



An Overview of Social Media in Library and Information Services

By

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Abstract

Social Media has become a platform that everybody, organizations and institutions cannot do without. The emergence of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram and WhatsApp has affected virtually every sphere of human endeavour as it revolutionized information environment. In this paper, social media has become an increasing familiar tools employed in academic libraries in improving services and resources to patrons. The paper also discussed the application of social media to library and information service practice. The application of social media platforms in library services such Facebook, Facebook Messenger, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr, Blog, Academia.edu, Reserachgate, Instagram and WhatsApp were also highlighted and discussed. The paper concluded that social media applications offer boundless opportunities for users to learn while also contributing to the knowledge of others. The paper recommended that there should be increased advocacy at all levels on the use of social media for effective delivering library services.

Keywords: Social Media, Facebook, WhatsApp Messenger, You Tube, Library, Information, Services

Introduction

If we are asked the question “what is social media”? I believe many will mention Facebook and WhatsApp and perhaps think that is all it entails because these are the most used ones by the young, the old and the elderly in Nigeria. Social media has been defined by various dictionaries and platforms without any difference in their definitions. The Webster dictionary defines social media as “forms of electronic communication (such as websites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content such as videos”. Tayo, Adebola and Yahya (2019) reported that Boateng and Amankwaa (2016) defined social media as “the application that allows users to converse and interact with each other”. It is an online space that is used by people to connect, share, communicate, establish or maintain a connection with others for various purposes. They stressed further that “Social media is an online platform which enables people to build social networks or relations with other people who share similar personal or career interests, activities, backgrounds or real-life connections”.



Social media is therefore the interaction among individuals in which they create and share information and ideas in networks.

The key element in these and other definitions is the medium of interaction or communication which is 'electronic communication'. This implies that a social media user needs an electronic device such as a desktop, laptop, tablet, or mobile android phone. The element requires internet connectivity through Wi-Fi or mobile data. Tayo, Adebola and Yahya (2019) affirmed that "social media relies on many electronic devices like tablets, iPad, laptops, and Internet-based technologies for connecting people. Thus, social media can be described as technologies that facilitate social interaction, make collaboration possible, and enable deliberation among people globally.

The other features of social media are the creation of communities and sharing of information of any kind. The most widely used device for social media are mobile devices. Mobile social media differ from others because they incorporate the current location of the user (location-sensitivity) or the time delay between sending and receiving messages (time-sensitivity).

Types of social media

There are various types of social media, but this presentation will focus on the commonly used general social media and academic social media. Each of these is enormous and can be used for either of the purposes. The commonly used general social media include but are not limited to Facebook (Social networking with colleagues and for teaching groups), WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, Telegram, LinkedIn, Instagram (widely used picture-sharing and storytelling tool), Twitter (A microblogging platform), Blogs, Flickr to mention but a few. The academic social media include ResearchGate, Academia.edu (Share your papers, track their impact, follow colleagues), Altmetric (Subscription-based tracker for your publications' impact across different social media metrics) Google scholar (Recently providing additional services, such as Google Authors and citation tracking), Mendeley (Reference manager and academic social network that can help you organise your research, collaborate with others online, and discover the latest research), to mention but a few.

Usefulness of Social Media

Development and advancement comes with its intended benefits and so is social media. Social media has allowed for mass cultural exchange and intercultural communication. As different cultures have different value systems cultural themes, grammar, and world views, they also communicate differently. The emergence of social media platforms fused different cultures and their communication methods, blending various cultural thinking patterns and expression styles. Social media has affected the way youth communicate, by introducing new forms of language. Abbreviations have been introduced to cut down on the time it takes to respond online. The commonly known 'LOL' has become globally recognised as the abbreviation for "laugh out loud" thanks to social media.

Business advertisement/marketing of products are being done today on social media especially Facebook which allows posting a variety of things. Many have used that medium to advertise their products. For example, a Zaria based fashion designer advertised his caftans on Facebook and drew a customer in Minna several years before they met physically. The same applies to WhatsApp where many (especially ladies) advertise their products on their status. Instagram has proven to be a very good medium for business advertisement where varieties of business organisations advertise their products to the global community.

Although social media has been used for all these positive things, there are also negatives to the use of social media. Fake news and misinformation are negative features of social media



especially Facebook and WhatsApp messages. This is because messages are not censored before posting. The consequence of such is misinformation of the reader who does not go the extra mile to screen the information and take the fake news as the whole truth which he further spreads. Hate speech develops from such and can bring civil unrest because the ordinary man can start to react to such. Surprisingly, librarians that are supposedly skilled in identifying accurate information are not even left out of this fake news and misinformation pandemic.

Social media has also offered a new platform for peer influence with both positive and negative communication. From Facebook comments to likes on Instagram, how the youth communicate, and what is socially acceptable is now heavily based on social media. Social media has made more kids and young adults susceptible to peer pressure. The American Academy of Paediatrics has also shown that bullying, the making of non-inclusive friend groups, and sexual experimentation have increased situations related to cyberbullying, issues with privacy, and the act of sending sexual images or messages to someone's mobile device.

Cyberbullying is another unpleasant feature of social media. This is when threatening messages are sent to individuals on social media. This is more common in WhatsApp, Messenger, Twitter etc. this could send some fears in the mind of the recipient of the message.

Many people have used social media for organised crime through the formation of groups. Groups are formed by people with like minds and so any information posted to the group is for members.

Application of social media to Library and Information Services

The core concepts of social media include the fact that it is driven by ICT, online, web-based, or mobile and involves communication, interaction, and participation (Penzhorn, 2016). The social media tools like Facebook, Twitter, Blogs, Google and Google+ can be used to communicate and market library services to library users. According to Li (2009), social network services have become new technical benchmarks for current web-based library and information services in the digital age. Libraries now use Facebook, Twitter to mention but a few to expand library services and boost interactive connections with library users over the Internet (Salau and Obaje, 2015).

The 21st-century libraries no longer have 'walls. The barriers of access and physical location have been broken and one of the platforms on the Internet that has facilitated this is the social media. All the traditional library services can be facilitated using social media basically as a medium of information dissemination. The library user persona has changed with many of the library users depending on social media as the first point of call for information. It is thus imperative for libraries to push out their acquisition enquiries/purchases, reference services, serial services, and e-library services on their social media handles, using links that direct the users back to the library webpage or the physical library location.

Also, social media can be used as an enclosure of information commons. An information common is a dedicated space usually located in academic libraries for researchers and research intense services. This space can be replicated as a virtual community of researchers using social media platforms like WhatsApp and Telegram. The same services rendered in the physical space can be rendered in the virtual space. The social media community will have the advantage of close collaboration through crowdsourcing of enquiries, questions, and answers. Research is needed to solve human problems. In social research, data are usually generated in different ways. Through the general community participation and discussions of



people on social media on certain topical issues, useful conclusions can be drawn. Real-time news of the day can be read on social media from the daily newspapers and electronic media platforms.

Transmission of data for libraries has also become easier and faster with the advent of social media. Social media is one of the ways libraries that have the visibility of their services online or offer the services online can collate and track the number and demographics of users that engage in particular services. The data collected can be analysed and inferences made can be utilised for evidence-based decision making for policymakers and funders.

Research studies have also indicated an increase in the use of social media in libraries. For instance, Taylor & Francis (2014) research conducted with focus groups of librarians in India, the UK and the US and followed up with desk research, a Twitter ‘party’ and in-depth phone interviews found out that over 70% of libraries were using social media tools. 60% of these libraries have had at least one social media account for three years or longer and 30% of the librarians posted contents daily. Facebook, Twitter, and blogs were the most popular channels and there was particular growth in visual channels such as YouTube, Pinterest TikTok and Snapchat. However, in Nigeria, Akporhonor and Olise (2015) concluded that social media use in South-South Nigeria is still very low despite the many advantages it comes with. Omeluzor and Bamidele (2015) also corroborated this when they stated that librarians used social media tools for personal matters and not necessarily for library service delivery. Five years after, Ilesanmi and Mabawonku (2020) study also revealed that librarians used very few social media applications for delivering library services. This goes to show that libraries in the developed countries have taken leverage of the low cost and highly effective social media platforms and to create awareness and market services in borderless environments which sadly Nigerian libraries are not taking advantage of.

Some Examples of Social Media Applications and how they can be used for Service Delivery in Libraries

Social media applications are not exhaustive. However, for this presentation, we will look out some popular ones and how they can be used for delivering library services.

Facebook - Facebook is the largest social media network with 2.7 billion monthly active users. On Facebook, you can connect with people as friends or network with them in groups. You can post text, images, videos and links. According to Kumar (2015), the primary function of any library is to acquire, store and disseminate information, in the same way, Facebook also explores the information variously.

The author stated some advantages of Facebook application to library services to include:

- Facebook helps students or research scholars to develop practical research skills that they need in a world where knowledge construction and dissemination make increasing use of online information networks.
- Facebook works as a tool to mobilise the academic library services among the younger generation of Library users.
- Facebook can be used to improve current awareness services, especially on new arrivals to the library.

Teaching faculty of Library and Information Science may get share information with their students on social networks, Facebook that will help to embark their wide knowledge to the student’s community outside the classroom.



Facebook can work as a tool for interaction among students and teachers.

Many academics on Facebook, have joined groups or liked pages from the associations and societies they are members of. This can help you stay connected to your field in real-time. Several society conferences, inaugural lectures, public lectures, etc. are posted on Facebook.

WhatsApp Messenger/WhatsApp

WhatsApp is owned by Facebook. It allows users to send and receive text and voice messages, make voice, and video calls, and share images, documents, user locations, and other content. WhatsApp is robust in reaching a large group of users at the same time. Data collection for research has been successfully carried out by sending questionnaire links to WhatsApp groups. The library can create a group for users and request for completion of survey questionnaire using a link. The researcher will be able to reach a large audience and without stress collate his data for analysis.

YouTube

YouTube is an audio-visual medium commonly used by many especially the youths. The audio-visual collections of the library such as video and e-learning tutorials, events, and information literacy programmes of the library in multimedia library services can be effectively promoted and webcast through YouTube. On YouTube, you can search for videos and watch them. The library can have a channel where you can upload your videos. You can organise and sort videos you like into playlists. And you can choose whether they are public or private lists. For instance, you can have a playlist of videos related to Old and Middle English from teaching British literature surveys to undergraduates. This can be part of the academic library's Open Education Resources (OER)

Telegram

Telegram is a proprietary cloud-based instant messaging (IM) system with free and open-source, cross-platform clients. Like WhatsApp, it also provides end-to-end encrypted video calling, VoIP, file sharing and several other services. The servers of Telegram are distributed worldwide to decrease data load with five data centres in different regions, while the operations centre is based in Dubai in the United Arab Emirates. The medium has similar features and can be used in similar manner as WhatsApp.

According to Wikipedia, "Telegram provides end-to-end encrypted voice and video calls and optional end-to-end encrypted "secret" chats. Cloud chats and groups are encrypted between the app and the server so that ISPs and other third parties on the network can't access data, but the Telegram server can. Users can send text and voice messages, make voice and video calls, and share an unlimited number of images, documents (2 GB per file), user locations, animated stickers, contacts, and audio files". Library and Information centres can leverage this great opportunity to reach out to its numerous users' groups. Electronic resources sharing have become easier on such platforms.

Flickr

Flickr is a social media that is an image distribution tool that the library can use to share new image collections. Library photo collections such as those of workshops, conferences, social events, inaugural lectures, convocations, matriculations, and other programmes that are organised within the campus. You can create image sets with metadata, as well as take advantage of the many plugins available for Flickr users. Flickr users can also help gather missing information about images.



Instagram

Instagram is a visual social media platform and has one of the highest engagements. That means, when you post something, you tend to get a higher percentage of people interacting with that post than you would on some other platforms. With over 1 billion monthly active users of the platform, Instagram is highly popular. Instagram is a visual-based social media platform hitherto based around photos but now allows video too. You can share your library stories and achievements on the library Instagram account, and with innovative services, the library will be followed by many.

Twitter is the best way to share your work. Twitter has more than 330 million monthly active users who post 500 million times a day. Twitter is popular for academics and researchers though it has a smaller audience than Facebook or Instagram. Libraries as research hubs should have a Twitter account, follow serious researchers and they will also be followed. New services and products introduced by the library and new arrivals of library collections should be twitted to notify those following your library on Twitter.

LinkedIn is a social networking site for professionals with more than 760 million users, the platform is about more than getting a job because businesses do recruit and hire talent through LinkedIn. It is the most powerful platform academics are on but rarely use well This is a great way to get library patrons connected with the people that can help them find information. The patrons can get connected to the library and through the library, connections can get needed information from the library, librarians, faculty, authors, historians, or other sources.

Blog is a discussion or informational website published on the World Wide Web. Usually posts are displayed in reverse chronological order, so that the most recent post appears first, at the top of the web page. It helps you to disseminate information to lots of people at one time. Whether you're updating students on new collections, or just conversing with library staff, blogs are a powerful tool.

Academia.edu is the biggest of the academic social networks, with over 114 million accounts. Their website says their platform is “for academics to share research papers.” The website allows you to share your papers and see their impact. With Academia.edu, you can create an academic profile that shares your data and institutional affiliation; you can connect with scholars in your field and follow their work. You can download public papers and request private ones. And when you share your research, you can track its impact on views and downloads. The library and librarians can take advantage of this to build a collection of publications in Library and Information Science.

ResearchGate a social networking site for scientists and researchers to share papers, ask and answer questions, and find collaborators. You do not require registration if you only wish to read articles from the site, but people who wish to become site members need to have an email address at a recognized institution or to be manually confirmed as a published researcher to sign up for an account. Members of the site each have a user profile and can upload research output including papers, data, chapters, negative results, patents, research proposals, methods, presentations, and software source code. Users may also follow the activities of other users and engage in discussions with them. Users are also able to block interactions with other users.



Conclusion

Social Media applications and their use have come to stay in libraries. Libraries have evolved from 'restricting social media use in libraries' to reaching out to our 'users through social media'. Thus, libraries in this part of the world must embrace this change and leverage and harness social media applications to effectively drive their services.

Way forward

1. There should be increased advocacy at all levels on the use of social media for delivering library services.
2. It is also recommended that libraries have a social media work plan with details on content development, activities and frequencies of engagement to ensure sustainability.
3. Hand-on training and up-skilling of the library staff in charge of handling social media issues is important.
4. Librarians and LIS professionals should explore and research best practices on social media applications and trends and utilise this information accordingly.

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