THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN PROMOTING LIBRARY SERVICES IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN UGANDA

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Abstract

This paper examined the roles of social media in promoting library services in school Libraries in Uganda. The major areas examined include: an overview on the usage of social media in promoting library services; social media tools used; benefits of using social media by the libraries; identify the challenges that hinder usage of social media in promoting library services. Invitations to participate in the web based survey were sent to the libraries and phone calls were also made to 17 libraries. Responses were received from 10 libraries, yielding a response rate of 58.8%. Forty percent (40%) libraries used social media, 3(30%) were potential users who planned to use social media tools and 3(30%) didn't plan to use social media at all. Facebook was the most commonly adopted tool in schools. Major challenge was lack of gadgets by students to access the social media platforms and limited time by both students and librarians to access the social media platforms. The findings of this study provide an insight for school librarians to use as a basis for informed decisions in use of social media to promote their library services.

Keywords: Social media; library services; Facebook

1. Introduction

Social networking and social media in school libraries today are an up and coming trend. Often included are Facebook, Internet forums, social bookmarking, podcasts, Twitter, wikis, social blogs, magazines, social networking, photograph or video rating, YouTube, weblogs, webcasts, and social tagging. Social media refers to the methods of interactions between people in which they exchange, create and share information and ideas in online virtual communities and networks.

According to O'Dell (2010), social media is now mainstream and is expected by library users and client groups. Twitter reported that they reached the 100 million user mark in 2011 (Kiss, 2011), and there are increasing numbers of new social media tools entering the market. There are also many organizations in the non-library sector that have already incorporated social media into service models to enhance relationships with customers. This incorporation of social media is no longer novel. Organizations are even moving beyond the use of social media in this way and expanding its use further to drive innovation in products and services. Some of the most popular social networking websites are: Academia.edu, Flickr, Facebook, Friendster, Hi5, Twitter, LinkedIn, blogs, YouTube, Myspace (Mansa & Kumah, 2011)

This platform is used for social activities by organizations, academia and the general public specifically the youth. The use of this platform has compelled modern day students to spend a lot of time at these sites. It is against this background that Academic Libraries in Africa need to adjust their operations to suit the changing trends of their clientele and society (KPMG, 2011). Libraries use social media to fulfill a range of objectives, with mostly focusing on promotion (Visibility for and usage of the library service and resources).

2. Brief background

Social media has the potential to facilitate much closer relationships between libraries and their patrons – wherever users are based, and however they choose to learn about and access library services and resources. Current usage of social media by the library community generally remains ad hoc and somewhat experimental, but the uptake of these tools is accelerating, and they will likely play an increasingly important role in library service provision and outreach in the future.

Information via the Internet spreads faster and to more people than via traditional media platforms. This is very true for Uganda whose population now stands at 35.6 million people with an internet penetration of 15% which translates to 5 million users (Freedom on the Net Report, 2012). A great majority of Ugandans access internet from their mobile phones. Despite this growth in internet penetration access is still hindered by poor infrastructure, prohibitive costs and poor quality of service.

3. Research Objectives

The basis of this research is to:

- Give an overview on the usage of social media in promoting library services;
- Find out the social media tools used;
- Find out the benefits of using social media by the libraries; and
- Identify the challenges that hinder usage of social media in promoting library services.

4. Purpose

The purpose of this study is to highlight the contribution and value of the social media in the education sector. Specifically this study helps to establish the contribution of the social media in enhancing library services for effective and efficient support of academic and research activities in secondary school education. The study further outlines the key social media tools and their contribution to effective library services. The strategies that this study puts across are to help in addressing the key impediments to the use of social media in promoting library services.

5. Statement of the problem

Library services are a key component in education, especially now when the whole idea of education is stressing more and more independent learning and acting (Ryynämen, 1999). However, improved library services are largely implemented at university or higher institution level, and less at secondary school level. The existence of the many social media tools gives a chance to institutions to provide access points to information resources to all types of users. This technological platform, therefore ought to be explored by the secondary schools, to aim at improving their library services.

6. Justification

For any education academic in Uganda to be licensed by the Ministry of Education and Sports there must be proof of an existing library. Schools invest a lot of money in putting up these libraries, in terms of structure, information resources collection and the human capacity. However, very few school libraries are utilized to the satisfaction of resources investment in them.

7 Literature review

7.1 Definition of social media

According to Bruns (2009) there is no universally accepted definition for the term "social media" It is used by some analysts as a term that is virtually interchangeable with 'Web 2.0', that is, as a definition focusing largely on the technological dimensions, while others emphasize on the social dimensions and use 'social media' and 'social networking' as near synonyms, narrowing the definition of 'social media' to include only social networking sites such as the generic networks e.g. Facebook and MySpace and the purpose-specific networks e.g. LinkedIn (for professional networking) and RSVP (for personal dating). Social media in education is defined as the advent of a new wave of tools that support social interaction and collaboration (Harper, 2011). Wikipedia, on the other hand defines social media as computer-mediated tools that allow people or companies to create, share, or exchange information, career interests, ideas, and pictures/videos in virtual communities and networks. Social media is "a group of internet-based applications that builds on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content.

7.2 Usage of social media in promoting library services:

Social libraries are using social resources available to the academic community and as a tool of reference transactions, receiving/resolving complaints, building community (Adeyinka, 2010).

According to the State of America's Libraries report (2013), libraries generally use Pinterest, other social media tools. The following are some of the social media tools that librarians frequently used for their libraries included;
- Slide Share- Allows global presentation of library services and keeps users informed of the library events and activities.
- Google Docs- Librarians use this for a collaborative reference project, photo sharing and social cataloguing, sharing files with colleagues who require collaboration.
- Picasa- Librarians can make photos of the library interiors to share with colleagues/ research groups.

7.3 Types of social media tools used:

According to Liu (2010) social media is gaining its momentum at an unimaginable speed, which indicates that we as social beings, need constant connection with each other and with the outside world. The 2010 top ten social media websites are Google, Facebook, YouTube, Yahoo, Windows Live, Baidu.com, Wikipedia, Blogger.com, Twitter, and QQ.com, respectively (Hanna, Rohm, & Crittenden, 2011). On the other hand Liu (2010) lists the top seven social media tools as Facebook, Forum, Blogging, YouTube, Podcasting, Twitter, and Wiki. Flickr is another social media tool used in multimedia for sharing services (Bertot, Jaeger, & Grimes, 2010).

7.4 Benefits of using social media

According to Taylor & Francis (2014) Librarians have several objectives that they are using social media to help them achieve, which can be summarized as follows: a)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; b) 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; c) to publicize events, services, news and presence; d) to encourage collaboration, for example through collection development and building repositories of collaborative content specific to certain user groups; e) to increase usage of library collections by promoting new and existing content; f) to connect with other librarians and keep abreast of industry news; and g) to build a sense of community with both users and also with other institutions and industry contacts

In addition, social media benefits both the librarians and libraries in the following ways:

- It requires little training;
- It promotes library services and disseminates news quickly, delivering this information more directly to library 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;
- It can be used for outreach activities through onward sharing, well beyond the institution itself, helping build connections and reputation more broadly (Taylor & Francis, 2014).

7.5 Challenges that hinder usage of social media in promoting library services:

The main opportunities associated with libraries using social media are seen to be related to its low cost, its ability to take the library service to users in their preferred spaces, the opportunity to build a sense of community between the library and its users, to support co-development of collections and help keep librarians updated on industry news and initiatives.

Challenges are the considerable time that is required to maintain an active social media presence; the pressure to respond instantly to service queries, the variability of skills across library staff for using social media effectively; striking the right tone between professional and personal; coordinating activities across the institution to avoid duplication, maintaining visibility for the library brand and copyright issues relating to hosting library resources on social media sites (Taylor & Francis, 2014). According to Aduko and Perpetua (2013) among the major drawbacks of using social media for effective marketing is the lack of awareness of the social media services among majority of students and the inadequate infrastructure to access IT services.

8. Methodology

An online questionnaire with both open and closed ended questions was administered to the respondents and telephone calls were made to some of the respondents who couldn't access internet at the time.

8.1 Population

The population of the study consisted of international, public and private secondary schools. The sample included 3 librarians from 3 international schools, 4 public schools and three private schools.

8.2 Data analysis and discussions

The analysis of data presented here was based on information provided by respondents of the questionnaires administered by the researchers. Seventeen (17) questionnaires were sent to the school librarians and the researchers received 10 responses giving a response rate of 58.8% The analysis is therefore based on the 10 questionnaire responses received.

9. Summary of the findings

9.1 Analysis of demographic data

The distribution of the respondents by their personal data is shown in this section. Data were analyzed using simple percentages. The data in Table 1 is used to show the gender of respondents.

Gender	Frequency	Percent (%)
Female	3	30
Male	7	70
Total	**10**	**100**

Table 1: Distribution of the respondents by gender

From Table 1, it could be seen that majority 7(70%) of the respondents are males while females are 3(30%). This means that more male school librarians participated in the study than their counter parts.

Age (Years)	Frequency	Percent (%)
21-30	0	0
31-40	5	50
41-50	3	40
50 and above	2	10
Total	**10**	**100**

Table 2: Distribution of the respondents by age

Table 2 shows that half of the respondents 5 (50%) fall within the age bracket of 31-40 years followed by respondents in the age bracket of 41-50 i.e. 4(40%) and 1 (10%) was the lowest. It can be attributed that most school librarians are youthful and not fresh from university.

Highest Level of Education	Frequency	Percent (%)
Masters	2	20
Bachelor's Degree	6	60
Others	2	20
Total	**10**	**100**

Table 3: Education attainment

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It could be seen from Table 3, that majority of the respondents 6 (60%) have a Bachelors' Degree qualification, also 4 (40%) of the respondents had masters and other qualifications. It is quite interesting to know from the data analyzed that majority of the school librarians have attained at least Bachelors' Degree and 20% have a Masters' Degree.

Use of Social Media	Frequency	Percent (%)
Yes	4	40
No	6	60
Total	**10**	**100**

Table 3: Usage of social media in promoting library services

The respondents were required to give a response on whether they used social media in promoting library services in their school libraries 6 (60%) indicated that they didn't use social media while 4 (40%) indicated that they used social media to promote the library services. This may be attributed to that fact that most of the schools don't allow students to access mobile phones while in school or lack the ICT infrastructure to access internet and social media platforms

Libraries that were using social media
For the school libraries that were using social media to promote the library services indicated that they promote new books using social media by presenting videos on ipads, giving talks about book reviews using the Quick Referencing Code and students are able to share them on their Facebook platforms.

Libraries that were not using social media
While the 6 (60%) who indicated they don't use social media when asked why they didn't use social media to promote their library services they indicated that**:**

- One of the librarians indicated that they were advocating for computers and internet services first before they can embark on using social media platforms to promote the library services. The respondent indicated that the school management included it in library budget for next year.

- Two of the respondents indicated that they plan to start using social media next term or next year since they have just been connected with internet this term.

- The research also found out according to one of the respondents that even though they would want to use social media, the library has a very limited budget to even purchase a computer for students to use.

- Furthermore, another respondent indicated that there is low appreciation of library in the school. The administration only thinks the library should have only books and therefore management buy in is a challenge.

- Lastly, one of the respondents confessed that he doesn't know how to use social media platforms and therefore he cannot sell it to management.

However, when asked whether they would want to use social media to promote their library services all the 6 respondents showed interest and noted that school libraries should shift from the traditional ways of doing things to new ways of engaging and attracting students to use the libraries.

9.2 Types of social media tools used

The study found out that 4 (40%) of the schools using social media were using facebook as the main social media tool for marketing library services to the students. This is mainly because it is popular with the students compared to other social media tools.

9.3 Benefits of using social media

Concerning the question on "*what are the benefits of using social media to market library services*", the respondents indicated the following;

Overall, the respondents indicated that social media was beneficial because students are able to discuss on facebook about interesting library activities they have engaged in, as well as enhancing reference services and promotion of library services.

Another benefit reported was the quick spread of information with communication and promotion; improved interaction between the librarians and students and also students could easily make their comments and suggestions.

Only one respondent indicated that it was not beneficial because students are not interested in library services but only use social media for chatting and networking with fellow students. This is contrary to the findings by Taylor & Francis (2014) who found out that social media increases engagement and interactions with library users and helps gather feedback to enhance user services. The promotion of library holdings via social media can help increase usage of content;

9.4 Challenges that hinder usage of social media in promoting library services:

Regarding the question on "*what are the challenges that hinder usage of social media in promoting library service*", the respondents indicated the following:

Majority of the respondents indicated that not every student will subscribe to a given social media platform either because they lack the gadgets and skills to access social media. Another reason that was indicated by the respondents was that the computers in schools are few and not accessed by all students at the same time and the restriction of time to access the computer laboratories. Therefore, there is need to increase on the library budget.

In addition, was the limitation associated with inadequate time since students are in class almost all the day, hence they have limited time to learn and explore the different social media platform,

Some of the librarians reported that they have limited time available to learn how to use the social media tools and inadequate ICT infrastructure to explore and implement other social media platforms. These were perceived to be developing very quickly, and library users might not be able to keep up today. They proposed that there is need to improve staff competitencies through training of new web technologies to enable them keep up with the pace and be up to date.

One of the respondents indicated that other library users will abuse the social media platform by posting irrelevant information which could impact other members negatively.

10. Conclusion

The findings of this study indicated that social media tools were not being used by a number of school libraries to promote library services. The benefits included the quick spread of information with communication and promotion; improved interaction between the librarians and students; and also students could easily make their comments and suggestions. Social media tools were perceived to be helpful in promoting library services and interacting with students. However, implementation of these tools by the library staff was found to be challenged by limited resources, management buy-in and nature of education system, conservativeness and inadequacy of the staff to keep pace with the development of technology.

A number of the libraries which have not been using these tools, indicated plans to adopt them in the near future, depending on financial and ICT resources available. The phenomenon of social media is evolving at a rapid pace and therefore, school libraries have to embrace it to attract its clientele and promote the library services. Findings of this study suggests that staff competencies and increasing library budget need to be addressed in order to encourage libraries to take advantage of benefits offered by these web technologies.

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