Application of Social Networking Services (SNS) for Library Collaboration: An Exploratory Study

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Abstract

By rapid development of the information and communication technology, the web-based services in particularly social networking services are lets the user interact and work collaboratively. The aim of this paper is to describe an exploratory study to examine academic librarians' perspectives on using social networking services for library collaboration. The researcher used semi-structured interview guide to collect data for investigating where academic librarians are currently cooperating each other by using social networking technologies. Finally the study identified the current networking and knowledge sharing practices in the academic library community, with an eye toward improving those services using social networking technology to track and leverage connections between information and library professionals.

Keywords: Social Networking Services, SNS, Library Collaboration, Web 2.0.

1. Introduction:

The use of social networking services such as Facebook and Twitter has become a popular and integral part of everyday communication in India. People are fundamentally social beings, both in our private lives and in our professional interactions. Young generation people are very enthusiastic users and majority are engaging on a daily basis with social networking services via a computer or smart phone. Nowadays, the importance of social networking services has become a major issue within society, as well as a significant study topic for many researchers. Social network sites integrate digital communication; in addition, the most important characteristic of social networking service is that they enable users to make their social networks visible and build connections among individuals (Huan, & Eric, 2010).

The number of social networking websites has grown rapidly over the past several years. As of August 30, 2013, the Wikipedia entry "list of social networking websites"

mentioned 200 "major social networking websites". Other sources put the total number of social networking sites much higher, one at about 350 (Ramsey, 2008).

2. Social Networking Services

Social networking service is a platform to build social networks or social relations among people who, for example, share interests, activities, backgrounds, or real-life connections. A social network service consists of a representation of each user (often a profile), his/her social links, and a variety of additional services. Most social network services are web-based and provide means for users to interact over the Internet, such as e-mail and instant messaging. Social networking sites allow users to share ideas, pictures, posts, activities, events, and interests with people in their network (Wikipedia, 2013).

Boyd & Ellison (2007) has defined Social networking services as:

Web-based services that allow individuals to:

> (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system,

> (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and

> (3) view their list of connections and those made by others within the system.

Social networking service generally exist for one of two purposes: socializing around digital objects and/or topics of shared interest or developing and utilizing business and/or professional networks.

3. Library Collaboration

Dakers (2003) states that collaboration as a form of corporation requires individuals and institutions to agree on a common agenda from which both parties will benefit and contribute throughout the lifetime of the relationship. Roberts and Rowley (2004) posits that collaboration is a key feature of information science and an exciting aspect of the information profession because the history and development of library and information science is anchored on partners' hips with regards to library cooperation, bibliographic, research and development. The interdisciplinary and dynamic nature of the LIS profession renders it acquiescent to collaboration because of the of the dire need to keep

up with current trends in the profession, for example, standardization, technological progress, research and development among other issues. Information Technologies provide useful platforms to enhance collaboration and networking between educators and practioners.

For the present study, use of social network services for library collaboration is considered as the individuals and groups involved in academic library collaboration including librarians, information and library professionals.

4. Application of Social Networking Services in Libraries:

Social networking services for collaboration in libraries applies through various aspects which deals with collaborative partnerships, the partners in library collaboration and the types of work. By examining where and how librarians already collaborate, this analysis will provide a foundation for evaluating tools used in academic library collaboration. Ramsey (2008) detailed out the collective aspects of social networking services as below.

4.1 Information Exchange

Information exchange fall into small-scale collaborative activities, including exchange of informal ideas about concepts and technologies, and also formal categories of collaborative tasks engaged in by academic librarians.

4.2 Resource Sharing

The resource-sharing category of collaborations includes interlibrary loan and reciprocal borrowing arrangements, cooperative collection development efforts, and cooperative resource management programs.

4.3 Sharing Services

The sharing services category focuses primarily on public services functions such as reference and instruction. It includes efforts between librarians within individual institutions and externally, between librarians and vendors and with government entities.

4.4 Work-Related Project Collaboration

Work-related tasks include consortia partnerships. In this long-term groups seeking to establish priorities and standardize practices across member institutions in a particular

consortium, as well as short-term groups focused on particular shared projects or concerns for particular functional areas. Aside from consortia, work-related project collaboration also appears as participation on committees from local to international levels and as work with donors and friends of the library groups.

4.5 Resource Description and Standards of Practice

The final category of collaborative tasks, establishing rules for description and standards of practice, encompasses creating and refining classification rules and instituting broad standards of practice.

5. Objectives of the study

The specific objectives of the present paper are:

1. To find out the social networking services which are to be used as a collaborative tool in the academic libraries?
2. To identify how academic librarians are approaching emergent social networking based technologies.
3. To find out preferred contact maintenance tools to track the users by academic librarians.
4. To measure the perspectives on professional use of social networking services among academic librarians.

6. Research Methodology

The aim of this study is to find out how academic librarians are approaching emergent social networking service based technologies. The particular aspects of this approach to be examined include the adoption of existing social networking service tools in collaborative practices and the perspectives of academic librarians on using these tools for real work tasks.

For the study, investigator has conducted ten semi-structured interviews with academic librarians employed at college libraries affiliated to University of Pune. An interview guide was developed for this study. The guide presented a standard description of social

networking services and then divided interview questions into four main areas of inquiry. The first area dealt with current areas and tools of collaboration to establish a framework for each participant's comments. The second area uncovered if and how the participant tracks past professional relationships, providing clues about the participant's approach to offline and online social networking. The third area of inquiry addressed the participant's use of and perspectives on using social networking services for library collaboration. The fourth and final area of inquiry consisted of an open-ended discussion about what elements or characteristics each participant would like to see in hypothetical social networking service tools.

7. Results and Discussion

7.1 Social Networking Services Used to Collaborate

In response to the first area of questioning all interviewee noted, that number of tools used to accomplish their collaborative tasks. Obviously, all worked face to face with librarians from their own and other institutions. The tool most used for all communication was email. Every respondent mentioned using email on a daily basis (and all interviewees mentioned having more than one email account). Other tools used most frequently included email, telephones, and Facebook. Besides these most frequently used tools, 4 participants regularly used blog and wiki and 3 participants are using chat (IM) and online video as social networking service. Another 2 used document-sharing and online photo sharing tools. Finally, 4 interviewees used WhatsApp tool for instant messaging for professional purpose.

Each interviewee was asked to discuss their feelings about the tools used, focusing on aspects of the tools they found especially useful, impractical, or simply in need of change. The tools most frequently discussed were email, Instant Messaging, telephones, wikis, and blogs.

Figure 1. SNSs Tool Used by Academic Librarians
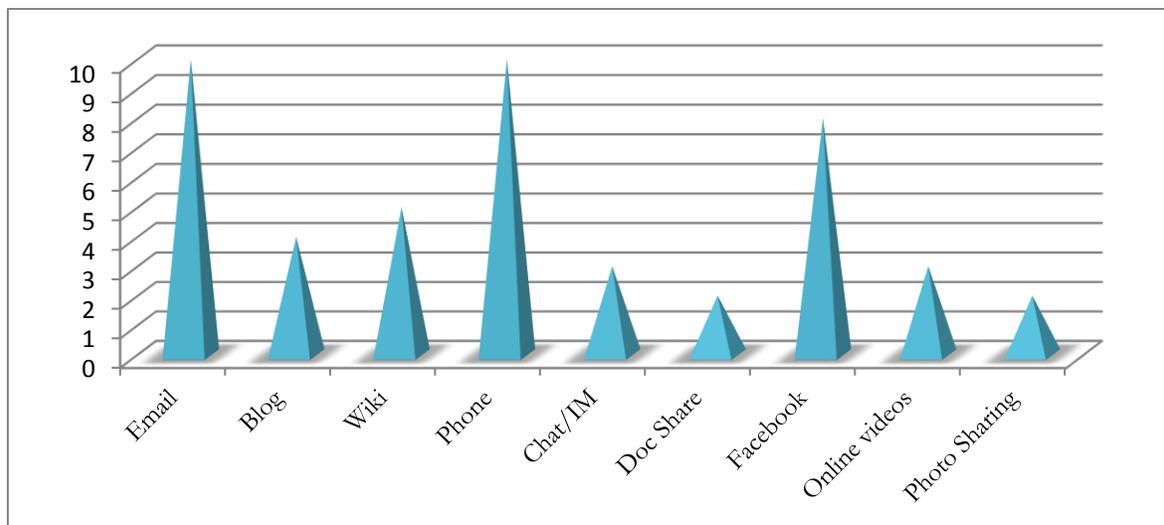
Most of librarians mentioned that Facebook and email seemed to be the tool of choice for the participants. The librarians using Instant Messaging generally approached it as an alternative to email to use when the task at hand needed a quick response. Those librarians less likely to use Instant Messaging generally opted to use a combination of email and the phone. Three librarians felt equally comfortable using Instant Messaging and phones, one of them noting that Instant Messaging is slightly less synchronous and thus provides extra time to think.

7.2 SNS Contact Maintenance Tools

This area of questioning revealed tools the librarians used to track people with whom they had collaborated or might collaborate in the future. Tools used included email address books, existing directories maintained by the institution or outside organizations and business cards.
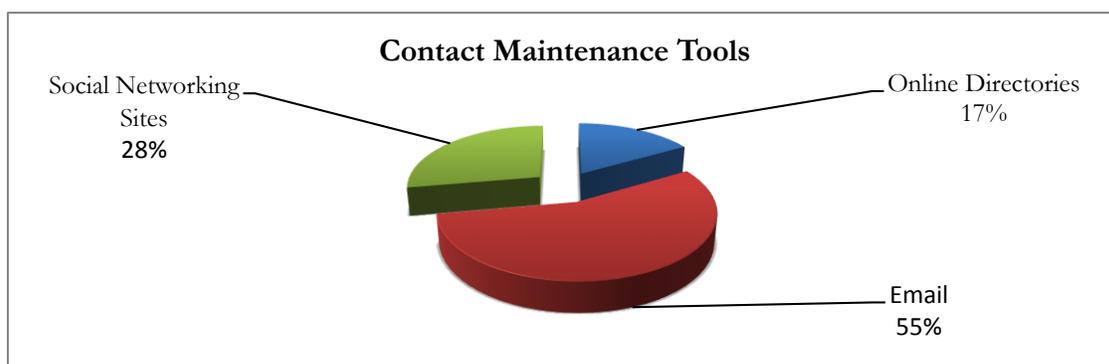
**Figure 2. SNSs Contact Maintenance Tools by Academic Librarians**

After talking about what contact maintenance tools they used, interviewees were asked to discuss advantages and disadvantages for using their chosen tools. The chart "Analysis of Contact Maintenance Tools" shows these considerations.

Analysis of Contact Maintenance Tools		
Tool	**Tool Benefits**	**Tool Disadvantages**
Email Address	Already open, both at work and home, automatic, searchable, low maintenance, large storage capacity, automatic affiliation with work, habit, attaches tasks with contacts.	Not always efficient searching, extremely high volume, hard to sift through.
Online Directories	Easily accessible, no maintenance for users, secure, searchable.	Only have limited information
Social Networking Sites	Broadly searchable, linked to detailed profiles, maintains links to most frequent contacts, self-updated, portable to anywhere with internet access	Time consuming to maintain presence, distracting features, don't allow control over organization, relevance rankings on people searches can be a pain.

7.3 Use of Social Networking Services

The interviews revealed that most of the librarians had accounts on one or more social networking services.

Figure 3. Number of Users using Social Networking Sites

SNS by number of Users
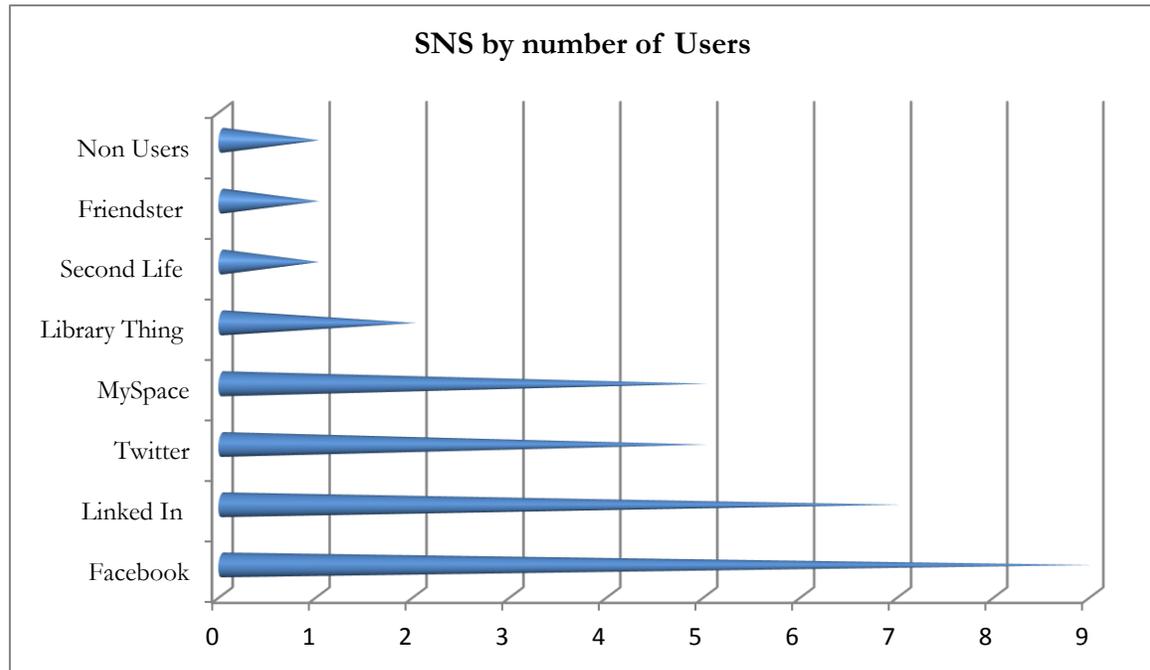
The most frequent social networking services on which the librarians held an account was Facebook with 9 of 10 interviewees. Next came Linked In (7 account-holders), MySpace (5), Library Thing (2), Second Life (1), Friendster (1), and Twitter (1). One of the librarians did not have any social networking services accounts. Having an account did not correlate with using an SNS with any regularity. Only about half of the librarians used an SNS on a daily basis (including for social purposes).

7.4 Perspectives on professional use of SNSs

Despite the broad definition of social networking services provided during the interview, most of the librarians focused their comments on the use of Facebook, MySpace, and LinkedIn. Even though comments focused on these particular sites, the interviews still revealed interesting thoughts about how the librarians were already using social networking services for professional collaboration. Participants described using their social networking accounts for student and faculty outreach, to participate in intra-institutional interest groups and committees, to discuss papers and ideas with other professionals, to share conference and event photos, and to advertise job openings.

8. Conclusion

This study set out to investigate how academic librarians are using emerging social networking services. The interview results indicate that participating librarians are very much aware about the use of social networking for library services namely Facebook is very popular among the librarians. Overall, the results suggest that the possible implication of social networking services can be successful by conducting maximum research and experiment on social networking services from different point of view on library. It is also suggested that the personal involvement in social networking services is usefulness for collaboration among the libraries and library professionals.

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