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Ester Ernest Mnzava

Introduction

The use of social networking sites such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram have proved to enhance information promotion and outreach services. Twitter is one of the most widely adopted and studied platforms in libraries (Shulman and Tomé, 2015; Harisanty, 2018). It is a popular and free service that allows registered users to send a message of a maximum of 140 characters (D'Monte, 2014). It allows users to interact in both local and global scale thus provide an important opportunity for the users to participate in global citizenship (Sobré-Denton, 2016).

Individuals, companies and institutions with Twitter accounts provide their followers with updates on various matters such as news, events, products and services relatively easily. This is owing to its ability to reach a wide audience quickly. The application of Twitter in various organisations has shown to be more effective in information sharing than other platforms such as Facebook and Instagram (Harisanty, 2018). Cuddy *et al.* (2010) assert that the use of social networking platforms like Twitter are beneficial in the business environment because it supports marketing and maintaining customer relationship.

Twitter in library settings

Several scholars have reported that Twitter has been used by the libraries in various ways including marketing of information resources, services and programs (Del Bosque *et al.*, 2012; Gunton and Davis, 2012; Harisanty, 2018). Sobré-Denton (2016) asserts that the application of Twitter in the library facilitates communication between librarians and library users by enhancing the understanding of user

information needs. Nevertheless, owning Twitter accounts and using it successfully are two different things. The owner of the Twitter account needs to consider several factors like possessing relevant social media skills and knowledge and best practices. This paper provides a review of various experiences from the use of Twitter by librarians and discusses strategies which can be used to improve its effective use.

The literature reviewed focuses on the issues related to the development of social media archives, uses of the Twitter in the library settings and the strategies which were used to promote its effective use.

A major initiative is the Twitter archive developed by the Library of Congress that was meant to make available a digital archive of all public tweets for the research community in the future (Zimmer, 2015). The challenges of the archive related to the organisation of the tweets, facilitating retrieval and how to physically store them. Other challenges were related to the policy issues such as use and user control, privacy and ethical considerations. While the challenges related to implementation may affect the implementation, those related to use implies the general use of the archive. Fondren and McCune (2018) add that the development of the Library of Congress Twitter archive was challenged by several factors ranging from social, cultural to symbolic challenges which cannot be ignored when one thinks of developing a social media archive. Nevertheless, the experience given by the library of Congress was important to Gayo-Avello (2016) who was able to develop a personal Twitter archive. This tells that other libraries and institutions in the world can learn and capitalise from the highlights of the key issues given by

Zimmer (2015), Gayo-Avello (2016) and Fondren and McCune (2018). It is worth noting that the development of the Twitter archives requires a high commitment of the researcher's and Twitter resources. With that context, Gayo-Avello (2016) believed that Twitter itself could market the archive as a physical item that can be made available to affiliated researchers.

Libraries use Twitter for several reasons ranging from providing traditional library services to modern and trendy (to enhance users' library experiences) (Vassilakaki and Garoufallou, 2015). It has influenced high increase in the usage of online information resources and services and to support user education (Al-Daihani and AlAwadhi, 2015). Huang *et al.* (2017) revealed that Twitter is one of the major social networking platforms that have been used in the library to support various library activities.

The use of Twitter has allowed users to get news and announcements regarding various events, services and collections. Twitter allows online communication which helps librarians to understand user information needs. Shulman and Tomé (2015) assert that although the primary purpose of using Twitter by most of libraries is to send information, it can best be used as an interaction platform with users. Harisanty (2018) asserts that librarians need to take time to listen to Twitter followers because their feedback is important to address various needs without extra efforts like the use of a survey instruments or focus groups. In recent time, Twitter has been used as a source of social media historical data sets (Gayo-Avello, 2016).

Library users find Twitter as an entree for library and personal uses. Parabhoi *et al.* (2017) reported that users of the State Library, Odisha, use Twitter for sharing and finding

information, staying up-to-date, sharing photos and chatting. Harisanty (2018) revealed that the personal use of Twitter was influenced by factors such as entertainment and social relationships with librarians and others. This requires librarians to be proactive to be able to listen and understand users so that they can serve them accordingly.

Zou *et al.* (2015) revealed that tweets with current topics receive more attention from users. Various approaches can either be related to the content of the tweets (one can learn how the library Twitter account is used by studying the tweets and retweets), users or librarians (by asking). However, the researchers/librarians may opt to use only one approach or more than one depending on the focus of the project.

Humphreys (2019) asserts the need for the library to establish a clear social media strategy to focus on and record important activities which are essential to ensure desirable success. Surprisingly, the study conducted by Humphreys (2019) revealed that although the smaller UK libraries were aware and follow best practices, many Twitter accounts were not used to their fullest capacity. Shulman and Tomé (2015) maintained that the skills on how to reach a targeted audience via messages retweeted by influential accounts that are spread broadly. Another strategy that can be used by the library is to create a team that is responsible for the Twitter account (Ewbank, 2015). This will ensure that enough effort is available to improve its usage and effectiveness.

Generally, librarians need to adopt new roles to live up to user expectations for innovative ways of communication and access information. This can be made possible by the use of planned actions which will guide librarians and users regarding information sharing and communication (Vassilakaki and Garoufallou, 2015; Al-Daihani and AlAwadhi, 2015; Stovold, 2017). Sakas and Sarlis (2016) provide libraries with a decision-making tool (model) that can be used by libraries to optimise Twitter for the promotion of information and services. This model produces certain outcomes when using specific resources and the need to be careful when librarians decide to implement Twitter in promotion activities.

The literature reviews different promotion strategies. Some of authors like Shulman *et al.* (2015) analysed Twitter networks, Huang *et al.* (2017) and Zou *et al.* (2015) analysed users' interactions/engagements and Ewbank (2015) and Stovold (2017) examined tweets and retweets with specific hashtags. Furthermore, Sakas and Sarlis (2016) developed a simulation model to facilitate the utilisation of Twitter in the library, and Humphreys (2019) assessed the Twitter best practices. It is worth noting that each strategy aims to improve the effectiveness of Twitter in the library. Humphreys (2019) determined if library Twitter accounts were effective in terms of time and financial resources. Likewise, Shulman *et al.* (2015) analysed Twitter networks of two academic libraries to determine the influential accounts that connect to them.

Concluding remarks

Although the use of Twitter has shown promising support for library services, it is also important for librarians to be aware of the essential factors for it to be used effectively. While owning the library Twitter account may need some minutes, maintaining the account to ensure maximum success is a continuous activity, that requires specific social media skills and knowledge of social media research, modelling, programming language, Twitter APIs and ElasticSearch (Huang *et al.*, 2017; Gayo-Avello, 2016; Stovold, 2017; Sakas and Sarlis, 2016; Humphreys, 2019). With Twitter, librarians can interact with their users as another way to understand user information needs and behaviour. However, there must be effective strategies, relevant skills and knowledge to facilitate and enable smooth utilisation of Twitter to ensure maximum success.

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