Social Media Practices and Support in U.S. Public Libraries and School Library Media Centers

Rachel M. Magee, Robin Naughton, Patri O'Gan, Andrea Forte, Denise E. Agosto
College of Information Science & Technology
Drexel University
3141 Chestnut Street,
Philadelphia, PA 19104 USA
{rmm348, ran37, po56, af468, dea22}@drexel.edu

ABSTRACT

Many U.S. teens spend hours each day communicating with friends via social technologies like Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and Flickr. To develop a better understanding of the state of library support of teens' social technology practices, we are conducting a national survey of a representative sample of 750 public and 750 school libraries in the United States about their current policies and social media strategies. Preliminary results indicate that public and school libraries' use of social media differ in terms of policy and strategies, and that rather than enabling libraries to harness the power of social networking tools, library policies often serve as use barriers.

Keywords

Teens, social media, policies, libraries

INTRODUCTION

Many of today's teens spend hours each day online communicating with friends. They visit their online friends in social network sites such as Facebook and Twitter; they comment on each other's videos and photos on sites such as YouTube and Flickr; and they send each other text messages throughout the day – and night – via their ever-present cell phones.

A 2010 report from the Pew Research Center indicated that almost 75% of U.S. teens use social networking sites on a regular basis (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010). Texting has become an important part of teen technology use and daily communication (Lenhart, 2012). Research shows that 75% of U.S. teens aged 12-17 have their own cell phones and that most use their phones for going online and texting (Lenhart, 2012; Lenhart, Ling, Campbell, &

Purcell, 2010).

In response to the high level of interest in online social interaction, a growing number of public libraries are creating profiles on social network sites (Agosto & Abbas, 2009). It seems that most public libraries use their social networking profiles mainly to provide contact information and links to their homepages, with significantly fewer libraries providing active programming or services via these tools (Agosto & Abbas, 2011). This study seeks to investigate in more detail how both public and school libraries use these technologies to serve teen populations and how institutional policies influence and shape public and school libraries' use of social technologies.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How do public and school libraries use social media and other Internet technologies to inform and interact with their service populations, in particular, teens?

2. How do public and school libraries' policies influence outreach and in-library use of social media, for both staff and library users?

METHODS

Stratified sampling methods were used to target a representative sample of 750 public and 750 school libraries in the United States.

The Institute of Museums and Library Services (IMLS) (2009) dataset on public libraries was used as the main data source for the selection of a sample of 750 public libraries, stratified according to population served. There were a total of 9,299 public libraries in the dataset. Twenty-four libraries were eliminated from the dataset because of lack of population data. We used the percent distribution of the full dataset based on 11 IMLS-defined population ranges to determine the percent distribution of our sample. Once we determined how many libraries we needed to sample within each range, we drew a random sample of 750 public libraries.

Library Service Area Population Range	# of Public Libraries
0 - 999	85
1,000 - 2,499	122
2,500 - 4,999	107
5,000 - 9,999	121
10,000 - 24,999	144
25,000 - 49,999	81
50,000 - 99,999	45
100,000 - 249,999	29
250,000 - 499,999	9
500,000 - 999,999	5
1,000,000 - more	2
Total	**750**

Table 1: Public Libraries Sample

There exists no similar dataset identifying school libraries; instead, we surveyed public schools that serve teens about their library services. The National Center for Education Statistics (2009-2011) was used as the main data source for public school data. There were a total of 98,760 public schools in the dataset, which included all 50 states and Washington, DC. Data was filtered for public schools that included a high grade of 12 to capture schools that serve teen populations. Schools that did not include high grade of 12, and schools with zero students or no student data, were excluded from the dataset. A total of 24,258 public schools remained in the dataset. For the remaining data, the percent distribution based on state was used to determine the percent distribution of the final sample of schools (for example, if 3% of public schools serving teens were in Arizona, then 3% of our sample came from Arizona). The percentage of students at each school that received free and reduced lunches was then used to create a quartile distribution and an equal number of schools was drawn randomly from each quartile wherever possible (in some states, the school populations were so low, that only one school was drawn from each quartile, thus obviating the need for a random selection). Again, a total of 750 school libraries were selected, representing all states in the US.

PRELIMINARY TRENDS

Though responses are still being accepted, as of August 14, 2012, 174 surveys had been started with 167 total completions. Completed surveys represent an overall response rate of 11.13%. However, public libraries make up 79.64% of the total completed responses, with 133 of the 167 completions coming from this category. For public libraries, the response rate is 17.73%, while school libraries,

with a total of 34 completed responses, have a response rate of 4.53%. This difference in response rates is likely explained by the fact that many schools have summer breaks that may overlap with our data collection period. Based on analysis of these completed surveys, we have identified two emerging trends in the data.

Trend 1: Using the Library Website to Interact

Survey respondents were asked to indicate which social media and Internet technologies they use and for what population (staff/faculty, patrons/parents, and teens/students). Respondents could select multiple options and also include any other technologies not listed in the survey. For public library respondents, the library website was used for staff, patrons and teens more than any other option. For patrons, public library respondents also selected social networking, particularly Facebook. However, few respondents selected social networking and Facebook for use with teens or staff. For outreach to teens, the library teen website functioned as the second leading technology to interact with the teen population. For school libraries, respondents indicated whether the technologies were provided by the school overall or by the school library specifically. Similar to public library responses, the library website played an important role regardless of whether the school or the school library was providing the technology.

Trend 2: Limited Use of Social Technologies in Schools

Unlike the public libraries, there were few, if any, additional social media and Internet technologies beyond the school websites that were being used by a large number of school libraries, whether that technology was provided by the school or the school library. For technologies provided by the school, some social networks (MySpace, LinkedIn), online image sharing (Flickr), social bookmarking (Delicious), podcasts and texting/SMS were not being used at all for faculty, parents or students. For students, wiki technology was also added to the list. In addition to the restricted technologies provided by the school, the school libraries did not provide social cataloging (LibraryThing, Shelfari, GoodReads) or RSS feeds, and did not include online video services (YouTube, Vimeo, TeacherTube) for students. Overall, the school library respondents indicated that the use of social technologies is much more limited in public schools than in public libraries.

DISCUSSION

Preliminary review of qualitative responses of school library respondents suggests that one reason there is limited use of social technologies in schools may have to do with social media policies, particularly the role of the district in granting access to use social media in the schools. As stated by one respondent, "District policy does not allow us to use social media." This theme is repeated throughout for the school library data, and is also described as one of the challenges of using social media.

Public library respondents were also concerned about the library policies associated with the use of social media but their policies appeared less restrictive than their school library counter-parts. Nonetheless, public libraries that were a part of a city department appeared to have similar concerns as school libraries in terms of administrative policies regarding social media use. For example, one respondent stated, "We've pushed the City to be less stringent in their rules; it isn't the library policies we have to worry about." However, these were just a subset of the overall public library respondents. Most did not have policies specifically for teens' use of social media. Instead, concerns regarding implementation and adoption of social media technologies appear to be a leading challenge for public library respondents.

CONCLUSION

In this poster, we discussed preliminary work in conducting a national survey of 750 public and 750 school libraries in the United States to better understand their use of social media and Internet technologies. While we are still in the early stages of data collection and analysis, preliminary trends emerging from the data suggest that the library website is an important social communication technology, and that there is limited use of social media technologies in schools, largely due to restrictive policies at the school administration level.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

REFERENCES

Agosto, D. E., & Abbas, J. (2009). Teens and social networking: How public libraries are responding to the latest online trend. *Public Libraries, 48,* 32-37.

Agosto, D. E., & Abbas, J. (2011). *Teens, Libraries, and Social Networking: What Librarians Need to Know* Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited.

Institute of Museum and Library Services. (2009). Public Library (Public Use) Data Files: Fiscal Year 2009 Retrieved from http://harvester.census.gov/imls/data/pls/index.asp

Lenhart, A. (2012). Teens, Smartphones & Texting. *Pew Internet & American Life Project*. Retrieved from http://www.pewinternet.org/~/media//Files/Reports/2012/PIP_Teens_Smartphones_and_Texting.pdf.

Lenhart, A., Ling, R., Campbell, S., & Purcell, K. (2010). Teens and Mobile Phones. *Pew Internet & American Life Project*. Retrieved from http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2010/Teens-and-Mobile-Phones.aspx.

Lenhart, A., Purcell, K., Smith, A., & Zickuhr, K. (2010). Social Media & Mobile Internet Use Among Teens and Young Adults. *Pew Internet & American Life Project*. Retrieved from http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2010/Social-Media-and-Young-Adults.aspx.

National Center for Education Statistics. (2009-2011). Common Core of Data Public School data: 2009 – 2010, 2010 – 2011 school years Retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/schoolsearch/