

Academic Library Services in Nigeria: Integrating Social Media

¹Rita Otibhor SALAMI, ²Lami AKAWU, ³Paul ABUTU and ⁴Prisca Oluchi CHUKS-IBE

Federal University of Technology, Minna, Niger State
Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University, Lapai, Niger State
r.otibhor@futminna.edu.ng

Abstract

The paper examined the integration of social media for academic libraries in the provision of information service delivery. The paper also described some of the services that could be provided through the application of social media tools such as communication, feedback, reference services, special events, circulation services, new arrivals, user education, marketing, provision of archival services among others. The paper also described some of the social media platforms whose tools could be adopted in academic libraries to include: LinkedIn, Facebook, Blogs, Twitter, Instant Messaging and YouTube etcetera. The following challenges could hinder practical application of social media in academic libraries such as lack of knowledge, lack of interest, too many academic tools to learn and slow internet network among others and could hinder the useful application of social media to academic library services. It was recommended that academic libraries in Nigeria must strategise before adopting and implementing social media. At the same time, librarians should develop a positive attitude towards the application of social media in service delivery.

Keywords: Academic Libraries, Library Services, Social Media

Introduction

Social networking is web-based tools applied by people from all walks of life across age, race, gender, age, the social and economic background to connect, collaborate, share experiences and create content among one another. Mutuala (2013) emphasised that social media is now regarded as the number one online activity, with its use accounting for 10% of users' time on the web. Besides, social media is reportedly growing faster than internet growth globally. As a result of this development, social networking sites are being applied in various business ventures to promote and provide effective and efficient services free of time and geographic constraints. There is no doubt that the technological advancement of the 21st century affects academic library services. One such technological advancement is social networking. Stoeckel and Sinkinson (2013) stated that there is increasing data that revealed that students live and interact with social media in their personal, civic and informal learning contexts. It is now necessary for academic libraries to adopt social networking in the provision of library services. It provides an opportunity for academic libraries to develop and maintain closer ties with patrons and to foster the passion for reading, learning, research and community development in academic libraries. When social networking is integrated into service delivery in academic libraries, the media will be used to provide current and up-to-date information to users, provide links to open-source

library resources, and give information on new arrivals. Besides, it will make way for a more interactive service delivery which will foster a two-way communication pathway and provide an opportunity for academic library users to be part of the services rendered to them. Stoeckel and Sinkinsone (2013) lamented that while social media has been frequently used in traditional classroom settings, its adoption in academic libraries has developed at a slower pace. This article seeks to reveal various library services that can be integrated into social networking applications to encourage its adaptation by academic libraries for efficient service delivery.

Social Networking and Library Services

In order to satisfy the growing information needs of their now technically sophisticated users, academic librarians now need to integrate social networking applications into service delivery. Kwanya and Stillwell (2015) stated that library users now exhibit a piece of unique information-seeking behaviour which is horizontal, promiscuous, diverse and volatile. They further explained that library users are now more competent with technology. They prefer interactive systems, have drastically shifted to digital form of communication, have limited tolerance to delay, find their peers more credible and believe everything is on the net. Librarians must be proactive and embrace the new technologies and face the challenges for better service delivery. Examples of such services that can be provided through social networking media are:

- **Communication:** The platform can be used to inform clients on changes in the library. For example, change in opening hours, creation of new units. Carr (2015) also suggested that the use of social media helps create immediate interactions with library users; this may lead to the conversion of potential users into becoming actual library users. One of the greatest strengths of social networking is the users' interaction with librarians. It is no longer a one-way flow of information from librarians; both librarians and users are actively engaged in the process of knowledge management (Fernandez, 2009). In order for library users to be abreast on the activities of the library, librarians can tweet about daily activities happening in their libraries.
- **Feedback:** Academic libraries can use social networking platform as a medium to obtain data concerning feedbacks from users regarding their satisfaction with the services rendered to them.
- **Reference Services:** Social networking platforms can be used for reference services such as Ask the librarian, Twitter and instant messaging can also be used by users to ask questions. Social networking also enables library users to have direct access to a reference librarian to ask their questions and likely get a response immediately. Social media platform, like Skype, provides users with an opportunity to interact face to face virtually with librarians without coming to the library physically.
- **Special events:** Social networking platforms such as Twitter, YouTube and Facebook can be employed to cover special events such as library week, workshops, seminars, orientation programmes, inaugural lectures and public lectures among others.
- **Circulation Services:** Circulation staff can employ social networking platforms to send alert messages informing patrons of date due and fine reminder. Users can also use

platforms like Facebook to book for reservation of books and journals by sending a message to the circulation librarian.

- **New arrivals:** New arrivals such as books, subscription of journals and databases can be publicised through various social networking platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instant messaging.
- **User Education Programme:** Social networking platform is a great way to aid user education programme. Kwanya and Stillwell (2015) suggested that academic libraries can communicate and share documents, provide a platform for user education, demonstration and practice.
- **Marketing:** Social networking is a great medium to improve the interpersonal relationship between academic librarians and patrons. Kwanya and Stiwell (2015) also argued that library users perceive librarians as harsh, unapproachable and know it all individuals who are not helpful to the users. In order to attract users, academic libraries, need to employ social networking to project themselves as progressive, liberal, approachable, friendly and adaptable. The library catalogue can be included on the library Facebook page in order for users to be able to be informed on the information resources available in the library. Social networking can also be employed to notify users and potential users on the various services, especially specialised services offered by the library such as selective dissemination of information, research consulting services and data management, among others.
- **Archival services:** Archival information resources can be shared to users through social networking platforms. Ezeani and Eke (2011) stated that archival pictures could be posted to users or uploaded on the library social media platforms.
- **Provision of information resources:** Social media platform such as Twitter and Facebook, provide an avenue for academic libraries to share links of open-source information resources to their clients. Librarians can also utilise social media platforms to send a list of current publications to users individually.
- **Referral Services:** Academic librarians can use social networking platform such as LinkedIn to offer referral service to their clients.
- **Current awareness services:** Librarians can employ the use of social networking services to provide information on the election, inaugural lectures, current happenings in Nigeria and all over the world.

Social Networking Platforms:

These are platforms that allow users to connect and exchange information with each other Dewing (2010) defined social networking platforms as a wide range of Internet-based and mobile services that allow users to participate in online exchanges of information or join communities. Some of the social media platforms that can be integrated to carry out academic library services are:

- **Linkedin:** This is the most popular professional social networking sites, with about 225 million users (Cutis, 2013). An academic librarian can create groups among library users,

especially faculty members, in order to aid communication among members of the group. They can also use LinkedIn platforms to offer referral services by connecting their users to various researchers.

- **Facebook:** Facebook has impacted the way people communicate (Hallaran, 2012). Facebook allows users to create a profile, upload and share photographs, share personal information and connect with others who share similar interest. Libraries can communicate, interact, market and promote their activities and services through Facebook. Facebook can also be employed in libraries to share relevant links of open-source information resources to users. Academic libraries can also be used to interact with users to know their information needs.
- **Blogs:** According to Downes (2014), a blog is a personal website that contains contents that are organised in reverse chronological order like a journal or a diary. Librarians can utilise the medium of blogging to educate users on various techniques of searching for information, provide current awareness services and can also serve as a discussion forum between librarians and users.
- **Twitter:** Twitter is a mini-blogging platform that is used to send messages of 140 characters to a web community. Library users can utilise this platform by posting a question to reference librarians. The platform can also be used to market library services and share links to open information resources.
- **Library Thing:** Elonye (2013) emphasised that a Library Thing is a social networking platform that enriches the library OPAC. Once a library thing account is created, a list of books with ISBNs is sent to the Library Thing which sends back a piece of code which is pasted into the footer of the library OPAC. Librarians can utilise this platform to send a list of current publication to users.
- **Instant Messaging:** Instant messaging can be defined as a platform that supports Internet-based synchronous text chat, with a point to point communication between users on the same system. Instant messaging is a useful tool that can be employed in academic libraries to provide online reference services.
- **YouTube:** Adekunle and Olla (2015) define YouTube as a video sharing website which allows users to upload, view and share videos. Academic libraries can use YouTube to share videos of live events such as library week, inaugural lectures, workshops and seminars.
- **Pinterest:** Pinterest is a free graphical and an emerging social networking platform that allows users to organise and share things (Gullando, 2015). Pinterest can be employed in academic libraries to market library services, showcasing historical archives, creating the reading list and sharing list of new arrivals.
- **Podcast:** A podcast is a digital medium consisting of an episodic series of audio, videos, PDF subscribed to and downloaded through the web or streamed online to a computer or mobile device (Adekunle and Olla, 2015). Academic libraries can use the podcast to provide information such as library orientation, display and exhibition of new arrivals and information literacy lectures in a library portal.

Benefits of Integrating Social Networking in the Delivery of Information Services in Academic Libraries

Academic libraries of all type can benefit in several ways in improving their service delivery by adopting social media. Some of the benefits are:

- **User Engagement:** SM provides a platform to enable librarians to engage users and potential users personally in an identified group. Kwanya and Stillwent (2015) supported this fact when they stated that social media enables librarians to break down the walls between them and their users. User engagement also enhances the library's ability to meet the information needs of the users. The platforms also help academic libraries to build a relationship between users and librarians through engagement.
- **Visibility:** Social media enables academic library activities and services to be visible among library users and potential users. Fernandex (2009) in an analysis of the strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats of social media in libraries noted that the use of SM is helpful in that librarians visible on the platforms can be easily identified in addressing various questions asked by users. It also helps users to be up-to-date with the various activities in the library without visiting the physical library.
- **Cost and Ease of Use:** It is usually painless and cost-effective to set up and maintain a social media account.
- **Marketing and Promotion of Library Services:** Social media is a useful tool to promote library services. It helps users and non-users to change their perception of the library. SM is used to keep users abreast with current development in their libraries.
- **Improvement of Customer Services:** Social media enables academic libraries to improve their customer service provision. Academic library management can get feedback from the services rendered to users and improve when necessary.

Planning for Social Media in Academic Libraries

In order to create and manage a social media platform effectively and efficiently, it is indispensable for an academic library to plan before implementing it. Elonye (2013) noted that planning helps us to anticipate any problem and craft library presence that will meet the future needs of the users. Before an academic library think of having a social media presence, they need to have lists of goals in order to eliminate a failed web presence. Dowd (2013) stressed that without directions social media content creators could be at risk of working in silos without a strategy to communicate their brand, connect their services, or drive people to the library or its website. It is vital for libraries social media platforms to be up to date because it could reflect poorly on the image of the library and parent institution. In order for an academic library to have an efficient and effective social media presence, the following steps should be followed.

- **Purpose:** The first step in creating a successful social media is to identify the reasons why an academic library should have a social media presence. According to Association of College and Research Libraries (2014), for academic libraries to have a

meaningful purpose statement, library management should connect the purpose of social networking to the mission of the academic library which is to enhance teaching, learning, research and community development. Virupakshan and Narayan (2013) also opined that librarians should think of the services to offer and create profiles and services that will capture the interest of users. It is important to note that the purpose of having a social media presence should not only be centred on the activities and services of the library and its parent organisation, but also on information that will be able to engage users and get them active. Diana (2012) in that direction stressed that sometimes just being able to get users to open up and start a conversation can open the door to information needs. Libraries can create content relating to sport, entertainment, current affairs and world news, among others.

- **Policy:** After the library has successfully identified its purpose, the next step is to have a policy. This can be established by articulating it in an official document. Association of College and Research Libraries (2014), referred to such a policy as Social Media Policy. This document will serve as a guide on their choice of social media. The policy must conform to the objectives of the library and its parent organisation.
- **Implementation:** At the implementation stage, libraries need to carefully select the social media platform and tools which have a higher potential of achieving their goals. That is why Kwanya and Stiwell (2014) suggested that libraries should consider specific issues before choosing the social media tools they want. These include affordability, availability, usability and functionality, among other issues. Academic librarians must take into account how social media platforms will be implemented and managed. Purpose and policy should be reflected in the implementation stage. Sachs in Elonye (2014) stated that during the implementation stage, librarians should keep in mind that sites may change their mode of operation at will without the consent of the user. Libraries need to be mindful that they may continuously adjust to continues changes or updates as regards to functionality and privacy policies on various platforms. It is important to note that before implanting a social networking platform, it is essential for academic library management to decide who will handle the platform. In this regard, Diana (2012) suggested that social media platforms should be managed by a librarian who is excited about creating a social media presence would be better for the job.
- **Goals:** In creating a social media presence, academic libraries need to consider goals to be achieved. A goal is the desired or expected result a library wants to achieve in creating a social media presence. The Association of College and Research Libraries (2014) suggested that any goal that is set up should have a SMART objective. This is an acronym for specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely. For example, a library goal for having a social media presence could be to support the curriculum of the institution, promote library services or to market library services. Regardless of the goal of a library what to achieve using social media, they must ensure it meets the criteria of SMART objective. The SMART objective includes the following:

1. **Specific:** An academic library management is expected to identify the purpose, appropriate social media tool and library staff to manage the platform to achieve the objective of setting up the social media account. It helps to track progress and measure the successes recorded during the implementation stage.
 2. **Measurable:** Whatever goal a social media networking platform is expected to achieve; the success must be measurable. For example, a goal for setting up a social media platform is to create awareness of library resources and services. It cannot be regarded as a goal unless a library has a way to measure if that goal has been achieved.
 3. **Attainable:** An academic, social media goals should be achievable if they put in the necessary work.
 4. **Relevant:** The goals of social media must be per the objectives of the library.
 5. **Timely:** Academic libraries must keep a time frame for achievement of their goals. It helps to keep every library staff accountable and to know when to measure their success.
- **Assessment:** In planning for a successful social media presence, the academic librarian needs to ensure that from time to time, they should assess their achievement on social media. There are many tools designed to measure the presence of a specific aspect of social media presence. Various social media platforms offer these services. Facebook and Twitter offer tools for assessment, such as Facebook insights and Twitter analysis, respectively. Kwanya and Stillwell (2014) stated that some of the issues that libraries may be interested in assessing include the reach of their social media efforts, how many users and potential users are being reached, their demographic and psychographic attributes and their responses to the messages.

Challenges of Social Networking

It is pertinent to note that even though social networking has many benefits, they also have various challenges in using the media, the followings are some of the challenges:

- **Lack of knowledge on how to use various social media tools:** Most academic librarians lack knowledge on how to use social media to provide library services. The few that have knowledge on how to use it for entertainment purposes but lack knowledge on how to apply it for educational purposes.
- **Lack of interest in learning and utilising social media:** Most librarians, especially the traditional librarians, are not interested in knowing new trends in the field of librarianship. They are comfortable with providing traditional library services only. Oladokun, (2014) stated that given the demand in the practice of today, the librarian that lack the knowledge, skills and tools required to keep pace with the efficient and effective information service and practice are living in an age that no longer exists.
- **Too many social media tools to learn:** There are several social media tools available that can be integrated into the delivery of information services, and most librarians do not know how to handle these tools.

- **Technophobia:** Some librarians are very comfortable providing traditional library services. They do not want to explore the opportunities that technology can provide in the provision of effective and efficient services to the digital native who is now library users.
- **Lack of Training:** most library staff lack training on how to employ social media in providing library services.
- **Lack of Institutional/ Support:** Most libraries do not have institutional support to create and maintain social media platforms. No library can successfully implement social networking without approval and support from their institutional management.
- **Bandwidth Issues:** Most academic libraries in Nigeria have issues with slow speed of the Internet, and this can result in frustration on the part of social media participation.
- **Lack of Social Media Policy Statement:** Most academic libraries do not have a policy statement surrounding the implementation of social media in their libraries. This has resulted in inefficient operation of social media in their service delivery.

Conclusion

Application of social media in academic libraries has great potential in helping libraries to occupy centre stage in the provision of information in the digital era. When it is effectively utilised, it can enable academic libraries to target more audience, to reduce the barriers in information delivery and improve their visibility. However, academic libraries management is likely to face some challenges in integrating social media in the provision of effective and efficient service delivery. These challenges include a lack of knowledge on how to use social media, lack of training, technophobia, lack of policy statement, among others. However, with the right attitude, planning, resources and tools, academic libraries can significantly benefit from social media.

Recommendations

1. Planning: Academic libraries should begin with planning and putting down a policy statement before thinking of the social media tools to adopt in their provision of information service delivery. During the planning stage, they should carefully select only social media tools that are very appropriate in satisfying the information needs of their users.
2. Attitude: Librarians should develop a positive attitude by embracing change as regards the application of ICT into the provision of library services to users.
3. Training: Library management should organise and encourage their staff to attend conferences, workshop, symposia, to educate librarians on various social media tools and its application to information service delivery.
4. Before engaging in any social media platform, library management must ensure their institutional management approves their social media policy.
5. Academic libraries should endeavour to connect with service providers that provide broadband internet connection.

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