Tales from the Tweets: Alternative perspectives on Library Consulting

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INTRODUCTION

Librarians are always adapting libraries to the times and the available “emerging technologies”. To meet the dynamic needs of library users, librarians must negotiate change. However, transforming libraries has become more complicated with the rapid pace of today’s technological and social environments. In order to keep abreast with the dynamic environment, librarians and libraries have looked into, and in some cases relied on, the expertise of consultants. Yet, what do we really know about library consultants?

My paper intends to provide a fresh approach to examining the world of library consulting and library consultants. I review the literature on library consulting and report on a narrative analysis of tweet data retrieved from 2006 to September 30, 2014 on the topic. Based on my doctoral research, Twitter was mined for selected keywords pertaining to library consultants and library consulting. The results retrieved were analysed using narrative analytical approaches and re-contextualised within relevant themes to trigger new ways of understanding how library consultants’ identities, occupation and work are rhetorically represented or socially constructed. The narratives emerging are from diverse perspectives ranging from actual “library consultants” to those experiencing library consulting, such as archivists, institutional clients and other librarians. This paper reports on insights from an analysis of tweets on the practice of library consulting from which to view the positioning of library consultants in libraries today.

While my research focuses on perceptions about library consultants, this paper is equally about a fresh methodological approach to researching and analyzing new data sources for public perceptions on a topic or brand. Using library consultants as an example, my study demonstrates how narrative analysis using positioning theory can be applied to analyzing data mined from tweets for meaningful insights into socially or rhetorically constructed ideas.

BACKGROUND

Consulting in the 21st century spans diverse institutions and industries. Governments (state agencies and municipalities) and other institutions (including non-profits like churches, school boards, hospitals and universities) use consultants. Both public and private sector rely on consultants for adopting new technologies, strategic planning, accounting services, environmental assessments, or for marketing/public
relation campaigns (Plunkett 2011). Not surprisingly, consulting has mushroomed across various sectors into libraries and the profession of librarianship.

Notwithstanding, library consulting, or consulting in libraries, is an emerging development on which there is little ongoing academic research. While scholars discuss how outsourcing and privatization trends in general have affected libraries and contribute to precarious employment for librarians (Hill 2009; Dilveko 2009; Mason 2014), little is written about the impact of library consulting on libraries and librarianship. It is to this end that my study proposes to explore this inadequately studied topic of library consulting and its implications for librarianship through a narrative analysis of tweets.

THE PROBLEM

Sparse scholarly research is undertaken to understand library consultants and library consulting as an emerging practice in the LIS professional environment. What exists is often outdated and/or focused on a specific type of library consultant (Feehan 1991; Moore 1995). The professional literature, on the other hand, produces perspectives from a few consultants’ experiences (Holt 1984; Parker 1988; de Stricker 2008) or as textbooks prescribing guidelines for contracting or using library consultants (Rawles and Wessells 1984; Garten 1992; Morris 2004). These available professional sources offer subjective accounts that offer no assurance of systematic research design and data gathering. In particular, Holt (1984) admits to sharing his own “personal – and therefore very prejudiced views” that he has not gone to any lengths “whatsoever to research or document” the points made (261). He further states that he offers “one individual’s commentary based solely on a career” of 35 years in librarianship with about one-third of those years as a full-time library consultant (Holt 1984, 261). As such, the existing literature in turn presents a limited understanding of library consulting that may not be generalizable. Hence, library and information professionals have very few perspectives and information from which to properly understand library consulting.

THE PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

My study addresses the gap in the academic literature by providing systematic research and inquiry into library consulting. Lack of academic literature on consulting obstructs potential practitioners interested in library consulting. Researching library consulting is also a step in formalizing it as an occupation and making library consultants and their work more visible and better understood. To address this problem, I analysed a relevant sample of 21 tweets to discover diverse narratives about library consultants and library consulting.

THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To accomplish my purpose, I proposed the following research questions.

Research question one (RQ1): How is the work of library consultants represented in tweets written by or about library consultants? How do narratives in tweets represent the practice of library consulting and the identity of library consultants?

Research question two (RQ2): How do tweets justify or critique the work of library consultants? What arguments are made for whether the position of library consultant is useful or problematic? How are these arguments being made for or against library consultants?
LITERATURE REVIEW

While there is much written about consulting outside of librarianship, this section focuses specifically on the library literature. In this regard, the library literature often discusses library consulting in conjunction with information consulting. LIS professionals like de Stricker (2008) highlight that in both library and information consulting, some consultants are formally educated in librarianship, while others possess informal qualifications from experience or expertise in working within library settings, from which they offer library-related expertise and services. Further, de Stricker (2008) defines library and information consulting as consisting of both librarians offering “skills to a variety of clients (not necessarily libraries)” and of “other types of professionals (e.g. architects, staff training experts)” offering services to “libraries and library-like entities” (vi). Regardless of the fact that library consultants are either former librarians or other professionals, both groups constitute a expanding library and information consulting sector. As Rogers (1994) puts it, “increasing numbers of highly qualified librarians, information scientists, archivists, architects, library planners, budget advisers, indexers and online searchers are available on a freelance basis” (v).

Nonetheless, while library and information consulting includes both the work of library consultants and information consultants, the two are sometimes separated for scholarly analysis. For example, Gilchrist (1999) separates library consultants from information consultants or information brokers. Feather and Sturges (2003) further suggest that distinguishing the consultant from the information broker is seldom clear. Yet, according to Prytherch (2005), the term “information consultant” generically refers to “self-employed [f]reelance individuals operating on a commercial basis in the areas of information handling, research, data handling and related fields” (350). On the other hand, library consultants are narrowly defined as individuals offering “a range of professional skills and advice relevant to the operation of libraries” (Prytherch 2005, 420). These “[f]ree-lance self-employed” individuals in turn market their skills “on a commercial basis” to the libraries concerned “on contract for a fee” (Prytherch 2005, 420). Considering these distinctions, I distinguish library consultants from information consultants, and study library consultants separately. Library consultants appear to be less studied than information consultants. For example, Broughton, Blackburn and Vickers (1991) cite at least two surveys on information consultants and information brokers. Unfortunately, I have found no such equivalent studies for library consultants.

Within the literature discussing library consultants, there appears to be some controversy in differentiating library consulting from freelancing and outsourcing. For Gordon (2008), the “line between freelance, contract and consulting work is very thin, and many people use the terms [as] interchangeable” (87). However, Gordon (2008) insists that the terms are not synonymous, with freelance work usually referring to very short-term work on a well-defined project, while contract work involves longer-term commitment and more complex activities, and consulting involves work at a more strategic level. Gordon (2008) summarizes that in any of these cases, library consultants provide outsourcing services to libraries.

Likewise, de Stricker (2008) distinguishes between freelancing and consulting. According to de Stricker, freelancing involves an outsider librarian temporarily working, due to unavailability of full-time staff, as a pair of hands to do librarian work or a special-purpose library work assignment or project. On the other hand, de Stricker (2008)
sees consulting as a process of entering into an organization with an outsider’s perspective, using professional experience to guide clients and recommending the best course of action, given the situation at hand. De Stricker is supported by Rawles and Wessells (1984), who propose that library consultants are brought into libraries to deal with changes in the external environment to which libraries need to adapt. For Rawles and Wessells, library consultants undertake a professional “helping and facilitating process” in order to help clients “bring about change and solve problems” in libraries (3). Blasingame (1969), in agreement, suggests that the library consultant represents “a shortcut to new, expanded or updated [library] facilities or programs” (Purpose of a consultant, para 1). Feather and Sturges (2003) are of the view that “consultants” do more than provide information, but also offer a “detached, objective view of an organization’s problems and needs while recommending and occasionally implementing fresh solutions for a fee” (105). Genway (1992) also attempts to demystify library consultants and the practice of library consulting by defining a library consultant as a person “who gives professional advice, analyzes problems and makes recommendations for solving them, provides short-term staff training sessions, or negotiates the best price from vendors” (30).

Despite attempts by LIS professionals to demystify library consulting, there is still a need to define library consulting. The previously discussed literature is based on the independent or self-employed external library consultants and is a bit dated. However, the self-employed library consultant is only one type of consultant within a wider spectrum of library consultants that also include technology firms that offer outsourced products and services and the institutionally employed internal consultant.

In recent times, the idea of the internal academic library consultant has been examined in the literature (Kaspar and vanDuinkerken, 2014). Kaspar and vanDuinkerken (2014) suggest that the internal consultant is responsible for work that improves the library rather than maintains the status quo, while playing other roles as needed. Kaspar and vanDuinkerken (2014) list that such an internal consultant must be flexible to take on various roles as needed including:

* Addressing a special situation
* Undertaking infrequent special projects
* Kick-starting a new initiative
* Dealing with unpleasant situations or problems
* A liaison and facilitator between various departments or between management and the frontline.

Further, Kaspar and vanDuinkerken (2014) see the use of internal consultants as the “best way” for libraries to succeed in a changing work environment.

It is therefore evident from the literature that understanding what constitutes library consulting work is emergent. The literature points out that

- library consulting is a meaningful part of the discussion in LIS scholarship and practice
- the identity of library consultants is not well defined, with some overlap between information consultants and information brokers. There are also issues that formal definitions of library consultants ignore the fact that library consultants are not only independent self-employed individuals, but can also be employees of institutions
• there is disagreement in the literature as to whether or not library consulting, as defined as problem solving services offered to libraries for a fee or on a contractual basis, is equivalent to outsourcing.

Considering all these points, there is value in conducting investigation into better understanding library consulting and its relationship to issues such as outsourcing and the traditional work of librarians. It is further imperative to understand the implications of library consulting for the future of libraries and librarianship. It is also evident that further research into library consulting will benefit both the scholarship and practice of librarianship and help clarify the distinctions between outsourcing, freelancing and consulting. Finally, it is also important for librarianship to understand that library consulting comes in various forms and is not homogenous as represented in formal definitions in the literature.

**METHODOLOGY**

In order to generate new, additional and relevant knowledge about library consultants, I adopted a qualitative approach to studying tweets for narratives of library consulting and representations of library consultants. Specifically, I systematically analysed tweets primarily through narrative analysis using an approach called positioning theory. According to Riessman (1993), narrative analysis permits a "systematic study of personal experience and meaning" and "how events have been constructed by active subjects" (70). On the other hand, positioning theory is a method of analysis developed to reveal storylines as well as the implicit and sometimes explicit ascriptions and resistances to the ascriptions of rights and duties to perform actions (Harré 2012).

My research approach was designed to produce knowledge beyond a few anecdotal experiences of library consultants. It involved a systematic process to collect, produce and analyse data, comparing and contrasting them for new knowledge about various Twitter users’ experiences of library consulting and of being a library consultant. Sampling approach followed the principle of maximum variation sampling (Patton, 2002) enabling the representation of multiple voices or stories that presented either positive or negative sentiments regarding library consultants or library consulting. Further, basing the data on the tweets enabled access to diverse narratives and representations of the experiences of library consultants as well as others who experience library consulting.

To collect data, Twitter was mined for selected keywords pertaining to library consultants and library consulting. Twitter was selected as the site for data collection due to a number of factors. Data from tweets are primarily qualitative and occur in a natural setting, rather than being artificially contrived or constructed based on the researcher’s request for information. Tweets also make it possible to conduct micro-comparative research, where I can compare and contrast library consultants who micro-blog about their experiences, with the other individuals and institutions that also micro-blog about their viewpoints of and experiences with library consulting.

Results retrieved from this mining of tweets were analysed using social positioning theory and coded according to how tweets provided storylines that represented library consultants and library consulting. According to Hall (1997) representation is an act of producing the meaning of concepts through language that refer
to “real” world objects, people or events (p. 17). To examine the phenomenon of representation of library consultants and their reality in tweets, I examined how tweet text and language referred to library consultants (the people or characters) and library consulting (events) as well as the point of views and characterizations of the narrators producing meaning on library consultants and library consulting (See Table 1). Tweets represent library consultants or library consulting by using language to refer to, produce meaning on or describe either

a) the library consultant(s) as a character or
b) an event of library consulting with a point of view being offered about library consultants or about library consulting by the narrator

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tweet narrative</th>
<th>Event/Character</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A refers to</td>
<td>Event in which library consultant X is a character</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B refers to</td>
<td>Event with person X offering a point of view about library consulting or a library consultant.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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In this study, I investigated how tweets produced meaning of the concept of library consultant and library consulting by presenting the library consultant as a character in relation to other characters or by drawing on storylines, language, word images and metaphors to make sense of library consultants and library consulting. For this, I applied positioning theory as a framework for analysis.

Positioning theory is a suitable framework for studying human communication for the work of representation. Proponents of positioning theory such as Davies and Harré, (1999), argue that language is used according to rules that “are explicit formulations of the normative order which is immanent in concrete human productions, such as actual conversations between particular people on particular occasions” (p. 33). In addition, they argue that various conversations can only be explained by “reference only to whatever concretely has happened before, and to human memories of it, which form both the personal and the cultural resources for speakers to draw upon in constructing the present moment” (Davies & Harré, 1999).

“Though artificial mnemonic devices such as books and manuals are often understood as evidence for pre-existing knowledge structures independent of any speaker, these only have meaning to the extent that they are taken up by any speaker-hearer as encodings to be attended to. It is the actual conversations which have already occurred that are the archetypes of current conversations. We remember what we and others have said and done, what we believe or were told that they have said and done, where it was wrong and where it was right” (Davies & Harré, 1999 p.33).

In the case of my study, tweets constitute human productions and conversations that are formulated using the rules of the normative order of librarians and the library professional community. Tweets are therefore not created in a vacuum, but draw on actual discourse and discursive practices that are found within library speak or library jargon and the professional library literature. Hence, like Davies and Harré (1999), I argue that to understand tweets discussing library consultants and library consulting, then one has to interpret and explain these with reference to the library professional discourse. Hence, micro-bloggers produce tweets to and for an audience about what is
said or written in the library literature or based on actual happenings or their memory of happenings regarding library consultants and library consulting. Tweets further draw on what Davies and Harré (1999) call “specialist conversations” which those tweeting about library consultants and library consulting use to talk and write to audiences. Library discourse serves as the “conceptual scheme” that, according to Davies and Harré (1999), makes the phenomena “relatively determinate” though not static.

Narrative analysis using positioning theory involves examining people’s use of language for producing or performing a narrative. According to Bamberg (2006) this approach analyzes people’s talk and specifically “what people do with their talk” (142). As such, positioning theory serves as a “hermeneutic framework” for analyzing how people use language to “accomplish a sense of self when they engage in storytelling talk” (Bamberg 2006, 142).

Bamberg (2006) further outlines the following steps to narrative analysis using positioning theory:

- begin by “paying close attention to the ways in which constructed/represented world of characters and event sequences is drawn up” (Bamberg 2006, 145)
- look for “descriptions and evaluations of the story characters” and the “time and space coordinates in the way that these relate to social categories and their action potential” (Bamberg 2006, 145)
- Look for how narrators sequentially assemble and arrange “referential and representation aspects of story construction” (Bamberg 2006, 145)
- Interpret these uses of language as signals of how the narrators either comply with or oppose dominant discourses or master narratives. (Bamberg 2006, 145)

Consequently, Bamberg’s (2006) approach to using positioning theory is applicable to my own study as a framework for identifying and selecting features of tweet text to analyze, discuss, and interpret. In particular, I apply positioning theory to analysing the positioning of library consultants as characters in tweet narratives as well as narrators’ practices for positioning library consultants as characters in tweet text. I examine how narrators or micro-bloggers use language to reveal their complicity or opposition to dominant discourses or master narratives told about library consultants and library consulting. Using this approach permits me to interpret the data and the meanings produced in tweet text in a way that addresses the research questions of this study. Finally, I use positioning theory approach as a conceptual frame for organizing the results of this study according to the storylines of library consultants and library consulting.

RESULTS

This study collected four sets of data using the Twitter search platform, retrieving all relevant results up to September 30, 2014. Results retrieved pertained to the four sets of query terms: “library consultant”, “library consultants”, “library consulting” and “library consultancy”. In total, 605 tweets were collected in response to four search queries, the distribution of which is presented in the table below. Many of these 605 tweets collected proved fruitful sources of data to be analysed for various narrative elements around the topics of library consultants and library consulting.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Query term</th>
<th># of tweets</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Library” +</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultant</td>
<td>378</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultants</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultancy</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consulting</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>605</td>
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However from this listing of 605 tweets, I further purposely selected a maximum variation sample of 21 tweets to discuss in-depth in this paper. Tweets selected intensely present diverse and informative or interesting storylines on library consultants and library consulting.

Selecting a smaller sample to analyse in-depth is done as narrative analysis is not a good approach to be employed on a large number of data, but is best applied to a small sample. At the same time, my sampling approach applies the principle of what Patton (2002) refers to as “multiple variation sampling”, where sample is purposely selected to include data sources that are different from each other in some way.

The results reveal that my sample of tweets generally fell into these four storylines:

- Heroic, epic or romantic storylines
- Tragic/Comic - library consultant failure storylines
- Critical / anti-neo-liberal/conflict and satirical storylines
- Idealized romantic storylines

**THE STORYLINES IN TWEETS**

One of my research questions asked how is the work of library consultants represented in and tweets written by or about library consultants and how do narratives in tweets represent the practice of library consulting and the identity of library consultants. These questions are answered when we investigate the various storylines of the narratives of library consulting. By classifying narratives into storylines, I was able to illuminate how the stories are constructed about library consultants and library consulting, as well illuminate how library consulting and library consultants are represented. Namely, I found the following:

**THE LIBRARY CONSULTANT AS HERO: THE HEROIC OR ROMANTIC NARRATIVE**

The hero, epic or romantic storyline or plot is one of the positive storylines in the tweets sampled. The hero or epic narrative tends to portray consultants as knowledgeable persons that facilitate knowledge transfer. Alternately, hero narratives seem to become romantic storylines, especially when narrators or other characters exult and praise library consultants for possessing particular positive characteristics, traits or qualities.

One tweet narrative that formulates a romantic storyline is found in April 2009, when a female educator narrated about her meeting with a library consultant.
April 7
Just met [name of library consultant] [webpage of library consultant] thanks to [name of library educator] Fantastic library consultant!
Librarians check out his website!

April 29
Coordinating the visit of this *amazing* library consultant to BKK in Aug: http://tr.im/k4JZ Any other regional librarians interested?

The narrator’s tweet summarizes the meeting with the consultant as being one with a positive outcome as she positively describes the library consultant as being "fantastic" and refers librarians to check out his website. Her comments and recommendation were retweeted by two other individuals, an individual from Singapore and a librarian from the United States. The same female educator later tweeted in the same month that she was coordinating a visit from this same library consultant and asked if any other regional librarian was interested. In this invitation tweet, she extolled her library consultant as being “amazing”. This invitation to meet with the library consultant was retweeted by an individual from UAE.

In the above narrative, there is a positive outcome from a meeting with a library consultant, where the client seems to represent the consultant as playing a role in helping her achieve her goals. The enthusiasm evident in the language of the tweets provides evidence that library consultants can have a transformative or positive effect on their clients, to the point where the client begins to promote and encourage others to utilise library consulting services or wisdom. Such positive outcomes are shared by others, circulating the narrative beyond the original post and bringing the library consultant’s positive contribution to the attention of new audiences.

The expression of appreciation for consultants is also found in another narrative, where we find students at a university expressing appreciation and enthusiasm for the work of library consultants in an academic library setting. In June 2012, the president of a Student Union expressed her excitement in response to another student about the transformation of the library space with new furniture.

Narrator1 19 Jun 2012
I am irrationally excited by this Library furniture review document...
#softfurnishings #desks #lameduck xx

Narrator2 [student union president]
@Narrator1 ME TOO!! Just got a report back from @U**R**Library consultants on study space improvements.
#LibraryFurnitureQualityGeeks

The narrators in this tweet attribute their excitement to a document produced by library consultants. In this narrative, the library consultants are narrated as being responsible for producing a document that has a positive effect on the emotions of the narrators. The narrators in turn use Twitter to share their enthusiasm. This narrative is also indicative of the evidence that the library consultant can bring something new that clients are pleased with, such as an innovation or fresh perspective to clients. This is further evident in the following narrative.

[An Assistant Professor and a PhD researcher who self describes himself as being from London (and Korea) tweets]:
In the case above, the micro-blogger provides a post that describes how an institution sees the need for a library consultant. In this narrative, the institution describes that it needs a library consultant to help “modernize” its library catalog. However, if one critically interrogates this position, one could ask the question, could not a “normal” or “regular” “librarian” do this job as well? Cannot librarians also modernize a library catalog? In this regard, the narrative told in the tweet reflects a discourse and discursive practice in librarianship where library consultants are seen as the ones that can bring changes to an organization as opposed to the “regular” or “insider” librarian. Even within the professional literature, it is suggested that “outsiders” are needed to bring about transformation and modernization to institutions (De Stricker, 2008; Feather & Sturge, 2003).

The term modernization also conceals the disruptive nature of library consulting. While library consultants are characterized as causing new structures to be built or as bringing new things into libraries, they are also in another sense, the destroyers of old structures and ways of doing things. Hidden in the institutional narrative of modernizing the catalog is the idea that something happens to the “old” library catalog. More explicitly, in another narrative, there is the storyline of library consultants calling for destructive action or acts of violence to a library building.

**FCNP:** Library Consultants’ Report Calls For a Tear-Down of Existing Building: According to Falls Church City C... http://bit.ly/15nThAk

OR

Library Consultants’ Report Calls For a Tear-Down of Existing Building http://goo.gl/fb/YzXVO

Hence, sometimes library consultants are narrated as destroying what is old in the process of bringing in what is new. As such, the narratives relate that library consultants are sometimes responsible for either announcing or bringing change in clients that disrupt emotions, habits and mindsets.

**THE CAUTIONARY TALE: TRAGIC LIBRARY CONSULTANT FAILURE NARRATIVES**

There are times however, when library consultants or library consulting are represented as deviating from the heroic or romantic ideal. While the prior section indicates what happens when library consultants achieve success or on the ideal for library consulting as transformative action, there are times when library consultants fail to fulfill the heroic or romantic narrative expectation. This brings us to narratives that discuss situations in which library consultants or library consulting fail and where narrators themselves question the usefulness of the knowledge transferred by these consultants.

One narrative features a conversation surrounding a statement by a library consultant as reported by a female self-described archivist:

“Library consultant: ‘Maybe have students curate wikipedia articles in the classroom’ -- guess why I wrote that down to share on Twitter.”

At first, the tweet seems like satire, possessing a mocking tone. However, another female (D), self-described as being into libraries and archives, responds “bc it's kinda a terrible idea?”

Ms. Archivist (the original poster) replies:
"There are so many things to pick apart! Curate is my favorite mistake, don't use that word in front of archivists please."

This is followed by a discussion on the problems of Wikipedia as well as the idea that anyone can be a curator or use Wikipedia as a curation tool. D responds

"My issue is right now it's a one-time project, not ongoing; no way to assess it, actual teacher doesn't know wikipedia..."

Ms. Archivist to D:

"Totally understandable! Wikipedia is a sticky creature that is misunderstood, I think all reasonable LIS professionals agree"

In the above narrative, the recommendation or advice provided by a specific library consultant is represented as being problematic. Further, D suggests that there is no way to assess the library consultant's work to prove how unfruitful it is, as the work of the library consultant is a “one-time” project. Hence in this case, whereas the library consultant is supposed to be a wise sage providing useful and beneficial advice to the clients, the narrators represent the consultant as a fool who is leading unknowing clients blindly astray.

Some tweets serve as the abstracts to a narrative from a newspaper article. These too produce storylines that sometimes indicate library consulting failures. In one case, two tweets introduce a link that points to a news article where a library consultant (firm) backs out of an agreement with library trustees, with another one being hired.


One Niles Library Consultant Backs Out Of Agreement, Another Hired http://ift.tt/1uoOwam

In the above narratives (or “breaking stories”), the library consultant fails to honour his or her agreement by backing out. Like Ms. Archivist’s story, the storyline continues to convey that library consultants cannot always be trusted.

Sometimes institutions employ persons as library consultants, but how they apply title to the person’s actual responsibilities and duties may not fully reflect what is entailed in library consulting. In an unusual narrative, an individual laments what she deems a low paid employed “library consultant” position that is not very challenging.

1. Narrator1 @N1 Sep 8
2. I start my job as a law library consultant tomorrow. Probably gonna strip on the side to make ends meet
3. Narrator2 @N2
4. @N1 omg [Narrator1] you’re so official now
5. Narrator1
6. @N2_ lmao its really just the title that’s official. All I do is put paper in printers
7. Narrator2
8. @N1 lmao awe yeah just stick with the title if anyone asks

While this is an unusual narrative that does not convey what the literature frames as the type of work that library consultants do, this narrative does point out that in some scenarios, institutions are assigning the label or title of “library consultant” to work that may not be theoretically defined as consulting. Nonetheless, as Narrator2 points out, library consultant is a compelling title and that regardless of what the work involves, she
should “just stick with the title” (Line 8). As such, in this scenario, the “library consultant” is not presented as the purveyor of new knowledge to the institution to which she is employed, but rather as a clerical worker with a fancy title who does routine paper work. Secondly, this particular narrative also raises another issue or theme which is dealt with in our next section, the theme of labour market conditions, precarious employment and library consulting as exploitation of librarianship labour.

TALES OF LIBRARY CONSULTANTS AS VILLAINS IN LIBRARYLAND

Apart from the tragic or comic narratives above, there are a number of narratives told that reflect something deeper than the failure of library consulting and library consultants to meet the ideal narrative expectations. In these narratives, library consultants are no longer the protagonists in the narratives, but rather the villains or the antagonists. In some of these narratives, library consulting and library consultants are critically questioned. One librarian in a tweet dated 2008 expresses a cognitive dissonance at seeing the trend of paid library consultants and their promotion through a directory.

anyone else find this for-pay directory of library consultants a bit behind the curve? http://www.libraryconsultants.org/

Similarly, in October 2013 another group of librarians converse on Twitter about their reservations about library consultants.

1. Narrator1 @N1 20 Oct 2013
   Why are library senior managers/councillors bringing in consultants to make efficiencies, why don't they just talk to users, staff & unions?
   3 retweets 1 favorite
2. Narrator2 @N2
   Alternative answers > (1 of 2) Before paying consultants they should have looked up the word "efficiency" in the OED [Oxford English Dictionary]... and
3. Narrator2
   A lot easier to *hide* or *bin* a consultant's Report than feedback from "users, staff and unions" - ain't it?
4. Narrator1
   @N1 and too many ex library managers are now consultants making money out of our misery :-(
5. Narrator2
   @N1 Dear Library consultants When asked to recommend #efficiencies - Have you *ever* advised councils "not to use consultants" ?
   2 Retweets 2
6. Narrator3 @N3
   Yes. But I do suggest they talk to the staff.
7. Narrator2
   @N3 @N1 It'd be like asking turkeys to vote for Christmas, I suppose.
8. Narrator1
   1 retweet 1 favorite
9. Narrator3
   @N2 @N1 I don't know. Don’t meet many turkeys. Sure there are many turkey technologists out there though.
10. Narrator1
    @N3 @N2 there are some very technical issues that outside help may be needed with but in general I'm concerned re costs
23. Narrator3
24. @N1 @N2 Me too! But also with money spent on poor technology choices. "4 legs good" argument oversimplifies.

25. Narrator1
26. @N3 @N2 having only 140 characters on twitter oversimplifies ;-) 

27. Narrator2
28. @N1 Simple souls, like us, simply prefer simplicity | P.S. @N3 What does "4 legs good" MEAN? 

29. Narrator3
30. @N2 @N1 Animal Farm. 4 legs good, 2 legs bad (or better?). :-) My way of suggesting not all consultancy is bad.

31. Narrator4 @N4 K. @K**** 20 Oct 2013
32. @N3 Chris Collinson (a consultant) writes a lot about use of consultants and impact on 'KM'. @N2 @N1 

33. Narrator4
34. @N3 He's well known for advocating consultants shouldn't be used when own knowledge/skills can be used @N2 @N1 

35. Narrator4
36. @N3 But my own team would sink without our contractors. They have technical expertise we just don't @N2 @N1 

37. Narrator1
38. @N4 @N3 @N2 I wasn't singling mick out just making a general point about spending money unnecessarily :-) 

39. Narrator1
40. @N4 @N3 @N2 I did say it might be necessary some times :-) 

41. Narrator3
42. @N4 @N2 @N1 Most public libraries had tech experts - but posts were cut to save money. Very much opposed this. 

43. Narrator3
44. @N4 @N2 @N1 Choice now is trust suppliers or hire expertise - not a great choice :-)

45. Narrator3
46. @N1@N4 @N2 I knew that. But have to defend value of some consultancy - just as you defend library posts.

47. Narrator2
48. @N1@N4 @N3 Mick was the only consultant who responded. We know he's a good, principled egg.

49. Narrator3
50. @N2 @N1@N3 Thank you [Narrator2]. Other eggs are available… :-)

The tweet above reflects back and forth conversation on the value of using consultants and when should libraries use consultants. The first narrator in line 2 asks “Why are library senior managers/councillors bringing in consultants to make efficiencies, why don't they just talk to users, staff & unions?” This question critically challenges library administration to give an explanation for why they use library consultants, when it appears that users, staff and unions may also be able to provide answers that management or administration seeks. In line 36, we see one of the justification for the use of library consultants as a respondent argues that “my own team would sink without our contractors. They have technical expertise we just don’t”. As such, the narrative reflects that the hiring of library consultants is not without controversy and as one respondent commented in line 46 that library administration has “to defend value of some consultancy - just as you defend library posts”.
Alternately, others critique library consulting as a negative trend in librarianship as it represents the move to outsource library services to suppliers or temporarily hire outside expertise. This trend according to a commentator in line 42 represents a cost saving initiative undertaken by “Most public libraries” that “had tech experts - but posts were cut to save money.” The storyline therefore emerges that library consulting and library consultants are a negative outcome of library practices to reduce expenditure and to become more efficient.

While the above narratives reflect storylines critiquing the idea of library consultants in general, there are some narratives that critique particular individual library consultants. Specific library consultants are also represented in a few tweets as exhibiting bad behaviour at library conferences without being properly held accountable for such behaviour. In one tweet, there is a narrative told of “library consultants” who are not well-behaved at library technology conferences. In May 2014, librarians converse about the library consultants’ behaviour at library conferences, portraying the library consultants as villains and, in particular, “predators” who prey on librarians (Line 13).

1. Narrator1 @N1 May 3
   2. And the fact that most of you THAT KNOW WHAT I AM SAYING IS TRUE and letting me stand here by my [expletive] self, I have lost all respect
   3. 1 retweet 1 favorite
   4. Retweet1 Favorite1
5. Narrator2
6. @N1 I can understand why you are disappointed - but you're not alone here. There are folks against this with you
7. 1 favorite
8. Narrator2
9. @N1 I'd advocate in the strongest possible terms of the necessity of a code of conduct at [abbreviation of library conference] and [abbreviation of library conference]. But I don't go to those
10. Narrator2
11. @N1 And I don't go to [abbreviation of library conference] and [abbreviation of library conference] on principle. And known poor behaviour by well known library consultants is one reason why
12. Narrator1
13. @N2 I've also started taking that pledge and I do not attend conferences where known predators will be.

The theme of library consultants behaving badly at conferences and being “predators” also occurs in another narrative, where a tweet summarizes and refers to a blog post about a male library consultant suing two female librarians who accused him online of womanizing behaviour. It is difficult to identify the victim in the narrative as the library consultant is positioned as the one taking action to defend his reputation from two antagonists who have painted him as a villain.

Hey @B****B****, two female librarians are being sued by a library consultant for accusing him of sexual predation
http://teamharpy.wordpress.com/2014/09/19/official-teamharpy-statement-on-the-case-of-joseph-hawley-murphy-vs-nina-de-jeus-and-lisa-rabey/ ... 

There is also another narrative whereby a library consultant resorts to a lawsuit to settle a problem with a client. In 2011 tweets abstracted a newspaper article about a library consultant suing her client for trademark or copyright infringements.
USA : Frankly, We'll Sue the Library : Consultant in Copyright Claim
http://www.mvgazette.com/article.php?31828 ...

In this particular case, we see that a library consultant, who is supposed to share
knowledge with clients, seeking to prevent a client through legal means from using her
knowledge or applying the fruits of her labour. Such narratives indicate a trait of library
consultants as attempting to use legal structures to maintain power over librarians and
clients by controlling what information is shared or used.

SATIRICAL NARRATIVES OF LIBRARY CONSULTANTS

On the lighter side, library consultants also happen to be the butt of jokes and
satirical criticisms in a number of tweet narratives. For example, US librarians
conversing on Twitter shared satirical jabs at library consultants about their power status
at library conferences and their practice of charging money for their advice. One tweet
narrative records this conversation:

1. Narrator1 @N1 Jun 3
2. Here’s my two cents on calling people out on bad behavior at conferences....just
   be adults.
3. Narrator2 @N2
4. @N1 Or you could become a library consultant, charge $200 an hour, and say
   the same thing. :D
5. Narrator 1
6. @N2 When I give a talk, I try not to be full of crap. LOLOLOL. Mostly. Also, I
   charge way more than that.

In this conversation library consultants are portrayed as characters that “charge
$200 an hour” to seemingly say the obvious. However, Narrator 1 responds stating that
“When I give a talk, I try not to be full of crap” which seemingly pokes fun that library
consultants give talks that are not useful to hearers. These serious allegations are
however masked in emotions of humor, signaled by the emoticon “:D” and the
“LOLOLOL”. The imagery of money and the theme of library consultants not providing
value for money emerge out of this tweet as a storyline that negatively challenges the
idea of library consulting as well as provides a negative stereotype of library consultants.

A further negative characterization of library consultants is the idea that library
consultants are arrogant. In one tweet, a narrator complains of the big egos of library
consultants in the following conversation:

1. Narrator1 @N1 Aug 8
2. On the other hand (back to promotion topic) just unfollowed a consultant who
   only follows a small %age of followers...
3. Narrator2 @N2
4. @N1 why? just because they don't follow back?
5. Narrator1
6. @N2 mild aversion to promo only (altho @[subject] helped me over corporate
   ad ire), esp in my field, part ego, part anti-PR-only
7. Narrator2
8. @N1 oh, yeah, I guess I can see that.
9. Narrator1
10. @N2 Library consultant. Former libn I think. And the ego thing? I do know a fair
    amount, share widely, know many, lv to promote..

In this narrative, the narrator produces a storyline that critiques a particular library
consultant as using Twitter only to increase in numbers of followers and for self-
promotion. Such practices instigate within the narrator an “aversion” especially if the consultant uses their tweets for “prom only”. Consequently, library consultants are also critiqued for how they go about presenting self.

Nonetheless, another tweet does advocate that there is a place for library consultants to present about themselves and their expertise. As one narrator states:

If you are a library consultant, any work you do for a library conference isn’t ‘pro bono’. That would be called marketing.

This tweet crosses between a critique of library consultants who charge money for presenting at conferences and discussing the ideal situation where library consultants present at conferences and share their knowledge for free. As such, while is apparent that some clients of library consulting are not satisfied with library consultants that promote themselves, others are willing to listen to such promotion if done in the context of a conference presentation in which the consultant shares useful knowledge for free. While these satirical storylines, like the tragic storylines in the previous section, portray library consultants as villains or tricksters or characters that are unlikeable because of some undesirable behaviour or trait, the next section discusses the themes of the idealized library consultant.

ROMANTIC IDEALIZATION NARRATIVES OF LIBRARY CONSULTANTS AND LIBRARY CONSULTING

In contrast to the previous narratives that focused on either real events or real characters, the romantic idealization of tweet narratives on library consultants are more like fictional narratives that seek to promote what library consultants should be or how they ought to behave. In this romantic genre, we find tweets that idealize what library consultants could or should do. One such tweet narrative features librarians discussing the job market situation for librarians. In this conversation, in line 8, one of the narrators expresses that library consultants are needed to improve the job situation by making proposals to institutions (businesses and non-profits) that would create librarian positions in these entities.

1. Narrator1 @N1 Dec 9
eliminate scarcity and I fervently hope every single person becomes a PhD. not now though.
3. Narrator2 @N2
@N1 I think some people continue school *because* there are no jobs now and that thing improves in two years. Happened in the 80s recession
5. Narrator1
@N2... caused me to stop griping except for griping about YOU, [Narrator2], who did it before it was common. ARRRRRR
7. Narrator2
@N1 What we *need* are library consultants who approach companies and non-profits and campaign for library positions within those orgs

This particular conversation creates a storyline that positions library consultants as being powerful and having influence outside of librarianship, so that they can put their skills and influence to getting outsiders to provide more employment for librarians. As such, in this conversation library consulting is proposed and recommended as a means of creating more employment opportunities for librarians.

Creating jobs for librarians is not the only type of idealized narrative told about library consultants. In some tweets, a job announcement is made regarding the creation of
an employment opportunity for a library consultant. I also classify these announcements or tweets about job positions within the romantic genre. Tweets that summarize job positions belong to a very important genre of narratives produced about library consultants and library consulting. A query shows that the term “job” (and the variants of “jobs, #job, #jobs”) occurs in 64 of the 605 tweets in my dataset and is mentioned a total of 117 times in the tweets. Other terms related to the term are “position” (or “positions”), which occurs 13 times in the data, “jobannouncement” (sic), which occurs twice, and “opportunity” (or “opportunities”), which is mentioned 13 times. As such, due to their prevalence in tweets, job positions as narratives deserve analysis in their own right.

While sceptics may suggest that job positions or tweets about a job are not narratives, it is possible to treat tweets referring to jobs as narratives or as possessing storylines. I particularly treat job positions or advertisements as somewhat narratological with the basic storyline that an institution is seeking or recruiting for a particular individual to help it achieve its mission. The job ad that the tweet links or refers to further outlines the qualities of this imaginary or idealized individual that the institution perceives to be the perfect candidate or hero for the job. In one regard, a job ad embodies a romantic storyline, inviting a candidate to a job interview which can metaphorically be considered as a matchmaking date.

For example, in the narrative of the “American University of Afghanistan is hiring a library consultant to modernize their catalog” this tweet presented earlier in the previous section highlights that a particular institution is seeking an ideal character that can help it attain fulfilment of having its catalog modernized. Tweets, like this one, produce idealized narratives that express narrator’s wishes and fantasies. They sometimes serve as conceptual playgrounds for reimagining reality. Such narratives in tweets also document alternative realities that narrators conjure in their head as the ideal experiences or events. Riessman (1993) labels such narratives that “depict events that have not happened” as hypothetical narratives (18).

**TALES OF ALTERNATIVE LIBRARY CONSULTING**

Within romantic idealized or hypothetical narratives discussing job positions, there is an unusual storyline that presents what I call alternative library consulting. In one particular job opportunity tweet, a particular UK library presents an alternate way of selecting and hiring library consultants. Rather than employing or hiring consultants to gauge what library “consumers” want, the Essex library in 2011 took a grass roots approach to library consulting by posting several tweets inviting several teenaged users of the library to become its “library consultants”. The tweet reads:

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Library consultant opportunities for 12 - 16 year olds
http://goo.gl/oSfRx
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In this case, the client seeks more than one library consultant person, firm or entity. Additionally, the client’s approach is unusual, as rather than hiring an adult with the appropriate professional expertise, the client seeks to hire teenaged or juvenile users of the library that are served by the client. While this seems like an unusual practice for hiring and selecting library consultants, the approach does seem to have some merit. At least one narrative, a conversation on Twitter, features young adult library users fantasizing about becoming library consultants for the library’s young adult book collection.

1. Narrator1@N1 13 Aug 2012
2. Enter to win a YA book of your choice from @N2 in the Young Adult Giveaway Hop! http://www.onceuponaprologue.blogspot.ca/

3. Narrator2 @N2
4. @ N1 Thanks for the RT, and for the awesome comment on my review! I can't wait for you to read Defiance.

5. Narrator1
6. @N2 My pleasure! I can't wait either. I might have to bug my library, see if I can be their YA book correspondent/suggester lol

7. Narrator2
8. @N1 I like that idea! I need to be mine for my library! Haha

9. Narrator1
10. @N2 Wouldn't it be a crazy fun job? My library is good about YA books but could definitely be better.

11. Narrator3
12. @N1 @N2 I wonder if my library needs one. :D

13. Narrator1
14. @N3 @N2 I wonder if they'd actually consider it. We're the next best thing to 'experts' on YA, you know?

15. Narrator3
16. @N1 @N2 yep! We read plenty of it, have the experience.

17. Narrator1
18. @N3 @N2 Exactly! Plus keep up with trends and see what's popular among other bloggers. I'm going to contact my library!

19. Narrator2
20. @N1@N3 I think I might give mine a call too and ask!

21. Narrator3
22. @N2 @N3 me too! Or maybe email because I have phone phobia.

23. Narrator1
24. @N3 @N2 OMG phone phobia! Me too! I think it'd be cool if the 3 of us could be YA library consultants. :-)

25. Narrator3
26. @N1@N2 we can start a consultant business together..? *beams*

27. Narrator2
28. @N1@N3 phone phobia? :( I LOVE talking on the phone.

29. Narrator3
30. @N2 @N1 I don't. I hate it. I get so anxious. It is ridiculous sometimes. :( 

31. Narrator1
32. @N3 @N2 You guys have my mind reeling with ideas! How freaking awesome would a consultant business be?! 

33. Narrator2
34. @N3 @N1That's too bad! But we love you anyway!

35. Narrator3
36. @N1 @N2 can we? Pleeease.

37. Narrator1
38. @N2 @N3 I talk to people I know, but calling strangers or answering the phone freaks me out. I have social anxiety issues

[Tweets omitted]

In the above narrative, actual young adults, who are a part of the community that librarians serve, fantasize in their conversation about being library consultants who provide young adult book advisory services to their public library. They are excited about the prospect and contemplate what they need to do in order to start such a consulting
business. Part of their perception about the library consulting start-up is that they may have to cold call strangers.

This narrative also shows that there are would-be library consultants among library users who would willingly offer outsider perspectives. This particular narrative provides evidence that librarianship may need to rethink the discourse surrounding library consulting and how we define who is a library consultant and who is not.

**DISCUSSION**

One of the surprising emerging thought that came to me as I conducted this study is how different some of the narratives from tweets are from the narrative in the published library literature. From reading the library literature on library consultants there appears to be a monolithic narrative that assumes that consultants bring new ways of thinking and acting to libraries. This monolithic narrative represents what Lyotard (1984) calls the master narrative or the use of a “philosophy of history” to “legitimate knowledge” and/or institutions (p. xxiv). According to Jensen (2008), the grand or master narrative introduced by Lyotard refers to institutional and ideological forms of knowledge that represents the status quo or that a society uses to define itself. In this regard, the library literature tells a narrative that defines library consulting in a particular way that perpetuates and legitimizes the practice in the way that it has been defined. The narrative further legitimizes the idea that library consulting exists and is a useful practice because not many libraries have the expertise for the wide and diverse environmental changes that they have to monitor and respond to.

However, some of the tweets portray an alternate narrative or counter-narrative that challenges the positioning of library consultants as heroes and as at the forefront of positive change in librarianship. Some tweet narratives attribute to the practice of library consulting a legitimization of the way things are that prevents librarians from getting desired employment. While some ascribe to library consultants the powers of being able to bring positive change to librarians, not all are of the view that library consultants are creating the desired positive change for librarianship. Yet, despite the fact that some expectations held about library consultants may be unrealistic, library consultants can get insights into what the public realistically and unrealistically expects of library consultants, and can take action to change those expectations for better by improved communication and conversation.

Other narratives propose alternate ways of getting expertise that librarians do not have, by engaging customers or others that are not defined by the literature as “library consultants”. Hence, tweet data provides evidence that there are narratives that reflect greater diversity of perspectives than found in the library literature’s discourse. This hereby raises the question of whether or not the literature on library consulting is indeed aligned with the changing times or whether or not there is need to revise the discussions about the practice of library consulting.

Despite the counter narratives, tweet data also reflect the master-narrative of the library literature that paints a positive and romantic view of library consulting. Such hero and romantic stories are important as they hold up the ideals that library consultants should aspire to. They also confirm that library consulting and library consultants are still valued for helping librarians and libraries evaluate and make needed transformations.
CONCLUSION

This particular study investigated the world of library consulting and library consultants from a scholarly perspective that has not yet been applied in the library literature. In particular, I investigated the storylines in tweets on library consultants and library consulting. In general, tweets produced storylines portraying the good, the bad, the ugly and the ideal of library consulting and library consultants. These positive and negative representations in storylines reveal that library consultants are represented in tweets but not without opposition and controversy by those who tweet about library consultants. While there are positive views that there is a need for library consultants, storylines reflect various lack of consensus about the position of library consultants and what they should or should not do. Consultants can sometimes be seen as heroes when they produce meaning that their clients value, but are negatively stereotyped for problematic behavior or for producing meaning that clients do not consider valuable.

Tweets are further used to both justify and critique the work of library consultants by drawing on positive or negative word images or metaphors. Some library consultants are said to be “fantastic” and “amazing”, while others are labelled to be “predators”, “full of crap” or possess big egos. Nonetheless, narrators tweeting about library consultants do not see the position as altogether problematic. In fact, it seems that library discourse is currently ready for a new conversation about the idea of library consultants.

It is evident that the library literature has outdated notions of library consulting that the profession is currently questioning. Far from library consultants just being outsiders with expertise, there needs to be a conversation about what is library consulting and who can do it. Can library users be temporarily hired as library consultants to offer the “outsider” perspective? Can ordinary librarians play library consulting roles in initiating change within an institution? Can library consulting save librarians from unemployment or is library consulting a contributor to the precarious employment of librarians? These are some of the questions that this study raises as potential questions for future research.

On a cautionary note, the results of this study must be seen as breaking ground for further research on library consulting. While tweets may not provide a complete picture of the world of library consulting, they provide alternative perspectives about library consulting and library consultants. In addition, tweet narratives are more diverse than those presently existing in the library literature. As such, this data can still inform future research and surveys of library consulting.

References


ENDNOTES

1 Narrative analysis refers to a qualitative research approach that evaluates human textual communication using linguistic and literary techniques (Riessman 1993; Daiute and Lightfoot 2004).

2 According to Davies and Harré (1999) discourse further refers to the “institutionalized use of language and language-like sign systems” (p. 34).