

The New Normal of Staying Connected: Content Analysis of Facebook and Instagram Posts of an Academic Library in the Era of a Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to explore how the University of Malaya Library uses social media such as Facebook and Instagram to connect with library users and the public in the era of COVID-19 pandemic. The significance of this study at present stage is that the findings and conclusion made can be used for promotional activities, thus saving cost and manpower. By analyzing the library's Facebook and Instagram content, this paper demonstrates the tools used to identify the type of content users respond to and have enjoyed, in order to make the social media marketing more impactful. A qualitative methodology using the content analysis approach was applied. A total of 459 posts from both Facebook and Instagram were examined using key variables such as the number of user reactions to a particular post, the number of posts and the average engagement rates. The findings reveal that even though the total number of posts under 'marketing/promotion' were the highest for Facebook, 'Community Building' posts generated the most reaction. The demography also shows that most Instagram followers are below the age of 35 at 80.3% while Facebook has more followers from the age 35 and above at 32% compared to Instagram 19.7%. Based on the results, although Facebook has more followers, Instagram has a much higher engagement rate. This study also discusses practical implications that can be considered for better engagement, content design and marketing strategies towards the adoption of the new normal.

Keywords: social media; Pandemic; Engagement rate; Content analysis; Library promotion; Academic library.

INTRODUCTION

Social media is essential in the digital landscape nowadays and its influences are spreading wide across multiple demographics with the majority of people sharing its contents. According to Datareportal Global Overview Report which was published on 27th January 2021, social media growth has accelerated significantly since the outbreak of COVID-19

(Datareportal, 2021). Its user numbers have increased by more than 13 percent over the past year with nearly half a billion new users taking the global user total to almost 4.2 billion by the start of 2021. This is particularly the case for platforms such as Facebook, Whatapps, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, Tik Tok and Blogs. Contrary to popular belief, social media is not limited to Millennials and Gen Z merely updating their social lives. More and more corporations are now investing heavily in getting their social media presence acknowledged in order to attract more consumers (Wu, Zha and Li, 2013).

As the number of users are expanding exponentially by threefold, an organization would likely miss out on potential audience by not being adopters of social media. The ubiquity and high uptake of social media makes it suitable for students, faculty members and administrators in higher learning institutions. Academicians and non-academicians alike can leverage social media marketing to enhance university programs and improve students' enrolments and usage of services. Academic libraries have not been left behind and have also been adopters of this global phenomenon (Kolhar, 2021). Over the years, academic libraries have responded to this change with many now believing social media has a vital role to play in moving academic libraries beyond their traditional borders and helping them engage new stakeholder groups. It is now widely accepted that social media is a tool that enables users to join together and share in the commonalities of research, learning and the university community.

Because an overwhelming majority of today's university students use social media, having a presence on social media is especially important for academic libraries (Garofalo, 2013). The University of Malaya Library (UML), the first Research Intensive University (RU) in the country, had introduced Web 2.0 applications as part of its services in October 2008. A survey of the effectiveness of Web 2.0 applications in promoting library services in University of Malaya Library shows that Facebook is the most popular tool used by UM students and the main reason to use Web 2.0 application is for information communication (Faizal, A. Aziz, Adila Mustafa & Zanaria Saupi, 2014). Its usage can be found in four main areas specifically related to promotional activities, information dissemination, medium for answering user enquiries, two-way communication and instant feedback.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A study by Taylor and Francis (2016) reported that more than 70% of libraries use social media tools for promotional purposes, collection management, outreach or for enhancing teaching and learning. However, not much research has been carried out to identify such practices, and how institutions and individuals go about their social media activities in a library setting or measures its success.

In his book, King (2015) indicated that Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, LinkedIn, Google + and Flickr as popular social media platforms among libraries. While Facebook overall growth has slowed, it still remains the most popular social media site with other sites seeing increases in usership. One particular platform, Instagram has its number of account holders steadily increasing. Pew Research Centre reported that Instagram is the second most used social media platform among people ages 18-29 in the United States, after Facebook. Many libraries also use Twitter to broadcast information to their

stakeholders. They update their Twitter accounts with a range of information, both original and retweeted from other Twitter users. Studies have shown that these tools have become the means for libraries to communicate with users (Ofili & Emwata, 2014).

And as the social media landscape is constantly evolving and user online interaction patterns change, libraries' social media strategies should be evaluated and readjusted on a regular basis (Brookbank, 2015), to ensure not only the retention but also the expansion of their user base.

Various studies have examined the use of social media in higher education. Much of the reviewed literature have been focused on identifying the different tools that are being used by the different academic libraries and studying perception and influences to adopt social media. Ali and Parveen (2015) examined the use of Web 2.0 tools by Engineering libraries which included the different social media networks. Chu and Du (2013) explored the use of social networking tools in academic libraries, specifically examining extent, perceptions and factors influencing adoption.

In a study by Ihejirika (2021), it was stressed that the clarity of purpose and adequate planning been adopted by libraries for social media marketing because these have been established as essential ingredients for creating and sustaining social media engagement.

Use of social media by academic libraries during COVID-19 Pandemic

Social media platforms provide an opportunity for wider communication and collaboration between academic librarians and online users. During the COVID-19 spring lockdown, Polish university libraries used social media to engage with patrons while the physical location was closed. Digital content such as texts, graphical information, video sequences and links were posted to draw users' attention to services provided by the library (Gmiterek, 2021). Social media have also emerged as an effective tool for risk and crisis communication during disasters and emergencies (Eriksson, 2018), and individuals turn to social media to look for updated information on critical situations, as well as for getting emotional support (Valentini et al., 2017).

The global crisis brought about by the coronavirus COVID-19 had resulted to libraries changing their services to be provided to partly or solely online including remote access for electronic resources, virtual references and research support as well as communication and engagement with the community via library web sites and social media (Guo, Y. J. et al, 2021; Rafiq, M. et al, 2021; Winata, A. P., Fadelina, R., & Basuki, S., 2021). Even if the library physical space is closed to its users, the library staff must continue to provide its service given the fact that they represent the main source of trust in the distribution of verified information (Tirziman, 2020). Social media was found to offer an interactive, collaborative, conversational and community-based platform for crises communication (Al-Saggaf and Simmons, 2015, Spence et al., 2015; Spence, Lachlan and Rainear, 2016; Yates and Partridge, 2015).

In Greece during the lockdown, librarians rapidly responded to the pandemic by organizing and disseminating timely and accurate information about COVID-19. For example, the library social media use 21 National Documentation Center (2020) to launch a daily updated COVID-19 scientific information website, which accumulated coronavirus-related scientific papers (including abstracts in the Greek language), covering various

research areas, such as medicine, business, psychology, education and tourism. The Library and Information Center of the University of Patras (2020) Greece also developed a webpage dedicated to this topic, whereas the Library of the Hellenic Parliament provided links to select free online resources about COVID-19, ranging from librarianship to health science and economy. Similarly, at the University of Malaya Library, two platforms were created upon collaboration with the Faculty of Medicine; Clinical Evidence Retrieval Service (CERS) and Clinical Health Ethics Resources. These tools aim to assist clinicians by retrieving the best available evidence regarding COVID-19 and guide healthcare professionals during their decision making involving pandemic patients.

The need for a content analysis

Organizations are increasingly looking for ways to develop long-term, extra-transactional relationships with stakeholders on social media (Hoffman & Fodor, 2010). Facebook “likes” to have been shown to deliver pragmatic benefits for an organization (Beukeboom, Kerkhof, & de Vries, 2015), and so interest has been growing to fully understand what prompts likes, comments, and shares (Johnson, Safadi, & Faraj, 2015). An analysis of Facebook contents of Vietnamese academic libraries showed that it was mainly used to encourage reading and to transmit announcements. Users’ engagements were low, and Duong (2021) suggested that postings with a higher level of vividness may be a better practice with Facebook as users interacted more when the posts had photos or videos.

The current Facebook newsfeed selection algorithm shows that organizational content that has not received many likes, comments, or shares could drop out of a user’s view altogether, making it more important to have content that motivates a response from users. According to Facebook Akos Lada (2021), the ranking algorithm are based on 1) Relationship: Is the post from a person, business, news source or public figure that the user often engages with? 2) Content type: What type of media is in the post, and which type of media does the user interact with most? (i.e., video, photo, link, etc.) 3) Popularity: How are people who have already seen the post reacting to it? Are they sharing it, commenting on it or ignoring it? 4) Recency: How new is the post? Newer posts are placed higher.

In view of this, libraries should create content that would generate interest of users and try to engage them or feed them links to content they would be interested to find out more. This is necessary to ensure growth trends. King (2015) suggested that Facebook administrators should examine the reason behind a drop off in the number of followers to take remedial actions. The library would not be able to increase engagement levels or gain more monthly referrals if its users are unfollowing the social media channels.

In Malaysia, few studies have been conducted on content analysis of social media. The last comprehensive study was conducted by Ayu & Abrizah (2011) over a decade ago. Furthermore, as of July 2021, there seems to be limited information available on social media usage locally in times of crises particularly during a pandemic based on literature searches in Web of Science and Scopus database. The goal of this study is to fill a gap in the literature by analyzing academic library posts in social media and studying how users engage with these posts. This is important to sustain growth trends and thus assist libraries in formulating better strategies to manage social media effectively. It is however focused to the University of Malaya Library’s (UML) Facebook and Instagram platforms only.

Research questions

The key objectives of this study were aimed at answering the following research questions:

1. What type of social media content did UML make available during the pandemic?
2. What type of post works best on each platform?
3. Is the number of likes or the existence of comments related to the post category?
4. What level of engagement did the followers have on the Facebook and Instagram account of UML during the pandemic?
5. What social media content was the most popular?

RESEARCH DESIGN

To answer the research questions, this study used a qualitative methodology using the content analysis approach. A comprehensive data analysis was implemented based on the data recorded in the library social media accounts. The data recorded are the total number of followers, media type of posts, the number of responses and reactions (like, love, haha, wow, sad and angry), comments and shares. Data collection was mainly derived from Facebook Insights. However, since Instagram Insights only cover past 30 days analysis, data had to be collected manually using the Excel spreadsheet.

Since COVID-19 is still ongoing in the country, the research gathered data from 1st January 2020, approximately when it appeared in the local news, to 6th June 2021. The duration of the study is longer compared to other content analyses researches (Chan 2020, Duong 2021) so that a detailed finding can be established throughout the span of time. During this period, the library had various level of opening and closure, from a total lockdown, partial opening for staff only to a minimized number of patrons.

Analysis of the content included sorting the posts into categories and sub-categories which were then assigned into codes. Initially textual based data, the codes were converted into numerical figures to allow for statistical analysis (Phillips, 2011; Duong, 2021).

The entire process is listed as below:

- 1) Downloading the data from Facebook Insight into Excel format. For Instagram, data collection was gathered by going through each posting manually;
- 2) Coding the posts by relevant categories and sub categories;
- 3) Analyzing the relationship among media type, purpose category and total reactions, comments and shares;
- 4) Taking note of the number of followers for each site on 6th June 2021.
- 5) Calculating the engagement rate of posts;

According to Siel (2019), engagement rate is the currency of the social media marketing industry. Higher engagement rate signifies the content is resonating with the audience and that engagement formulas put vanity metrics like followers, likes and impressions counts into a more reliable perspective. Even if the number of followers is high, if they

are not engaged with the content then the social media efforts are considered to be somewhat unsuccessful.

Engagement rate is a formula that measures the amount of interaction the social content earns relative to reach the audience in terms of reactions, comments and shares. There are various ways to measure the engagement however this study has adopted Bonson and Ratkai (2013) earlier metrics measurement which was also used later by Lam et al (2019).

Table 1 : Facebook metrics for engagement

Popularity	P1	Number of posts liked/total posts	% of posts liked
	P2	Total likes/total number of posts	Average number of likes per post
	P3	P2/number of fans x 1000	Average number of likes per post per 1000 fans
Commitment	C1	Number of posts commented/total posts	% of posts commented
	C2	Total comments/total number of posts	Average number of comments per post
	C3	C2/number of fans x 1000	Average number of comments per post per 1000 fans
Virality	V1	Number of posts shared/total posts	% of posts shared
	V2	Total shares/total number of posts	Average number of shares per post
	V3	V2/number of fans x 1000	Average number of shares per post per 1000 fans
Engagement	E	P3+C3+V3	Stakeholder engagement index

Engagement here is defined as stakeholder engagement index per post per 1000 fans, in the cases of P3, C3, and V3, multiplication by 1,000 was used in order to offer the possibility of a better comparison, as the original results were close to zero.

Another method of acquiring the engagement rate is by referring to Facebook Insights as follows: