# Social Media

Summer 2013
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## Overview and Definition

Social media is a growing phenomenon in expanding networked and connected information landscapes. According to Junco et al. (2011) social media is defined as "a collection of internet websites, services, and practices that support collaboration, community building, participation and sharing" (119). Considered part of Web 2.0 applications, social media tools range from networking platforms such as Facebook to video sharing sites such as YouTube. Each tool may differ drastically in utility, interface, and application, but each supports collaboration and sharing where "everybody and anybody can share anything anywhere anytime" (Joosten 2012, 6).

## Basis for Current Interest

There is increasing data that demonstrates that students live and interact with social media in their personal, civic, and informal learning contexts. The Pew Research Center's Internet and American Life Project recently found that 67 percent of Internet users aged 18 to 29 use social media sites, including Facebook, Tumblr, Twitter, Pinterest, or Instagram (Dugan and Brenner, 2012). This demographic is more likely than any other to use social media tools. Recognizing that this age group encompasses traditional aged college students, educators have been investigating the affordances of social media for teaching and learning.

Furthermore, educational theorists have been speaking about the shift from the instructional paradigm to the learning paradigm for some time. Many see the potential for social media to offer a means of connecting learners in ways that respond to modern pedagogies that call for participatory experiential learning opportunities (Bass 2012, 24).

While social media has been increasingly used in traditional classroom settings, adoption in library instruction has developed at a slower pace. This document seeks to reveal current applications and to demonstrate potential for wider adoption of social media in information literacy and library instruction.

## Current Applications in Academic Libraries and Higher Education

A recent study conducted by Pearson Learning Solutions and the Babson Survey Research Group surveyed 2,000 faculty across the United States. The survey found that 2/3 of these faculty use social media in class contexts (Moran et al. 2011, 3). Pedagogical motivations for using social media may include increased collaboration and dialog, community and knowledge building, and encouraging learner interaction with rich media (Joosten 2012, 30). Social media, in contrast to institutionally controlled learning management systems, is often free, open, and public, which presents both opportunities and concerns when social media is used in educational contexts.

Most social media tools allow users to create individual profiles through which they may share content, socialize, and dialog in ways previously restricted by time- and space- bound traditional classrooms. Additionally, social media allows a virtual space where team-based and collaborative learning are possible (Michocha 2011, 252). Teachers are able to view each student's contributions in team-based projects, while learners are able to view the strategies and problem solving of their peers, thereby encouraging self-reflection as well as peer-based learning (Minocha 2011, 253). While there are numerous technologies considered to be social media, the tools most commonly used by educators can be grouped into a few broad categories: blogs, wikis, social bookmarking, social networking, and video and image sharing.

Blogs and microblogs have been used to facilitate learner opportunities to write for an authentic audience, to conduct assessments, and to increase dialog. Social media applications often used for this purpose include Tumblr, Wordpress and Twitter. For example, facilitated by a course hashtag, a class might engage in iterative dialog on Twitter

both during the synchronous class time and beyond. Teachers may choose to embed this dialog in a course site or display a visualized feed during class (TwazzUp, Visible Tweets, Twitterfall). Alternatively, students might compose a post on Twitter or a blog to record their responses to classroom assessment techniques such as one-minute papers or the muddiest point. Other creative applications include condensed argument compositions, literature analysis through role play, and student note taking.

Another promising category of social media tools is social bookmarking. Diigo and Delicious both enable learners to curate and share found resources with peers. When structured within a class context, students may build and manage a content library around the area of study thereby supporting their independent inquiry and self-directed learning. These tools often include features for annotating or evaluating, which further extend learners' critical interaction with content. Content curation sites like Storify, Learnist, Scoop.it, and Pinterest allow similar strategies and applications. For example, at the University of Florida, students enrolled in a New Media and Democratic Society class created a week-by-week Storify that compiled links, media, and comments.

For several years, educators have experimented with community building through social networking sites such as Facebook, Google+, Ning, Edmodo, and LinkedIn. These tools allow learners to create an online profile and to interact in a virtual space, thus extending class dialog beyond the physically bound classroom. The networks may include only students or teachers, or alternatively, the networks could connect learners with practitioners and experts.

Educators interested in encouraging student created content have also utilized video and image sharing sites, such as YouTube, Vimeo, Flickr, and Picasa. These tools allow learners to share multimedia content that they themselves have authored.

The use of social media in academic libraries is widespread in terms of marketing and broadcasting. Libraries commonly use Facebook fan pages, Twitter accounts, YouTube channels or blogs to distribute news about events, services, or resources. Libraries have also actively used these mechanisms to reach out to potential new users (ALA 2012, 34).

## Applications in Academic Library Instruction

Over the past decade, many instruction librarians have experimented with social media in their teaching. The means for integration varies; however, three objectives have been most common:

### Online Collaboration
Librarians are starting to take advantage of the collaborative aspects of these platforms. At Wake Forest University, librarians used Facebook as an alternative to the local campus learning management system to share documents and allow for collaboration. They also extend Facebook functions with a wiki app as well as some library and database widgets (Mitchell and Smith 2009). At the University of Lethbridge, librarians used PB Wiki to help students understand and experience the information cycle. Students began collecting content related to a specific historic event from the time of the event to the present. The librarians coached students to annotate and evaluate each resource, and students were permitted to post only citations not yet found by peers. (Eva and Nicholson 2011, 6).

### Curation & Sharing
The visual nature of many social media platforms is lending itself to new information literacy pedagogical methods. At the American University of Cairo, librarians used Flickr to model the concepts of databases and controlled vocabulary. Prior to an introduction to library databases, students were tasked to create a photo library with descriptions and tags. Next, students were encouraged to search for and find their own and other groups' photos. Through active creation of their own database, students were able to more readily grasp the structure and construct of library databases and controlled vocabulary (Bussert et al. 2008, 6). At Central Methodist University librarians have worked with composition teachers to design a research assignment that utilizes Pinterest and encourages both visual and information literacy. Students are asked to develop individual research portals for the class topic. Students build a Pinterest board, annotate pins, and share their board with classmates.

Similarly, a tool such as Scoopit helps students share citations as they navigate through their research process. A blog post in Misscybrarian suggests an activity in which students create a Scoopit on their topic as well as an RSS feed from academic journals. Next, students engage in comparative analysis of the quality of sources discovered from both.

Related strategies have been suggested for using Diigo. Students may join Diigo and identify an existing group on their topic in order to find recommended or valuable sources. Students may also be tasked to locate, tag, and annotate sources for group or class research projects. Librarians may specify how students annotate each source. For example, students may be asked to identify what the source contributes to their argument and what new questions the source raises.

**Practicing Inquiry**
In the previous examples, students curate and share content with peers as they explore and extend their research inquiries. The students are active in the process and are motivated by the social sharing and investment. A complimentary exercise is to ask students to investigate the ways scholars and practitioners use social media for knowledge generation. For example, at Oregon State University, librarians and writing teachers developed an assignment which required students to find scholarly "public conversation" on blogs or other social media sites (Deitering and Gronemyer 2011, 500). In this activity, students glimpse the informal dialog and peer evaluation that happens before or after formal peer review publications. A similar activity might ask students to connect with practitioner networks to explore information practices and sharing in those contexts (Chen 2013). Through these kinds of assignments, students view the social, complex, and participatory nature of research and knowledge negotiation. Students learn that inquiry can be an act of iterative meaning-making not simply the passive accumulation of sources.

## Potential Value

With the explosion of social media options available, educators are increasingly exploring how they can take advantage of their affordances and popularity to engage their students. As a result, library instructors should be doing the same. Social

media can be another avenue in which librarians can embed themselves in courses and assignments.

For example, Stephen Abram brainstormed that social media has great use for guided connectivity between students and information experts in response to the article "Taking Advantage of "Disruptive Technology" in the Classroom." If a class is using a blog, Facebook page, or a Twitter hashtag for online discussion, librarians can be there to offer support the same way they currently can and do within a course management system.

With the wealth of user generated content being created on and delivered via social media, instructors may be looking for librarian collaborators to instruct their students about copyright and digital attribution. At the University of Wisconsin-Madison, librarians created a LibGuide to address these skills for students creating public digital media assignments such as videos in YouTube.

Additionally, many college campuses are using channels such as Twitter or Facebook in their official communications strategy.  At universities where this is occurring, such as Notre Dame and Ohio State, instruction librarians have an opportunity to work with their library communications colleagues to promote drop-in workshops and online instructional content that may be pertinent to students during a specific time for a specific need.

## Potential Hurdles

As with any new technology there can be potential hurdles to successful use of social media in library instruction.  When looking through the 2012 PEW report of the demographics of social media users each social media platform has a somewhat different user community.  Librarians who would utilize these for library instruction surely will need training and experience in use, best practices, and effective communication within the specific platform before starting to interact with students and faculty via the social media. With many social media choices, and more being created, it can be difficult to keep up with the technology.

Not surprisingly, because of the social aspect of the medium some library instructors may not feel comfortable interacting with students in this way

and/or may be concerned about their privacy or the privacy of the students they are assisting. While Twitter allows for multiple accounts for personal and professional use, Facebook does not lend itself so nicely to this work/personal life separation. In a 2011 study of how faculty use social media, 70% had privacy concerns about using social media in their instruction.

## Conclusion

Social media is increasing in type and usage. With advances in the technology, instructors will continue to look for ways to use the popular medium in their courses to encourage more active participation and engagement with course materials. Instruction librarians are starting to do the same. There are many examples available, a few of which have been captured here, that can spur creativity for using this pervasive medium to extend student learning.

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