Winter 12-11-2020

Enhanced Library Services Through Social Media in the Age of Covid-19 Pandemic: An Anecdote of Academic Libraries in Zambia

Pailet Chewe
University of Zambia, pchewe@unza.zm

Zachary Zulu Mr.
Zac.zulu@unza.zm

Eness M. Chitumbo Mrs
echitumbo@unza.zm

Yolam Musonda Mr.
yolammusonda@gmail.com

Introduction

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) has considerably transformed the modus operandi of academic libraries globally. With social distancing, lockdowns and quarantining now part of the new normal, academic libraries are now operating on a largely digital and therefore remote basis. Owing to this paradigm shift in the library landscape, academic libraries in Zambia are increasingly incorporating social media for enhanced service delivery.

By definition, social media refers to a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010). They include a variety of applications, including collaborative projects, content communities, and micro-blogs/blogs. Twitter; social networking sites and virtual worlds.

Adigun, Adegbore and Amuda (2015) believe social media is a term that encompasses all Web 2.0 and social networking tools that enable content creation, sharing, discovering and exchange of user-generated content, with the main focus on their participatory nature. Bradley (2015), posits that as social media increasingly becomes a strategic resource for university education, its adoption and use is no longer a luxury, but a necessity for academic libraries. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) believe that since the inception of social media technology, many corporations and institutions have adopted and applied it successfully, displaying the power of these

applications to lead to remarkable outcomes. In this changing library landscape, using social media in the library effectively enables librarians to connect with users in a space that they already occupy, while bringing added value to existing activities.

Social media enable libraries to gain a broad reach in the digital world – even beyond their usual user communities. This is because social media affords the library the opportunity to connect with users in a space they already occupy and bring value addition to existing activities. Events are planned and promoted; discussion groups are formed; products are advertised, sold and reviewed; our own cognitive biases are reinforced as we read and share news and information within our filter bubbles of likeminded friends.

Therefore, how can academic libraries make the best use of these tools; while avoiding their downsides in this era of COVID-19 pandemic? Thus as social media tools such Facebook, Blogging, WhatsApp, Twitter and others permeate all fabrics of human life, many sections of society including libraries have moved into cyberspace.

Thus, academic libraries in Zambia could also leverage on these platforms to enhance service delivery. Despite the growing mass of literature on social media adoption and use in academic libraries globally, there is a deficiency of research in Zambia on this emerging subject. To date no comprehensive study has explored social media adoption and usage practices at both UNZA and MU libraries in the COVID-19 pandemic era. This paper sought to address this knowledge gap in these two selected academic libraries in Zambia.

Purpose and objectives
This study explored how top academic libraries in Zambia can harness social media to enhance library services, boost audience engagement and create a community of users in the era of COVID-19 pandemic. Specific objectives were to:
1. Ascertain the extent of awareness and usage level of social media among academic librarians,
2. Determine the perceived benefits of social media in library service delivery,
3. Identify **p**erceived opportunities and challenges of social media and
4. Investigate librarians' readiness to support social media adoption for service delivery.

Review of Literature

A number of studies have been conducted on the adoption and use of social media for service delivery in academic libraries. Most of the studies have shown that academic libraries globally are increasingly adopting a multiplicity of social media apps to design services that allow them to enhance their communication, interaction and collaboration as acknowledged by (Tripathi & Kumar, 2010; Onuoha, 2013).

Qualman (2012), states that as a platform which engages millions of users in cyberspace, allowing rapid information flow in various forms and directions, social media can be powerful information dissemination tools and offer a way for academic libraries to promote their activities, resources and services while offering the opportunity to engage with patrons innovatively. social media can also serve as an avenue to develop a closer relationship between libraries and their clientele as it facilitates a two-way communication between two or more parties (Taylor & Francis, 2014).

Adewoyin, Onuoha and Ikonne (2017) examined the influence of social media use on library service delivery by librarians in the Federal Universities in South-West, Nigeria. The study revealed that the extent of use of social media tools for library services was generally low. Findings also showed that the most popular social media tool used was Facebook, followed by WhatsApp, You-tube and Instant Message. Similarly, Omeluzor, Oyovwe-Tinuoye and Abayomi (2016) investigated librarians' use of social media in academic libraries in South-East, Nigeria. Results show that service delivery via social media was being inhibited by erratic power supply, inadequate skills, technophobia, lack of awareness, insufficient bandwidth, apathy in using modern technologies and lack of internet connection.

Proper integration of social media in the provision of library and information services proffers benefits to academic libraries. Chinese academic librarians opine that the values that social media has added to their services include increased library's relevance to community of users, improved library's brand; facilitated rich, collaborative, quick and convenient services; facilitated prompt feedback to patrons' queries; enabled them to draw collective knowledge to serve users better and enhanced knowledge sharing (Cao, 2009).

Despite the great opportunities that social media holds for academic libraries, research indicates that there are many challenges that hinder its efficacious implementation. For instance, Chu and Du (2013) state that most university librarians in Asia, North America, and Europe have positive perceptions on the usefulness of social networking Tools. Taylor and Francis (2014) believe that technological infrastructure is one of the barriers that hinder the implementation of social media in academic libraries.

Based on the literature review, it can be established that academic libraries, utilise social media for marketing, dissemination of information, reference services, and communication with users and to answer student queries. In addition, low adoption was attributed to inadequate training of library staff in social media use, poor ICT infrastructure, and the preference for traditional methods of service delivery by some academic librarians; a mismatch in terms of what is offered by the library; and what is preferred by the patrons.

Methodology

The study employed a survey research design in which an online questionnaire was the main data collection tool. Population of this study was the entire academic librarians with a Master's degree and above. This study population was distributed as follows: 18 respondents were drawn from UNZA Library while 4 were from Mulungushi University Library. The two study institutions were purposively selected. The choice of the study sample was premised on the assumption that respondents with a master's degree and above were deemed to have a deeper theoretical grounding and therefore a better understanding of social media and their relevance to library service delivery. Data analysis was done via a statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) to generate percentages, tables and graphs while data from open ended questionnaires was analysed through content analysis.

Key findings and discussions

The study results are presented and discussed according to the four main objectives: Extent of adoption and usage practices of social media platforms, perceived benefits of social media, factors influencing adoption of social media and librarians' readiness to support social media adoption. All the 22 questionnaires sent out were returned representing a response rate of 100%.
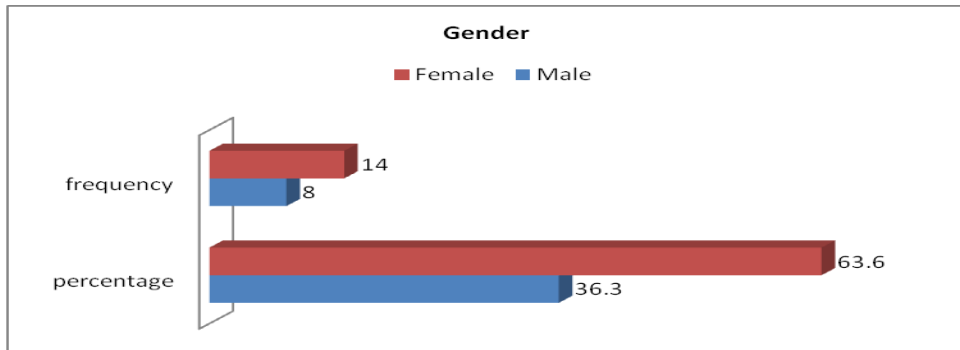
Demographics of respondents: Gender

Fig.1: Gender of participants (n=22)

Of the 22 respondents, 14 (63.6%) of them were female and 8 (36.3%) were male. Clearly there were more women participants than male. This means that there are more female academic librarians compared to the male counterparts at both UNZA and Mulungushi University libraries
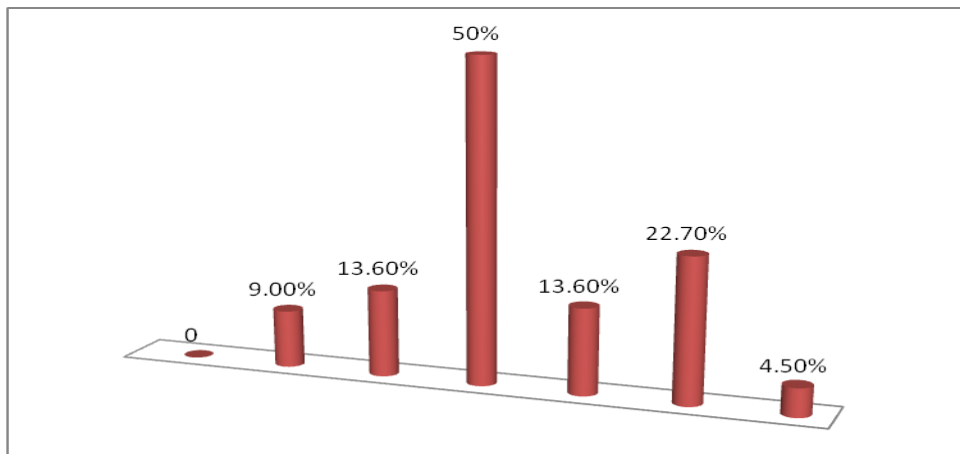

Fig.1: Age cohort (n=22)

With regard to the age cohort, majority 11 (50%) were aged between 31and 40, 5 (22.7%) were aged between 41-50, 3 (13.6%) were aged between 26 and 30, , 2 (9.0%) were above 51 years while 1 respondent (4.5%) was below 25 years old. With regard to educational qualification, all the 22 (100.0%) respondents had a master's degree in Library and Information science (LIS). Awareness of social media apps

Table 1: Awareness of social media

Awareness of social media tools	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	22	100%
No	0	0
Total	22	100%

Table 1 above shows that all the 22 respondents were aware of social media prior to this study. This finding agrees with a study by Adewoyin, Onuoha & Ikonne (2017) who found that academic librarians showed a high level of social media awareness and use. This result is an indicator that social media platforms have permeated almost all activities in libraries.

Most popular social media apps

The objective was to know the most popular social media platforms being used by academic librarians.

Table 2: Most popular social media tools

Social Media type	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency of use
WhatsApp	22	100.0%	Daily
YouTube	18	81.8%	Almost daily
Face book	20	86.3%	Daily
Instagram	1	4.5%	Rarely
Wikis	1	4.5%	Rarely
Blogs	1	4.5%	Rarely
Twitter	1	4.5%	Rarely

From all the above listed social media tools in table 2, 22(100%) of respondents were on WhatsApp, 20(86.3%) were using Facebook, and 18(62.5%) were using YouTube. There was minimal (n=1, 4.5%) usage of Blogs, Wikis, Instagram and Twitter. This finding is contrary to that of Draper and Turnage (2008) who found that Blogs were mostly used by library staff in promoting library services.

It is clear from the results that respondents often make use of WhatsApp and Facebook everyday which had the highest score of 22 (100%) and 20(86.3%) respectively. This finding collaborated with that of Priolkar and Kumbhar (2015) who reported that library professionals mostly use Facebook in disseminating information.

From the foregoing, it is clear that academic librarians can meaningfully use social media platforms that they were already acquainted with to innovatively deliver library services to clients.

Having noted that most academic librarians are on social media platforms, the research sought to find out the motivation or purpose for using these tools. The results in table 3 below indicate that 19 (86.3%) of the respondents use Face book to engage with friends and family members, 22 (100%) use WhatsApp for chatting and communication, 18 (%) use YouTube for entertainment and video streaming while 4.5% use Wikis and other tools for keeping abreast with current news and information sharing and searching. It is clear from the results that despite the high use of these tools by academic librarians, their application for work related purposes was nonexistent.

Table 3: Purpose for using social media

Social media	Purpose	Frequency	Percentage
YouTube	Entertainment & video streaming	18	81.8%
Face book	Chatting with friends & family members	19	86.3%
Wikis	Information searching	1	4.5%
WhatsApp	Chatting & official communication	22	100%
Other apps	Personal/private use	1	4.5%

The results in table 3 above indicate that 86.3% of the respondents use Face book to engage with friends and family members, 100% use WhatsApp for chatting and communication, 100% use YouTube for entertainment and video streaming while 4.5% use other forms of social media platforms for keeping abreast with current news and information searching. It is clear from the results that despite the high use of these tools by academic librarians, their application for work related purposes was nonexistent. It is obvious that the higher number of respondents is on social media platforms for leisure and communication.

These results are not surprising because Olasina (2011) notes that social media apps such as YouTube are powerful tools for entertainment amongst individuals. However, since the results further show that librarians are not utilizing these tools for work related activities, they are therefore challenged to take advantage of this opportunity and start using these tools to reach out to their users in library service delivery.

However, since the results further show that librarians are not utilizing these tools for work related activities, they are therefore challenged to take advantage of this opportunity and start engaging with library patrons via social media in this era of COVID-19 pandemic for enhanced service delivery.

Perceived benefits of social media

In order to find out how academic libraries in Zambia could profit from using social media, the respondents were asked if their libraries could gain from these platforms. The results show that 80.3% of the respondents were of the view that using social media would be beneficial to both librarians and the patrons, 5.6% felt that there were no benefits, while 1.1% did not respond. This implies that participants had different opinions as to whether libraries could benefit from using social media or not. However, it is encouraging to note that majority (80.3%) reckoned that the use of social media could benefit their libraries.

A follow up question was posed to the respondents on how the adoption of social media could benefit their libraries. Table 4 below shows that 5 (22.7%) noted that libraries could gain credibility as providers of digital services, 4 (18.1%) indicated that social media could promote outreach to the community, 4 (18.1%) noted that use of social media would enhance direct communication with users, 4 (18.1%) mentioned social media would trigger a positive image transfer to the public, 3 (13.6%) indicated that social media is likely to raise the libraries' level of awareness and visibility and 2 (9.0%) were of the view that it was likely to minimize the impact of limited space in my library. These findings are in agreement with the finding from Chu and Du (2013) found that most university librarians in Asia, North America, and Europe have positive perceptions on the usefulness of social networking tools. However, reluctance amongst

some librarians and limited participation from patrons were the professed hindrances to the usage of social networking tools in those university libraries.

Table 4: How Social Media benefit academic libraries

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Credibility as a provider of digital services	5	22.7%
A tool for outreach	4	18.1%
Enable direct communication with users	4	18.1%
Trigger positive image transfer	4	18.1%
Raise the libraries' level of awareness and visibility	3	13.6%
Expected to minimize the effect of limited library space	2	9.0%

Perceived challenges of social media

This objective sought to find out the potential challenges that academic librarians were likely to encounter in the process of adopting social media. According to the findings of the study in figure 2 below, a majority of 81.8% cited lack of social media literacy skills as the number one challenge. The next most significant challenge was network problem, poor connection, and low bandwidth (59.0%). This was followed by lack of a clear policy on social media at implementation stage (50%), negativity toward social media by academic librarians (45.4%) and too many social media platforms on the market (36.3%). 3 (13.6%) of the respondents indicated that use of social media was time consuming. These findings generally collaborate those of Ezeani and Igwesi (2012) who concluded that lack of bandwidth constrains, lack of training of staff, inadequate ICT facilities in the library, poor internet access, lack of ICT skills and lack of personal knowledge to mention but a few are some of the challenges hampering the effective use of social media.
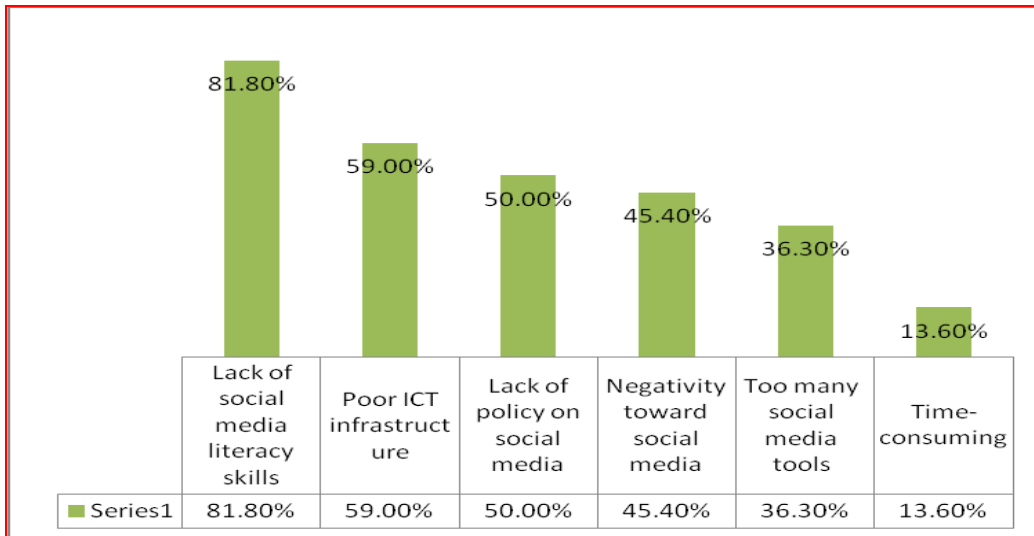
Fig. 2: Perceived challenges

Perception on how social media can enhance service delivery in the era of COVID-19 pandemic.

An open ended question solicited views from respondents on how library services can be enhanced through social media. Below are some of the key responses:

- 9 respondents claimed that social media has the potential to facilitate online services via Facebook 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.
- 7 mentioned that libraries can create social media links such as facebook page on the library website. Such platforms would allow interaction between the library and users.
- 7 were of the view that libraries need to come up with a social media strategy so that the apps can be adopted in a phased manner.
- 11 respondents called for sensitization campaigns, workshops and tailor made training to both librarians and users on the use of social media in information provision.

The general premise from these comments is that use of social media for service delivery in age of the global pandemic can yield more benefits for both the library staff and library users if well implemented.

Librarians' readiness to support social media adoption

When asked about their readiness and willingness to support the adoption of social media for service delivery, 17 respondents affirmed their readiness and willingness to support this progressive initiative, while 3 were not willing and 2 did not answer. These results therefore are an indication that adoption of social media in library service delivery would be embraced since majority of the respondents were in support of it and were already using the platforms.

When prodded to provide their candid opinions regarding the viability of social media for library service delivery, a majority, 19 of the 22 respondents were of the view that social media use was viable, but libraries should approach the issue cautiously in order to avoid problems in future. When further probed to indicate which social media platforms they would prefer for engagement with users, Facebook (91%) and WhatsApp (82%) were the most proffered tools.

Conclusion and recommendations

This paper explored the potential of social media as a tool for enhancing library services in the age COVID-19 pandemic in two academic libraries in Zambia. The study has found that while the use of social media for personal purposes was very high, the application of these platforms to facilitate service delivery was nonexistent. Challenges such as lack of social media literacy skills and poor technological infrastructure were critical success factors that need to be addressed if utmost benefit is to be derived from these platforms once adopted.

In view of the Covid-19 pandemic and the need for libraries to properly adopt social media tools for effective library services, the authors recommend that Library managements need to:

- Provide support to mobilize librarians into a more proactive and participatory role in creating social media presence.
- Enhance and upgrade social media literacy skills of academic librarians.
- Design a social media strategy which would guide a smooth adoption and use of social media.

References

Adewoyin, O. O., Onuoha, U. D., & Ikonne, C. N. (2017). Social Media Use and Service Delivery by Librarians in Federal Universities in South-West, Nigeria. Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal). 1641. Retrieved from https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/1641

Adigun, G. O., Adegbore, A. M., & Amuda, H. O. (2018). The Social library: integrating social networking into library reference services. In *Library Science and Administration: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications* (pp. 697-712). IGI Global. Retrieved from

Bradley F., (2016). A World with universal literacy: The role of libraries and access to information in the UN 2030 Agenda. IFLA Journal, 42(2): 118-125. DOI:10.1177/0340035216647393

Burkhardt, A. (2010). Social media: A guide for college and university libraries. College & Research Libraries News. Retrieved from https://crln.acrl.org/index.php/crlnews/article/view/8302/8391

Cao, D. (2009). Chinese Library 2.0: Status and Development. *Chinese Librariaship: An International Electronic Journal, 27*. Retrieved from www.iclc.us/cliej/cl27cao.htm

Carr, C.T. & Hayes, R.A. (2015). Social Media: Defining, Developing, and Divining, Atlantic Journal of Communication, 23:1, 46-65, DOI: 10.1080/15456870.2015.972282

Chu, S.K.W.& Du, H.S. (2013). Social networking tools for academic libraries. Journal of Librarianship and Information Science,45(1), 64-75. https://doi.org/10.1177/0961000611434361.

Draper, L. & Turnage, M. (2008) Blogmania, Internet Reference Services Quarterly, 13:1, 15-55, DOI: 10.1300/J136v13n01_02

Ezeani, Chinwe Nwogo and Igwesi, Uzoamaka, "Using Social Media for Dynamic Library Service Delivery: The Nigeria Experience" (2012). Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal). 814. Retrieved from https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/814

Howard, H. A. (2018). Academic Libraries on Social Media: Finding the Students and the Information They Want. *Information Technology and Libraries*, *37*(1), 8–18. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.6017/ital.v37i1.10160

Kaplan, A.M. & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite!: The challenges and opportunities of social media. Business Horizons53, 59-68.http://doi:10.1016/j.bushor.2009.09.003

Mabweazara, R. M. (2014). Use of social media tools by library staff at the University of the Western Cape, South Africa and the National University of Science and Technology, Zimbabwe. [Masters dissertation, University of University of the Western Cape]. Retrieved from http://etd.uwc.ac.za/xmlui/handle/11394/4120

Olasina, G. (2011). The use of Web 2.0 tools and social networking sites by librarians, information professionals, and other professionals in workplaces in Nigeria. PNLA Quarterly, 75(3), 11-39. Retrieved from https://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C5&q=The+use+of+Web+2.0+tools+and+social+networking+sites+by+librarians%2C+%09information+professionals%2C+and+other+professionals+in+workplaces+in+Nigeria&btnG=

Omeluzor, S. U., Oyovwe-Tinuoye, G. O., & Abayomi, I. (2016). Social networking tools in library service delivery: The case of academic libraries in South-East Zone of Nigeria. *DESIDOC Journal of Library & Information Technology*, *36*(5). DOI: 10.14429/djlit.36.5.10174

Priolkar, S.A. & Kumbhar, S.S. (2014). Use of social networking sites by library professional in the institute Libraries: A study. Paper presented at Application of Information Technology in Library and Information Sciences conference, BVU AKIMSS, Solapur.https://doi.org/10.13140/2.1.4994.6401

Quadri, G. O., & Adebayo Idowu, O. (2016). Social media use by librarians for information dissemination in three federal university libraries in Southwest Nigeria. *Journal of Library & Information Services in Distance Learning*, *10*(1-2), 30-40.

Qualman, E. (2012). *Socialnomics: How social media transforms the way we live and do business*. John Wiley & Sons.

Social media and academic libraries: Current trends and future challenges. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/259540329_Social_media_and_academic_libraries_Current_trends_and_future_challenges

Taylor & Francis. (2014). Use of social media by the library: Current practices and future opportunities. Retrieved from http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/access/white-paper-social-media.pdf

Tripathi, M., & Kumar, S. (2010). Use of Web 2.0 tools in academic libraries: A reconnaissance of the international landscape. The International Information & Library Review, 42(3), 195-207. Retrieved from https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1057231710000445