

LIS6010 ~ Assignment #2 ~ Blog

Topic #2 ~ Social Networking: Adoption and Impact on Libraries

The impact of social networking in libraries is two-fold, firstly as a library implements this media for its own purposes, and secondly, as a library provides the service to its patrons for their own personal use. Librarians have embraced new mediums for and methods of reaching out to current and potential users for decades as advocacy has evolved. With each new medium, however, come unique challenges for its practical integration into the library facility, services and staff awareness. Who will use it? Who will regulate it? How much will it cost? How will it benefit us? Libraries must have the foresight to evaluate these and other questions as social networking grows within the scope of library service.

Increasingly over recent years, libraries must reach users by connecting with them “in their preferred method of communication” (Topper, 2007), which today, means linking with them via online, mobile and virtual formats. When “1 in every 7 minutes spent online is at Facebook [and] Twitter captures “340,000,000 tweets a day” (Rozen, 2012), librarians need to be well-versed in reaching their patrons through these channels. Fluency in these technologies opens avenues for marketing, advocacy, research, sharing, circulation and more, activities that were highlighted in a recent study by MLIS graduate students at the University of British Columbia.

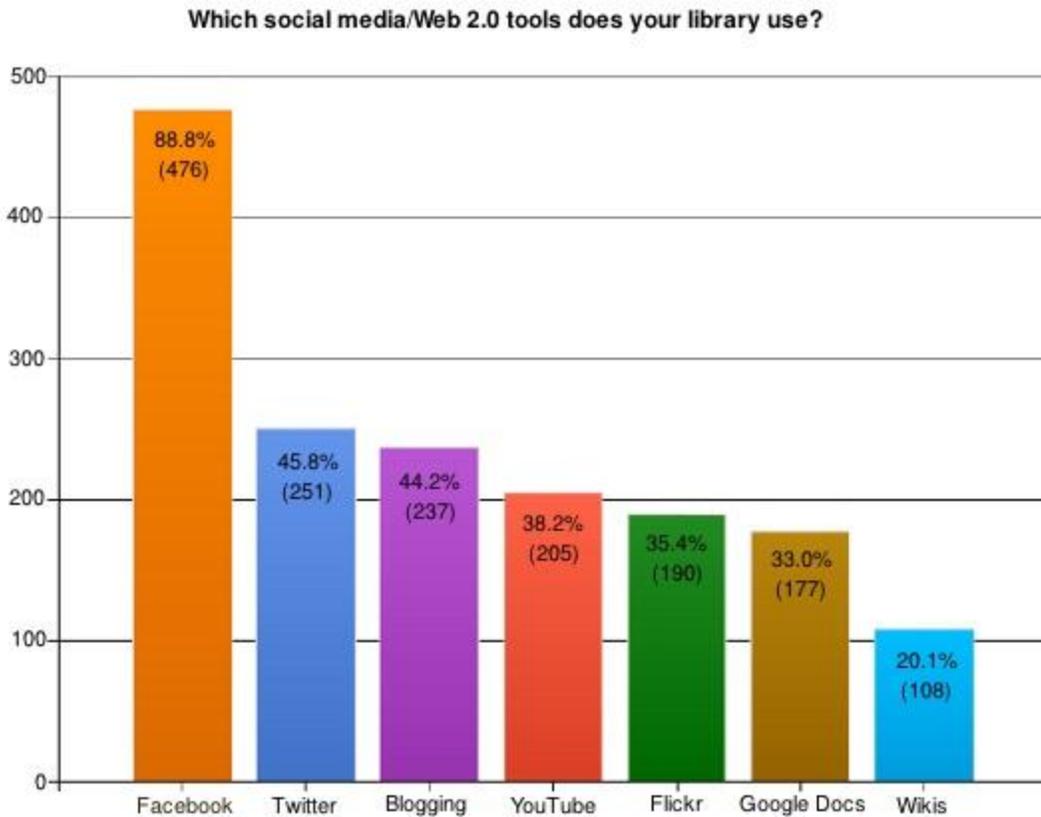
In the 2010 State of American Libraries report by the ALA, the data reveals that librarians are increasingly promoting their libraries through online or digital mediums, with a “consensus that technology is developing rapidly and that libraries and librarians who are slow to adapt put themselves at risk” (www.ala.org). As a single example, the use of these tools to

“provide quick updates to users” has increased 132% since 2009, a very revealing indicator of the trends in library promotion (www.ala.org).

| | 2010 | 2009 | Change |
|---|-------|-------|--------|
| Use of Web 2.0 tools | | | |
| Promoting general library services | 82.5% | 77.7% | 6.2% |
| Marketing specific adult programs and/or services | 70.0% | 60.3% | 16.1% |
| Marketing specific children’s and/or youth services programs | 63.0% | 56.8% | 11.0% |
| Providing quick updates to users | 65.6% | 56.8% | 15.5% |
| Reaching a new audience of potential users | 50.6% | 48.7% | 3.9% |

| | 2010 | 2011 |
|---|------|------|
| Promoting general library services | 83% | 88% |
| Marketing specific adult programs and/or services | 70% | 72% |
| Providing quick updates to users | 66% | 75% |
| Reaching a new audience of potential users | 51% | 54% |

Clearly, libraries are seeing significant benefit in the use of social networking, but what methods of social networking and web 2.0 are libraries actually using to reach out to their patrons? According to the same report by the American Library Association, libraries are using multiple mediums to reach the greatest level of penetration among their patrons (and even non-patrons). Facebook ranks as the number one social networking tool used by libraries with wikis listed last. If libraries want to remain relevant, it’s clear that they must follow the public trend of on-line activity, and these statistics reveal that libraries are, indeed, doing so.



The greatest challenges for librarians in using social networking for their own professional purposes are arguably time and training. The time to learn each new medium as well as the time to use it to its full potential can be a daunting, endless task; many libraries operate with fewer staff, fewer hours, and fewer resources but have as many or more responsibilities as in the past. An even greater obstacle, however, for libraries exists in the delivery of the service to allow public access to social networking. Expense, equality, and ethics are primary concerns as libraries bring technology to patrons.

The equipment required to supply social networking in libraries is a costly and continuous expense in a library budget. Computer systems, printers, Internet access, and software are merely the tip of the iceberg in the delivery of technology services. The expense of training library staff in the operation of these components is a substantial secondary cost. Each new piece of equipment represents funding that is eliminated from collection, program or even staffing budgets. Administrators constantly juggle the

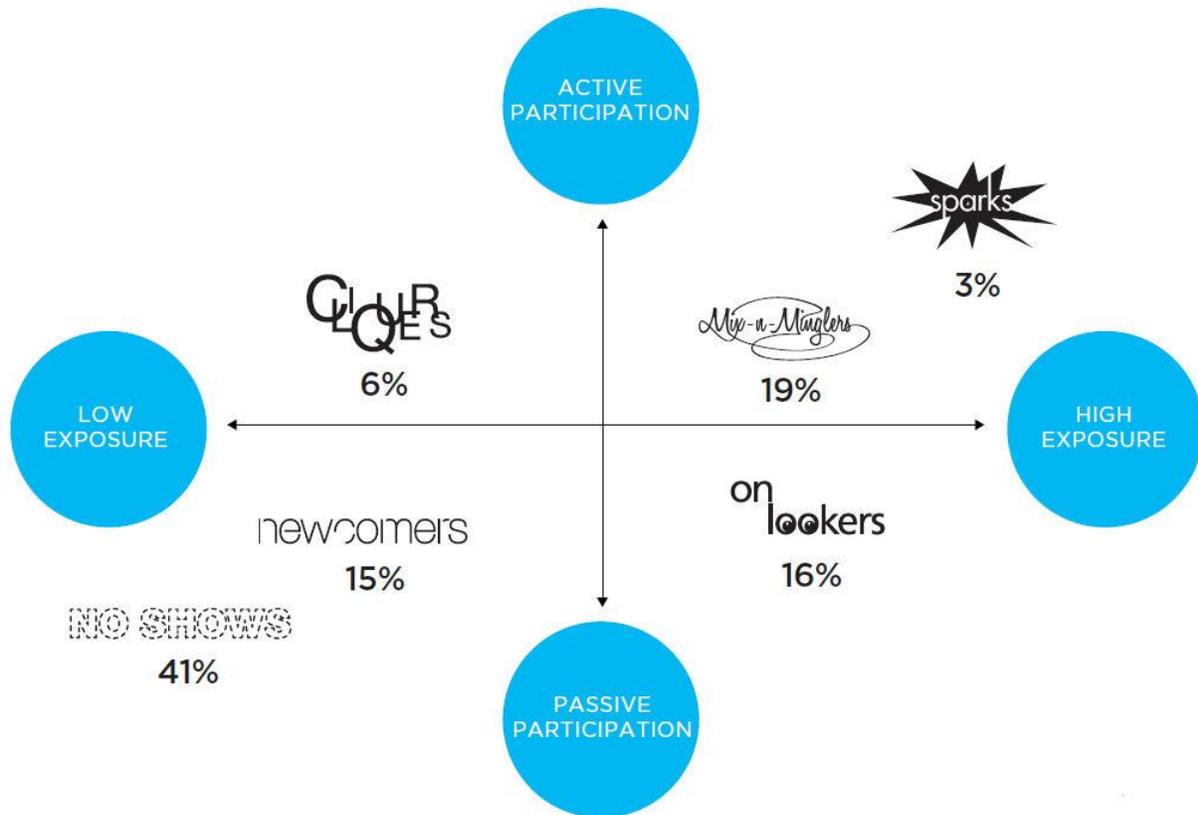
allocation of money to equally deserving areas of service. Does the need for and expense of a new computer, for example, outweigh the need for and expense of new children's books? Which need is greater? Despite the significance of books in the history of libraries, the last century has witnessed a digital revolution that has resulted in a shift away from print. The explosion of social networking within this revolution is an effect that libraries are continuing to navigate.

Perhaps the earliest form of modern social networking arrived in the form of email, and quickly progressed to "included applications such as online multiplayer games, bulletin boards, news groups, mailing lists, and dating services" (Topper, 2007); since then, "the total universe of social media users has raced past critical mass much faster than even the most aggressive analyst could have predicted" (Rozen, 2012). The effects of this transformation have not been lost on public libraries. Library leaders recognize that social media is not disappearing anytime soon, and as even seniors discover its value, libraries need to find meaningful ways to not only use it, but to offer it.

A vast number of patrons visit public libraries each day to use public access computers; with "66% of on-line adults use social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, MySpace or LinkedIn [and] fully 95% of all teens 12–17 years old are now online, [with] 80% of them users of social media sites" (www.pewinternet.org), it's a natural given that these same statistics can be applied to the habits of library computer users. Further, "there are more than 845 million active Facebook users worldwide. Every week, LinkedIn gains a million new users, and Twitter publishes nearly two and half billion new tweets. Every day, consumers view an average of 3 billion YouTube videos" (Rozen, 2012). Who are these users, and how are libraries meeting their needs? According to research by AIMIA conducted by Rozen, there are six social media personas with differing level of use:

- No Shows (41% of US population) ~ least involved with social media, if at all; infrequently engage in online commerce.
- Newcomers (15%) ~ passive users of a single social media network, primarily to enhance offline relationships
- Onlookers (16%) ~ observe others via social channels on a regular basis, but share almost no personal information

- Cliques (6%) ~ active users of one network; influential among their small group of friends and family
- Mix-n-Minglers (19%) ~ those who regularly share and interact with a diverse group of connections via social media
- Sparks (3%) ~ most active and deeply engaged users of social media; will serve as enthusiastic online ambassadors for their favorite brands/[activities]



Undoubtedly, social networking is a high-demand activity for society, and therefore, an equally high-demand service for libraries. When the demand exceeds the supply, as is often the case with the number of computer users versus the number of computers in a library, this big demand frequently leads to big trouble. From the earliest days of the Internet in public libraries, anecdotal stories have surfaced again and again about its paradoxical nature as a library service. Patrons have engaged in physical and verbal confrontations with each other about fair and equal access to computers, and also with library staff. In *Part of the Job: Violence in Public Libraries*, verbal abuse against library staff is described as “the

most common form of abuse...usually in response...to perceived inadequacy” (McGrath, 1996) in service. Too few computers with too many users sharing too little time creates a melting pot for problems within public libraries as patrons access social networking.

Finally, the ethics of moderating and evaluating computer use enter into the impact of social networking in public libraries. Is one patron’s use of Facebook, for example, an equally worthy pursuit on a public library computer as another patron’s search for educational information on-line? Who decides the priority of one activity over another? Some libraries provide unfettered access to on-line services, as well as to all information on the world wide web, scholarly or not. Others, however, have chosen to restrict the availability of “social network sites such as MySpace...block[ing] these websites and not allow[ing] access” (Topper, 2007). Yet a different approach is a library “setting aside the majority of computers for homework and business related tasks, assuring patrons do not have to wait for a computer and limiting the number of computers with social network access” (Topper, 2007). Certainly, these actions are equivalent to censorship, an ethically tenuous position for any library to support.

Libraries are unmistakably important access points for significant social networking in society. Navigating the expense, equality, and ethics of its use in a public setting with public funding is equally important. The landscape of social networking will undoubtedly continue to evolve, and libraries will need to adapt with it. Access to these tools is a social equalizer, giving patrons young and old, regardless of status, income, race or religion, the means to stay connected and informed in this digital society. As such, it is critical for libraries to stay true to the path they have always blazed in the freedom of access to information.

Reference List

McGrath, Hannah, and Anne Goulding. (1996). Part of the Job: Violence in Public Libraries. *New Library World*, 97(3), 4-13.

Pew Internet and American Life Project. (2011). *Why Americans Use Social Media*. Retrieved from <http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2011/Why-Americans-Use-Social-Media.aspx>

Rozen, Doug, Askalani, Mona, and Tom Senn. (2012). Staring at the Sun: Identifying, Understanding and Influencing Social Media Users. Retrieved from <http://www.marigold.ab.ca>

Topper, Elisa. (2007). Social Networking in Libraries. *New Library World*, 108(7), 378-80.

University of British Columbia. (2010). Top 100 Ways Librarians Use Social Media. Retrieved from <http://blogs.ubc.ca/dean/2010/08/top-100-ways-librarians-use-social-media/>