

Paper II of II

Building Participative Library Services

The impact of social software use in public libraries

Abstract

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to examine the adoption of social software in public libraries and to explore its impact.

Design/Methodology/Approach

This research uses a qualitative methodology and took the form of open-ended interview questions using an e-mail format. The research uses Rogers' (2003) Diffusion of Innovations theory as a framework.

Findings

This research found that participants consistently described social software as a means to deliver a library service that truly reflected their users' wants and needs. Participants indicated that social software would help achieve this goal in two ways. Firstly, participants felt that social software enabled users to interact with the library in the ways they wanted to. Secondly, the participative elements of social software made it easier for users to provide feedback on all aspects of the library service. The study also revealed that while social software is not currently being used to its fullest extent in public libraries, public librarians are exploring the meaning and potential of this new technology.

Originality/value

This paper advances the discussion on social software by providing concrete examples of its impact in practice. It is a resource for public librarians considering the potential impact of implementing social software in their own library which will allow them to learn from the experiences of others.

Keywords

Library 2.0, social software, public libraries, Diffusion of Innovations

Paper type

Research paper

Introduction

The exponential growth and popularity of online information gathering tools has challenged public libraries to demonstrate and publicise the ways they can add value to the user experience. A new generation of online tools known as Library 2.0 or social software is increasingly presented as the solution to this problem. Under the umbrella of this term come tools like blogs, Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feeds, wikis, photo-sharing applications and discussion forums.

Social software has the potential to make library services much more interactive. Social software tools not only give users access to content, they also allow users to easily contribute their own content, develop communities and share their knowledge with the library community. These attributes fit well with the goals of public libraries, which have always encouraged participation, inclusion and the development of communities.

Social software may be a new concept, but it is already making a major impact. These tools continue to receive a lot of attention in the library community; at conferences, in blog postings and in practitioner journals. While there has been much discussion on social software: defining the concept, discussing what it means for libraries and sharing ideas on how it might be used in different library contexts, very few public libraries are currently experimenting with social software. This is possibly because there has been no source of in-depth information for public librarians evaluating the potential of social software for use in their libraries.

This is the second of two papers that address the need to examine and record the activities of public libraries relating to social software. The primary aim of both papers is to provide public libraries with a basis on which to assess potential adoption decisions for social software.

The current paper considers the impact that social software has had on those public libraries which have so far adopted it. The study achieved this by identifying and conducting in-depth interviews with seven participants from different public libraries in the United States and New Zealand who could be considered “early adopters” (Rogers, 2003) of social software.

The paper provides a discussion of what the respondents wanted to achieve through their implementation of social software, what it has delivered so far, and the particular potential they see in it for the fulfillment of their public libraries’ mission.

Development of a concept

In 2005, Tim O’Reilly published an article entitled “What is Web 2.0” (O’Reilly, 2005). In this piece, O’Reilly described a range of popular web services and characterised them by the fact that they offered users the ability to communicate interactively online and to create and share content. He argued that these popular web services belonged to a second generation of web tools (blogs, wikis and RSS feeds among them) that all shared the same underlying goal of enabling collaboration, community and participation. O’Reilly called these software tools Web 2.0 tools (2005).

Librarians were quick to see the potential of these web services as they applied to libraries and to begin discussing them. The idea of providing online services that were more user-centred, collaborative and community-focussed was and still is a compelling one for public libraries, because many librarians think of them as a natural extension of traditional library services. For example, (2007) saw social software as “a technology-enhanced progression of traditional library services and goals” (p. 7).

The Conceptual impact of social software

An established body of literature uses the term Library 2.0 to discuss the positive change that social software tools could bring to the library environment. The librarian Michael Casey coined the term Library 2.0 in 2005 to describe social software services as they applied to libraries. He argued that, using these technologies, libraries could create a new model of library service that encouraged “constant and purposeful change, inviting user participation in the creation of the both physical and the virtual services they want” (Casey and Savastinuk, 2006). The term Library 2.0 has often been used to frame arguments about how libraries should use social software to strategically position themselves for continued relevance in a technological future (Miller, 2005, Chad and Miller, 2005, Stephens, 2006, Casey and Savastinuk, 2006 and Maness, 2006).

The term Library 2.0 has been used by both by the representatives of library system vendors and by librarians themselves (Casey and Savastinuk, 2006, Stephens, 2006) to support their cause. Several of the early papers on how social software could be used in libraries were written by the representatives of library system vendors (Miller, 2005, Chad and Miller, 2005). These papers argued that if a library was to be innovative and customer responsive, it must embrace the concept of Library 2.0 (by embracing a specially designed new library system that incorporated participative elements). Some librarians without vendor affiliations also shared the view that libraries must experiment with technological innovations in order to remain relevant in today’s society (Casey and Savastinuk, 2006). Those who saw technological innovation as synonymous with relevance stood opposed to those who argued that innovation in libraries did not necessarily involve technology (Crawford, 2006).

Much of the debate around the term Library 2.0 stemmed from the fact that the term has become part of a larger debate on the whole future of libraries. Literature on Library 2.0

included arguments about the place of technology in libraries (Stephens, 2006), the future role of librarians (Chowdhury, Poulter and McMenemy, 2006), and the philosophy that should underpin library service as it moved into the 21st century (Casey and Savastinuk, 2006).

Crawford (2006) clarified this debate by giving an overview and critique of literature on Library 2.0. He pointed out that the term Library 2.0 itself implied a power relationship between a better Library 2.0 and a lesser 'Library 1.0' which libraries were moving from. In this way, use of the term implicitly criticised those libraries that do not use social software. Crawford also usefully drew a distinction between Library 2.0 as "the movement or bandwagon" (p. 2) and Library 2.0 as the positive concept that concentrated on "building on today's best and improving for the future" (p. 1).

Of all those who have contributed to the debate on social software in libraries, Maness (2006) has provided one of the most developed critical perspectives. Maness developed many of the more ephemeral ideas on the subject of Library 2.0, arguing that "a more exact definition and theory for Library 2.0 is necessary to focus discussion and experimentation within the community" (p. 3). He proposed a new definition of Library 2.0 as "the application of interactive, collaborative, and multi-media web-based technologies to web-based library services and collections" (p. 3).

The community impact of social software

While the term Library 2.0 is often used to frame discussions of social software, some papers on the subject have chosen to avoid it. These papers focussed more on the social impact of social software. They concentrated on the enhanced relationship between the library and its users that can be achieved by using the technology. These papers worked

on the principle that social software and libraries shared the same philosophy; they had ideals of participation, communication and community building at heart. Of these papers, some (Dames, 2004, Miller, 2005) pointed out that using social software could help keep library services relevant to users as their needs evolved. Other papers (Dames, 2004, Balas, 2006, Etches-Johnson, 2006, Salo, 2006) identified that the software could help libraries extend their traditional services to the online sphere.

Gap in the literature

Although there is no shortage of conceptual papers on the potential and desired impact of social software on the library environment, there is a distinct lack of empirical exploration of the actual impact of social software as it is experienced by librarians who are using it.

Current literature is theory-laden. While this is unsurprising due to the new nature of the topic, now that empirical information is becoming available it is important to redress the balance by learning from real experiences. While many authors have considered the changes in library philosophy that the use of social software is sometimes seen to embody, no study has been identified that seeks to understand and learn from the perceptions of the librarians that have experienced the impact of social software on the ground.

The researcher identified a distinct need for an in-depth study that considered the impact of social software use in public libraries. Current literature is limited to the conceptual, the introductory and to individual case studies, none of which focus on a public library environment. Although several studies include elements of the current research paper, none brought all elements together into a unified whole, as this research paper intends to do.

Research question

As mentioned in the introduction, this paper is one of a pair of papers that report the findings of a research project. This project answered the research question “how are public libraries using social software?” The study addressed the specific research question by way of four sub-questions:

- Which kinds of social software are public libraries using;
- How are they using them;
- What are the attributes of the diffusion of social software;
- What impact have social software tools had;

This paper discusses the fourth sub-question: “what is the impact of social software implementation on those public libraries that have chosen to adopt it?”

Methodology

The research project used a qualitative methodology because the topic of study was a subjective and time-specific experience. The experience of social software use will necessarily be different for every public librarian at any different point in time. A qualitative methodology was also chosen because the intent of the project was to deliberately explore social software use within a particular environment, rather than to isolate it from other variables as in quantitative research. Although this approach added to the complexity of analysis necessary, exploring the social complexity of social software use in public libraries was necessary to achieve the stated aims of the research.

The researcher saw a strong philosophical sympathy between qualitative research methodology, the public library service ethic and social software’s conceptual underpinning. These three things all strive towards the interactive, humanistic and

participative. They are all people focussed, they are all user/participant focussed and they share a goal of trying to make peoples' experiences more interactive.

Ethical approval

The project received the approval of a human ethics committee before it proceeded, and the researcher followed ethical principles throughout the study.

Participants

The participants in this research were key staff responsible for implementing and maintaining the social software that their library uses. Staff from twelve libraries were purposefully selected to participate in this project because their libraries were already using social software. The technology librarian or the staff member in the most similar role was chosen as the person to approach to fill in a questionnaire on how and why social software was being used in a public library.

The participant selection process consisted of the following steps:

- A review of the literature identified libraries reported to be using social software.
- This was verified by checking individual library websites.
- A list of twelve public libraries in the United States and New Zealand that were making the highest use of social software (using more than one form of social software) was established.
- Each library on the list was contacted by phone in order to find the name and e-mail address of their technology librarian or similar role.

- A first, friendly short invitation to participate in the study was sent by e-mail to each of the twelve selected participants.
- Of the twelve, nine indicated that they wanted to know more about the project.
- A second, fuller information sheet was sent by e-mail to these nine respondents, explaining the study in detail and asking for their confirmed agreement to participate.
- Of these nine, seven agreed to participate in the study.
- A questionnaire consisting of ten questions regarding social software use was sent out by e-mail to each respondent who had agreed to participate.
- Of the seven questionnaires sent out, seven respondents sent back completed questionnaires.
- Of the seven respondents who replied, all did so very promptly, within a few days of receiving the first invitation e-mail.
- Each of the seven participants was sent a personalised thank you e-mail on completion of the questionnaire and a summary of results.

Data Collection

Data for this study was collected in the form of e-mail interviews. E-mail was chosen as a communication medium for reasons of practicality and low cost. As most of the desired participants were geographically distant (some in the United States and others in distant areas of New Zealand), the project would otherwise have become unviable due to travel costs.

Interviews were chosen as the method of collecting data because they allowed participants to provide historical information. In depth, open-ended questions were chosen for the interview questions because they encouraged the respondents to discuss their subjective perceptions of the impact of social software in their libraries. This type of

question was also chosen in order to provide the researcher with a rich source of information to use to develop an in-depth understanding of the situation.

The E-mail interview format provided some useful benefits to the researcher. E-mail was a cost efficient way of conducting in-depth interviews with participants who are physically distant. Also, e-mails are a textual form of communication – this eliminated the need for interview transcription. E-mail also gave the researcher the opportunity to solicit contributions from overseas library staff who would not otherwise have been able to participate.

Interview Questions

The specific qualitative data consisted of answers to interview questions, including: the participant's professional background and current position; when and why their library had first decided to implement participative software; the differences they saw between social software and more traditional online services; any implementation difficulties they had experienced and their view of the statement 'participative software has improved the ways that my library is providing services to users'. These questions were developed based on interview questions developed by Tran (2005) in her study of the diffusion of community information networks in New Zealand public libraries. This paper focusses on the data concerning participants' perceptions of the value and impact of participative software in their libraries.

Data Analysis

Content analysis was chosen as the method of analysing the data resulting from the interviews. This approach allowed the information to be broken down and analysed under different thematic headings. This enabled the researcher to bring coherence to the raw data and use it as evidence in an argument to draw conclusions as to how social software is being used in public libraries.

The content analysis method used in this study consisted of two stages. The first stage of content analysis involved a formal coding process. The second stage involved an analysis of all the seven responses question by question, drawing out trends and patterns in the different answers to the same question.

Validity and reliability

In order for research to be considered valid, its findings should be “accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant, or the readers of an account” (Creswell, 2003, p. 196, from Creswell and Miller, 2000). This study used the following strategies to help ensure validity:

- Use of a variety of data sources;
- Use of thick description to convey findings;
- Inclusion of information that runs counter to the argument;
- Clarification of the bias of the researcher.

Although reliability is not a major part of qualitative studies, this research did take steps to ensure reliability. Steps taken included making sure each respondent provided answers to exactly the same set of ten questions, and that the same methodology was used to gather all interview data.

Delimitations and limitations

The researcher chose to investigate the use of social software in public libraries only. A further delimitation to the study was the decision to define 'libraries which are currently experimenting with social software' as only those public libraries which had implemented two or more different examples of social software. One of the limitations of this project was the small sample size. This limited the generalisability of the research findings.

Results of the research

Although the small sample size limited the ability of the study to make claims about the impact of social software in the larger public library population, this does not diminish the value of the study. The respondents were all thinking deeply about the current and desired impact of social software use on their libraries, and they shared their thoughts and perceptions generously, providing a rich source of data from which several clear themes related to the impact of social software emerged. These themes were as follows:

- Creating communities around the library
- Reaching users where they are
- Attracting new users
- Opening the channels of communication
- Redressing the power imbalance
- Measuring usage
- Measuring value

Creating Communities around the Library

Three of the seven respondents felt that social software offered opportunities for libraries to strengthen their local community. One remarked that his/her library used the implementation of social software to help fulfil their mission as “a “gathering place” for the community”. Other participants saw the potential for social software to help build up communities around the library. As one participant observed:

It has the potential to create online communities of people who can share recommendations for books, advice on how to research their family history, review recent library events etc.

Another respondent commented that social software enabled library users to take an active role in this community building: “participative software allows patrons to create a community of library users”. Six of the seven participants made remarks about how social software enabled communication and sharing with others. One participant stated that “we saw value for patrons in being able to share their experience, expertise and opinions with library staff and with other patrons”.

Communication and sharing with others is one of the building blocks of a community. Tran (2006) defined a ‘physical community’ as “a group of people living in the same geographical area and/or having similar characteristics in terms of interests, culture, information needs and demands” (p. 11). Tran defines a virtual community as “groups of people who cooperate to share information resources and satisfy each others needs” (p. 11).

Only one participant specifically mentioned the virtual nature of the communities that social software builds, commenting that his/her library implemented social software in order to “facilitate and encourage interaction and participation on our website so that we can create an online community – particularly for our younger members”. This

participant was the only one who drew a distinction between virtual and physical communities. However, the intuition of another participant that social software could “break down some of the calcified segregation that exists in our community” derives from the special nature of virtual communities; they allow people to interact with those they may never have the opportunity to interact with in a physical environment. It is for this reason that some people feel online communities are what Maness (2006) refers to as “an egalitarian electronic space” (p. 140).

Reaching Users Where They Are

Four of the respondents felt that one of the benefits of social software was that it allowed people who are physically distant to become part of the library community. Three participants mentioned this explicitly, and one indicated it by drawing a distinction between ‘in-building’ and ‘on-line’ services. One remarked that s/he was “able to foster long distance relationships with patrons throughout the country”. Another commented that the implementation of social software had a positive impact on his/her relationship with users who were physically distant. This participant stated that the impact was “most noticeable in our Local and Family History department. They receive phone calls, blog comments, and IMs from just about everywhere”.

The ability to reach physically distant users was the most important advantage of social software for one respondent, who expressed the opinion that “the number one advantage is that we are reaching patrons where they are instead of forcing them to come into the physical building.” The literature also underlined these perceptions. As Balas (2007) observed:

We have long known the importance of designing the library to serve its community, but the community is no longer defined by the library’s geographic

location. We now must build an online community that users feel they belong to (Balas, 2007, p. 40).

Attracting New Users

The ability to reach users wherever they are geographically has the obvious benefit of attracting new users to the library service. Two participants mentioned the fact that social software use opens library services up to new potential users. As one noted: “We have been able to bring services and programs to individuals who otherwise would not be able to use them”. Although only two of the seven participants specifically pointed out that social software had helped them attract new users, several implied this through their comments. These participants implied that social software could attract users who did not feel comfortable using the physical library, as well as those who were unable to use the physical library due to barriers of distance or lack of mobility.

Opening the Channels of Communication

One of the often-cited characteristics of social software is that it enables virtual communication. Stephens (2006) included ‘social interaction’ in his list of the characteristics of social software, pointing out that it allowed people to “have conversations and create together” (p. 5). Most respondents felt that social software had indeed improved communication between users and library staff. One respondent cited “conversations happening in the comments and via email with the post writers”. Another commented that “now that an open dialogue channel is established, patrons and staff are not afraid to use it”.

Librarians writing about social software have been quick to see the potential of more open communication as a way to “harness our customer’s knowledge to supplement and

improve library services” (Casey and Savastinuk, 2006, p. 3). All of the participants in this study seemed to agree with this insight. As one participant stated, “all of this interaction leads us to better ways to provide our services.” Another expressed a similar sentiment, saying that social software was:

There to serve communication between the library staff and the public, who use both [more traditional on-line services and social software services] to express their wants to us.

One respondent also talked about how social software had opened up the range of options for users to express their needs and wants to staff:

There are customers who are quite happy to walk in to the library and tell us what they do and don’t like. But there are lots of others who don’t feel comfortable doing that in person. The participatory software gives them an option to participate online, anonymously if they choose, and be heard.

Another felt that the ability to communicate better with staff gave users a sense of ownership: “participative software allows patrons... to contribute to improving their library and gives them a sense of ownership of their library”.

Most participants were positive about the benefits that better communication between staff and users could bring to users, but one respondent did acknowledge that there was still much work to do to achieve this vision:

Although there is potential for greater collaborative use of our resources, and ‘two-way conversation’ between staff and patrons, we are in the early stages of providing participative on-line services, and they are not as practiced, effective and comfortable as our more traditional in-building customer service.

Redressing the power imbalance

The researcher asked respondents about their reasons for implementing social software, and what they hoped to achieve by doing this. Reasons included allowing users opinions

to be heard more clearly, creating more convenient services for users and fostering a sense of community and ownership in the library. All of these goals seemed to be very user focussed, and to share a theme of giving users more power to shape their libraries. Salo (2006) considered that allowing users to have more power over their library services gave users the sense that they were respected:

Offering users control and a sense of mastery, letting them carve out their own information landscapes individually and in groups, is a profoundly courteous and inviting design choice” (Salo, 2006, p. 4).

One participant directly discussed his/her hope that social software use could redress the power imbalance between librarian and user, describing the current relationship in the negative terms of the “supplicant/provider dichotomy that exists in most of our in-building and on-line services now”. This respondent felt that social software could go some way towards resolving this problem, but that it was not a magic solution: “even much of the participative software is malformed – IM reference for example”.

Another participant mentioned that when s/he began implementing social software; facilitating the new relationship between users and staff that this entails, some of their staff were hesitant to give up some of the traditional power associated with being the controllers of knowledge:

There was some hesitancy among staff to permit patrons to contribute content. Some felt it was the librarian’s sole domain to give information to users.

Social software, and online services in general, allow the user to interact with library staff in an online space that is more power-neutral than the traditional library desk. One of the respondents sent the researcher a photo of the traditional high reference desk, accompanied by the comment that this design could discourage users from approaching the librarian. This participant described social software use as one element in a broader strategy to change the power relationship between staff and users. S/he observed that

social software allowed library users to “interact with their library in their comfort zone rather than requiring them to come into ours”.

Measuring Usage

Talking about measuring the usage of social software is a difficult issue, as each separate tool has different possibilities for measuring use. Three of the seven respondents discussed the ways they measured usage of different social software tools and the other four interviewees talked about measurement in more general terms. The most commonly used method of measuring usage was by gathering usage statistics.

Social software tools that people commented on specifically were blogs, podcasts and IM. Three participants discussed measurements for blog usage; one respondent counted comments, one counted subscribers, and one used both methods. One participant noted that “comments on the blogs are the easiest way to measure use”. A participant using podcasts said s/he got “statistics from our ISP concerning how many times our MP3 podcasts were downloaded and vodcasts viewed.” Different methods of measuring IM use were mentioned, with one respondent “keeping a 30 day history of conversations” and another measuring “number of sessions”. One participant pointed out that his/her statistics were “skewed slightly because robots love to crawl blogs and wikis”. This remark raised one of the potential problems associated with measuring usage in an on-line environment.

Although no library relied on feedback alone to measure usage, three participants stated that feedback was good way to measure use. One respondent also remarked that “word of mouth is another way to measure. We will often have patrons come in and start their inquiry with “I saw on your blog that...” Another used “Statistics of usage and amount of feedback offered” to measure use, rather than looking at what was specifically said. One

participant who had very recently implemented social software felt that qualitative measures such as user feedback were a good way to measure use. The same participant mentioned that more qualitative methods are also good ways of measuring perceived value: “I feel we will assess more by qualitative measures the value and usage of our participatory applications”.

Although all respondents discussed how they measured use in the abstract, only two mentioned any conclusions they had drawn from their measurements. One participant remarked that download statistics from their podcast service indicated they had “been very successful”. However, another respondent was honest enough to say that “with the exception of our on-line newsletter, none of our metrics are significant”.

Measuring value

Two of the respondents talked about the issues associated with determining the value to users of implementing social software. One raised the problem of measuring value, mentioning that she/he felt it would be easier to evaluate by ‘qualitative measures’. One participant that commented directly on measuring value said that:

I don’t believe the content is there for us to be able to say we have improved services to users. We may, and I expect we will, but there are many steps to take before we achieve any significant results.

However, the same participant believes that “it is clearly worth the effort”.

Conclusions

This analysis found that respondents believed that implementing social software in their libraries would help them fulfil their mission and goals for the library service. These goals included providing a service relevant to the community, meeting community needs

for information and leisure, building communities around the library and keeping the library “relevant in the lives of our customers”. Rather than being a new idea that would radically change what they were doing, most participants saw social software as extending the current range of services they offered, and providing new ways to achieve familiar goals.

One conclusion this study came to is that social software is not being used to its fullest extent in public libraries. Although several participants mentioned that in theory social software had the potential to allow users to create their own content, this was not generally happening in practice. Social software is being used in libraries to enable participation, but this participation is limited to library discussion forums, comments on blogs and questions on IM, rather than to actually allowing users to create information content. Only one respondent mentioned that his/her catalogue had participative elements, and follow up revealed that although tagging was enabled, this was the closest they came to allowing users to contribute information.

This finding suggests that perhaps librarians’ desire to keep control of information is still widespread: one participant discussed the traditional librarian’s status as controller and gatekeeper of information, saying that some staff were unwilling to change their role as the sole mediators of information content. To be fair, the issue of control and authority over information is a problem that extends beyond libraries. However, the researcher suggests that public libraries need to address the broader issue of whether user-contributed content is desirable, and to what extent it should be encouraged.

One of the strongest and most consistent points made by respondents was that above all they aspired to deliver a library service that truly reflected their users’ wants and needs. They saw implementing social software as a way to achieve these goals. Comments made indicated they felt social software would help achieve these goals in two ways; by

implementing the social software itself and by making it easier for users to provide feedback. Respondents perceived that users wanted to have these social software tools available. They also hoped that, through the improved feedback cycles that social software enabled, users would be empowered to comment on all aspects of library service. Armed with the knowledge of what the community wanted, librarians could then build a library service based on this knowledge.

One participant's experience confirmed his/her belief that users wanted social software in their library. This respondent commented that:

We discovered that our interactive features were among the most heavily used and most frequently complimented offerings on our site. This has justified the efforts undertaken thus far and encouraged us to seek additional ways in which patrons could actively be involved when visiting our site.

Other participants confirmed the benefits of feedback. Although three acknowledged that "we are in the beginning stages", all of the respondents who were currently using social software (six of the seven) agreed that it was helping them develop better feedback cycles with users. They used terms such as 'two-way conversation', 'interaction' and 'communication' to express this concept. Three of these participants also commented that they could see evidence that social software was improving the relationship between users in general and the library. One point not brought up was that because some members of the population may be more skilled or interested in using social software than others, the library could find a sub-population bias in the levels of feedback it received.

As the results of this research project demonstrate, the relationship between library staff and library users is a complex one. One respondent used the term 'presence' to express his/her thoughts on what is at the core of this relationship. This participant described 'presence' as the moment of interaction between the user and a library staff member. The

researcher believes that this concept is a useful one to concentrate on when implementing social software, or indeed any kind of library service. As the respondent put it:

The most important element of all, affect (as we say, “Presence”) is an of-the-moment event, whether we speak of face-to-face services in the library, or participative services remotely, and we are far from having perfected that in on-line participative services. We will.

The quest to strike the perfect pitch in an interaction with a user is a difficult one, but what better goal to aim towards?

The seven participants in this study all identified the library user at the heart of the mission to implement social software. Although each public library service was tailored to serve its own community, all respondents shared the common goal of having a service that supplies their users’ needs. Improving the user/library feedback cycle is a crucial first step to truly make the service reflect user needs.

Findings from this project indicate that social software is being successfully used to improve feedback, and perhaps this is the best way for libraries to be using social software right now. Developing better relationships with users is the first step on the road to achieving the vision Maness (2006) sets out: “as communities change, libraries must not only change with them, they must allow users to change the library” (p. 140).

Word count 5 690

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