

The Impact of Librarians' Individual Abilities on Using Social Networks in Iranian Libraries

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to articulate the Librarians' Individual Abilities affecting on applying the social networks, as a tool for marketing, from viewpoint of librarians working at the Iranian state university libraries. This research was analytical survey research. The *research community* consisted of 146 librarians who are working at central libraries of 40 state universities in the capital of province affiliated to Ministry of Science, Research and Technology. Data collection instrument was a researcher-made questionnaire. The findings of the research confirmed the impact of librarians' individual abilities on the usage of social networks as a marketing tool in academic libraries. Among the components, "skill for establishing a communication via a social networks" (3.34), "familiarity with social network" (3.26) and "cognitive skill for meeting users' information requirements" (3.13) had the greatest impact on using social networks as a marketing tool in academic libraries. Based on the findings of the research and outputs, we concluded that, individual abilities are among the most important success factors of academic libraries and most be defined as an important element of academic librarians' competency profile. For that, library managers and librarians are to be aware of the ever-changing conditions in academic libraries, and assess the strengths and weaknesses of individual librarians' characteristics and their job performance for effective use of social networks in library marketing.

Keywords: Iran State University Libraries, Librarians' Individual Abilities, Marketing, Social Networks

Introduction

Usage of the information technology (IT) in libraries has become essential and inevitable part of information centers. Many of information centers have their plan for IT governance to accelerate usage of these technologies to provide their users with more convenient services. Social network are among the newest technological developments which have been popularized in recent years and found their path into academic libraries.

Libraries are a social institution and increasingly try to leverage the advanced technologies to expand relationship with their customers. For that, they also step into the use of social networks as a new information technology in their ubiquitous services. Past research findings indicated that, the decisive success of the Internet service urging libraries to update their infrastructure and human resources to meet the requirement of the new information era (Rakshchar, 2015).

Academic libraries required to use modern technological facilities, including social media, to provide users with desirable services and increase interconnectivity of users with the library, so that they can achieve their goals by providing more attractive and user-friendly services and more interaction with users. Based on the previous investigations, Web 2.0 tools have been widely used in libraries for their interactive characteristics and have proven their outstanding performance in academic libraries (Currie, 2010).

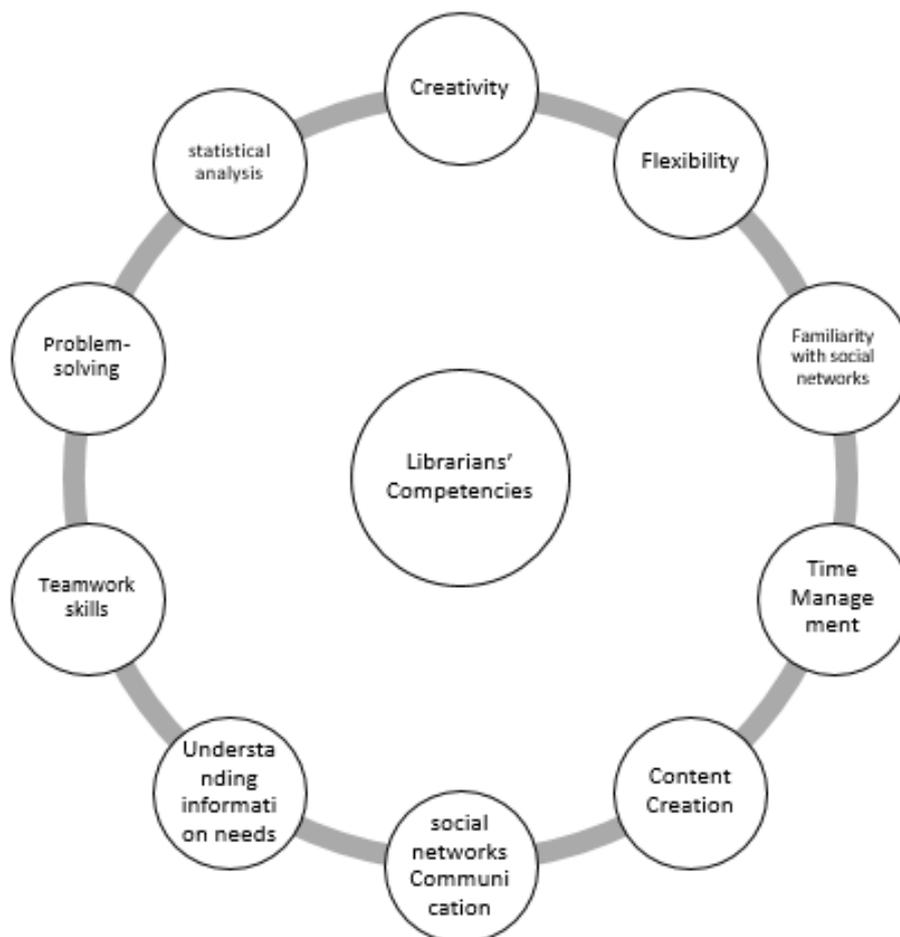


Figure 1. Librarians' competencies to deal with social networks

In this study, we extracted 10 individual competencies from previous literature which accelerating social interactions. These competencies were: Creativity, Flexibility, Familiarity with social networks, Time Management, Content Creation Skills, Communication skills through the social network, Understanding user's information needs skills (Audience), Teamwork skills, Problem-solving skills, and statistical analysis skills have been examined. The main research question was what is the role of individual competencies in using social networks as a marketing tool in academic libraries.

Social media and academic libraries

Social media employ mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms which enables individuals and communities to share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content. Given the tremendous exposure of social media in the popular press today, it would seem that we are amid an altogether new communication. (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy & Silvestre, 2011)

Social media is in continuation of using web-based technologies to build a social relationship among people and facilitate information exchange through interactive platforms. Social media is defined as an Internet-based application that allows users to create content based on Web 2.0 technology. Social media is considered in the form of a rating based on social participation in many different forms including blogs, social blogs, microblogging, wikis, podcasts, photos, and videos. The use of social networks in organizations will lead to improve well-being and increase the organization's performance gains. Social Media based on Chandler & Munday (2016) is websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in Social Networking”.

Social media provides more opportunities to reach your community, target specific audiences, and give them a chance to interact with your library (Tortorella, 2012).

In countries with developed education and advanced library systems, libraries utilize contemporary trends for marketing their library and information products and services for their distance users (Khan & Bhatti, 2012). Considering the Libraries, therefore, have an important role to play in utilizing social networks for marketing purposes.

Libraries as service organizations are affected by customer satisfaction so, the level of service and the quality of support should also meet the expectations of the user community to the best of all. In this regard, social media can be a platform for promoting and encouraging library products and services, and thus satisfying customers.

Academic librarians and information professionals are tasked with providing these social networks with the necessary context for communication and interaction between themselves and users of libraries. Due to the benefits of using social networks in libraries, examining the factors that increase the use of social networks among librarians helps managers to provide better services in the library.

Background

Khan & Bhatti (2012) explored the role of social networks in library marketing. Findings showed that respondents' attitude was positive; the majority agreed that the use of social media is important to capture the attention of online users and helps in distance learning and

knowledge sharing. Respondents recommended the use of Facebook, Wikis, LinkedIn, Blogging, YouTube and online groups for marketing different library services. They indicated that inadequate training opportunities, lack of knowledge, privacy and identity theft, slow speed of internet and electricity failure are the problems for applying social media in libraries of Pakistan for marketing library resources and services. They demanded more training courses on social media usage and suggested that libraries should develop social media pages for maximum exploitation of library services.

Jain (2013) in her research, explored how libraries and information centers are using Social Media applications for marketing library and information services worldwide. The purpose of this research was to review empirical studies on the utilization of Social Media for marketing, discuss the most widely used Social Media tools, and analyze the general guidelines for the utilization of Social Media applications in libraries and information centers. Finally, the paper presented a framework for the successful design and utilization of Social Media applications in marketing libraries and information centers.

Kim & Sin (2016) commented in their article two web surveys: one for undergraduates (n=1355), and the other for academic librarians (n = 189). The study found that two groups were similar in terms of social media platforms used for information-seeking, as well as their main purposes for using them. However, a significant gap was identified in the strategies that students used, and those that librarians found useful, for evaluating information from social media. Based on the findings, suggestions were made for information literacy education and future research.

Harrison, Burrell, Velasquez & Schreiner (2017) used a phenomenological approach and Institutional Theory to explore social media postings at six different public and private university libraries in two Midwest states. The research addressed what themes emerge among the university library's social media pages and what, if any, differences in themes emerge based on the status of the library in question. Social media postings included ten different codes: archives; collections; events; exhibits; facility; library community; sentiments; services; site management; and university community. These codes were tied to three different themes: libraries create a sense of outreach and advocacy to establish community connection, provide an inviting environment, and access to content as needed or desired. Ultimately, while libraries at universities with an ARL library or an MLS granting degree program showed a similar breakdown between these three themes, libraries at other master's degree institutions spent less time on making community connections instead of posting content and information about the library's environment.

Stvilia & Gibradze (2017) studied undergraduate students' use of library services and social networks in their research. This study reports on findings of a survey of 104 undergraduate students in information technology courses at a large research university. Results of ordered logistic regression analysis indicated that students considered access to information and computer resources and study support services as the most important library services offered. Likewise, students perceived library social media postings related to operations updates, study support services, and events as the most useful. Future related research will investigate the needs and priorities for library services of other key user populations of academic libraries, such

as graduate students and online students, to assemble service repertoires that are tailored to individual user groups.

Research method

The main questions of this research was: What is the role of individual abilities in using social networks as a marketing tool from the point of view of librarians of central academic libraries?

Since the research was mainly approached to investigate the opinion of librarians then, survey methodology was selected. A questionnaire developed by the researcher and was used for data collection. Validity of the instrument was examined by referring to experts on social media and knowledge and information science. Reliability of the questionnaire was calculated using Cronbach's alpha. It was acceptable (0.92). The study population consisted of 146 librarians working in central libraries of Iranian state universities, Affiliated with Ministry of Science, Research and Technology (MSRT). Our adoption of research methods in response to each research question is summarized in Table 1. Data were analyzed by SPSS software version 18.

Findings

In response to the research question, on "the role of individual abilities in using social networks as a marketing tool from the point of view of librarians of central academic libraries", the following findings are significant:

Research findings show that only three components of individual competency have significant relationship with the usage of social media in marketing tasks compared to the average level. Two components namely "familiarity with social networks" and "communication skills through the social networks" were the highest impacting factors, given that their average is more positive and higher than the average level.

Creativity (3.4), communication through social network with an average of 3.34, and understanding the information needs of users (3.13) have the greatest impact on the use of social networks as marketing tools in academic libraries. This means that, creative librarians who are well equipped with communication skills and are able to build a good relationship with library users are more likely to leverage the social media and market the library services. This finding also indicates that working with social media in academic libraries requires more communicative persons than others. Components like Problem-solving skills (2.84) and statistical analysis skills (2.70) have the least. But, the total average impact of the individual competencies on using social networks for marketing was confirmed to be significant.

Table 1

One-sample t-test for the components of individual abilities

Factors	Test value: 3					
	Test statistic	Degrees of freedom	Significance level	Average difference	Difference at 95% confidence level	
					Minimum	Maximum
Creativity	11	145	/621	/04110	-/1229	/2051
Flexibility	-/096	145	/923	-/00685	-/1474	/1337
Familiarity with social networks	3/210	145	/002	/26712	/1027	/4316
Time Management	-/155	145	/877	-/01370	-/1887	/1613
Content Skills	-/081	145	/935	-/00685	-/1738	/1601
Communication skills through the social network	3/931	145	/000	/34932	/1737	/5250
Understanding users' information needs	1/372	145	/172	/13014	-/0574	/3176
Team working	/328	145	/744	/02740	-/1378	/1926
Problem-solving	-1/731	145	/086	-/15753	-/3374	/0224
Statistical analysis	-2/941	145	/004	-/29452	-/4925	-/0966

Results of One sample t-test indicated that the significance level of the three components including: “familiarity with social networks”, “communication skills” and “statistical analysis” were less than the significance level (0.05). This indicates that there was significant difference between means and the test value. Since the mean difference between the two components of “familiarity with social networks” and “communication skills” is positive, so the role of these two components was assessed higher than the average. The role of the seven other components of individual competencies such as creativity, flexibility, time management, content management, the user information needs recognition, team working and problem solving was evaluated as moderate.

Results & Discussion

Social media research has confirmed the role of this technology in marketing affairs. Using social media in academic libraries will enable them to attract more users to the libraries. Proper utilization of social networks requires the competencies that academic librarians need to be well equipped.

The present study examined an important aspect of social networking requirements in university libraries. The findings will help university librarians to consider influential aspects in selecting human resources. Ignoring the key success factors in deploying social networks technology will cause academic libraries to fail in the knowledge age.

Many managers seek to increase the impact of their services on the peripheral community but do not consider the tools necessary to succeed. Entering the knowledge age, on the other hand, requires competencies that academic libraries may not have taken into account. Such a gap in decision-making will waste time, money, and manpower. However, social networking has given university librarians great opportunities for success. Among the 10 competencies we investigated, role of “communication skills through the social network” and “familiarity with

social networks” in using social networks as a marketing tool was higher than the average and the “statistical analysis” was less than the average.

Total effect of the individual competencies on the use of social networks as a marketing tool was positive. But there was a significant gap between the current and desirable point. This indicates the intention of academic librarians to leverage the social media as a marketing tool in their work space but there are obstacles prohibiting libraries to accomplish with the new and advanced technologies such as social media. The main problem is that, the majority of academic library managers have not specialized knowledge on library and information science and are not equipped with related expertise as well. This difference prompts the academic libraries to provide librarians with personalized skills and enhance their competencies in using social networks to market the products and services of libraries. Librarians’ competencies on social media and marketing will increase their acceptance among audiences. Packaging and presenting new services and marketing them has become a very simple task using social media but the main challenge is the competency profile of librarians.

Based on the findings, impact of individual abilities on the use of social networks as marketing tools were generally considered moderate. Library managers need to consider improvements of existing individual abilities and to bring them closer to the desired situation. But this is not a simple process and requires full commitment of librarians and their intention to update their knowledge and skills on social media. Improvements of librarians’ competencies will lead to the promotion of the use of advanced electronic marketing tools (e.g. social media) in libraries.

Considering the impact of individual abilities on using social media in academic libraries marketing programs, some recommendation are proposed as following:

- 1- Holding meetings, conferences, seminars, workshops on information technology, especially social networks, to improve the advanced knowledge required of librarians and exchange their knowledge and experiences on how to use these social networks in the library.
- 2- Holding in-service training classes for improving the skills, creativity, and attitude required by librarians and addressing shortcomings.
3. Promoting and assigning responsibilities based on the level of performance, skill, expertise, and experience of individuals.
4. Changing the curriculum of academic courses to improve the understanding and taking advantage of the capabilities of information technology, especially social networks in libraries.
5. To review the librarianship curriculum in line with the different goals and roles of librarians and libraries in today's highly competitive world.
- 6- Adding curricula related to information technology, especially social networks, to academic courses.
7. To give special privileges to creative librarians to use social networks in the library to increase their job motivation. (Such as providing favorable conditions and determining more appropriate salaries and benefits for innovative librarians).
8. To improve teamwork among librarians in the library environment and to strengthen the spirit of cooperation and exchange ideas and creative ideas among them on how to use social networks as marketing.

9. Library managers need to develop problem-solving skills in the workplace to make logical and systematic decisions and make appropriate choices and be aware of the unpredictable nature of the issues.

Since this study only examines the factors influencing the use of social networks in marketing academic libraries, further research that can address the grassroots of these issue will be very useful. In particular, unless library managers are more advanced than the librarians in their specialized knowledge, it will not be possible to properly guide libraries to take advantage of new technologies and provide effective services to improve the quality of teaching and research in universities.

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