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Integrating Social Media into East Asia Library Services: Case Studies at University of Colorado and Yale University

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Background

In recent years, more and more academic libraries have adopted social media into library services to disseminate information, promote library services, and connect with library patrons. Evidence of this trend is shown in Wan’s 2011 study of the Facebook presence of Association of Research Libraries (ARL) member institutions, which revealed that the majority of libraries (90.4%) have at least one Facebook page. Social media is particularly useful for academic librarians, who often face challenges in promoting library services due to limited budget and staff time, since social media provides an effective, inexpensive means of spreading information and enhancing communication.

A quick survey of 33 East Asian collections in North America conducted by the authors in August 2013 demonstrates that social media has also become an important venue for East Asian librarians. The survey finds most East Asian collections have adopted social media either by creating their own accounts (14 or 54% of the respondents) or by contributing to their central library’s accounts (7 or 27% of the respondents). It also demonstrates that East Asian collections were among the early adopters of social media. The C.V. Starr East Asian Library at Columbia University created a podcast for library iPod tours in 2006, followed by the East Asian Library at the University of Kansas that established its presence on Facebook in 2007. A number of East Asian collections started experimenting with social media between 2008 and 2009, including the University of Toronto, the University of British Columbia, Indiana University, the University of Hawaii, the University of Minnesota, Princeton University, and Yale University.

However, since few East Asian librarians have documented their experiences with social media, it is unclear what strategies they applied to their work with social media and what problems they encountered during the process. This paper examines two cases of social media efforts by East Asian librarians from the University of Colorado Boulder (UCB) and Yale University. The two libraries’ practices represent the two models of how East Asian librarians in North America deliver services via social media tools, namely managing and maintaining independent social media accounts targeted specifically to patrons interested in East Asian Studies, and participating in and contributing to the central library’s social media accounts that have a broader audience. This paper presents successful strategies used by both UCB and Yale University East Asian Librarians to engage the public with library news, events, and activities via social media tools, and reflects on the issues and concerns related to integrating social media
into library services. Closely examining current practices of the two libraries provides insights regarding planning and evaluating academic libraries’ social media efforts.

Literature Review

Social media is generally considered to be tools that allow interaction among people on the internet. Few authors, however, have explicitly discussed the definition of social media, and there seems to be some confusion regarding what exactly social media is. The term itself is often misunderstood as interchangeable with web 2.0 or social networking.

Kaplan and Haenlein’s definition of social media draws a clear line as to what should be included under the term social media. It states, “Social Media is a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content.” Web 2.0 is a concept that is used to recognize the evolutionary shift from users being passive viewers of the web to an interactive environment where users actively publish their own content. However, social media, an embodiment of this evolutionary shift, grows out of the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and represents a group of specific tools that allow web users to create and share information and reach out to millions of others. There is a wide range of tools that can be considered social media tools. Not only social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, Linkedin) but also blogs, collaborative projects (e.g., Wikipedia), content communities (e.g. YouTube, Flickr), virtual social worlds (e.g., Second Life) and virtual game worlds (e.g., World of Warcraft) are all in the librarians’ tool box, although the latter two are far more advanced in terms of media richness and haven’t been frequently implemented into library services.

Discussions and practices of social media in academic libraries started around 2007 soon after the emergence of the concept Web 2.0. During the following years, interest in integrating social media into academic libraries increased substantially. Wan’s study shows that 135 ARL libraries launched their Facebook pages in 2008 or 2009. Bosque’s analysis of 296 academic library Twitter accounts reported that the majority of libraries in his study started their Twitter accounts in 2009. Following active participation and practice, a significant number of publications on the topic mushroomed in the library and information science literature.

The literature includes well documented recommendations and best practices on how libraries adopt social media tools for various purposes, including reference, instruction, collection development, and communication with patrons. For instance, Vucovich found that blog posts and YouTube videos are useful in virtual reference encounters. Saw suggested that librarians impart information literacy skills via social media. Walton documented a two-week campaign entitled “Suggest a book for the Library” on Facebook at the University of Sussex and showed how social media can be used for collection development. Cho also valued YouTube as a collection development
resource and a pedagogical tool. Many authors emphasized using Twitter as a listening tool. For instance, Sewell insisted that “Twitter could be used to gather intelligence about account holders by monitoring their tweets.” Bell stated that librarians can learn more by using Twitter as a digital listening post. Ekart also argued that a well-managed Twitter account is a two-way street. Librarians can learn a lot about the library from library users by using keyword searches, hashtags, and location limits.

Although social media has been successfully used for various purposes, the most notable achievement of many libraries that have adopted social media has been to promote library and library services. For instance, Colburn evaluated YouTube videos created by libraries for promotional purposes and found that both view count and viewers’ interactivity indicate YouTube to be a potential successful outreach tool. For Vucovich, Facebook is an effective marketing tool for library events and news. Bosque’s analysis of 296 academic libraries’ Twitter accounts found that “libraries are using Twitter to discuss resources, library events, hours.” Just as Chu discovered in his survey on librarians’ opinions of the benefits and challenges of using social networking tools in academic libraries, the two most frequently-mentioned purposes of using social networking tools were promotion of library events and dissemination of news. This is because social media tools make it easier for people to discover. When libraries use social media tools, they are raising visibility, awareness and access to the library. With social media tools, librarians gain the ability to quickly spread information to a broader audience.

Integrating Social Media into East Asia Library Services: University of Colorado Boulder and Yale University

1. University of Colorado Boulder

To support the rapidly growing East Asian programs on campus, the UCB Libraries is making great efforts to build the East Asian collection and provide high quality library services to East Asian scholars and students. However, unlike the well-established East Asian Libraries in North America, UCB does not have a self-contained East Asian Library. Instead, all library services related to East Asian studies are performed in various units of the central library. The two East Asian librarians who deliver public services to East Asian scholars and students work in the same library department as subject specialists. This centralized organizational structure provides frequent opportunities for the East Asian librarians to join projects and activities at the central library as team players, including presenting on social media tools.

UCB Libraries currently has an active blog, as well as accounts on Facebook, Twitter, Foursquare and a YouTube channel. All of them are linked in the News and Event page and further linked to the library’s home page. For each of these social media accounts, there is one or a group of librarians who take primary responsibility for posting and
monitoring. Other librarians are strongly encouraged to participate. As a matter of fact, the East Asian librarians regularly contribute new content and reply to comments.

The team work of using social media in library services makes it easier to keep the social media accounts rich with new information, thus fresh and alive. At the same time it does not detract from East Asian librarians’ daily work performance. East Asian Librarians who work with a medium/small sized collection often assume duties related to every aspect of the collection, including instruction, reference, collection development, and outreach. Thus, taking on an additional task or experimenting with a new technology is frequently unrealistic. Although social media has been accepted as a practical channel for better communication, few librarians would wish to start it from scratch. Therefore, participating with the central library’s team seems an ideal choice since it only requires composing posts at times when they are needed. Of course, the downside of this is that it may lessen the motivation to contribute posts and new content for participating librarians who did not assume major responsibility for maintaining the social media accounts.

East Asian librarians contribute most often to the blog and to Twitter. East Asia related new resources, database trials, and events that are happening in the library are often selected for posting as a means of promotion. Campus-wide events that involve East Asia are also posted. Figure 1 below is a tweet about International week, a time during which a series of activities and events were organized to promote international education on campus:

![Tweet](https://twitter.com/ucblibraries/status/26)

Figure 1: UCB Libraries’ tweet on International Week posted on 11/17/2011

Another type of content that often gets posted is related to events that take place in East Asia and have a broad impact. For instance, in October, a blog post of Mo Yan who won the Nobel Prize for literature was posted, in which Mo Yan’s representative works were highlighted followed by a link to library holdings.

Both the above-mentioned tweet and blog posts were aimed at highlighting UCB Libraries’ local East Asian collection. At the same time, peer institutions’ posts on resources that are related to East Asian Studies are often posted to serve the library users’ broader interests.

The UCB East Asian Librarians have also created library tour videos for international students whose primary language is not English. These videos are planned to be narrated in Chinese, Japanese and Korean, in order to help students from East Asia adjust to campus life more quickly and easily. A pilot video which is in Chinese has
The video project has proven to be time and labor intensive. Starting from the planning stage, the East Asian Librarians worked on writing and translating scripts, taking photos, shooting footage, recording audio parts, and finally creating and editing the film. It took months to finish this five minute video with acceptable quality. Although the video gained hundreds of view counts on YouTube with very limited promotion, for future video projects the librarians would prefer handing over the technical part of creating the video to video production professionals.

Nevertheless, promotion through social media channels has reached a much broader audience than traditional means such as flyers and email news. Social media has helped the East Asian Librarians to broadcast their existence and raise their visibility. More importantly, the library as a whole is able to take advantage of social media to actively engage users and meet their research interest in East Asia.

2. Yale University

Yale University was the first university in the U.S. to collect East Asian language books, which started as early as 1849. After over 160 years of development, the Yale East Asia Library (EAL) has become one of the largest East Asian collections in North America.

Since the dawn of the digital age, Yale EAL has been keen on providing high-quality services to library users with cutting-edge technology and tools. Accordingly, it created a Public Services Librarian position in the late 1990s dedicated to working collaboratively with other Yale EAL librarians to investigate and implement new technology tools to improve user services. As mentioned previously, Yale EAL was one of the early adopters among East Asian collections in North America to integrate social media tools into library services. In February 2009, Yale EAL produced a pilot Chinese podcast tour about the EAL’s history, resources, and services. It was quite a success, as it received 441 downloads within three months. In summer 2009, Yale EAL set up a blog using MovableType, open source software for blog management, to automatically embed blog entries to the EAL website. It allows display of up to five entries on the EAL website.

Yale EAL considered creating a Facebook account for reference back in 2008 when Facebook started to become a mainstream social networking site. Surprisingly, there was not much interest according to a user survey conducted in December 2008. Less than 1/3 of respondents answered the question on virtual reference services using Facebook and other web 2.0 tools. One comment even suggested that Yale EAL focus on traditional offerings (in-person, via email, and by telephone). Hence, Yale EAL put off the Facebook initiative. However, Facebook gained such popularity among faculty and students within a few years that in 2012 Yale EAL decided to launch a Facebook page,
as it is always a principle for libraries to go where patrons are and provide services accordingly.

The main goal of setting up a Yale EAL Facebook page is three-fold: 1) It is a new virtual venue to publicize what’s new in the Yale EAL and highlight its collections, people and space, in addition to traditional news channels such as email and website. 2) Since Facebook is widely used by people around the world, it is an effective tool to outreach not only to current EAL users but also to Yale alumni and scholars worldwide. 3) As Facebook becomes an important platform for a virtual image of a place, it has great potential for branding. Yale EAL hopes to explore this possibility while building the Facebook page.

The most challenging part for a Facebook page is what to post on the page. As mentioned above, the main goal for the Yale EAL page is to publicize what’s happening in the library. Accordingly, a large portion of the Yale EAL Facebook posts are brief announcements and photos taken from exhibits, symposiums, events, etc. There are also a good number of posts to highlight Yale EAL staff, space, and services. In addition, the Yale EAL Facebook page shares a lot of posts from peer institutions as well as posts of academic sources on East Asia. Yale EAL librarians always try to post creatively on the Facebook page to attract more attention. For instance, in order to promote a newly acquired book scanner in spring 2012, Yale EAL librarians created a step-by-step tutorial of how to use the scanner instead of simply displaying an image of the equipment (Figure 2). Yale students are always invited to pose for Yale EAL exhibit photos because their peers find it interesting and it draws them to come to see the exhibits. Figure 3 is a perfect example: the exhibit displayed an article written by this student’s father.
Figure 2: Yale EAL Facebook Page post on 4/18/2012
3. Assessment

Social media tools, such as YouTube and Facebook, often provide statistical analysis to account administrators, which is useful for evaluating the success of librarians’ social media efforts. The following are two examples of how such statistical data can help librarians understand their users’ information behavior on social media and enhance their efforts at a social media presence accordingly.

YouTube provides statistical data or analytics on viewership, in addition to comments and ratings. It divides viewership data by how many people have viewed the video, what part of the world they are in, where views originated from, overall demographic groups to which viewers belong (e.g. age and gender), and popularity and engagement compared to other videos in a given period of time. The graph in figure 4 shows how the Chinese video made by UCB librarians was viewed since it was created in May 2012.
Given that publicizing of the pilot video was extremely limited, the 326 views became a major encouragement for the East Asian librarians to further develop the project. In

Figure 4: statistical data on viewership of library tour video made by UCB librarians as of 5/14/2013

Given that publicizing of the pilot video was extremely limited, the 326 views became a major encouragement for the East Asian librarians to further develop the project. In
addition, data on the demographic composition of the viewers helped the librarians learn that since YouTube is so popular worldwide, the video should target a broader audience to include people from outside the U.S. Therefore, strategies for attracting foreigners should be put in place when designing the videos. Using data on where viewers were directed to the video, the librarians were able to figure out more effective ways to promote the video. That is, the name and description of the video should be key elements to consider when promoting, since many viewers found the video by searching in search engines.

Facebook offers statistics or “insights” to show the page’s performance. It consists of a variety of metrics to analyze posts, followers or “likes”, and outreach level. The graph in Figure 5 gives an overview of the reach level and trend for the Yale EAL Facebook page from 4/17/2013 to 5/10/2013. The table below the graph analyzes all posts from the beginning to current time (as of 5/14/2013) based on Facebook metrics, including “reach” (# of people who saw the post), “engaged users” (# of people who clicked on the post), and “talking about this” (# of people who created a story from the post). It can be sorted by all metrics in either a descending or ascending order as well. As “reach” is a key factor to determine the outreach level or popularity of a post, the table in Figure 5 is sorted by reach in a descending order.

![Figure 5: Insights for the Yale EAL Facebook page as of 5/14/2013](image-url)
According to the Facebook insights, many of Yale EAL Facebook posts have a high “reach” level. Sixty-three percent of the posts (as of 5/14/2013) had a reach level of over 100, which demonstrates the effectiveness of Facebook as an outreach channel for Yale EAL. Interestingly, most popular or top “reach” Yale EAL Facebook posts are not always related to library collections and resources that librarians want to promote. As the table in Figure 5 shows, the top three posts were: 1) one EAL staff who just celebrated her 45th year of service; 2) a newly acquired book scanner; and 3) a welcome party for a new EAL staff. This finding may be disappointing to librarians, but is should not be surprising. After all, Facebook is a platform for people to network casually, not a place for serious study or research.

Conclusion

With the great popularity of social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, social media has become one of the most powerful tools for librarians to explore for marketing and promotion purposes. Our studies have demonstrated that integrating social media tools into library services is an effective approach to engage library users with library news, events, and activities, and for outreach to a broader audience beyond the community.

Social media is very popular among library users, but that does not mean that a library using social media will become popular. It involves careful planning, design, and most importantly—librarians’ hard work, to keep a library’s social media accounts alive and sustainable. In both the UCB Libraries and Yale EAL cases, it is evident that integrating social media tools into library services is time consuming. For instance, it took UCB East Asian librarians several months to plan and create a YouTube video. Furthermore, using social media is not a onetime task. Once a library sets up a social media account, it is expected to keep the account running. To make the Facebook page a viable way to reach users, Yale EAL librarians post on it at least twice a week. For librarians who already carry many responsibilities, participating in social media becomes one more ball to juggle.

Managing social media accounts requires intellectual and collaborative work. Relevant and interesting content is the key to the success of a social media account. Any social media account that simply consists of announcements or occasionally adds new content is unlikely to attract and keep followers’ attention. However, there are not always new happenings in the library. Likewise, there are not always new collections, space, or people that can be highlighted. It falls again on librarians’ shoulders to think creatively about content to make the social media venue sustainable. Both UCB Libraries and Yale EAL include as many contributors as possible to maximize sources for new content. They encourage all librarians to post on their social media accounts and to share posts from peer institutions and scholarly sources. With these effective strategies, both libraries are quite active on social media and provide followers with continuously updated content.
Social media is not cost free. It was once thought to be cost free because most social media tools are free to use and can get started with minimum technology requirements. However, social media costs staff time to create and manage, and keep them running. For high-quality and complex projects such as videos and flash movies, it requires special expertise and skills, and thus the cost of production is even higher. It means the library either has to get training for librarians or needs to hire professionals. Either way, funding is necessary.

Another issue that is often neglected is to what extent the statistics provided by social media tools can be used for assessment. The data is convenient and helpful in many ways. But can we trust it to give a comprehensive picture? Can we depend solely on it to assess our work? First of all, the data does not provide a full picture of all aspects. For instance, Facebook insights data only reflects the first 28 days after a post’s publication. Such a methodology can catch usage data only for recent and current posts. Data is certainly out-of-date for older posts and thus is not useful for tracking trends throughout the whole period since the page was created. In addition, the data seems to come primarily from subscribed users. However, most Facebook and Twitter pages, as well as YouTube videos, can be viewed by people who do not necessarily have an account on these applications. Therefore, the data may not represent all user groups. Second, it is not clear to account administrators how social media tools gather data, as the documentation on their website tends to focus more on definitions of metrics rather than explanation of their algorithm of collecting and analyzing data. Third, social media tools offer limited customization options for data analysis. For this reason, it is almost impossible to get more detailed data or organize and analyze data in our own way. Fourth, data can be misleading, as there are many factors that can affect the number of followers, viewers, etc. As a matter of fact, collection size, history, and reputation can be key factors for the number of followers for libraries’ social media accounts. This is especially true for East Asian collections in North America as they vary greatly in size, history, and user groups. East Asian collections with a larger size, longer history, and bigger user group can easily get a lot of followers on Facebook with only a few posts. Therefore, it is more reasonable to combine data from social media tools with other statistics, such as number of the East Asian collection website visits, number of reference transactions, and number of event attendees, etc.

Last but not least, social media is platform dependent and at the mercy of third-party companies. It is impossible to predict whether Facebook will still exist or will still be popular in five or ten years. Meanwhile, new programs such as Pinterest and Foursquare, are becoming trendy. Librarians have to be prepared for the unpredictable nature of social media and constantly keep up with changing technologies.

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The survey was run from 8/6/2013 to 8/15/2013. It consisted of 3 questions asking respondents if they have independent social media accounts for the East Asian collections or contribute to the central library social media accounts, when they started to set up social media accounts, and what types of social media tools they use. The 33 East Asian collections selected for the survey vary greatly in size, number of staff and history. A total of 26 collections responded to the survey.


Ibid.


A recent chance discovery of a mid-Qing set of *Five Classics* 五經體註 which entered the Yale College Library in 1849 has led to the rewriting of the Yale East Asia Library history. It predates what was considered the beginning of the collecting of East Asian books at Yale (the 1868 gift of two late Tokugawa period Japanese woodblock print books donated by Miss Myra Higgins, *Ansei kenbunshi* 安政見聞誌 and *Ansei fūbunshū* 安政風聞集) and in North America in general. It also documents a much earlier start date for the Chinese Collection at Yale which was long thought to be the 1878 donation of Yung Wing's personal collection. The shipment of this set of *Five Classics* together with other five groups of Chinese materials in 1849 was recorded in Samuel Wells William's correspondence with the Yale College Librarian. For more information and preliminary research on this discovery, see Ellen Hammond, “Chinese Collection History Revised after Discovery of Early Donation,” *Newsletter of the East Asia Library at Yale* (December 2010): 2-3, [http://www.library.yale.edu/eastasian/EAL_Newsletter_Nov_2010.pdf](http://www.library.yale.edu/eastasian/EAL_Newsletter_Nov_2010.pdf) (accessed July 22, 2013).
For documentation on Facebook insights, please see an online guide about insights on the Facebook website: https://developers.facebook.com/docs/opengraph/guides/insights/ (accessed 5/24/2013).