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Assessing Anti-Racist Resources Online: Developing a framework for examining institutions' online anti-racist outreach and engagement

1. Abstract

Examining the response of a library during a tumultuous period not only provides insight about the library's past, but also allows the library to improve its actions to better serve its communities in the future. The summer of 2020 marked such a period in American history. Amidst the cries for systemic change following the murder of George Floyd, the social media profiles of individuals and organizations alike—including academic libraries—flooded with reading lists, informational articles, webinars, and other such educational materials. How do we qualify these resources? How do we understand the roles that academic libraries play in this resource sharing, and how do we use that information to assess their involvement? Building off Bharat Mehra and Davis' (2015) Strategic Diversity Manifesto, this presentation describes a work in progress meant to determine how academic libraries can examine their online presences in regards to the ongoing civil rights movement for Black lives: where and how they have raised their voices, incorporated the voices of others, or stayed silent.

2. Introduction

After the protests following the murder of George Floyd in May of 2020, social media accounts of individuals, institutions, and corporations alike were flooded with educational videos, reading lists, links to organizations accepting donations, and other such resources concerning anti-racism. Over two years later, many questions remain: how have academic institutions used their online voices to speak to anti-racism? Where are these voices silent? Have these answers changed over time?

The answers to these questions can be found in part by Mehra and Davis's 2015 article, "A strategic diversity manifesto for public libraries in the 21st century," which codified the different ways in which public libraries can advocate for diversity. Their Strategic Diversity Manifesto, or SDM, model categorizations (and similar models) has been applied to other marginalized groups, such as older adults and LGBTQIA2S populations, and is useful for understanding where a library does (or does not) provide representation and support for the group in question (Mehra and Gray, 2014; Mehra and Jaber, 2020; Winberry, 2018). It has not,

however, been adapted for strictly online use, nor was it used uniquely for academic libraries. This study proposes changes to the SDM model to suit academic libraries and anti-racist content online.

3. Method

To create this edited model and gather data regarding online presences, We looked to New York state's Empire State Library Network and selected two of the nine research councils to study. We chose Central Library Resources Council (CLRC-approximately fifty-seven libraries) and Capital District Resources Council (CDLC-145 libraries) for their sizes and geographic proximity. From there, We used Google site search command and the Facebook search function to search the councils' websites and Facebook pages for posts. The eleven terms used for this study were:

- Anti-racism, anti-racist,
- Diverse, diversity,
- Equality, equity,
- Inclusion, inclusive,
- Race, racism, and racist.

Posts that contained the keywords and concerned issues of race were recorded in a spreadsheet. We searched each of these terms myself with little to no automation, which made this a fairly time-consuming process.

4. Findings

Academic and research libraries' online content falls into three categories within the SDM model:

- Information sources, or resources to learn about anti-racism;
- Connections, or internal and external events or partnerships to learn about or support anti-racism; and
- Information policy and planning, or policies or resources related to policy that speak to anti-racism.

We omitted the original "collections" category of the SDM model, as very few systems have their own collections.

After searching both the CLRC and CDLC's websites and facebook pages, it is possible to visualize the data in order to better interpret it. The CLRC is much more prolific in terms of posts, but the CDLC takes advantage of sharing resources on Facebook more. Additionally, it is possible to determine which terms were most popular for each. CDLC posts more content regarding equity or equality whereas CLRC has more instances with anti-racism and diversity. The sources of each council's posts are also a topic to note, as they can determine whether the sites depend more on their own content or if they source their content from others. Both CLRC and CDLC share a majority of their content from other resources, primarily other councils. And finally, almost all of these systems' posts concerning the keywords were resource-sharing and

connection-oriented. CLRC's posts using these keywords, for example, were almost exclusively webinar announcements.

5. Issues and Next Steps

Most of the issues we came across concerned keywords and the search process. The searched terms are not mutually exclusive, and some websites may avoid language that speaks directly to race and activism. Searching for language that only covertly supports anti-racism can be difficult, as different institutions will use different indirect terms, and it may be impossible to guess them all. Some terms, such as "inclusive," can refer to social justice topics that do not directly respond to anti-racism or the protests of 2020. This may gather several results that are irrelevant to the analysis. The act of determining which posts are applicable will rely primarily upon the researcher's discretion, and this reasoning must be carefully recorded.

Despite this, the edited SDM model has a lot of potential provided several amendments, including the following:

- While data collection is possible with only basic search functions, using a web crawler created through Python or similar programming languages will speed up the process and allow users to expand the keywords list.
- Terms that would prove useful additions include "social," "justice," "progress," "Black Lives Matter," and "activism."
- Additionally, more institutions should be added to this analysis to provide a full comparison of the Empire State Library Network institutions, and tools like R could be used to visualize the crossover between posted events.
- Finally, this method can be applied to other types of institutions' websites, such as towns, public libraries, colleges, etc. The system is adaptable and ready for use.

6. References

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