

Engaging Library Staff in Social Media Promotion: Practices and Experience by Dar al-Hikmah Library, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), Kuantan Campus

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Abstract

The power of social media fulfils the dynamics of communication to the public. Libraries are also taking advantage of social platforms now more than ever before. Social media promotion in libraries is a trend that ensures users get access to library content, anytime, anywhere. It is an effective platform to build good relationships between libraries and its users. As the process of creating content can be daunting and time-consuming, the Dar al-Hikmah Library, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), Kuantan has appointed staff to manage their social media platform. This article discusses the processes involved; the learning and training activities; the challenges; struggles; planning; and lessons learned from the activities to promote and market the library. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok are currently optimised by the staff to promote the library. Managing the social media platform is not an easy feat, however with determination, persistence, and teamwork, the staff are able to share ideas and enhance their creativity. Engaging the library staff in social media management helps to build their confidence and keeps their skills sharp and relevant in connecting with users. It also helps the library build a strong online presence, increase engagement with the community, and provide more personalised and effective services for its users.

Keywords: *Social media, library promotion, staff training, marketing, social content, communication.*

Introduction

Promotion and marketing are some of the techniques employed to share information about our products. As libraries, these skillsets are not to be taken lightly especially in the digital era. Library promotions are carried out to draw attention to what the library has to offer, and the fastest way to reach the library users is through social media. A study done by Howard et al (2018) found that social media is the choice of platform for the students to receive information and updates. The famous platforms often used are Facebook, Instagram, Twitter (now known as 'X'), YouTube, and TikTok.

Being able to produce good social media content is vital as it helps to create a connection with the library users. Libraries should engage in social media promotion as it is a good way to promote library services and resources, engage with their communities, receive feedback from their users, communicate information about their activities to the public, reach a wider audience beyond the library's physical location, and be an educational tool in providing information on online resources and searching skills (Anwar & Zhiwei, 2019; Harrison et al., 2017; Koulouris et al., 2021; Oyetola et al., 2023).

Dar al-Hikmah Library Kuantan (DaHLK), International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) is one of the organisations that needs the support of social media promotion. Using

social media is one of the strategies to support the library's mission to deliver quality information products, services, and programmes. DaHLK started utilising social media by blogging in 2008 however, the blog was not updated on a regular basis. DaHLK later moved on to Facebook in June 2010 but this too was not updated regularly. DaHLK started using Instagram in 2018, and while there were two librarians overseeing the account, there was no clear posting plan or schedule so it was not updated regularly either.

When COVID-19 swept the globe, Malaysia implemented a nationwide Movement Control Order (MCO). Various services were affected by the order, and libraries were one of the agencies in Malaysia that adapted well by adjusting and realigning their services and resources to fit the situation (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions [IFLA], 2020). When the pandemic occurred, DaHLK decided to engage with its library staff to better handle its Facebook and Instagram accounts since the library's services, many of which were physical, were of limited access to their users.

Through social media, DaHKL started sharing content that could be accessed remotely by library users. Online sharing sessions were organised using platforms such as Zoom and Facebook, and free access to databases and E-books were provided with the support of publishers and communicated to users through library social media. Since then, DaHLK has continued to embrace social media by utilising TikTok to create promotional videos and posting reels on Instagram to disseminate information about the library to its users.

Thus, DaHLK has employed strategies and best practices to include and engage staff in social media promotion to keep up with the library's social media use. This article endeavours to share the practices and experiences of DaHLK in engaging the staff in social media marketing and promotion of the library.

Background

Social media has become a crucial tool for libraries, but many libraries have trouble getting their personnel involved in social media promotion initiatives, which thus reduces their online visibility and efficacy (Manhas & Kaur, 2020). Kenchakkanavar (2015) highlighted that libraries that successfully engage their staff in social media promotion efforts can benefit from increased visibility and engagement with users, improved communication and collaboration among staff members, and a more personalised and engaging online presence.

Simons et al. (2016) discussed the function of social media in library marketing and promotion and their survey results indicate that social media can be a useful tool for libraries to attract new customers and advertise their services, but to be effective, they must adopt a planned strategy. The authors advised libraries to establish precise objectives and performance indicators for their social media initiatives and to involve staff from various departments in social media strategy and execution. Ahenkorah-Marfo et al. (2016) similarly discussed the lack of policy on social media and the skills needed for better social media interaction. Poor planning and management of library social media accounts are listed as a challenge in the utilisation of library social media in various articles (AlAwadhi & Al-Daihani, 2019; Daniel Oriogu et al., 2020; Duong, 2023). Based on the gaps identified such as the importance of a well-planned strategy, lack of policies, and necessary skills, it is imperative for DaHLK to develop a structured strategy for their staff to handle social media content effectively.

Additionally, it should address the skills and training required for staff members to engage with social media platforms efficiently.

The Hennepin County Library in Minnesota serves as an example of the successful use of social media to promote itself (Daugherty & Moran, 2007). According to the report, the library established clear policies and expectations for staff on social media use and involved employees from many departments in social media planning and execution. As a result, the library was able to advertise its services and programmes to the community.

Many articles highlighted the experiences in using social media as a promotional tool, but few discuss the framework or marketing practices put in place. Benn et al. (2013) conducted a survey among the world's top 100 universities and found that there were no documented strategies for social media, but some universities were in the process of developing it.

A survey was conducted by Ihejirika et al. (2021) to gauge the attitudes and perspectives of university library staff towards social media usage. In the survey, staff members found that social media can be a valuable tool for promoting libraries. However, many lacked the knowledge and confidence to utilise social media platforms effectively. To address these gaps, the authors recommended that libraries provide staff training and support.

Other studies have also highlighted the issue of the lack of skills and staff training, with similar suggestions of providing staff with adequate training to allow them to be able to deliver effective library service via social media (AlAwadhi & Al-Daihani, 2019; Anwar & Zhiwei, 2019; Daniel Oriogu et al., 2020; Friday et al., 2020; Kwaghga et al., 2019). Additionally, Duong (2023) listed the lack of supportive policies and guides in the use of social media, inadequate training, and lack of interesting content posted as some of the problems encountered by academic libraries in Vietnam.

The literature indicates that engaging library staff in social media promotion is an important issue for libraries to consider, and that they should take a strategic and collaborative approach to social media use. Providing staff training and support, developing clear guidelines and expectations, proper planning and execution, as well as creating a culture of social media engagement are all key strategies that libraries can use to effectively engage staff in social media promotion.

Practices and Strategies

Engaging staff in social media promotion provides numerous benefits to DaHLK. By working together, including both librarians and support staff, and using social media platforms effectively, the library can increase visibility, enhance reputation, and build stronger relationships with the community.

Previous studies show that the lack of planning and management of library social media accounts prove to be a challenge in the utilisation of library social media (AlAwadhi & Al-Daihani, 2019; Daniel Oriogu et al., 2020; Duong, 2023) while establishing clear policies and strategies can lead to the success of library promotion via social media (Daugherty & Moran

Jr. Robert F., 2007) The following section describes the practices and strategies carried out at DaHLK to engage staff in social media promotion and to aid them in its implementation.

Developing clear guidelines for staff members:

One of the most important practices at DaHLK is the development of clear guidelines for staff members. When it comes to promoting the library on social media platforms, it is essential that staff members understand the library's expectations and follow certain guidelines to ensure that the promotion process is effective and aligned with the library's goals. These guidelines specify on the content, hashtags, templates, formats, frequency, and identifies the staff responsible for the posts. Providing clear guidelines ensures consistency and coherence in social media posts. This approach helps to establish their reputation and enhance the overall image.

Annually revising the library social media guidelines:

In addition to clear guidelines, the DaHLK also revises the social media guidelines annually. The revisions are performed to keep up with the constantly evolving information landscape, social media platforms, and latest trends. The guidelines may be updated to change the content or frequency of the posts, to include new and popular platforms in the library's social media repertoire, or to update guidelines related to privacy or security issues. *Table 1* refers to a sample of the revision of themes in the social media guidelines.

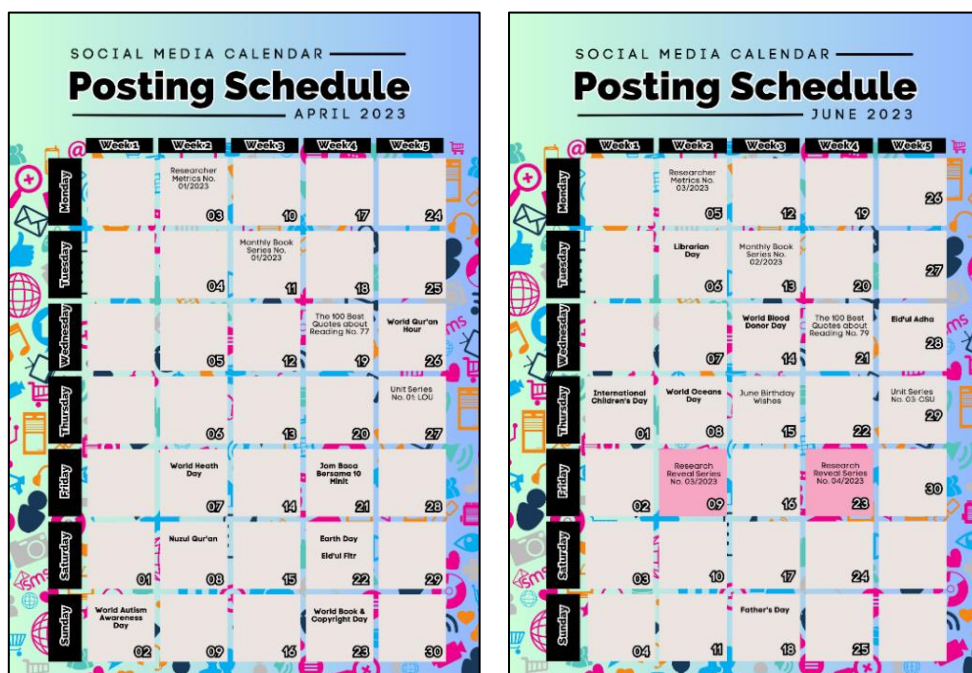
Table 1: *Social Media Post Themes for the Years 2021, 2022 and 2023*

2021	2022	2023
Positive Vibes	Qur'an of the Day	100 Best Quotes about Reading
Library Stories	Hadith of the Day	Monthly Book Series
Book Excerpt	IIUM Kuantan Facts	Birthday Wishes
IIUM Membaca	Know Your Researcher	Researcher Metrics @IIUM Kuantan Campus
Pahang Facts	Research of the Month	Research Reveal Series

Establishing a social media content calendar:

DaHLK also established a content calendar or social media calendar that outlines the library's social media activities for the year (*Figure 1*). This calendar includes a schedule of the types of content that will be shared and the frequency of posting as specified in the guidelines. The calendar is used as a tool to keep the promotional activities organised and on track, allowing us to prepare content in advance. Furthermore, it ensures that staff members responsible for uploading content to social media are aware of the posting dates and can schedule their posts. This approach has helped us to maintain a steady and engaging social media presence that keeps our community informed and connected with the library.

Figure 1: Sample of Social Media Calendar



Providing staff with training and resources:

Internal training and sharing sessions are planned and have been implemented to ensure that all staff members are equipped to create effective and engaging content for social media posts. Providing staff members with relevant training and resources is crucial in ensuring that our social media promotion efforts are successful (Anwar & Zhiwei, 2019; Chakrabarti, 2016). Since most of the staff members do not have qualifications or certifications in social media marketing or content creation, DaHLK has sent them to external workshops and training sessions to provide them with the necessary skills, competency and knowledge. *Table 2* and *Figure 2* refer to the training sessions attended by DaHLK staff.

Table 2: Sample of Training Attended by DaHLK Staff

No	Description
1	Training on How to Use Canva
2	Visual Hierarchy in Design
3	Basic IG Reels and TikTok Content
4	Sharing Session on Mobilegraphy
5	Bengkel Edit Video Menggunakan Smartphone
6	Kursus Rekabentuk Poster
7	Bengkel Asas Mobilegraphy

Figure 2: Sample of Social Media Training Attended by DaHLK Staff

KURSUS	TARIKH	YURAN
PROSES INSTRUMENTATION & CALIBRATION	10-14/03/2021	RM40
KURSUS ASAS ADOBE INDESIGN	4/3/2021	RM10
KURSUS SILK SCREEN	4/3/2021	RM10
ASAS MS POWER POINT	16/3/2021	RM10
ASAS PENDAWAIAN LAMPU	20/3/2021	RM10
ARDIUNO FOR BEGINNERS	29-30/03/2021	RM160
JAHITAN JUBAH MODEN	21-22/3/2021	RM80
ARDIUNO FOR BEGINNERS	21-22/3/2021	RM160
KURSUS JAHITAN FELT	21/3/2021	RM40
KURSUS MOBILE VIDEOGRAPHY	22 & 23/3/2021	RM150
PENGGUNAAN APLIKASI GOOGLE DRIVE	28/3/2021	RM10
KURSUS ADOBE PHOTOSHOP	28/3/2021	RM40
KURSUS ASAS PERISIAN ADOBE ILLUSTRATOR	29/3/2021	RM10
KURSUS REKABENTUK POSTER	31/3/2020	RM10

Encouraging staff to take ownership of their personal development:

Apart from the workshops and training provided by the library management, it is inspiring to see our staff members take ownership of their own learning and development in social media promotion. Through various online resources, our staff members have learned how to create engaging posters, videos, and other forms of content for social media. Our staff experimented with different tools and platforms such as Canva, Capcut, Inshot, Kinemaster, Wondershare Filmora, and Adobe Photoshop. This self-directed learning has not only helped our staff members to develop new skills and knowledge, but it has also fostered a culture of continuous learning and improvement within our library. The creativity and ingenuity of our staff members in their self-directed learning has resulted in impressive and engaging social media content.

Encouraging staff to create a variety of multimedia and visual content:

Another practice that our library has implemented is encouraging staff members to use multimedia and visual content, such as images, videos, and infographics when preparing social media content. By incorporating these elements into our posts, we can convey information more effectively and create a more engaging experience for our audience, as discovered by Joo et al. (2018). Recognising the growing popularity of video content, we have also incorporated reels into our social media strategy to highlight the different library services we offer.

Our 'Know Your Researchers' social media posts (Figure 3) have emerged as one of our most successful initiatives, aiming to highlight the achievements and contributions of our researchers. By showcasing their total publications in Scopus and IJUM Repository, these posts were positively received by our academicians. They appreciate its effectiveness in demonstrating the expertise within our institution. We have recently rebranded the posts as 'Researcher Metrics @ IJUM Kuantan Campus', with the quantitative aspects of our researchers' accomplishments.

Figure 3: Sample Posters of 'Know Your Researchers' and 'Researcher Metrics @ IIUM Kuantan Campus'



To summarise, DaHLK has implemented six practices to engage staff in social media promotion. These include developing clear guidelines, revising the social media guidelines annually, establishing a content calendar, providing staff with training and resources, encouraging staff to take ownership of their own learning and development, and using multimedia and visual content to enhance social media posts. The practices and strategies employed by the library are in line with suggestions found in the literature, particularly in terms of involving diverse staff in social media implementation (Simons et al., 2016) and providing the appropriate training to better equip staff in their social media interaction and content creation (AlAwadhi & Al-Daihani, 2019; Anwar & Zhiwei, 2019; Daniel Oriogu et al., 2020; Friday et al., 2020; Ihejirika et al., 2021; Kwaghga et al., 2019).

Experiences: Impact and Challenges

Using social media effectively as a tool to enhance market presence and engage users necessitates the implementation of a well-developed and strategically positioned plan (Chen & Divall, 2018). The strategies employed to engage library staff in social media promotion at DaHLK have substantially impacted various aspects of our social media practices. These effects are not only evident in the growth of our online community, but also in the enhancement of user satisfaction and the overall effectiveness of our library’s social media engagement efforts.

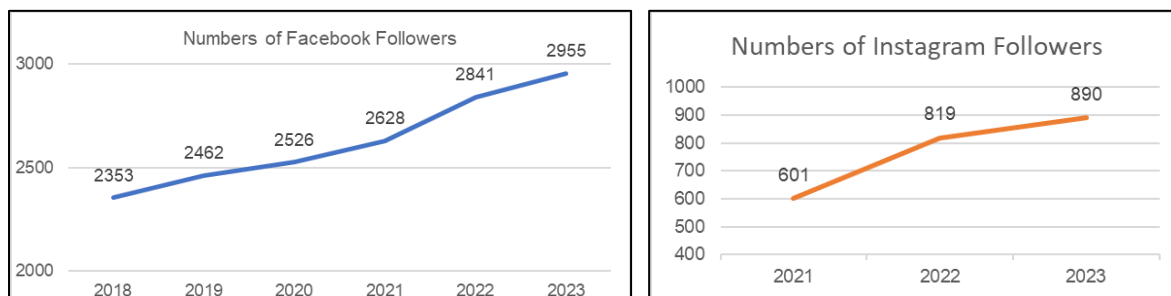
Impact on the social media content creation and posting process:

The decision to periodically revise our social media guidelines has instrumental to staying relevant. For instance, adjustments may be necessary to alter the content and posting frequency, accommodate newly emerged topics that gain popularity, or address evolving concerns related to privacy and security. Secondly, the practice of annual guideline revisions by monitoring our social media performance gives us the opportunity to identify areas for improvement to meet our objectives. Lastly, the annual revision process plays a critical role in keeping all staff members informed about the most current policies and procedures. This practice fosters a culture of shared responsibility and accountability, ensuring that our entire team is well-versed in the latest guidelines.

Impact on social media metrics:

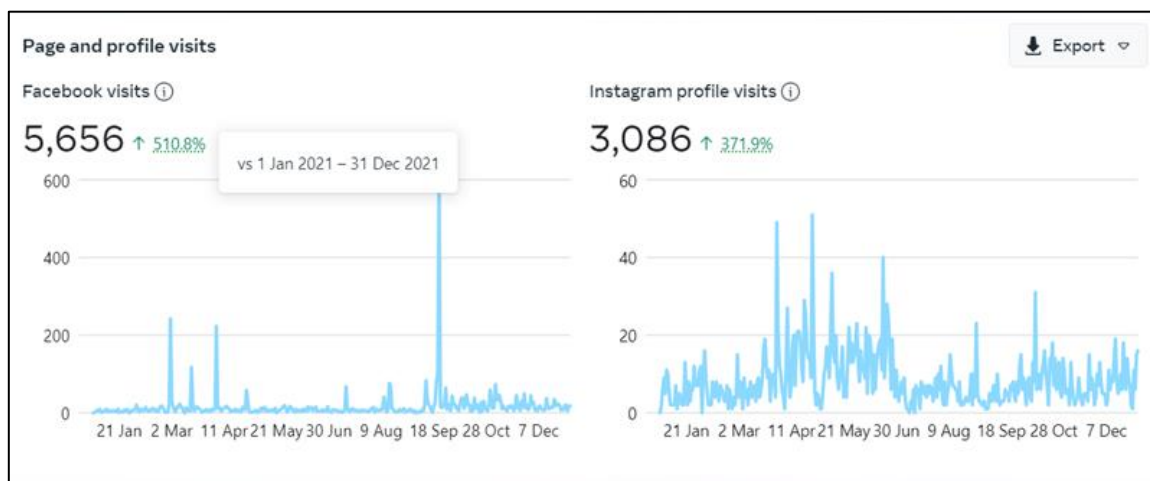
The implemented strategies have resulted in significant advancements in our social media performance metrics. Notably, our Facebook followers count has experienced steady and substantial growth, rising from 2,353 in 2018 to 2,955 followers in 2023. Our Instagram followers count has also seen an increase, growing from 601 followers in 2021 to 890 followers as of September 3, 2023. This increase in followers underscores the expanding reach and influence of our online community, a trend visually represented in *Figure 4*.

Figure 4: DaHLK's Facebook & Instagram Followers Statistics from 2021 to 3rd September 2023



In terms of reach metrics, we have observed substantial increases in page and profile visits on both Facebook and Instagram after reviewing and applying new social media strategies. Specifically, our Facebook visits in 2022 have surged by an impressive 510.8%, while our Instagram visits have seen a remarkable growth of 371.9% compared to the figures recorded in 2021 (*Figure 5*).

Figure 5: DaHLK's Facebook and Instagram Page and Profile Visits Statistics in Year 2022



The cumulative social media reach has witnessed a notable increase of up to 100% from 2021 to 2023 (*Figure 6*), a clear indicator of our heightened online visibility. Our new page likes and follows statistics have exhibited a 100% increase from 2021 to 2023 (*Figure 7*), highlighting the growing interest and engagement in our social media content.

Figure 6: DaHLK's Facebook and Instagram Reach Statistics from 2021 to 3rd September 2023

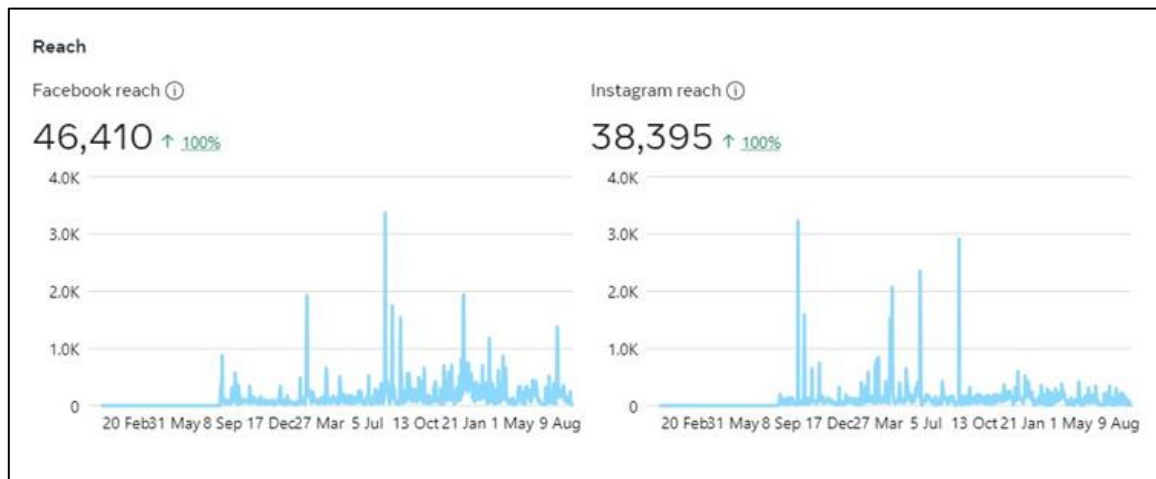
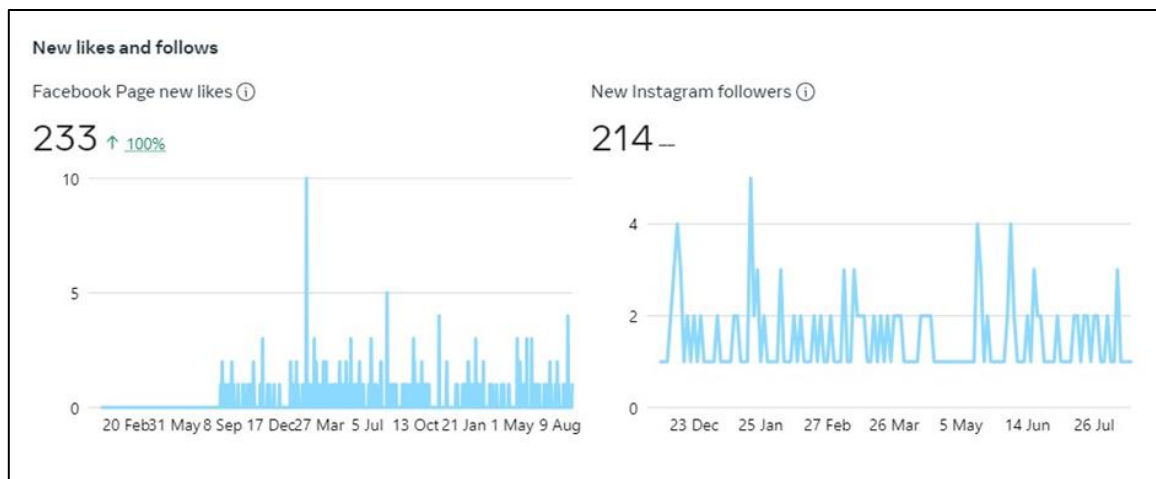


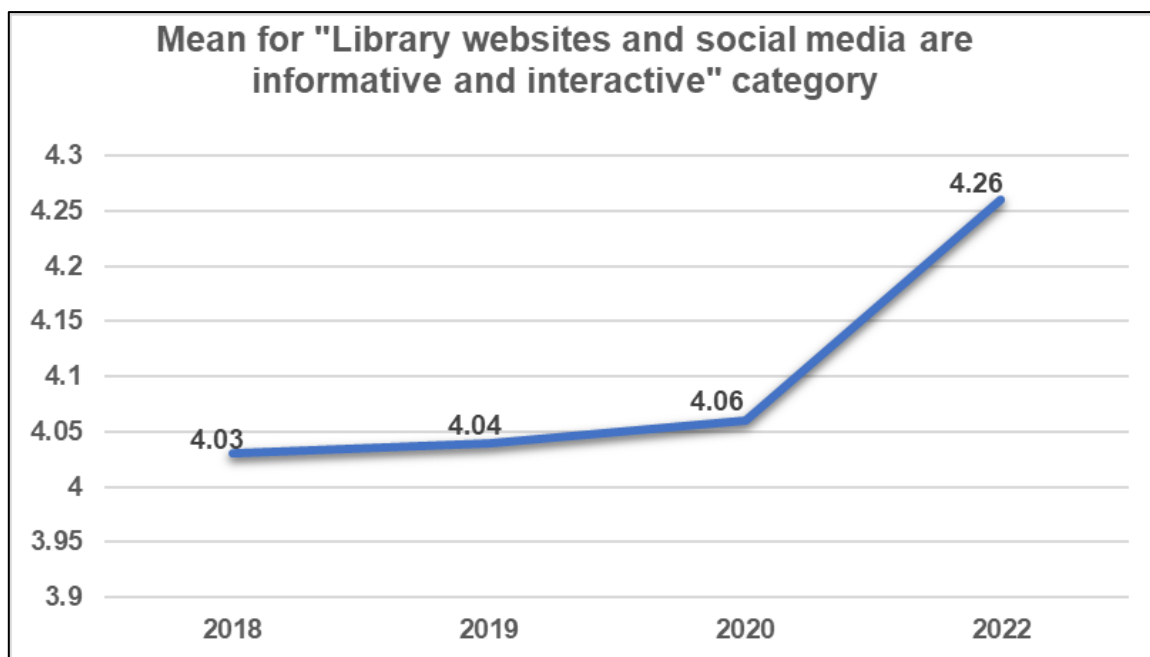
Figure 7: DaHLK's Facebook and Instagram New Like and Follows Statistics from 2021 to 3rd September 2023



Impact on customer satisfaction:

To assess the effectiveness of these strategies, we administered customer satisfaction surveys. Our Customer Satisfaction Survey shows an increase in the mean satisfaction rating for the category "Library websites and social media are informative and interactive" from 4.06 in 2020 to 4.26 in 2022 (Figure 8).

Figure 8: DaHLK's Satisfaction Rating for the Category "Library websites and social media are informative and interactive" from 2018 to 2022 (International Islamic University Malaysia, 2023)



The rise in the mean satisfaction rating implies that the strategies employed by the library to engage staff in social media promotion have led to enhancements in the quality of content featured on library websites and social media platforms. For a more comprehensive understanding, it is imperative to conduct a deeper exploration of the specific strategies implemented and their direct impact on staff involvement and content creation. This could involve interviews or surveys with staff engaged in social media promotion to gain insights into their experiences and contributions.

Furthermore, ongoing monitoring and analysis of user feedback and satisfaction levels are essential to ensure the sustainability of this positive trend. It will also facilitate the continuous improvement of these strategies, aligning them even more closely with user expectations.

Impact on staff: Feedback on the training provided:

DaHLK staff's feedback on the internal training provided for social media processes was evaluated to gauge the effectiveness of these training programmes. This evaluation pertains exclusively to internal training sessions and does not encompass any external training that staff may have attended. There have been four internal training programmes related to social media promotion since 2022.

Based on the data presented in *Figure 9*, it is evident that all staff members have agreed that the training provided has positively impacted their job performance. They have selected the "very good" and "excellent" options, indicating a high level of satisfaction and perceived effectiveness of the training programmes.

Figure 9: Staff Feedback on the Internal Trainings Provided by DaHLK



To further validate the effectiveness of these training programmes, it would be beneficial to gather qualitative feedback from staff members. Open-ended questions or surveys that allow staff to provide specific examples of how the training has benefited them in their social media roles could provide valuable insights into the practical impact of these initiatives.

Overall, the above impacts show that putting in place practices and strategies to engage and support staff in social media promotion yields positive results in terms of the library’s reach and user satisfaction of the library’s services, which is in agreement with Kenchakkanavar (2015) and Simons et al. (2016).

Challenges

Despite the successes, the library has also faced obstacles in implementing social media promotion. One of the initial challenges encountered was the skill level of our staff in creating visually appealing posters and editing videos. However, through training and continuous practice, our staff members have developed their design and editing skills over time and have become proficient in producing visually attractive content that resonates with our audience.

Another obstacle we faced was a lack of resources and equipment to support the social media content creation process. To overcome this challenge, we explored alternative solutions such as borrowing equipment from staff or from any relevant offices in the campus and utilising free online tools. However, improving the infrastructure and equipment needed for more efficient work should remain a priority for the library.

Another challenge that we faced was finding the right balance between promotional content and engaging, informative posts that provide value to our followers. To overcome this, we carefully curated content that appealed to the interests and needs of our audience.

As a library with limited staff strength, we initially faced challenges in devoting adequate time and personnel to manage an active and captivating social media presence.

Nevertheless, by recognising social media as a crucial communication channel and incorporating it into our library's overall marketing strategy, we were able to optimise our social media management processes. We accomplished this by fostering the active participation of all units within our library in social media promotion, rather than relying solely on librarians and one unit. The inclusion of many library support staff has significantly contributed to our ability to sustain a consistent and engaging social media presence.

Conclusion

In conclusion, libraries can establish effective connections with their communities by involving their staff in social media promotion. The trend of social media promotion in libraries is growing, and the Dar al Hikmah Library in Kuantan is an example of how libraries can effectively manage their social media platforms based on revising and updating one's practices and developing and motivating the team's capabilities. Engaging staff to handle social media helps build their confidence, keeps their skills sharp, and helps them stay relevant in connecting with their users and their changing needs and expectations.

Overall, social media promotion in libraries is a valuable strategy for fostering good relationships with users and improving library services in this digital era. Implementing social media audit could also help the library in identifying the gaps. This paper focussed primarily on the practices and experiences by DaHLK. Certain relevant factors or sub-topics related to engaging the library staff in social media promotion were not fully explored. Future survey could consider a mixed method approach such as focussed group interviews on social media or audiences' perceptions on the content for a more comprehensive perspective.

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