A DIGITAL STRATEGY FOR THE EFFECTIVE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS BY LIBRARY AND INFORMATION CENTRES.

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ABSTRACT

Social Media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Youtube etc. have become extremely popular among Internet users. A majority of library users, especially the youth, are also making use of such platforms for various purposes. Library and Information Centres, with a right strategy, could harness the potential of these platforms to serve the users in a better way. This paper lays down a digital strategy for this purpose.

KEYWORDS: digital strategy ,social Media platforms , library and information centres.

1.INTRODUCTION :

Social media are the most dynamic development on the Internet after the birth of the World Wide Web. We have witnessed revolution in communi-cation thanks to tools like email, newsletters, etc., but nothing compares to Social media development in terms of popularity, versatility, and ease of use. Safko (2010)1. gives a simple yet an encom passing definition of social media as the media that we use to be social . Choi (2012) summarized social media as "all web 2.0 and social networking tools that enable content creation, sharing, discovering and exchange of user-generated content, with the main focus on their participatory nature" Social media tools are not a new development. A considerable time has already passed since their advent on the Internet. Many of library customers, rather 'users' are definitely using such tools. If libraries want to stay in reckon, they should use the technologies what the users are using.

2. SOCIAL MEDIA AND LIBRARIES- A POWERFUL COMBINATION

The application of social network in academic libraries helps the librarian to re-shape the traditional ideas of library services . It is an undeniable fact that a large number of educated people who potentially need the services of a library use social media. To connect with such library users, a library should use social media channels. Such a usage will bring following dimensions to usual library services:

• extending reach
• establishing constant connections and
• faster two-way communication

To make a great use of these digital dimensions a well planned and well defined strategy is require. Lee King (2016) has opined that when well implemented, social media can be extremely useful when it is used to connect the library to its customers For this 'well implementation' the ensuing paragraph suggests a strategy.

3. AN EFFECTIVE DIGITAL SOCIAL MEDIA PLAN OR STRATEGY

Ezeani and Igwesi opined that (2012) that most librarians in the developing countries are not aware of social networking services, and that even the few that are aware were still struggling to find productive uses of these tools for library services . The following plan would help to come out such situation and make an effective use of Social Media channels.

3.1Defining purpose/ purposes

To begin with, Library and Information centres should make themselves clear what is their purpose in using social media. In addition, they should also clearly mark it out what they intend to achieve in clear time frames of three months, six months or one year. The purpose may be to achieve an effective communication channel with the users; may be to market the library services; may be to get feedback about the services offered etc.

3.2 Making a SWOT analysis

The next important step is to make a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis. Though it is a general analysis, it works very well when it comes to make an online presence especially with the Social Media. In specific terms, this analysis could be on the following lines:

Strengths: Availability of robust and well established ICT infrastructures, a large number of tech savvy users, availability of library staff with adequate social media skills and needed technical knowledge etc.

Weaknesses: Lack of positive attitude in staff and users towards adopting social media channels in place of traditional nature of work, lack of man power to handle technical breakdowns, lack of co-operation from higher authorities etc.

Opportunities: Availability of large number of free online resources, increased use of social media by library users, gradual shift of publishing of scholarly content from print to digital Threats. Cyber security issues, frequent technological up-gradation etc.,

3.3 Selecting a particular social medium/media

The next important step would be to select a particular social medium or a number of such mediums which would fit with the defined purposes. There are a number of social media channels which serve a number of purposes. An elaborative study of each channel and a study of the type of users that the channel has, have to be made for this task.

For social media to happen two things are primary: Presence and networking . 'presence' in the connotation of social media assumes different dimension that is of being online. This online presence could be anything like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, Skype, Blogging etc.

Each of these social media platform offer particular benefits and library information centres should select a platform or a combination of platforms in tune with the purpose/purposes already identified.

The following gives an idea how each platform could be useful in library context:

Facebook: Facebook is one of the online social networking website which provides a platform, to build social relations among people. Libraries could use this platform for spreading library news, information about already held or forthcoming events in the library, new arrivals etc.

Twitter: Twitter is a popular social media channel with social networking, instant messaging and micro-blogging features. A library could use twitter services to spread all types of news that users need such as lectures, book talks, book exhibitions, newly acquired resources, changes in the working hours at the time of examinations etc.

YouTube: YouTube is a video sharing website. It provides a platform for posting many different types of videos, such as current events, short movies, music videos, tutorials etc by individuals. Libraries could use this platform for hosting library-related instructional videos, information literacy videos, library events videos etc.

LinkedIn: It is one of the world's largest professional networks with more than 400 million members in 200 countries. It allows users) to create profiles and connect to each other for professional purposes. Libraries can use LinkedIn to connect with other professional libraries/librarians and share innovations in service areas. This would indirectly benefits users.

Pinterest: Pinterest is an online pinboard allows members to "pin" images, videos and other objects to their pinboard. Pinterest helps people discover things in a simple, visual way. Libraries could use this platform for pinning book covers, creating visually appealing reading lists, Showcasing learning-related infographics, showing pictures of the library etc.

There are many other social media platforms such as Instagram, Tumblr, Flikr, Vimeo etc. Each of these has unique features and libraries could adopt for specific needs.

3.4 Creating useful, relevant and timely content .

Creating a useful content is the hardest task in social media strategic plan. It is the ultimate factor that drives users to use library's social media channels. Without a relevant and timely content, social media channels of libraries are of no use. A broad plan is suggested as below for creating attractive and useful content:
• Priority for on-going or upcoming events
• Enriching content with videos, graphics, pictures and other multimedia items.
• Providing opportunity for feedback so that the platform remains interactive.
• Quick response to queries, suggestions and other feedbacks.
• Uploading original, unique and reliable content.
• Developing and following content upload calendar.

3.5 Enhancing visibility of library's social media channels

Without a reasonable visibility, a library social media channel, however greatly designed, is of little use as it would

escape attention of the scholarly community. This would defeat all the efforts in designing and placing a social media channel online. For enhancing visibility of social media channels, wide publicity should be made among potential users. Also, key words that users may commonly use in search engines should be embedded in the social media sites. Online advertisements are also a great step in this direction.

4. CONCLUSION

It is evident that many successful organizations and institutions are making use of the power of social media to achieve their goals. Their strategies are being re-modified to keep in line with the technological developments; especially the social media. It is the time to carve out a digital strategy for the effective use of social media tools which could in turn help the libraries to promote the products or services.

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