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Advocating For the Formulation and Implementation of Social Media Policy for Information Service Delivery (ISD) in Nigerian Academic Libraries

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Abstract

The paper advocates the need for the formulation and implementation of social media policy by academic libraries in Nigeria. The paper explains that use of social media as tool for service delivery has become imperative in academic libraries. However, observations have shown that most libraries are using social media tools without having a proper guidance. The paper explains that social media tools such as wechat, linkedIn, facebook, twitter and blogs have different functions and role to play in the provision of information service delivery as well as different purposes. The paper posits that though in academic libraries in Nigeria, these social media are found to be used interchangeably without the consideration on their functions due to lack of policy guidance. It is based on this premise that the paper seeks to advocate the need for a social media policy for enhancing ISD by identifying imminent challenges associated with the use of social media in academic libraries in Nigeria with the view of recommending a proposed framework for policy formulation and implementation strategies.

Keywords: Social Media, Policy, Advocacy, Academic Libraries, Nigeria

1.1 Introduction

There is no doubt the traditional library and information services need improvement as a result of their limits and inadequacies. To remedy this, inadequacies, University libraries are incorporating new media, such as social media (SM) in order to remain relevant in meeting the information needs of their patrons. Bradley cited in Shihab (2015) defined social media as the use of web-based technologies that allow users to communicate, share ideas, pictures, messages and information of common interest. Social media therefore, can be regarded as an Internet enabled technology that facilitates

communication and sharing of information in the form of text, videos and pictures with different people.

The use of SM such as facebook, RSS Feeds, Youtube, Blogs, Wikis etc in the delivery of library and information services has become necessary for the services of University libraries. The SM therefore, are gradually being used in libraries all over the world. By using social media, libraries can connect to their patrons outside the physical building. It also enables communication among libraries and their users, thereby, serving as an opportunity for information dissemination and marketing of new services.

Buttressing the above point Akporhonor and Olise (2015) stated that social media are tools that libraries can use to provide services in order to maintain their relevance in this century. They further added that social media are new media for effective promotion of library and information services in this technological era. Similarly, Kwanya (2016) also stated that social media tools provide libraries with the ability to engage with users in multi-directional communication and information sharing on a wide range of library-related issues; promote library resources and services; and extend services beyond the physical boundaries of library buildings.

Additionally, social media allows librarians to reach out to users who are not physically present in the library. It enhances interaction and strengthen relationship, saves cost, saves time, space and accelerates the flow of information. It is also used for promotion of information services by the libraries, facilitates instant problem solving, improves knowledge sharing, builds image, enhances a fast two-way communication and enhances organizational performance.

Coming from the above significance of SM in information service delivery, it is obvious to note that social media in libraries offers a wide variety of services. However, the peruse of literature indicated that there is no policy solely targeted towards the use of SM in libraries. To support this, the study of Chitumbo & Chewe (2015) showed that there are barriers that prevent the integration of technologies such as poor infrastructural facilities, low level of ICT compliance, lack of systematic library-centered social media policy, cost, poor maintenance of ICT equipment, frequent change in technology which might lead to total overhauling of the existing system, poor funding, poor bandwidth, too many social media to explore and inadequate ICT. It is based on this premise that the paper seeks to advocate the need for a

social media policy for enhancing ISD by identifying imminent challenges associated with the use of social media in academic libraries in Nigeria with the view of recommending a proposed framework for policy formulation and implementation strategies in academic libraries in Nigeria.

The objectives of this paper are therefore, to:

1. Identify the types of social media used in information service delivery
2. Examine the significance of social media in information service delivery
3. Examine social media policy in libraries
4. Identify challenges associated with the use of social media in information service delivery.

2.1 Literature Review

2.2 Concept of Social Media

Over the years, social media has become an inevitable part of our daily life. However, there are many definitions of social media and new ones are added as the concepts keep changing and evolving with time. According to Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) social media refers to “a group of internet based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0. They maintained that such applications allow users to interact freely, share and discuss information using multimedia mix of words, pictures, videos, and audio”. Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online defined social media as “forms of electronic communication (as websites for social networking and micro blogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (as videos). Oxford Dictionary (2013) defines Social Media as “websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in Social Networking”. According to Bradley (2012) the term social

media refers to “the use of web-based and mobile technologies to turn communication into an interactive dialogue”. Social media is a growing phenomenon being connected to the information in areas and widens. It is a digital platform where the sharing of information captured simultaneously by the user-friendliness brought by new generation web technologies and communication speed is followed (Aras, 2015).

According to Quadri & Idowu (2014) social media as “a web-based channel of information dissemination is rapidly permeating all aspects of library and information services to other remote users”. Similarly, Ezeah, Asogwa & Edogor, (2013) referred to social media as “modern interactive communication channels through which people connect to one another, share ideas, experiences, pictures, messages and information of common interest”. According to Neti (2011) social media is derived from two words, namely social and media. It is explained that “social” has to do with the interaction of individuals within a group or community while “media” refers to advertising and the communication of ideas or information through publications/channels. When these two words are used together, they signify “communication/publication platforms which are generated and sustained by the interpersonal interaction of individuals through the specific medium or tool”.

Khan and Bhatti, (2012) stated that social media is a general term dealing with instrument on communication. This covers a large range of web sites that enables people to interact with other visitors in a collaborative manner. They added that social media is a tool for social interaction and that it uses highly accessible and publishing techniques. Choi (2012) also agrees that the term social media includes a wide range of any internet-based or mobile application which operates for the purpose of collaboration, enabling participants to connect, create, comment,

view, share, rate, discover, profile and exchange user-generated content.

Social media can be explained as an interaction between people or communities where information can be shared and exchanged through a virtual network. In the past three-four years, social media has grown out from being restricted to tweets on fashion trends or commenting on a celebrity's relationship status to commenting on events of national and global importance. Social media are computer-mediated technologies that facilitate the creation and sharing of information, ideas, career interests and other forms of expression via virtual communities and networks. The variety of stand-alone and built-in social media services currently available introduces challenges of definition; however, there are some common features (Boricha & Solanki, 2018). Furthermore, Acharya (2018) described social media as the collective of online communications channels dedicated to community-based input, interaction, content-sharing and collaboration. She added that it is a group of web-based and mobile applications that allow users to share and create knowledge in a real time social interaction. It is user-centric, multi-purpose and it is not time and location bound.

From the above, the definitions of social media have been provided from different perspective. However, it can be understood that the writers, scholars and authors unanimously described social media as a web-based medium through which people can share content, personal opinion, spread news, swap perspectives and generally communicate with other people. Evidently, social media brings into use the newer, better and more useful systems and technologies that libraries could thrive on.

2.3 Significance of Social Media in Information Service Delivery

Libraries have historically been places to

receive information and create an environment to disseminate the information. Following the advent of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and emergence of new technologies (social media), the information flow has been revolutionized. For libraries, particularly academic libraries, to remain visible and relevant part of its community the presence of new technologies such as social media is important for stirring up interactions and interpersonal connections between the librarian and the users. Thus, the increasing trend of social media has compelled academic libraries to enhance the reach of academic library systems and foster information sharing and collaboration, as well as attempting to develop connections and networks by leveraging the capacity, reach and ubiquity of social media (Kemrajh 2013).

Social media has the potential to bridge the established gaps and divides that have hindered access to scholarship and knowledge in countries with developing higher education and research sectors as evident in the study of Al-Aufi and Fulton (2015) on the impact of networking tools on scholarly communication where they found that social media tools have had positive impacts on informal scholarly communication for scholars working in the University's humanities and social sciences disciplines.

From the forgoing, it is evident that social media is used pervasively in academic libraries in offering wider channels through which users are able to share scholarly information with minimal effort and cost. This experience is a gap in Nigerian context as the impact of social media is yet to be felt by libraries, this is because the implementation of social media technologies is a trend that has not been fully embraced by libraries (Akeriwa, Penzhorn, & Holmner, 2014).

Mahmood & Richardson (2013) shared the same view where they found that the significance of social media in libraries

includes: the maximize library exposure; modernize the library image and e-reputation, promote specific content offers; build discussion groups and collaborative work, reach a new audience of potential users; and publish library news and press releases. They further outlined the value of social media as follows:

1. Increased library's relevancy to users.
2. **Building brand loyalty:** Social media is a center for engagement that would enhance two-way communication like never before. This in turn builds the library's image. Using social media in libraries increase reliability on the library thereby building brand loyalty.
3. **Saves Time:** Social media have helped libraries in providing quick updates to users and provide a forum for quick and speedy feedback from library patrons. More so, social media make it easier to reach a large number of library patrons in the most time effective manner.
4. **Enhances fast Two-Way Communication:** This is where social media come to play as social media create a forum for feedback in library promotion. Monitoring the comments and questions of library users give the library immense power to offer clarification on issues and potentially make improvement. This is a form of promotion that boosts the library's image.
5. **Saves Costs:** Many of these social media technologies cost next to nothing. Using social media for marketing library and information services allows for a vast reach yet having very low cost. This offers a good opportunity for libraries.
6. **Increases Library Users:** The online community is opened to all as long as there is an Internet connectivity. Facebook, for instance, the activities of a friend or fan of a library page are known

by friends connected to that friend or fan. Hence, when a fan of a library page comments or likes a status/post put up by the library, others can come to the knowledge of the promotional activities carried out in a library. This can motivate a friend of a library fan to join the library.

Furthermore, Kumar (2015) stated the benefits of social media to libraries as:

- i. to identify the individuals, teams, and units who play central roles;
- ii. to discern information breakdowns, bottlenecks, structural holes, as well as isolated individuals, teams, and units to make opportunities to accelerate knowledge flows across functional and organizational boundaries. To strengthen the efficiency and effectiveness of existing formal communication channels, to raise awareness of and reflection on the importance of informal networks; to enhance their organizational performance, and leverage peer support, as well as
- iii. to improve innovation and learning; and to refine strategies.

Kaur (2016) in his article outlined the significance of academic libraries' visibility on social media as follows:

- To seek opinion on the library and its services for self- evaluation purposes, to encourage debate and to instigate an opportunity to rebound to library user feedback.
- To publicize events, services, news and presence.
- To encourage collaboration, for example through collection development and building repositories of collaborative content specific to certain user groups.
- To increase usage of library collection by promoting news and existing content.

- To connect with other libraries and keep abreast of industry news.

Similarly, the empirical findings on maximizing the potentials of social media in technical university of Kenya library by Abok and Kwanya (2016) found enhancing interaction, saves cost, economy of space, marketing library services, strengthening interpersonal relationships as benefits of social media in academic libraries

From the above review of the significance of social media, the technology is an efficient and effective platform that is instrumental to a library's shift from traditional mode of information service delivery to technology based services where users of the library are served in a better improved and value added way. These tools allow the librarian to be more innovative, retain users of the library, save time, profit and cost, broaden the range of services provided through promotion services, increase communication and interaction as well as improve the image of the library. Further relating the literature to the context of this research, it can be seen that most of the literatures reviewed discussed the experience of libraries and the incorporation of social media in developed countries with little experience from Africa. This evidently shows the level of technology divide between the developed and developing countries in terms of technology integration, hence, a gap that can be filled through the formulation of social media use policy in libraries.

2.4 Need for Social Media Policy in Libraries

The use of social media in all fields has seen tremendous growth in the recent past. Library services have certainly been affected by the penetrating influence of social media especially in the quality of information service delivery. The pervasiveness of social

media has brought about rapid technological advancement, thus, this has eventuated in a network society organized around ICT. It is in view of the above, Hundu Akut and Tok (2016) stated that like other organizations, increasingly, all types of libraries around the world are moving towards Social Media and Social Networking through various platforms; Blogs, Facebook, YouTube, twitter, Myspace, Pinterest, Google Plus, Instagram, Mashup, Flickr, LinkedIn, and Wikis. Social Media is being used worldwide for diverse purposes in libraries and information centers: marketing, branding, building customer relations, reference services, quick dissemination of news and communication with users. If social media are going to be part of the communication process for informing your users about the library, and responding to their questions and concerns, then the library will need to develop policies and procedures for doing so. Therefore, the importance of a policy for the incorporation of social media in the provision of library services cannot be overemphasized.

According to Anderson (1979) a policy is a set of principles and strategies which guide a course of action for the achievement of a given goal. Policies may be developed at the organizational or institutional level or at the regional, national or international level and are embodied in a variety of policy instruments (legal, professional and cultural). A policy is also a statement of intent that guide decisions and is implemented as a procedure to achieve rational outcomes.

On the other hand, social media policy according to ALA (2018) is a corporate code of conduct that provides guidelines for employees who wish to publish content on the Internet as a part of their work or a private person. Fiander (2012) defined social media policy as detailed set of principles and procedures guiding the communication

process between the library staff and the user. He further added that the difference between a social media policy and most of the other policies developed by the library is that the social media policy needs to be flexible enough to enable staff to share information in a timely fashion, usually without a lot of internal review, and to allow staff to respond to users' comments promptly. From the definitions, it can be concluded that social media policy is a carefully developed procedure guiding the use of social media by employees in an organization.

Thus, social media policy is needed for the libraries to use one or several of the social media tools; and to continue the operations in this area. As such University libraries in Nigeria are expected to create social media policies for social media accounts to be used correctly by researchers, students, academics and other stakeholders in the framework of certain rules (Kamrajh, 2013). A social media policy if put in place and implemented would offer new opportunities for improved library service such as:

- Attract more library users considering the fact that this is its era. Generally, social media has a lot of appeal to the youths.
- It will improve in-house operations like selective dissemination of information (SDI) and current awareness service (CAS) offered by the library. For example, library can select certain information and send to users based on their research interests using social media platforms.
- Social media will offer marketing and public relations and also feedback opportunity for the library. This will help in building a good relationship between the library and clientele.
- It helps trigger knowledge revolution where the reading culture is poor as the social media will help in easy knowledge sharing.
- It increases library users: The online

community is opened to all as long as there is internet connectivity (Hundu Akut and Tok, 2016)

Many guides and tips for best practices and creating good social media policies in workplaces exists however, focus on legal considerations, Internet etiquette guidelines, quality control, and employee management is imperative (Mello, 2012; Bertot et al, 2012 and Nadworny, 2009). The purpose of a social media policy in many of these cases is to protect the company or organization from potential social media risks. Some risks are sharing confidential information, inappropriate posts, responding poorly to a customer's complaint and employees' lack of productivity due to social media use. Flynn (2012) explains that employers must balance the need to stay relevant and engaged on social platforms, while they also must manage social media use effectively in order to protect their organization's assets, reputation, and future by creating and enforcing a social media policy. Her recommendations include using clear language, which also means defining key concepts and terms; be brief and accurate; and implement the policy with staff education.

In the perspective of Nigeria, the National ICT policy that has 14 sectoral application areas including education (human resource development), and whose objectives among others is to “integrate IT into the mainstream of education and training”. The sectoral application of the policy in education with regards to tertiary institutions is overseen by National Universities Commission (NUC) (Adomi, 2011). In Oyesanya's (2004) performance review of the Nigerian National policy on ICT, it revealed that “NUC manages NUNET and only a dozen Universities use NUNET (NUNET is responsible for IT Networking among Universities in Nigeria)”.

From the review of Oyesanya (2004) it

clearly showed that ICT policy on the education sector, which also include academic libraries that support teaching learning and research, is still not adequately implemented (Adomi, 2011). The policy has not also clearly made provision for emerging technologies like the social media. Therefore, the need for libraries to develop policy frameworks in order to harmonize emerging technologies and integrate them into services delivery in order to move with best practice around the world.

Nonetheless, there has been few literatures that look at social media policies in the context of libraries particularly in developing nations like Nigeria. To corroborate this, a study of academic libraries in Tanzania, Lwoga (2014) found that the nonexistence of policy on social media, was the bane of low integration of social media in African libraries. Most libraries provide information about their services and content in a conventional way. Also, Kooy and Steiner's (2010) survey with 51 respondents found that only seven academic libraries had a social software policy. Five of those seven were created because of librarian interest, one in response to inappropriate student behavior and one due to a lawsuit. In that same survey, the authors found that 82 percent of the respondents did not have a social software policy, and 24 percent of that group believed having a policy for that purpose was unnecessary. In another part of the world, Aras (2014) identified University libraries with social media policy to, include; Baltimore Langsdale University Library, University of Chicago Library and University of Utah Spencer S. Eccles Health Sciences Library and Middle East Technical University Library. From the above, it can be seen that, while some libraries have strived to come up with policies on the use of social media in libraries, other libraries, especially, in those developing countries like Nigeria are yet to formulate policies in their libraries. Thus, the

absence of SM policy has created a gap particularly in the area of integration of the technology into information service provision in libraries.

It can be said, therefore, that policies manifest an organization's beliefs, priorities and commitment. Few libraries have social media policies and when they do, they are rarely rooted in the library's mission. Therefore, development of thoughtful policies gives libraries an opportunity to revisit and demonstrate the intent of their mission.

2.5 Types of Social Media Used in Information Service Delivery

The social media revolution is changing the way individuals and organizations interact, and libraries are not immune to this. Many authors have identified types and categories of social media relevant for service delivery in libraries. Kwanya & Abok (2016) in their empirical study, maximizing the potentials of social media in technical University of Kenya libraries; found that Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Wikis and Blogs are the widely used social media in academic library activities. Similarly, Islam & Habiba (2015) in their study of Bangladesh libraries found facebook, twitter, myspace, youtube, Research gate, RSS, Delicious, Wikis, Blogging, Library Thing, Slideshare, Onlinegroups/Forums, Flickr, LinkedIn and Picasa as the social media commonly used for information service delivery. Similarly, Gupta, Gautam & Khare (2014) investigated social media application and library staff. The study found social networking (facebook), wikis, blogs, instant messaging (twitter), social news (Digg), RSS, video/photo sharing (youtube), social bookmarking (CiteUlike) as types of social media tools used for service delivery in libraries. Agyekum, Arthur & Trivedi (2016) in their study of university libraries in Ghana found that facebook, twitter, linkedIn, blogs, wikis, flickr,

slideshare, and youtube as types of social media tools that have enabled academic libraries to transform the physical library into an open space where information can be access by all at any place at any time. An understanding of the literature above reveals that facebook, is the most popular type of social media amongst other platforms. Its popularity is attributed to the features of the platform, and also because the tools has been in use for a long time. However, social media changes relatively fast, so also the libraries must be flexible to deploy new and existing social media features to consequently be able to match patrons with their desired information needs.

The use of social media technologies by academic libraries is increasingly prevalent and a growing tool that is being used to communicate with more potential library users, as well as extending the services provided to individual libraries. To support the claim, Omeluzor, Oyovwe-Tinuoye & Abayomi (2016) undertook a study of academic libraries in South East zone of Nigeria and found facebook, twitter, blog, youtube, google+, linkedIn, wiki and myspace as tools that have the capability and features to boost library processes and services. Also Emezie & Nwaohiri, (2016) identified MySpace, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Delicious, Flickr, Blogs, Wikis, Youtube, Podcasts, Academia.edu and Hi5 were types of social media being used by libraries to connect their users. They further stated that the students were using tools like Ask a Librarian, meebo and twitter to ask questions in “real time” and this is assisting in promoting the library as a relevant, efficient and helpful place.

From the foregoing, the literatures have identified numerous types of social media platforms available to deliver information services to users. Therefore, libraries need to take these tools seriously. The literature also underscores the fact that most

of these academic libraries have not maximize the potentials of social media in library services, perhaps these are the tools the libraries are aware of, but the actual integration of these tools into service delivery is not a success story yet, hence, Okoroma (2017) concluded that the visibility and activities of libraries on social space were significantly low and therefore, the need for policy to ensure maximum utilization of various types of social media.

3.1 Challenges associated with the Use of Social Media in Information Services Delivery

In recent years, social media have grown amazingly, which is being used all over the world. Social media delivers several opportunities to reach and interact with the society. Today, libraries are using the latest technologies to make their services popular and user friendly. However, irrespective of the benefits of social media as stated above, there are constraints to effective utilization of these tools in academic libraries. A longitudinal study conducted in Ontario academic libraries by Collins & Quan-Haase (2014) revealed that limited access to affordable and reliable wireless services, difficulty in delivering equal services in English and French in bilingual communities, inability to secure funding for new technologies or training opportunities as barriers against service delivery using social media. Furthermore, libraries may also unable to deliver these services due to lack of interest or skills amongst library personnel, or a feeling of social media fatigue among staff. Also a survey of 110 libraries conducted by Noorhidawati, Chu, Rajagopal, Wan, & Yeung, (2015) invited participants from Greater China, Switzerland, United States, United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand. The study found that staffing issues, exploring the best or suitable social media for each service, time consumption, non-existence of

policy on social media use, fear of invasion of privacy, fear of social media going out of fashion as challenges facing social media tools in those libraries studied.

A study conducted by Okoroma (2017) identified various challenges inhibiting the use of social media by academic library personnel in Nigeria, such impediments include: lack of awareness on the various kinds of social media and their application to library services, dogmatism on the part of some librarians and library personnel (inability to conform/adapt to changes), infrastructural and technological challenges amongst others. Similarly, there were reports of non-regular trainings to enhance and upgrade the library personnel on the emerging technologies and how to apply them information services delivery and other aspects of librarianship. Even where such trainings exist, quite a few staff is usually granted approval for sponsorship due to limited library fund allocation. All these coupled with inadequate infrastructure and technical issues are hindering the full integration of social media in Nigerian academic libraries. Akporhonor & Olise (2015) found that network problems, lack of social media skills, lack of awareness, lack of funds, privacy concerns erratic power supply, low level of technology penetration as challenges militating against successful integration of social media in academic libraries. Further studies conducted by Adewojo & Mayowa-adebara (2016) on social media usage by library staff in academic libraries revealed that lack of management support, lack of skills and personal knowledge, poor access to internet, lack of cooperation among staff, lack of awareness, irregular power supply lack of finance, were the bane of low integration of social media for service delivery.

The discussion above has highlighted numerous challenges to successful integration

of social media in academic libraries. It is also evident from the literature that studies conducted in developed countries have tackled the problem of infrastructure deficit particularly electricity and internet access as far as library operation is concerned. This is a major challenge and a gap that needs to be filled in academic libraries, particularly in countries like Nigeria where epileptic power supply has been persistent problem affecting almost every sector of the economy in the country.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Since the importance of social media in information service delivery cannot be over emphasized, it has therefore, become imperative for a social media policy be formulated and implemented in Nigeria's academic library. Doing so would ensure appropriate utilization and integration of the social media, identify which social media is best applicable for which information service in library and ensure information service delivery that would allow both the library and users to use the right social media within the framework of certain rules and this would go a long way to protect the organization from potential social media risks. On this note, the following recommendations are made:

1. On the types of social media, the library should constitute a team of expert on social media to identify and come up with various social media platforms that are user friendly and can be applicable to various services provided in the library.
2. A holistic approach towards the formulation and implementation of social media policy for all academic libraries in Nigeria should be made. This should include all relevant stakeholders from the Nigerian Universities Commission (NUC), University management, University library, Librarians Registration Council of

Nigeria (LRCN), Nigerian Library Association (NLA). Doing so would also ensure uniformity across all academic libraries in Nigeria.

3. On challenges, the library should embark on finding alternative sources of funding to tackle various issues, since most of the problems libraries are facing is tied to inadequate funding. This can be achieved through engaging philanthropist and friends of the library who have the library at heart and are willing to support where necessary. In addition, libraries should also prioritize staff retraining and retraining particularly on the use of social media. This opportunity would adequately expose and equip staff with all required knowledge about the relevance, applicability, and other technicalities of social media use in information service delivery. It would also expose the staff to other emerging technologies.

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