SOCIAL MEDIA AND PROFESSIONAL NETWORKING: A CASE OF INFORMATION PROFESSIONALS IN THE SCECSAL REGION[1]

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to establish the extent to which library and information professionals in the Standing Conference of Eastern, Central and Southern Africa Library and Information Associations (SCECSAL) region are using social media applications for professional networking. The findings show that although the professionals are adopting social media applications, its use is more for social networking than professional networking purposes. Among those using the applications for professional networking, Social Networking Services (i.e. Facebook, LinkedIn, Google+ and MySpace) are their first choice applications; with Facebook being the most popular. They study also revealed that most of the professionals had taught themselves how to use social media. The major challenge faced in the use of social media was the lack of time in the effective use of the applications. The paper recommends that to enhance the use of social media for professional networking, social media must be integrated into individual networking activities and that library and information professionals and associations in the region should embrace social media applications.

INTRODUCTION

The term *social media* does not have an official or universally agreed definition (Broughton et al, 2009: 1), and as a result literature is replete with definitions of the term. For example, Yates and Paquette (2011:6) define social media as "tools that enable open online exchange of information through conversation and interaction". Marchese (2007), posits that "social media describes the online technologies and practices that people use to share opinions, insights, experiences, perspectives and media itself". Kaplan and Haenlein (2010: 61), see social media as "a group of Internet-based

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applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content".

For the purpose of this study, the definition by Henderson and Bowley (2010: 239) is adopted. They define social media or Web 2.0 as "as collaborative online applications and technologies that enable participation, connectivity, user-generated content, sharing of information, and collaboration amongst a community of users". This definition includes most of the characteristics associated with social media identified by Mayfield (2008) who is of the view that social media encourages contribution and feedback (*participation*), is open to feedback and participation (*openness*), facilitate two way communication (*conversation*), facilitate formation of communities (*community*), and facilitate connections through links to other sites, resources and people (*connectedness*) (Mayfield (2008:5). Dye (2007: 38), on the other hand refers to social media users as Generation C where C stands for *content*, could also stand for *creativity* or *consumption* or *connected*.

Social Media Categories

There are already thousands of social media applications and new ones are emerging. Social media is constantly evolving and its uses are changing and expanding (Cohen, 2011). In addition, "social media is different things to different people" (Ham, 2011). All these factors make it difficult to categorize social media applications. However, in this study we used focused on the following ten categories of social media applications:

- Audio Sharing Applications (i.e. Podomatic, SoundCloud, etc)
- Blogging Applications (i.e. Blooger, Wordpress, TypePad, etc)
- Discussion Forums Platforms (i.e.Dgroups, Google Groups, etc)
- Micro-blogging Applications (i.e.Twitter, FriendFeed, Tumblr, etc)
- Photo/Image Sharing Applications (i.e. Flickr, Picasa, etc)
- Remote Collaboration Applications (i.e. GoogleDocs, Wikis, etc)
- Social Bookmarking/Tagging Applications (i.e. Digg, StumbleUpon, Deliciouus, etc)
- Social Networking Services (i.e. Facebook, Google+, LinkedIn, MySpace, etc)
- Video Sharing Applications (i.e. YouTube, Blip.tv, Vimeo, etc)
- Voice over IP (VoIP)/Instant Messaging (IM) Applications (i.e. Google Talk, Skype, etc)

It is important to emphasize that in some case the above categories are not absolute. For example, Social Networking Services such as Facebook and Google+ are also used to share photos and videos.

Therefore social media users who have little content in form of photos or videos to share may not see the need for dedicated accounts on applications such as Flickr and YouTube.

Social Media and Professional Networking

In addition to *social media*, other key concepts relevant to the study are *networking*, *social network*, *professional network* and *professional networking*. Their definitions adopted for the study are outlined below:

- *Networking (noun)* – "a supportive system of sharing information and services among individuals and groups having a common interest" (Dictionary.com).
- *Social network (noun)* – "a person's family, neighbours, and friends with whom they are socially involved; An association of people drawn together by family, work or hobby" (Answers.com).
- *Professional network* - "a type of social network that is focused solely on interactions and relationships of a business/professional nature rather than including personal, non-business interactions" (Vascellaro, 2007).
- *Professional networking* - "the process of developing relationships with people in the field of one's occupation" (Association of American Geographers, 2012).

Professional networks, according to Ramsey (cited in Alcock, 2009: 1), "can be used to get expert advice, exchange ideas, get a second opinion, obtain a reality check, test new ideas, gain moral support, and engage in collaborative problem solving". Social media applications have great potential to enhance networking, collaboration, sharing of experiences and communication among professionals. The applications provide affordable means to link up professional colleagues and facilitate sharing of experiences and information. They provide easy access to a pool of peer knowledge. For example, "subscribing to the blogs of other information professionals can provide insight into the profession, enable learning from their experiences, and lead to conversation in blog comments" (Alcock, 2009: 2).

Existing literature shows that individuals in various fields of work are adopting and using social media for professional networking purposes. For instance, results of a study of marketing and allied professionals in the United States showed that professional networking is the primary reason they use social networks (American Marketing Association, 2009: 6), and nearly half (48%) of the 2,790 healthcare professionals surveyed in the United States also use social media for professional networking (AMN Healthcare, 2011). A study in the United Kingdom that examined whether engineers made use of social media also indicate that they used the applications, especially LinkedIn

to "engage with the online community, professionally, search for new career opportunities and raise their personal profile in the industry" (Napier, 2011:3). Social media could also provide an easy and cheaper opportunity to library and information professionals scattered around the Standing Conference of Eastern, Central and Southern Africa Library and Information Associations (SCECSAL) region to link up, professionally, with each other and with colleagues outside the region.

The SCECSAL Region

The SCECSAL is the oldest and most active regional forum for library and information associations in Africa. It has its origins in the East African Library Association (EALA) which was established in March 1957 (Musisi, 1998). The SCECSAL region covers 26 countries - Angola, Botswana, Burundi, Congo Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, Seychelles, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, Sudan, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. However, only 11 countries have national library and information associations that actively participate in the forum's biennial conferences and these are Botswana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The use of social media applications in Africa is booming with over 17 million Facebook users and a large number of people visiting Twitter and YouTube sites (Essoungou, 2010). The first Twitter map of Africa also shows that social networking is gaining ground across the continent and applications such as Twitter are connecting people from Cape Town to Cairo (Seibt, 2012). The impact of social media on the continent is already being felt in some quarters. For example, social media networks are said to have played a critical role in organizational and communication aspects of the "Arab Spring" protests in Tunisia and Egypt (Stepanova, 2011). However, in spite of the increase in the number of people using social media on the continent, there is a paucity of empirical studies on the use of the applications by individuals in various professions. To contribute to filling the literature gap, this study focused on the use of social media applications for professional networking by library and information professionals in the countries of the Standing Conference of Eastern, Central and Southern Africa Library and Information Associations (SCECSAL) region. The results provides empirical baseline for future studies in the use of social media for professional networking purposes on the continent.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine the extent to which library and information professionals in the SCECSAL region are using social media applications for professional networking. The specific objective is to answer the following five research questions:

- RQ1: Are individual library and information professionals in the SCECSAL region using social media applications for professional networking?
- RQ2: What categories and types of social media applications are being used for professional networking?
- RQ3: For what specific professional networking activities are social media applications being used?
- RQ4: What major challenges are being faced in the use of social media applications for professional networking?
- RQ5: How can the use of social media for professional networking in the SCECSAL region be enhanced?

METHODS AND DATA COLLECTION

The population for the study was library and information professionals in the SCECSAL region. The data was collected March 19-30, 2012, using an online questionnaire hosted on the SurveyMonkey platform. The questionnaire design process benefited from surveys on the use of social media by professionals conducted by AMN Healthcare (2011) and the American Marketing Association (2009). The final draft of the questionnaire was piloted among library and information professionals in Ghana who provided useful feedback on the instrument.

Distribution of Invitations

Electronic mail invitations containing a web link to the questionnaire were sent to the following national Library and Information Associations (LIAs) that actively participate in the SCECSAL biennial conferences, with a request to assist with the distribution of the invitations to their members:

- Botswana Library Association (BLA)
- Kenya Library Association (KLA)
- Lesotho Library Association (LLA)
- Malawi Library Association (MALA)
- Namibia Library and Information Workers Association (NIWA)

- Swaziland Library Association (SWALA)

- Tanzania Library Association (TLA)

- Uganda Library and Information Association (ULIA)

- Zambia Library Association (ZLA)

- Zimbabwe Library Association (ZimLA).

The invitation to the Library and Information Association of South Africa (LIASA) members was sent directly to the association's *LIASONLINE listserv.* We observed that NIWA and ULIA also used their mailing lists or discussion groups to distribute the invitations to their members. ZimLA, in addition to direct e-mail distributions of the invitation to the members also posted it on its Facebook page. Sending invitations through national library and information associations ensured that most professionals who are active in the associations' activities were made aware about the invitation to participate in the survey. It also helped to avoid the possibility of e-mail invitations being treated as "spam" by some recipients.

In countries that are not active in the SCECSAL biennial conferences, we used personal contacts to get in touch with professional colleagues who could assist with the distribution of the invitations. This approach yielded very positive results in Sudan where the invitation was later distributed to the members of the Sudanese Association for Library and Information (SALA). The invitation to participate in the survey was also distributed on the IFLA-L listserv.

Study Sample

There is no comprehensive list or directory of library and information professionals working in the SCECSAL region. We therefore did not have access to any sampling frame that could be used to select a random sample for the study. This being the case, our final data set is therefore a non-probabilistic convenience sample and it is difficult to make generalization, with any confidence, from the findings of the study to the whole population of library and information professionals in the SCECSAL region. However, the results provide a regional empirical baseline for future studies.

FINDINGS

The survey was anonymous and participation in the study was voluntary. Of 402 individuals who started the survey and responded to the question - D*o you agree to participate in the survey?* - 396 (98.5%) agreed to do so while the remaining 6 (1.5%) declined. However, not all questions were answered by the 396 respondents. The respondents came from 22 out of the 26 target countries in the SCECSAL region. There were no respondents from Djibouti, Eritrea, Seychelles and Somali. The

country with the largest number of respondents (n=91; 25.4%) was South Africa, followed by Kenya (n=40; 11.2%), Zambia (n=33; 9.2%), Tanzania (n=32; 8.9%), Zimbabwe (n=24; 6.7%), Sudan (n=19; 5.3%), Namibia (n=15; 4.2%), Malawi (n=13; 3.6%), Lesotho (n=8; 2.2%); Ethiopia (n=5; 1.4%), Mauritius (n=4; 1.1%), Burundi (n=2; 0.6%), Congo Republic (n=2; 0.6%) and the remaining countries (Angola, DRC, Madagascar, Mozambique and South Sudan) all each had one (0.3%) respondent.

Demographic Information

Gender and Age Distribution

Of the respondents (n=292; 73.7%) who provided demographic related information, 182 (62.3%) were females and 110 (37.7%) were males. The percentage distribution of the respondents by age group is given in Figure 1.


Fig. 1 - Distribution of Respondents by Age Group
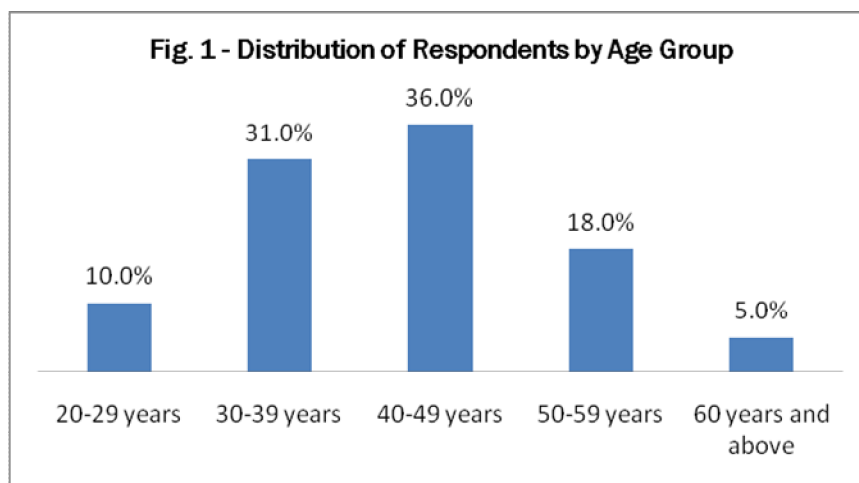
Academic Qualifications of Respondents

The highest academic qualifications of the respondents (n=292) included doctorate degree (n=20; 6.8%); master's degree (n=130; 44.5%), post-graduate diploma (n=21; 7.2%), post-graduate certificate (n=2; 0.7%), honours degree (n=34; 11.6%), bachelors degree (n=67; 22.9%), undergraduate certificate (n=4; 1.4%) undergraduate diplomas/national higher diplomas (n=13; 4.4%), and secondary school certificate (n=1; 0.3%).

Respondents by Institutional/Work Setting

The 292 respondents came from a broad range of library and information institutions and work settings as shown in Figure 2 below.

Fig. 2 - Distribution of Respondents by Type of Institution/Work Setting (n=292)
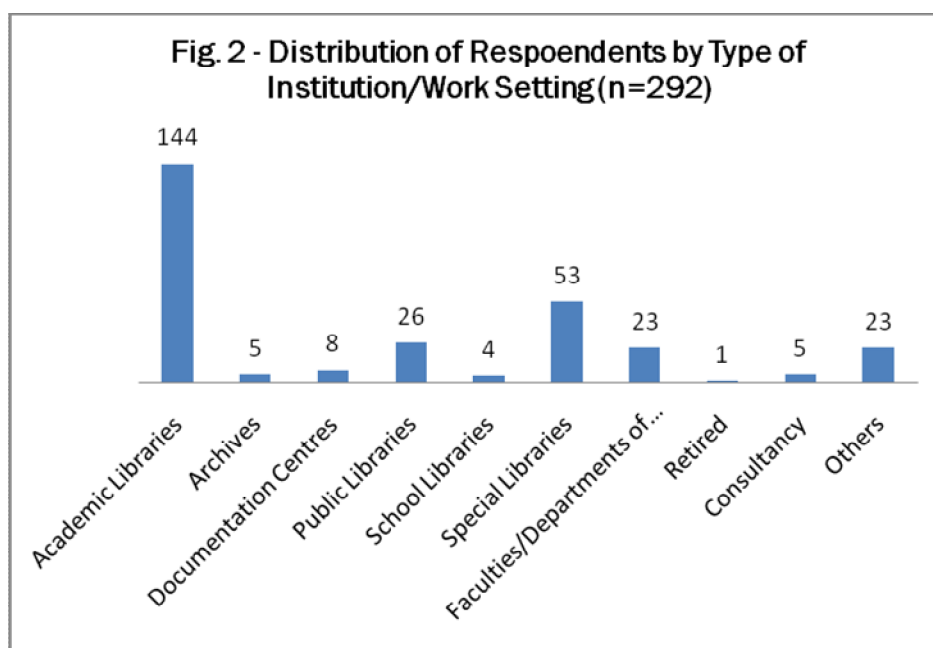
Others included institutions such as international development organizations, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and the United Nations Agencies.

Library and Information Association Membership

Majority (n=252) of the respondents (n=292) belong to a library/information association or network of information professionals in their country of residence or outside the country (Table 1).

Table 1 – Membership to Library/Information Associations or Networks

Library/Information Association	Number of Respondents (n=292)
Library and Information Association of South Africa	71
Tanzania Library and Information Association	28
Zambia Library Association	26
Kenya Library Association	25
Zimbabwe Library Association	17
Swaziland Library Association	15
Sudanese Association for Library and Information	14
Uganda Library and Information Association	13
Namibia Library and Information Workers Association	12
Malawi Library Association	10
Botswana Library Association	6
Lesotho Library Association	5
Ethiopian Academic Library Association	2

SADC[2] Network of ARD Information Managers	1
Christian Association of Librarians in Africa	1
Kenya Society for Agricultural Professionals	1
Information Science Association in Jimma University	1
Burundian Association of Librarians, Archivist and Documentalists	1
Mauritius Agricultural Information Specialist Network	1
Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professional	1
None (not members of any association)	40

RQ1: Are Individual Library and Information Professionals in the SCECSAL Region Using Social Media Applications for Professional Networking?

About 78% (n=310) of the respondents (n=396) who took part in the study indicated using social media applications. The distribution per country is shown in Table 2.

Table 2 – Distribution of Users of Social Media

Country	Number of Respondents (n=310)
South Africa	83 (26.8%)
Kenya	39 (12.6%)
Tanzania	31 (10%)
Zambia	30 (9.7%)
Zimbabwe	24 (7.7%)
Sudan	17 (5.5%)
Namibia	14 (4.5%)
Uganda	14 (4.5%)
Swaziland	13 (4.2%)
Malawi	12 (3.9%)
Botswana	9 (2.9%)
Lesotho	7 (2.3%)
Ethiopia	4 (1.3%)
Mauritius	4 (1.3%)
Burundi	2 (0.6%)
Congo Republic	2 (0.6%)
Angola	1 (0.3%)
Angola	1 (0.3%)
DRC	1 (0.3%)
Madagascar	1 (0.3%)
South Sudan	1 (0.3%)

Factors Influencing Adoption of Social Media

The major factor motivating library and information professionals in the SADC region to use social media is "the need to connect with professional colleagues" for the majority (n=240, 80%) of the

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[2] Southern African Development Community

respondents of the 300 who answered the question. This was followed by "easy access to the Internet and other information technology tools" (n=206, 68.7%); "most social media tools are free/do not require payments" (n=169; 56.3%), the belief that "social media would enhance ones visibility in the profession" (n=183; 61%), the "need to connect with family members and relatives" (n=169; 56.3%), and the "influence from colleagues already using social media applications" (n=152, 50.7%). Fifty-three (17.7%) of the respondents also indicated that their superiors/bosses at work expected them to use social media applications. Thirty-four (11.3%) respondents also mentioned others factors including the need to join the "social media trend", to communicate with the children who live elsewhere, and participation in a training session on Web 2.0, as having motivated them to start using social media applications.

Length of Period of Using Social Media Applications

The majority (n=124: 41.3%) of the respondents have been using social media applications for a period of between 1-3 years; 81 (27%) respondents for more than five years, 72 (24%) for between 3-5 years, and 23 (7.7%) for less than one year.

Primary Reason for Using Social Media Applications

The primary reason for using social media for almost half (n=144, 48%) of the respondents is for social networking purposes, 119 (39.7%) for professional networking, and 37 (12.3%) for official work purposes. The focus of the study is on the 119 respondents who indicated using social media for professional networking.

Fig 3 - Primrary Reason for Using Social Media

Official Work 12%

Social Networking 48%

Professional Networking 40%
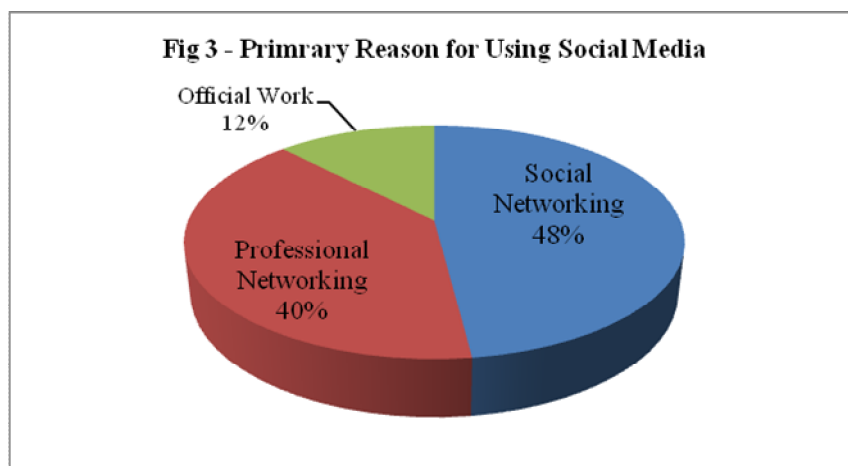
Social Media Application Skills

The respondents acquired social media skills using a combination of strategies (Figure 4). Of 103 who provided the information, more than three quarters (n=79, 76.7%) taught themselves how to use social media applications, 25 (24.3%) have attended face-to-face training workshops, 20 (19.4%) have been on seminars, and 19 (18.4%) used web-based training facilities to acquire the needed social media skills.

Fig. 4 – Strategies Used to Acquire Social Media Skills
(*n*=103)

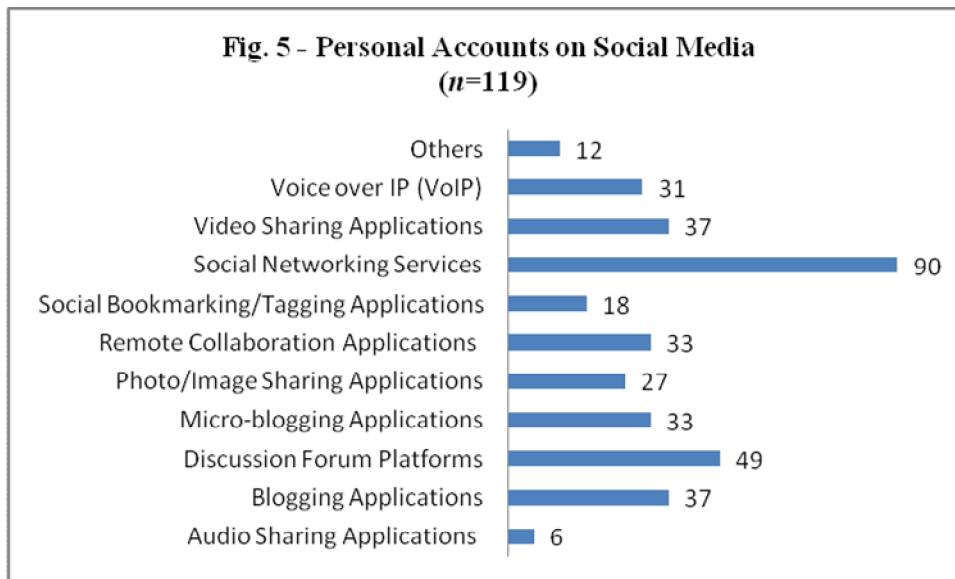| Strategy	Count
Others	9
CD-ROM based Training	9
Conference Presentations	16
Component of Formal Course	16
Web-based Training	19
Face-to-Face Seminar	20
Face-to-Face Workshop	25
Self-Taught	79
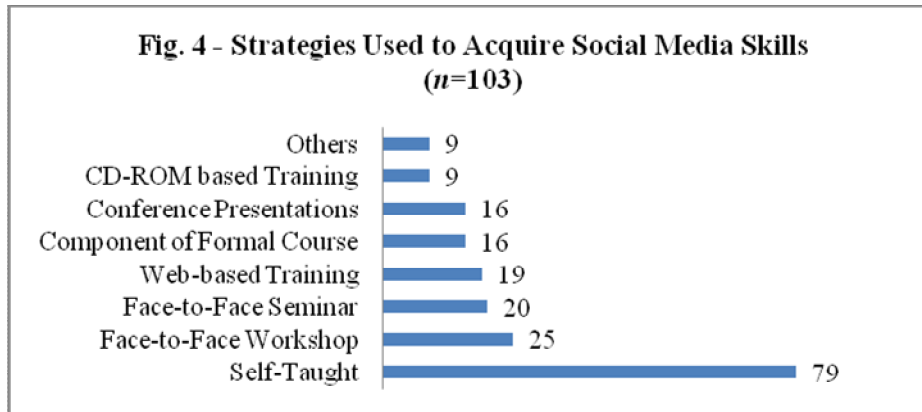
Asked to self-assess the levels of social media skills, 45 (43.7%) respondents indicated that they had basic skills, 39 (37.9%) were proficient, 16 (15.5%) had advanced skills, and three (2.9%) were below the basic skills level.

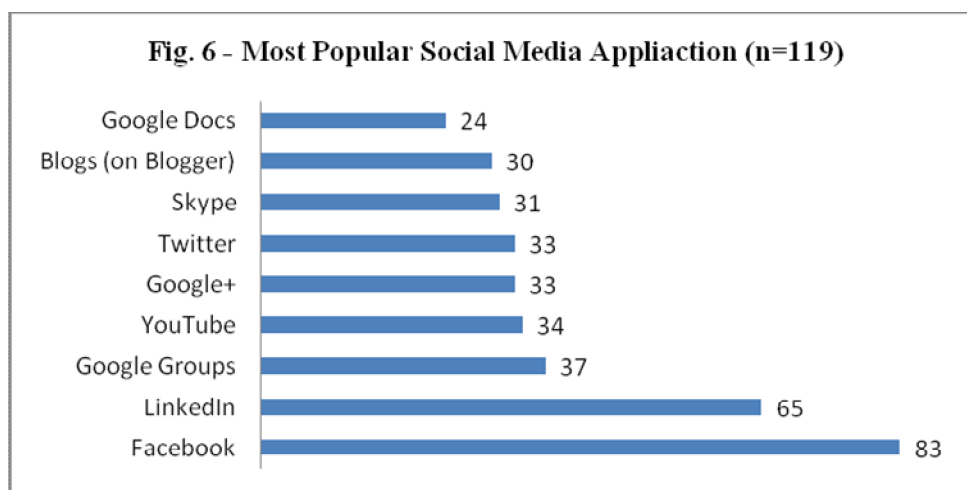## RQ2: What Types of Social Media Applications Are Being Used For Professional Networking?

Personal Accounts on Social Media

The respondents (n=119) who use social media for professional networking indicated having personal accounts on several social media applications (Figure 6). The majority (n=90; 75.5%) have accounts on Social Networking Services (i.e. Facebook, LinkedIn, Google+, MySpace, etc) and a good number on Discussion Forum Platforms (n=49; 41.2%). On the extreme end, only 6 (5.0%) respondents indicated having accounts on audio sharing applications.

Fig. 5 - Personal Accounts on Social Media (*n*=119)

Category	Value
Others	12
Voice over IP (VoIP)	31
Video Sharing Applications	37
Social Networking Services	90
Social Bookmarking/Tagging Applications	18
Remote Collaboration Applications	33
Photo/Image Sharing Applications	27
Micro-blogging Applications	33
Discussion Forum Platforms	49
Blogging Applications	37
Audio Sharing Applications	6

Most Popular Social Media Application

Of the 119 respondents with personal accounts on social media applications, 104 (87%) indicated the specific applications on which they have their accounts. The most popular application mentioned was Facebook (n=83; 79.8%), followed by LinkedIn (n=65; 62.5%), Google Groups (n=37; 35.6%); YouTube (n=34; 32.7%), Google+ (n=33; 31.7%), Twitter (n=33; 31.7%), Skype (n=31; 29.8%) and Blogger (n=30; 28.8%). Overall, there was no overwhelming favourite application for professional networking. However, Social Networking Services (i.e. Facebook, Google+, LinkedIn, MySpace, etc) were considered as first choice applications for professional networking by 35 (29%) respondents, followed closely by Discussion Forums Platforms (i.e. Dgroups, Google Groups, etc) which were mentioned by 32 (27%) respondents as their first choice applications for professional networking.

Fig. 6 - Most Popular Social Media Appliaction (n=119)

Application	Value
Google Docs	24
Blogs (on Blogger)	30
Skype	31
Twitter	33
Google+	33
YouTube	34
Google Groups	37
LinkedIn	65
Facebook	83

RQ3: For What Specific Professional Networking Activities Are Social Media Applications Being Used?

Keeping in touch with professional colleagues (n=96, 91.4%) is the major use for social media applications among 105 library and information professionals who respondent to the question. This is followed by sharing information and knowledge (n=92, 87.6%), finding information related to one's professional field (n=79, 75.2%), disseminating information of common interest to colleagues (n=76, 72.4%), getting opinions and views from colleagues (n=69, 65.7%), participating in the activities of the national library and information association (n=62, 59%), monitoring events in one's professional field (n=57, 54.3%), and following up on professional meetings and events (n=53, 50.5%).

Frequency of Use of Social Media Applications

The frequency of using social media applications among the respondents is generally low (Table 3). The total number of users who indicated the frequency of using the applications in all the cases was lower than the number that indicated having personal accounts on the application

Table 3 – Frequency of Use of Social Media Applications

Social Media Related Activity	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Once in a While	Total Respondents
Interacting on Social Networking Services	36	16	2	2	(n=56)
Communicating Using VoIP	7	8	6	5	(n=26)
Contributing to discussions in Discussion Forums	3	7	7	2	(n=19)
Sharing Videos	2	3	5	6	(n=16)
Sharing photos	0	2	5	6	(n=13)
Posting entries on your blog	1	2	2	7	(n=12)
Sharing audio files	3	0	2	5	(n=10)
Collaborating on content development	1	3	4	0	(n=8)
Bookmarking online resources	2	2	1	1	(n=6)
Sending out tweets	2	2	1	1	(n=6)

Overall, Social Networking Services (n=56), VoIP applications (n=26) and Discussion Forums platforms (n=19) are being used more often than applications such as blogs (n=12) and micro-blogging (n=6). Social Networking Services and VoIP are the only categories of social media applications with more than 50% of the respondents who have personal accounts on these applications using them frequently. Although the number of individuals sharing photos (n=13) is more than those with personal accounts (n=6) on Photo Sharing Applications there is no contradiction. Photos and videos are also shared on Social Networking Services.

Access to Social Media Applications

Majority of the respondents (n=76; 72.4%) access social media applications at their work place. Only 17 (16.2%) respondents indicated accessing the applications at home, and 8 (7.6%) using mobile broadband internet access. None (0.0%) used cyber/internet cafes.

For the majority (n=51; 48.6%), access is on to social media is done using Personal Computers, while 44 (41.9%) used laptops. Users of mobile technologies are very few. Four (3.8%) indicated using a smartphones (i.e. iPhone, Samsung Galaxy, Blackberry, etc), while 3 (2.9%) each, used Tablet PCs and Netbooks.

RQ4: What Major Challenges Are Being Faced In The Use of Social Media Applications for Professional Networking?

The total number of respondents to a series of questions related to challenges faced when using social media was 101 (85%). Lack of time to make effective use of social media applications was mentioned by 60 (59.4%) out of which 39 (65%) also ranked it as their key challenge. Although concerns with privacy on social media had a total of 25 (24.7%) indications, it was not seen as a key challenge.

Table 4 – Challenges Faced When Using Social Media

Type of Challenge	Frequency (n=101)
Lack of time to make effective use of social of media	60
Concerns with privacy on social media	25
Not many professional colleagues using social media to make my use more beneficial	24
Difficult in managing time spent on using social media	23
Lack of reliable internet access	20
Inadequate skills to make effective use of social media	20
Concerns with legal/copyright/IPR implications of social media	17
High cost of mobile broadband Internet access	17
Difficult in deciding on what information/content to share	16
Unable to easily create content to share on social media	16
Difficult in finding suitable/trusted content on social media	12
Lack of time to learn/teach myself how use social media	12

Lack of motivation for professional networking	9
Unable to define clear social media goals for myself	5
Lack of access to mobile broadband internet access	2
Lack of access to a Smartphone or tablet to use social media anywhere	2
Unfamiliarity with (the benefits of) social media	1

RQ5: How Can the Use of Social Media for Professional Networking in the SCECSAL Region be Enhanced?

Incorporating the teaching of social media in the curricula of library and information studies schools was seen by the majority (n=71; 71.7%) of the 99 who responded to this question as a key strategy towards enhancing the use of social media in the SCECSAL region. The second popular strategy is for libraries to embrace social media (n=66, 66.7%), followed by library and information associations embracing social media (n=60; 60.6%). Twenty-eight (28.3%) respondents felt that social media is personal and individual professionals should take the initiative.

DISCUSSION OF KEY FINDINGS

Using Social Media Applications for Professional Networking

The purpose of the study was to establish the extent to which library and information professionals in the SCECSAL region are using social media applications for professional networking. The findings show that although the professionals are adopting social media applications and teaching themselves how to use the applications, the use is more for social networking than professional networking purposes. This could be an indication that a large number of information professionals in the SCECSAL region are yet to realize the potential social media applications have in enhancing professional networking. This finding is almost similar to the results of a study conducted in Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa, which showed that librarians, information professionals and other professionals in the country were using Web 2.0 tools mostly for entertainment purposes (Olasina, 2011).

Today it is very easy to have a personal profile/account on any social media application. However, that alone does not constitute using the applications. It is the frequency of use of the applications that tells a story. The findings of the study tell a different story. While the majority of the respondents have personal profiles/accounts on several social media applications or platforms, only Social

Networking Services, Voice over IP applications and Discussion Forums have a sizable number of frequent users when compared to the number of respondents who profiles on these categories of social media applications. The low frequency of use of social media applications could be attributed to the key challenge that was indicated by more than 50% of the respondents – *lack of time to make effective use of social media applications* and possibly the means of access to social media applications. The lack of time for social media-based activities appears to be a global challenge among professional and some business. It was also cited in the results of the American Marketing Association Social Media Survey as the primary barrier to increased social media adoption among marketing professionals (American Marketing Association, 2009: 3). Red Rocket Media, a UK-based marketing firm also states that lack of time is "often quoted as the biggest challenge with social media as there never seems to be enough hours in the day to devote to it" (Red Rocket Media, 2011: 4).

Social media applications are best and effectively used when accessed using mobile (Smartphones and Tablet PCs) and wireless/broadband-based Internet technologies. These technologies make it possible and easier for individuals to access and use the applications from anywhere and at anytime (24/7). For the majority of the respondents that indicated using social media for professional networking, access to the applications is at their workplace on "fixed" Personal Computers (Desktop Computers). This arrangement has several implications on the use of some social media applications, and these include the following:

- Applications such as Twitter which require readily available access to the Internet in order to respond to the question – *What is happening?* are rarely used;
- Access and use of social media applications is in principle restricted to office hours which makes it difficult to make effective and efficient use of the applications outside the office hours;
- In the event that the use of social media applications is not part of the institution's policy, users risk the wrath of their bosses if "caught in the act". Therefore, there is likely to be little use of social media.

Types of Social Media Applications Being Used

Social networking services are the most used applications and Facebook is the most popular application among library and professionals that are using social media for professional networking purposes. LinkedIn comes in second position. Discussion Forums applications such as Google Groups and Dgroups are also being used to a large extent. However, there is little use for Twitter and blogging applications. The predominant use of Social Networking Services (i.e. Facebook and LinkedIn) for professional networking, and their relative high numbers of daily and weekly users,

mirrors the trends that have been observed in other professions elsewhere (American Marketing Association, 2009; AMN Health, 2011; Napier 2011). Social Networking Services provide an easy to use platform for creating personals and professional networks and for sharing content (i.e. documents, audio files, photos, and videos). In addition, professional associations such as LIASA, ZLA and ZimLA have Facebook pages on which they post news items and information for their members, while LIASA and NIWA also have discussions forums. These arrangements could have contributed to the large number of the respondents using Facebook and Discussion Forums since they have to participate in their associations' networking activities.

Professional Networking Activities

Although the majority of the participants in survey indicated using social media for social networking purposes, to some extent a good number are using the applications for professional networking purposes. There is also some use for work related purposes. Regarding professional networking, social media applications are being used to keep in touch with professional colleagues, to share information and knowledge, to find information related to one's professional field to disseminate information of common interest to colleagues and to get opinions and views from colleagues. However, it is important to note that the frequency of use of the applications, except for Social Networking Services, is very low, a factor largely attributed to lack of time.

Enhancing the Use of Social Media Applications

Library and information institutions in the SCECSAL region should embrace social media applications in their networking activities. This is likely to motivate a large number of the professionals to adopt social media. In addition the professionals should deliberately integrate social media in their professional networking activities. This is the only way they will be able to find time to use the applications. As indicated by Alcock (2009), regular use of particular social media applications, even for short amounts of time are likely to be more beneficial than accessing the applications infrequently and trying to catch up.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of the study show that although most library and information professionals in the SCECSAL region are using social media applications for social networking purposes, there are some that are using the applications for professional networking and work related purposes. Social media has great potential to connect professionals within the SCECSAL countries and at the regional level. Therefore, library and information professionals should make an effort to use the applications for

professional networking purposes. This is the only way they will also overcome the challenge of lack of time to make effective use of social media applications. They also need to adopt the use of mobile technologies (Smartphones and Tablet PCs) if they are want to make maximum use of social media applications. The work place should not be the only place where one should have access to the social media applications. Individuals need to take the initiative. Library and Information Association in the SCECSAL region also have an important role to play in enhancing the use of social media among their members. They should develop and implement social media strategies that encourage the adoption of applications such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and Blogs by their members. These applications can easily enhance networking and communication among the professionals. Integration of social media into official library work and curriculum of library and information science schools would also go a long way in promoting the use of social media for professional networking in the SCECSAL region.

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