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Using Social Media as a Tool to Re-Define and Transform Academic Library Service in the 21st Century

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USING SOCIAL MEDIA AS A TOOL TO RE-DEFINE AND TRANSFORM ACADEMIC LIBRARY SERVICE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract

Academic libraries are meant to acquire, provide and disseminate information resources to satisfy their patron's information needs. A potent means in which librarians in academic libraries can optimize for their work and services as well as maintain their relevance is through social media. The purpose of this paper is to expose library and information personnel in academic libraries to the effective utilization of social media as an effective tool for re-defining and transforming academic library services in the 21st century. The specific objectives are to identify the types of social media used for effective library service provision in academic libraries, to identify the roles of social media in libraries, to identify the skills needed by librarians to effectively sustain library services through social media, to identify the major challenges associated with social media as a tool for service delivery and to develop strategies for effective adoption and utilization of social media as a tool for library service delivery. The methodology adopted is content analysis. The study was done by related literature review in which related articles on social media in academic libraries were analyzed. Hence, the study reviewed and analyzed the content of 21 articles in which topical issues based on this paper were addressed. The study revealed that social media are powerful tools that can enhance and promote library services. To be able to stay relevant in the socially networked environment and meet the growing needs of its patrons in the 21st century, it has become imperative for academic libraries to explore and adopt social media, which has become a library technology that has the capacity to expand the frontiers of library service delivery as well as to reach the hitherto unreached categories of patrons. The study recommended that academic libraries personnel should efficiently explore and adopt various social media platforms that are suitable for their community so as to grow the visibility and social media presence of their libraries and as well, reach out to every member of their community. Furthermore, adequate budgetary provision for the purchase and maintenance of technologies and facilities to effectively drive the social media implementation for service delivery is imperative.

Keywords: Social media, Information Resources, Library Services, 21st century libraries, ICT

Introduction

Among the types of libraries, academic library is a vital part of the big working machine (the higher Institution). Academic library in their characteristics as noted by Akporhonor (2015) are libraries attached to tertiary institutions such as universities, polytechnics and collages of education, collages of Agricultures and research Institutes. These libraries are established to acquire, preserve, create access to knowledge and information which is the main mandate of their parent institution as well as create an enabling environment conducive for teaching, learning and research (Bayat, Isfadyari-Moghadam & Alipouri Hafezi, 2018).

The concept of service delivery in an academic library is important because the effectiveness of the library can be measured in its effective service provision. Therefore, library services such as circulation services, reference services, book reservation, technical services, current awareness services, etc., are directed towards enhancing information access for the satisfaction of library patrons' information need. The advent of the Internet (WWW) has brought a new challenge for librarians in meeting the rapidly changing information needs and expectations of the 21st century library patrons (Okoroma, 2017). Academic libraries of the 21st Century witnessed a paradigm shift in communicating library services to users. Hence, the use of social media became a potent means in which librarians and libraries can optimize for their work and services as well as maintain their relevance (Gallardo, 2013).

Concept of Social Media and the Evolving Trends of Social Media
Social media is a social instrument of communication. It is a strategy and an outlet for broadcasting/communication. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) defined social media as a group of Internet based application that allows the creation and exchange of user generated content. They noted that social media as a group of internet-based applications builds on the ideological and technological foundations of web 2.0 and allows the creation and exchange of User Generated Content (UGC), (Dikka and Chukwudum 2017). Ezeani and Igwesi (2012) also noted that social media networks are viable tools for cooperation and sharing of knowledge in an open access platform. Hence, people with common interests are able to share information with each other via a huge variety of social networking sites created specifically to make sharing, communicating, and creating information as simple and efficient as possible. Therefore, Implementation of social networking tools in academic libraries is extremely useful for the improvement and promotion of qualitative library service especially in the provision of reference services.

The evolution of social media according to Drew (2013) can be said to have begun in 1978, when the first social media known as *Bulletin Board System (BBS)* was created by Ward Christensen and Randy Suess, which was used to announce meeting and sharing information by posting it on BBS. It was the beginning of virtual community and the first dial-up in history. After the internet (WWW) was launched and loved by many people, *Geocities* was launched by Beverly Hills Internet (BHI) as a web hosting service that allows internet users to create simple websites for themselves.

Early social media service that appeared in 1997 was *"Six Degrees"*, which allows its users to create profile and list of friends. The year 1999 was a year for *Blogger and Live journal*, as users could write, share and communicate with friends by using their own blog or journal. After which *Friendster* was launched in 2002, which allows users to create profile and virtual connection with people around the world, which later became a social media for games. *MySpace, LinkedIn*

and WordPress launched in the same year, 2003. Most of MySpace users were musician and band. WordPress was created to be used as open-source content management system. And LinkedIn was social networking for business-oriented.

In 2004, Mark Zuckerberg launched *'The Facebook'*. Facebook was created as social networking for college students. *YouTube* was launched in 2005. Later on, other social network tools such as Twitter, *Google plus (Google+)* were launched in 2006. Today, social Media consists of thousands of social media platforms, all serving the same but slightly different purpose. With new and exciting technologies just around the corner, social media will be interesting to see in the coming decades (McFadden, 2018).

Evolving Roles of Social Media in Academic Libraries
Academic libraries world-wide and in Africa in particular, are striving to sustain their relevancy in information service delivery for the achievement of primary objectives and goals of their parent institutions. Digital revolution along with the Internet made it possible for potential library patrons to access the resources they need without really visiting the library, forcing libraries to think of alternate ways to reach and remind the patrons about their presence. Hence, adequate communication and information transmission to numerous library patrons irrespective of their location is the major challenge facing academic libraries today, which social media is an efficient tool for overcoming this challenge. The adoption of social media in academic libraries can be understood in the context of developing an efficient communication and information environment, changing user needs and attitudes, collaboration among library organizations, and improving the connections and relationships between library staff members and patrons (Abdulsami & Dika, 2017)..

Therefore, the major aim of any academic library's presence on social media is to be where their patrons are. Hence, outreach to users is a very important factor in a time where users have no time to come and spend hours in the library. The roles of social media in the 21st century academic libraries include:

- ➢ Outreach/reference service role
- ➢ Information dissemination
- ➢ Building a strong online community
- ➢ Creating a good institutional visibility
- ➢ Library education
- ➢ Marketing and Promotion of library services, and
- ➢ Networking with other libraries

Areas of Utilization of Social Media in Service Provision in Academic Libraries
Library and information services are usually carried out by library professionals whose main duties are to select, acquire, organize, disseminate and store information embedded in various formats with the intention of satisfying the information needs of library patrons. In Nigerian situation in particular, these responsibilities of managing and dissemination of information by librarians have been made effective through the use of social media.

Quadri & Idowu (2014) in their study on the use of social media for information dissemination by librarians in Nigeria corroborated this fact when he pointed out that 73% of librarians make use of social media for current awareness services, 63.3% for reference services, 56.7% for

selective dissemination of information and about 58% for library orientation. Similarly, Onuoha (2013) studied librarian's use of social media for professional development in Nigeria and found out that Facebook, blogs, wikis and YouTube were highly used among Nigerian libraries. These submissions are indications social media utilization is being embraced and used in the Nigerian academic libraries. To buttress the fact that social media is suitable in library operations, Ezeani & Igwesi (2012), Ifijeh (2014), Adetola & Okeoghene (2016) and Bakare and Umar (2018) identified the following services through which social media can enhance services provision in libraries. These are:-

Marketing of Library Services: This can be done by uploading a pictorial expression of the library facilities and the various sections of the library, available resources and library personnel which can be placed on the library's Facebook page or Flickr. This approach is a good selling point as it encourages library patrons to access the available resources and services that library can offer.

Current Awareness Services: Library and information personnel can place information on new arrivals, orientation programmes, electronic resources and online resources available in the library on its social media sites. This will increase the awareness of library's resources and services with ease.

Reference Services: Through the Facebook, Skype and other platform, library patrons can have direct access to the reference librarian and ask queries and is sure to get response almost immediately in a more friendly way even without visiting the library.

Reservation: Social media platform use is suitable in the aspect of reservations and renewal of items on loan. Rather than visiting the physical library for such transaction, the library user can send messages to the to the Customer Service Librarian (Circulation Librarian) through any of the most convenient social media platforms; the library patron can even go to the extent of making a call also through any of the media platforms such as WatsApp, Skype, or Facebook.

User Education Programme: This can be done virtually and hosting on YouTube for library patrons to access and study at a leisure time and pace. The use of social media to reach out to users saves the management of the library the time and resources to organize such programmes; and for the library patrons, it saves them the stress of having to learn it in a classroom situation.

Selective Dissemination of Information: This is one of the specialized library services that is critical and appealing to library patrons of the library. This can be achieved through platforms like LinkedIn.

Multimedia Sharing: Multimedia resources like presentations, videos, audio recordings, and photographs/graphics play an important role in teaching and learning. Social media tools such as YouTube, Skype and Flicker greatly support this activity.

Taylor and Francis Group (2014) also noted that social media is used in carrying out library housekeeping functions such as: cheap publicity of events, programmes and services; enhancing feedback from patrons thereby enhancing library service evaluation; charging and discharging of library resources.

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Social Media Sites Used by Academic Libraries in Nigeria
As identified by Ezeani & Igwesi (2012), Adetola & Okeoghene (2016) and Bakare and Umar (2018), identified some major Social media tools popularly used by academic libraries in Nigeria to include:

- **Facebook:** Most popular because it is librarian-friendly, with this network, academic libraries try to link some of these specialized library applications like JSTOR search, World Cat, and much more to Facebook to draw users' attention to useful hidden treasures of the academic library.

- **WhatsApp:** is yet another social media platform mostly used by librarians in Nigeria. It allows interaction between library staff and their colleagues. WhatsApp Messenger is a cross-platform messaging application which allows its users to exchange messages without having to pay for SMS' (WhatsApp.com, 2012).

- **LinkedIn:** This is another social network platform used by librarians in Nigeria to connect and collaborate with other library and information professionals in various States and abroad. Librarians also use this site to get patrons connected with specialists in their particular field of interest via LinkedIn.

- **Blogs:** Here, librarians can periodically post messages; share information on a particular subject or issue, and allow users to contribute to content. They can write articles, news on topical issues and expect an instant reaction from their users.

- **MySpace:** In academic institutions where the students are; libraries have taken advantage of this site to post, calendar, custom catalogue search tools, and blog features to improve their presence.

- **Twitter:** A micro blogging application, to keep staff and patrons updated on daily activities, like frequently updated collections. Users can utilize this platform to type in short messages or status update. Librarians in Nigeria use this platform to give users first-hand information on the on- going national elections.

- **YouTube:** In institutions in Nigeria, events such as important highlights of inaugural lectures, conferences and workshops are disseminated via the YouTube.

- **Instagram:** Librarians use this tool to share and distribute new images of library collections. Cover page of new arrivals of both books and journals can be disseminated to users via Instagram. It can also be used to enlighten users on topical issues.

- **Library Thing:** A tool that enriches the library Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC). Once an account is created, a list of books with ISBNs is sent to Library Thing which sends back a piece of code which is pasted into the footer of the Library OPAC. Librarians utilize this to send a list of current publications to users.

Social Media Skills Needed by Librarians to Effectively Sustain Library Service Delivery in the 21st Century

According to Murphy & Moulaison (2009), Librarians need a new branch of skill sets specific to utilizing and leveraging social networking sites to provide quality services and maintain their role as information experts in a Web2.0 world. The American Library Association (2006) noted that the following competencies based on the ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education are general enough to be applicable across various social networking sites and are flexible for new sites and their evolving applications to library services.

- ➢ **Understanding and Articulating Social Networking Sites and Their Roles:** Librarians should be familiar with a diversity of social networking sites and social media including those most relevant to their patrons.
- ➢ **Creating Content:** The ability of creating, contributing, and revising content in various formats including images, text, audio, video, links, and more within and beyond the presence of their library in a variety of social networking sites with various tools.
- ➢ **Evaluating Information:** The ability to critically evaluate information encountered in social networking sites on the basis of authority, currency, and bias etc.
- ➢ **Applying Information Ethically and Legally:** Being able to respect copyright and intellectual property of information encountered and applied in social networking sites, and conscious of the unique cultural norms.
- ➢ **Searching and Navigating:** The ability to know how to effectively search and browse various online social networks for known and unknown contacts, and for information and resources in a variety of formats.
- ➢ **Interacting:** Being familiar with the diverse methods of communicating with social networking sites and must be aware of and be able to apply the unique cultural norms and expectations of each communication method. A librarian must be familiar with every communication channel, they should possess the skills for interacting with patrons in these sites via smart phone applications, mobile webpages, etc.
- ➢ **Teaching:** The librarian must be capable of teaching these skills to library patrons and peers. This includes guiding and training patrons through targeted aspects of social networking sites that arise in their use as resources and tools and teaching about the use of social networking sites for scholarly purposes.
- ➢ **Providing Services:** The ability to utilize a variety of online social networking sites to provide quality library services. They evaluate social network sites and choose which are most appropriate to establish a library presence in. It is important that librarians are familiar with the steps and etiquette for initiating and responding to friend requests in building networks.
- ➢ **Photo and video skills.** Social media is very visual. Take a peek at Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest, Instagram, Snapchat, Slideshare, Vine, Flickr, Youtube, e.t.c., all include photos and videos. It means that library personnel will should be able to create photos and videos that quickly communicate to his/her organization's social media crowd.
- ➢ **Marketing and promotion.** Part of library personnel social media duties include sharing the cool stuff your library is doing.

Benefits of the Use of Social Media for Library Services Provision in Academic Libraries

Social networking sites have its own advantages to librarians and Clients. Some of the benefits according to Penzhorn (2010) are as follows:

1. Social media enables effective collaborations and direct communication with library patrons. Social media help librarians to get direct feedback from patrons outside the library.
2. Social media can raise the libraries' level of awareness and visibility. It has enabled many academic libraries to gain a broad reach in the digital world even beyond their usual user communities.
3. It will generate a flow of information excluded from search engines and Library Catalogues. The use of this tool does not require any special equipment apart from computer, Internet connectivity and a trained professional to manage.
4. Through the social media, academic libraries can offer more and more digital services, press reader, databases, streaming services and many more.
5. Social Media presents the academic library as a modern, open and future-oriented institution. Academic libraries will no longer be seen solely as a book rental point, but with high level of awareness, they are seen as a location with a full range of services.
6. Social media tools have greatly facilitated delivery of information to meet search queries presented by many patrons. It has helped librarians in answering queries from different patrons at the same time reducing their physical presence in the libraries.
7. Social networking sites wall linked to a library's web page has the potential of reaping great results by attracting and serving distance education students. Watts et al (2002) stress that it is through social networking sites that a reference librarian is capable of communicating and delivering a message to a distant target person.
8. It will help library staff in academic libraries to keep pace with technologies and compete effectively with the developed World.
9. Limited library space in academic libraries can be unnoticed if personal assistance is rendered to users to enable them access necessary and very important information from the comfort of their rooms, lecture rooms or offices via social media tools.
10. The cost of implementing and facilitating social media platforms is relatively low. Therefore, with little cost, Librarians can promote Library services using social media platforms.

Challenges in the Use of Social Media in Library Services Provision in Academic Libraries

Lack of Policy: Lack of library social media policy contributes to wrong or inadequate implementation of social media which can even tannish the image and purpose of the library.

Lack of Awareness: A great number of librarians engaged in discharging library services in academic libraries are still unaware of the potentials and opportunities of social networking services in library service provision.

Finance: Many academic libraries in Africa still suffer setbacks in adoption of social media in library service provision due to lack or low budgetary provisions for technologies that supports the implementation of social media tools such as computers, robust internet facilities, mobile devices, alternative power supply, etc.

Lack of ICT Skills: Most librarians are yet to come to terms with this sudden exposure, as it looks alien and antagonistic to them. As such, they continue to provide library services traditionally.

Bandwidth problem: Every library online services are driven by efficient internet bandwidth. Poor connectivity frustrates effective online participation.

Technophobia/Techno stress: Some librarians are afraid of handling computers and online services. They make the traditional library services their comfort zone and are not eager to embrace change.

Lack of maintenance culture: Maintenance culture is seriously lacking in most academic libraries especially in developing countries. The few available technologies are in moribund conditions that does not encourage the adoption of social media technology talk more of supporting remote access to information.

Unreliable power supply: Erratic supply of electricity hinders the effective and efficient use of ICT gadgets and discourages academic libraries from implementing digital services. This is because, the facilities on which social networks thrives on is power driven.

Inadequate Training: – Inadequate training opportunities for a responsible workforce to handle library service provision through social media are major challenge in developing countries.

Strategies for Adoption and Utilization of Social Media for Effective Library Service Delivery

Successful adoption and implementation of social media in libraries is done in number of strategies. Burclaff and Johnson (2014) stated **t**he following strategies for successful social adoption and implementation of social media for library service provision in academic libraries.

1. **Purpose:** Identifying the purpose for using social media is the first step to creating a successful social media plan. A meaningful purpose statement connects with the library's mission, so as to explicitly make the library social media actions one of the many ways your library fulfills its mission. The purpose for adopting social media should hinged on the library's core values and types of library services to be provided.
2. **Policy:** Once the library's social media purpose established, it should be articulated in an official document referred to as social media policy. The overarching document outlines the library's intentions and guides the choices to make on various platforms. The purpose statement must be present in the policy because the purpose informs future decisions on social media. The policy should address issues such as creating new accounts, approval of posts, and appropriate ethical or legal issues, including copyright and privacy policies.
3. **Implementation:** Successfully putting a social media policy into practice is demonstrated by your ability to select the right platform, create posts and interact with patrons on social media in a way that reflects the library's purpose and follows the social media policy.
4. **Goals:** Engage in aggressive social media campaign and awareness programmes using various mediums in the community, set goals that are firmly rooted in the purpose that is articulated to ensure that every action is purpose driven.

5. **Assessment:** Measuring and determining success is dependent on what you're trying to achieve. Most social media platforms offer embedded tools for assessment, like Facebook insights, Twitter analytics, or Google analytics.
6. **Give away:** Establish specific rewards and recognition for contributors to the library's social media platforms. This will help attract and motivate the community to connect and appreciate the role of the library as a major information provider.

Conclusion

Academic libraries play important roles in providing information for research and access to diverse knowledge embedded in materials in various formats. To be able to stay relevant in the socially networked environment and meet the growing needs of its users in the 21st century, it has become imperative for these libraries to adopt social media which has become a library technology that has the capacity to expand the frontiers of the library service delivery as well as reach the hitherto unreached categories of users. At this point in time, it has become very important for every academic library to integrate social media into the main stream of its service delivery chain through dedicated, skillful and committed professionals.

Recommendations

To enhance the quality of library service provision using social media in academic libraries, the following recommendations are proffered:

1. Library personnel in academic libraries should efficiently explore and adopt social media platforms that are suitable for their community, so as to grow the visibility and social media presence of their libraries and as well reach out to every member of their community.
2. Academic libraries should develop an effective library social media policy to regulate their social media activities for effective service provision.
3. Library and information professionals should engage in aggressive social media campaigns and awareness so as to enhance the patronage of their library services and resources by new and prospective patrons.
4. Institutions of higher learning should ensure adequate budgetary provision is made for the purchase and maintenance of technologies and facilities to effectively drive the social media implementation for effective service delivery.
5. Library and information personnel in academic libraries should be exposed to various training and development programme that will enrich skills on how to drive and manage the social media technologies for effective service provision.

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