

Academic Libraries as Social Hub with Special Reference to North Eastern Region

Pravakar Rath

Abstract

Libraries in higher educational institutions have under gone a great transformation from an automated to virtual environment using Internet and social media with an objective to enhance the reach of library resources and services among the academic fraternity. The present paper emphasises on the importance of academic libraries as social hub with special reference to North Eastern region by using social media tools. The author presents an overview of higher education in NE region and the libraries of centrally funded institutions currently providing various resources and services through Internet and social media. It is concluded that more efforts and initiatives need to be undertaken by academic libraries of North Eastern region for which some of the issues need to be addressed by planners and policy makers, library authorities and professionals like policy issues, develop ICT infrastructure on priority, promote modernization of libraries, participate in library networks and consortia, develop digital library and optimal use of e-resources, creation of indigenous knowledge and knowledge specific to the region, recognize the importance of “Libraries –As Gateways to Knowledge” and contribute to national development, recognize the importance of social media and its application in teaching , learning and research.

Keywords: Academic Libraries, Social Hub, Social Media, North-East India

1. Introduction

With the advances in information and communication technology in general and Internet in particular, the social activities among the community are increasingly rapidly using social media and social networking sites. Social media allows connecting all people in a community, create human relationship, connect and bridge people for social interaction. Similarly academic libraries as social hub have started using social media to connect its users and promote optimum use of its resources and services. The ultimate objective of using social networking sites to promote awareness among its user population with regards to:

- ❖ Access to information;
- ❖ Appraise library events of other programmes;
- ❖ Publicise its resources, services and products;
- ❖ Obtain feedback to improve library services;and
- ❖ Allow interaction among the library staff and users as one social community.

To make academic libraries as social hub, libraries attached to academic institutions are constantly engaged in applying social media technology with an objective to outreach its clientele through this technology, the users can search, browse, filter, find, collaborate and have open access to knowledge resources.



1.1 Library Services through Social Media

With the emergence of Web 2.0/3.0 and its compatibility with library management software, the libraries have started providing a number of innovative and value-added services to its users community by using social media tools as explained below.

- ❖ Facebook appears to be the most logical social networking site to be used by the academic library. Discussions by academic librarians highlight several uses of Facebook for academic library outreach. One of the primary uses of Facebook by academic libraries is to market the library with a library fan page. Libraries advertise hours, location and web site information. By linking the library's web site, the Facebook page acts as a portal to the library. As students frequently use outside search engines for academic research, even a basic Facebook page can serve as reminder to use the resources available at an academic library. Libraries also create event invitations for programmes as an additional forum to promote library activities. Essentially, Facebook pages provide a marketing tool for the services available to students at their academic library. Using Facebook applications, some academic libraries embed the library catalogue to allow students to access the contents of the library catalogue without actually visiting the library's website. Some academic librarians are also embedding the "ask-a-librarian" feature within the Facebook page to provide reference services through the social networking medium and to expand the chat and message function available through Facebook itself.
- ❖ WhatsApp is a free, cross-platform and end-to-end encrypted instant messaging application for smartphones. It uses the Internet to make voice calls, one to one video calls; send text messages, documents, PDF files, images, GIF, videos, user location, audio files, phone contacts and voice notes to other users using standard cellular mobile numbers.
- ❖ Instagram is an online mobile photo-sharing site that enables its users to take pictures and share them either publicly or privately on the app, as well as through a variety of other social networking platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Flickr etc.. Users can also apply digital filters to their images. Videos on Instagram debuted in June 2013, allowing pre-recorded square standard definition resolution clips of up to 15 seconds to be shared; later improvements added support for widescreen resolutions of up to 1080p and longer recording times for either pre-recorded (up to one minute) or disappearing live (up to one hour) videos.
- ❖ Twitter is a fast growing, free messaging service for people those who can make good use of it without spending much time or effort. At present number of libraries and librarians are taking the help of twitter to engage readers to spread information. Twitter is a microblogging and social networking service with millions of members and growing at a tremendous rate. With the buzz surrounding the service have some claims of its ability to transform the way people interact and share information and calls for public figures to start using the service. People are primarily using Twitter to disperse information, particularly links to news articles about

themselves and to their blog posts, and to report on their daily activities, and acts as vehicles for self-promotion.

- ❖ LinkedIn can be a powerful resource for librarians, both as a tool for career development and as a resource to assist library users. LinkedIn is also a social networking site, which was founded in the year 2003. It provides a platform for the professionals to connect with the other professionals that could help find the information. LinkedIn is a professional networking group intended to cater the platform for the group members to find the people, jobs and business opportunities in the interest of the group of users.
- ❖ YouTube is one of the largest social media platform having the ability to upload videos of anything you like in any format. One of the possible uses for YouTube in academic library is a storehouse for instructional videos with a link that could take the viewer to the library's web site for more information. Another creative use of YouTube for a library can be as a method of introducing resources that are available on campus. Academic libraries can also disseminate important highlights of inaugural lectures, conferences and workshops via YouTube.
- ❖ Pinterest is a web and mobile application company that operates a photo sharing website. Pinterest is a free website that requires registration to use. Users can upload, save, sort, and manage images known as pins and other media content (e.g., videos) through collections known as pinboards. Pinterest acts as a personalized media platform. Users can browse the content

of others in their feed. Users can then save individual pins to one of their own boards using the "Pin It" button, with Pinboards typically organized by a central topic or theme. Users can personalize their experience with Pinterest by pinning items, creating boards, and interacting with other members. The end result is that the "pin feed" of each user displays unique, personalized results.

- ❖ Synchronous messaging is more widely known as Instant Messaging. Real-time text communication takes place between users and libraries' chat reference services. IM applications can support co-browsing, file sharing, screen capturing, data sharing and mining including audio and video messaging. The various messaging applications may be Google talk, messenger services or e-mail services. SOUL 2.0, library management software developed by INFLIBNET also employs the chat facility.
- ❖ Streaming Media which is a database of tutorials, streaming audio or video, multimedia chat rooms or wikis where users can interact in hand with one another with learning object in hand as happened in a class room or instructional lab and allows media creation, access and archiving.
- ❖ Blogs which means "Web log" is an outline chronological collection of personal commentary and links. An established communication tool in the form of internet publishing, easy to create and use from anywhere with an internet connection. For example-family blogs, community blogs, war blogs, liblogs etc. The various blogging and software that could be employed is Word Press, Type Pad, Blogger etc.

- ❖ Wikis: They are open web pages in which any one registered can publish, amend and change it. The advantages of using Wikis in LIS include community portals, an interactive tool as well as research tool, full text search, easy file uploading and downloading.
- ❖ Tagging: It is used to create subject's headings for the objects available in the Web. It allows users to add and change not only content (data) but the metadata describing content. Tagging makes lateral searching easier.
- ❖ Bookmarking: Social bookmarking service is a centralized online service which enables users to add, annotate, edit, and share bookmarks of web documents. Delicious (www.delicious.com), citeULike (www.citeulike.org), bibsonomy (www.bibsonomy.org) are some of the bookmarking tools.
- ❖ Really Simple Syndication (RSS) Feeds: RSS is an emerging content creation and management tool provided by the website in XML files for up to date and value-added service to the users. It is useful for current awareness offered, new information sources added in collections, instructional and reference service. Rapid feeds (www.rapidfeeds.com) and Enfeedia (www.enfeedia.com) are some of the software that could be employed for creating and publishing RSS feeds.
- ❖ Podcasting is the combination of audio and video (i.e. vodcasting) files. It's a method of distributing multimedia files such as audio programs over the Internet. Library uses podcasting in recording of book reviews by users, new resources, and Librarian's tour for usage of library and its services, story time for

children and book club promotions, events and programs, speeches by visiting authors. The various sharing applications are YouTube (www.youtube.com) and Motion box (www.motionbox.com). Various software for video/audio editing are Juice (www.juicereceiver.sourceforge.net) and Audacity (www.audacity.sourceforge.net).

- ❖ Mashups: It's a hybrid of blogs, wikis, streaming media, content aggregators, instant messaging and social networks. Library 2.0 is a mashups which remembers the users when they log in and allows the users to edit data and metadata, saves the user's tags, IM conversations with librarians, wiki entries with other users. The users are able to make all or part of their profile public. Users can see what other users have similar items checked-out, borrow and lend tags. The user driven catalogue is created mashed with a traditional catalogue.

2. Higher Education Scenario in North East Region

Education plays an important role in the developmental process of a nation which demands more educational institutions to provide access and opportunities, knowledge and skill development, contribution to society through research and innovation. In the process, higher education in the north east region assumes great significance in understanding, exposing the students and teachers towards emerging trends and developments by adopting global standards which has a great impact on bridging the digital divide. One of the major recommendations of National Knowledge Commission (2008) was expansion of higher education which can contribute a lot for socio-

economic development, enable access and opportunities, quality and excellence, and create an inclusive society to form a strong foundation of knowledge society. Academic libraries and trends and developments in social media can only make the libraries as social hub.

The table given below depicts the higher education scenario in the north east region.

NE States	Universities CU, SU, DU, PU	Colleges (2F+12(B)+ Autonomous	IIT	NIT	IIM
Arunachal Pradesh	1+0+0+8	11	-	1	-
Assam	2+12+0+05	325	1	1	-
Manipur	1+2+0+1	62	-	1	-
Mizoram	1+0+0+1	29	-	1	-
Meghalaya	1+0+0+8	38	-	1	1
Nagaland	1+0+0+3	47	-	1	-
Tripura	1+1+0+1	27	-	1	-
Sikkim	1+0+0+5	10	-	1	-
Total	56	549	1	8	1

2.1 Library and Information Science Education, Training and Research

In order to strengthen the libraries of all categories in general and academic libraries in particular in the NE region, it is equally important to provide the best and contemporary LIS education in creating appropriate manpower. Schools of library and information studies in the region are constantly engaged in offering innovative education in librarianship, conducting a good number of seminars, conferences, workshop and training programmers, UGC refresher courses and other professional development programmes intended to

develop professional knowledge, skills and competencies to man the libraries and provide effective and efficient services to its customers. Besides, these schools of library and information studies are also undertaking research in librarianship to bring qualitative and innovative solutions to the problems faced by the libraries of all categories. As part of curriculum and syllabus, these schools of library and information studies provide ICT application libraries, digital library, social media to access, store, retrieve and share information of academic in nature.

2.2 Access to Library Networks and E-Resources in NE Region

Library networks and consortia more importantly e-resources provide access to academic world. The objective of library network is to form of a group of participating libraries to share a large amount of information resources in electronic format for the benefit of academic, research community and public at large. As on date, there are two popular and operational library networks in India namely INFLIBNET and DELNET. INFLIBNET over the period of time has been more visible in north east universities, colleges and other institutions of higher learning whereas DELNET because of its objectives, resources and services is making a steady progress in the region. Both the networks have common objective to empower academic fraternity and public at large by providing qualitative information resources and services, assisting in all educational activities and contributing to nation building. This is a great contribution to digital initiative by the Government of India and bridges the “information poor” and “information rich” by ensuring that people from all sectors and society have easy access to information and knowledge.

2.3 e-ShodhSindhu: Consortium for Higher Education Electronic Resources (INFLIBNET)

Based on the recommendation of an Expert Committee, the MHRD has formed e-ShodhSindhu merging three consortia initiatives, namely UGC-INFONET Digital Library Consortium, NLIST and INDEST-AICTE Consortium. The e-ShodhSindhu will continue to provide current as well as archival access to more than 15,000 core and peer-reviewed journals and a number of bibliographic, citation and factual databases in different disciplines from a large number of publishers and aggregators to its member institutions including centrally-funded technical institutions, universities and colleges that are covered under 12(B) and 2(f) Sections of the UGC Act.

The main objective of the e-ShodhSindhu: Consortia for Higher Education E-Resources is to provide access to qualitative electronic resources including full-text, bibliographic and factual databases to academic institutions at a lower rates of subscription.

2.4 N-LIST (INFLIBNET)

The Project entitled “National Library and Information Services Infrastructure for Scholarly Content (N-LIST)”, being jointly executed by the e-ShodhSindhu Consortium, INFLIBNET Centre and the INDEST-AICTE Consortium, IIT Delhi provides for i) cross-subscription to e-resources subscribed by the two Consortia, i.e. subscription to INDEST-AICTE resources for universities and e-ShodhSindhu resources for technical institutions; and ii) access to selected e-resources to colleges. The N-LIST project provides access to e-resources to students, researchers and faculty from colleges and other beneficiary institutions through server(s) installed at the INFLIBNET Centre. The authorized

users from colleges can now access e-resources and download articles required by them directly from the publisher’s website once they are duly authenticated as authorized users through servers deployed at the INFLIBNET Centre.

All colleges covered under section 12B of UGC Act and Non Aided Colleges (except agriculture, engineering, management, medical, pharmacy, dentistry and nursing) can access to electronic resources subscribed by the UGC-INFONET Digital Library consortium as well as few selected e-resources that were found most appropriate for colleges including e-journals and e-books. These resources include more than 6000+ e-journals and 97,000 + e-books. All Non-Aided (except agriculture, engineering, medical, pharmacy, dentistry and nursing) colleges are required to register themselves online.

3. Issues Concerning Development of Academic Libraries in North-East Region

Some of the issues that north-eastern states are facing which are relevant and need to be addressed as stated below.

- a) **Policy Issues:** Understanding the ground realities of of 8 states including Sikkim, developing ICT infrastructure need to be addressed by both state and central government as a National Policy of the central government. Although many initiatives have been undertaken by the central government, still a lot has to be done to improve the living standards of the people of NE region.
- b) **Develop ICT Infrastructure on Priority:** There is an absolute need to develop information and communication infrastructure including the

speed of Internet, increase Bandwidth/ Use of Fiber Optics which will enable people to communicate fast and could eliminate many socio-economic and educational barriers and shall result in to many developmental activities in the region. All universities, colleges and institutions of higher learning need to be covered under National Knowledge Network to increase the speed of Internet which is the back bone of present knowledge society.

c) Promote Modernization of Libraries, Participate in Library Networks and Consortia:

The changing information scenario demands libraries of all categories need to be computerized with the help of integrated Library 2.0 software. This will enable its users to communicate easily, securely and cost effectively. Library should develop its own website which is dynamic, innovative and interactive. With the help of a computerized library and Internet connectivity, the libraries can join any library network to access the resources of other libraries and provide effective and efficient services to its clientele.

d) Develop Digital Library and Optimal Use of E-resources:

With the help of a dedicated library website, libraries can digitize very important and rare material and procure a number of e-resources and upload in the website for easy access by its own users. Digital libraries provide instant access to e-resources (24x7) with huge and variety of contents with least cost.

e) Creation of Indigenous Knowledge and Knowledge Specific to the Region:

Contribution to knowledge and society, knowledge creation, access and knowledge dissemination are some

of the mandates of libraries for which they are established. Indigenous knowledge which is unique and carries much educational and research importance, local databases on those areas can be developed and be uploaded in the library website for greater dissemination of among the user group and bring visibility of the institution worldwide.

f) Recognize the Importance of “Libraries –As Gateways to Knowledge” and Contribute to National Development:

Library authorities, educationists who are heading the academic institutions, state and central government should recognize the value and importance of information and knowledge which the libraries as knowledge centers can only provide. Libraries and knowledge resources can contribute and supplement to all educational activities and national development. Promoting reading habits, reading culture, providing reading material can only be possible if all stake holders recognize the value and importance of libraries.

g) Recognize the Importance of Social Media and its Application in teaching, Learning and Research-

There is a sea change from traditional method of teaching learning to technology enabled learning, web-enabled learning, mobile learning with the advent of modern teaching tools like social media, smart class rooms, smart phone, multimedia integration etc. Optimal use of social networking sites will increase academic competencies of the students in time management, access latest information, group collaboration, discussion, file sharing, instant messaging or chatting etc. Besides, libraries can easily reach out for marketing of their library products and services.

4. Role and Responsibilities of LIS Professionals

The changing information scenario has created a number of challenges for the library and information professionals with regard to application of social media tools and techniques in libraries in the following areas:

- ❖ Understanding the information needs of the Users and its utility.
- ❖ Identifying information as key input for decision making.
- ❖ Generating capacity among the users to raise information queries.
- ❖ Understanding related information and sources and services.
- ❖ Developing effective and efficient literature search using modern information tools and techniques.
- ❖ Allowing users to do critical analysis.
- ❖ Organisation and manipulation of information for different applications.

4.1 Skill Development /Capacity Building

Library automation, networking, digitisation, open access and open source movement, application of social media in academic development have compelled library and information professionals not only posed challenges in single area of capacity/competency development but multi skill development to cope up with contemporary real life situations of a library environment . Library information professionals need to develop their professional ability in three broad areas which include:

4.1.1 ICT Skills

These include handling sophisticated and state-of-the-art technologies required for automation, networking, digitisation, web site development, both in terms of hardware and software operations.

4.1.2 Information Management Skills

Content development in electronic environment, collection organisation and dissemination of information design, development of database with user friendly information search techniques.

5. Conclusion

Academic libraries are exploiting the social media to supplement higher education to enhance the reach of library resources and services for better usage. “Bridging the Digital Divide” through social networking sites could result in to academic and research productivity as it enable easy access to primary data and instant response from the targeted audience. “Sharing is Caring” is one of the objectives of social media application in academic libraries in which large amount of knowledge resources could easily be shared for the betterment of teaching, learning and research. Libraries around the world are showing their presence in social media due to the obvious reasons like use, share, collaborate large amount of research findings there by making the institution visible to the academic world.

Further Reading

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About Author

Prof. Pravakar Rath, Senior Professor (HAG), Department of Library and Information Science, Mizoram University, (A Central University), Aizawl
E-mail: pravakarrath@gmail.com

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