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Facebooking It: Promoting Library Services to Young Adults through Social Media

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Abstract:

With social media a normal part of the daily lives of young adults, librarians are using these sites to promote library services. This paper investigates the perceptions and attitudes of librarians towards social media as a tool for libraries; and explores the way librarians utilize social media to portray professional roles and responsibilities to young patrons. This author focuses on the pastoral role of librarians and discusses possibilities for performing this role through social media. Although presently under-researched, social media provides librarians with one more avenue to advocate for, engage with and support young adults.
Introduction

With social media a normal part of the everyday lives of young adults, libraries have begun to use online tools to promote library services to this age group. According to a study released by the Pew Research Center (2013), 67% of young adults visit social networking sites daily with an additional 21% visiting weekly. These sites provide librarians with an avenue to engage with young adult patrons regularly and in ways have not been possible before. With a multitude of social networking sites already in existence, it is essential that librarians, particularly those serving young adults, understand how to use these sites to reach young adults. A quote from a recent report produced by Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) illustrates this need distinctly, “Clearly, if all libraries serving teens want to more effectively serve today’s ‘connected’ teens and demonstrate value to the community, they must ramp up engagement in areas beyond academic or formal learning” (Braun, Hartman, Hughes-Hassell, Kumasi, and Yoke 2014 6). Social media provide librarians with one possibility to engage with young adults in a way that is not rigidly focused on education.

Social networking sites are defined as online services that permits individuals to create a public or semi-public profile within an enclosed system, identify a list of other users with whom they would like to connect, and view and navigate this list of users and lists created by other users within the system (boyd and Ellison 2007). The formats of social networking sites vary; from the image-focused micro-blogging site Tumblr to the largely text-based micro-blogging tool Twitter. Typically, users of these sites are not socializing with strangers but with
“real life” friends, family members, classmates, and colleagues (boyd and Ellison 2007). Libraries and librarians exist within the daily lives of young adult patrons. Yet, library and information studies (LIS) literature offers little regarding how social media can be used to promote the roles libraries and librarians play in the lives of young adults.

The sheer number of these sites, along with frequently changing interfaces and features, often leaves librarians confused and reluctant to incorporate social media into their existing collection of marketing tools (Carlsson 2012). However, social media provides librarians, and young adult librarians in particular, with an inexpensive and innovative avenue to advocate for libraries, engage with young adults, and present less obvious services librarians to young adults (e.g. library as a safe space, social/emotional/psychological support, mentoring). For the purposes of this study, young adults are defined as youth between the ages of 12 and 18.

This paper presents the findings of an exploratory study investigating how librarians use social media to engage with young adult patrons and what roles librarians perceive social media as providing for promoting library services. One role focused on in particular is pastoral care. While the term “pastoral care” may be new to LIS, this describes a role that librarians have long filled (Cesari 2014; Jones 2008; Miller and Wallis 2011). In the context of libraries, pastoral care describes the social, emotional, and psychological support librarians provide patrons, primarily children and young adults.

**Problem Statement**
There is a significant lack of scholarly research focusing on library marketing and promotion through social media. This is especially true for public libraries. The bulk of literature on social media marketing is produced by professional librarians in service-oriented publications in the form of how-to articles, manuals, and similar guides (Burkhardt 2010; Glazer 2012; Hardin, Klug, and Williams 2012; Salomon 2013; Solomon 2013). Case studies of individual libraries as exemplars of best practices in social media are also common (Cahill 2011; Dempsey 2012; Ezeani and Igwesi 2012; Dankowski 2013; Salomon 2013). While these resources are excellent tools for professional librarians, scholarly research could assist in understanding the what, how, and why of social media use by libraries and librarians.

Not only do librarians need to know how to use social media to reach patrons, but they also must understand what types of patrons they are reaching and what services appeal to social media savvy patrons (Horn 2011). This is particularly relevant for young adults who are increasingly active on social networking sites (Madden et al. 2013). An awareness and understanding of social media is critical as young adults go online more and more to satisfy their information needs and seek support (Braun et al. 2014). Research into young adults and their social media use has the potential to improve library services targeting this age group, provide a better understanding of how this population perceives and uses libraries, and reveal practical opportunities for supporting young adult patrons. Although this study focuses on Facebook as its primary
social media platform, the general use of other social media platforms by librarians is also explored.

**Significance of Research**

This exploratory study lays the groundwork for a more thorough study into the ways librarians promote their pastoral role to young adult patrons and how successfully this can be done through social media. Pastoral care refers to the social, emotional, and psychological support librarians provide patrons along with more explicit professional duties, such as collection development, programming, and outreach (Shaper and Streatfield 2012). For many young adults, the library and its staff not only support educational and leisure needs, but they also offer support for the developmental needs of young adults (Agosto and Abbas 2009; Braun et al. 2014). While the pastoral role is largely invisible, it is especially important for children and young adult patrons (Shaper and Streatfield 2012).

**Research Questions**

There are three research questions in this exploratory study:

1. How do librarians engage with young adult patrons through their libraries’ social media profiles?
2. What professional roles and responsibilities do librarians portray to young adult patrons through their libraries’ social media presence?
3. What role do librarians perceive social media as playing in providing pastoral care to young adult patrons?

Librarians are spending increasing amounts of on-the-job time updating, maintaining, and promoting their library through social media (Vucovich et al.)
Because librarians put a significant amount of effort into their professional social media use, it is worthwhile to investigate librarians’ views of social media and its usefulness for promoting library services. Additionally, to best meet the needs of young adults patrons, librarians must be aware of the ways in which their use of social media is reaching and impacting young adults. Along with exploring librarians’ current use of social media for libraries, another intent of this study’s research questions is to explore pastoral care as it relates to libraries and librarianship. Prior to this study, only one other study has discussed the pastoral role of librarians (Shaper and Streatfield 2012).

**Literature Review**

Given the growing role of social media in the lives of young adults, there is a notable lack of empirically-supported research on social media use as a tool by public libraries and librarians, which provides little dimension to the extent and nature of the research problem. However, a substantial amount of practitioner-geared books, reports, and articles exist covering social media use by libraries for marketing, promotion, fundraising, and advocacy purposes (Burkhardt 2010; Price 2011; Dempsey 2012; Solomon 2012; Swanson 2012; Dankowski 2013; Harmon and Messina 2013). A fair amount has been written regarding library outreach to young adult patrons through social media (Agosto and Abbas 2011; Horn 2011; Salomon 2013). As an entry point to the existing body of scholarly research, this literature review will highlight examples of recent investigations into general social media use by libraries in practitioner-focused publications and then discuss scholarly research into this area. Closing this review
is a general discussion of pastoral care and its application for libraries and library services.

*Practitioner-Focused Publications*

Ahmed and Edwards-Johnson (2013) addressed the professional dilemmas librarians may encounter when “friending” patrons on personal Facebook accounts. In an editorial, the authors debated the positive and negative aspects of Facebook friendships between librarians and their patrons. For some librarians, friending patrons allows them to appear more approachable, helpful, and involved with the community. For others, connecting with patrons on Facebook forces librarians to become a 24/7 gateway to library services. Ultimately, librarians (or library administrators if there is an existing organization wide policy) decide whether or not to friend patrons. This may be determined by how comfortable librarians are sharing aspects of their personal lives and political and religious viewpoints with the individuals they serve in a professional capacity.

An article by Burkhardt (2010) is one example of the type of guides for developing a social media presence in academic, public, and special libraries that appear frequently in practitioner periodicals. The author covered the basics of social media use for libraries, including why libraries should use social media regularly, how to create an engaging social media profile, what to post, how to market using social media, how to develop a social media strategy, and how successful communicate online with patrons. This type of step-by-step guide reduces some of the mystery and intimidation of social media, which otherwise may dissuade some librarians from building a social media presence for their
library. With new social networking sites developing regularly, there will always be a need for introductory resources, like Burkhardt’s article, about these sites for library professionals.

In practitioner publications, another common form of analyzing social media use by libraries is the case study. In her article for Library Journal, Dankowski (2013) presented three case studies of public libraries that are effectively using social media for marketing, promotion, and advocacy. New York Public Library, Multnomah County Library (OR), and Charlotte Mecklenburg Library (NC) are offered as illustrative examples of best practices in social media. New York and Charlotte Mecklenburg libraries both took to social media as a public response to budget cuts and dwindling funds. Similarly, Multnomah County Libraries incorporated Yelp, Facebook, and Foursquare into several highly successful advocacy campaigns. In a related article, Guza (2011) discussed the ways in which Washington state library systems are using social media to create a cohesive brand, provide mobile library services, encourage literacy through book blogs, and expand outreach possibilities. These descriptive case studies of libraries in action on social media offer guidance and encouragement for librarians in the beginning stages of developing social media strategies, but provide little in the way of data driven research.

Scholarly Research

Turning to more research driven publications, Calvi, Cassella, and Nuijten (2010) is one of the older studies featured in this literature review. In their study, the authors performed a content analysis on the Facebook profiles of 12 university
libraries in Italy. Calvi et al. had two primary goals for this analysis: to sample existing social media practices and to determine the general best practices for library social media use. Much like the findings offered in practitioner articles, Calvi et al.’s research found that the larger a library is, the more active their Facebook profile. Along with this, the authors revealed the significant amount of time and energy required of librarians to maintain a library’s profiles in addition to other duties. Because of this added strain, the effectiveness of social media as a communication tool is not always obvious or understood.

An article by Vucovich, Gordon, Mitchell, and Ennis (2013) also investigated the effectiveness of social media for reaching patrons. To understand the success of these tools for promoting services and resources, the authors conducted a case study of Lester Hill Library’s, a university medical library, Facebook page, YouTube profile, and blog. Using a combination of statistics and metrics, Vucovich et al. found that social media profiles are “effective in reaching different user groups in the various online spaces they inhabit” (2013, 24). One finding from the study revealed that librarians reported Facebook and other social networking sites as successfully marketing library’s services and resources. In slight contrast to Calvi et al. (2010), the Lester Hill librarians believed that maintaining the library’s social media profile is worthwhile and helpful for both librarians and patrons. Findings from Vucovich et al. (2013) and Calvi et al. (2010) suggested that librarians who are supportive and enthusiastic social media users help develop a strong and active social media presence for their libraries.
Charnigo and Barnett-Ellis (2007) studied the perspectives and attitudes of 126 academic librarians regarding Facebook. The authors surveyed these librarians about their understanding and awareness of Facebook to determine what perceptions and attitudes the librarians had towards the social networking site. While the majority of the librarians had heard of Facebook and felt somewhat knowledgeable about the site, many librarians displayed an uncertainty toward the role Facebook had in the library. Librarians expressed a discomfort distinguishing patrons using Facebook for academic purposes from those using for socializing. However, librarians did view Facebook as providing a social space for university students to develop a sense of community. It is important to remember that this survey took place in 2006, the early days of Facebook and similar social networking sites. Recent studies of public and academic librarians have revealed significant shifts in beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions towards social media (Aharony 2012; Glazer 2012).

Another investigation into the perceptions of academic librarians towards social media is by Chu and Du (2012). The authors surveyed 38 libraries about their librarians’ perceptions towards social media usefulness, the factors influencing these libraries’ decision to use social media, and the ways libraries engage with patrons through social media. The results indicate that libraries use these tools primarily for publicity and marketing purposes, improving reference services, and “knowledge sharing among staff” (68). Similar to Vucovich et al. (2013), the librarians surveyed by Chu and Du (2012) reported social media as very useful for marketing library services, engaging with patrons, and collecting
patron comments. For the authors, the findings demonstrated that librarians, as a whole, are becoming more positive towards social media and more engaged with patrons online.

*Pastoral Care in LIS*

There is a noticeable gap in existing scholarly research into the perceptions held by public librarians regarding social media and the professional roles and responsibilities librarians present through these online tools (Smeaton and Davis 2014). Pastoral care, investigated in depth in this study, is one professional role that has the potential to be expressed through social media. This term refers to the social, emotional, and psychological support librarians provide patrons along with more visible roles such as collection development, programming, and readers’ advisory (Shaper and Streatfield 2012). More recently, the pastoral role of school librarians has been investigated, but only as an accidental finding of a larger study (Shaper and Streatfield 2012).

Pastoral care is a largely British concept that has been explored significantly within the context of education since the early 1900s. In 19th century England, scholars and educators began to recognize the role that teachers had in the “general and moral welfare” of students (Best 1999, 55). Library and information studies has long supported the idea of the library as a safe space and librarians as a source of emotional, psychological, and social support for young patrons (Cronin 2001; Jones 2004; Jurkowski 2006). In LIS literature, a variety of terms and phrases have been used when referring to this role including support, empowerment, adolescent development, empathy, and compassion (Brautigam
The pastoral role of librarians has been explicitly explored, albeit unexpectedly, in a study by Shaper and Streatfield (2012). Parents, teachers, school administrators, and the community often overlook this “one-on-one pastoral engagement” between librarians and young patrons (Shaper and Streatfield 2012, 68).

Although practitioner and scholarly publications discussing the supportive role of librarians do not identify this role as “pastoral care”, they are one in the same. Through reader’s advisory, programming, book displays, collection development, and everyday interactions with patrons, librarians provide a supportive system for troubled and stressed patrons (Jones 2004). Librarians serve as non-threatening role models without the “supervisory” persona of teachers, parents, religious leaders, or school administrators” (Braun et al. 2014, 10). Without this obvious authoritative presence, young adults feel more comfortable expressing fears, frustrations, doubts, and uncertainties to librarians (Braun et al. 2014). While pastoral care has traditionally been provided within the physical library, the informal and flexible nature of social media offers librarians a new opportunity for helping young patrons when they need it.

Regarding more visible roles of librarians, practitioner publications -- such as *American Libraries* and *Library Journal* -- provide useful examples of libraries successfully using social media for marketing, promotion, and advocacy. Within the last few years, research published in academic journals has largely examined the use of social media by academic libraries, along with the perceptions and attitudes academic librarians have towards these tools. As indicated by this brief
literature review, significantly more research is needed into the how and why of social media use by public librarians and libraries. This exploratory study will add to the literature by addressing these gaps and promote pastoral care as an emerging research opportunity within LIS.

**Methodology**

*Data Collection*

To investigate the research questions, this study applies a mixed method approach. Data collection took place through two methods: an online survey followed by in-depth interviews. The participants for this study are librarians who engage with young adults regularly in the library and have worked (currently or previously) for a library with a social media presence. To recruit participants, the researcher posted calls for participation, over a two-month period, on relevant national and state library association and organization list-servs as well as the author’s professional social media profiles. A total of 68 librarians from across the United States and internationally (United Kingdom and Australia) took part in the survey. Although those participating represent a mixture of professional years of service, these librarians skewed slightly younger, with new librarians heavily represented.

Table 1 presents a breakdown of the types of libraries the surveyed librarians represent. The majority of these librarians work in a public library (68%), with a smaller group working in school libraries (18%). Table 2 shows the range of professional titles of these librarians. The “other” titles indicated by participants include Branch Librarian, Research Librarian, Teen Librarian, Young
Adult and Adult Librarian, Program Services, Youth and Young Adult Services Librarian, Youth Outreach Coordinator, Young Adult Specialist, Director, and School Media Librarian.

The survey was a mixture of 37 closed-ended and open-ended questions. Closed-ended questions included a combination of multiple choice, yes/no, and ranking. After a data collection period of three months (April through June 2014), the researcher closed the survey and continued to the second phase of the study, the in-depth interviews. The online survey platform, Qualtrics, served as an inexpensive and reliable data collection tool. This paper will focus solely on the findings culled from the data of the online surveys. The author is currently analyzing the in-depth interviews. A second paper will address the key themes uncovered from these interviews and offer a comparison between the findings from the survey and interviews.

Data Analysis

The researcher applied a combination of descriptive statistics for close-ended questions and thematic analysis for open-ended questions to analyze the survey responses. Thematic analysis is “a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data.” (Braun and Clarke 2006, 6). This method provides researchers with “a rich thematic description” of a data set (Braun and Clarke 2006, 11). The researcher selected this type of analysis because of its flexibility, an important feature for an exploratory study (Braun and Clarke 2006). Additionally, the process of conducting a thematic analysis served to introduce the researcher to the process of data analysis. The data from collected surveys
assisted in the construction of in-depth interview questions. This data is currently
supporting the analysis of interviews conducted during the second part of this
study.

Findings

To introduce the research areas to the participants, the survey began with a
few questions about general use of social media for libraries. The surveyed
librarians indicated that social media was a useful tool for reaching out to all
patrons. Regarding promotion of library materials (e.g. books, audiobooks,
DVDs, computers), 88% reported social media as beneficial. For promoting
services, 94% viewed social media as helpful. It is worthwhile to note that none of
the librarians surveyed reported social media as not useful to their library. A
minority of librarians in the survey expressed uncertainty about the usefulness of
social media, but for many librarians social media was a distinctively effective
marketing tool. Although librarians assessed library marketing to all age groups, it
is clear that social media is a tool that these librarians valued.

Engaging With Young Adults

Through a library’s Facebook ‘Wall’, librarians have access to an
additional channel to engage young adult patrons. Librarians are using social
media, particularly Facebook, to engage with young adults for a variety of
purposes. In the survey, librarians indicated they regularly use Facebook to
promote young adult programming (76%), young adult materials (65%), and
young adult services (54%). The free responses of these librarians suggest that
much of the information provided to young adults via Facebook concerns
standard library activities. These activities include basic library information, contact information, branch locations, programs, and readers’ advisory. When asked for examples of Facebook postings, surveyed librarians provided many that demonstrated a focus on programming, materials, and services.

“Hey Harry Potter fans! Have you heard about NPL's new Harry Potter fan club, Dumbledore's Army? Our next meeting takes place tomorrow, Wednesday, 12/4 from 3-4:30. Join us for wandmaking, sorting and listening to some wizard rock. Teens 10-18 only.”

“Well, it's official. We're going to have a SUMMER TIME FANDOM EVENT. Friday, July 25 from 6:30-9pm. Registration is open; invite your friends!”

“We're getting a bunch of new YA Books! Check the comments for a link to our Pinterest page that shows all the new titles.”

“We post about our weekly tutoring sessions, usually with a funny meme or image about studying, and we post about volunteer meetings with a link to the blog post about it with the application and consent form.”

“We often post about our Teen Advisory Board (TAB), a volunteer group that help with library-related activities.”

As these examples indicate, librarians focused much of their social media efforts on promoting more-traditional library activities (e.g. programming, materials, and services). For the majority (72%) of the surveyed librarians, publicizing programming was the primary use of their library’s Facebook profile. However, librarians acknowledged the importance of social media for promoting
less-visible library activities and services. Librarians viewed Facebook as useful or very useful for promoting support services (e.g. emotional, psychological, and social support) (67.1%), study room/spaces/quiet zones (77.4%), fundraising (56.8%), and advocacy (57.1%).

Librarians also utilized a range of social media platforms, in addition to Facebook. In their responses, librarians cited Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram, and Pinterest as sites for a current or future library presence. Several librarians identified feedback from young adults as a key reason for creating library profiles on these social media platforms. One librarian commented, “Our TAB just started a Tumblr and it’s VERY popular. They have also asked for instagram (sic). No Twitter interest.” Another librarian wrote, “Instagram is what teens are using now and we’re building our following.” These comments and others indicate that librarians are accepting input from young adult patrons about the future direction of their library’s social media presence. Surveyed librarians displayed an awareness of what is trending in social media, what sites young adults are using, and how these sites can be used to engage with young adult patrons.

While using social media, librarians must contend with Internet filters and social media algorithms. Particularly in school libraries, filters prevent young adults from accessing social media, regardless of purpose. A comment from one librarian highlighted this challenge, “We need to migrate ASAP to Twitter and instagram (sic), even Tumblr, butinstagram (sic) and Tumblr are both blocked. Twitter might be as well on the student side.” These filters block libraries from effectively reaching young adult patrons while they are in the library and have
easy access to library services. Along with filters, Facebook’s new algorithms have impacted the way in which librarians can effectively reach patrons. Regarding Facebook posts about young adult materials, a librarian remarked that, “due to the newest Facebook algorithms for who sees what, we have found that posting the link in the comments helps more people to see the post”. Librarians developed unique strategies to work around the restrictions that algorithms place on their online reach. Expanding the library’s social media presence to other platforms has been used as one strategy to avoid the hazards of Facebook algorithms.

Professional Roles and Responsibilities

For many of the surveyed librarians (85%), updating the library’s social media profiles was one of their official responsibilities. When asked if updating these profiles should be part of their designated professional responsibilities, again 85% responded yes. The responses to these two questions indicate the high value these librarians placed not only on the development and maintenance of online profiles, but also the responsibility of librarians to be involved in this process. It is worthwhile to note that there is often more than one librarian updating his/her library’s Facebook/Twitter/Tumblr/etc. profile. Of the librarians surveyed 59% indicated that more than one library employee contributes to his/her library’s Facebook profile. Whether posting is the responsibility of a committee or divided between different library departments, the social media presence of the library has become a vital, and sometimes shared, aspect of library work.
Regarding specific professional roles demonstrated to patrons through Facebook, once again library programming was strongly represented. Table 3 details the professional roles that surveyed librarians believe they show through their library’s social media presence. The “other” roles indicated by librarians include promoting opportunities in the community for young adults and library advocacy. Literacy and reading advocacy was clearly a professional role that librarians believed could be expressed through posts to social media profiles. As indicated by the Facebook posts shared above, posts about young adult book clubs, book reviews, young adult book displays, and readers’ advisory highlight this professional role.

To display these roles successfully and professionally through social media, librarians have developed personal rules and general practices for posting to Facebook and similar platforms. These are not institutional rules or policies, but guidelines these librarians developed for themselves from personal experience, relevant training, and/or professional literature. The rules shared by librarians emphasized three themes: audience, appropriateness, and technical focus.

When composing Facebook posts, librarians placed importance on the intended audience. Many librarians emphasized “knowing your audience” and tailoring posts to appeal directly to this audience. The word “audience” repeatedly appeared in the responses of librarians. Appropriateness of posts was another frequently cited personal rule of survey librarians. For many librarians, appropriateness referred to ensuring posts were suitable for the image of the
library. Although librarians did not specifically refer to library policy or
guidelines, the influence of these institutional policies can be felt. Along with
upholding the reputation of the library, appropriateness for the maturity of the
audience was another concern for librarians. This includes avoiding profanity and
questionable or off-topic content in young adult geared posts.

Finally, librarians had many technically focused rules for posting to
Facebook and other social media platforms. The rules to which librarians adhered
range widely and at times contradicted one another. Some librarians had very
specific rules for how often to post (e.g. daily, as needed), when to post (e.g. after
school hours), and how to post (e.g. management tools, in-house schedule). This
is not surprising, as often there is not a clear understanding by librarians or
administrators of how social media can be used effectively and efficiently. Much
has been published in practitioner literature regarding the “best practices” of
social media use (Guza 2011; Studdwell 2012; Ahmed and Edwards-Johnson
2013). However, social media best practices are not one-size fits all; techniques
that work for one library or librarian may not work for another. Additionally,
fewer than half (44%) of the librarians surveyed worked in libraries with an
official social media policy. While not surprising, an official policy is helpful for
outlining a library’s approach to outreach and is one “way to generate confidence
and support” in library staff (Enders and Winehouse 2012, 19) A formal policy
would also assist staff in determining what is or is not appropriate for social
media posts.

Role of Pastoral Care in Social Media
Additional survey questions delved deeper into the pastoral role of librarians and the use of social media to promote the role to young adults. Pastoral care refers to the emotional, psychological, and social support librarians often provide young patrons (Shaper and Streatfield 2012). This support is usually hidden from general library patrons and is often unacknowledged in LIS literature. Yet, social media is a possible opportunity for revealing the pastoral role librarians fulfill for young patrons. The pastoral role is particularly needed with the emergence of online violence (e.g. cyberbullying, cyber stalking, and cyber dating abuse).

When introduced to pastoral care in the survey, the majority of the librarians surveyed (69%) had not heard of the term. However, after a brief description of the concept, libraries expressed a familiarity and experience with this type of support. Many of these librarians indicted that pastoral care should be taught in Master in Library and Information Studies (MLIS) coursework (85%) and in the workplace (85%). For librarians, training on pastoral care could help improve their ability to assist young patrons as well as build stronger relationships with these patrons. Surveyed librarians discussed the reality of day-to-day patron interactions, which can sometimes include requests for information on difficult and/or sensitive subjects. The common theme of these librarians’ responses was helping young people. Pastoral care can support librarians’ ability to connect and support the psychological, emotional, and social development of youth adults (Yohalem and Pittman 2003; Jones and Delahanty 2011).
Particularly for librarians working young adults, the responses to the survey suggested that training on how to appropriately respond during these situations would be beneficial for both MLIS students and professional librarians. Additionally, this training would help support several of YALSA’s competencies for librarians serving youth such as “provide a variety of informational and recreational services to meet the diverse needs and interests of young adults and to direct their own personal growth and development” (Flowers 2011, 8) and “form appropriate professional relationships with young adults, providing them with the assets, inputs and resiliency factors that they need to develop into caring, competent adults” (Flowers 2011, 4).

Although librarians expressed a desire for pastoral care education and training, an overwhelmingly number (93%) did not believe they provide pastoral care through social media. Surveyed librarians appeared divided regarding social media as a useful tool for promoting the pastoral role of librarians. Table 4 reveals this uncertainty concerning the ability of social media to promote or provide pastoral care. The responses to these questions indicated that pastoral care was still rooted in face-to-face interactions within the library. Perhaps with more training, librarians will become more comfortable engaging in pastoral care through social media. Also, librarians may be unaware that they are already providing pastoral care through posts, tweets, or shares to different social media platforms. Through MLIS coursework or continuing education, librarians can learn how to ethically, appropriately, and confidently take pastoral care online.

Discussion
Regarding the first research question, librarians are engaging with young adult patrons through a growing number of social media platforms. Although this study focused largely on Facebook as a tool for engagement, surveyed librarians identified many other platforms they used or plan to use in the near future. Compared with earlier research into librarians’ awareness and knowledge of social media (Cahill 2011; Charnigo and Barnett-Ellis 2007), the findings of this survey suggest that this awareness and knowledge has continued to increase.

The content that librarians are contributing to their library’s Facebook profile tend to focus on basic library information about the library and library programming. For the majority of librarians, this is what the primary emphasis of social media postings should be. This finding supports one found earlier in Aharony’s (2012) study of public and academic libraries use of Facebook. Although many librarians identified themselves as the sole creators of social media content, other responses suggested a shift towards more co-creation between young adults and librarians. With this active engagement through social media, libraries can continue to demonstrate their relevancy in the lives of young adults and strengthen relationships between libraries and young patrons (Smeaton and Davis 2014). As libraries are expanding their social media presence to other platforms, opportunities to encourage active participation by young adults online will continue to grow.

The second research question addresses the professional roles and responsibilities librarians portray to young adults through their libraries’ social media presence. Overwhelmingly, librarians (85%) agreed that maintaining their
library’s social media profiles should be a part of their professional responsibilities. While there is little research into public librarians’ perceptions of social media, there has been some research into the perceptions of academic librarians. Charnigo and Barnett-Ellis (2007) conducted a survey of academic librarians awareness and perceptions of Facebook. Examined during the early days of Facebook, the researchers showed that many of those surveyed (51%) believed librarians should stay current with Internet trends. Charnigo and Barnett-Ellis’s study also revealed a small but developing enthusiasm for social media in the library. When compared with the current study’s findings regarding the library’s role on Facebook, librarians’ attitudes about this role has evolved from an early uncertainty to a present day comfort when engaging on social media.

During the survey, librarians identified several professional roles they believe are exhibited through their library’s Facebook profile. For many, programming (81%), literacy/reading advocacy (65%), and access (58%) are key roles demonstrated through their Facebook use. This finding complements a similar finding from Aharony’s (2012) study of Facebook use in public and academic libraries. In his research, Aharony found that almost half of the public libraries’ (49.05%) Facebook posts focused on library activities. Clearly, librarians place heavy importance on promoting in-house activities.

Although the majority of surveyed librarians may not have been familiar with pastoral care, once introduced to this role, many librarians responded positively to including training on pastoral care in LIS coursework and in the workplace. While much has been written about pastoral care in education, very
little research has been conducted on pastoral care in LIS. This is particularly true for LIS research produced for American audiences. In a national study of school libraries, Shaper and Streatfield (2012) inadvertently learned of the importance school librarians in the U.K placed on their pastoral role. Comments from the librarians surveyed by the authors regarding the critical role librarians play in pastoral care of youth are similar to those provided in the present study. Librarians in both studies discussed the support they offer troubled students and the desire these librarians felt to help students. The responses from the surveyed librarians regarding pastoral care suggested that there was an interest among practicing librarians for learning more about pastoral care and methods for performing this supportive role in the lives of young adult patrons. These librarians felt strongly about receiving training on this type of support both in MLIS programs and as a part of professional development.

**Limitations**

Because this is an exploratory study, the results cannot be generalized to the entire young adult librarian population. The sample of participants used by the researcher is appropriate for the scope of this study. However, the results of this study will be used as a beginning investigation into the little-researched area of delivering supportive services through social media. Additional quantitative studies into the perceptions of librarians towards social media will allow the findings to be generalized to the larger young adult librarian population. Future qualitative studies will reveal a wider range of young adult librarian perceptions
and attitudes towards social media use for library promotion, marketing, and advocacy.

As discussed earlier, there is a significant lack of scholarly research into the perceptions of public librarians regarding social media as a tool for libraries. This is particularly true for young adult librarians. Since these librarians work with a population who is enthusiastic and active in its use of social media, more research into this area is greatly needed. It is challenging to relate the findings of this exploratory study to those of research that are focused specifically on academic libraries and librarians. Without a sufficient amount of literature, this study must apply the literature from related areas, such as social media use of academic librarians, practitioner articles of libraries and social media, and interviews with academic librarians concerning social media.

Conclusions

Social media offers librarians one way to promote library services directly to young adults instead of “waiting for users to seek out the library” (Agosto and Abbas 2009). The feedback from surveyed librarians suggested several potential directions for research. As revealed through survey responses, librarians are becoming more comfortable using social media to promote programming, materials, and services. Instead of relying on one social networking site, librarians are expanding to a variety of sites like Tumblr, Twitter, and Pinterest. Not only are librarians engaging with young adults through social media, young adults are providing feedback on the growing social media presence of libraries. Along with promoting services, librarians view social media as a tool for displaying
professional roles and responsibilities including pastoral care. Future research could more closely examine the way young adults perceive these roles and responsibilities and how accurately these perceptions reflect the perceptions librarians have of themselves.

Regarding pastoral care, librarians indicated an interest in receiving more education and training. Further research is needed on the types of education and training librarians would like to see incorporated into MLIS coursework and libraries. Additional research would suggest possibilities for libraries providing continued, on-the-job training for practicing librarians. In the survey, librarians reported that they did not providing pastoral care through social media. These comments prompt questions regarding how (or whether) social media can be used to support the emotional, psychological, and social needs of young adults. As social media continues to evolve, research into the role of social media in libraries must reflect these changes. Social media has much to offer libraries in the way of promoting and marketing services, and by doing so, demonstrating the importance and relevance of libraries in the everyday lives of young adults.
References


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