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## **Social media usage and assessment for Greek Academic Libraries**

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### **Abstract:**

*The aim of the present study was primarily to examine the social media practices and the organization, management and leverage of the social media accounts for Greek academic libraries. Important aspects of the research were also the examination of the usage assessment of Greek Academic Libraries' presence in social media in terms of awareness, engagement and interaction with the users and additionally the study of the importance of social media presence along with participants expectations from their usage and their future role. For the purpose of the study a questionnaire was constructed and customized to academic libraries' needs and reality. According to the findings, all the participating libraries use social media to measure their user interaction and all (except one) their awareness, while on the contrary user engagement does not equally concern them. The main benefit of the social media assessment proved to be the increase of their openness, awareness and credibility, and for that the majority of the libraries use social media as a tool of outreach. Furthermore, most of the libraries highlighted the extraordinary usefulness of social media, particularly for the direct and two-way interaction between libraries and users, although they are not so mature in conducting strategic planning and management schemes. The main challenge libraries face is the new trends follow-up. Social media are also thought of having a future for the academic libraries and of playing an important role. The usefulness of the results lies in the fact that other foreign academic libraries could take advantage of the Greek experience and the study insights. In national level there has not been any similar study in the field of Library Science management. The lack of post content analysis and a feedback from the social media users' point of view could be a perspective for future research.*

**Keywords:** social media usage, social media assessment, academic libraries, Greece

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## Introduction

Social Media (henceforth SM) is widely recognized as a powerful tool and it has become as such because of the people's internal urge to connect in any way they can even in public spaces as libraries. Kilgour (1972) mentioned that "passive, depersonalized service is no longer enough" for the libraries. An OCLC report in 2007 verified that nearly half of the U.S. library directors believed that the library plays no role in building networked spaces to communicate with their users. Even the general public considered the libraries only as a place for learning and for information (Epperson & Leffler, 2009; Storey, 2007). As far as the academic librarians were concerned, only 12% of the participants in Charnigo & Barnett-Ellis' study (2007) "identified academic potential or possible benefits of Facebook".

However, through the years, the roles of both academic libraries and SM shifted. The ability to use SM is frequently discussed as a skill that academic librarians should have (Chawner & Oliver, 2013). Today, in the SM Guidelines for Public and Academic Libraries, it is stated that "Libraries participate in SM for many reasons but primarily to communicate information about library services and resources, and to engage with their communities" (EDIAZ, 2018).

Furthermore, an important amount of surveys on user channel preferences and application of their results on the library SM channels, libraries' choices as a criteria for creating specific SM channels for specific reasons, organization methods, How To's, strategies for implementing SM, for posting, for making policies and for evaluating the impact of SM use in library users, have begun to sprout (Collins & Quan-Haase, 2014; Datig, 2018; Garofalo, 2013; Harrison, Burrell, Velasquez, & Schreiner, 2017; Howard, Huber, Carter, & Moore, 2018; King, 2015; Mergel, 2017; Salomon, 2013; Vassilakaki & Garoufallou, 2015). Academic library services are more frequently provided through specific SM channels (Munshi, 2017; Palmer, 2014) and SM marketing methods start to be exploited (Ihejirika, Goulding, & Calvert, 2017). Recognizing the academic libraries' SM usefulness, goals start to be assessed. As a result, a number of surveys have been carried out about the impact of SM on academic libraries and a number of SM assessment tools are developed and tested (Faisal, 2018; Fodor, 2010; Mergel, 2017; Winn, Rivosecchi, Bjerke, & Groenendyk, 2017).

Counting the benefits of SM implementation could be long listed. But so is the downside as well (Gaha & Hall, 2015). From the very first thoughts on SM challenges expressed by Griffey (2010), expressions of distress and second thoughts on hinders concerning workflow obstacles, technology obstacles, organizational obstacles or personal obstacles conquered the librarians' minds. (Chu & Du, 2013; Fasae & Adegbilero-Iwari, 2016; Magoi, Aspura, & Abrizah, 2019; Zohoorian-Fooladi & Abrizah, 2014).

In Greece, the majority of the publications on academic libraries SM referred to either user-centered surveys (Karagiorgou & Vasilakaki, 2012; Kiprianos, Rouggeri, & Gaitanou, 2010) or to the notion from the librarian students and professionals of SM importance (Garoufallou & Charitopoulou, 2011). It must be noted that the findings of these studies almost a decade before, revealed that an important percentage ignored the possible advantages that social networks could offer in terms of professional networking and exchange of knowledge. Some years later, from the librarian profession point of view, scholars examine the new librarian roles that emerge as marketers (Garoufallou, Zafeiriou, Siatri, & Balapanidou, 2013) or library fundraisers (Kondylis, 2014) through training programs (Androu et al., 2010). Even some years later, the difficulties of the academic librarians duties, among which the promotion of the public relations through SM, in times of economic depression were still studied by Mouza & Grigoriadou (2016). Regarding all the above, the literature gap concerning the SM usage and

assessment from the Greek academic libraries is obvious. Therefore, the need for filling in this important gap in the Greek literature seemed to be an absolute necessity.

### **SM for Library & Information Center of University of Macedonia**

It was not until 2012 that the decision was taken to create SM channels for the Library & Information Center of University of Macedonia. After experimenting in various SM channels, library's first SM channels launched in 2013, including Facebook, Youtube, Pinterest, Flickr and LinkedIn. Library's presence on Instagram followed in 2018.

In order to set usage context and management of content, timing, tone and above all in order to set the balance and limits for all these, a SM policy was developed for both the employees and for the audience. The policy included the library's SM channels' scope, the SM policy's audience (administrators and users), the post categories and the post content (Accuracy, Respect, Knowing the Audience, Personal Opinions, Privacy). Information regarding the handling of post frequency, the data management, the crisis management and the banning rights was also included.

For the management of SM post categories in the different SM channels and always according to the Library's marketing objectives and target audience a marketing mix was created. Changes to the marketing mix (i.e. post categories, time posting) followed along the way according to user preferences and reactions.

A strong stimulus for the initiation of this research was an infographic from a survey conducted by WEBJunction and TechSoup (WebJunction, 2018), concerning the library's use of SM, together with the Taylor & Francis White Paper (Taylor & Francis, 2014).

### **The study**

#### *Aims*

The aims of the study were to examine for Greek academic libraries:

1. The SM usage
2. The usage assessment of their presence in SM in terms of visibility, engagement and interaction with their users
3. The importance of SM and their expectations from their usage and their future role

#### *Participants*

For the implementation of the study a list of academic libraries in Greece with communication details was developed (cross-checked from their websites). An invitation for participation was sent to 42 Greek academic libraries (university and technological institutions). In the study participated 34 Greek academic libraries forming a 81% response rate in the study.

#### *Instruments and procedures*

For the purpose of the study, two questionnaires were constructed and customized to academic libraries' needs and reality. These were:

- *Academic Libraries SM usage and assessment questionnaire*: a 30 item was constructed and customized to academic libraries' needs and reality. The questionnaire was based on a questionnaire used in a study to 311 libraries worldwide (Taylor & Francis Group, 2014). The questionnaire is structured in three (3) sections: usage, assessment and scope and future

- *Demographics questionnaire*: a 7 item questionnaire was administered in order to collect data on library's and SM administrator (s) profile and SM management

A pilot testing of the instruments presented the study. A two-week period was given to fill out the questionnaire. A reminder followed in a week, while a one-week extension period was also given. When was necessary follow-up phone calls were made to inform directors about the study and to encourage participation.

## Findings

### *Demographics*

21 of the participant libraries have SM accounts, whilst 13 have no presence in SM. The participating libraries were mainly central (29) and few of them were departmental (5). SM administrators were Library employees and directors as well, but for the majority of the participant libraries were Library employees, and in most cases the administrator was 1 person. SM administrators didn't have any special education and most of them dedicate 1-5 hours/week in SM management.

### *Usage Section*

As evident in Table 1, the majority of the participant libraries have SM accounts (61,8%). Regarding specifically to the channels, the absolute majority of the participant libraries have a facebook account. Twitter follows with 38,1% and YouTube with 33,3%.

SM	%	No.
Facebook	100	21
Twitter	38.1	8
Flickr	9.5	2
Instagram	19	4
LinkedIn	14.3	3
Google+	9.5	2
YouTube	33.3	7
Pinterest	14.3	3
Blog	0	0
Vimeo	4.8	1
Issue	4.8	1

Table 1: SM accounts for Greek academic libraries

The first SM accounts of the libraries were created among 2006-2009. The SM that is most commonly used, that is Facebook, was created between 2014-2017. Given that Facebook is the most popular channel, what's worth to mention is that the number of their followers don't exceed the 2000 for most of them (71,43%). Only 14,3% of them have over 4001 followers. More than half of the libraries do not follow a posting plan. Of those that do, some follow a weekly posting plan and only 3 of them follow a daily and 2 a monthly. The post frequency

differentiates according to the SM, with bigger emphasis given on Facebook. 33% of the libraries post content 1-2/week and almost half of them post multiple/week.

The main reason for using SM was the promotion and advertising. All libraries use SM to enhance their image and their professional profile, all but one use SM in order to promote events, sources, collections and services. The promotion of library information & educational material is a common practice for most of them (85,7%). All libraries, also, use SM to post content about news, photos, etc. relevant with their events and activities, while all but one post content about library services. As a tool, nearly all libraries (80,9%) use SM in order to provide services (i.e. reference). The majority of the libraries currently use SM to share events or news of the academic community and almost all wish to attract the new members of the academic community and to build relationships with the wider community (90,47%). The majority of the libraries haven't developed an SM management policy (71,4%).

As far as the channels they prefer to use, Facebook is the one to post in various categories (Figure 1).

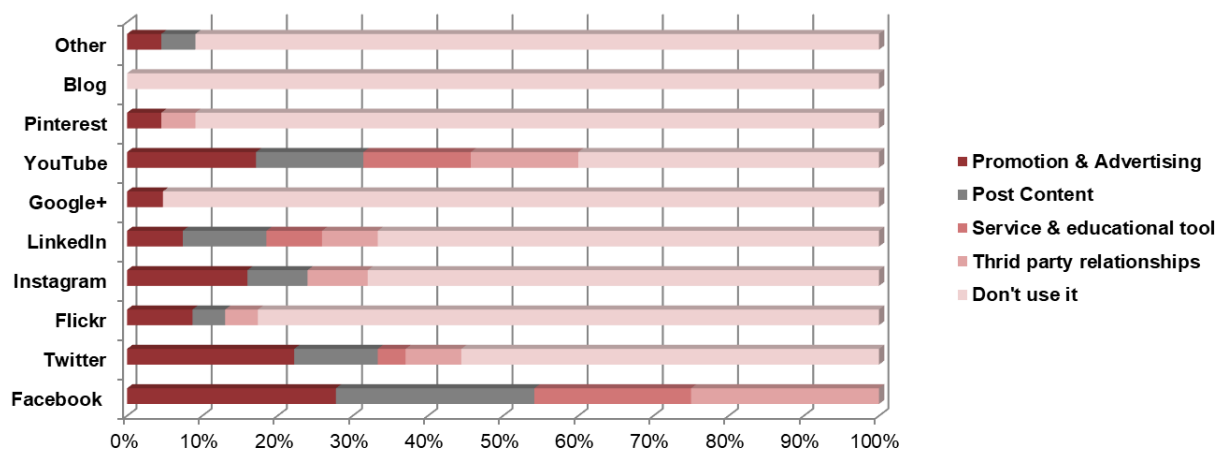


Figure 1: Post categories

All the suggested benefits gathered high rates on their extreme importance; especially the easy promotion of their services, sources and collections, the improvement of trustworthy relationships and interaction with users and the direct and quick information. As very beneficial, were considered the low usage cost, the contribution to building relationships with the wider community and the broadening of its reputation and the broadening of their communication and cooperation with the academic community.

The majority of the libraries promote their SM channels through their website (81%).

#### Assessment Section

Of the respondent libraries only 12 assess their SM usage. The frequency of assessing refers by the majority to Facebook. Half of them analyze it every month, 25% analyze it ad hoc and the rest report either quarterly or yearly. All libraries, minus one, analyze the SM usage in order to count the SM channels' interaction with the users and the visibility from the users. The user engagement doesn't seem to particularly either bother the libraries or they just ignore the exact importance of it (41,7%).

The number of SM users is the main indicator that is measured for all three reasons of SM usage analysis. For the user interaction, the 66,7% of the libraries count the number of shares and only half of them count the users' session time in SM. As far as the SM visibility is concerned, the majority of the libraries measure the number of visits in the SM channels, while an important percentage of the libraries (75%) measure the number of user mentions in the SM channel. The user engagement is measured based on quantitative data, such as the frequency of shares and tags (91,7%). The qualitative analysis of the user engagement is based on the analysis of emojis and comments and the appearance of loyal users, which is extremely low (33,3% and 16,7% respectively). From the libraries that assess (3), the only assessment tool they use to measure the above-mentioned indicators is the Facebook Page Analytics.

The most important benefit that libraries obtain from measuring the effectiveness of the SM channels appears to be the increase of the openness, recognition and credibility of the libraries. It is also important for them to increase the trust of the users towards them (75%), by using actively their SM channels.

#### *Scope and Future Section*

The direct and two-way relationship between libraries and users is considered by the absolute majority of the respondent libraries to be the main goal of their SM usage. Greek Academic libraries have a very positive impression for SM, rating them either extremely or very useful. In general, it is stated that SM are very or extremely important as tool for several services, but the highest rates are gathered for the extreme importance of the SM as tools of Communication and Outreach (66,66%).

Among the biggest challenges & difficulties in managing Greek libraries' presence in sm were the monitoring of new trends, the staff and time sufficiency for SM management, the great required effort for the maintenance of relations of trust with users and of library's popularity, the use of analytics for measuring effectiveness.

Regarding the future of SM the ranking was very close between the statements. None of the libraries has stated that there will be no future for the SM and all of them believe that they will play active role in the libraries' everyday life. SM are also believed to become more important for libraries, that new roles dedicated to them will appear and that channel specific strategies will emerge.

#### **Conclusions**

The study examined the SM usage and assessment for Greek Academic Libraries. The 61.8% of Greek academic libraries use at least one SM channel. These results seem to be consistent with other research findings (Chu & Du, 2013; Collins & Quan-Haase, 2014; Taylor & Francis Group, 2014). SM were found to be less popular (1/3 of libraries use them) in the study of Olajide & Alao (2016). 43% of participant libraries do have a posting while the majority (75%) of other libraries prefer to post ad hoc (Taylor & Francis Group, 2014). Concerning SM year of birth for Greek Academic Libraries, this was between 2006 and 2009, and especially speaking for the most popular (Facebook) the peak time was between 2014-2017. SM were born later for other libraries, but their presence in SM is dynamic from the time they were born nonetheless (Taylor & Francis Group, 2014). The post frequency for Greek academic libraries differentiates according to the SM channel, with bigger emphasis on Facebook. The 33% of them post content 1-2/week and a big percentage (almost half of them) post multiple/week. Average no of 1-2 posts/ week we can see in other studies in university libraries (Olajide & Alao, 2016). Bigger post infrequency (average no of 1-3 posts/ 2 months) was found in another

study for Facebook (Aharony, 2012). Results of a study show that patterns of SM posting are difficult to identify, as they varied from hourly to sporadic even for the more popular, Facebook and Twitter (Xie & Stevenson, 2014).

Concerning SM administrators profile in more than half of the participant libraries only 1 person from the staff is addressed as the SM administrator and no special education existed. The majority of academic libraries that participated in a study didn't offer SM training to their staff, as well (Chu & Du, 2013), but with regards to the number of administrators almost half of the libraries participated in a study have 3 and more (Taylor & Francis Group, 2014).

For Greek academic libraries Facebook is the most popular SM channel. Facebook also maintains the highest patronage in two other studies in university libraries followed by Twitter and Youtube like in Greek Academic Libraries (Harrison et al., 2017; Olajide & Alao, 2016). Twitter is also in the main preferences of academic libraries in other countries apart from Facebook (Chu & Du, 2013; Winn et al., 2017) and of libraries worldwide (Taylor & Francis Group, 2014), while Twitter and Facebook were equally popular SM in other studies (Boateng & Liu, 2014; Collins & Quan-Haase, 2014; Xie & Stevenson, 2014).

The main reasons for using them are to promote themselves, to post content, to use them as tool to provide services, to build third party relationships and they actually prefer to use Facebook for all of these. SM and especially Facebook have been likewise suggested in other studies to deliver and promote library services (Charnigo & Barnett-Ellis, 2007; McNicol, Graham, Faix, & Hartman, 2009; Taylor & Francis Group, 2014). Around the 30% of Greek Academic Libraries do have a written policy, and the same percentage can be also found in the study of Taylor & Francis Group (2014). According to the results of the study of Chu & Du (2013) social networking tools were used in academic libraries for marketing and publicity and for enhancing reference services, to release information about new collections, to convey general library information and to offer online resources. In Greece academic libraries prefer to use their website for SM promotion, as other libraries do (Boateng & Liu, 2014; Harrison et al., 2017; Taylor & Francis Group, 2014; Xie & Stevenson, 2014), whilst the linkage to website of other academic libraries are near zero (Olajide & Alao, 2016). SM were mainly rated as an outreach tool. Other studies highlighted the great potential of SM for library outreach (Taylor & Francis Group, 2014; Wan, 2011), for marketing and creating awareness of library services to their users (Ayu & Abrizah, 2011). The majority of the libraries haven't developed a SM management policy. The findings are consistent with the findings of another study (Taylor & Francis Group, 2014).

All the suggested benefits gathered high rates on their extreme importance; especially the easy promotion of their services, sources and collections, the improvement of trustworthy relationships and interaction with users and the direct and quick information. Social networking tools perceived to be very helpful in the study of Chu & Du (2013) in terms of information sharing, knowledge sharing, enhancing reference services and promoting library services. Benefits associated with the use of SM included the quick spread of information, communication and promotion, enhanced interaction between library and users. SM were also reported in the same study to help library staff keep up-to-date with activities and resources in their profession, and in finding opportunities to learn new technologies (Chu & Du, 2013). The main benefit from SM usage for the participant libraries of a worldwide study is to raise their professional profile (Taylor & Francis Group, 2014). Low usage cost was likewise among the choices for the benefits of SM usage that gathered the highest rates per beneficial ranking. The cost of using SM, in the study of Chu & Du (2013) was perceived to be from minimal to almost

none and mainly connected to the extra time needed by staff on learning and administering social networking tools.

The 57% of Greek academic libraries analyze the SM usage of their library. On the contrary, the findings of a worldwide study identified that all the participant libraries assess SM usage (Taylor & Francis Group, 2014). The absolute majority of the participants prefer to count their visibility in SM and interaction with their users, while the measurement of engagement is not so widely used. This agrees with the results of a study in Nigeria (Olajide & Alao, 2016), while in a study in Canada all (visibility, interaction and engagement), were measured (Winn et al., 2017). The most important benefit that all the Greek libraries obtain from measuring the effectiveness of the SM channels is to increase openness, recognition and credibility, whilst the measure of return on effort (ROE) was considered as the most important benefit in another study (Taylor & Francis Group, 2014).

Among the biggest challenges & difficulties in managing Greek libraries' presence in sm were the monitoring of new trends, the staff and time sufficiency for SM management, the great required effort for the maintenance of relations of trust with users and of library's popularity, the use of analytics for measuring effectiveness. The inadequate mastery of technology and the difficulty to keep up, the reluctant staff, were also perceived to be challenges in another study, while the most pressing challenge for academic libraries appears to be the limitations associated with inadequate time (Chu & Du, 2013). Apart from the time needed, the biggest challenges seem to be different in a study in 311 libraries worldwide and included the resources needed, the tone of communication, and the people awareness of SM activities (Taylor & Francis Group, 2014).

Greek Academic libraries have a very positive impression for SM, rating them either extremely or very useful. Positive perceptions on the usefulness of social networking tools were also found in other studies for libraries (Chu & Du, 2013; Taylor & Francis Group, 2014). Regarding the future of SM the ranking was very close between the statements. None of the libraries has stated that there will be no future for the SM and all of them believe that they will play active role in the libraries' everyday life. SM are also believed to become more important for libraries, that new roles dedicated to them will appear and that channel specific strategies will emerge. These findings are confirmed by the libraries of another study (Taylor & Francis Group, 2014).

The usefulness of the results lies in the fact that other foreign academic libraries could take advantage of the Greek experience and the study insights. In national level there has not been any similar study in the field of Library Science management. A suggestion for further research refers to the need for feedback from the SM users points of view and user engagement measurement. The present study can, also, provide a perspective for future research on content post analysis.

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