

The Impact of Social Media Technologies upon Academic Researchers and Librarians

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1. Social Media Revolution

Everywhere we look today, we are surrounded by the impact of social media. Twitter, Facebook, linked in, Wikipedia to name a few. There are a myriad of different ways to create and consume content, generated by us and others like ourselves.

This is impacting our lives from the little things eg. Reading our favourite daily newspaper, or buying a drink from a vending machine, to the big eg. Revolution in the Middle East. Anyway we look at it, Social Media is causing huge change in our lives today and cannot be ignored.

Back in 2006, it was all about the individual ie. “I”. Today is all about “We” – the community: Connection, collaboration and sharing.

The use of social media has overtaken email, and is the main form of communication amongst the younger generation.

2. What is Social media?

So what exactly is Social Media? It is the phenomenon of Community-led information exchange, ie. users generating and consuming other user-generated content. It is enabling sharing of ideas, co-operating, collaborating, meeting new like-minded people, keeping in touch, strengthening relationships and reaching out to potential customers: both in a personal and professional context.

There are many different tools available to support Social Media. Tools for:

- Sharing: ie. sharing stories, sharing approaches, sharing discoveries, sharing photos. Eg. Facebook, Flickr, YouTube
- Communication: Skype, Viber, Blogs, news agregators
- Collaboration: working together to create something or solve problems. Eg. Wikipedia, Scitopics, Radiopedia, filesharing eg. Drop box, Social Tagging and bookmarking eg. Delicious, Digg,
- Networking: Reaching out to expand contacts, or connect with others with similar interests. Eg. Linkedin, Biomedexperts, Nature Network

3. Social Media in Research

Social Media is starting to have an impact across the research workflow. In a recent study performed by the University College London, it was found that Social Media provides a strong

tool for a number of researcher needs. Researchers perceived the key benefits of Social Media in supporting research were: Communication internationally, fast dissemination, Connecting with people, targeting specific communities.

In fact, 62% of researchers were using collaborative authoring tools, 48% conferencing tools and 40% scheduling and meeting tools. It was found that Social Media tools were being used to support every phase of the research life cycle, from identifying research opportunities, to disseminating findings.

That said, we are still at the beginning of the take-up.

Collaboration:

One active area for Social Media in research is that of Collaboration. Crowdsourcing is a particularly exciting movement and is being used for everything from designing new lego products, to solving math problems and trying to find cures for diseases. Scientists are reaching out to Gamers to help predict disease pathways and other scientific problems. The US Government, on its Challenge.gov site posts problems and reaches out to the public to help solve them, offering prize money as an incentive.

There are Social Media Tools, such as Scival Experts that also help individual scientists to identify and reach out to other scientists that they wish to collaborate with.

Dissemination:

Social Media is changing the way we disseminate information, learn and teach. Eg. Publishing community-generated content on open forums eg. Wikisurgery and Radiopaedia; and teaching via Twitter in the medical field.

Social Funding and Evaluation:

New ways of funding and evaluating research are emerging through the social movement. Crowd-funding, following the lead of many micro-funding movements, where the public can directly decide which projects they wish to fund. This calls for a move away from the traditional criteria for funding eligibility, and opens the room to far more scientists and streams of research.

4. Social Media and Libraries

Librarians are embracing this change, with 80% of libraries using social networks, 52% using blogs. Librarians see the benefits of Social Media in promoting the library, connecting with users, reaching out to potential new users, and ultimately better serving their customers.

Many libraries are being very innovative in deploying tools like facebook pages, and integrating photos, chat, links to catalogue search, and even implementing social catalogues.

Librarians are also using Social Media for their own professional development

5. Conclusion

In Conclusion, Social Media is not a fad. It is a revolution that is here to stay. It empowers the community, leading to better outcomes for all.