

## **Developing the Use of Social Media in the Activities of University Libraries in Vietnam**

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**Abstract:** In Vietnam, the application of social media with regard to managing and informing library activities is increasingly attracting the attention of university libraries. This study aims to examine and clarify the features, roles and different forms of social media available to university libraries. It seeks to show and analyse recent survey results pertaining to the use of social media in 25 university libraries in Vietnam on May 2016. Finally, it draws upon the information documented in order to propose recommendations on how to maximize the benefits that social media can bring to university libraries in Vietnam.

**Key words:** Social media, university library, information and communication technology, Vietnam, social

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The emergence and strong development of the World Wide Web as well as web-based utilities has resulted in enormous changes to all aspects of society. The advent of Web 2.0 technologies has had a particularly profound impact on the activities of companies, organizations and businesses; including activities related to market research, customer interaction, marketing and developing online services, etc. In this context, social media, a powerful, interactive communication tool, has brought many competitive advantages and opportunities to increase work efficiency for companies, organizations, businesses and individuals who use them.

So far, around the world, there are hundreds of varieties of social media with millions of people accessing and using every day for the purposes of sharing and receiving information. The primary forms of social media which are often used are Facebook, Myspace, WordPress, Youtube, Flickr, Instagram, Twitter, Hi5, Blogspot, etc. Among them, Facebook and Myspace are the most successful sites with billions of user accounts. With exceptional advantages, social media has attracted much attention from businesses, organizations and been widely used for the purposes of researching the needs of customers, developing marketing strategies and promoting products and services. The growth of social media has gradually overcome the mass media.

While it is easy to recognize the importance of using social media to promote and introduce products and services, questions arise with regard to how university libraries in Vietnam can best avail of this new resource? how to further expand their presence by social media? What content should be posted to serve their users? These questions will be answered through the results of a recent survey pertaining to the use of social media by university libraries in Vietnam. Afterwhich, we propose solutions to maximize the benefits that social media offers.

### **Literature review**

**Social media:** Is the era of social media probably started in 1960s, when Bruce and Susan Abelson founded “Open Diary”, an early social networking site that brought together online diary writers into one community. The term “weblog” was first used at the same time and truncated as “blog” a year later when one blogger jokingly transformed the noun “weblog” into the sentence “we blog”. In 1979, Tom Truscott and Jim Ellis from Duke University had created the Usenet, a worldwide discussion system that allowed internet users to post public messages. The growing availability of high-speed Internet access further added to the popularity of the concept, leading to the creation of social networking sites such as MySpace in 2003 and Facebook in 2004. This, in turn, coined the term “social media” and contributed to the prominence, it has today.

Social media is a broad term which is used to refer to the tools used for a new type of communication manners including many different services and ways of interacting. According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), 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”. And another definition found on Wikipedia, social media “are computer-mediated tools that allow people or companies to create, share or exchange information, career interests, ideas and pictures/videos in virtual communities and networks”.

Via social media, information can be shared, spread quickly and dialogical because the participants can express an opinion or discuss with each other. The instance of social media can be in the form of the networks of exchanging and sharing personal information (MySpace, Facebook, Yahoo 360) or specific resources (documents-Scribd, photos-Flickr, video-YouTube).

Social media technologies take on many different forms including blogs, business networks, enterprise social networks, forums, microblogs, photo sharing, products/services review, social bookmarking, social gaming, social networks, video sharing and virtual worlds.

**Features of social media:** Each form of social media has separate advantages, separate disadvantages, a separate user community and separate interaction manner. However, if considered as a whole, social media have some common features:

- Social media are web 2.0 internet-based applications
- User-Generated Content (UGC) is the lifeblood of the social media organism
- Users create service-specific profiles for the site or app that are designed and maintained by the social media organization
- Social media facilitate the development of online social networks by connecting a user’s profile with those of other individuals and/or groups

Based on the feature 4, it’s possible to recognize the most popular social networks. This is the list of the leading social networks based on number of active user accounts as of April 2016:

- Facebook: 1,590,000,000 users
- WhatsApp: 1,000,000,000 users
- Facebook messenger: 900,000,000 users
- QQ: 853,000,000 users
- WeChat: 697,000,000 users

- Qzone: 640,000,000 users
- Tumblr: 555,000,000 users
- Instagram: 400,000,000 users
- Twitter: 320,000,000 users
- Baidu Tieba: 300,000,000 users
- Skype: 300,000,000 users
- Viber: 249,000,000 users
- Sina Weibo: 222,000,000 users
- Dyung day: 215,000,000 users
- Snapchat: 200,000,000 users

Additionally, one more noteworthy advantage of social media is the relatively minor cost of creating and managing. Most social media users are allowed to register to use free of charge, easily and quickly.

**Popularity of social media in the world and in Vietnam:**

Interest and research into social media is rapidly increasing throughout the world and in Vietnam. Google’s search trend analysis tool shows that the keyword “social media” is used more and more for searching information on the internet

According to the trend analysis map of Google, the areas with most interest in “social media” are North America, then Australia, South Africa, Central Africa, South Asia, Western Europe, Southeast Asia and some other regions. In Vietnam, interest in social media through Google is concentrated in the two largest cities, Ho Chi Minh and Hanoi (Fig. 1).

According to the data published by Internet World Stats (Internet World Stats, 2012), up to November 30, 2015, Vietnam was in the top 20 countries with the highest number of internet users in the world, ranking number 15 with the number of people accessing the internet reaching 47,300,000, accounting for 50.1% of Vietnam’s population.

And according to the data of research group “we are social” up to January 2016, statistics relating to the use of internet and social media in the world and in Vietnam as follows (Fig. 2 and Table 1).

The role of social media for the university libraries an investigation conducted by the Taylor and Francis Group in 2014, on the use of social media in libraries worldwide, indicates that 90% of surveyed libraries have social media accounts. Among them, about 61% of these libraries have been using social media for 3 years or more, 37% of libraries had 1-2 social media accounts, 31% of libraries have 3-4 accounts and 22% of libraries have more than 4 accounts (Annex, 2014).

In recent years, university libraries have been actively using social media to provide increased access to their users. In many university libraries, it’s easy to see numerous collections of QR codes, Facebook accounts,

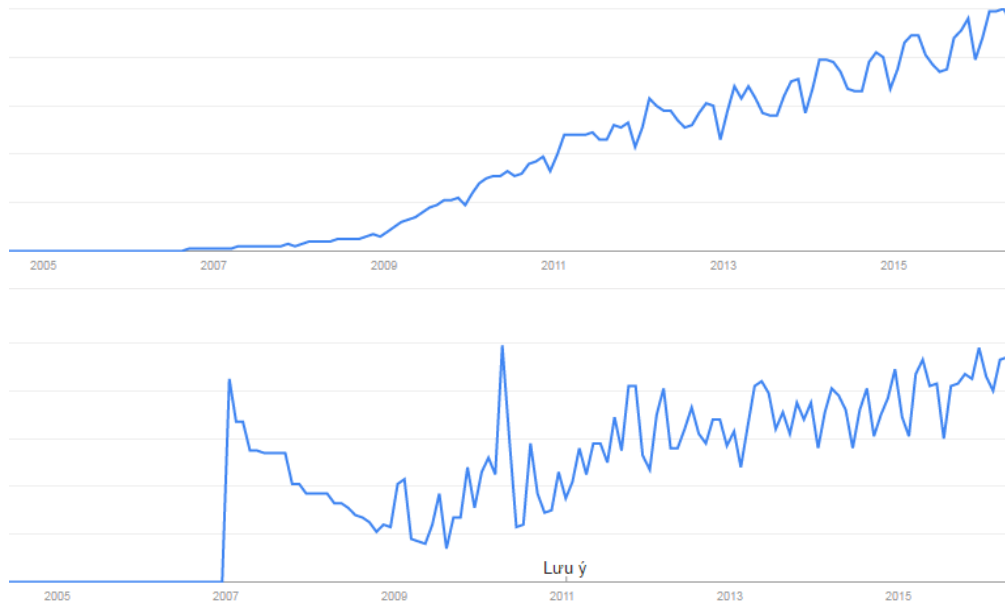


Fig. 1: Trend of searching keyword “social media” on Google Trends: a) in the world and b) in Vietnam

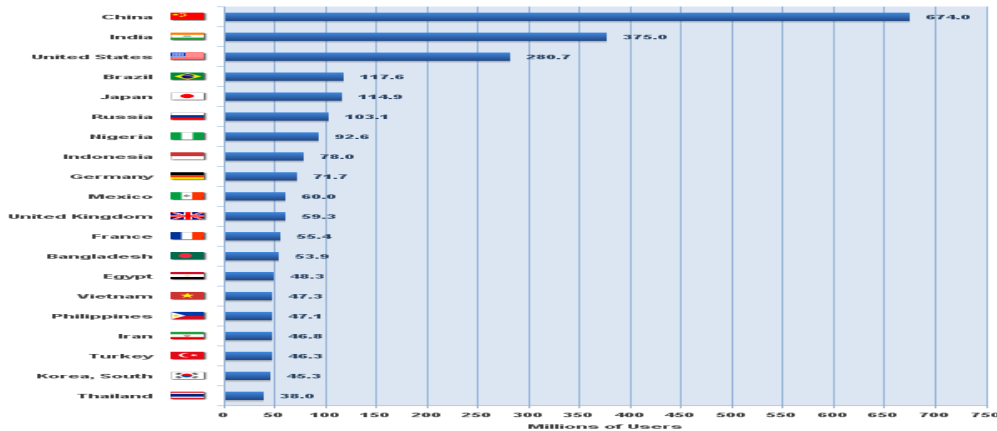


Fig. 2: Top 20 countries with the highest number of internet users (Internet World Stats, 2012)

Table 1: The use of internet and social media in the world and in Vietnam

Indicators	In the World		In Vietnam	
	Quantity (billion)	Percent of global penetration	Quantity (million)	Percent of Vietnam penetration
Internet users	3.42	46	47.3	50
Active social media users	2.31	31	35.0	37
Unique mobile users	3.79	51	143.0	152
Active mobile social users	1.97	27	29.0	31

online diaries, Flickr photos or videos on Youtube which are created or established by students, faculty or administrative staff. The university libraries have taken advantage of social media's communication capabilities and community interaction to increase the efficiency of activities and competitive advantage in the age of the information society.

Social media are now providing many of the tools that support university libraries in disseminating their presence to numerous users, promoting the libraries as well as providing their contact details. Social media also helps the libraries introduce their products, services and facilities to their users, create new services, implement information literacy programs, research needs and habits

of users, receive feedback and suggestions. Besides all these benefits, social media are also a powerful communication tools for libraries to transmit notifications, news and events.

Each different form of social media plays different roles, offering differing potential benefits. Some forms of social media are popular among university libraries and thus commonly used.

**Blog:** Blogging has two primary roles. First, it can take on the role of the traditional library newsletter and announcements board but with neither the publication delays of the former's typical monthly schedule nor the tendency of the latter to go unnoticed. Second, it can be used by individual librarians to communicate with their constituents, deepening the relationship between the librarians and their users and personalizing "the library" in a way that often leads to increased use of the library, especially by undergraduates (Fiander, 2012).

**Microblogging:** Microblogging is the general term for concept of posting very short status updates as popularized by services like Tumble or Twitter. For the university libraries, microblogging should be viewed primarily as a customer service medium. It should also be used for cross-promotion: to share links to the latest news items posted on the library's homepage and to new blog posts by librarians. Besides, microblogging is also useful for tracking what the library's users are saying about it. Librarians can receive feedback of users and respond directly to the users at the moment of the complaint (Fiander, 2012).

**Video sharing:** A video sharing site is not going to create the same type of social community that might form on Facebook, nor will it be as active a communication channel as Twitter but creating an account on a video sharing site and using it to host instructional videos makes it simpler for an university library to embed videos in its own website, offloads the complications of hosting video and makes sure it is compatible with all the various browsers and operating systems out there and gives your users a forum in which to discuss the videos. The content of uploaded videos is usually introduction about library, instructions for use of resources and services, search guides and more.

**Social network:** If used properly, social network such as Facebook and Twitter could bring many advantages to university libraries. Not only does social network fully take on the role of microblogging, it also is used for other activities. By creating an official page on the social

network, university libraries are going to have one more channel for disseminating their presence, promoting themselves, introducing their products and services. The connecting to library page is rapidly spread from one library's user to another that allows to share and receive information quickly. Social network could also tremendously help the university library connect to other ones. Many university libraries use social network as a tool for their marketing strategies.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

By employing a survey method, the authors directly surveyed 25 university libraries in Vietnam in mid-May 2016. Based on the survey results, the researchers analyzed the use of social media in activities conducted by university libraries which social media the libraries have been using, the purposes of using social media and the appreciation of librarians.

The study also used secondary data of scholarly documents such as articles of journals, scientific research reports and information on the internet to identify the roles and advantages of social media, demonstrate the necessity of enhancing the use of social media in the activities of the university libraries in Vietnam and thereby proposing solutions for the use of social media in activities of university libraries in Vietnam (Table 2).

**Data collection:** The list of the university libraries participating in the survey:

- Central library of Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City
- Library of University of Science of Ho Chi Minh City
- Library of University of Social Sciences and Humanities of Ho Chi Minh City
- Library of Ho Chi Minh City University of Technology and Education
- Library of Eastern International University
- Library of Ton Duc Thang University
- Library of University of Natural Resources And Environment of Ho Chi Minh City
- Library of Ho Chi Minh City University of Foreign Languages - Information Technology
- Library of University of Labour and Social Affairs
- Library of Ho Chi Minh City University of Culture
- Library of University of Law of Ho Chi Minh City
- Library of University of Economics and Finance
- Library of People's Police University
- Library of RMIT Vietnam University
- Library of University of Information Technology of Ho Chi Minh City

Table 2: Survey results of 25 university libraries in Vietnam on May 2016

Survey objects	Frequency	Percent (%)
University libraries participating in the survey	25	100
Without using social media	5	20
Using social media	20	80
<b>Social media are chosen for use</b>		
Facebook	20	100
Youtube	10	50
Flickr	3	15
Blog	2	10
Instagram	2	10
Google Plus	2	10
<b>The purposes</b>		
Disseminating library's presence	19	95
Disseminating library's announcements, news and events	19	95
Introducing library's products and services	14	70
Interacting with library's users	11	55
receiving comments, feedback and complaints of users	10	50
Training library's users	10	50
<b>The proportion of users accessing library's social media (%)</b>		
<5	4	20
5-20	4	20
20-50	2	10
50-70	4	20
>70	6	30
<b>The appreciation of librarians on using social media</b>		
Being important and useful	19	76
Being important but not useful	2	8
Being not important but useful	1	4
Being not important and not useful	2	8
Other	1	4

- Library of University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Ho Chi Minh City Library of Ho Chi Minh City University of Pedagogy
- Library of Pham Ngoc Thach University of Medicine
- Library of University of Security
- Library of Tra Vinh University
- Library of Dong Nai University
- Library of Nha Trang University
- Library of Van Lang University
- Library of Hoa Sen University
- Library of PetroVietnam University

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Survey results of 25 university libraries in Vietnam on May 2016 show: there are 20/25 university libraries using social media in their activities, accounting for 80% of those surveyed. According to the data, Facebook is used by all libraries using social media, accounting for 100%; the number of libraries using Youtube is 10 (50%), Flickr is 3 (15%), Blog is 2 (10%), Instagram is 2 (10%) and Google Plus is 2 (10%). This indicates that Facebook is being used more than the rest of social media. However, according to further research we conducted which involved searching for all the university library pages

on Facebook in Vietnam on May 2016, there are approximately, 55 pages operated by university libraries, out of the 204 university libraries in Vietnam, about 27%. This figure includes library pages that have not been updated in a long time. So in general, it appears that university libraries in Vietnam do not have much interest in the use of social media in their activities.

For the university libraries using social media, the main purposes of using social media are activities of disseminating library's presence and disseminating library announcements, news and events both are 95%. The other purposes relate to introducing library's products and services (70%), interacting with library's users (55%), receiving comments, feedback and complaints of users (50%) and training library's users (50%).

Because the capacities and the investments of the different libraries are different, the number of their users with possible access to their social media varies. Some university libraries participating in the survey (30%) believe that there are many users with access to their social media, over 70% of their current users. Some others believe that the number of users with access to their social media is around 50-70% of their current users (20% of university libraries) or around 20-50% (20%) or around 5-20% (10%), even under 5% (20%).

When the librarians were asked to assess the importance and usefulness of using social media in their activities, 76% of them said that using social media is important and useful for their library, 8% of them said that it is important but not useful and one of those libraries did not use social media in their activities. For the librarians of the other libraries which haven't used social media, they said that using social media is useful but not important (4%) or it is not useful and not important (8%), even one library decides not to use any social media because of their security features which are not reliable, even though they believe it useful.

## CONCLUSION

Using social media to facilitate and communicate the activities of libraries is becoming a universal practice and Vietnam is no exception. University libraries in Vietnam should not be concerned about "whether to use or not to use" social media but need to focus attention on "how to use it". University libraries will no doubt develop their own strategies in the employment of social media which will be suited to their own particular purposes. However, we advise that the findings and recommendations detailed above would provide a useful reference point and source of information for any library. In the near future, if used

properly, social media can be a core tool for libraries across Vietnam, providing the primary means to bring the library and their users closer together.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The use of social media in the activities of university libraries in Vietnam has gone through its initial phase. In the near future, the university libraries in Vietnam need to further strengthen their investment in social media in order to maximize the benefits that social media offers. Some recommendations that we propose for using social media in the activities of university libraries in Vietnam are as follows.

**Choosing:** Today, there are hundreds of social media applications and there will certainly be new ones appearing in the future. However, it is not feasible for a university library to participate in them all. This requires that university libraries choose the right medium for any given purpose, depending on the target group to be reached and the message to be communicated. On the one hand, each social media application usually attracts a certain group of people and the library should be active wherever their users are present, they thus have to carefully consider which social medium will best suit their users. On the other hand, the chosen social medium must have the features that support the library's activities and best facilitate them in achieving their goals.

For the university libraries in Vietnam, there are so many varieties of social media they can choose from. However, Facebook can be seen as a preferred option that they should consider. This is because, first, Facebook is the most popular social network in Vietnam at present. According to statistical data of Facebook, up to June 2015, the number of Facebook's users in Vietnam is around 30 million, over 30% of Vietnam's population. Among them, around 75% of Vietnamese Facebook users are aged from 18-34 (TN. News, 2015). That is considered as the common age of people who are learning, teaching and working at the universities, including students (undergraduates and postgraduates), faculties and staffs. It's rare that student, faculty or staff at a university do not have a Facebook account. Therefore, the use of Facebook is able to ensure a large number of users can have access to this communication channel offered by the library. Second, Facebook provides a lot of utilities that support the activities of university libraries including promoting their library, introducing their products and services, training their users, collecting information and more.

In addition, Youtube is also a wise choice. In recent times, the trend of information transmission is converting from text communications to video communications, this

has been particularly evident in the creation of guidelines and introductions. The main advantages of Youtube have been mentioned in this study above (video sharing).

Of course, university libraries in Vietnam can use different iterations of social media separately or simultaneously, depending on the purposes of the library and the habits of library users.

**Popularizing:** After choosing the suitable form of social media and establishing the next step, the university libraries should focus on encouraging user access, this is extremely important for social networking sites. University libraries should focus on how to increase the number of followers on social networking sites and the number of views on video/image sharing sites in order to ensure that the information shared on social media is accessed by as many users as possible. There are three main factors that can help the libraries disseminate their social media in the initial phase.

**The front-line service staff:** These staff can mention the library's social media to the users during their normal interactions and can promote it as a way to stay current with what's going on in the library.

**Liaison librarians:** these staff are often social networking friends with faculty in the department for which they are responsible and this too can help spread the word about the library's page from one person to another through a network of relationships.

**Library's fandoms:** These are the familiar users of library, they use the library frequently and have a positive attitude towards library. They are willing to promote and popularize the library's social media to people they know. In addition, university libraries should use some other means to popularize their social media such as attaching the social media site links to the library's website or providing information in newsletters or notice boards, etc.

**Managing:** In fact, establishing social media is not difficult, but maintaining it effectively is not easy either. Nobody is interested in something boring or irrelevant to them. So, to attract the attention of users, university libraries need to give them a reason for to take notice. First, university libraries must understand their users, must know what their users care about, what their users want to know, what their users want to discuss and what their users like and dislike. Then, the university libraries should create and post on social media in a style and involving content consistent with users preferences.

So what type of content do university libraries typically post through their social media? In a guide compiled by Andy Burkhardt, posted on College and Research Libraries News in 2010, the researcher pointed out that the content university libraries usually posted on their social media related to library news and events, new additions to the library's collection, links to articles/videos/etc., community information, means to solicit feedback, respond to library's users, pictures and something else (Burkhardt, 2010).

The content posted on social media should always be controlled and updated regularly. The contents posted by the users should be approved by content control mechanisms before publishing, in order to reduce inappropriate information. University libraries must have at least one person responsible for managing and updating information continuously and regularly. Jacobson (2011) when talking about the use of Facebook in the activities of libraries, concluded that: "librarians must be aware that using Facebook as a tool requires a lot of attention and, if a library cannot commit to updating its Facebook page at least once a week or more, it may not be a very useful or successful tool" (Jacobson, 2011). She emphasized that the libraries must really pay attention to constantly updating information on social media.

**Enhancing social interaction between the users:** To attract the attention of the library's users consistently, social media must be highly dynamic and interactive. The content posted on social media must be stimulating and motivating, attracting users to pay attention to it. The content can be related to current events, the issues they are researching, information supports for examinations and something else. Thereby, a network is created that allows the library's users to interact with each other. This will foster an interactive, exchange based network in which users can share information, making the social network will be more lively and attractive. One way of keeping the network fresh is for more recent interactions to move up to the top the timeline of the users who have followed that page.

**Developing social media policies:** In an investigation conducted by Annex (2014) approximately, 72% of libraries were found to have no social media policy or plan in place and in Vietnam, we haven't found any university library with such a plan. This indicates that there are a lot of libraries including university libraries, not concerned about developing social media policies.

University libraries tend to be highly structured organizations with very detailed policies covering all of their day-to-day workings. If social media is to form part

of the communication process for informing your users about the library and responding to their questions and concerns, then a library will need to develop policies and procedures for doing so. Social media policy is different from the other policies developed by university libraries; it needs to be flexible enough to enable staff to share information in a timely fashion, usually without a lot of internal review and to allow staff to respond to users' comments promptly. In the world of social networks, there is no "official spokesperson" for the library, everybody who works for the library takes on that role through their interaction with the library's users. The other difference between traditional library communication practices and the social environment is that the library has less control. The community is holding conversations about the library on Facebook, Twitter and their own blogs already. All the library can do is try to join those conversations as another participant and create a space for the library to communicate its own point of view. Thus, there are two types of policies that need to be developed: covering issues related to posting to social media sites which includes not just distributing announcements but also responding to users' comments; giving guidance related to moderating and managing comments that users have made on the library's own website or on the library's page.

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