Chapter 7
Libraries and Digital Media

Jessica R. Olin
Wesley College, USA

ABSTRACT

Both academic and public libraries have, since the inception of the internet and the world wide web, experienced a seismic level of change when compared to the past. The impacts of such specific issues as social media, open access, and the digital divide, and how they change both the short and long term operations and planning for libraries, are considered here through the lens of recent research on these topics. Some attention is also given to gaps in the current research and recommendations are made for further study. Particular attention is given to ways in which these issues overlap for academic and public libraries.

INTRODUCTION

When confronted with a topic like this, it can boggle the mind a bit. Much like contemplating the idea of infinity, the possible permutations of the impact of digital media on academic and public libraries are endless. Regardless, this topic is an undercurrent of the daily lives of most (if not all) librarians, not just those working at public and academic libraries. To be honest, this topic could possibly be turned into a series of dissertations and an encyclopedia. Rather than try to tackle all of the literature about all the different ways in which digital media impacts public and academic libraries, this chapter focuses on three major areas that are, in the opinion of the author, the most broad reaching and have resulted in sea-level changes across the board. Because of the limitations of space and time, much has been left out that could potentially be very important. Further, this chapter examines only a small cross-section of the research being done in these areas and is in no way meant to be exhaustive.

The specific topics under the umbrella of “digital media” that are presented within this chapter are: social media, the interplay of open access / digital repositories / proprietary databases, and the digital divide. In each section, the reader will find an introductory overview of the topic, including definitions; a consideration of the research being done in these areas and is in no way meant to be exhaustive.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-8310-5.ch007
Please note that any gaps in materials considered in this chapter are based upon access to said materials. This is not intended to be either an exhaustive consideration of the research in any area or a historical perspective about the evolution of the interplay of libraries, both academic and public, and these digital media.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Succinct Overview of the Research

Social media are an inescapable part of much of modern culture, and as a result they are very much a part of the lives of the communities most public and academic libraries serve. This means social media are necessarily a part of those same libraries. While definitions vary, most people agree that social media are an expression of Web 2.0, a somewhat misleading term that captures those places on the internet where the content is cooperatively created by the users and the owners of websites. Social media, as an extension of that, are applications and websites where the purpose of the cooperative creation is primarily “social” in nature. This, therefore, describes everything from the (mostly) anonymous conversations being held on some applications known only by a few that exist almost exclusively between and among smartphone users to the web, and identity based discussions on platforms that are broadly known and available pretty much worldwide. While libraries exist or are at least discussed in every permutation of social media, from Yik Yak (an anonymous social networking application that has conversations structured around the physical location of the users) to Facebook (an almost ubiquitous social network), the research relating social networks to libraries is much less extensive. (It is important to note that much work has been done on the role of social media for e-government, a lot of which touches on, but is not exclusively about, public libraries.)

One such study, “Social Media Practices and Support in U.S. Public Libraries and School Library Media Centers,” looks at the different ways that public and school libraries use these tools than about active research which tries to find research-based strategies for effective use. (It is important to note that much work has been done on the role of social media for e-government, a lot of which touches on, but is not exclusively about, public libraries.)

This study is broad in aspect, based on the researchers using stratified sampling to select both 750 public libraries and 750 school libraries. Their response rate was somewhat disheartening, with only ~18% of public libraries completing the surveys and ~5% of school media centers, but the study’s authors were still able to draw a couple of conclusions from what they have gained so far. Unsurprisingly, it is clear from their data that the most commonly