

A Systematic Review of Application of Social Media in Libraries

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ABSTRACT

Social media has emerged as a pivotal technological tool for libraries, enabling them to promote resources, services, and online offerings effectively. Many scholars and experts worldwide are trying hard and fast to explore the possibilities of an effective library social media presence. This paper systematically reviews 25 studies from the last six years (2018-2023) available in the area of social media application in libraries. PRISMA guidelines have been used to filter and select the most relevant literature to present a holistic and tangible view of the contemporary level of social media amalgamation in libraries. The chosen articles represent the numerous social media platforms available for libraries, the challenges in incorporating those platforms into monotonous services, and promotion and operative strategies to overcome those challenges. In the review, the library's social media practice revolves around three dimensions, i.e., communication, advertising, and services. Reference service is found to be the most preferred service through social media. Multiple factors, indicators, actions, and motivations have been found to strategize the libraries' social media incidence. This paper will provide a bird's eye view of the current status of library social media applications and help library professionals strategically select and utilize different social media platforms.

Keywords: Social media; Social media marketing; Library marketing; Social media strategies; LIS professionals; Libraries; India

1. INTRODUCTION

Libraries in the present era serve a purpose far beyond their traditional image of packed shelves and busy halls with users lost in their thoughts elsewhere. Every year, libraries spend crores purchasing physical records and subscriptions to electronic resources. The best return on investment for any library would be its users' optimum usage of its resources and services. The advent of technology has revolutionised how libraries operate and provide services. The evolution of new technologies always brings opportunities and challenges for libraries regarding services and adoption. However, the main concern is how library users engage with libraries and use their resources and services. In the digital era, libraries must prioritize engaging their users, making it a fundamental concern. To convert the maxim of 'spending on library resources' into 'investing in library resources' and get the maximum return on this investment, libraries must improve user engagement by embracing new and innovative ways.

Social media have the potential and desired prerequisite a library needs to engage with end users and to provide remote services. Social media qualities such as easy installation, easy account creation, ease of maintenance, limitless connections, types of engagement, entertainment,

creativity, timeless access, etc., give libraries an upper hand in establishing a strong bond with users through creativity, integrity, and accessibility. In this context, many experts have explored how to incorporate social media in libraries and surveyed various social media applications in library services and operations. This study systematically reviews multiple studies to look at the application of social media in libraries, numerous challenges faced by professionals, emerging trends in libraries' social media presence, and strategies for libraries' social media accounts and pages.

2. METHODOLOGY

This paper reviewed 25 articles from the last six years available in the area of "applications of social media in libraries". The literature has been retrieved from three databases: Web of Science, Scopus, and ProQuest. All the retrieved data have been critically analyzed and filtered for final selection in the systematic review by following the 'Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses' (PRISMA) guidelines¹ for the systematic review of the literature. Additionally, we referred to the literature concerning systematic literature reviews, specifically the PRISMA guidelines as elucidated by Asiq², *et al.* (2022), for invaluable insights and guidance. The development of our search strategy involved the careful curation of keywords derived from a thorough examination of extensively referenced articles pertaining

to social media applications in libraries. This meticulous scrutiny of highly cited articles guided the formulation of our research questions and served as a cornerstone for refining our search queries.

Research Questions

1. How are libraries using social media to market and promote their resources and services?
2. What are the challenges library professionals face in incorporating social media in libraries?
3. What are the various strategies to incorporate social media in libraries?

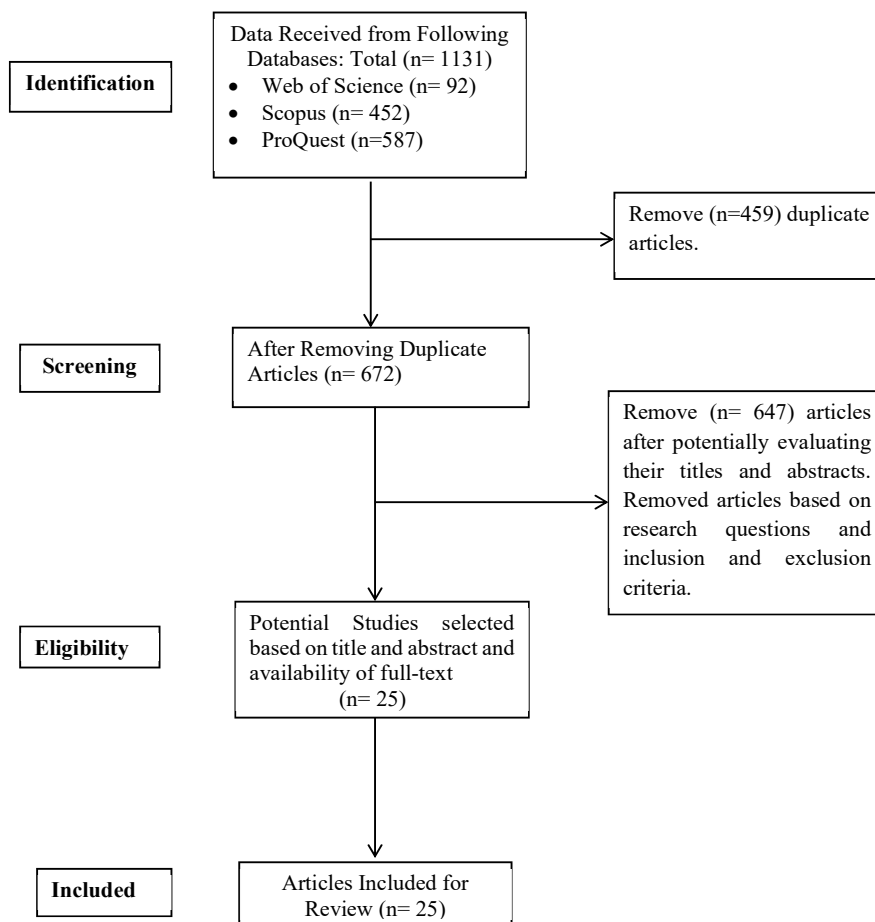
Search queries were made by combining different keywords such as (Social Media AND Libraries AND marketing), (Social Media AND Academic Library), (Social Media AND Challenges for Libraries), and (Social Media AND Strategies for Libraries). The literature has been retrieved through all three databases under the title, abstract, and topic fields by applying filters: publication years (2018-2023), document type (articles), source type (scholarly journals), and language (English), along with the full-text availability. The authors selected the inclusion and exclusion criteria to follow PRISMA

guidelines. Figure 1 is the meticulously orchestrated flow diagram, adhering to the stringent PRISMA guidelines, through which the entire corpus of retrieved literature underwent a rigorous filtration process in four distinct phases. This intricate curation was facilitated by utilising the Endnote online reference management software, culminating in selecting articles that met the stringent criteria for inclusion while judiciously excluding others.

3. REVIEW OF SELECTED ARTICLES

3.1 Social Media and Library Services

Social media is an indispensable tool to be incorporated in libraries for effective and efficient library services. Xie and Stevenson³ show the benefits of social media Twitter in building digital library communities. Twitter has many roles in the digital library, ranging from promotion and social connection to information. Chaptula⁴, *et al.* investigated the potential of WhatsApp to provide various user and reference services in the library. Gmiterek⁵ revealed that Facebook has emerged as the most frequent social media platform libraries use during the COVID lockdown. Other social media platforms less used by libraries include Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube. Akagah⁶



*n denotes the number of articles

Figure 1. Flow diagram of PRISMA.

found that using social media, especially in reference services, has improved communication between librarians and users, increasing the visibility of library resources and services. Koulouris⁷, *et al.* found that libraries have used various social media platforms during the pandemic but only as a static communication channel. They needed to catch up in exploiting the full potential of social media. Chiparousha⁸, *et al.* examined that library professionals positively perceive social media as a useful and easy-to-use provision in libraries. However, findings also revealed that superintendents needed to be more motivating professionals to use and explore social media as an opportunity for innovative services. Choi & Kim⁹ found that libraries have changed their way of communication on Twitter after the COVID-19 pandemic. They become more active and creative regarding promotions, communications, and operations. Libraries adapt to community emergencies, cater to different service populations, and adjust to varying geographic locations, showcasing their versatility. Mogale & Boppape¹⁰ found that besides conventional social media platforms, libraries also explore blogs to promote services and communicate with users and faculty members.

3.2 Social Media and Library Marketing

Velasquez & Campbell-Meier¹¹ suggested integrating social media into libraries' marketing campaigns can amplify their impact and outreach significantly. Social media enable libraries to strategise outcome-based marketing to overcome serious budget cuts and showcase their true role to the communities. AlAwadhi & Al-Daihani¹² recognising awareness building, conducting need analysis, and evaluating satisfaction are key benefits of marketing libraries via social media. However, effective implementation requires strong management support in the vicinity. Okike & Oyeniyi¹³ discussed security-related questions in marketing libraries through social media regarding confidentiality, integrity, and availability. Regular security evaluation is a must in libraries' social media marketing environment.

Joo¹⁴, *et al.* indicated that posts featuring community events, awards, and photos were more likely to capture user attention and engagement. This highlights the importance of libraries adopting creative strategies when utilising social media for marketing. Ofori¹⁵, *et al.* suggested hiring experts and experienced individuals to effectively manage the library's social media presence. This approach ensures libraries can fully harness the potential of information communication technology and effectively compete with other information service providers.

Muhammad & Zhiwei¹⁶ advocated the participation of library users and staff to make the marketing campaign of the libraries more appealing and entertaining. Masizana & Salubi¹⁷ revealed that challenges related to copyright issues and organisational policies, particularly those favouring a single social media platform, could hinder library professionals from expressing their creativity.

Additionally, these obstacles might divert libraries from achieving their marketing objectives through social media. Wojcik¹⁸ advocated using aesthetics by libraries in their social media marketing and promotion. Employing social media aesthetics, especially in conventional and older libraries, can project a strong and good image. Fadhli¹⁹, *et al.* analysed that the pandemic restrictions have encouraged libraries to explore new and innovative ways of marketing and reaching out to end users. The library frequently publishes informative and entertaining posts to reach a wider audience and interact with them differently.

3.3 Challenges and Factors Influencing Social Media for Libraries

Deodato²⁰ shows that the literature discussing social media applications in libraries offers numerous innovative examples. However, libraries need help to practically implement and justify these promising examples outlined in the literature. Williams²¹, *et al.* highlighted that erratic internet connectivity, low bandwidth, outdated infrastructure, access to social media, and staff development are negatively impacting the morale of library staff in adopting social media in effective service delivery. Izuagbe²² showed that image and subjective norms were the main determinants of the perceived usefulness of social media in libraries. Choi & Joo²³ unveiled that the primary challenges faced by libraries include a need for more staff resources, skills, training, and expertise. Despite these challenges, library professionals view social media as a crucial marketing tool. Factors such as peer influence, top management support, demand and acceptance from patrons, and the library's organisational innovativeness motivate them to enhance the utilisation of social media within the library.

3.4 Social Media Strategies for Libraries

Jones & Harvey²⁴ revealed that time, staff skill and knowledge, promotion or marketing, place of the library in the wider institution, and type of engagement are the main aspects that should be considered critically for strategising incorporating social media in the library. Magoi²⁵, *et al.* described the importance of trust and authority in the libraries' social media presence. They discussed six themes on trust-creating activities, of which three themes were related to actions by individual librarians, two themes were associated with activities by librarians as a group, and one theme was related to activity taken by the library management. Mensah & Onyanacha²⁶ emphasised the library's social media strategy in terms of planning, policy, staff competency, user engagement, user feedback, and the vibrant definition of responsibilities, training, and stakeholders' involvement. Stephens²⁷ recommended that developing an effective social media strategy for the library requires a consistent marketing plan and reasonable goals aligned with the library's objectives. Regarding the content of the posts, there should be no compromise on quality, consistency, professional authorisation, and adherence to a regular posting schedule.

4 FUTURE TRENDS IN THE APPLICATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN LIBRARIES

The critical analysis of the selected articles has shown that social media application in libraries is confined to three dimensions: communication, promotion, and services. In the services, it is mainly employed in providing reference services. Many studies have found that libraries need to catch up on the effective use of social media. The main reason may be the need for more social media strategies. Studies have suggested that professionals positively perceive incorporating social media, but lack of skill, training, and management support obstruct them. In developing countries, libraries must formulate robust social media strategies and policies. Selecting suitable social media platforms that align with governmental and institutional policies is crucial.

Many studies have limited their analysis to a single social media account of libraries. However, given the evolving dynamics of users' needs and demands, libraries should prioritize utilising multiple platforms. Examining the content across these diverse platforms will greatly influence future library strategies. If libraries embrace a solid plan, the role of social media in libraries can become grander and enthralling. The availability of dynamic social media platforms can help libraries renovate themselves as learning hubs for the patrons and community rather than sheer information centres.

5. CONCLUSION

Libraries can leverage social media for diverse functions, encompassing information dissemination, seamless communication, and establishing valuable feedback mechanisms. Using social media marketing, libraries can create brand value among patrons. The literature selected for the review has shown the availability of a range of social media platforms with exclusive features that will help libraries improve their networking, visibility, and online services. Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Twitter are the popular social media platforms among library professionals. They should also explore YouTube, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Reddit, etc., to increase their reach to a wider audience. The available literature has shown that using social media platforms, libraries can share information about workshops, conferences, seminars, lectures, discussions, research guidance, etc.

However, there is a need to explore the possibilities of the role of social media in the sustainability of libraries in the digital era. Perceiving the potential of social media, scholars need to shift their focus from merely studying social media services in libraries to viewing libraries as vibrant hubs for recreation, culture, and knowledge dissemination. Nevertheless, this comprehensive review is focused exclusively on articles published within the most recent six-year timeframe and meticulously curated from three highly esteemed databases: Web of Science, Scopus, and ProQuest. It is important to acknowledge that, regrettably, this review does not encompass the extensive body of research related to "users' perceptions

and perspectives" concerning the utilisation of social media within library contexts, primarily due to the constraints imposed by the authors' guidelines.

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