



Evidence Summary

Academics in the UK Use Social Media to Enhance Traditional Scholarly Reading

A Review of:

Tenopir, C., Volentine, R., & King, D.W. (2013). Social media and scholarly reading. *Online Information Review*, 37(2), 193-216. doi:10.1108/OIR-04-2012-0062

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Abstract

Objective – To investigate academic staff's use and creation of social media for work-related purposes as well as analyze how this influences consumption of traditional scholarly resources.

Design – A 60 question survey instrument in questionnaire format (instrument appended to the article).

Setting – Six universities in the United Kingdom.

Subjects – Respondents include 2,117 academic staff or faculty.

Methods – In 2011, the authors sent a 60 question survey to 6 universities in the United

Kingdom. Library directors were asked to send out the survey to their university's academic staff, and 12,600 invitations were sent out. An application to the Institutional Review Board was also implemented and approved as long as the respondents could exit the survey at any time. There were 2,117 respondents with a maximum of 1,078 respondents to the questions regarding social media.

Questions included in the survey asked the frequency of use of traditional scholarly resources with a focus on reading articles and books. Respondents were also asked to answer questions regarding how they accessed resources and how they used what they were reading. They were asked to provide information regarding accessing other publications such as conference proceedings, government documents, and magazines or

trade journals. The authors also recorded demographic information such as respondent's field of study, position within the university, age, and gender. Following questions regarding use of traditional resources and demographics, respondents were asked to answer questions regarding social media use and creation for work-related purposes.

Main Results – The authors asked respondents how much traditional scholarly reading they did in the last month. With regard to traditional scholarly reading activity, the authors found that academic staff in the United Kingdom read about 22 articles, with medical and health sciences field consuming the most articles and social scientists consuming the least. Book and book chapter reading is more prevalent in the humanities discipline as they, on average, read about 20 books or book chapters. The average across disciplines is seven books or book chapters, with the medical and health sciences academic staff reading the least. "Other publications" were also accounted for such as government documents, trade journals, and conference proceedings, and on average, academics read about 11 in the last month. After data was collected, authors excluded outliers over three standard deviations from the mean to assure a more representative average.

Respondents were asked how often they use social media such as blogs, online videos, RSS feeds, Twitter, user comments in online articles, podcasts, and other. The authors found that academics in the United Kingdom use social media occasionally, but not on a regular basis. They also found that social media is less likely to be created than used. Occasional use is recorded by half of the respondents who use only two of the resources listed in the survey. Only 5% of the respondents said they use all of the social media tools listed. Over half of the respondents said they do not "create" social media tools for work. Participation and use of the tools is much more prevalent according to the results of this survey.

Regarding demographic responses recorded, those who are in the humanities and medical

and health sciences use more blogs for their work, and those in the medical and health sciences also participate most in user comments in articles. Younger respondents (under 30-40 years of age) use more social media tools such as blogs, RSS feeds, and Twitter. Those who are actively teaching tend to use social media more frequently and while they do not create tools more frequently than others, they do create the most online videos out of any of the tools mentioned. There was no significant association between use of social media and the respondent's position, gender, or the number of awards earned. Respondents who "tweet" or use Twitter consume the most amount of scholarly material. Overall, the authors found that those who participate in social media also consume a significant amount of traditional scholarly content.

Conclusion – The authors conclude that while most academics in the United Kingdom participate in use of social media for work-related purposes, the results show that usage is not as frequent as expected. Creation of these tools is even less frequent, although the survey did show that academics who consume traditional scholarly resources tend to also consume social media more frequently. The use of social media is also not replacing traditional scholarly resources, but instead they are used alongside as part of the vast amount of information sources available to scholars. Publishers and others who are tasked with creation of scholarly content should consider the addition of social media tools into products. The article also implies that when academics can easily access both traditional and social media tools and use them in conjunction, the use of social media tools in academia will grow.

Commentary

The use of social media to enhance scholarly communication activities has increased in the last decade, and the authors have found evidence by surveying multiple academics at universities in the United Kingdom. While traditional scholarly resources are still being utilized in the larger academic community, the

use and creation of social media tools such as blogs, Twitter, and RSS feeds are increasingly prevalent and do not result in disuse of the traditional format.

The authors of this paper chose to focus on the frequency of use and creation of social media in relation to use of traditional scholarly resources. They found that academics are using both types of resources to gain information, however they did not necessarily address the “how” and “where” of the use and creation of social media. Are they using these tools to enhance their teaching or are they using tools to enhance their own personal growth with regard to their work? What are the reasons for using these tools versus using traditional scholarly resources? Also, the word “create” to describe tweeting or blog posting or RSS feed creation is a bit misleading. Academics are not creating tweets but are participating in Twitter or “using” Twitter. Researchers create RSS feeds far less than they consume them or subscribe to them. There are also various levels of creation with regard to social media. Are the blogs that respondents create research related or are they used for classroom purposes? These questions left unanswered are, of course, an opportunity for further research, however the authors did ask how the respondents use traditional scholarly resources.

With regard to limitations of the study, the authors were thorough in mentioning that the survey was self-reported and there could be some recall bias in relation to how much reading or social media use the respondents use. They also make note that they made the assumption that the six universities included

in the study are typical of all research universities in the United Kingdom and elsewhere in the western world. The researchers also derive data from a convenience sample and therefore do not provide a representative sample of the population.

The authors collected information regarding demographics that proves to be interesting. The information could be useful to those interested in discipline specific use of social media tools and traditional resources. Age is also an interesting factor with regard to use of social media versus traditional scholarly resources and the authors addressed this issue.

Overall, the information presented in this paper is useful to those interested in researching the current use of traditional scholarly resources. The data shows that academics use both to enhance scholarly communication and have not dismissed traditional methods for new tools. The authors imply if publishers provide access to social media tools via traditional scholarly materials, use of these tools will grow.

The *Evidence Based Library and Information Practice* (EBLIP) Critical Appraisal Checklist was used to calculate validity (Glynn, 2006). The study is found to be valid.

References

- Glynn, L. (2006). A critical appraisal tool for library and information research. *Library Hi Tech*, 24(3), 387-399. doi:10.1108/07378830610692154