

INTEGRATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA INTO LIBRARY SERVICES IN NIGERIA IN THE 21ST CENTURY

A Festschrift in Honour of
DR. FEMI ZACCHEAUS OGUNTUASE
UNIVERSITY LIBRARIAN, FEDERAL UNIVERSITY
OF TECHNOLOGY, AKURE (2010-2016)



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

• Foreword	iii
• Dedication	iv
• Table of Contents	v
• List of Contributors.....	ix

CHAPTER 1

Essence of Diligence: The Biography of Dr. Femi Zaccheaus OGUNTUASE, University Librarian, Federal University of Technology, Akure (2010-2016)	1
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CHAPTER 2

Use of Social Media in Promoting Research among Library and Information Science Professionals Oyemike Victor BENSON, Nkechi M. AMAECHI Ph.D & Charis O. ONUOHA	10
---	----

CHAPTER 3

Applications of Social Media for Service Delivery in Modern Library: Issues and Challenges in the 21 st Century Ademola OLANUSI	24
---	----

CHAPTER 4

Enhancing Reference Service Provision through the Integration of Social Media Ezinwanyi MADUKOMA Phd, CLN	40
--	----

CHAPTER 5

Social Media as a Means for Promoting Library Services in Nigerian Universities in a Digital Age Ejiro JAMOGHA, Oresiri JAMOGHA & Anya P. UDONSI	57
---	----

CHAPTER 6

Harnessing Social Media for Effective Dissemination of Information in Agricultural Research in Nigeria Taiwo Elizabeth OGUNJOBI Ph.D. & Bolanle O. FAGBOLA Ph.D.	72
---	----

CHAPTER 7

Social Media as Tool for Library Orientation in Academic Libraries in Nigeria

Oyemike Victor BENSON, Dr. (Mrs.) Nkechi M. AMAECHI & Ifeyinwa Vivian OKERE 87

CHAPTER 8

Social Media as Tool for Publicity and Reference Services in Academic Libraries 113

Biliamin Oladele POPOOLA & Nafisa RABIU

CHAPTER 9

Social Media and Publicity: The 21st Century Innovation in Libraries 128

Joshua Sani MAGOI & Fidelia Mbowehing WHONG

CHAPTER 10

Social Media and Information Dissemination
Juliana Obiageri Akidi (CLN) & Catherine Oluchi UMEBALI (CLN) 151

CHAPTER 11

Provision of Reference and Information Services in Academic Libraries through Social Media Tools
Oyemike Victor BENSON, Dr. (Mrs.) Gertrude C. UMUNNAKWE & Chidi Augustine DIKE

CHAPTER 12

Social Media and Information Dissemination in Library and Information Centres in Developing Countries 164
Lady Gloria Chianu CHUMA-IBE Ph.D

CHAPTER 13

The Internet as a Reference Tool in the Library
Adebambo A. ODUWOLE Ph.D & Marie Beauty DIRISU Ph.D 187

CHAPTER 14

- Social Media and Readers' Services in a Modern Library 196
Adeola F. AFOLABI & Kemisola Mercy AKINYEMI

CHAPTER 15

- Social Media and Information Dissemination in Libraries:
Issues and Challenges 211
Dr. (Mrs) Comfort U. UZOIGWE (CLN)

CHAPTER 16

- Social Media and Research 225
Rukayat Tijani IBRAHIM, Tihyaunin Luka DANG & Fatima DAYAN

CHAPTER 17

- Social Media Usage and Research Productivity of Library
Professionals in a Federal University of Technology, Akure,
Ondo State, Nigeria
Abel Kayode AFOLABI Ph.D & Deborah Adeola IPADEOLA 233

CHAPTER 18

- Integration of Social Media and Repository Services into
Nigerian University Libraries 248
Ekanem B. E. EYO, CLN,

CHAPTER 19

- Social Media and Reference Services 264
Rukayat Tijani IBRAHIM, Sekinat O. YUSUF & Nansoh SHEHU

CHAPTER 20

- Knowledge, Uses and Challenges of Social Media among
Librarians in a College in Nigeria 272
Johnson Ayodeji AKERELE Ph.D, Rotimi Adesina EGUNJOBI Ph.D, Robert Akinade AWOYEMI and Omotayo Ayotunde FALADE

CHAPTER 21	
Enhancing Library Publicity: The Role of Social Media	
Ehize Felix EFOSA, M. R SHEJI and Sandra Omoniyi	282
EFOSA-ISIBOR	
 CHAPTER 22	
Use Of Social Media in Resource Sharing and Inter-Library Loan	
Oyemike Victor BENSON, Dr. (Mrs.) Gertrude C.	294
UMUNNAKWE & Elizabeth Bola NWAUWA	
 CHAPTER 23	
Reference Services in Nigerian libraries: The 21 st Century Scenario	
Dickson Tunde ADEMODI	302
 CHAPTER 24	
The Influence of Social Media Use on Activities of Academic Libraries in Nigeria: Opportunities and Challenges	
Rasaq Femi QUADRI Ph.D & Sodiq ONAOLAPO	316
 CHAPTER 25	
Charging and Discharging System: The Use of Social Media	
Catherine O. UMEBALI & Juliana O. AKIDI	330
 INDEX	342

CHAPTER 8

SOCIAL MEDIA AS TOOLS FOR PUBLICITY AND REFERENCE SERVICES IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES



Biliamin Oladele POPOOLA and Nafisa RABIU

Introduction

The use of technological tools for service delivery in libraries has been widely adopted in varying degrees (Rogers, 2009). While some libraries are fully automated, some make use of a hybrid setting of manual and automated services, and still, other libraries are yet to plug into the technological revolution for one reason or the other. In Nigeria today, the various ICT tools that are used for library services include computers, the internet, intranet, CD-ROM, databases, e-mails, telephone, scanners, security cameras, and social media. The degree of adoption and use of these technologies are not the same in all libraries, although libraries and librarians have come to realize the importance of using modern technologies to foster efficient service delivery.

Internet use for library service delivery has indeed gained a huge recognition in recent times (Ifijeh, 2013), and academic libraries are using modern technologies, such as social media to communicate and engage with users, and exchange materials with them. This is important in reference services, library publicity, Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI), current awareness, user education, and outreach services (Lihitkar and Manohar, 2014).

With the popular use of social media by members of the public, academic libraries around the globe have started using this neo-technology to communicate, engage, and interact with library users in the delivery of their services. This is possible because most of the users of an academic library, especially the students, are connected to

one social media platform or the other (Harmon and Messina, 2013). Therefore, libraries now have a widened option of using social media to improve their service delivery.

What is Social Media?

Social Media are web-based applications, platforms, and technologies that make it possible for people to interact and share contents with one another via the internet. They are websites and online applications that are used to create and share information among people of similar interest and social interaction. Cabiddu, De-Carlo, and Picoli (2014) explained that social media “allow users to create, edit, access, and link to contents and/or individuals.” Social media technologies are generally used in maintaining social interaction, communication, and collaboration among people. According to the Webster Online dictionary, social media refers to the “forms of electronic communication (as website for social networking or micro blogging) through which users creates online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other contents.”

The term “social media” is broadly used to describe a group of Internet tools including social networking, web publishing, content sharing, instant messaging, and Wikis; these form the various types of social media available on the Internet for sharing information through digital devices (Curtis, Edwards, Fraser, Gudelsky, Holmquist, Thornton, and Sweetser, 2010). Social networking is one of the most commonly-used social media types. It is a platform that facilitates information sharing and enables people to stay in touch easily.

In other words, social networking tools are like directories that provide means for searching and connecting with people. Presently, the various types of social networking sites include Facebook, Google+, LinkedIn, Twitter, et cetera (Cabiddu et al, 2014). Facebook was established to “give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected.” As of July, 2014, Facebook had about 1.32 billion active users who regularly connect to the network to share information or view the information shared by others (DailyMail

Online, 2014).

Social Networking in Library Services

Facebook is a social networking site (SNS), which affords people from different parts of the globe to connect, interact and share information through the internet. Stone (2014) asserted that librarians that make use of Facebook to deliver library services, such as reference services, get more users to seek their assistance than those who do not use the platform. Hence, the use of Facebook for library service delivery can assist immensely in bringing back users' recognition of academic libraries and librarians as the right sources of information. Zaremohzzabieh, Samah, Omar, Bolong and Kamarudin (2014) also asserted that university students spend a large amount of time on Facebook every day. This indicates that the social network will be very useful for librarians to promote and deliver services in academic libraries.

Aside Facebook, other social networking sites, such as Twitter, LinkedIn, Google +, and MySpace, are frequently used by library users to interact with one another and gather information. Thus, academic libraries can also integrate the use of these media to interact with library users for effective service delivery. Similarly, WhatsApp and Blackberry Messenger (BBM); which are mobile phone applications used for instant messaging are presently being deployed in other industries as social networking tools, and can also be deployed in academic libraries to deliver various services.

Web Publishing and Content Sharing in Librarianship

Web publishing and content sharing are other types of social media that can be used by librarians to deliver services in academic libraries. Web publishing, such as blogging, affords librarians the opportunity to publicise and promote library services, and share ideas and information online. Blogging can also be effectively used in SDI services, user education, and current awareness services. Blogging involves the creation of a webpage (known as blog) on which contents are added in chronological order. It provides "a platform for in-depth

discussions guided by the material uploaded by the original user” (Casella et al, 2014).

Blogs are presently being used to deliver library services as a new way for creating impact on the library users. An important variation of blogging is microblogging, which is the type of social media platform being used on Twitter, which is website application that allows users to share information (called tweets) in just 140 characters or less. There is no limit to the number of tweets that can be published by a user on the platform. According to Folley (2014), Twitter can be used to ensure that a group of people (called followers) on the network are continually updated on latest information provided by a user they are following on the platform.

Content sharing involves the exchange of information in different formats and files among users on the internet. It is a popular form of social media that is frequently used by internet user. Content sharing on the social media may include the upload of videos (video sharing) on YouTube, pictures (photo sharing) on Flickr and Instagram, PowerPoint presentations on Blackboard, and audio resources on SoundClouds. YouTube, Flickr, Instagram, Blackboard, and SoundClouds are social media services on the internet that are available for the general use. Contents can be shared with users using this social media type in response to users' reference queries and for the publicity of library programmes and services.

Benefits of Social Media in the 21st Century Librarianship

The use of the different types of social media is very beneficial for the delivery of services in academic libraries. Social media tools generally provide librarians with the opportunity to try a new format of packaging and delivering information services. The social media technology can be readily deployed in services such as promotion and publicity, information sharing and dissemination, current awareness, inter-library loans, reference service, literature search, user education and outreach services (Ali, 2014). Academic libraries can make use of the platform to receive feedback on their services from users and also

to provide answers to users' queries.

Library service delivery is a process that involves interactions between library users and librarians. Such interaction can be facilitated in academic libraries through the use of social media as a means of contact between librarians and users. This infers that users do not have to physically visit the library to make use of some library services. For instance, reference processes, which are like interviews, can be conducted online through Facebook, WhatsApp, BBM, and Twitter, among others. By having the choice of reaching the library remotely, library user will be sure if and when they need to physically visit the library to access the needed information. Similar use of social media is also possible for other services rendered in academic libraries as well.

The benefits that can be harnessed from the use of social media for service delivery in academic libraries encompass nearly all services rendered in these libraries, especially the readers' services. This is because a library exists through the interaction of the librarian, information resources, and the users. Such interaction, when facilitated through the use of communication technologies such as social media, can guarantee a high level of effectiveness and efficiency in library services promotion, librarian-user collaboration, and other information services rendered in the libraries. Social media-facilitated communications are delivered without delays; therefore, the technology is an effective means of delivering library services to the users in academic environments (Onuoha, 2013).

Various libraries around the globe have started adopting social media for their service deliveries, especially in the aspect of virtual referencing. This may be due to the benefits that are perceived or known to be derivable from such use, or the need to stay where the users are. A number of studies have highlighted the applicability of social media tools such as Facebook and instant messaging in library service (Greenwell and Kraemer, 2006; Bates and Can, 2007; Landis, 2007; Miller and Jenson, 2007). This is because library users now find it easy to communicate with and utilize library services remotely.

In a study by Mack, Behler, Roberts, and Rimland (2007) on the use of various social media applications including Facebook, email and instant messaging (IM) for reference services, it was reported that users inquiries were received mostly through Facebook and emails, even more than the physical face-to-face reference inquiry. Findings from the study of Hendrix, Chiarella, Hasman, Murphy, and Zafron (2009) also showed that academic libraries are gradually beginning to use Facebook in their activities. The study revealed further that the libraries use Facebook for marketing purposes, to make announcements, provide reference services, and share photos with the users.

Aside academic libraries, other types of libraries are also plugging in to use social media in their services. Aharony (2012) reported from a study on the use of Facebook for service delivery in American public and academic libraries, that the academic libraries are using their Facebook walls to post information on library collections, which accounted for 47.5% of the total Facebook posts by the libraries; deliver library services (38.5%), technology (7.37%), and library information in general (6.6%). The study also revealed that the public libraries occupy their Facebook walls with miscellaneous messages (36.2%), general information (24.5%), congratulations and thanks (17.64%), world cup information (10.87%), survey (6.86%), and others (3.92%). The author revealed that most of these libraries are not using other sectors of Facebook apart from the wall, although few academic libraries were found to provide search boxes to JSTOR and WorldCat on their Facebook page. However, the public libraries “use the wall and the photos section as major channel of information more than the academic libraries” (Aharony, 2012, p.369).

The integration of social networking sites (SNSs) as part of library service is gradually becoming a global phenomenon. This was revealed in the study by Canty (2012), who surveyed the use of Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr, and blogs by libraries across the world, and reported that the social networking platforms are sparsely being implemented in libraries across the globe; some libraries were

discovered to have fully embraced the technology, while others have concentrated on few of the SNSs. The report also showed that the libraries are majorly using social media for marketing and publicity, responding to others' queries, and intimating users with the resources available in the library.

Even with the patchy implementation of social media in libraries, specifically in Nigerian libraries, there are expectations that the use of the technology will enhance library works in general. The importance of social media for service delivery in libraries was shown by Kho (2011) who reported that the New York Public Library has a Twitter account with over 122,000 followers, a Facebook page with 32,000 fans, and a YouTube Channel with about 1500 subscribers. Similarly, Blakeman and Brown (2010) identified the benefits of social media use in libraries to include marketing, awareness, and branding. However, Makori (2012) earlier reviewed the literature and conducted a document analysis on the use of social media and other web 2.0 technologies in African university libraries, and revealed that the level of implementation of social media-mediated service delivery in the continent is very low, despite the success recorded in other parts of the world.

A glimpse into social media integration in Nigerian library services was provided by Ezeani and Igwesi (2012) who reported that librarians in the country are still lagging behind in the integration of social media applications for their services. Adeleke and Habila (2011) also conducted a study on the awareness, ownership and use of blogs among librarians from public, academic, national, and special libraries in Nigeria. Out of the 60 librarians surveyed, 70% were reported to have "high knowledge" about weblogs and they consider the tool to be beneficial in library service delivery. Also, 18 of the respondents reported that their libraries maintain a blog, while 12 respondents claimed to have personal blogs. Meanwhile, Popoola (2015) recommended that librarians in the country need to translate their knowledge of social media into actual usage to engage with library users.

Challenges of Library Use of Social Media

Despite the various benefits that have been highlighted on the use of social media, there are a number of challenges that can hinder the use of these tools by users. Some librarians are of the opinion that social media may not be necessary in their daily routine. Lack of skills and knowhow are challenges that can push a librarian to think that social media will not be important in his job (Hendrix et al, 2009). In Africa, and particularly in Nigeria, some of the challenges that may debar the use of social media for library services include lack of awareness, bandwidth problem, technophobia, irregular electricity supply, inadequate maintenance culture, copyright issues, and inadequate support from the government (Ezeani and Igwesi, 2012; Makori, 2012; Chaputula and Majawa, 2013).

Conclusion

The use of social media for 21st century Librarianship in Nigeria is a feat that can be accomplished. Considering the benefits that are accruable to the use of this technology in terms of virtual referencing and library publicity, every academic library and librarian should ensure that users are engaged through the platform. Social media can fast track speedy communication between libraries and their users; its use should thus be one of the top priority of winning back the hearts of library users to the library. With adequate modalities put in place to deliver library services through the social media, most of the challenges impeding its use could be easily overcome to pave way for a sound library-user relationship. Social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter get thronged everyday by library users this makes such platforms the right avenue to publicize the library and respond to users' queries. The benefits in terms of this will be in terms of improved library patronage, efficient library service delivery, and technology-driven information delivery services that will be trusted by the patrons of our libraries.

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