

Social Media and Library Services: A Case of COVID-19 Pandemic Era

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ABSTRACT

Before the advent of the Covid 19 pandemic, many libraries have traditionally provided library services to users in manual and print format while few others opted for digital collection. However, with the lockdown imposed on every sector including the library, the inefficiency of most libraries in continuing her provision of useful and up to date library service to her users have been exposed. This unfortunate situation has accelerated their need to innovate new systems that will aid them to be more visible and effective in the delivery of their mandate notwithstanding the Covid 19 lockdown. This has given rise to the adoption of social media tools such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Pinterest, Podcasts, Flickr and blogs, Instant Messaging (IM), and Rich Site Summary (RSS) in libraries. This paper discusses social media for library services; adoption of social media for library services in the Covid 19 era; and issues of social media for library services in the Covid 19 era. The paper concluded that social media by libraries have increased the effectiveness of most libraries in their provision of library services to their users who are isolated and restricted to use the regular physical library collection. Recommendations were that library staff should be provided with regular training in the use of new tools and social media platforms to make them IT compliant and in turn, they can utilize these tools for library service delivery

Keywords: Social media, Library services, Library staff, Users, Covid-19 pandemic

INTRODUCTION

Libraries as a social institution have fostered teaching, research and learning through her acquiring, organizing, storing, preserving and making available for use information contained in human intellectual records. They have also facilitated information sharing. But with the recent outburst of Covid 19 epidemic in China in December 2019 (Zhu, Zhang, Wang, Li, Yang, and Song (2020), many economies, business and educational activities has been shut down temporarily. In this view, library services have been affected.

Library services are services that a library renders to its patrons and users of information. Example of library services are information consultancy, indexing and abstracting, current awareness services (CAS), user education, reference services, selective dissemination of information (SDI), book loan, photocopying, binding, computer typesetting, CDROM searching and publishing among. These services enable users to gain access to library products and resources. The need to move with the times has made libraries to incorporate the use of new media and technology (ICT) for information service delivery; fallout of which brought about the use of social media.

The term 'social media' is used synonymously with terms such as social networks, and web-based tools. They emerged due to enormous development of Web 2.0 technology. Fang, Hu, Li, & Tsai

(2014) defined social media as computer and mobile-mediated tools that facilitate interaction and sharing of information in text, visual, audio and video forms in an online networking environment. Examples of social media tools include the Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, YouTube, Blogs, Wikis, LinkedIn, WhatsApp, Flickr, Orkut among others. They are interactive product in a virtual environment that facilitates information sharing.

In a bid to maintain the lockdown and curtail the spread of the Covid 19 virus, social media tools are currently applied in library services which helps to facilitate information access by a wide range of users. According to Hamade (2013) the popularity and usage of social media, especially among students and young populations, has rapidly increased over the past few years. This has given room for its utilization for various library services which are now provided online. No doubt that Covid 19 pandemic has affected library services; libraries too have proposed digital avenues to deliver information to her user and provided them with online support in their search for information.

With the presence of Covid 19 and other lockdown regulations put up by government, the vision of the library should go beyond the physical library services to a digital and convenient ways at which users and library patrons can be reached even in their remote locations. Here, library users and patrons do not necessarily need to come physically to the library (Collins & Quan-Hasse, 2012). This is true because social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and Blog can link users with their information needs in the most faster and efficient manner. Therefore, the adoption of social media tools can help to enhance library consulting services, and advertising of library products.

In addition to the use of social platforms for library services, Otulugbu (2019) stated that library personnel are also increasingly reaching out to their clients via the social Web by communicating messages

about existing print and online resources as well as to render reference services such as selective dissemination of Information, current awareness services, sharing of images/photographs, facilitation of literacy skills and library education. Regrettably, poor skills of library staff in use of social media tools and lack of funds may have played host to the myriad of problems for libraries in adopting social media tools in their service delivery. However, Ezeani & Igwesi (2012) noted that the present economic scenario where libraries are constantly experiencing dwindled budgets, has left libraries with no option than to incorporate social media as a subtle means of serving patrons in a more specialized, interactive and value added manner without incurring undue expenses. Therefore, this paper will discuss the social media and library services: A case of covid 19 pandemic era

Social Media

Social media is a virtual information sharing space which compliments face-to-face interaction and relationships between individuals. Chitumbo and Chewe (2015) defined social media as online tools whose principal aim is to offer social interactions and exchange of items, ideas, products and services among people of common interests. Social media are online platforms through which individuals, groups and organisations create presence and share information through texts, photos, music videos etc (Ladan, Haruna & Madu, 2020). Social media are networked information services, designed to support in depth social interaction, community formation, collaborative opportunities and collaborative work (Bruns & Bahnisch cited in Chhiato, 2018). Social media operate in dialogic transmission where there may be many sources to many receivers of information, pictures, images and other resources. Examples of social media applications include the Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, You tube, Blogs, Wikis,

LinkedIn, WhatsApp, Flickr, Orkut among others.

Library Services

Library services are services a library provides to its patrons (Madu & Adeniran, 2005). These services are centered on user services which are: user education (orientation/instruction services), inter-library loan/connection services, abstracting and indexing services, bibliographical services, reference services, library services and circulation services. Other library services are photocopying services; compilation of reading list and bibliographies; and publishing (Ifidon, 2008). Anyoagu (2007) also asserts that these library services support the user's accessibility of information from both physical and virtual resources which includes current awareness services; selective dissemination of information; document delivery services; repackaging services; facsimile services; binding services and referral services. According to Madu and Adeniran (2005) library services also includes digital services that provide a wide range of information in all the areas of knowledge to users in an online format. They are computerized services a library provides to its patrons. There are also online services that a library offers such as online user education, online abstracting and indexing services, online bibliographical services, online reference services, online information services and circulation services, internet services, e-mail, internet connectivity, and CD-ROM searching. The essence of providing library services is to extensively meet the information need of library patrons

Social media for library services

Social media as a Web-based channel of information dissemination is rapidly permeating all aspects of library and information services. Also, it is observed that social media is rapidly becoming the most preferred means of establishing social/professional networks among

librarians, while it is also being used to communicate with potential library users, as well as extending the information services to other remote users particularly in the academic community (Quadri & Idowu, 2016). In the information profession, particularly in libraries, universities, and colleges, social media tools serves as the platform mostly suited for individuals to interact, disseminate, and share information among themselves (Sahu, 2013). Librarians are now realizing the potentials of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, Skype, and Google+, and other social tools and are making efforts to integrate them into library services such as library orientation, new arrival of library resources, references services, selective dissemination of information (SDI), and customer services in general.

Social media tools, mostly MySpace, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Delicious, Flickr, Blogs, Wikis, Youtube, Podcasts, and Hi5 have enabled libraries to connect their users and allowed librarians to adopt a new role by placing themselves into a social realm with users (Ezeani & Igwesi, 2012). By reading blogs, group postings, and message boards, the librarian becomes an active participant, who is able to anticipate and advise patrons as needs arise. Social media tools have also enabled libraries to link their various patron profiles which keep them abreast of their information needs.

Libraries now have a fan page on Facebook which help them to market the library's services and products. By linking to the library's website, the Facebook page acts as a portal to the library. Blogs and wikis have been recognized as ideal sources to disseminate news and information. Blogs in academic libraries are tools to reach out to students. Blogs and Twitter are a real-time communication platform and have been overwhelmingly used to market the library services and products. According to Musibau, Milstein, Enyinnaya, Edward, Wantrudis and Nojeem (2011), social media tools also allows users to create an account, post and receive messages to a network of

contacts, as opposed to send bulk email messages. There are libraries which use Twitter to connect themselves with important information sources. These social media tools and their networking sites help establish a cordial relationship with users while attracting them to the library environment.

Libraries have increased the use of Facebook and Twitter to connect, communicate as well as collaborate with users in an innovative way, and providing the needed services to users. Suraweere et al (2011) admitted that the availability of online social networks in libraries and information organizations is increasingly prevalent and a growing tool that is being used to communicate with more potential library users. Ezeani and Igwesi (2012) add that social media tools sites are two way transparent communications that encourage a feedback mechanism; connecting people with shared interest. Furthermore, the availability of social networking tools enables librarians to identify library patrons on the social cyberspace and pro-actively provide the type of information that would normally result from reference service. Social media tools are not only being available for promoting services, programs and new resources but they are also used for reference service. Libraries have also provided available platforms such as Ask a Librarian, meebo and twitter for students to use and to ask questions in “real time and this is assisting in promoting the library as a relevant, efficient and helpful place.

In recent time, there have been different interaction rituals which can be performed on social media for reconstructing the established social networks. Such popular activities include updating user information and getting updates on new library collections. Libraries can also add value to their services by creating knowledge repositories on Wikis, developing bibliographies through social bookmarking sites, building historical and cultural collections through media sharing applications, and forming relationships with

like-minded individuals in social networking communities (Kroski, 2007). These platforms can help libraries to be harvesting information from individual users for improving online services, and research, etc. (Chu, Cheung, Hui, Chan & Man, 2010).

With the advent of social media tools, libraries can now relate to her wide users even in remote areas. The availability of social media for libraries also enhances two-way communication which afforded libraries to be in tandem with their users’ changing needs and expectations. These platforms of information service delivery can increase library’s reach to the patrons. Social media tools in libraries act as information resource while supporting collaboration between students and libraries. Succinctly put, social media tools are rebranding the library services in view of the current trends of Covid 19 pandemic.

Adoption of social media for library services in the Covid 19 era

Since the declaration of Covid 19 pandemic in the world, the adoption of social media tools in libraries has been agitated for. The Covid 19 pandemic has opened up many deficiencies of the libraries in providing efficient service delivery to patrons. To a large extent, social media tools have been supportive for library services and have increased efficiency and quick information delivery to library patrons. Adeleke & Habila (2012) stated that both the library personnel and patrons are aware of the importance of adopting social media for both personal and professional use. Therefore, these social media tools have been adopted in most library services delivery. Since the Covid 19 pandemic, some libraries have embarked on publishing electronic research guides and tutorials online while integrating help content and virtual reference services into their Facebook pages and Websites.

The lockdown placed by government due to the Covid 19 pandemic has exposed and motivated libraries to adopt RSS feed,

Facebook, Blog and Wiki to serve library patrons more effectively. Aharony (2009) revealed that library personnel can make adopt of social media such as blog to post information related to professional, personal and both issues on the same platform. In Otulugbu (2019) it was found that Web 2.0 tools such as Facebook are being adopted in libraries to deliver efficient services while the least used among the tools were Flickr, RSS feed, podcast and social bookmarking. The adoption of social media tools in libraries in this Covid 19 pandemic era has enhanced web-based Current Awareness Services (CAS) which is designed to help time constrained users keep abreast of the latest developments, issues, and activities related to selected topics in their fields. With the adoption of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and Blog, libraries can provide users' with new information through saved searches, e-mail alerts, and RSS feeds.

The adoption of social media tools in this Covid 19 pandemic era can facilitate online services via RSS feeds, Facebook and Twitter and can make the current awareness services to become relatively convenient for users to be abreast of recent trends in their choice of information needs. Most especially, RSS feeds, can enable users to track new updates to a web site without having to visit that web site over and over (Wittenbrink 2005). SMS technology can also be adopted to deliver library services more effectively and efficiently. SMS could be used to provide quick, easy access to library services by sending to the customers (users of a library) new stocks and collection online. It can also be adopted when the library wants to remind users of the overdue books or when the books borrowed is due. In cases where the users need to renew it, they can send a message for getting it reissued rather than going to the library and renew the books since there is a lockdown on movement.

With a view of this Covid 19 pandemic lockdown, library users can also be informed of the library's new innovations

and updated services. Users can check the loans and also know of the availability of any particular services or book by sending SMS (Abdulsalami & Dika, 2019). By adopting social media tools, readers can subscribe to receive library notices via email, library newsletters and can also subscribe to online databases. Libraries can broadcast text messages to groups of clients for promoting services such as new databases, extended library opening hours, or a new series of hands-on workshops (Abdulsalami & Dika, 2019). It is worthy of note that the adoption of social media and social networking applications such as Zoom, GoogleMeet, Group discussion using Facebook Live, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram among others can serve as a useful communication link on relate users on emerging library services. If the situation persists and lockdown is extending, using social media tools for delivering library services will be a better option.

Empirical findings revealed that some university of Florida uses cell phone text messaging service to distribute information and news updates campus wide; the system allows professors and students to use social media tools for similar communications (Briggs, 2007). Otulugbu (2019) reported that the highest level at which the University of Benin Library deliver services and provision of factual answers to queries was through Facebook. Quadri and Idowu (2016) also found that adoption of the social media tools was for immediate feedbacks from the patrons on the library service. They concluded that social media could influence the library users to become library advocates and in turn promote library image within and outside the community. Collins and Quan-Hasse (2012) found that social media tools have become an increasingly familiar tool employed by academic libraries to market services and resources to current and prospective patrons. There were similar results from a survey of respondents in Asia, North America, and Europe with 71% of academic libraries reporting using social

media (Chu and Du, 2013). Anari (2013) work showed that many libraries (national, public and academic) in the 21st century are making use of Social Media Technology (SMT) to provide services to visitors and to create an environment of mutual interaction in order to create a platform for sharing views, experiences, ideas and opinions with others.

Issues of social media for library services in the Covid 19 era

Social media tools have presented a lot of merits to the delivery of effective library services mostly in this present Covid 19 pandemic. However, there have been a number of issues that have affected their adoption for effective library services. At present due to this Covid 19 pandemic, most libraries are not well funded to procure relevant media tools that will facilitate their adoption and implementation of social media for library services. Most librarians are not properly aware and competent in the use of social media tools in providing library services. Some librarians in libraries are not trained and equipped with new media skills to enable them adopt social media tools in their provision of relevant library services to their numerous users in their remote location in this Covid 19 pandemic era. Also, there is usually network problem, poor connection, and low bandwidth which is peculiar to developing countries when using these social media tools for library services. Users who are expected to access these library services via social media are not skilled with virtual education and it has proved to be very challenging for them to access and utilize these available library services online via social media. Furthermore, the Covid 19 pandemic has restricted libraries in reaching out to their users via social media tools since most of them are not motivated with incentives unlike their medical counterparts. These incentives would have motivated them to carry research activities and procure subscription to download and upload online library services for users' access. Since this

covid 19 era, library users, mostly student finds it boring and un-engaging to use social media tools to access library services

Other issues of adoption of social media for library services in the Covid 19 era is that most libraries may infringe on some authors' copyright if they are not well knowledgeable in the process of making information accessible on social media. Also, some library professionals lack needed skill to function effectively in their use of social media tools to deliver library services to patrons. Taylor and Francis (2014) reiterated that high level of expertise is required when using social media which may require skills for customizing applications that aid in the process of accessing online catalogs. Despite the level of infiltration of social media in library services today, some library professionals still have that inert fear of technology since most are them are more used to manual system of providing library services. Similarly, library staffs that make use of social media tools for a long period of time usually experience technology related stress and these issues may have affected their adoption of social media tools in providing library services during this Covid 19 pandemic era.

CONCLUSION

Since the Covid 19 pandemic was declared and lockdown imposed on all sectors, including libraries, the adoption of social media by libraries has been noticeable. This has increased the effectiveness of most libraries in their provision of library services to their users who are isolated and restricted to use the regular physical library collection. Social media technology such as Facebook, twitter, Blog, YouTube, LinkedIn, Delicious, MySpace and Flickr are being adopted for library service delivery and this has improved the efficiency and techniques at which the library relates its patrons in this Covid 19 era. Social media tools as applied in libraries in recent time has come to stay and have served as a platform for

information and knowledge dissemination and sharing. In this regard, libraries need to do all that is possible to operate and maximize the benefits of these social media tools for an enhanced library service provision to her users. These media would enable libraries to perform better for greater user accessibility to library resources at their respective location and it will also establish the library's visibility on the media space and as well facilitate online learning

Recommendations

In view of the Covid 19 lockdown and the need for libraries to properly adopt social media tools for effective library services for users, the following recommendations are made:

- I. Library staff should be provided with regular training in the use of new tools and social media platforms to make them IT compliant and in turn, they can utilize these tools for library service delivery
- II. Social media tools such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, WhatsApp videos and others media should be institutionalized in all libraries as this would fasten their reach to users even in remote location
- III. There should be adequate funding for libraries to enable them procure systems and application that would facilitate the use of social media tools in their library services
- IV. Users of the library needs to be trained in their use and access to relevant resources via their social media platforms since this is a new trend that requires skills in usage
- V. The available social media tools adopted by the library should be managed by experts who can skillfully attend to queries and enquiries from users who may face problems in accessing or downloading online documents from the platforms

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