

Connections Matter: Personal Learning Network (PLN) Amidst the Pandemic

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Abstract. Library and Information Science (LIS) education has shifted and continued to transform as a growing organism, especially with the emergence of Web 2.0. In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic shifted face-to-face classes to online. Most of the colleges of the University of the Philippines Diliman adopted a remote learning education. One of these colleges is the School of Library and Information Studies (UP SLIS). The faculty members of UP SLIS were driven by their changing roles to quickly adapt to remote teaching. As LIS educators, they have utilized Web 2.0 for their classes while they sought online collaboration for their own professional development.

This study analyzed the UP SLIS Faculty members and their trends as connected educators during the pandemic. Specifically, the tools used, how they managed them, and their motivations to build their Personal Learning Network (PLN). Using a survey questionnaire, the data collected were analyzed to answer the research problems.

The results of the study found an increased trend of utilization of social media tools, participation, and collaboration in the national and international fields of LIS during the pandemic, which not only benefits the development of the academic but also the professional life of the UP SLIS Faculty members as part of their PLN.



Keywords: Personal Learning Network (PLN), Library and Information Science Education, LIS Teachers

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic forced everyone to engage more in the digital world. Everything shifted to online means, from communication to learning. The impact of the pandemic is significant and has changed the way people learn these days. For more than two years now, learners have already adapted to online learning where the many readily available platforms and tools to use have served as alternatives.

With the current modality of learning in the academe, the faculty members are not exempted in this mode as they are the ones who are generally affected. But whatever effect the pandemic has brought, the faculty saw this as an opportunity. They adjusted, took initiatives, and looked for other ways and means on how and where to learn and gain information to support their learning and teaching needs. As an aid in their quest for learning and development, the faculty (without realizing what they have built), widened their personal learning networks in the digital space.

1.1. The UP School of Library and Information Studies (UP SLIS)

The UP School of Library and Information Studies (SLIS) is the oldest library school in the Philippines with both program offerings for the graduate and undergraduate levels. The first courses in Library Science were offered at the College of Liberal Arts of the University of the Philippines in 1914. The course became a separate degree granting unit as this was elevated to university level on July 1, 1961. The four-year curriculum was instituted to prepare students for professional work in libraries and for teaching Library Science courses.

It was in 1961 when the Institute of Library Science was founded and later became the Institute of Library and Information Science on 29 August 2002, upon the approval of the Board of Regents. The UP ILS was renamed UP ILIS to reflect the expanding field of library and information science (Golfo-Barcelona, 2021). On 29 March 2007, the Board of Regents approved its second change of name to School of Library and Information Studies (UP SLIS). This is in recognition of its dynamic growth both in the number of enrollees and in the development of its curricular offerings.

Since its establishment, the school has consistently contributed to the development of librarianship and information science education, archives and profession. It continues to produce top ranking graduates who are sought after in the field of LIS, archives and records management, information systems management, knowledge management, and the like. A significant number of its

graduates have excelled in the profession and have been recognized as trailblazers in the field of LIS in the country (Golfo-Barcelona, 2021).

The UP SLIS is recognized as the Center of Excellence in Library and Information Science by the Commission on Higher Education because of its faculty and student profile, research productivity, and contribution to the field. In 2016, UP SLIS became a member of the iSchools Consortium whose objective is to advance the information field and bridge information, people and technology.

UP SLIS Faculty Members

According to the current Dean of UP SLIS, the school has a robust faculty complement (Golfo-Barcelona, 2021). They have a diverse range of academic research interests from librarianship, information practice, archives, technology, management, young adult librarianship, and many more. The faculty members also have contributed various researches and have published in several journals.

As part of their commitment to serve, all of them are active members and/or officers of various associations and organizations, both locally and internationally. They are also tapped as resource speakers and lecturers in various fora, seminars, conferences, and conventions in the country and abroad.

All of the school's faculty members have graduate degrees in various LIS fields and specializations. At present, most of them are enrolled in their doctorate studies and/or other advanced education in universities.

1.2. Research Problem

With the lack of local studies on PLN in LIS field, the authors were motivated to conduct this study as it attempts to find out the Personal Learning Networks or PLNs of the University of the Philippines School of Library and Information Studies Faculty (UP SLIS Faculty) members during the Covid-19 pandemic. The study looks at the faculty's perspectives about PLNs, the tools used, time spent in PLNs, and their encounters in building their PLNs.

For the purpose of this study, the authors used their conceptual definition of Personal Learning Network or PLN, which as that of both formal and informal networks of people with similar interests where the learning professional joins in, interacts with, collaborates, and solves problems with, among others, to enrich their learning and development.

2. Literature Review

This section looks at the various literature on Personal Learning Network, its definition, its relation to the professional lives of individuals, and its presence or absence thereof, in LIS Education.

2.1. Personal Learning Network (PLN)

In 1998, the idea of Personal Learning Network or PLN was described by Daniel Tobin in his article as “a group of people who can guide your learning, point you to learning opportunities, answer your questions, and give you the benefit of their own knowledge and experience” (p. 1). It was further explained in an article by Lalonde (2009) that Tobin was referring to his informal network of colleagues and professional acquaintances to whom he could turn if he needed information. It’s noted that during Tobin’s time PLNs were not particularly virtual or on a PC-based network.

An earlier description was also made by Digeni (1999) stating Personal Learning Network (PLN) consists of relationships between individuals where the goal is enhancement of mutual learning. Digeni noted that PLN can be a valuable tool for enhancing and building interdependence in an organization. However, in building a PLN, Digeni emphasized overcoming the hesitation around “us-ing” people. This is so since PLNs follow a reciprocal relationship with others where the main goal is to serve and provide value-added information and increase mutual learning in the network.

For Ferguson (2011), a PLN is a community of individuals around the world who are learning together. As so, Harding and Engelbrecht (2015) describe PLN as a person making a connection with another person with the specific intent that some learning will occur because of that connection. In their study, they found that there is a spontaneous formation of PLN clusters from knowledge-pull communities and that the longevity of PLNs clusters can be sustained if it commits to life-long communal learning. However, they did find difficulties in dealing with the more structured collaborative learning practices.

2.2. PLN and Web 2.0

The gap of PLN literatures during the early 2000s is evident. Nevertheless, the advancement of technology, the rise of Web 2.0 from social media to software applications have followed suit of the earlier descriptions of Personal Learning Network.

Rajagopal et al (2012) mentioned in their study that individuals can create and tailor connections to effectively support their learning needs. Moreover, they emphasized the importance of adapting technology to support this network, ultimately transforming it into a Personal Learning Network (PLN). Oliveira

and Morgado's (2018) study described PLN as a network of people with whom you are connected to in order to learn and that is created according to personal interests and needs, providing learning opportunities, providing answers to questions and contributing to mutual learning. They concluded that Web 2.0 supports the process of acquiring and sharing knowledge, collaboration, and network cooperation in developing a PLN. Thang (2018) emphasized in her chapter that personal networks formed through PLNs provide individuals with knowledge and skills by collaborating with people worldwide who share a common interest. These PLNs are primarily through easily accessible social media platforms. Therefore, the creation of a PLN enables individuals to expand their knowledge by engaging in discussions with people across the globe via social media.

Carter & Nugent's (2011) PLN is based on the premise that learning through interaction with multiple people and in multiple contexts through virtual communities. By engaging with others who share similar interests and motivations for learning, the learner develops a network of contacts and resources to solve problems and access learning when and where it's needed. The PLN functions as a self-designed and self-initiated system for lifelong learning.

Bauer (2010) simply described PLN as a collection of both experts and a variety of things while Richardson and Mancabelli (2011) PLN, on the other hand, is in the context that the Internet is present. They described PLN as a set of connections to people both offline and online who enrich learning- at a moment's notice. However, both did observe that many existing Web 2.0 tools can help an individual develop their PLN whatever their personal information needs and interests might be. Both studies pointed out the advantage with a technology-assisted PLN is its accessibility. It allows an individual to be part of the global conversation asynchronously, even without Internet access. A discussion from a recent study of Ekoc (2020) particularly highlighted both synchronous and asynchronous interaction of digital PLNs of teachers. They found out that the teacher participants voluntarily engage in informal learning through online communities but in their "own time", even recognizing that there is knowledge sharing beyond the topic or interest of the network.

2.3. PLN and Professional Isolation

In 2020, SARS-COV2 spread throughout the world. It is a communicable disease that is said to spread through aerosol droplets. To combat its spread, many businesses and institutions adopted the work-from home or remote working arrangement. As the pandemic dragged on, professionals were made to adapt to the challenges and demands brought by remote working arrangement. The long lockdowns and community quarantine have led people in isolation. Some individuals may have even experienced professional isolation - a state when a professional individual experiences a little to no interaction,

collaboration, and development from their professional peers (Kutoane et al, 2021).

Teachers in Trust et al (2016) study described the different types of isolation including geographic, content area, grade level, learning disposition, and educational philosophy. Teachers overcame those types of isolation with the aid of the PLN. They were able to connect and learn mutually with various educators and experts. Tour's (2017) study mentioned how PLN, especially online communication, helps teachers socialize and overcome their professional isolation. Online communication helped teachers share and discuss topics relating to their profession which provided them insights and support for their work. An article written by Flanigan (2011) also mentioned PLNs helping reduce teachers' isolation, promote autonomy and offer global access and support to them.

Connections made through Technology-assisted PLNs contribute to diminishing the feeling of professional isolation in Bauer's (2011) observation. Manning's (2015) study also found out that the worker's approach of learning a new skill is by using online tools then tapping for assistance and support in their personal network of trusted sources.

Haas et al. (2020) study noted that Web 2.0, especially social media platforms, overcomes the challenges of geographical distances as it allows connections with new nodes. Whether in person or via-technology facilitated venues, any connections occurring can develop into a PLN. They concluded that a strong PLN incorporates connections developed in person and via technology-facilitated experiences. They also acknowledged that there are strategies on professional use of social media and assisting faculty educators and trainees in the creation and maintenance of their PLNs. Asarkiji and Laohajatsang (2021) recent study further emphasized the significance of PLNs as they contribute to both formal and informal learning in the digital era. They specifically highlighted the integration of PLNs with online learning, which has the potential to enhance professional experiences and internships across various learning domains. They noted that PLNs are commonly established within social networking platforms, which serve as effective communication tools connecting learners and educators.

2.4. Teacher PLN and Professional Development

A study of Ivanova et al (2012) signified Personal Learning Networks (PLNs) and social networking's potential in supporting teacher's personal and professional development. Their findings highlighted that the decision to utilize a PLN is a personal choice for educators. Nevertheless, teachers and administrators are PLN motivated. They will develop both types of PLNs: information aggregation and social media connections. They will gain more PLN currency as they manage the information overload brought by it. Teachers

with PLN thrive in a demanding and dynamic work environment. Networking with like-minded individuals becomes a cyclical learning process. There is mutual receiving and providing of information. They share their knowledge with others and tap other experts in their PLN. With PLN, the isolated teacher becomes a lifelong learner (Trust, 2012) as it helps an individual's personal goals evolve and grow through life (Richardson and Mancabelli, 2011).

According to Bauer, (2010) teacher professional development needs are not a one-size-fit-all. Personal Learning Networks have the capacity to let adult professionals personalize their own informal programs of continuing education (Neubauer et al, 2011; Ivanova et al, 2012). Trust et al's (2016) study on the Personal Learning Network of teachers suggested that PLNs are complex systems of people, digital tools, and resources. The study found and highlighted various ways PLN can aid teachers' cognitive and professional growth based on individual and group interests and needs. In consideration of PLN's flexibility and adaptivity advantage brought to teachers, it offers them opportunities to continuously learn, engage, and participate among and beyond their community. PLN in the study of Gorla et al. (2019) supported teachers to enhance their skills, professionally expand and network, and created opportunities beyond their formal training programs for their professional development. They noted digital technologies and social media are utilized as individuals organize their own learning. Teacher's continuity of learning occurs in diverse contexts and sources. Significantly, PLNs help promote professional learning amongst teachers. It will help them independently navigate to relevant online learning spaces for them to engage and grow their PLNs (Tour, 2017). Lastly, Rajagpal et al. (2012) studies showed that a professional who actively cultivates and utilizes their personal network, including both strong, weak, and very weak connections, with the intention of enhancing their learning and leverages technology for this purpose effectively establishes a Personal Learning Network (PLN).

2.5. PLN and LIS Education

In 2012, Cooke acknowledged the changing landscape of LIS education as it is a growing organism. New technology and media opened opportunities for connections and collaborations. Cooke discussed Personal Learning Networks in building online learning communities. PLN was described in the article to occur asynchronously with a learner and the people they may or may not know they surround themselves to collaborate with. The article implied that Personal Learning Network is dedicated more to professional learning and development. Cooke also stated that PLNs utilize technological applications to reach both more local and global experts for learning.

Learning is at the heart of PLN. The most effective learning situations, face-to-face or online, are in an environment where there is mutual learning present

according to Cooke. It however takes significant time and effort in planning, creation, and its maintenance for learning to occur in an online environment. Studies of Oliveira and Morgado (2018) and Couros (2010) supported that communities or networks crumble when they are not based on communal learning. Even Warwick (2009) highlights that the members, the learners, are the core of every PLN. Lifelong learning is sustained by individuals both actively and interactively committed to continue forming connections. Ultimately, the amount of trusted network of experts, the learning experiences, and new opportunities compensate for the significant time in the development of a PLN. The connections built through PLN are the best part of it (Couros, 2010).

3. Methodology

The study is a descriptive research that utilized questionnaires to gather data about the Personal Learning Networks of the UP SLIS Faculty members during the pandemic. The questionnaire consists of sections that seek to answer, among others, the type of their PLN collaborations and connections, the gadgets mostly used in their PLNs, the time spent in their PLNs, the social media platforms used for PLNs and the time spent on these platforms, length of their PLNs, and their perspectives about PLNs.

Faculty members who were handling classes in both the graduate and undergraduate programs during the 2nd Semester Academic Year 2019-2020 until the 2nd Semester Academic Year 2021-2022 were given the online questionnaire. Those academic years were chosen as they were the pandemic semesters where classes were held remotely.

Prior to the distribution of the questionnaire, a letter of request was emailed to the Dean of UP SLIS asking for her consent to distribute the survey to the faculty members. Upon her approval, the questionnaire was emailed to the faculty members via Google form. They were given 5 days to answer the survey. Out of the 18 faculty members (comprising both full-time and part-time faculty) emailed, there were 9 faculty members who responded.

The data gathered were carefully analyzed and tabulated to answer the research questions.

4. Results and Discussion

The study looked at the PLNs of the UP SLIS full-time faculty members during the pandemic semesters at the University. There were a total of 9 faculty members who responded to the questionnaire. Interestingly, two (2) out of these 9 respondents mentioned that they do not have PLNs and these networks are not applicable to them.

This section is divided into segments based on the questions asked in the survey.

4.1. Subject Expertise/ Research Interests

The faculty members who responded to the survey had various subject expertise and/or research interests. These are the following:

- Library and Information Science (LIS) in general
- Foundations of LIS
- LIS education
- Social aspects of information
- Information practices
- Information literacy
- Information technology
- Media materials and technologies
- Digital libraries
- Digitization
- The Web
- Children and young adult literature
- GRFX
- Library management
- Indexing and abstracting
- Archival studies

As UP SLIS is a library and information science school in the Philippines, the subject expertise of its faculty members corresponds to the curriculum of the School and to that of the Philippine Commission on Higher Education (CHED). The faculty members' diverse expertise and research interests contribute to the richness and breadth of knowledge within the PLNs they establish. There is an importance of subject expertise and shared interests in forming effective PLNs (Tobin, 1998; Lalonde, 2009; Carter & Nugent, 2011; Bauer, 2010).

4.2. PLN Collaborations

The PLN collaborations asked for are either national or international networks. All of the respondents equally said that they both have national and international networks as seen in Table 1.

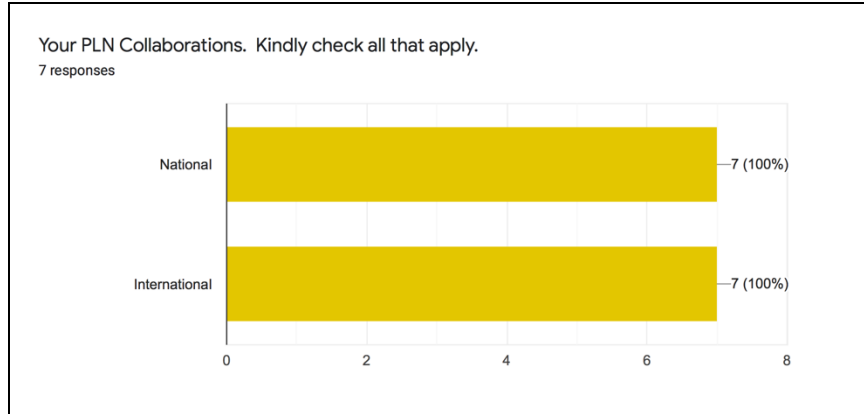


Table 1. PLN Collaborations

Indeed, there are various learning networks in the Philippines that are about LIS and LIS Education. All the faculty respondents also mentioned that their PLNs are both for personal and professional purposes. These results recognized the value of PLNs in fostering collaborations and knowledge exchange across different networks (Asarkiji and Laohajaratsang, 2021; Ferguson, 2011; Haas et al., 2020). Faculty members actively participate in these networks to enhance their professional growth, access resources, and stay updated with professional developments. Some of these networks mentioned are the Philippine Librarians Association, Inc. (PLAI), the accredited and integrated professional organization of librarians in the Philippines that is recognized by the Professional Regulation Commission of the Philippines through its Professional Regulatory Board; the Philippine Association of Academic and Research Librarians (PAARL); the Philippine Association of Teachers of Library and Information Science (PATLS); the Association of Special Libraries in the Philippines (ASLP); the Medical and Health Librarian’s Association of the Philippines (MAHLAP), and; the Society of Filipino Archivists (SFA), among others. Aside from these Philippine associations/organizations, the faculty respondents are also active in international associations or organizations. There are faculty members who are members of the International Federal of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) committees or working groups, the American Library Association (ALA), the Association for Information Science and Technology (ASIS&T), the Southeast Asia-Pacific Audiovisual Archive Association, and others.

4.3. PLN Connections

As for the respondents’ types of PLN Connections, all of them had online or virtual links or ties, 3 of them had face-to-face ones, and one faculty member had connections through mobile phones via calls or text messages. See Table 2.

Type of Your PLN Connections. Kindly check all the apply.
7 responses

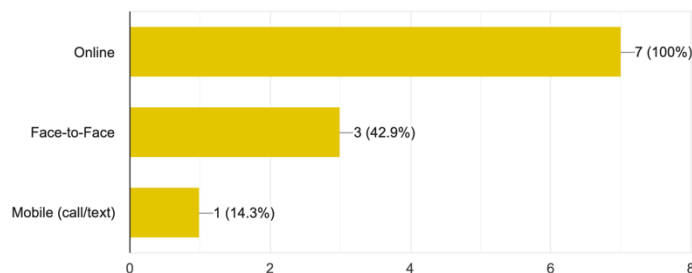


Table 2. PLN Connections

Due to the pandemic and the limitations it posed to face-to-face interactions, it is explicable that all of the faculty respondents had online connections.

The study found that UP SLIS faculty members primarily establish online or virtual connections within their PLNs. This highlights the impact of technology and Web 2.0 tools on PLN building (Asarkiji and Laohajaratsang, 2021; Cooke, 2012; Gorla et al, 2019; Oliveira & Morgado, 2018; Rajagopal et al, 2012; Richardson & Mancabelli, 2011). The faculty members utilize tools such as laptops, desktops, tablets, and mobile phones to connect with their PLNs. The choice of gadget depends on individual preferences and availability. Technology-assisted PLNs provide accessibility and convenience, allowing individuals to connect globally and engage in asynchronous interactions (Bauer, 2010; Cooke, 2012; Rajagopal et al, 2012; Richardson & Mancabelli, 2011).

4.4. Gadgets Used in PLNs

To establish connections with their PLNs, the respondents used various gadgets. These are gadgets that are mostly used by the faculty respondents are laptops, desktops, tablets, and mobile phones or smartphones. One respondent mostly used a laptop while another preferred to use a mobile phone or smartphone. Another faculty mostly used a desktop but the others mostly used a tablet.

The choice of what gadget to use for PLNs depends on the preference of the faculty respondent and also the availability of the gadget for this kind of use. These results emphasized the use of technology in PLN building (Cooke, 2012; Oliveira & Morgado, 2018; Rajagopal et al, 2012; Richardson & Mancabelli, 2011). This supports the idea that technology-assisted PLNs provide accessibility and enable individuals to connect with their networks conveniently, regardless of their geographic location or time constraints. The availability of

multiple gadgets allows faculty members to engage with their PLNs in a manner that suits their preferences and circumstances.

4.5. Time Spent per Network in a Day

The faculty respondents were asked the amount of time (in hours) they spent per network in a day. The identified networks are: Associations (international); Associations (national); Blogs; Book Clubs; Chat Groups; co-faculty; Professional Colleagues; Community Groups; Family; Forums; Emails (group); Friends/Peers; Group Discussion; Meetings; Organizations (international); Organizations (national); Podcasts; Vlogs, and; Webinars.

Table 3 shows the number of hours spent by the faculty respondents in the said networks.

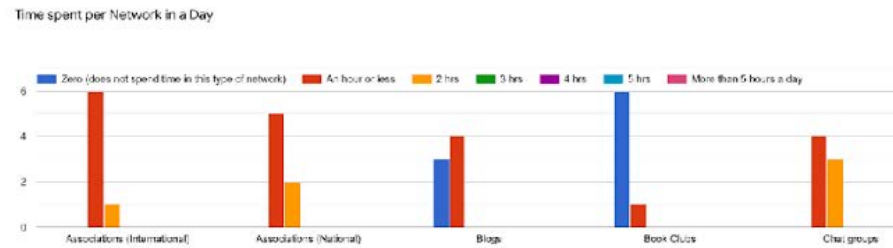


Table 3. Time Spent per Network per Day

Table 3 showed that most of the faculty respondents spend an hour or less in a day for both international and national associations, blogs, and chat groups. For book clubs, most of the respondents spent no time on this in a day.

Table 3.1 showed that most of the faculty respondents spend an hour or less on a co-faculty network, professional colleagues, community groups, family, and forums. However, there are also respondents who do not spend time in these networks.

Table 3.1. Time Spent per Network per Day

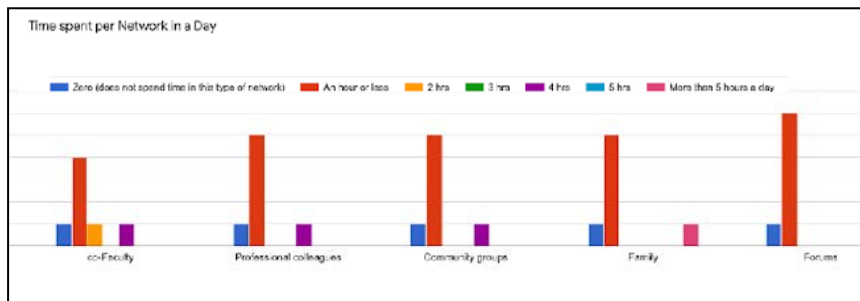


Table 3.2 showed there were faculty respondents who spent 2 hours in a day on emails, friends/peers, meetings, and international organizations. However, there were more faculty respondents who spend no time in a day for emails, group discussions, meetings, and organizations.

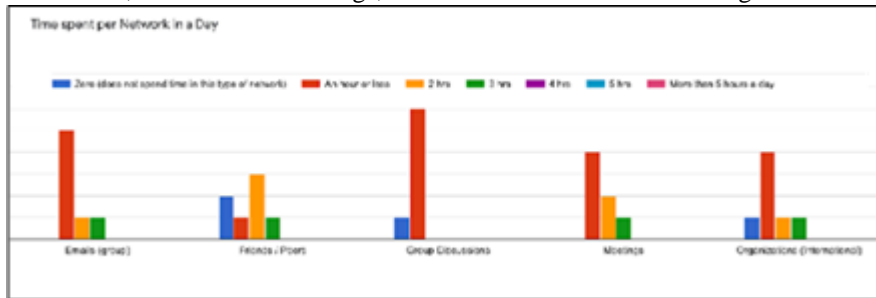


Table 3.2. Time Spent per Network per Day

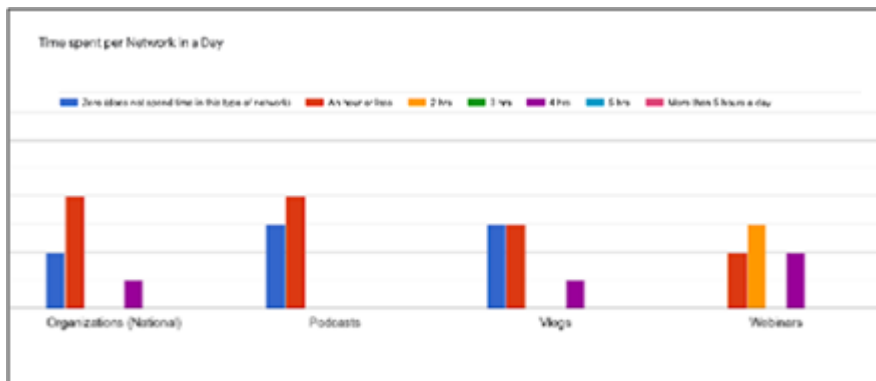


Table 3.3. Time Spent per Network per Day

Table 3.3 showed that there are a number of faculty respondents who spent an hour or less in national organizations, podcasts, and vlogs in a day. There are also some who do not spend time on these at all. It is good to note though there are a number of faculty respondents who spend 2 hours a day in webinars.

Apart from the networks identified, other networks mentioned by a faculty respondent were Coursera, Domestika, and Udemy. For these, s/he spent 1-2 hours per day.

Since the pandemic pushed individuals to work and study online in their own homes, faculty members were also learning via the remote mode. As such, the time spent in the various networks varies on a daily basis.

The UP SLIS faculty members allocated varying amounts of time to different networks within their PLNs. Most faculty members spend an hour or less on international and national associations, blogs, chat groups, co-faculty networks, professional colleagues, community groups, family, and forums. However, there are also faculty members who do not spend time in certain networks. Some faculty members spend 2 hours a day on emails, friends/peers, meetings, international organizations, and webinars. The time spent by the faculty members varies based on individual preferences, priorities, and the availability of activities within each network. This finding aligns with the flexibility of PLNs in terms of time management (Tobin, 1998; Bauer, 2010; Ekoc, 2020). Faculty members strategically allocate time based on their interests and information needs, ensuring that their PLN participation aligns with their other professional responsibilities. PLNs have the capacity to let individual professionals personalize their own informal programs (Neubauer et al, 2011; Ivanova et al, 2012; Ekoc, 2020).

4.6. PLNs through Social Media Sites and Platforms

The faculty respondents were also asked about the social media sites and platforms used for their PLNs. The options given are Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Viber, Telegram, Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, Reddit, Pinterest, Twitter, and LinkedIn.

Table 4 showed that the mostly used sites are Facebook and YouTube (both garnering the highest spots), then followed by Twitter.

PLNs through Social Media Sites and Platforms. Kindly check all that apply.
7 responses

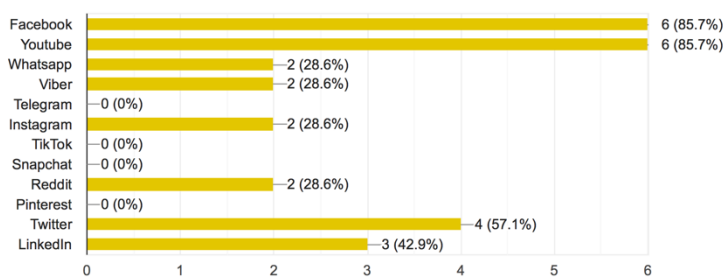


Table 4. PLNs in Social Media Sites and Platforms

Other media sites mentioned by a respondent are the review section of both Lazada and Shopee applications as they provide useful evaluation of products or items that the faculty intends to purchase.

These results showed that UP SLIS faculty members utilize various social media sites and platforms for their PLNs. The most commonly used platforms are Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter. This highlights the role of social media in PLN building and knowledge sharing (Bauer, 2010; Gorla et al, 2019; Oliveira & Morgado, 2018; Rajagopal et al, 2012; Thang, 2018;). Social media platforms provide opportunities for faculty members to connect with colleagues, access resources, and engage in discussions within their field. Social media platforms contribute to the accessibility and global reach of PLNs (Gorla et al, 2019; Haas et al., 2020; Oliveira & Morgado, 2018; Rajagopal et al, 2012; Richardson & Mancabelli, 2011; Thang, 2018;).

4.7. Time Spent in Social Media Sites and Platforms in a Day

The study also looked into the time spent of the faculty members in each of the sites and platforms above. Table 5 showed that most of the faculty respondents do not spend time in TikTok, but spend an hour or less on YouTube and Instagram. For some of the respondents, they spent more than 5 hours on Facebook and YouTube.

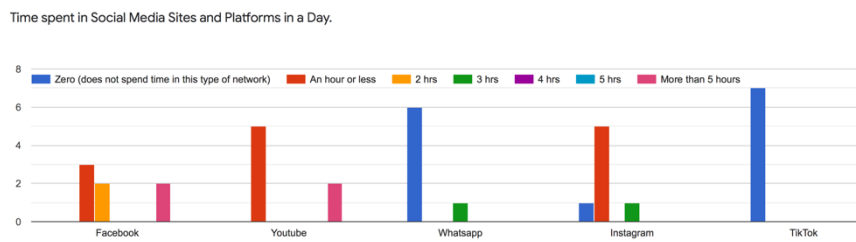


Table 5. PLNs in Social Media Sites and Platforms

Table 5.1. below showed that there was no time spent on Snapchat and Pinterest by the respondents. A number of them spent an hour or less on Reddit, Twitter, and LinkedIn.

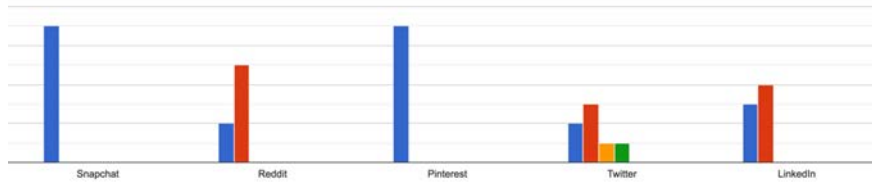


Table 5.1 PLNs in Social Media Sites and Platforms

These results showed that UP SLIS faculty members allocate varying amounts of time to different social media sites and platforms within their PLNs. Most of the faculty members spent an hour or less on YouTube and Instagram. Meanwhile, the time they spend on Facebook varies with some spending more than 5 hours per day. Faculty members spend an hour or less on platforms such as Reddit, Twitter, and LinkedIn. This finding acknowledges the varied time commitments and preferences of individuals in using social media for their PLNs (Bauer, 2010; Richardson & Mancabelli, 2011). Faculty members allocate time based on their specific interests and engagement levels within each platform. Their PLNs personalize for their own needs (Neubauer et al, 2011; Ivanova et al, 2012; Ekoc, 2020).

4.8. Number of Years Connected to PLNs

There were varying answers on the number of years in creating connections through PLNs from the faculty respondents. One mentioned their connection to be for 1-2 years, another mentioned 3-4 years, one for 5-6 years, another for 7-8 years, another one for 9-10 years, and 2 for 11 years and more. See Table 6.

How long have you been connected to your PLNs?
7 responses

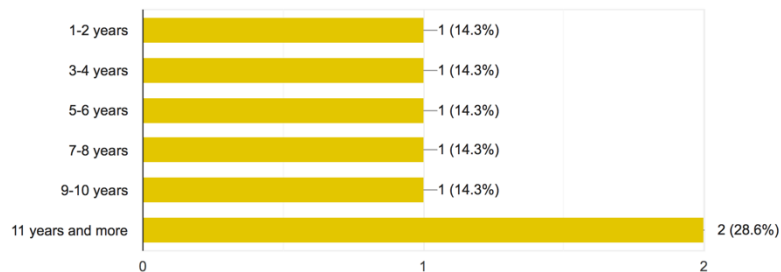


Table 6. Number of Years Connected to PLNs

These results showed that UP SLIS faculty members have varying lengths of experience in being connected to PLNs. Their number of years ranges from 1-2 years to 11 years and more. The faculty's PLNs is a growing organism, as Cooke (2012) mentioned, since there is a changing landscape in LIS education. This recognized the evolving nature of PLNs and the individual's journey in building and maintaining their networks (Bauer, 2010; Richardson & Mancabelli, 2011). The length of time connected to PLNs reflects the faculty members' commitment to ongoing learning and engagement with their networks. It also supported the idea that PLNs are dynamic and evolve over time, with new connections and collaborations forming as individuals expand their professional circles (Richardson & Mancabelli, 2011, Couros, 2010)).

4.9. Growth of PLNs during the Pandemic

When the faculty respondents were asked if their PLNs increased or decreased during the pandemic, all of them answered that it increased. Reasons given were the following:

- Due to the availability of numerous webinars, online MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses), conferences, and workshops, which are either free or offered at discounted rates.
- More time now since you are not stuck in traffic going to and from work.
- The desire to learn and expand skills to avoid stagnation.
- More Zoom meetings, more active in WhatsApp since you do not have face-to-face interactions.

Results showed that the pandemic brought enormous challenges to people but it also provided professional opportunities for some. The UP SLIS faculty members reported an increase in their PLNs during the pandemic. They attributed this growth to the availability of online webinars, conferences, and workshops, as well as the increased time and opportunities for learning due to remote work setups. This finding highlighted the role of PLNs in overcoming professional isolation and facilitating learning opportunities in challenging times (Flanigan, 2011; Trust et al., 2016). PLNs can thrive and expand during periods of remote work or isolation, as individuals seek connections and learning opportunities online (Tour, 2017). The pandemic presented unique circumstances that encouraged faculty members to actively engage in their PLNs for support, collaboration, and professional development.

4.10. PLN Perspectives

Insights of the faculty respondents were also gathered regarding PLNs. All of the respondents gave favorable answers regarding their networks during the pandemic. Most of them cited that PLNs during the pandemic provided them opportunities to improve professionally and connect and share with colleagues and like-minded individuals in their field.

Answers of the respondents were in Table 7.

Respondent	PLN Perspectives
1	“Joining a PLN gives us an avenue to share and learn from other individual having the same interest. Being a member of a PLN gives me the chance to learn from the experience of others and it also gives me new insight on certain aspect of the profession.”
2	Translated from Filipino to English: “It increased during the pandemic, specifically technology and software tutorials, updates, techniques, etc.”
3	“More networks and collaborations have been established especially with colleagues from different countries. We don't need to be physically present to meet or share ideas unlike before.”
4	“I know PLNs greatly contribute and motivate activities for professional development and I believe that career progress is my primary motivation in engaging with PLNs in LIS. I prefer those learning activities that allow me to have evidence for CPD crediting and for future applications for merit promotion. So that I won't be stagnant with my teaching activities, I enter into PLNs in other related fields such as IT and education.”
5	“Since I only experienced 1 regular sem [semester] before the pandemic, I had no choice but to grow and develop my PLN during the pandemic. Nevertheless, I think that the pandemic, and remote work setup, provided me with the opportunity to network internationally.”
6	“For my work-related-PLNs are very important for me because it helps me update my knowledge in my specialization. As for my personal/leisure-related-PLNs, I benefit from it mainly because it supports my hobbies. Both my work-related-PLNs and leisure-related-PLNs enable me to not just learn more (interesting) stuff; but it also allows me to unwind, and network with other like-minded individuals.”

Table 7. PLN Perspectives

The table narrowed down UP SLIS faculty members' favorable perspectives regarding their PLNs. They viewed PLNs as avenues for professional growth, connecting and sharing with colleagues, and gaining new insights in their field. This emphasized the value of PLNs in supporting professional development and providing opportunities for learning and collaboration (Tobin, 1998; Gorla et al., 2019). The faculty members recognized the benefits of PLNs in expanding their knowledge, accessing diverse perspectives, and staying connected within their profession. PLNs contribute to an individual's career progress, enhance teaching activities, and provide opportunities for personal interests and hobbies (Lalonde, 2009; Richardson & Mancabelli, 2011).

4.11. PLN Challenges Encountered

PLNs do not come without problems. There were issues cited by the faculty respondents ranging from connectivity problems, hardware availability and compatibility to time zone challenges when attending conferences, webinars, or workshops. Time, discipline, and commitment are required to finish courses or MOOCs. Issuance of certificates to attendees was also a concern since most international conferences do not give certificates to their participants. In the Philippines, a certificate of attendance, completion, or participation is needed for it to be counted as a continuing professional development activity for librarians. This is a requirement before they can renew their professional license as librarians. There was also one respondent who mentioned that initiating connections with those individuals who share the same interests as theirs was difficult.

These findings acknowledged the potential challenges and barriers in PLN building (Tour, 2017; Manning, 2015). This highlighted the importance of overcoming these challenges by leveraging technology, developing strategies for online communication, and seeking support from trusted sources within one's PLN (Haas et al., 2020; Rajagopal et al, 2012; Trust et al., 2016). Faculty members' experiences reflect the dynamic nature of PLNs and the need for proactive engagement and adaptation to overcome challenges and maximize the benefits of network building.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The study shed light on the Personal Learning Networks (PLNs) of UP SLIS full-time faculty members during the pandemic semesters, examining their perspectives, tools used, time spent, and encounters in building their PLNs. The

findings provided valuable insights into the characteristics and dynamics of PLNs within the context of LIS education in the Philippines.

The results revealed that UP SLIS faculty members possess diverse subject expertise and research interests, aligning with the curriculum and standards set by the Philippine Commission on Higher Education (CHED). They actively collaborate within both national and international networks, engaging with professional associations and organizations. These collaborations serve as valuable avenues for professional and personal development, knowledge exchange, and access to resources.

The study also revealed that UP SLIS faculty members primarily utilize online platforms and digital tools to connect within their PLNs, employing gadgets such as laptops, desktops, tablets, and mobile phones. This emphasized the significant role of technology, particularly Web 2.0 tools, in facilitating PLN building and engagement. The faculty members allocate their time strategically across various networks and social media platforms, reflecting individual preferences and information needs. It is notable that the growth of PLNs during the pandemic can be attributed to the abundance of online learning opportunities, remote work arrangements, and the desire to connect and learn in a challenging environment.

The perspectives of UP SLIS faculty members towards PLNs are largely positive, recognizing the value of these networks in their professional growth, collaboration, and acquisition of new insights. However, the study also acknowledged the challenges encountered in PLN building, such as connectivity issues, hardware compatibility, time zone differences, and difficulties in initiating connections. These challenges emphasize the importance of proactive engagement, technological literacy, and the development of strategies to overcome barriers in PLN development.

The findings of this study showed the benefits and challenges associated with these networks. There was a significance on subject expertise, collaborations, technology, time management, and social media platforms in PLN formation. It highlighted the potential of PLNs to foster professional development, knowledge sharing, and the mitigation of professional isolation.

Furthermore, the findings of this study emphasized the importance of addressing the literature gap on PLNs in the field of LIS education. Future studies can delve deeper into the specific aspects of PLNs within LIS education, examining their impact on teaching practices, professional development, and information

sharing among LIS professionals. Furthermore, exploring the role of PLNs in bridging the gap between academia and profession within the LIS field can provide valuable insights for curriculum development and preparing students for the evolving information landscape

In conclusion, this study contributed to the understanding of PLNs within the LIS field, specifically examining the experiences of UP SLIS faculty members. The findings provided insights into their perspectives, practices, and challenges related to PLN building. The study serves as an initial resource and reference for future research on PLNs in the Philippines, encouraging further exploration of this topic in the context of LIS education. By leveraging PLNs, faculty members can enhance their professional and personal growth, collaborate with colleagues, and stay updated with the latest trends and developments in the field.

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