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Social Media to Survive and Thrive: School Librarians Describe Online Professional Learning

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Abstract

*School librarians balance leadership and instruction in a fluid role that is highly influenced by education trends such as innovation, budget cuts, and distance learning. Prior research found these professionals remain relevant by learning through social media. This exploratory project inquired about the activities, motives, and barriers associated with social media learning. The questionnaire results were dissected by media type (self-d**ecad23.18pa*

repertoire is the collection of community products and is also the ability of members to recognize

orientated behavior (Matikainen 2015). Social media users have repeatedly reported motives such as trust, commitment, community, self-efficacy, altruism, reciprocity, reputation, enjoyment, and learning need (Chang, Hsu, and Lee 2015; Lertpratchya and Carpenter 2015; Wasko and Faraj 2005; Zboralski 2009). Adding to the general list, school librarians interviewed about their participation in Twitter chats used the terms "networking" and "connection" (Moreillon 2015). Administrators, like school librarians, have few campus peers; administrators reflected that Twitter afforded the social opportunity to feel less isolated (Cho 2016). This project applied these literature-based motives to the school librarian population to explore whether the findings can be generalized.

In the vocational teacher research previously discussed in *Activities*, a second variable interacted with career motivation in the context of three learning activities (Van Rijn, Yang, and Sanders 2013). That second variable was self-construal orientation: individual, relational, and collective. Participants with an individual orientation were motivated by personal goals, detached from the social context. Participants with a relational orientation were motivated by a close relationship with a significant second person, such as a supervisor. Participants with a collective orientation sought impersonal bonds with a social category, such as a community. In the study reported here, motive items in the survey (see appendix) were written to encompass both individual and collective orientations. Relational construal items were not included in the survey because the results were not significant in the research by Monique B. van Rijn, Huadong Yang, and Karin Sanders. Specific motive items in the survey do not, however, represent only individual or collective constructs because it is difficult to isolate these two rationales (Haythornthwaite et al. 2018).

Sanghee Oh and Sue Yeon Syn compared ten common motives for general social media use, not specific to professional learning, across Facebook, Twitter, Del.icio.us, YouTube and Flikr. Oh and Syn found that all ten motives were positively associated with all five platforms, but statistically significant differences existed between platforms and also between user demographics (2015). Based on that finding, the research reported here sought to determine if motive differences also exist between media types when focused on the school librarian population, and whether motive differences Oh and Syn found with demographics may also exist between user roles.

BARRIERS

Community leaders may be interested in why members do *not* participate, so they can better support individuals. Barriers are conditions that inhibit participation. Teachers have cited lack of time and lack of technology 1ll.e,le

Media Type	*n*=169		User Roles	*n*=442	
	Number	Percent		Number	Percent
Microblogs	100	59	Networker	122	28
Discussion Forums	75	44	Content Creator	53	12
Social Networks	119	70	Community Leader	29	7
None	8	5			

Note: Participants *n*=169 may select more than one type of social media. One role was selected for each media type, *n*=442.

In response to the first open-ended question, participants described where they go for high-quality information. In the responses (*n*=102), participants provided a mix of media types and specific platforms, which were tallied. The "high-quality" results do not parallel the multiple-selection use results presented in the previous paragraph. Most participants in the open-ended response said self-published content sites yield the highest-quality information (32 percent), whereas the overall use of this media type ranked third. One participant described her use of "Blogs: Teachers share their real classroom situations and solutions." Social networks were mentioned least frequently in content quality (11 percent), while overall use ranked this media type first. The remaining frequencies for high-quality information in descending order were: curated content (24 percent), microblogs (20 percent), discussion forums (15 percent).

Some participants responded to the open-ended question with specific platforms rather than the encompassing media types. The most-common platforms for high-quality content were (in descending order): Twitter, Pinterest, Facebook, and blogs, followed less frequently by YouTube, ALA discussion boards, Edmodo, LinkedIn, wikis, and Teachers Pay Teachers.

In the second section, participants chose a user role (Passerby, Lurker, Networker, Content Creator, or Community Leader) specific to each media type they selected; one participant could provide up to five user role responses. The total user role responses were *n*=442 (see table 2). Overall, participants most frequently identified a(t)-6Tw 5.69 0 t

Table 3. Within media type, percent of participations identifying with each role.

	Self-Published %	Curated Content %	Microblogs %	Discussion Forums %	Social Networks %
Passerby	13	16	10	25	11
Lurker	**51**	**42**	26	**43**	**34**
Networker	19	25	**44**	22	29
Content Creator	9	13	7	4	23
Community Leader	8	4	12	6	3
Rounded Total	100	100	99	100	100

Note: Underlined, bold number: highest frequency of user role within each media type. Percent values are rounded to the nearest whole ($\chi^2(16)=48.5$, $p<.001$).

Table 4. Within roles, percent of participants using each media type.

	Self-Published %	Curated Content %	Microblogs %	Discussion Forums %	Social Networks %	Rounded Total %
Passerby	23	**27**	13	21	16	100
Lurker	**32**	26	12	13	18	101
Networker	17	22	**30**	9	22	100
Content Creator	19	26	11	4	**40**	100
Community Leader	31	14	**34**	10	10	99

Note: Underlined, bold number: highest frequency of media type within each role. Percent values are rounded to the nearest whole number, resulting in rounded totals that do not equal 100% ($\chi^2(16)=48.5$, $p<.001$).

To further simplify patterns, the five user roles were condensed into two groups: passive (Passerby and Lurker) and active (Networker, Content Creator, Community Leader). As shown in figure 1, passive users were more likely to visit self-published content, curated content, and discussion forums than active users. Conversely, active users were more likely to use microblogs and social networks. The closest balance between passive and active users occurred in social networks, and the largest disparity was in discussion forums. Chi square analysis indicated the differences between active and passive users was significant ($\chi^2(4)=22.9$, $p<.001$).

Expert	To establish myself as an expert	20	**48**	32

Note: Blank cells: frequency less than 50 percent. Underlined, bold number: highest frequency per motive and media type or user role.
Media type key: Self=Self-Published Content; Curat=Curated Content; Micr=Microblogs; Disc=Discussion Forums; SocN=Social Networks.
User role key: Pass=Passerby; Lurk=Lurker; Netw=Networker; Crea=Content Creator; Lead=Community Leader.
Motive abbreviations are in table 7.

When answering the first open-response question, participants explained why they visit particular media types for high-quality content, and many of those comments aligned with the five high-agreement motives. Comments describing individual-oriented motivations—learning, work needs, and current trends—elaborated on the quality of the site's content. For example, a participant recommended self-published content for high-quality information "because I can verify the reliability of the work by previous posts and comments." Participants tied curated content, Pinterest in particular, with specific work needs. For example, "Pinterest is my go-to to find lesson ideas and book challenges, etc." Participants associated microblog content with timeliness and topical breadth. For example, one wrote, "Twitter because it is the most current and broad reaching." Finally, participants associated discussion forum content with reputable hosting organizations, such as AASL and conferences.

Participants related community-oriented motives—contact with the best educators and community commitment—with network quality. Participants wrote about network size, the potential audience reach, and the number of professionals they follow. Community responses most often referenced microblogs and social networks. For example, one respondent wrote, "Microblogs f

role. Within user roles, the pattern of consensus continued, but not as uniformly as when the responses were grouped by media type. As shown in table 8, three of the five motives with universal agreement for media type continued to have universal agreement across user roles: learning, work needs, and current trends. However, a mixture of participants agreed with the remaining six motives in some user roles and not in others.

First considering the passive roles, Passersby agreed with four of the eleven motives, adding "organization, district, and school advocacy" to the universal three (83 percent). Lurkers additionally reported being motivated by contact with the best educators and by community commitment. However, Lurkers were not strongly motivated by building a professional network or by the desire to share their knowledge, which were present in the results for respondents in active roles.

In the active roles, Community Leaders agreed with the most motives, all items except isolation and employability. Other motives were similar across the active roles with two exceptions. Content Creators were not strongly motivated by organization advocacy of social media use, suggesting they are internally inspired to participate. Also, only Community Leaders agreed they participate to establish themselves as experts. This reputation item may be tied to Community Leaders' heightened community awareness. They also reported highest agreement in other community-oriented motives such as: community commitment (96 percent), sharing knowledge (89 percent), and networking (82 percent).

Finally, although no motives received at least 50 percent disagreement for the media types, Passersby registered one disagreement when the results were viewed by user role. Respondents who reported themselves as being a Passersby disagreed with the idea that participation is tied to employability (53 percent). The general lack of disagreement suggests that all motives, including isolation, employability, and expert recognition (all of which fell under the 50 percent frequency threshold), factor into some participants' use of social media. This finding leads into the final consideration: barriers that prevent further use.

BARRIERS: COLLECTIVE, MEDIA TYPE, USER ROLE

Collective Barrier Results

The last Likert question block in the survey proposed barriers that could inhibit greater participation in social media for professional learning (see table 9). Contrasting with the activity and motive results, school librarians collectively disagreed with every item except "I do not have time" (agree=61 percent). Participants most strongly disagreed they lacked technology knowledge (disagree=76 percent), consistent with the demographic results in which 98 percent identified as proficient or better with technology (see table 1). One histogram, however, was bimodal. Overload registered both agrees an

Table 9. Barrier items: abbreviation, question stem, and descriptive statistics.

Abbreviation used in table 10	Question Stem	Disagree %	Moderate %	Agree %	Histogram
Time	I do not have the time	13	26	**61**	
Motivation	I am not motivated	**55**	37	8	
Criticism	I fear criticism	**71**	28	1	
Security	I am concerned about security	**66**	28	7	
Confidentiality	I am concerned about confidentiality	**60**	32	8	
TechKnowledge	I lack the technological knowledge	**76**	23	1	
Overload	I expect information overload	44	**45**	11	
NoNeed	I do not have a need	**57**	35	8	
Confrontation	I fear my posts will be viewed as confrontational	**74**	24	2	
Firewall	The district firewalls my favorite sites on campus	**49**	34	17	
NotRequired	It is not required	**58**	33	9	
NoReaders					

RELATION TO COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE AND PROFESSIONAL LEARNING NETWORKS

The activities meeting the Competencies articulated in the AASL Standards also evidence a robust and relevant community of practice (Wenger 1998). Mutual engagement is confirmed through interactive behaviors such as following specific professionals, looking for new connections, seeking support, and posting comments. Open responses described mutual engagement as discussions, posting questions, and keeping in contact with peers. Joint enterprise is confirmed through activities such as posting resources and opinions, and in comments such as "how well it worked after it was tried by someone like me." Shared repertoire is evident through activities such as looking for information to solve a work problem and looking for leads on professional readings. Further, school librarians broker this shared repertoire through their professional learning networks. Open responses described the melding of professional networks with the community of practice in comments such as, "I use Pinterest as a resource for ideas related to instructional needs, professional groups, and community outreach."

The study's five user roles based on Wenger's community trajectories (1998) and Dennen's (2014) blogging community roles were present in all five media types. Dennen (2014) associated user roles with varying participation. In this research, respondents who reported enacting active user roles—Networker, Content Creator, Community Leader—unsurprisingly agreed with the greatest number of active behaviors. Participants reporting passive roles—Passerby, Lurker—did not agree with any active behaviors above the 50 percent threshold. Overall, participants reporting different user roles engaged in different activities, attributed different motives to their use of social media, and experienced different barriers to its use for professional learning. These differences exemplify the fundamental premise of professional learning networks: personalization and individual need (Prestridge 2019).

RELATION TO LITERATURE THAT INFORMED QUESTIONNAIRE DEVELOPMENT

Activities

The activity results are most strongly related to the AASL Standards and the community of practice theory and were presented in the previous two sections. One final activity observation deserves note. This project is unique in its direct questioning about both passive and active behaviors—questioning not found in previous research. Previous research often used content analysis on message posts. In this study, participants were most likely to engage in passive activities that would not leave a digital footprint to be analyzed. The activity results presented in this study represent a more-complete picture of professional learning behaviors.

Motives

Of the many motives listed in the literature, participants in this study universally agreed with learning enjoyment, work need, and community commitment (Chang, Hsu, and Lee 2015; Lertpratchya and Carpenter 2015; Oh and Syn 2015; Wasko and Faraj 2005; Zboralski 2009). Three additional motives received agreement for some media types but not others, and six items received agreement for some roles and not others (see table 7). These dissections show participants distinguished their motives depending on the media type and user role. Altruism, worded "share my knowledge with others," is a common motive found in the literature that was not universally represented in this study. Participants agreed with altruism in microblogs and when assuming the three active user roles, but otherwise, they recorded moderate opinions about

media types. More-active school librarians visit these media types, resulting in high engagement (posting comments) and following. If professionals are new to social networks and microblogs, a defined audience may be more comfortable than the vast school librarian community. Facebook Groups and Twitter chats narrow the audience and may potentially reduce time and information overload barriers.

Taking advantage of social media to locate professional readings is common in all five media types. School librarians often look for resources in microblogs. Yet, participants most frequently post their own resources in self-published content sites and social networks. Therefore, active users should broker content between these media types.

"Posting links to their own content" is moderately cited by active users and is an opportunity for expansion of participation. This marketing technique may increase viewers and community interactions. Content Creators in particular agreed they post comments and resources, but then do not agree they market those resources. They could increase their community integration by integrating marketing links in their posts. It should be noted that lack of readers is not a major barrier for Content Creators.

Finally, Community Leaders agreed with activities most frequently, so increased participation should focus on community facilitation. Leaders should capitalize on motives and reduce barriers to encourage active participation from other members. Participants expressed a strong receptivity to new ideas and a commitment to the school librarian community. This collective orientation suggests that Community Leader encouragement may move school librarians toward actively posting resources. Contributions to the shared repertoire help members of the school librarian community effectively deal with work problems. Organizations, schools, and districts should promote social media for professional learning; their influence motivates school librarians in four user roles. This influence is perhaps most notable for librarians who identify as a social media Passerby because 83 percent of these respondents agree that organizations' advocacy for professional learning motivates them.

While some barriers are internal, external barriers can be addressed by Community Leaders and educational systems at large. As social media is indeed a valuable learning resource for a fast-changing profession, barriers should be reduced. The greatest barrier, time, may be lowered if schools and districts accept learning through social media as professional development time. Policymakers should review their social media regulations to ensure that firewalls do not inhibit professional learning. Community Leaders can advocate for these educational system changes on members' behalf.

LIMITATIONS

Like many online questionnaires, this study used a convenience sample. The FAME population consisted of 850 members; 187 started the survey, and 169 met the sample criteria, active or former school librarians. An ideal sample size for 850 members at 95 percent confidence level and a 6 percent margin of error is 206 participants. A larger sample would reduce the margin of error. In addition, a larger sample would increase the response frequencies when the items are divided by media type and user role.

School librarians who use social media for professional learning may have been more likely to respond to this questionnaire than school librarians who do not. Further, enthusiasm for social media may have influenced participation. Eight participants indicated they did not use social media for professional learning at all, and they did not continue the remainder of the survey.

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- ƒ Extremely proficient – I am skilled in "behind the scenes" technology, such as programming, web design, and network maintenance. I am also a leader in desktop and online technology applications for schools.

4. Highest level of education attained:
   - ƒ Bachelor's Degree
   - ƒ Master's Degree
   - ƒ Specialist Degree
   - ƒ Doctoral Degree
   - ƒ Other: Please specify

Routing Question

Which social media have you used to inform your professional practice?

- x Self-Published Content (e.g., blogs, wikis, websites, YouTube, Flikr, Teachers Pay Teachers)
- x Curated Content (e.g., Pinterest, Diigo, Scoop It, Symbaloo)
- x Microblogs (e.g., Twitter, Tumblr, Yammer)
- x Discussion Forums (e.g., Edmodo communities, ALA discussion boards, Reddit communities)
- x Social Networks (e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn, Google+)

Role Question

Phrasing varied slightly for each media type

Which role is your primary focus when you engage in microblogs?

- x Passerby – You view microblog posts occasionally, but you do not have an overarching goal.
- x Lurker – Your primary goal is to follow specific sites/professionals and read posts regularly, but you do not generally leave comments. (Lurking is an accepted social media practice and is not creepy).
- x Networker – Your primary goal is to build your professional network. You frequently look for new connections and attribute specific people.
- x Content Creator – Your primary goal is to share your knowledge with others by posting unique information.
- x Community Leader – Your primary goal is to solidify the school librarian community. You likely post and repost frequently; you may frequently participate in Twitter chats and hashtag conversations.

Activity Question Block

Phrasing varied slightly for each media type. Only activity items common across media types are listed below. The questionnaire also included activities specific to a particular type that are not used in the study's data analysis and are not included in activity items listed below.

Likert scale responses:

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

When I visit (self-created content, curated content, microblogs, discussion forums, social networks) I...

1. Follow specific professionals
2. Look for specific information to solve a work problem
3. Look for information to share in my social media posts
4. Post comments to the current post
5. Post tips, resources, and links
6. Look for support from others who share my tribulations
7. Look for leads on professional readings or web resources
8. Look for new professional connections
9. Post links to my publications or posts (marketing)
10. Post my opinions on trending topics

Motive Question Block

Phrasing identical in all media types

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