Application of Social Media Networks for Research among Academic Librarians: A Survey of Academic Libraries in Imo State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study investigated the application of social media networks for research among academic librarians in five academic libraries in Imo State, Nigeria. The survey method was used for the study while a structured questionnaire captioned, Application of Social Media, Networks for Research among Academic Librarians Questionnaire (ASNRALQ) was used to elicit data from the respondents. The population of study was 74 drawn from the five academic libraries under study. Data collected were analyzed using simple descriptive method while the results were tabulated. The study concluded that academic librarians in Imo State have essentially embraced the use of social media networks in their research, though restricted to a few of the media: Facebook, Wikipedia and YouTube. Some challenges like poor funding, inadequate ICT infrastructure, epileptic power supply, poor maintenance culture, etc, were found to hinder effective use of social media tools for research. Amongst the recommendations made to enhance effective use of social media in research were: government should guarantee adequate ICT infrastructure in academic libraries through conscious funding and supervision, management of academic libraries should provide internet services to enhance the use of social media tools by academic libraries, academic librarians should go all out to acquire ICT skills and competencies via personal efforts while management ensures regular training and retraining of staff on ICT.

Introduction

The advent of social media, powered by Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has radically and progressively changed the way people, communities' organizations and societies do things. Social media have become ubiquitous and permeated virtually all facets of human socio-economic, political, cultural, educational as well as developmental endeavours.

Before the coming of social media, research activities were essentially cumbersome and drudgery. Today, the application of social media tools have revolutionized the conduct of research and made it quite exciting and fascinating; positive results arising from it have turned around educational and developmental initiatives of institutions, corporate bodies and nations at large.

What then is the social media and accompanying tools which can be used to fast track the conduct of research? The social media employs "mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms via which individuals and communities share, co-create and modify user generated content" (kietzman Hermkens, McCarthy and Silvestre, 2011).

Dollarhide (2019), noted that social media is computer based technology which facilitates the sharing of ideas, thoughts, and information through the building of virtual networks and communities. By design, social media is internet-based and gives users quick electronic communication of content.

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Content includes personal information, documents, videos and photos. Users engage with social media via computer, tablet or smart phone via web-based software or web application, often utilizing it for messaging.

According to Jamie (2019), there are over 60 types of social media; prominent among them are Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, Twitter, Wikis, Wechat, Qzone, Instagram, Tumbir, Google +, Baidu, Tieba, Skype, Viber, Sina, Weibo, LINE, Snapchat and Blogs, etc.

The global trend today is to adopt and apply the wide range of social media tools in research and development; this has paid off handsomely. Academic librarians just like their comparable counterparts in schools, colleges and faculties are statutorily required to engage in research and generate peer reviewed published works for assessment and promotion. It has thus become imperative for these calibres of librarians to work towards increasing the level of their research competitiveness by deploying these internet-driven devices for harvesting ideas, information gathering, cross fertilization of ideas and knowledge enrichment to their advantage. Notwithstanding the overabundance of advantages realizable from use of social media in research activities, librarians may be saddled with the problem of acquiring the relevant skills and competencies necessary to use these devices in research. This investigation will therefore find out how inclined academic librarians in Imo State, Nigeria are in using social media networks for conducting research and their probable impact on their research output.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the overabundance of benefits derivable form the use of social in educational and developmental research, there seem to be glaring apathy among Librarians in fully using these media in conducting their research. Afolabi and Ipadeola (2017) acknowledged that social media have brought innovative changes like easy access to information, removal of information barrier, increase in information provision, sharing of ideas, widening knowledge base and encouraging online discussion.

However, notwithstanding these advantages, factors like inadequate ICT infrastructure in academic libraries to drive the adoption of social media networks, low level of the use of social media, and most importantly, lack of the necessary skills and competencies may be attributable for the apathy among librarians in using these ICT-driven devices. This study is therefore designed to investigate, academic librarians use of social media in conducting research in academic libraries in Imo State, Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this investigation is to find out academic librarians use of social media for research in libraries in Imo State, Nigeria.

The specific objectives are to:
i. Find out the various social media used by academic librarians in Imo State to conduct research;
ii. Investigate the frequency of use of social media among academic librarians in Imo State;
iii. Evaluate the contributions of social media use for research among academic librarians in Imo State; and
iv. Identify the challenges affecting the use of social media for research

Research Questions

The study was anchored on the under listed research questions:

i. What are the social media platforms used by academic librarians in Imo State to conduct research?
ii. How frequent do librarians use social media to conduct research?
iii. What impact do the use of social media have on academic librarians research output?
iv. What challenges inhibit academic librarians' use of social media for research?

Significance of the Study

Apart from awareness creation on the relevance of social media for research and professional activities, the study will expose librarians and academics to the benefits derivable from the application of social media on other facets of human endeavour. Furthermore, the study will sensitize management of libraries and tertiary institutions on the imperative of putting in place the necessary ICT infrastructure which drive application of social media so as to encourage their use by librarians and faculty members. This will ultimately enhance research productivity for better service delivery in institutions.

Review of Related Literature

Technology has revolutionized the world and significantly changed the ways library operations can be deployed and activated to render traditional operations of materials selection, ordering, acquisition, receipt, settlement of payment, processing, retrieving and utilization.

Indeed technology is like an octopus and has its tentacles in virtually every library service:- circulation, reference, serials, current awareness service (CAS), selective dissemination of information (SDI) services, to mention but these few. Users can interact, ask questions and get answers from the comfort of their homes, offices or wherever, without having to be physically present in the library. Thanks to availability of technology tools to persons, libraries and information centers.

Madukoma (2017) stressed that with the introduction of these tools, the library cannot but make use of them to enhance and meet users demand. Among these tools is the social media which has made its way to the library.

What then is the social media? Investopedia (2019) explained that social media is computer based technology which facilitates the sharing of ideas, thoughts, and information through the building of virtual networks and communities. It further notes that by design, social media is internet-based and gives users quick electronic communication of content. Content includes personal information, documents, videos, and photos. Users engage with social media via computer, tablet, or Smartphone via web based software or web application, often utilizing it for messaging.

According to Spencer (2019) there are over 60 types of social media. Prominent among them are Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, Twitter, Wikis, Wechat, Qzone, Instagram, Tumbir, Google +, Baidu, Tieba, Skype, Viber, Sina, Weibo, LINE, Snapchat and Blogs, etc.

To Subramani (2015), the term social media refers to internet-based applications which enable people to communicate and share resources and information. It describes any medium that facilitates and regulates real time social media communication among users. They are used to communicate with more than one person at a time. It includes networking sites like Facebook, Myspace; Micro blogging sites like Twitter and tumlri; media sharing sites like YouTube, and Flickers, blogs and other communication within the virtual world. For Simisaye and Adeyeoye (2015) social media can be described as online technologies and practices which people use to share opinions, insights, experiences and perspectives and it takes many different formats, including texts, images audio and video images.

Social media are platforms for discussing and sharing of ideas and information on areas of interests. They are modern interactive communication channels through which people connect to one another, share ideas, experiences, pictures, messages and information of common interest. What distinguishes the social media from the conventional means of communication is their interactive nature which allows the audience to participate in it from any part of the world they reside (Ezeah, Asogwa and Edogor(2013).

Social media has empowered librarians to become part of digital communication where they collaborate and share their works as well as promote their products and services within the global world. The diverse platforms of social media are there for the library and information science professionals to utilize; it will be an aberration for LIS professionals not to explore them in this globalized society (Ekere, Akanwa and Benson, (2015). Doubtless, the communication and integrative power of the social media is far reaching and pervasive and must be deployed to achieve maximum speed and timeliness in research by academic librarians.

Characteristically social media are distinguished by their interactive capabilities which allow users to participate in it from any part of the world they reside. Social communities focus on bringing people together to interact with one another through chart rooms and encourage users to share personal information and ideas via personal web pages by providing easy way to use publishing tools free or inexpensive web space (Eke, Omekwu and Odoh, 2014).

By nature social media is noted for openness; anyone can become a member and appropriate their use. Ezeah and Igwesi (2012) identified some of the basic characteristics of social media as:

Participatory: Users have the opportunity to actively engage in the construction of knowledge rather than being passive consumers of content.

Educative: Users are kept abreast of the latest developments and can have open access to knowledge.

Collaborativeness: Social media ensures knowledge sharing, establish communication link with experts and allow users to develop a team working skill.

Fascinating: Is very on inspiring, interesting and users can be engrossed in the use of social networks sites. Some users garner information with these sites in an easy and unhindered manner.

Flexibility: Easy content creation and sharing and easy update of files and personal contact.

According to Taylor and Francis (2014) social media is used by librarians to deliver a blend of customer services, news and updates, content/collection promotion, dissemination of institutions' research output, provision of educational tools and resources and for building relationships both within and outside the institution. Social media have the potential to help the increase engagement between users, library staff, and services. It is seen as an effective outreach tool, helping librarians to promote the work of their faculty and connect more deeply with the broader library community. This will in essence help bring a closer relationship between the librarians and their users.

Kumara (2016) cited by Jimogha, Jimogha and Udonsi (2017) listed social media that can be used in libraries to include, Facebook, Twitter, Myspace , YouTube, Research Gate, Rss, Wikis, Blogs, Library Thing, Slide share, Linkedln, etc.

A catalogue of benefits can be derived by librarians using social media networks, some of them according to Madukoma (2017) are:

- The cost of using social media are perceived to be below;
- It requires little training;
- It promotes library services and disseminates news quickly, delivering information more directly to users;
- It increases engagement and interactions with library users;
- It helps gather feedback to enhance user services
- The promotion of library holdings via social media can help increase usage of content;
- It enhances communication both within the library and with other departments; and
- It can be used for outreach activities through onward sharing, well beyond the institution itself, helping to build connections and reputation more broadly.

Despite a legion of benefits derivable from the use of social media, there are however, some challenges confronting their use. Some of these challenges were noted by Akidi and Umebali (2017), as:

- Irregular internet access makes it difficult for people to use social media information access, retrieval and use;
- Poor connectivity and low bandwidth problem; most institutions have limited bandwidth to support social media use for services;
- There is no privacy on personal information because of how information are shared and disseminated by friends on social media;
- Increase in number of cyber-crimes has posed a security concern against the social media;
- Displacement of reliable media sources; the use of newspapers, magazines, radio programmes are gradually being replaced by social media.

From the foregoing, the power, ubiquity and benefit of social media are real and here with us in information/ social media age; librarians and libraries must therefore adopt and deploy them positively and effectively in researches for maximum productivity.

Research Methodology

The survey method was used for this study while the research instruments was a questionnaire captioned; Adoption of Social Media Networks for Research among Academic Librarians (ASMNRALQ).

The population of the study was all the professional librarians in the five (5) academic libraries under study. The libraries are, Alvan Ikoku College of Education (ALVAN), Federal Polytechnic Nekede (POLYNEK), Federal University of Technology (FUTO), Imo State Polytechnic Umuagwo (IMOPOLY) and Imo State University (IMSU) all in Owerri, Imo state, Nigeria. In view of the fact that the population is not a large one and thus manageable, the entire population of 74 was adopted. The 74 questionnaire distributed, were all returned through the help of research assistants. There was thus 100% return rate of distributed questionnaire. Data collected was analysis using tables, frequency counts and simple percentage.

Data Analysis and Discussion

Research Question 1: What are the social media platforms used by academic librarians in Imo state to conduct research?

Table I: Social media networks used for research by Academic Librarians.

S/N	Social Media Network	Frequency of use	Percentage
1	Blogs	5	6
2	Delicious	00	00
3	Dig	00	00
4	Facebook	75	100
5	Flicker	5	6
6	Skype	5	6
7	Twitter	20	25
8	Viber	00	00
9	Wikipedia	50	67
10	YouTube	40	54

From the table I it is deductible that only Facebook 75 (100%), Wikipedia 50 (67%) and YouTube 40 (54%), are social media tools usually used for research by academic librarians. This is thus suggestive that the awareness of the existence or better still, the relevance of other social media platforms for research activities is very low among academic librarians.

Research Question 2: How frequent do academic librarians use social media to conduct research?

Table II: Frequency Use of Social Media for Research

S/N	Social Media	Very Often	Percentage	Often	Percentage	Occasionally	Percentage	Never	Percentage
1	Blogs	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00
2	Delicious	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00
3	Dig	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00
4	Facebook	58	78	50	67	00	00	00	00
5	Flicker	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00
6	Skype	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00
7	Twitter	00	00	00	00	20	26	00	00
8	Viber	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00
9	Wikipedia	00	00	50	67	30	40	00	00
10	YouTube	40	54	00	00	5	6	00	00

Table II on frequency of use of social media for research revealed that 58(78%) of the respondents use Facebook very often while 50(67%) use it often. Furthermore, 40(54%) of academic librarians use YouTube for their research activities, 5(6%) use it occasionally. Admittedly this analysis shows that only Facebook, Wikipedia and YouTube social media platforms were used for research by academic librarians in Imo state.

Research Question 3: What impact do the use of social media have on the research output of academic librarians?

Table III: Impact of Social Media on Research Output of Academic Librarians.

S/N	Impact	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Collaborative work	74	100
2	Connection to colleagues	73	98
3	Interaction with other researchers	60	81
4	Knowledge growth	60	81
5	Knowledge sharing	74	100
6	Knowledge transfer	66	85
7	Encourages learning	60	81
8	Online discussion	74	100
9	Information dissemination	65	87
10	Research skill improvement	69	93

Table III on impact of social media on research output of academic librarians shows that these professionals use social media for collaborative work 74(100%), knowledge sharing 74(100%), online discussion 74(100%) to connect with colleagues 73(98%), knowledge growth 60(81%), research skill improvement 69(93%), information dissemination 65(87%), interaction with other researchers 60(81%), knowledge transfer 66(85%) and encouragement of learning 60(81%).

Evidently, all the academic librarians realize the power and potentials of social media networks for developing and improving their research outcomes.

Research Question 4: What challenges inhibit academic librarians use of social media for research?
Table IV: **Challenge of Social Media use in Research.**

S/N	Challenges	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Bandwidth problem	50	67
2	Epileptic power supply	74	100
3	Poor funding	70	94
4	Inadequate internet facilities	70	94
5	Poor ICT skills	74	100
6	Technophobia	60	81
7	Poor maintenance culture	65	87
8	Problem awareness	50	67
9	Lack of ICT infrastructures	74	100
10	Lack of cooperation	45	60

From table IV, the respondents were unanimous that epileptic power supply 74(100%), lack of ICT infrastructure 74(100%) and poor ICT skills 74(100%) were some of the challenge which hamper the use of social media tools for research. Other reasons were, poor funding 70(94%), inadequate internet facilities 70(94%), poor maintenance culture 65(87%), technophobia 60(81%), bandwidth problem 50(67%), problem awareness 50(67%) and lack of cooperation among researchers 45(60%).

Discussion of Findings

The result of the findings revealed that academic librarians in Imo State recognize the relevance of application of social media in research. Fawkes and McCabe (2012) supports this position and observed that some lecturers and supervisors have integrated social media into their lectures, research and curricula. Unfortunately, the research findings also revealed that the most frequently used social media for research activities were Facebook, Wikipedia and YouTube. Ezeani and Igwesi (2012) bemoaned this retrogressive attitude among librarians for lagging behind in embracing opportunities offered by social media for research development and library services.

Furthermore, academic librarians in Imo State generally agreed that the power of social media is far reaching and have impacted positively in their research outcomes in the areas of collaborative work 100%, knowledge sharing 100%, online discussion 100%, connection to colleagues 98%, research skill improvement 93%, information dissemination 87%, knowledge growth 81% and encouragement of learning 81%.

However, certain challenges were found to be hindrances to effective use of social media. These include, lack of ICT infrastructures 100%, poor ICT skills 100%, epileptic power supply 100%, inadequate internet facilities 94%, poor funding 94%, poor maintenance culture 87%, technophobia 81% and bandwidth problem, 67% among others.

Conclusion

Professional academic librarians in Imo state, Nigeria have essentially embraced use of social media networks in their research. They are however, restricted for now, to a few of these media: Facebook, Wikipedia and YouTube. This is not good enough especially as Jamie (2018) noted that there are 60+ social networking sites worth knowing and used. Some challenges were discovered to be hindrances to effective and efficient use of social media networks for research. These include amongst others; epileptic power supply, poor funding, lack of ICT infrastructure, inadequate internet facilities, lack of maintenance culture and technophobia.

Recommendations

In view of the research outcome of application of social media networks for research among academic librarians in Imo State, Nigeria, the under listed recommendations are proffered:

✓ Management of academic libraries should provide internet services to enhance the use of social media tools by academic librarians.
✓ Librarians should adopt and implement a continuous maintenance culture to ensure preservation of ICT resources.
✓ Government should guarantee adequate ICT infrastructure in academic libraries through conscious funding and supervision.
✓ Academic librarians should go all out to acquire ICT skills and competencies through personal efforts while management ensures regular training and retraining of staff on ICT.
✓ Since constant power supply cannot be guaranteed, libraries should make provision for alternative sources of power like sound proof generating set and solar-power electricity supply.
✓ Conferences, Seminars and workshops should be organized to educate librarians on the relevance and use of social media networks in carrying out research.
✓ Since Facebook is the most popular of social media networks, librarians should establish Facebook page on their websites to encourage its use for research by both professionals, students and outside patrons.

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