

# ADOPTION AND USE OF MOBILE AND SOCIAL MEDIA TECHNOLOGIES BY LIBRARIES: A CASE OF BINDURA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION (BUSE)

Josiline CHIGWADA<sup>1</sup>, Blessing CHIPARAUSHA<sup>2</sup> and Bvumai MUSARURWA<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Sub Librarian, Bindura University of Science Education, P Bag 1020 Bindura, Zimbabwe.  
jphiri@buse.ac.zw

<sup>2</sup>Deputy Librarian, Bindura University of Science Education, Zimbabwe.  
bchiparausha@buse.ac.zw

<sup>3</sup>Chief Library Assistant, Bindura University of Science Education, Zimbabwe.  
bmusarurwa@buse.ac.zw

## Abstract

*This paper is an exploratory study investigating the use of mobile and social media technologies (MSMTs) by Bindura University of Science Education Library (BUSE). A qualitative analysis of web content and questionnaire data was performed using content analysis. The mobile and social media technologies in use were identified and reasons for adopting the technologies were analysed. It was found out that the following mobile and social media technologies are in use: Whatsapp, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, LinkedIn, Skype and Live chat. The use of these tools was, however, not uniform. This can be attributed to a number of reasons, particularly, user preferences, library patrons and staff preferred platforms and the monetary cost and time investments required to access and use the various mobile and social media technologies available. This study uncovers potential of mobile and social media technologies in promoting services offered by libraries. It offers librarians an opportunity to make informed decisions about effective applications of MSMTs.*

**Keywords:** Mobile and social media technologies; Mobile applications; Social Media; Library technology; Contemporary issues in librarianship.

## 1. Introduction

Use of mobile and social media technologies has become part of the daily lives of most students as stated by Choy (2010). Barile (2011) states that libraries should be exploring mobile devices as a way to connect with patrons. This would enable libraries to provide effective and efficient services and timely access to the needed information as pointed out by Akeriwa (2013). Lippincott (2010), Vila, Galvez and Campos (2010) added that libraries are designing services around mobile technologies in order to meet the changing needs of clients. Mobile phones and web technologies such as social networking, virtual references, RSS feeds and blogs are used by library patrons to access e-mail and other library services and products, search the web and do video chat. Libraries are taking advantage of mobile and social media technologies to deliver enhanced services to the patrons. A white paper from Taylor & Francis (2014) states that over 70% of libraries are using social media tools, 60% have a social media account for three years or longer and 30% of librarians are posting daily. This is done by using various mobile and social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, WhatsApp among others. Libraries use

these various mobile and social media tools not only to support researchers in their information seeking but also to assist them to identify research information and then disseminate the research results and write research reports. The study aims at investigating the potential of MSMTs in promoting services offered by libraries. It provides a reference point for library professionals in their efforts to make informed decisions about effective applications of MSMTs.

## 2. Context of the study

The paper is a case study of Bindura University of Science Education Library which documents how the Library adopted and uses mobile and social media technologies in its day to day activities. Bindura University of Science Education is a government supported university in Zimbabwe that was established in 1995 as a College of the University of Zimbabwe and later became a fully-fledged university in February 2000 following the passing of the Bindura University of Science Education Act in parliament (BUSE 2014). BUSE has one library which is located at the main campus and in its endeavour to provide services to its clientele, it utilises various mobile and social media platforms such as Facebook, Live chat facility, WhatsApp, YouTube, Flickr, and Twitter. The platforms are accessible via the library webpages and the users are taught how to use them during the orientation and electronic resources training sessions.

## 3. Literature review

A number of articles have been written on the use of mobile and social media technologies in libraries. This study would focus on the various mobile and social media technologies used in libraries, how they are used, and the challenges that are faced when using these technologies as well the possible solutions that are used to solve the problems.

### 3.1 Mobile and social media technologies

A lot of mobile and social media technologies have been used in libraries. Akeriwa (2013), Chua and Goh (2010) and Mahmood and Richardson (2011) point out the following as the common social media tools:

**Blogs** which contain current scholarly opinions of various writers. Libraries can create blogs for specific subjects to ensure that users are kept up-to-date on their areas of interest. Blogs can also be used to disseminate library news, inform the clients on library activities and also to publish library newsletters. They can also be used for the promotion and marketing of library services.

**RSS (Really Simple Syndication)** which is used to disseminate library news, make library announcements, exhibit new and already existing acquisitions, and offer reference services.

**Social bookmarking/ user tagging** which is used to connect to online bookmarking sites which are related to specific subject areas. Patrons will be able to create their own tags or keywords and can also share items on the online public access catalogue.

**Wikis** which are used to develop subject guides and archive past reference questions on library services. These can be used for the promotion of internal resources such as committee minutes, procedures, rules, policies among other things.

**Social networking sites** such as Facebook, YouTube, Flickr, MySpace and others are used for sharing information, photos, videos, PowerPoint presentations, and marketing library services. Other platforms such as LinkedIn, Academia.edu and Research Gate are used for professional networking and communication with patrons.

**Podcasts** enhance information dissemination such as the delivery of information on library services and also to give tutorials to clients on the use of library resources for example, on how to use a library catalogue.

**Instant messaging** is used for real time communication. These enhance reference service delivery as it allows user queries to be responded to instantly.

### 3.2 Use of mobile and social media technologies

Kai-Wah Chu and Du (2012) point out that mobile and social media technologies are used for various purposes in libraries which include promotion, collection management, outreach and teaching and learning. These include promotion of library products and services i.e. visibility for and usage of library services and resources. These tools also provide feedback from the clients and this can be used for collection development. They also offer real time customer service and build engagement with users. As a collection management tool, mobile and social media technologies offer ways of presenting resources and categorising them, e.g. YouTube for delivering videos such as orientation videos and training sessions. The technologies are also used by librarians to increase their visibility and connections with the broader library community and assist in promoting their work to the faculty and the university community, for example, the use of LinkedIn, Research Gate and Academia.edu. These platforms can also be used for teaching and learning whereby students can be referred to certain blogs and sites to find information sources. Discussion fora can be used for group assignments and revision purposes when offering information literacy to students.

- A summary of reasons for using mobile and social media technologies is provided in a white paper by Taylor and Francis (2014: 5) as follows:
- To seek opinion on the library and its services for self evaluation purposes, to encourage debate and to instigate an opportunity to respond to library user feedback;
- To reach library users in their homes or 'virtual spaces' as today's modern online library is no longer solely relying on its physical space as an access point;
- To publicise 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 collections by promoting new and existing content;
- To connect with other librarians and keep abreast of industry news; and
- To build a sense of community with both users and also with other institutions and industry contacts.

### 3.3 Challenges

Although mobile and social media technologies offer a number of opportunities, challenges in a library set up are also evident.

They are regarded as activities that offer services at a low cost and support the development and management of the collection between the faculty and the library. They help to strengthen the relationship of all the stakeholders who are actively involved in the day to day running of a library. However, there are also challenges in the use of mobile and social media technologies. There is need to maintain an active social media presence and user questions and queries must be answered in time. There is also lack of resources to get the technological and communication infrastructure that is needed for the service to work since the costs far exceed budgets allocated for library and other information systems as stated by Makori (2012) and Marks (2013). The implementation of social media and use of mobile technologies for service delivery are trends that have not yet been fully embraced in developing countries and there is need to train the library staff on how to make use of mobile and social media technologies. To deal with some of these challenges, there is need to develop policies and plans which govern the use of mobile and social media technologies in libraries. This would help to avoid duplication since there would be best practices and guidelines in place. Therefore, libraries would also be able to evaluate the effectiveness of various mobile and social media technologies in use. A white paper by Taylor & Francis (2014) states that some libraries use social media management and reporting tools such as Hootsuite. The challenges encountered when using MSMTs highlighted above necessitated the need to explore how BUSE had adopted these technologies.

#### **4. Research objectives**

The study sought to answer the following questions:

- Which mobile and social media technologies are in use at BUSE Library?
- What guides the use of mobile and social media technologies at BUSE Library?
- What are the challenges that are encountered by BUSE Library when using mobile and social media technologies?

#### **5. Research Methodology**

The study was a qualitative research whereby questionnaires and web content analysis were used to gather data from a case study of BUSE Library. Twenty three questionnaires were distributed to BUSE library staff who are actively involved in the maintenance and use of the mobile and social media technologies in use. Seventeen questionnaires were returned which makes it to 74% response rate. Web content was also analysed to take note of the mobile and social media technologies that are used by BUSE Library. Content analysis was used to analyse the data whereby questions were grouped and responses were collated to ensure that the results are not scattered. Charts and diagrams were used to present the findings.

#### **6. Findings and discussions**

##### **6.1 Mobile and social media technologies used by BUSE Library**

The results of this study showed that Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp and YouTube are mostly used at BUSE. This goes hand in hand with the study by Gauntner Witter (2014) which shows that libraries are primarily using Twitter and Facebook to market the library.

The diagram below shows the mobile and social media technologies that are available at BUSE Library:

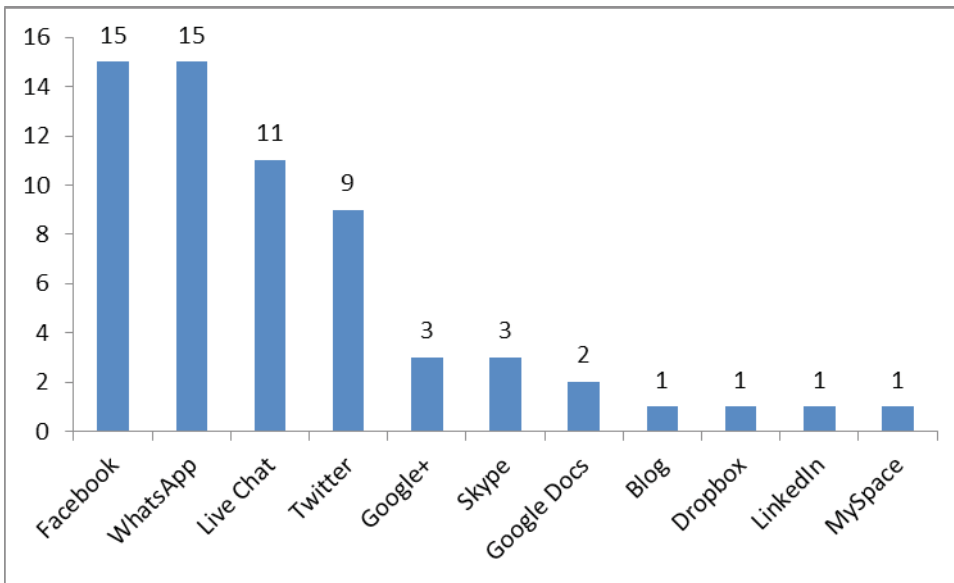


Figure 1: Mobile and social media technology used at BUSE Library

### 6.2 Mobile and social media technology preference

The results showed that personal preferences and ease of use are the major reasons for using the chosen tools. This buttress the information provided by Kai-Wah Chu and Du (2012) which is under literature review. This is represented by the diagram below:

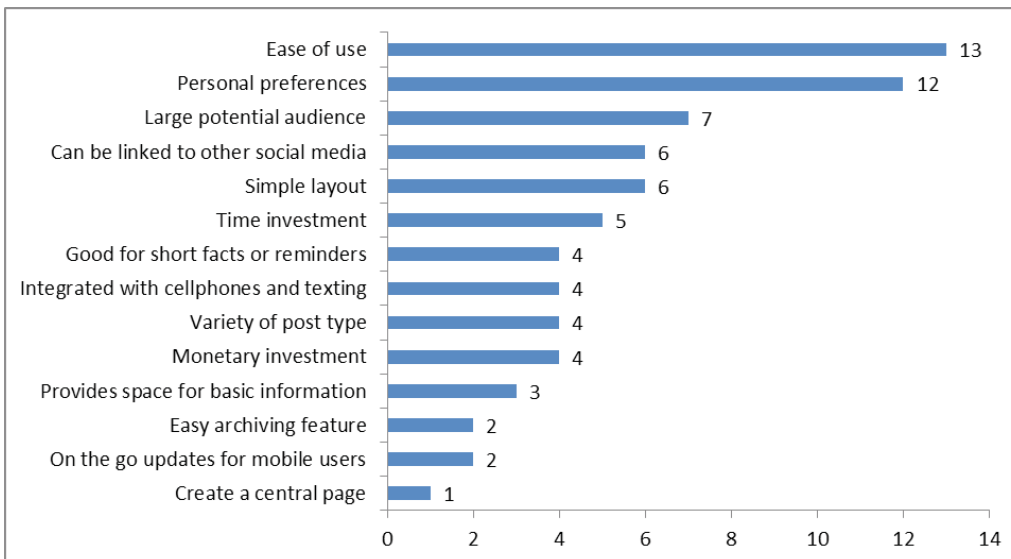


Figure 2: Reasons for using mobile and social media technologies at BUSE Library

### 6.3 Purpose for using mobile and social media technologies

It was noted that mobile and social media technologies are mainly used for communication at BUSE Library. Evidence from BUSE Library social media accounts shows that the tools were used to make announcements and provide news, among other things. The results are shown below:

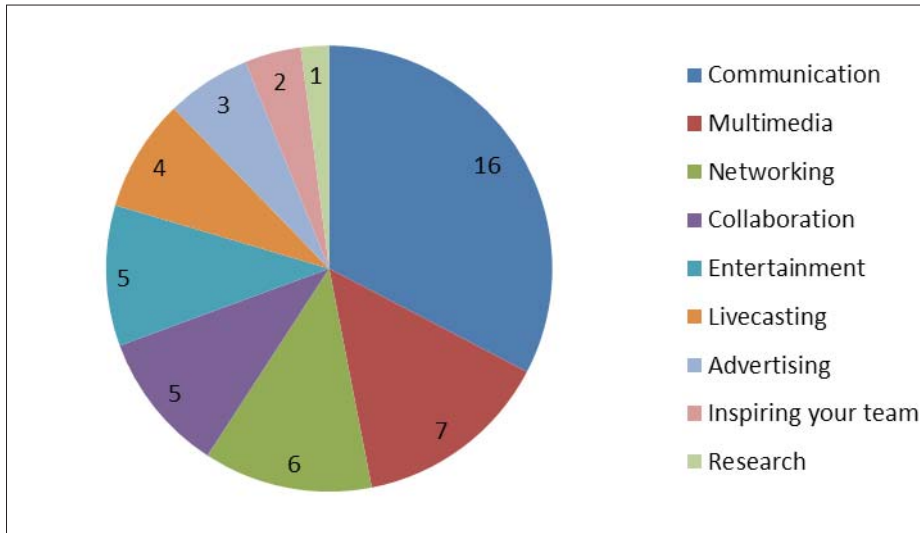


Figure 3: Purpose of using mobile and social media technologies

### 6.4 Guiding instrument for using mobile and social media technologies

The use of mobile and social media technologies at BUSE Library is governed by policies and plans which point out the best practices and guidelines which are needed for the effective and efficient use of these technologies. The table below documents the guiding instruments which were used by respondents:

Guiding instrument	Number of responses
University ICT policy	12
Personal norms and values	11
Social media policy	9
Library strategic plan	4
University strategic plan	2

Table 1: Guiding instruments for using mobile and social media technologies

### 6.5 Challenges encountered when using mobile and social media technologies

The major challenge that has been encountered is the limited time to manage the mobile and social media applications that are used at BUSE Library. The table below shows the challenges that are faced:

Challenges faced	Responses
Limited time to manage mobile and social media applications	11
Knowing the best time to post	6
Difficulties in engaging the audience	5
Privacy	5
Monetary cost of using mobile and social media applications	4
Choice of application to use	3
Difficulties in measuring return on investment	3
Transparency	3
Diversity of the audience	2
Lack of standards	1

Table 2: Challenges faced when using mobile and social media technologies

These findings correspond with evidence in literature written by Makori (2012) and Marks (2013).

### 6.6 Solutions to challenges faced

The findings show that the use of the policies that are in place tops the list in solving some of the challenges that are faced. This is represented diagrammatically below:

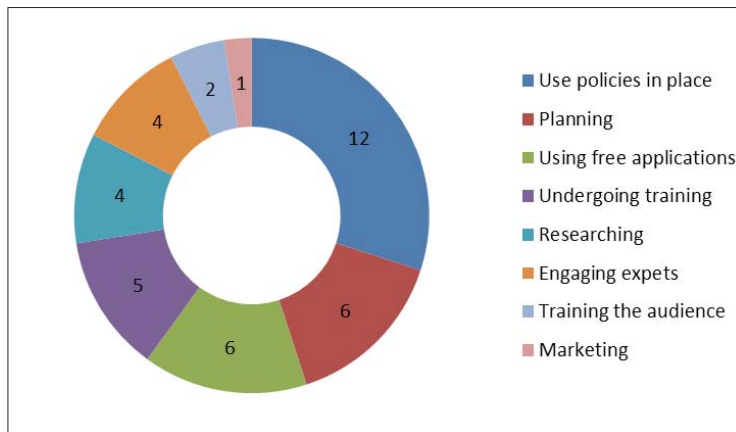


Figure 6: Solutions to challenged faced when using mobile and social media technologies

## 6.7 Mobile and social media technologies and librarianship

One respondent indicated that mobile and social media technologies are vital information dissemination tools in libraries. Therefore, this can necessitate the need for creating specialist roles so as to assist with mobile and social media usage. Librarians at all levels also need to be knowledgeable on how to use these technologies and this can only be achieved through training.

## 7. Conclusions and recommendations

It has been noted that a wide range of mobile and social media technologies are used by libraries and there is need to promote these activities so that they are used. The most popular way is the use of links on library websites and also by word of mouth. The various social media tools are used for marketing library services and products, to deliver news and updates, collection management, education and training, and dissemination of information. As a result, there is need to provide broader Internet bandwidth to support mobile and social media technologies. This would encourage the use of mobile devices to access information resources by clients. Library staff responsible for managing the mobile and social media technologies should be trained and continuously retrained on how to use and manage it. All the other staff members should also be trained in the use of this service and its benefits to the library. The library should also offer training to students on how to effectively use social media applications through their mobile devices to access information resources and services. Further studies can be undertaken to see the actual use of the social media technologies in libraries to know whether students are using and benefiting from these technologies. This can be done through tracking mobile and social media use using various mobile and social media management software and assessment plans. An area for further study is social media metrics in libraries to study whether librarians are assessing the use of mobile and social media.

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