



Social media Tools for Library service delivery in Higher learning Institutions: Case of University of Zambia and National Institute of Public Administration Libraries

Chitumbo E.M.M and Chewe P.

University of Zambia Library, P.O. Box 32379, Lusaka, ZAMBIA

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Abstract

This research paper investigated how social media tools (SMTs) can be leveraged to market library services by libraries in higher learning institutions. Questionnaires and interview guides were used in the data collection process from two academic libraries in Zambia, namely; the University of Zambia (UNZA) and National Institute of Public Administration (NIPA) Libraries. Data analysis was done using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) and content analysis. Findings indicate that both librarians and students only used social media for social networking purpose. The study further noted that there were a number of potential challenges such as limited Internet access points, poor Internet connectivity and Lack of awareness of some exiting SMTs by most librarians and users. These need to be resolved for the use of SMTs to be successful. However, nearly all the participants acknowledge the value in using SMTs in library service delivery and hence supported its adoption.

Keywords: Social Media Tools, academic libraries, UNZA Library, NIPA Library, Zambia.

Introduction

Currently, it has become a trend by libraries to use Social Media Tools (SMTs) to market their programs and services. They also use SMTs to connect and engage with their communities beyond the library walls. For instance, a study by Hamade has shown that SMTs have increased in usage, especially among the 21st century generation. Social media tools also known as social networking sites (SNS) can be understood to be Internet, computer or mobile applications that allow people to interact with one another. People can create, exchange knowledge and ideas, which can either, be in written or picture/video form. Common examples of such tools would include Flickr and Instagram (photo sharing), Facebook, Hi5, WhatsApp and LinkedIn (mainly used for social and business networking), YouTube (video sharing), Twitter (news and information sharing), blogs, etc¹.

In their study, Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe established that SMTs allow individuals to be visible to others and could therefore be used to keep relationships. Facebook for example, allows users to create online profiles, which are visible to others. Members join virtual groups based on their common interests, share information on common issues, and also learn more about each other's interests, hobbies, and relationship status through viewing individual profiles².

Today, social media has become a catalyst in reshaping the manner in which individuals and organizations do their businesses, collaborate or communicate and create relationships

with colleagues, peers and prospective audiences. Social media has also become an increasingly familiar tool employed in academic libraries to promote services and highlight resources to current and prospective patrons. As libraries yearn to remain relevant to the contemporary audiences, social media is viewed as an important tool for enticing and retaining patrons who are already familiar with and immersed into the social media world. In addition to marketing, the simple act of having conversations and creating relationships with patrons is immensely useful. Through conversations on social media, libraries can gain insights into what their users want and need and ultimately understand their users' better³.

Following this development, numerous efforts have been made particularly to understand the use of social media in library service delivery and how it can elevate the quality of learning in higher learning institutions. SM has been identified as one of the tools in promoting library services to existing as well as the "would be" library users. It has helped in reshaping the manner in which institutions and organisations operate and interact with their clients. Apparently, efforts have been made in developed countries such as the USA to promote the use of SMTs in academic libraries. Very little or limited research and effort has been done in the developing world such as Zambia to bring on board the use of SMTs among librarians and students in higher learning institutions.

Focusing on UNZA and NIPA Libraries, this study aimed at exploring strategies on how Libraries can exploit social media tools in the promotion of academic information provision and

sharing. The study further identified potential challenges in the process of introducing SMTs and ways through which such challenges can be dealt with.

Literature Review: As quoted earlier on, Hamade noted that from the time SMTs (such as Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, and MySpace) have attracted a lot of users from all walks of life. He further observed that researchers and scholars from different fields have investigated the use of these SNS among many segments of the population, especially among the young generations such as school and university students, in order to understand the practices, implications, and importance of these sites¹.

An exploratory study by Ogonnaya and Mji of how university students from two South African universities have adopted Facebook in their social life and academic pursuits found that majority of university students see Facebook as a tool for socializing and making friends and connecting with old friends while only a small percentage see it as a tool for their studies⁴. Another study by Kumar investigated the perception and use of SMTs among Sikkim University students. The study showed that a good number of university students use SNS for academic purposes in addition to entertainment. Facebook was the most used social networking site followed by Orkut and Twitter⁵.

Stieglitz, Brockmann and Xuan also sought to gain insight into the political communication based on social media in Germany by conducting an analysis of social media presence of German political parties on Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, and YouTube as well as a survey of members of the German parliament regarding their social media use. The study found that although there were obstacles to the usage of social media for political communication from the perspective of political institutions, social media tools were relevant to the current political dispensation in Germany and therefore their usage needed to be promoted⁶. Bosch further explored student use of Facebook at the University of Cape Town, as well as lecturer engagement with students via the new social media. His findings indicated that while there were potential positive benefits on using Facebook in teaching and learning, particularly for the development of educational micro-communities, certain challenges, including ICT literacy and uneven access, remained pertinent⁷.

Use of SMTs in libraries: Collins and Quan-Haase examined the ubiquity of social media through a longitudinal study of the adoption rates and usage patterns of Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Flickr at academic libraries in the Canadian province of Ontario. The findings showed that large discrepancies exist in adoption rates across libraries, with two-thirds of Ontario academic libraries maintaining at least one social media application during the period of examination. Despite its low adoption rate and usage, YouTube was by far the most effective means of reaching patrons. The study concluded

by examining the implications of engaging with patrons via social media in ways that are effective, engaging, and meaningful⁸.

Chu and Du in their investigation of SMTs use in 140 university libraries from Asia, North America and Europe revealed that Facebook and Twitter were the most used tools. Most library staff had positive opinions on the usefulness of social networking tools, but hesitancy among library staff and limited participation of users (i.e. students) were barriers to usage. This study offers insights for academic librarians to make informed decisions in applying Social Networking tools⁹. Further, a study by Mundt evaluated the marketing success of libraries' social media presences. Findings revealed that Social Media was used to market library. However, of all Social Media tools, Facebook was the platform most libraries used. The study further identified barriers to Social Media utilization as lack of staff resources or competence, privacy issues and a general hesitation about the potential benefits of social media, and lack of Social Media policies. Less than one third of the libraries have developed and implemented Social Media policies¹⁰.

In 2012, Ezeani and Igwesi examined how Nigerian libraries can leverage on social media and social media skills to provide dynamic library services. The authors acknowledged that social media provide important opportunities to libraries. Librarians can use these platforms for marketing library and information services. The study identified the challenges faced by Nigerian libraries in the use of Social Media as: lack of awareness of Social Media, lack of trained staff, lack of Government intervention, bandwidth problem, technophobia, and unreliable power supply¹¹.

Methodology

This study combined both quantitative and qualitative methods. Data collection from the field involved the use of self-administered questionnaires and interview guide. The aim of adopting this research approach was for the purpose of gathering in-depth insights and experiences into the research as well as capturing information not captured by the other research method. Before the research instruments were used, they were pilot-tested on a small group of students and Library staff in order to identify weaknesses and any biases or ambiguity on terms used.

A randomly selected sample population of 30 Library staff and 100 students from UNZA and NIPA were used for this research. Out of the 30 members of staff, 27 were from UNZA and 3 were from NIPA. Out of the 100 students used, 60 were from UNZA and 40 were from NIPA. For interviews, 2 Librarians, one from UNZA and the other one from NIPA were interviewed. Data analysis for closed ended questions of the questionnaires was done using SPSS while open ended questions and responses from interview guides was done by content analysis.

Results and Discussion

Research findings and discussion: The target sample for the study to the questionnaires was 130 (100 students and 30 library staff), out of which 124 answered and returned the questionnaires, giving us a response rate of 95%. This indicates good response and hence general stable. Out of the 124 respondents, 94 were students and 30 Library staff. Age: 9 (7%) were below 20 years, 73 (59%) between 21-30 years, 24 (19%) between 31-40 and 18 (15%) were above 40 years. Sex: 62 (50%) were males and 57 (46%) were females and 5 (4%) did not indicate their age.

For interviews, 2 Librarians were interviewed one from NIPA and the other one from UNZA.

Awareness and use of social media tools in library service delivery: In terms of awareness of SMTs, 117 (94%) indicated that they were aware of Facebook while 7 (6%) were not aware of it, 49 (89.5%) stated awareness of MySpace while 75 (60.5%) expressed ignorance of it, or, 100 (81%) were aware of Twitter while 24 (19%) were not, 23 (18.5%) were aware of Hi5 while 101 (81%) were not. Further, 45 (36%) indicated that they were aware of LinkedIn while 79 (64%) were not, 34 (27%) were aware of Flickr whilst 90 (73%) were not, 95 (77%) were aware of YouTube while 29 (23%) were not. Responses are recorded in figure-1.

Other SMTs respondents were aware of included Delicious, Skype, Twoo, Netlog, Instagram, Whats App, Eskimi, Mxit, 2go, Black Berry Messenger (BBM) and Badoo.

The study further sought to know if the respondents used the SMTs they claimed to be aware of or not. The results showed that 103 (83%) used SMTs, 19(15%) did not and 2 (2%) did not respond. The 94 students that took part in the questionnaire where asked to indicate whether they used SMTs in their academic work or not, 66 indicated that they do use SMTs for academic purposes while 22 did not and 2 did not respond. For responses, refer to table-1.

Meanwhile out of the 30 members of staff, 3 indicated that they used SMTs in delivering library services to users while 27 said they do not. Responses from interviews also showed that librarians were not using SMTs in providing information to their clients.

The assumption based on these results could be that since the majority of students are already using SMTs to access academic information, adding another factor of accessing library information from the same sites would be well received. However, since the results further show that librarians are not utilizing these tools, they are therefore challenged to take advantage of this opportunity and start using these tools to reach out to their information users in library service promotion and delivery. Speaking to the same idea, Kim and Abbas suggest that libraries have taken for granted the actual level of technological understanding and sophistication of their users, particularly those who are classed as Millennials¹². The only difference is that they further found that librarians were often more interested in the library's social media applications than students, a case opposite to ours.

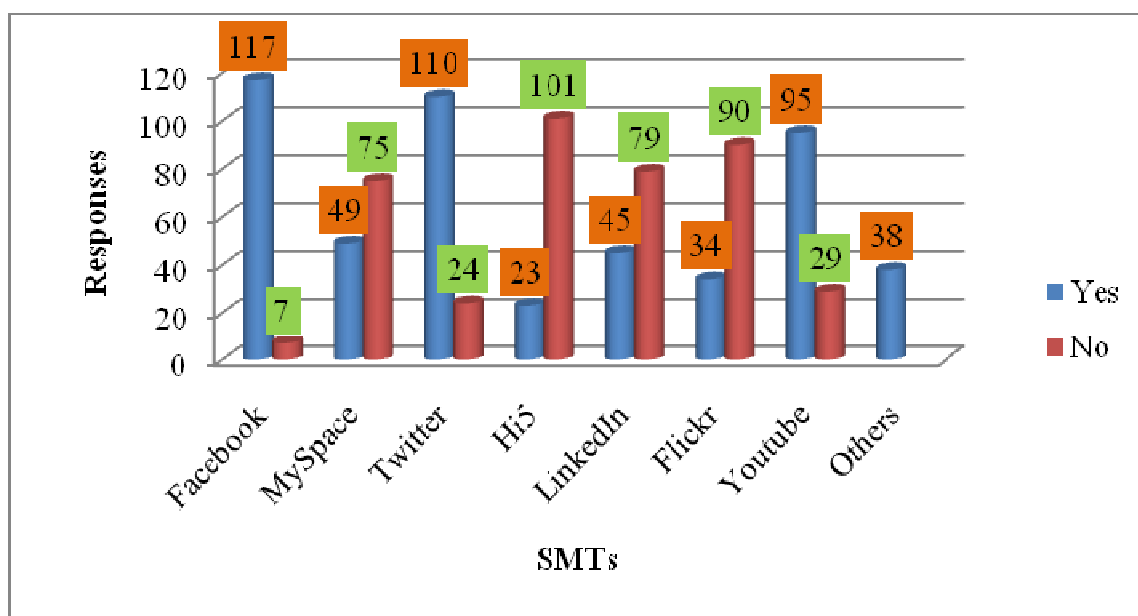


Figure-1
 Awareness of SMTs

Table-1
If respondents used social media tools

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	103	83.1	84.4	84.4
	No	19	15.3	15.6	100.0
	Total	122	98.4	100.0	-
Missing	System	2	1.6	-	-
Total		124	100.0	100	100

In order of priority, the following SMTs were recommended: Facebook (63 respondents), Twitter (49), YouTube (37), LinkedIn (13) and MySpace with 9 respondents.

The results of this research give us a greater advantage of exploiting these tools because our target group is already engaged with the same tools. It is however important that as libraries contemplate on adopting/implementing SMTs in their service delivery they need to start with what the “would be users” (respondents) have recommended and are already comfortable with.

Benefits of using social media in higher learning institutional libraries: With regard to benefits of using SMTs in libraries, 118 (95%) respondents said there are benefits while 4(3%) said they did not and 2(3%) did not say anything. The two key informants (Institutional Librarians) stated that there were benefits in using SMTs. They both noted that because SMTs would provide a platform that is already popular among students, it would be easier for libraries to reach out to their users. SMTs would further help the libraries to quickly know what users want through interacting with them figure-2.

From a list of benefits on the questionnaire, 120 respondents felt that SMTs would improve marketing of available information resources, 92 said SMTs would promote newly acquired materials, 88 felt that SMTs would improve staff response to reference queries. Sixty-two felt that SMTs were convenient, 92 stated that SMTs were quicker in service delivery and 102 showed that SMTs make it easier for the library to reach out to a wider audience. These results are presented in figure-3.

Meanwhile 17 respondents stated other benefits outside the list, which included the following: i. Provision of a wider range and current information such as global news updates. ii. Reaching out to a massive youth audience who are the major users of SMTs. iii. Easy access to information. iv. Cheaper way of disseminating information. v. Provision of interaction between the library and patrons. vi. Information sharing even outside school and library hours.

These findings show that most of the respondents (102) felt that the use of SMTs in libraries would improve marketing strategies

on the available information resources and that SMTs would make it easier for the library staff to reach a wider audience. These findings correspond with Belden who observed that using external sites like Wikipedia and MySpace was instrumental in promoting the digital collection¹³.

The findings further show that SMTs would lead to efficiency in service delivery. Hence, the adoption of SMTs would reduce the problem of inefficiencies library users face as they seek library resources.

How academic libraries can incorporate SMTs in providing information services to clients: i. Libraries should create social links/pages or blogs that would allow for interaction, marketing and accessing of library services. These tools would further allow students to access and share concerns and experiences on library services with one another. ii. Libraries should provide adequate Internet access points and provide students with accounts to ensure that they have all come on board. iii. Librarians should conduct sensitization/training programs to market the use of SMTs.

When asked if their library had a roadmap on incorporating SMTs in providing information to users, 30 respondents said no, 93 were not sure while 1 did not respond. Meanwhile 113 indicated that they would however support the idea of libraries using SMTs in service delivery, while 7 said they would not support it and 4 gave no response. Their responses are shown in figure-4.

The results from the interviews also showed that both key informants were in total support of SMTs adoption in library service provision. They however indicated that their institutions did not have formal roadmap per se but plans were under way. The Librarian from the University of Zambia revealed that consultations were going on with key stakeholders on how an institutional social media policy could be framed. NIPA Librarian said that the institution planned to create a Facebook page, which would be linked to the institutional website. This link would provide information on library services as well as a platform for students’ comments.

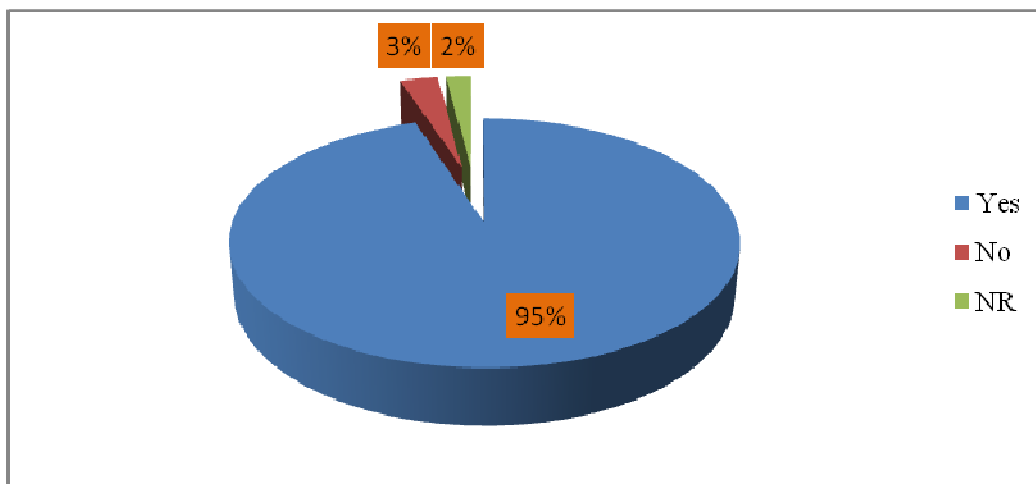


Figure-2
 Benefits of using SMTs

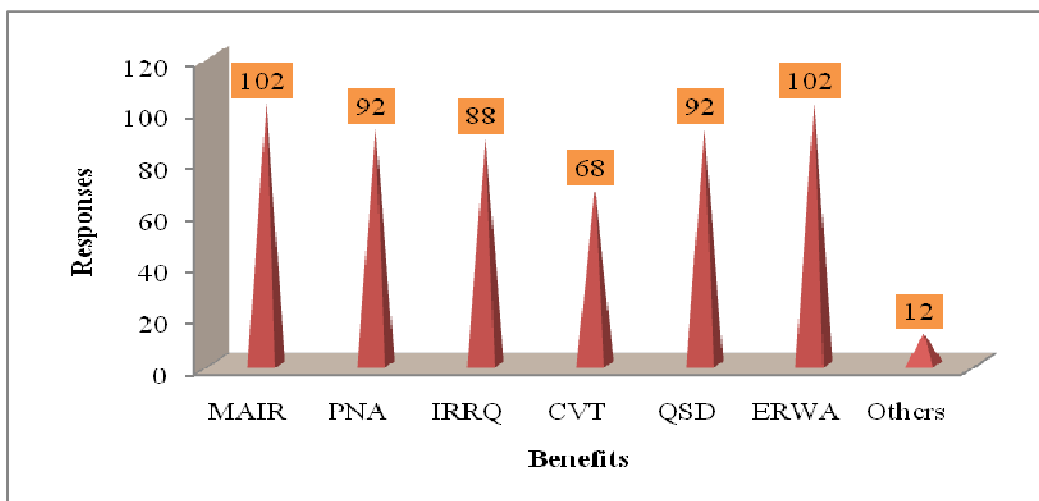


Figure-3
 Identified benefits of using SMTs

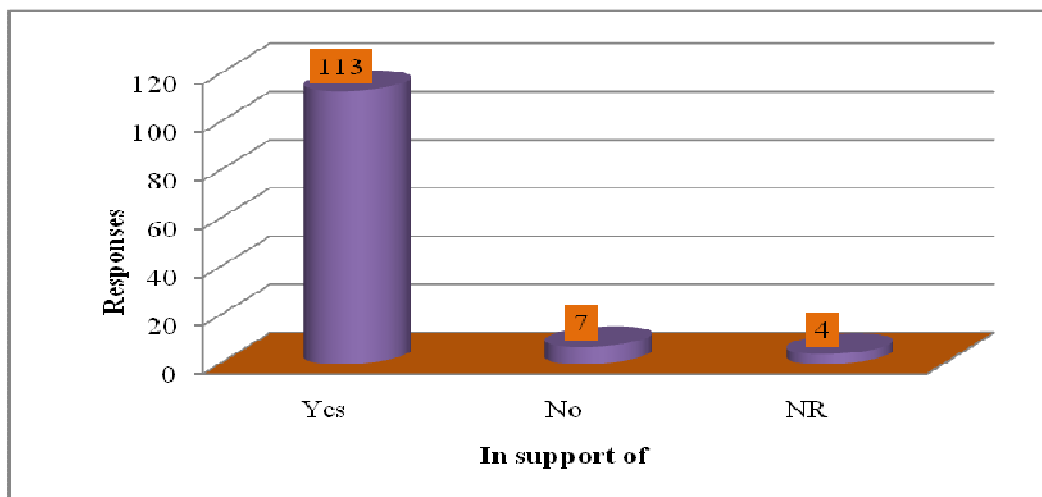


Figure-4
 In support of SMTs

These results therefore are an indication that adoption of SMTs in library service delivery would be accepted and used by many since the majority of the clients are in support of it and are already using it. It also encourages libraries to actively engage in the use of social media tools in marketing their services and reach impact many at a less cost.

Potential challenges: The study sought to establish likely challenges in the adoption of SMTs in libraries. The following were the responses collected from questionnaire respondents: i. Limited Internet access points, poor Internet connectivity and limited bandwidth. ii. Lack of awareness of the existing SMTs by most librarians and users. iii. No privacy and too many SMTs coming on. iv. Lack of a clear policy on SMTs at implementation stage. v. Shortage of staff and inadequate training opportunities.

One other interesting revelation from the study was that most students used their mobile phone to access the Internet. This is because of fewer institutional computers made available to them. As a result of this, scenario, downloading of bulky documents becomes a challenge. Reading and viewing of images becomes strenuous.

Strategies to Mitigate challenges: To mitigate the identified potential challenges, the study brought out the following strategies: i. Increase bandwidth, computer access points and wireless hot spots. ii. Conducting sensitization campaigns, workshops and training to both librarians and users on the use of social media in information provision. iii. Enactment of a social media policy. iv. Create a social media link on the institutional websites to promote their services. v. Identify a position of a social media librarian who would be dedicated to social media communication and services. vi. The government must also take an active role in providing ICT facilities to its institutions.

Implications of Social Media use in Libraries: It is important for librarians to understand that even if they do not wish to engage with social media in their personal lives, or in their professional sphere, they still need to be knowledgeable in SMTs. Responses to the survey indicate that there is considerable amount of experience and enthusiasm among library staff to engage with social media in order to deliver their library service in different ways, or reach different audiences, or try new communication methods. Results showed that Social media is integral to market library resources and services. It offers more than just traditional ways of marketing library services. It allows users to create, connect, converse, contribute, vote and share information. Social media is helpful in accessing information needs of online users and helps libraries to get closer to users.

Conclusion

The study established that more than 60% of students were not only aware of the existing SMTs but use them in their academic

work. Among the top five and highly recommended SMTs included Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn and MySpace. The study further revealed that more than 80% of the respondents appreciate the benefits of using SMTs and hence would support its adoption in their institutions. The study also identified a number of potential challenges such as limited Internet access points, poor Internet connectivity and lack of awareness of the existing SMTs by most librarians and users. To mitigate these challenges, the participants suggested an increase on Internet access points and improved connectivity; promote awareness through campaigns and re-skilling of library staff and students in SMTs. With these factors put in their right places, SMTs adoption in any institution would be a success.

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