Social Media Applications as Effective Service Delivery Tools for Librarians

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INTRODUCTION

Social networking refers to a process of relationship building among a group with a common interest (Suraweera, Kahingala, Batepola, Punchihewa, Senevirathne and Kahandwaarachchi, 2011). The use of social media for information communication, information sharing, for pleasure, for dating, work related purposes and so on, is growing rapidly, therefore, their importance in academic libraries cannot be over emphasized. Academic libraries are libraries established in higher institutions (universities, polytechnics and colleges of education) by their parent institutions for the primary purpose of teaching, learning and research which therefore forms an integral part of the institution's educational system.. With the exponential growth of the use of social media such as the Facebook, Friendster, MySpace, Flicker, Instagram, LinkedIn YouTube, Twitter, Blogs,Wikis, Delicious, Online groups/forums,, Library Thing, Ning and so on, it has also become inevitable that academic librarians around the world and especially in Nigeria, must learn to use these tools to be able to keep their ever growing and sophisticated patrons and also remain relevant in the society.

Adeleye (2015) noted that these sites can be oriented towards work-related contexts (LinkedIn. com), romantic relationship initiation (Friendster. com), connecting those with shared interests such as music or politics (MySpace.com, Twitter), or the undergraduates population (Facebook.com). Social media such as Facebook was used initially for social discussions, over time it evolved into the grouping of individuals into specific groups. Professional groups started to spring up and within time the library profession had its own group with the sole purpose of sharing ideas and gathering first hand information regarding the profession.

Beyond this, the different academic libraries in the country have felt the need to move with the times. The emergence of social media in academic libraries has changed the way information is delivered to the library patrons. Libraries have started to use these tools to interact with their patrons on real time. In fact, given the present economic scenario in Nigeria, where library budgets have been constantly on the decline, the social media have become a means for serving our patrons in a more specialized, interactive, and value added way without incurring undue expenses.

Hence, it has become very important for academic libraries to embrace these social media for effective service delivery to their library users and also to improve the library profession tremendously in Nigeria. Also, the previous top-bottom approach to service delivery where the library would pass information down to its patron without feedback will no longer suffice for our ever growing clients. Library users have been yearning to be a part of the services rendered to them, in essence being able to dictate what they need thereby making for a more interactive service delivery which will foster a two way communication pathway and provide the opportunity for more involvement. Undoubtedly, Nigeria which is still suffering from dwindling economy, are faced with diverse challenges amidst the opportunities derived from the intrusion of social media.

Consequently, a gap exists in literatures on the intrusion of social media in academic libraries in Nigeria. Hence, this chapter sought to bridge this gap by investigating the intrusion of social media in academic libraries in Nigeria as well as their opportunities and challenges for effective service delivery to their library users. Therefore this chapter will sought to identify the various types of social networking applications in academic libraries in Nigeria and how librarians use these social media for effective service delivery to their users, the opportunities accrued in using these applications, the various constraints in using these social networking applications in academic libraries, recommendations and the future trends will be succinctly discussed in this chapter.

BACKGROUND

Social media which are also known as social networks are tools (through the registration of profiles with their platforms) that help promote the sharing of information on real time basis, and these tools are dependent on modern digital communication like the Internet and the www (Ekuoye, 2015). In addition, social media are seen as computer-mediated tools that allow people to create, share or exchange information, career interests, ideas, and pictures/videos in virtual communities and networks *(*Buettner, 2015). However, social media was broadly defined to refer to 'the many relatively inexpensive and widely accessible electronic tools that enable anyone to publish and access information, collaborate on a common effort, or build relationships" (Murthy, 2013).

In the past, most of these relationships existed mainly among family members, colleagues, friends, church members, and others who relied mainly on face-to-face communication. Today the story is no longer the same as most of these relationships can be carried out in virtual space using social networking sites which makes it possible for people to interact on the Internet. Online social networks can therefore, be described as relationships between groups of people carried out in virtual space.

The history of online social networks dates back to 1997 with the appearance of SixDegrees.com and there are over 100 websites which provide social networking functionalities (Boyd and Ellison, 2007).Social networking sites are two-way transparent communication that encourages a feedback mechanism; connecting people with shared interest. In the social network site, the user is a participant, a co-creator, and a builder of knowledge. The dynamic nature of this technology enables users to have an open access to knowledge and contribute local content on the social network space. This has being made possible by the tremendous growth and increase in the use of social media across the world. However, the developing countries are still lagging behind compared to their counterparts in the developed countries. This is confirmed in figure 1, which is social media use around the world.

According to Adeleye (2015), "Social media and its elements in Nigeria isn't really as new as some people believe it is, social media started in Nigeria as a concept many years ago, but has evolved into sophisticated technology. The concept of social media invariably can be dated back to the use of the analog telephone for social interaction in the 1990s.

The emergence of social media in Nigeria has become very prevalent in every sector of the country for example in education, agriculture, aviation, health, finance, politics, entertainment and to mention but a few. Digital in Nigeria, a snapshot of the country key digital statistical indicators from Wikipedia internet live stats (2015) shows that; the total population of Nigeria is 183.5million (Urbanisation 50%) with active internet users of 70.3million (38%), active social media accounts of 13.6million (7%), mobile connections of 138.0million (75%) and active mobile social accounts of 12.4million (7%).

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