

# CHAPTER 16

## SOCIAL MEDIA AND RESEARCH



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### Introduction

Social media are the various online technological tools that enable users to communicate easily via the internet to share information and resources. They are emerging digital communication channels which create a user-oriented information sharing ground where anybody can generate or subscribe to information content as both information provider and consumers (Kim, Kim, & Kim, 2010). Social Media became popular after the advent of Web 2.0; a web technology that enhances and promotes great interaction among user and since then, it has continued to evolve. There have been changes and expansion in its uses as well as its applications. These include text, audio, video, images, podcast and other multimedia communications.

Social media sites allows users to engage in conversations with one another through unique interactive features, such as sharing of ideas, research outputs, photos and comments. According to Park, Rodgers and Stemmler (2011) interactivity in the context of social media sites has received great attention. Interactive features offered on social media sites, include feedback mechanisms, news feeds, or quizzes. These characteristics have enhanced the information center's image and activities by creating awareness and encouraging their repeated use of the library's collection for study and research (Zarrella 2009). Thus, it becomes necessary that libraries should adopt the use of social media because they provide several opportunities to reach and interact with the researchers in their various communities.



Little wonder, Jain (2014) asserted that if the library is not participating in social media today, it is missing an opportunity to spread its message and missing valuable and even damaging conversations that could arise about library services which could prompt a research. These suggest that social media applications and capabilities have far reaching effects as they impact research and also the researcher.

### Concept of Research

Research means to search, examine or make an extensive investigation into a problem. In a broad sense, it is a process of finding out or searching for the solution to a problem situation, an exercise in problem solving. There are different impressions given to the understanding of research. Generally, people take it to be scientific, thought demanding, difficult to carry out and also that it is meant for those with academic career. This is a fact but does not necessarily entail all. Though it's the act of "finding out" or "searching for," it is an activity done purposely and with an intention of which its result or outcome will contribute to solving a societal problem.

For any research to take place there must be an underlying issue or existing problem and a strong desire to provide solution to the problem. A great deal of relevance has been given to research in the developed world; precisely the educational research. This is due to the benefits (knowledge) derived from it. Educational research refers to the process of investigating or examining educational problems with the aim of arriving at a solution. These are activities from which a researcher derives knowledge that focuses on the solution of an educational problem. The concept of educational research is broad. Generally, it can be said to be a deliberate change in the behaviour of a person through the acquisition of new knowledge and skills as well as the act of desirable attitude appreciation. This conception is more technical as it constitutes the study of problems of teaching and learning (Nwana, 2005).

Research in education is a legitimate concern of everyone as it's a means of providing a continuous professional growth of investigators.



Research in Africa; especially in Nigeria encounters a lot of difficulties due to the fact that very little is available in the nature of valid and reliable information or data which is a catalyst to research planning. Developing countries like Nigeria are still lagging behind in the use of Internet making it a factor for proper integration of social media into library services. Hence, with technologies evolving every day in the media ecosystem, librarians are in for an ever learning era in their attempts to make use of the advantages of technological innovations.

### **Role of Libraries/Librarians in Research Advocacy**

The researcher in an academic setting identifies the library as a safe haven where it does not only serve as a storehouse of knowledge but also a place where effective research can be conducted starting from the initial process of identification of research area, to the final step of dissemination of findings and facts. This entire process consist of various engaging activities ranging from writing proposals, reports, development of literature review, identification of funding sources, identification of collaborators, data management, training, mentoring and real time communication. This entire process is commonly referred to as the research workflow (Pienaar & Deventer, 2009). Each of these steps is relevant in a research circle. The librarian in his capacity is expected to make each step count. Aside the obligation of providing up to date information to the researcher, he must be involved in this steps. Getting involved may require commitment towards getting acquainted with the common trend such as application of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and particularly; social media.

The advantages of Social media are not far fetch. Social media platforms allow users to *connect, create, promote, share* and *follow* interest groups. Academic libraries can make use of these capabilities as it will not only enhance research output but also practically change the invisible nature of researches stemming from most universities in Nigeria. As it is already established, research plays significant roles in any institution of learning. It sets a hallmark for development and



increase the visibility of such institution and its ranking. This also add personal benefits to individual staff in areas of career development, contribution to community development, building a reputation and becoming an authority in a field. It is therefore binding on librarians who wish to continually remain relevant to use the advantages of technology to change the status of research in their institutions.

### **Social Media Platforms that can be Used in the Research Process**

The paradigm shift in information services in libraries with the advent of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has dramatically changed the way libraries communicate with users, because, the global trend is now characterized with a fundamental shift from traditional information environment to electronic environment where emphasis is placed more on social network services. Libraries are now expected to provide users with a range of information services quickly from both within and remote. Therefore, scholars, researchers and information providers have also tapped into social media tactics as part of their communication planning. Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, Second Life, Delicious, Blog, are just a few of the social media available on the internet today and are increasingly used by individuals and researchers alike. They have served as tools for outreach in academic libraries.

Some examples of social media platforms and their uses are as follows:

**Wiki:** This site allows users to create, add, edit or delete content in collaboration with others. It is an open web that allows approved researchers to add and alter a paper's content thereby contributing to a research. Collaboration plays an important role in a researcher's circle of activities in order to advance knowledge. Collaboration in research can take different forms, from giving advice to colleagues in the laboratory during a single experiment, to collaborative ventures spanning many years. It is well-known that in research it has gradually become more common as evident by the increase in co-authored publications. Kyvik (2012) stated that through Wiki, collaboration becomes much easier as it gives room for real time update, easy



navigation and reaching participants in short period of time irrespective of location.

**Blog:** This is a discussion or information site published in World Wide Web. Blogs also allows for collaboration, interaction and information sharing. It consists of Web pages consisting of user supplies. Content can be disseminated in a chronological order and can be used for sharing ideas and opinions of other researchers about a research. The library can share works of research with readers and bloggers around the world. A Blog can be created and dedicated specially to researchers. Management of library should spare no effort in promoting this and take steps towards creating awareness of its existence; to the point that researchers themselves can become managers of the Blog.

**Facebook:** Facebook is the most dominant personal social network in the World with increasing users every day. With Facebook, the library can connect with current and potential supporters, library donors, volunteers and publishers. Facebook has the capacity to allow library to create an online community around their users. It can also be used to promote the content they create. For instance, it promotes new collections, additional database, Institutional Repository and assist in making research visible. It also allows researchers to access library catalogue embedded in it without actually visiting the library. Librarians can use Facebook to advertise outreach programmes, library orientations, trainings and also to create awareness about research collections. Library guides and subject guides can be embedded in Facebook application as it is capacitated to share, upload, and download photos, videos files and documents of researches in any format.

**Twitter:** This is an online social networking service that enables users to send and read short messages. With Twitter, researchers can follow interest groups that are important to the research community and find out about literature, study's population, conferences, call for papers, trainings and workshops.

**Pinterest:** This is an application that operates a photo sharing website. It also allows real time communication and sharing of research data.

**LinkedIn:** LinkedIn is a social media platform for researchers of like minds. Researches can be promoted by attaching a link and author's signature to a research work.

**Academia.edu:** This is another social networking Website for academics. It provides a good platform for sharing research findings and also allows for real time communication. This can be particularly useful for researchers, because the aim of every research is to reach a particular audience for a particular purpose.

**Every post:** This site allows users to post updates on major social networking sites from a place at a time. This tool makes management of social media platforms easier and enhances research information dissemination as one post can be circulated through all the platforms as desired.

**MySpace:** MySpace is a social media site that allows researchers to meet, collaborate, communicate, share and market research findings.

**Instagram:** This site has a unique feature of allowing users to upload a short video aside other capacities of communication and interaction. This can be useful to researchers who have a hard time reading and would prefer to watch or listen to academic outputs. A video of how to conduct a research among other activities involved in a research circle can be watched via Instagram. Database websites can be uploaded on Instagram and may serve research purpose as this can be widely disseminated, shared and downloaded.

### **Relevance of Social Media in a Research Environment**

Social media has become a relevant and complementary channel for conducting and disseminating research. Importantly, it has made enormous impacts on many people's lives. Libraries generally, are seen as a knowledge hub irrespective of the type. The integration of social media into library services in Nigeria in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is necessary, especially in a scholarly environment where availability and accessibility to information resources and services are priorities towards carrying out a successful research. However, in contrast to



information glut being experienced by the developed nations due to the use of Internet and social media, there is prevailing insufficient availability and poor accessibility to information resources in Nigeria and other developing countries. Thus, they are inflicted with information poverty. This state of affairs is already a concern to library scholars and information scientists. Therefore, a proactive approach should be taken to ensure availability of Information and Communication Technology in all information centres. This in the long run will enhance the integration of social media into library services for good research output.

### **Conclusion**

The advent of technology has led to the introduction of hybrid, digitized and electronic libraries; thereby making library's presence to be further felt in the present age. Social media is a new technology, offering a promising outreach options for academic librarians and researchers. They provide a new platform to reach users beyond the traditional library building and allow them to access librarians and the library's resources without leaving the comfort of their homes. If research opportunities embedded in social media are well harnessed, library will continue to remain a pacesetter in the provision of current and timely information to her users with unprecedented record of research outputs; thereby expanding the frontier of knowledge.

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