

Have You Heard About the Herd? Using Yik Yak as a Tool for Library Assessment

Maxwell Hackman, MA, MLS, Access Services Librarian, Reese Library

Melissa E. Johnson, MLIS, Electronic Resources & Serials Librarian, Reese Library

Karin Williams, MLS, Cataloging/Search Associate, Reese Library

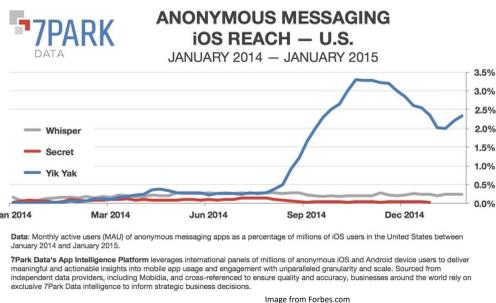
Virginia Durham, MPA, Project Manager, Reese Library

Project Summary

During the Spring Semester 2016 (Jan 4 – May 13), the social media site, Yik Yak, was monitored by Library staff to collect data on how the Library was referenced. During this period, the researchers saw an opportunity to assess the information gathered about the Library to improve Library services and conditions in real time.

What is Yik Yak?

The Startling Rise of Yik Yak in One Chart



- Social Media Application – iOS & Android
- Launched in 2013
- Uses GPS Proximity Limiters (5 mile radius)
- Anonymous Posts
- Discussion Threads called Yaks
- Yaks are “Voted Up” or “Voted Down”
- Unfiltered Language
- Must Be 18+ to Use

Library Information

Located in Augusta, Georgia
Summerville Campus –
Undergraduate Liberal Arts
Masters Programs - Business, Public Administration & Counseling
Masters and Doctoral Program - Education
Reese Library - Medium Academic Library
Fall 2015 Undergraduate population – 4,976 (Augusta University)
Large number of commuter students

Review of the Literature

“By letting users express themselves, exchange thoughts, and explore their world, Yik Yak helps users feel at home within their local community” (Yik Yak, 2016, n.p.).

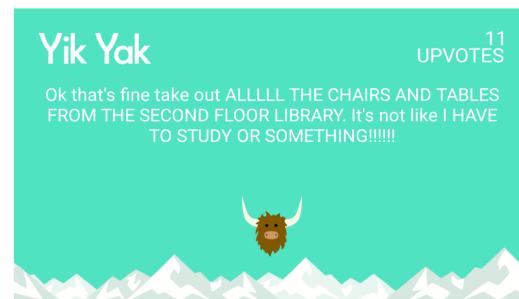
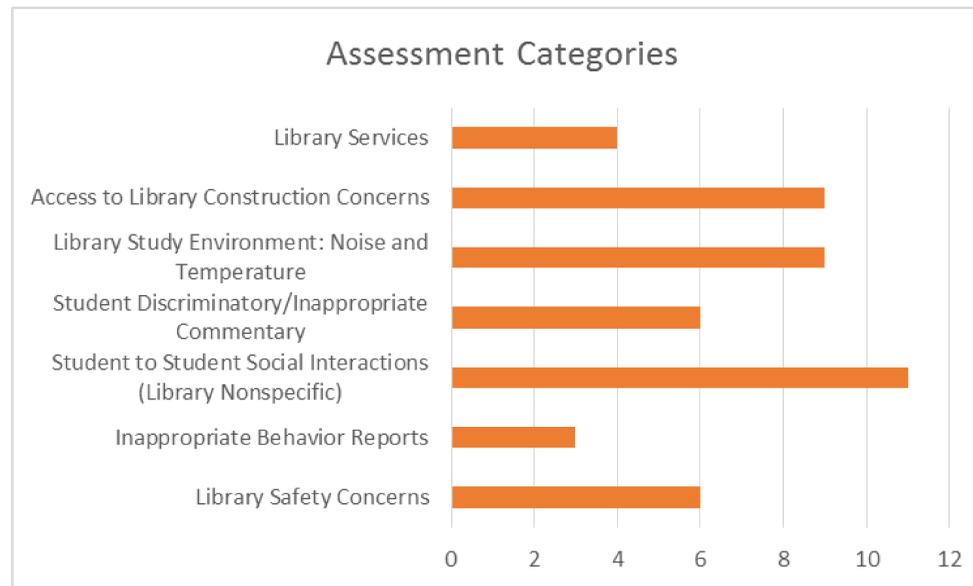
Originally designed “as an instantaneous source of news on a micro level,” Yik Yak has morphed into a site for anonymous students to gossip (Gossip Guys, 2015, p. 92).

“Yik Yak poses a danger to higher ed communities, but few institutions aggressively track its traffic or have tried to banish the anonymous social media site from campus” (Zalaznick, 2015, p. 14).

“Racism, sexism and sexuality emerged as the most likely [communications] to be controversial” (Black et al., 2015, p. 20).

“Yik Yak has become an unlikely safe space for people with suicidal thoughts – a place where, students say, responses are consistently helpful, not mean” (Shahani, 2015, n.p.).

Findings



From January 4 - May 13, 2016, there were 48 original posts (OP), Yaks, mentioning the Library.

The post with the most responses was classified as Inappropriate Behavior. It received 88 responses.

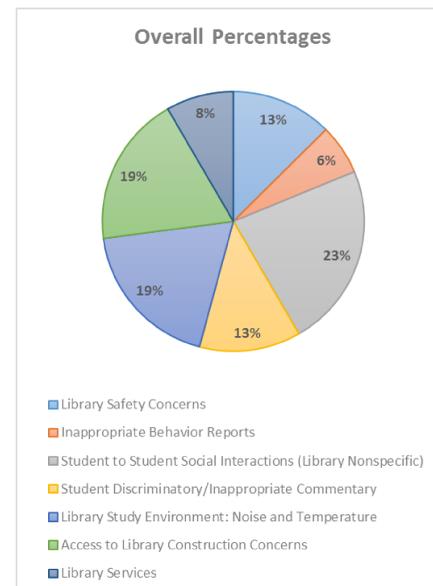
The number of up-votes fluctuated with 478 being the total at the time of recording. Up-votes and down-votes canceled each other out.

If a post accumulated five down-votes, Yik Yak automatically removed it.

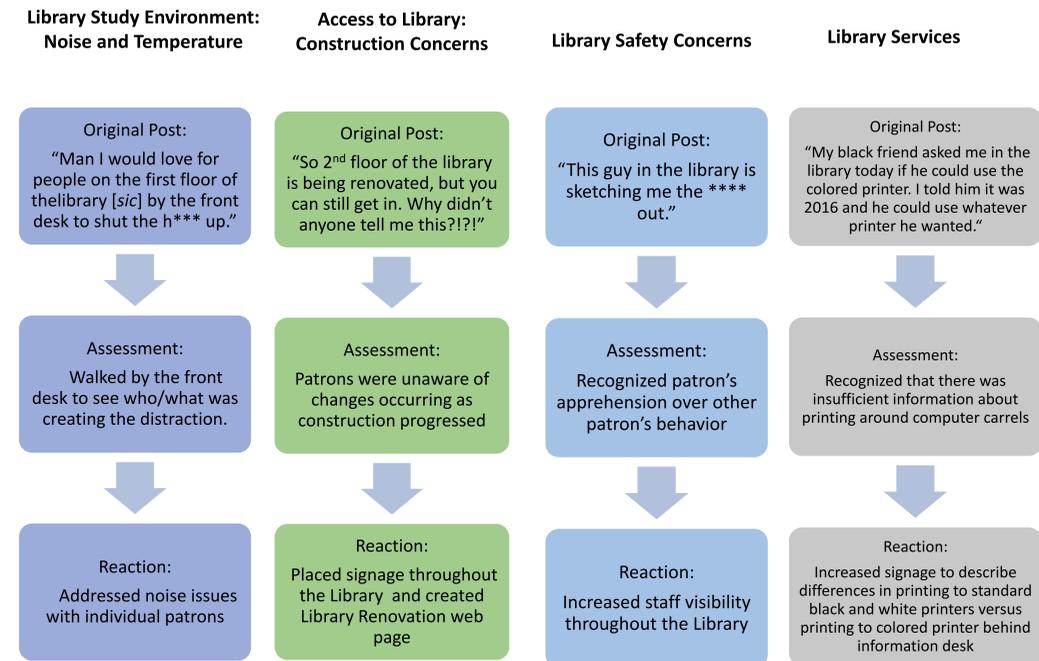


Replies

There were 269 responses to the 48 Original Posts. The responses varied in their content, from answering questions posed to defending the noise created by the construction. These responses were anonymously posted by individuals using the reply icons referenced to the left. These icons are randomly assigned by the Yik Yak application. Each respondent is assigned a particular icon for each post. The icon is maintained by the same user during the duration of the post. The same user may be assigned a different reply icon when replying to a different post. These icons were used prior to Yik Yak implementing user handles in March 2016.



Real-time Assessment Opportunities



Determinations

- Yik Yak offered an opportunity for real-time assessment
- Provided the ability to communicate with patrons about construction issues
- The anonymity facilitated a better understanding of patron needs
- Patrons were able to communicate their frustrations with no imbalance of power or fear of repercussion, providing a venue for freedom of expression
- Library staff gained a new understanding of how the Library is used by patrons
- It was noted that 13% of the posts were of a discriminatory nature – the Library is considering partnering with student services to host cultural awareness events

Future Directions

With the rapidly changing world of social media, this study would not be able to be replicated in the same way it was created. One reason is that Yik Yak, itself, is no longer as anonymous as it was when this study was conducted. Users are now required to create “handles” and are provided the opportunity to generate personal profiles and private chats.

The key for future studies will be to use the most current social media platforms available.

Based on this qualitative research, there appears to be a relationship between patron anonymity and candor.