

# FACEBOOK AS A TOOL FOR ACADEMIC LIBRARY SERVICES: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

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## ABSTRACT

*In the past few years libraries have begun to examine the possibilities available to them through social networking sites. As Facebook has become dominating in the social networking sites arena, more libraries have created their own library web-pages on Facebook to create library awareness and to function as a marketing tool of the library, its resources and services as well. Although Facebook's existence is not new in social networking arena, its use in the library setting has not become a common agenda yet. Though inclusion of Facebook in the field of library and information science has started in some of the developed libraries around the world but that also only in an experimental level. Evidence suggests that students are increasingly using the internet to conduct research for classes and to socialize with each other. Social networking websites, particularly Facebook provides a preexisting online community that reflects the real campus community, which librarians can utilize to better understand students and offer useful and applicable library services. In order to stay relevant with the student population at college and universities, academic librarians need to pay attention to the trends and behaviors of the students who constitute maximum of users group in academic libraries. And today's users expect more from libraries than ever before; to satisfy these modern users the library professionals also need to enhance new skills of web based servicers and to know more about the users behavior it has become necessary to stay connected with the users directly and the social networking sites especially Facebook has become a good means for connection. This paper will mainly highlight on the different pros and cons of Facebook as a tool for academic library services.*

**Keywords:** Social networking; Facebook; Academic or University libraries.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Today's libraries are not just a mere storehouse of books; instead libraries are considered multifaceted and multifunctional information as well as knowledge dissemination centers. Moreover with the changing scenario of information seeker or users there is always need of constant change and adoption of newer and most recent development being accepted or used by the people at the time. Modern libraries are

hybrid libraries characterized by print and electronic collections, manual and ICT based services. Hence they must move beyond their traditional role as custodians of books and integrate new methods of storage and transmission of information into an already existing structure. Today's users expect more from libraries than ever before. Modern libraries must link users with the information they seek.

## **1.1 Social Networking Site**

Today internet has become an integral part of everyone especially the urban people of their daily life. One can say that most of the individuals have become mostly dependent on the internet and other communication technology for their day to day activities. And since the internet does not have any physical restrictions it has become easy for the people around the globe to have a connection through internet and forming a social group in the internet through a common network. And this web based networking is called social networking sites. Social networking is defined as a web based services that allows individuals, groups and organizations to build relationships with other users these sites often feature a public or semi-public profile within a restricted system, a list of contacted users and a list of connections of users which is created within the system of the site.

## **1.2 Definition of Social Networking**

According to Computing Dictionary<sup>3</sup>, a social networking site as any website designed to allow multiple users to publish content of them. The information may be on any subject and may be for consumption by friends, mates, employers, employees just to mention a few.

Boyd and Ellison define social networking sites as web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, to view and navigate their list of connections and those made by others within the system.

Today there are billions users of various social networking sites and these social networking sites has become an integral part of our lives. Out of various social networking sites Facebook has become dominating in the social networking arena. Most social network services are web based and provide a variety of ways for users to interact, such as e-mail and instant messaging services. Social networking has encouraged new ways to communicate and share information. Millions of people have made their profiles on these social networks and interact with others regularly. These social networking sites may contain set rules and regulations to be followed as per their editorial policy or may be entirely user-driven.

This platform is used for social activities by organizations, academia and the general public specifically the youth. The use of this platform has compelled modern day students to spend a lot of time at these sites.

### **1.3 Facebook**

Facebook is a social networking site that allows people to connect with friends, classmates, coworkers, casual acquaintances — anyone who is also a member of the site. The name refers to the traditional print face books of incoming students once popular at many colleges. The site started at Harvard in February 2004 and soon spread to some other campuses. At present there are 1.650 million monthly active users on Facebook and has a total of 1.65 billion user till April 2016 (Wikipedia).

Currently Facebook is the fifth most visited site on the internet worldwide and second most trafficked social media site on the world. It was first founded by Mark Zuckerberg in 2004. These are interactive allowing visitors to leave comments, message each other via widgets on the blogs and it is the interactivity that distinguishes them from other static websites. Users must register before using the site, after which they may create a personal profile, add other users as friends, and exchange messages, including automatic notifications when they update their profile. Additionally, users may join common-interest user groups, organized by workplace, school or college, or other characteristics, and categorize their friends into lists.

## **2. ACADEMIC LIBRARY AND SOCIAL NETWORKING SITE: FACEBOOK**

It is clear that the modern academic community is mostly constituted by a large number of young and more technologically advance students and the teachers or the scholars who mostly considers the web based or online information resources due to various reasons. If we have to mention some of them the first reason will be the vast resources available, ease of access, can be access easily if users have an internet connection without any physical incontinence. And most above this regarding academic knowledge, a vast source of information, resources and academic research materials are now freely available on internet, which make the users spend more time in internet or be online maximum time.

The present academic environment has now totally revolves around web and internet based background. And the social networking sites are the most active and common among the present generation without any particular differences of age, sex, or education qualification or profession. It has become a platform for most of the individuals for various activities other than just socializing with each other i.e. those persons having profiles in these social networking sites.

It is understandable that twenty-first century student is not interested in printed work; for librarians to make libraries interesting innovations such as social networking site should be introduced to attract them to the library environment. Social networking sites would help establish a cordial relationship between librarians and patrons; market the library's services; announce library programs on the wall and so on.

At present with many developed PDA (Personal Digital Assistance) devices like, mobile phones with better applications and developed, i-Phones, Tablets etc. has become more easier for the students and other professional to use internet and other web based services effectively and in maximum, since one does not need to rely only on a pc or a laptop for the purpose.

According to many surveys and studies done on the use of Facebook and as according to the Facebook record also in has been noticed that maximum number of user belong to the age group between 15-25. And we can assume that most students either high school, college, and university fall under this age group mainly. It has also be highlighted in many research and documents that most of the Academicians also use various social networking sites out of which Facebook become more prominent. Considering the situation and the development in the field of information, the time has come for the library and information professionals come in term with every possible opportunity to keep in contact with the information users. Though library and information science has been developing and evolving with each development in various fields, it is also true that in case of information nothing is enough. We can see that everything is changing in a very fast way we the library and information personals should be more active, open and more faster above all. A new way of providing library services through internet technology which will emphasis on user oriented is must for the present users to meet their information need. Here, we can use the social networking site Facebook can be used for a multi-dimensional information flow i.e. Library to users, users to library, library to library and user to user instead of being only one way communication.

### **3. USE OF FACEBOOK FOR ACADEMIC LIBRARY SERVICES**

Today, libraries are using the latest technologies and trends to make their services popular and user friendly. The concept of a library as physical place where one can visit to get information is rapidly changing to a social cyberspace where users access, communicate and contribute to existing knowledge. This is because the modern library of the 21st century is characterized with collective knowledge creation and enabling technologies; and also a movement away from the old stereotype, conventional and one directional library services to users to a more dynamic, two-way communicational network environment characterized by open access, content creation, collaborative and participatory social space where users are free to access and contribute content. It is very clear that Facebook is being used by different organizations and institutions and many other social groups to share information update information's, to acquire these update knowledge's, for marketing purpose which can be done by various available services of Facebook, Instant Messaging, It has become an important need for

libraries to adopt the new social networking tools in their services as a strategy to embrace change while promoting a participatory role for library users in knowledge creation. The growing use of social networking tools calls for librarians to develop 21<sup>st</sup> century skills on digital technologies. Libraries can connect their social networking sites with their library Websites to links to their catalog, chat reference pages, research guides, calendar of events, news etc.

If we consider the use of Facebook as tool for these particular needs we can take the advantages of all available services or feature of Facebook to cover the needs. As mention earlier, due to changes in the academic environment and influence of the modern technology the strategy of use of information and its uses has change dramatically. These new generation students are more on the web based information's, only few numbers are visiting a library to search for information or consulting a librarian for document selection. The reasons may be many but it has affected the library and information field in many ways.

Apart from the educational institutions these students are available in the internet of the Facebook it has become a good platform for the library professionals also to connect with the information users. Most of the conventional academic libraries do lack update of information and mostly available resources are also not enough to meet the need of the users initially. In certain cases if the library is developed and have good collection and resources with good library profession also some student prefer web base information sources over these library materials which manly happen out of hobbit and influence of the environment.

In these case the initiative must be from the side of the library to encourage the user to have contact with the library and here the library have to be in the way which these users wants or prefer. Here the library must be a web based, common on the Social Network; Facebook among their common interest with ease of communication. This can be done in various ways, some are; by creating a Facebook profile of the library, by connecting the libraries web link with the Facebook, by forming a user's group of the library, providing discussion forum of the users and the library professional.

If libraries have a Facebook profile one can update most of the activities, which of course will be related with the information and its sources easily, and users can also check easily. Some of the library services which can be provided via Facebook to its users connected with Facebook is:

- ❖ Regular update of arrival of new books, documents, journals etc. in the library.
- ❖ Reference services can be provided through instant massages and on chats, which will help the users in selecting the appropriate internet based resources without wasting mush time.
- ❖ If the library and its user group in the Facebook keep active in communication and prepare good user profile with their information interest libraries can provide Current Awareness Services to the particular users.

- ❖ Online open help desk for all the internet users not only for the profile users can also be provided, where guidance may be given in information search process by guiding to the proper search option, proper website and the selection of proper information with good source.
- ❖ Most students are not aware of the different services offered in the library such as reservation of books, reference services and Strategic Dissemination of Information (SDI). The awareness can be given to the student users by providing maximum information of the library in the profile. Since visiting a Facebook profile is considered more appropriate than visiting a library to get the information about the library.
- ❖ The library can create a discussion forum or group for its users so that the user share their knowledge's and thoughts regarding the library, its services, collection, and any other related topics or even a feedback from its users which will help in the further development of the library.
- ❖ The user will also be able to provide any new information if available which may be of the education related or the institution also.
- ❖ Facebook can be used as a platform for the marketing of the library and regular updates of activities etc.
- ❖ OPAC can be directly link with the Facebook profile. One of the most important aim of librarians is to make library resources available to its users and information seekers so if social networking; Facebook can help achieve this goal then it should be pursued vigorously.
- ❖ The use of Facebook as a tool does not require any special equipment apart from computer, Internet connectivity and a trained professional to manage, which is affordable in most of the Academic libraries at present.
- ❖ Using Facebook as a tool for library services may be more effective for Distance Education students.

If we consider the use of Facebook as tool for the purpose there will definitely have positive side. But there are limitations or problems also.

### **3.1 Problems of using Facebook as Tool for Academic Library Services**

When we discuss about the problems of using Facebook they are not exactly the technical problems but problem from the professional point of view. Being in Facebook require a lot of activeness from the libraries and its professionals side. Librarians must be aware that using Facebook as a tool requires a lot of attention both technically and professionally. Though we have to mention that this tool does not require much except for some equipment only but it may be too much for some libraries in certain condition, especially in Developing country like India.

There will be need of constant and regular update of profile or the Facebook page at least once a week or more. If not updated it will become useless which require regular monitoring of the page and the library also. In such a case it may not be suitable for very small or conventional libraries instead may be helpful for large and active libraries that host a lot of events, exhibitions, workshops and other activities and having large amount of data's in its collection. Though it is a good medium for communicating with the users but the library professional should not get too attached to Facebook as there will always be a next or better tool coming up for the purpose. Every technology changes quickly and the internet is constantly changing; and the libraries and the library professionals should be prepared to leave current tool strategy to jump to the next tool quickly.

Apart from these problems there are some other noticeable problems that may affect, especially in India use of computer and internet is restricted to only a group of people of students though efforts have been made available of these facilities, but the process is rather slow. Most students are not aware of the different services offered in the library such as reservation of books, reference services and Strategic Dissemination of Information (SDI). The awareness can be given to the student users by providing maximum information of the library in the profile. Since visiting a Facebook profile is considered more appropriate than visiting a library to get the information about the library.

- ❖ The library can create a discussion forum or group for its users so that the user share their knowledge's and thoughts regarding the library, its services, collection, and any other related topics or even a feedback from its users which will help in the further development of the library.
- ❖ The user will also be able to provide any new information if available which may be of the education related or the institution also.
- ❖ OPAC can be directly linked with the Facebook profile. One of the most important aim of librarians is to make library resources available to its users and information seekers so if social networking; Facebook can help achieve this goal then it should be pursued vigorously.
- ❖ The use of Facebook as a tool does not require any special equipment apart from computer, Internet connectivity and a trained professional to manage, which is affordable in most of the Academic libraries at present.
- ❖ Using Facebook as a tool for library services may be more effective for Distance Education students.

If we consider the use of Facebook as tool for the purpose there will definitely have positive side. But there are limitations or problems also.

## 4. CONCLUSION

Though Facebook has been considered as the most recent tool for Library services we cannot deny the availability of various other tools for the purpose. But it has come to the fact that the dimension of a modern library has changed a lot from time to time so as the approach of the information user seekers towards information sources. Especially the students of this new academic environment have different strategy regarding information and acquisition of knowledge. And here Facebook become a prominent amongst its group as based on different study based documents. The emergence of online social networks and its expanding user base demand immediate attention from the side of academic libraries. The library's profiles on these networks facilitate the reaching out strategy to the new generation users at their own space and time. Using Facebook as a tool has both positive and negative sides but being new in the field still can be considered.

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