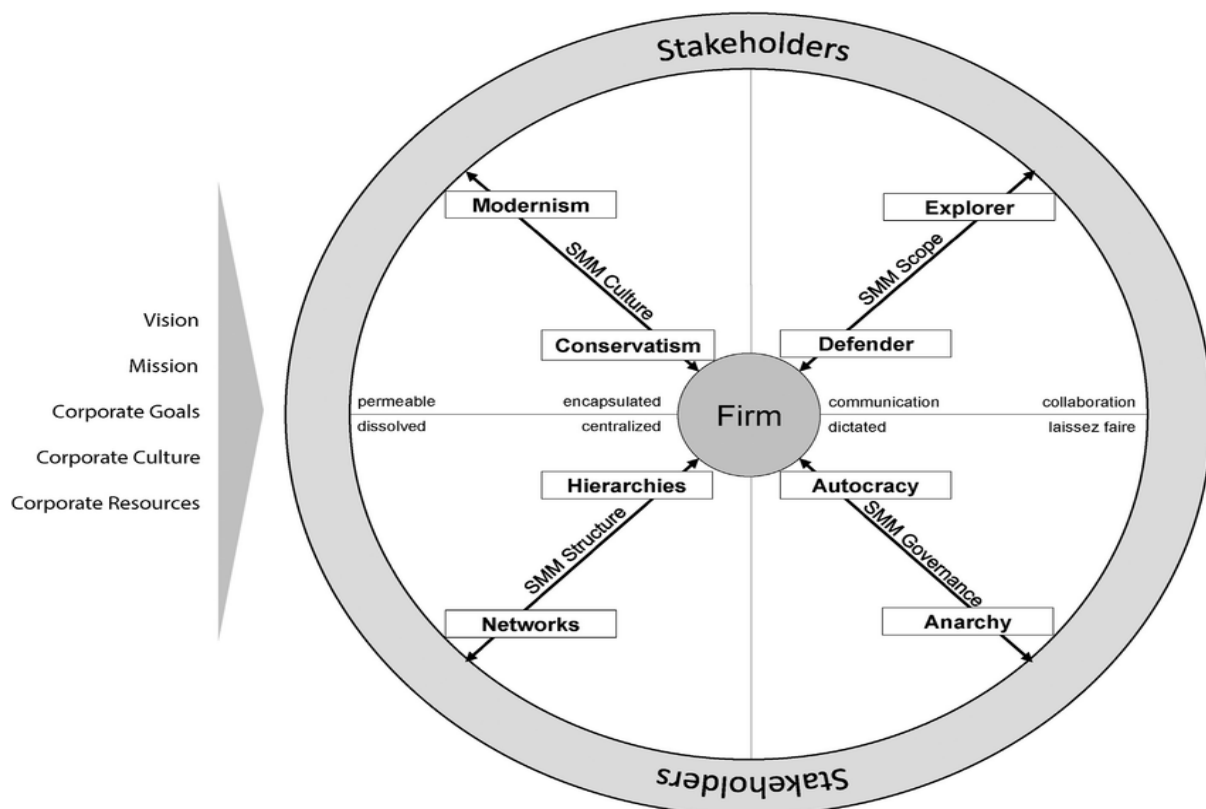**Source:** ProQuest (search undertaken May 2018)

There has, therefore, been little focus on aspects of user engagement with the library through social media within the LIS literature. As Wu, Chatfield, Hughes, Kysh and Rosenbloom (2014) point out, while there are many articles in the literature discussing tips and strategies for using social media in academic libraries, there are few studies that assess users' willingness to interact with the library on these platforms. Moreover, those studies that do consider it present a mixed view on the issue especially as it concerns students. On the one hand, Chu & Meulemans (2008) found that students were uncomfortable using social media sites for academic purposes. In their study, students indicated that they were more likely to use Facebook to communicate with friends and more comfortable interacting with academic personnel, such as librarians and professors, via more professional forms of communication, such as e-mail.

Similarly, Burhanna, Seeholzer and Salem (2009) reported that although the majority of students they interviewed expected the library to have a social media presence, their willingness to interact with library personnel was limited to specific online media, such as chat reference or virtual learning environments. One study found that students visited social networking sites primarily for non-academic purposes, namely to connect and share digital artifacts with friends, family, and acquaintances (Quan-Haase & Young, 2010). In the same

vein, Wu and colleagues (2014) found in a study across several health science institutions that the majority of students were not interested in interacting with their library using Twitter or Facebook. Stuart (2010) concluded that despite the increasing adoption of social network sites (SNSs) by libraries, user engagement on libraries' SNS is low. Results such as these suggest a need for further enquiry. From the limited evidence available, it would appear that academic libraries are missing an opportunity to connect with students through social media and build dialogic relationships for marketing purposes. Without the ability to foster engagement, participation, community and collaboration, libraries' social media activities could be expensive wasted efforts. As libraries increasingly adopt social media for relationship marketing, they need to understand how best to engage and maintain the interest of their users and the factors which support participation.

Exploring factors that foster sustainable engagement
Any discussion of successful social media marketing should begin at the strategic management level. The Strategic Social Media Marketing Framework (SSMMF) by Felix, Rauschnabel and Hinsch (2017) is a relatively new contribution to the literature of social media marketing. It suggests that four dimensions are central to an organisation's approach: scope; culture; structure; and governance (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Strategic Social Media Marketing Framework (Adapted from Felix et al., 2017)

First, social media marketing scope addresses the question of whether organisations use social media marketing predominantly for communication with one or a few stakeholders (Defenders) or comprehensively (both externally and internally) as a genuine tool for collaboration (Explorers) (Felix et al., 2017). For libraries, this means considering the role of social media within their operations, and whether social media is a mechanism for pushing

content to selected stakeholders or whether it can be used to build a dialogue with and among users. The evidence from the literature suggests that libraries tend to be Defenders, broadcasting information about events, services and resources available (Stvilia & Gibradze, 2017) rather than Explorers, seeking to engage stakeholders in interactions that will encourage them to support the organisation. It seems reasonable to suggest that those university libraries seeking to increase their engagement with student customers would be best advised to adopt the Explorers approach.

The second element focuses on whether the social media culture is Conservative taking a controlling, risk-averse view or Modern which is more "permeable, authentic, and sometimes risk-taking" (Felix et al., 2017, p. 5). Libraries with a more open and flexible social media marketing culture should find it easier to sustain a conversation with their users through social media platforms, than those who take a more cautious approach.

The third important element, structure, considers who is responsible for social media marketing within the organisation. A Hierarchies approach is where responsibility for social media marketing is highly centralised and there is a clearly designated staff member controlling all the organisation's social media activities. With a Networks approach, in contrast, all employees have responsibility and control is decentralised. There are advantages to both arrangements; a Networks structure is likely to lead to more spontaneous connections with users while a Hierarchies structure should ensure that key messages being conveyed cannot be confused or diluted. In libraries, a team-based approach has proven useful. Young and Rossmann (2015), for example, found that the formation of a social media group at Montana State University Library marked an important shift in their social media activity and was crucial in building a strategic and programmatic focus around social media. Including individuals from the key groups being targeted via social media could also be considered. Levesque (2016) suggested that users can be co-opted to the library's social media team to bring their perspective on the best ways to foster engagement.

The final element in the SSMMF focuses on governance and the extent to which social media activity in the organisation is guided by rules and policies, ranging from Autocracy where there are clear social media guidelines to Anarchy, which is much more laissez-faire and employees are free to post whatever content they want, whenever they want. As Felix et al. (2017) note, organisations with a more Hierarchical approach to the management of social media marketing are likely to need fewer formal guidelines and policies. Those tending towards the Networks approach, however, will require clear rules and editorial guidelines establishing principles of social media use and the consequences of non-compliance. In the LIS literature, Ramsey and Vecchione (2014) suggest that consistency in message and tone is a key element to successful social media marketing and, overall, policy-directed social media marketing has been reported as yielding more positive results (Mihailidis, 2014).

Conclusion: implications for libraries' social media marketing
Libraries have embraced social media for promotional and communication purposes but the capacity of social media for marketing has not been fully explored or exploited. Through social media marketing, libraries have an opportunity to facilitate much closer relationships between libraries and their customers, thus improving user satisfaction and improving their reputation and relevance (Taylor and Francis Group, 2014). While previous research has focused on techniques to increase customer engagement with the organisation through social media (Ramsey & Vecchione, 2014), a strategic, holistic approach is more likely to lead to a clear understanding of purpose and direction for the organisation's social media marketing

activities. Using the elements on the SSMMF, libraries could consider moving towards the Explorers end of the spectrum to facilitate conversations rather than just pushing information out to audiences. This can involve simple steps such as ensuring comments from customers are answered with a genuine, individualised response rather than a standard answer in an attempt to build interaction. Similarly, a Modern social media culture that is permeable is likely to connect with and engage customers readily although, as Felix et al. (2016) indicate, this does lead to some loss of control of content and messages. With regard to structure, a more dispersed approach has been proven to bring advantages for libraries. Carscaddon and Chapman (2013) suggest that having multiple contributors not only helps with staff buy-in and ownership of social media activities but also, practically, helps maintain continuity as individual staff move on from the library. Ramsey and Vecchione (2014) add that including posts and content from all units of the library increases variety and thus the chance that different customer groups will be engaged. They also recommend involving student contributors, noting that their ability to foster engagement within their community is strong. With the first three Framework elements discussed, a move from the organisation towards stakeholders seems more likely to lead to higher engagement, but the final element, governance, is more complex. The dispersed, team approach suggested above might imply a less Autocratic approach and yet, on the other hand, if social media activities are distributed throughout the library, rules and guidelines are important to ensure contributors remain "on message" and consistent. Felix et al. (2016) suggest involving employees in the drafting of policies and guidelines and training to ensure their effectiveness and to gather feedback on their implementation, which might be more appropriate in a team-based approach.

Although academic libraries have been quite enthusiastic adopters of social media, the extent to which they use it to truly engage with their users for marketing purposes is unclear. The evidence suggests that the promotion of resources, services and events takes precedence over interactivity for deeper knowledge of customers' needs, preferences and ways of meeting them. In an era of increased competition for information services and resources, it is vital that libraries make every effort to understand the mindset and circumstances of those the library is seeking to serve. Social media can help librarians reach customers in new ways but truly to engage them, stimulate their interest, build loyalty and demonstrate value (Luo, Wang, & Han, 2013), library managers need an understanding of the managerial, situation and personal factors that facilitate social media success and engagement.

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