Current Digital Marketing Landscape in Libraries

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Abstract:

Social media has taken a central role in most libraries' marketing strategies. Not surprisingly, many libraries manage multiple social media accounts in addition to traditional marketing channels. However, not many libraries have developed a strategic digital marketing strategy that synthesizes areas such as video marketing, email marketing, search engine optimization (SEO), mobile marketing, and even outreach through traditional marketing channels. These additional digital marketing channels are equally as important as social media, yet play different roles in attracting, retaining, and engaging users. As users spend an increasing amount of time searching online, it is essential for them to identify the right library resources in a search engine, find the right event in their email and social media, and develop a sense of loyalty through valuable content generated in videos and blogs. Planning for channel overlap as well as users that a campaign may have missed is an essential part of this strategy. This paper provides an overview of the multi-channel digital marketing landscape and its application in libraries. Twitter activity from 113 Association of Research Libraries member libraries is analyzed, showing the impact of multi-channel marketing strategies.

Keywords: digital marketing, SEO, video, content marketing, social media

What is digital marketing?

Digital marketing is an increasingly important extension of traditional marketing. In the same vein as traditional marketing, digital marketing creates unique experiences for customers to build trust in the brand and eventually convert the trust into action. E-retailers are at the front line of implementing digital marketing strategies by utilizing cutting-edge technologies. Non-profit organizations such as libraries are also striving to engage users beyond the physical space. The scope of digital marketing is very broad, and this article is intended to focus on the following seven areas: websites, SEO, social media, email, videos, mobile and content marketing. Despite the tech-heavy jargon, digital marketing is primarily about how marketers use the technology to build relationships. Regardless of the type of organization, the goal of

digital marketing is to leverage the technology to connect customers with the brand and cultivate long-term loyalty.

What does digital marketing mean for libraries?

Despite the advantages of convenience, scale, and cost, marketing in the digital realm boils down to meeting users where they are. Libraries work with distant users, job seekers, potential donors, alumni, friends of the library, etc. who all interact with the library in ways that may not be fully customized to meet their needs. For many library users, they start their information seeking process by searching in their favorite search engine. If they bookmark or remember to go to the library website, that's a great beginning. If not, very likely, they click on one of the top links on the search engine result page (SERG). In that case, libraries may lose them to Wikipedia, Amazon, or websites to which they are accustomed for accessing information. Perform a simple observation project of your users and see how many of them have had the habit of finding books through Amazon, streaming music through Spotify and finding a specific news article from a national or local news website. Depending on the age, education level, location, you will not be surprised to find out a lot of your users are not thinking about the library as a first stop in their search. To change that mindset, digital marketing can help and should be included in the libraries' overall strategic plan. Connecting your digital users with your online resources and services requires the library decision makers to create a cohesive user experience online, just like when the physical library needs to be renovated to meet current needs.

Online users, as identified by Jupiter Research, "are increasingly comfortable with the medium, want it all and now, are in control, are fickle and vocal" (Ryan and Jones 29). For libraries, these traits require the experience of using online collections and services to be speedy and intuitive. Even if users encounter any barriers, a help point should be there for them, be it a chat widget, search box, tutorial videos, or calling or emailing a librarian.

Digital marketing starts with a strategy based on your customers' needs. Your organization has a mission, a vision, and perhaps strategic goals. All levels of the library's marketing strategy should align with these broader initiatives. If you have a marketing specialist or an outreach librarian, the first step is to outline the future marketing strategies. The goal of creating a strategy is to coordinate and focus efforts that will increase users' engagement and satisfaction. Once you have a clear goal, the next step is to look at the following areas, if applicable, and define a more detailed plan accordingly. Different from for-profit organizations which intend to drive sales, the goal of most libraries is to increase the libraries' impact on people's lives. By measuring online marketing efforts, library marketers are able to document and prove the libraries' value, thus securing buy-in from a range of stakeholders.

Websites

Most libraries have a URL, but not all libraries treat the website the same as their physical space. A large portion of the library budget goes to the physical space. However, ignoring the maintenance and improvement of the website will result in lower user satisfaction and engagement, thus leading to even lower physical space visits eventually. The rationale is simple: your users are online anytime and anywhere now and before your users set foot in the physical space, your library's virtual appearance determines their future engagement with the entire organization.

In the context of digital marketing, the website serves as a hub to drive your potential users and engage current users. It is so essential that this area deserves to have specialized personnel and resources for ongoing support. Important as the physical space, this online real estate is in your control in terms of how you design for conversion. As Goldsmith and Fonseca state, "library websites, like commercial sites, need to be both engaging and intuitive, and as such should be based on a user-centered design" (30). Undoubtedly, all libraries intend to design the website to reflect the library and the institution's mission statement. Besides providing access to digital collections, easy navigation to key services, teaching objects from information literacy professionals, and many more, marketing can increase all of these initiatives and enhance the value of the library to all your stakeholders.

The design is more than the graphic presentation of the website, it's how the color, shape, structure, and even the tone of messages gives an overall impression to users. If your library has full control of the design, lay a solid foundation by working with a team of graphic designers, programmers, marketers, information architects, and of course users. If the website structure is in the hands of a parent organization, maximize the space you have and follow the same method mentioned as above. Additionally, the website is more than the homepage, which is usually the number one landing page. The design should encompass all subpages, outsourced web sites such as the discovery search engine, databases, etc. All sites should deliver a unified voice, since users can't always distinguish between different sources of content. The ultimate goal is to convert users' impressions to the next action and reinforce their positive relationship with the library, thus cultivating long-term loyalty.

Two ever-important keywords for a user-friendly website are usability and accessibility. Usability is "a measure of how effectively visitors are able to use a website" ("Website Usability"). Despite the users' intentions, all should be treated equally and given the best user experience. That optimal user experience would mean an engineering student looking for a 20-year-old conference proceeding online has the same pleasant experience as a music teacher trying to download scores. One way to increase the usability is to eliminate broken links and reduce steps to users' target page. That way, the bounce rate, the percentage of visitors that leave the website without viewing other pages, will drop, and 40% and below is considered successful, generally speaking ("What's a Low Bounce Rate…"). Accessibility is getting more attention nowadays. Just as library facilities managers strive to ensure accessibility for people with different physical, emotional, mental needs, so should the website decision makers. The best practice is to check with the government regulations and run accessibility tests on a regular basis. Educate marketers as well as all content contributors about international best practices as defined by the W3C (https://www.w3.org/standards/webdesign/accessibility).

SEO

With every passing day, more library users filter their world through the lens of a major search engine. As of April 2018, Google processed 11.3 billion queries, while Oath (formerly Yahoo) processed 2.03 billion search queries (comScore). Very possibly, your users start their search journey with one of the four leading search engines: Google sites, Microsoft sites, Oath, and Ask Network. Recently, small scale and privacy friendly engines such as DuckDuckGo are gaining mainstream credibility too. At the same time, many information seeking behavior studies showed people with different ages have unique habits (Sanchiz, et al.). This is a great opportunity for libraries. Your website has great content like expensive ebooks and databases, but if the site is ranked low in the SERG, very few users will be directed to your website. It's also not about just attracting people to your homepage. All the images, texts, links and

documents should also be visible in search engines so the overall ranking of your website will be high.

To rank high and grow organically in the SERG, it is required the library has a plan and budget. It is understandable library staff are not familiar with this new skill. So, if possible, outsource to a reliable expert or train your marketing staff to be proficient. It is a significant investment in time, from weeks to months before seeing the improvement in results. Be aware of black-hat SEO, meaning "deceptive and underhand techniques used to scale up to higher rankings in search results (Shenoy and Prabhu 1). Instead, focus on the white-hat SEO to use ethical tactics. Your goal is to prove to search engines that your sites are authoritative and reliable. Another marketing goal is to promote awareness of your website, especially branch libraries and pages lower in your organization's structure which users may not be aware of.

As the SEO community expands, there are some universally practical methods to optimizing websites. No one can claim they know the secret of ranking as search engines constantly change their algorithms behind the scenes. Take Google for example. The search engine rewards sites which fit their 200+ algorithms and five categories of algorithms are penguin, panda, pigeon, hummingbird and mobile algorithm. These "animals" examine different areas of the website, from number and quality of links, website content, local impact, and mobile friendliness.

SEO and website quality are closely related, so improvements to website usability will often result in improved search ranking. Editing applications such as Adobe AEM and WordPress have built-in SEO features, but it is still a good idea to check all historical sites to make sure they can be crawled easily. If possible, avoid flash, JavaScript navigation, frames, image maps and other non-text navigation since search engines will have a hard time identifying the content (Hui et al. 932). Many resources talk about the importance of keywords. Different from retailers, libraries tend not to compete with each other for users, but the search engines are still a battlefield for promoting the library as a brand. To learn more about choosing effective keywords in order to generate awareness, there are many tools available or simply use Google AdWords.

Social media

The booming of social media marketing is largely due to the immense growth in the number of social media users. Globally, there were 2.46 billion social media users in 2017 and it is expected to reach to 2.77 billion in 2019 (eMarkerter). In the United States for example, seven out of ten Americans used social media as of February 2018 (Anderson and Jiang). The technology enables brands to reach out and engage customers online as well as to track and measure users in real time. Some organizations are even able to hire full-time social media specialists because they realize the value of increasing brand awareness and cultivating long term loyalty.

Social media tools are diverse, though many libraries have yet to move beyond Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat. The decision to manage each tool requires very different strategies. Facebook continues to dominate the overall landscape, yet, it continues to lose popularity among teenagers, replaced by Snapchat and YouTube (Anderson and Jiang). Media sharing sites such as Pinterest, Instagram and Vimeo require a lot of image and video editing work, so unless the library is fortunate enough to have media specialists to work with marketers, engagement with these channels may be limited due to technological constraints. Other types of media such as podcasts, blogs, and wikis cater to people with different

accessibility needs. Generally, it's an exciting and sophisticated world to be in and great potential exists for growth, particularly outside the better-known social media apps.

Since many libraries are present on social media, the next essential topic is how well they are doing. Just as gate counts, circulation numbers and sessions of workshops don't tell library stories effectively, simply presenting the number of impressions, posts, and followers is not enough. It's about the impact and it means engagement and driving users to take actions in social media. To access the engagement data, many social media themselves often provide it within the platform. Libraries should track the engagement data including but not limited to numbers of favorites, sharing, comments and hashtag clicks. Since social media ties closely with the website, SEO, email and other marketing efforts, treat social media evaluation as one piece of the full picture, rather than a silo. It also takes time to grow users and engagement organically, especially since the library often has no spare budget for online advertising. Externally, libraries should share and collect data from their peers regarding their engagement on a regular basis, ensuring user privacy is not compromised in the process. Some organizations try to have a directory of social media such as the New Jersey Library Association.

Looking forward, libraries should continue to invest in social media marketing. The learning curve for marketers exists, and the number one barrier is to reach out to users first. Just because there are active social media users out there, it does not mean they are aware of, following, and engaging with libraries online. The reality is the opposite. There is a gap in terms of what social media users use, how they perceive libraries online, what messages to communicate and so forth (Jones and Harvey 4). Libraries are still at the beginning stage of using social media, and a lot of efforts are focused on posting rather than interacting. Having social media policies really helps, especially if your library is within an organization such as a university. Tufts University clearly states their social media policies online and any new hired marketers will learn it as the first step ("Communication and Marketing"). Follow such policies closely as you run social media on behalf of your organization.

Email

Email marketing is prevalent and so are email service providers (ESPs). It's an area of digital marketing many brands choose to outsource due to the nature of work behind it: designing, mass targeting, measurement, and so on. In the library's context, marketers intend to use emails to promote the library's brand, services, new collections and hopefully customers will click within the email for the next action such as attending a workshop or downloading an ebook. The non-for-profit motivation of libraries determines that goals of email marketing are different from retailers, that is, to increase library's recognition and engagement, or intimacy as Ayyadurai and Michelson call it (141). When used right, email marketing is very powerful and cost effective. Be careful, though, to avoid becoming just one more message marked as 'spam' by giving users options to opt out of certain emails or unsubscribe altogether.

If the library explores an ESP, make sure you find a reliable one and integrate the voice of the library in each email. In reality, not many libraries use ESPs for marketing, instead, relying on the employees of the library. The design of the email should be inviting, and the key is relevance, which determines whether the users will like to continue to receive emails. Relevant emails empower users to stay in touch with the brand (Hartemo 213). To improve the service, marketers need to measure the engagement on a regular basis. Common behavioral metrics include: click-through rate (CTR), open rate, unique CTR, unique open rate, unsubscribe rate, and bounce rate. Retail emails have an average 1.6% CTR (Goodfellow), and so far, there is

no data for the library community. Using a mix of metrics will give a holistic picture of whether your campaign or the general outreach is working. You can tell from the data whether your users are engaging with content or if technical issues might be preventing users from viewing all content. For example, you may have encountered a situation when your browser doesn't load the email appropriately, causing users to abandon it within five seconds. Without the data, it is hard for library marketers to know if their emails were received and/or viewed. Before choosing an ESP and data analysis tool set, consult with the organization's IT department for approval and guidance.

Videos

You know video marketing is effective when even gas stations and taxis have a tiny screen with short but attention-grabbing videos for customers. The booming of YouTube has made many new celebrities and driven sales for individuals and brands around the world. The reason behind this is simple: people love watching videos on various devices. Take the United Kingdom (UK) for example. The population of the UK was 65.65 million in 2016, while the digital video viewers were 41.3 million, or 63% of the population (IMF and eMarketer). According to wyzowl's, an online video service company, survey of 311 marketing professionals and consumers, 63% of businesses are currently utilizing video as a marketing tool ("Video Marketing Statistics 2017"). Among those businesses, a vast majority of them feel positive about having videos in their marketing strategy, as well as positive about the return on investment. Additionally, the cost to produce high quality videos is drastically down, giving more opportunities for small businesses, including libraries, to reach out to users online. Currently, live streams and on-demand video are getting popular, despite their requirement for technical support and content management.

For libraries, video marketing should gradually be an important marketing initiative, utilizing multiple platforms for engagement such as the website, social media, and organization-based streaming platforms. Library marketers and/or the media team need to master video editing skills, cinematography, publishing, and most importantly, spend time on brainstorming ideas. Some services can be outsourced, but if not, start with feasible projects. It's not too late to join video marketing, and the key is to keep up with changes because the landscape is changing rapidly.

Just as in all marketing, content is the king and relevance is the queen. It is a more time-consuming project than creating a marketing email, but the impact can be extensive. A quick scan of videos shows libraries published videos about tours, skill or knowledge-based tutorials, as well as testimonials from users and library workers. There is certainly more we can do to expand such as thought-leader interviews, project reviews, case studies, webinars, vlogs. Comply with the government's usability and accessibility regulations, making sure all videos are accessible for different users. If the budget is limited, start small, with mobile devices or just laptops (Hoagland-Smith).

When the content is ready, the next big question to ask is if the right audience will watch it. Answering this question requires considerations related to the publishing platforms as well as technological barriers. For the publishing platform, many people by default think about YouTube. YouTube enjoys the biggest share of the online video market. Owned by Google, the search engine also favors content from YouTube over other media websites. The downside of relying solely on YouTube is the limited access. Not every country permits access to YouTube and not all countries have access to fast internet service. As Google claims, they

cannot provide high quality videos alone, and other factors that contribute to a successful viewing experience include the internet speed, the WIFI setup, connected devices, and so on ("Video Quality Report"). Think locally, whether your library can host videos in the cloud and whether they are searchable by major search engines (back to the topic of SEO). Other popular publishing websites include Vimeo and on social media directly.

Mobile

Now we can safely say every year is the "year of mobile". eMarketer estimates that "mobile phones will be the primary device for internet access, used by 2.73 billion people, or 78.9% of internet users" ("Worldwide Internet…"). Among those people, 87.4% would use smartphones to access the internet. It doesn't mean people will abandon desktops. Rather, users will be constantly in a multi-device ecosystem, jumping from one device to another or using various devices simultaneously depending on the nature of their work. The top two characteristics of mobile users are: on the go and information cruising. Knowing that, the key for digital marketing is to know their location and provide simple but engaging information. According to eMarketer, the budget for mobile marketing in retailing will be twice as that of TV marketing in 2019, though the former didn't enjoy the same treatment even three years ago ("Worldwide Internet…"). The scope of mobile marketing is broad and a lot of attention is on customized mobile advertising.

Mobile advertising is not currently the key business in many libraries. Instead, designing a mobile user-friendly application and website are on many libraries' agenda. Many have an application and the team behind works hard on the usability and accessibility (Fung 581; ChanLin 636). It is understandable if the organization is limited in resources, budget and personnel. Hence, it is recommended marketers review mobile users' behaviors, if measurable and trackable, then increase marketing efforts in other areas such as email reminders, social media alerts, and even videos. For example, the North Carolina Digital Library mobile application allows parents to filter results to only juvenile or young adult collections by setting up the application differently for different users ("NC Digital Library…").

Mobile marketing deals with users' data 24/7, so it's imperative for marketers and IT specialists to understand how to protect users' privacy. It is recommended that marketers disclose the terms of any offer as clearly as possible, the more transparent the information, the more likely users will be willing to accept the service (Gu, et al. 19) Lastly, make sure users are allowed to opt out for any mobile marketing efforts, just as they have the same right for other marketing strategies.

Content marketing

Content marketing is not a new trend. On the contrary, it has existed for over a century before the digital age. The famous Michelin restaurant guide is produced by the tire company, which became a top guide for gourmets. What is content marketing anyway? Although no universal definition has been agreed upon, we can see it through an emerging lens. "Content marketing is the marketing and business process for creating and distributing relevant and valuable content to attract, acquire, and engage a clearly defined and understood target audience - with the objective of driving profitable customer action" ("What is Content Marketing"). The more people use the content online, no matter from social media, email, and the brand application, the social media engagement, the website traffic, thus more sales and brand loyalty (Baltes 114). Content marketing's revival in the digital age is fueled by leveraging user data to

customize the content, which was not easy to achieve in the past. The data can tell you what your users' preferences are and what content interests them.

Many libraries might already own great content, but a lot of it is either not published consistently or not integrated with other marketing areas. The traditional monthly newsletters or weekly blog posts are still very useful and marketers should continue to work on reaching out to the right audience as much as possible. For libraries to distinguish themselves from the countless content marketing campaigns out there, they will have to rely on the library's reputation as an authoritative source of reliable information. Generally, content marketing needs a content strategy and it should be integrated with the overall marketing strategy, which also includes social media strategy, online PR strategy, and search strategy.

Content marketing requires detail-oriented analytical skills plus sensitivity to the next big thing. It doesn't mean the library should follow the retail world of coming up with viral campaigns. Whether for an event or regular promotion of new collections, the goal is always to align with the strategic plan. Otherwise, it is just purely copywriting. Many libraries own a blog and it works for many of them. The cost of publishing through a third party such as Hutspot or WordPress is minimal. Other formats vary significantly in price and time. Producing content that is creditable, targeted, differentiated, and measurable is most likely to result in user consumption and engagement (Mathewson and Moran). The data analysis activities of content marketing are not that different from social media marketing analysis, and basic data analysis skills are but required to effectively assess content impact. Again, many libraries may choose to outsource the analysis, writing, publishing parts, and even generation of ideas. There are emerging companies and freelancers with special skills and libraries are on their radars for sure.

Measurement – closing the marketing loop
All topics above mainly focus on the basic trends and the how-to of digital marketing. To close the loop, marketers need to spend a significant amount of time on measurement because the usage and engagement data can tell a lot of stories. The data collection tools are conveniently provided by the platforms marketers use, be it Facebook, Twitter, Google Analytics, an email service provider, or an integrated platform. The key is to figure out what marketing initiatives work and why. There is no textbook standard regarding how to measure impact, but this article intends to provide an example. If your library would like to know the Twitter engagement among your peers, you can find out by utilizing R and open access data Twitter provides.

The author used 125 Association of Research Libraries (ARL) members in Canada and the United States as samples and collected Twitter open data since the beginning of 2018. Eight out of 125 members do not use Twitter, and it doesn't mean those eight fail to engage users in social media as they may own other accounts. The final number of accounts for analysis is 116.

The data set includes the total tweets, total followers, total favorites and retweets from January 1, 2018 to June 21, 2018. By analyzing data in R or other statistical tools, marketers can instantly compare key performance indicators (KPI). Please see the appendix for the detailed table.

ARL Twitter Accounts

Engagement Level
- High
- Moderate
- Low
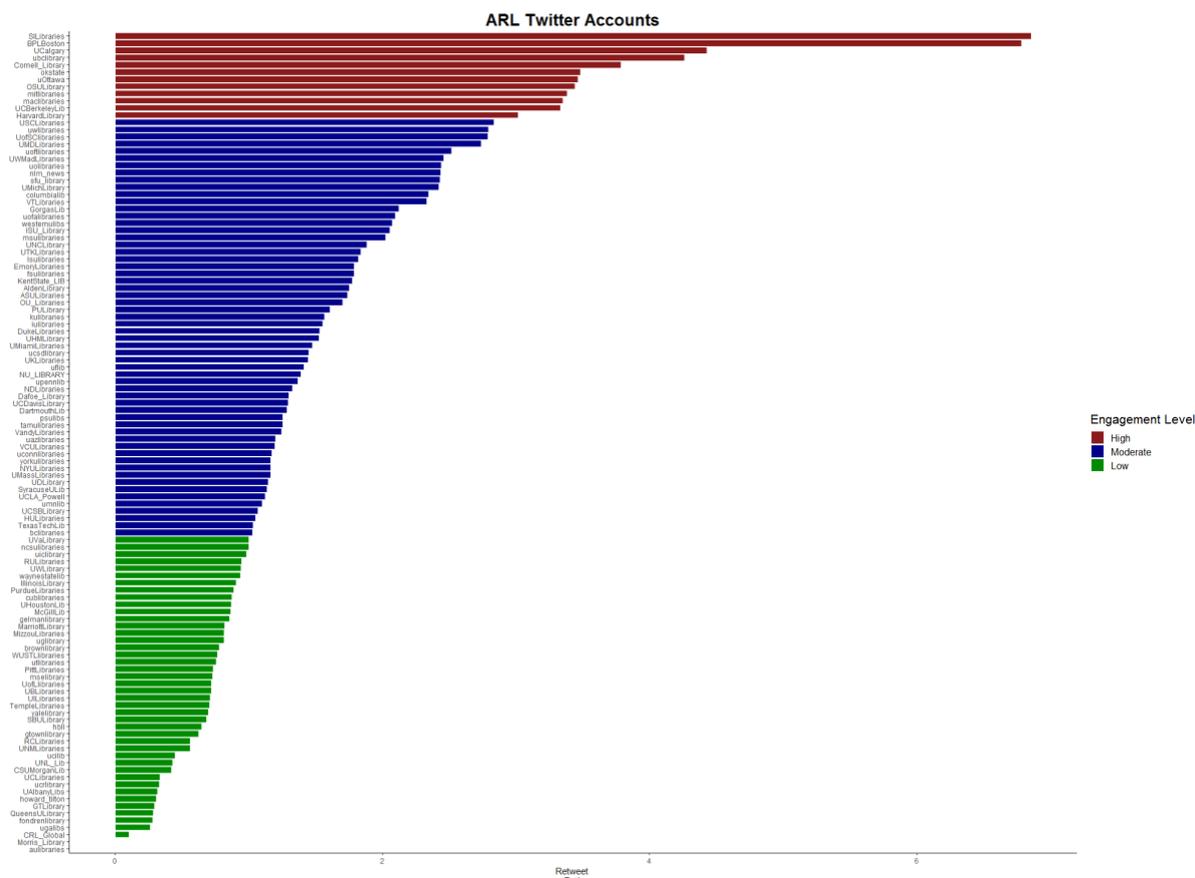
Retweet Ratio

The chart above shows the result of total retweets by total tweets from 116 members, January 1, 2018 to June 21, 2018. By examining this ratio, marketers can get a sense of peers' engagement data, better than only tracking the total tweets. Three members, the United States National Archives, New York Public Library, and Library of Congress have way more followers than the rest of members, representing higher regional to international level entities, thus they were removed from the dataset for the comparison. In order to derive meaning from the remaining 113 members, the author compare them in three groups based on a scale of 1-6. The top 12 ARL members with the rate between 3 and 6 are marked as the high engagement group, the moderate engagement group represents members with a rate between 1-3, and the low engagement group represents the members with a rate between 0-1. The boundaries between the three groups were used for comparison purposes, but will not necessarily apply to other datasets or metrics.

The next step was to research tweets from group members and run a content analysis. These 12 libraries from the top engagement group had a relatively high retweet rate between 3-6. So, on average, one tweet was retweeted three to six times.

High Engagment Twitter Accounts
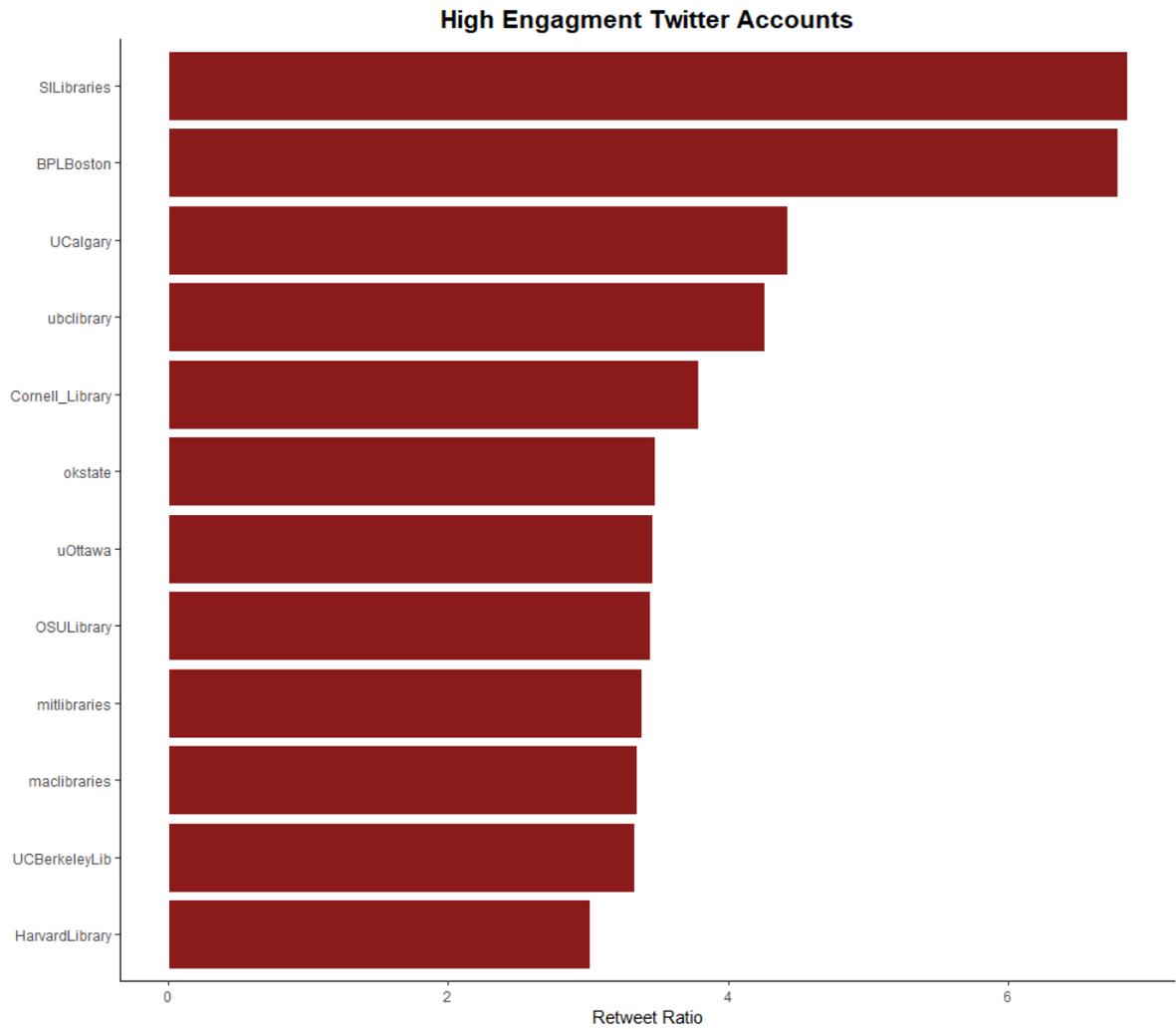
Retweet Ratio

The chart above shows the top 12 libraries in the high engagement group which had the relatively high retweet rate.

One possible reason the high engagement group members produce high-engaging tweets is because of their high number of followers. The more followers libraries have, the more interaction and the impact can be.

**ARL Libraries Twitter Followers
by Engagement Level**
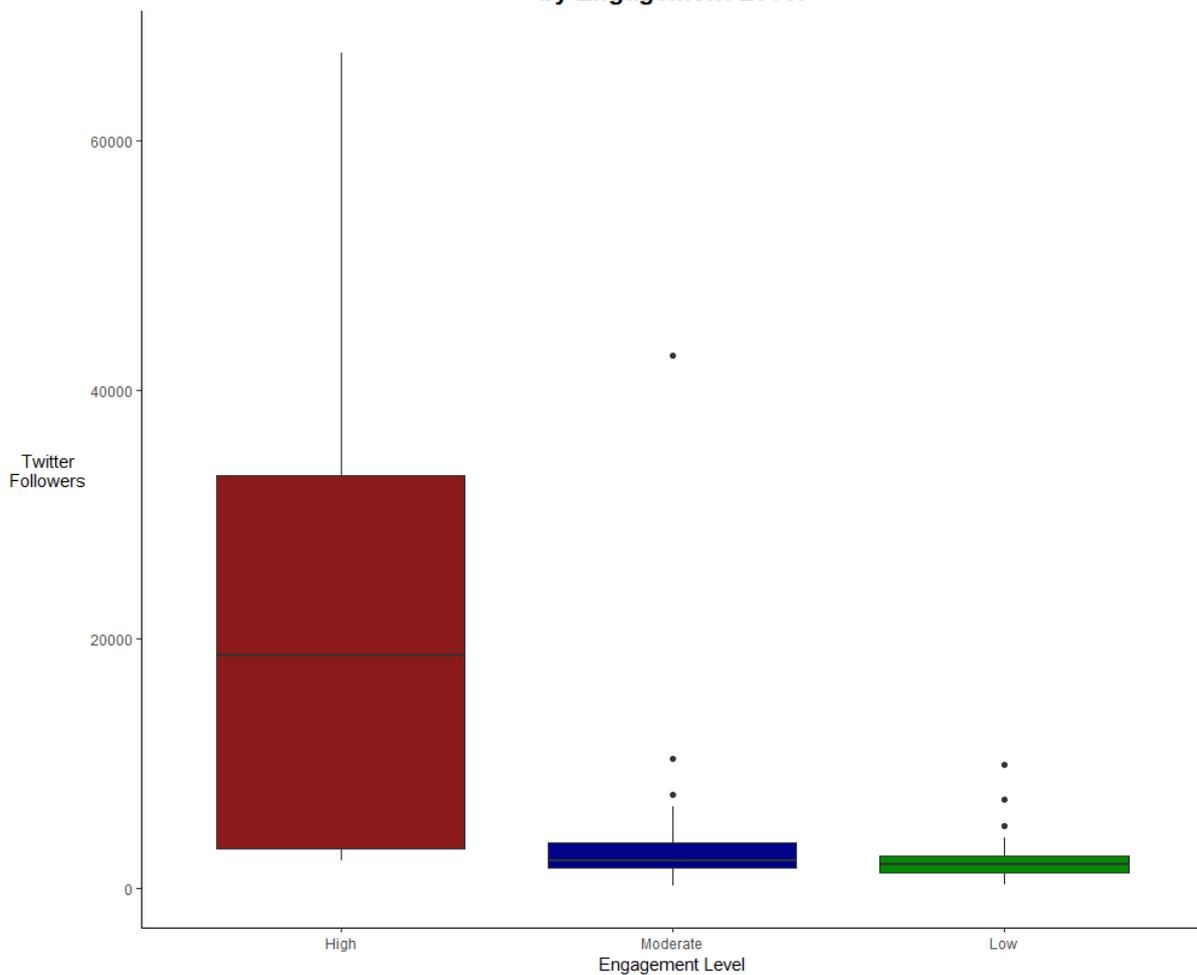
The boxplot chart confirms the assumption by comparing the followers from three groups. Clearly, the high engagement group demonstrates high engagement efficacy and have higher number of followers than the other two groups. The median followers of the high engagement group is 18,657, while the numbers are 2,293 and 1,852 for the moderate and low engagement groups.

Nevertheless, for libraries with limited personnel and budget, it doesn't mean they have to be in the high-performance group. Sometimes, one tweet could go viral and have a bigger impact. For instance, one exceptional tweet stood out during the analysis. The University of Tennessee Knoxville Libraries is ranked in the low engagement group in the retweet by total tweet comparison and does not have as many followers as peers in the high engagement group. However, the tweet from May 4th, 2018 was favorited almost 500 times and retweeted 172 times. The success was all because it contained a link to a short video about how students go through the library's main gate. By adding some humor, the video went viral and resonated strongly with the students. The video is not even showcasing the library's collection or services, but it triggered a heated discussion about how the not user-friendly library gate caused inconvenience, with a sense of humor (@UTKLibraries).

Summary
Libraries need more modern digital marketing in the 21st century. Technology makes it possible to experiment with different strategies, so library marketers need to be committed to

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lifelong learning. Library websites, search engine marketing, social media, emails, video, mobile marketing and content marketing each has power for engagement, and it works the best when they are integrated on the same page. It is recommended library marketers utilize data to find out the gaps and on top of that, create new ideas to get users' attention. With the engagement of digital marketing, libraries in the future will be more embedded in their users' lives, thus bringing even bigger impact to their communities.

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