SOCIAL MEDIA LITERACY FOR PATRONS IN THE INFORMATION AGE: A NEW ROLE FOR ACADEMIC LIBRARIANS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Social media tools such as blogs, wikis and social networking sites offer the promise of a more vibrant, social and participatory Internet with exciting services opportunities and challenges for academic librarians. Information professionals can capitalise on social media use tendencies of the 21st century dynamic user and engage them on the same platform. Librarians can lay a foundation for academic utilisation of social media by orientating users on the roles of attention, participation, collaboration, network awareness and critical consumption in social media. Moreover, Nigeria academic libraries are starved of some of the needed funds; librarians can capitalise on availability of social media and exploit it for effective service delivery in current awareness services, selected dissemination of information and knowledge sharing. The likely problem of technophobic librarians, teaching of curriculum not tailored to meet proliferation of digital technologies, and librarians with apathetic attitudes towards ICT were identified. Among the recommendations made are that, librarians should not wait for the government or employers to train them in ICT, they can self-finance basic training in ICT on part-time mode of study. Furthermore, library schools should continually review ICT courses offered to ensure it is applicable to librarianship to broaden the intellectual capacity and cognitive bandwidth of Librarians in training ICT wise, as the 21st century academic library users are dynamic in their use of ICT.

Keywords: Social media literacy; ICT literacy; Academic librarians; Nigeria

Introduction

The advents of social media concepts and tools have brought in a massive change in the process of library services. To bridge the gap between the user and the information many librarians and integrated library systems use these exciting tools. The rapid diffusion of social media applications is ushering in new possibilities in the academia. Any institution of learning that adopts cutting-edge social media technologies may open up great opportunities in teaching, learning and research. The library used to be the central source for the dissemination of all facts. However, the library as an institution is undergoing a significant identity crisis as technology impacts how people discover, process and use information. The major objective of the library is to enable the individual user to develop basic knowledge, skills and attitudes that are desirable for effective and efficient utilisation of the available information resources. Academic libraries are libraries that are integral part of tertiary institutions, administered to meet the information and research needs of its students, faculty, and staff. Further to this, the academic library supports the objectives of an academic environment in the areas of learning, teaching, research, and service, thereby supporting the educational objectives of the institution. The academic librarian performs administrative and academic functions in the areas of teaching, research and community service. However, in the 21st century the function of the library has been fairly effectively replaced by Smartphone and the Google search bar (Crompton & Boyd, n.d)

Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) define social media as a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0. Such applications allow users to interact freely, share and discuss information using a multimedia mix of personal words, pictures, video and audio. Similarly, Curtis (2011) opines that social media appear in many forms including blogs and microblogs, forums and message boards, social networks, wikis, virtual worlds, social bookmarking and video sharing. In addition, Rheingold (2010) avers that social media enable people to socialize, organize, learn, play, and engage in commerce. Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) expatiated further by classifying social media into six broad categories; blogs (e.g. twitter), collaborative projects (e.g. Wikipedia), social networking sites (e.g. Facebook), content communities (e.g. YouTube), virtual social worlds (e.g. Second Life), and virtual game worlds (e.g. World of Warcraft).

When it comes to social media, knowing how to post a picture, video or download a podcast is not enough. Access to many media empowers only those who know how to use them. We need to go beyond skills and technologies. We need to think in terms of literacies. And we need to expand our thinking of digital skills or information literacies to include social media literacies (Rheingold, 2010). Within the academe, among university faculty, librarians are uniquely situated with a strong foundation in information literacy to guide and instruct students in becoming critical consumers of social media. The library's role has expanded to include a curricular function of teaching research and technology skills that evolved as society developed new technologies. Herring (2011), noted Scottish authority on information literacy in schools, proposes that information literacy is "a critical and reflective ability to exploit the current information environment, and to adapt to new information environments" This definition focuses on the mindful use of information that is transmitted via all forms of past, present and future technology. Identifying the unique qualities of social media is challenging

since all media have a social element. Moreover, most social media integrate other forms of computer-mediated communication (Hogan and Quan-Haase, 2010). This speaks strongly for information and communication technology (ICT) literacy as being crucial to social media literacy. The International ICT literacy panel (2002) report that ICT literacy deals with using digital technology, communication tools, and/or networks to access, manage, integrate, evaluate, and create information in order to function in a knowledge society. ICT literacy can be regarded as quintessential in social media literacy.

Social media has different tools that enable fast connection and networking irrespective of the geographical location. In fact, in Nigeria, the use of social media is growing in importance among researchers, peers, colleague, professionals and the youth. People source information directly from their peers in a climate of trust through which suggestions and recommendations can be made. The availability and easy accessibility of direct connection through mobile phones make social media friendlier to use in sourcing or generating information or hosting research reports (Sokoya, et al., 2012).

Social Media in Education, Social Media Literacy and Academic Librarianship

In the last decade, a new learning environment has emerged due to the proliferation of Information and Communications Technologies, the emergence of social media, the convergence of technologies such as television, telecommunications, mobile and wireless technologies and computers. People are now using social media in their everyday lives and when students see materials, which use web tools such as wikis, podcasts, blogs, they are no longer taken aback, but are positive and believe these tools can help them to learn (Conole, de Laat, Dillon, & Darby, 2008; Carroll et al., 2012). Moreover, social media proves vital in generating streams of connections and interactions between people, interwoven with information, resources and digital artefacts on social networks. They have the potential to form a bridge between the informal and formal (Carroll, Kop, & Woodward, 2008; Carroll et al., 2012) to create a holistic learning experience (carroll et al., 2012).

Social media can be used to create connections that can bind local regions and span continents. These connections range from the trivial to the most valued, potent collaborations, relationships, and communities. Social media tools have been used successfully to create large-scale successful collaborative public projects like Wikipedia and scientific collaboration that accelerate research. The part that makes social media social is that technical skills need to be exercised in concert with others: encoding, decoding, and community. It became inevitable that librarians must learn the use of these tools to be able to keep their ever growing and sophisticated patrons. Libraries have started to use these tools to interact with their patrons on real time. In fact, given the present economic scenario in Nigeria, where library budgets have been constantly on the decline, the social media have become a means for serving our patrons in a more specialised, interactive, and value added way without incurring undue expenses. These media are used mostly to provide current and up to date information to clients, provide links to other open source library resources, give information about new arrivals in the case of books through the link to the library world cat and through the updated list of journals, selected dissemination of information through newsgroup function and sharing research output.

In addition, the previous top-bottom approach to service delivery where the library would pass information down to its patron without feedback will no longer suffice for our ever growing clients. Library users have been yearning to be a part of the services rendered to them, in essence being able to dictate what they need thereby making for a more interactive service delivery which will foster a two way communication pathway and provide the opportunity for more patrons involvement. Our current education system is very good at teaching content. Teaching intellectual skills is not as easy to assess and quantify as teaching content. Identifying the specific skills that are important to a vastly different world than the world that the teachers were educated in is even harder. In addition to dealing with what is taught, technology is having a significant impact on how we teach (Crompton & Boyd, n.d).

Anecdotal evidence reveals that, universities faculty and librarians in Nigeria does not face legal barriers and educational policies bottleneck when engaging students online. We can interact in virtual spaces with students at the tail-end of their teenage years. The first opportunity most students have to engage with instructors about social media sites from within the sites themselves. As earlier noted that among university faculty, librarians are uniquely situated with a strong foundation in information literacy to guide and instruct students in becoming critical consumers of social media (Bridges, 2012). With advancement in technology, however, librarians are also turning to social media to meet their professional needs (Martine, 2008; Ezeani, 2010; Olasina, 2011; Onuoha, 2013). Therefore, new competencies are required by information professionals in order to maintain relevancy and work effectively in a rapidly changing technology environment (Majid, 2004).
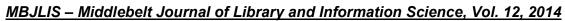
In higher institutions, librarians often rely on the Information Literacy Competency Standards developed by the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) when creating a framework for teaching information literacy (2000). According to the standards, an information literate student is able to:
• Determine the extent of information needed
• Access the needed information effectively and efficiently
• Evaluate information and its sources critically
• Incorporate selected information into one's knowledge base
• Use information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose
• Understand the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information, and access and use information ethically and legally

The need to expand our thinking of digital skills or information literacies to include social media literacies was mentioned earlier. Social media literacy can thus be viewed as a form of information literacy within almost any of the current definitions or frame-works of information literacy used by librarians (Bridges, 2012). Here, focus will be on five social media literacies that are considered important for academic utilisation of social media:
- Attention
- Participation
- Collaboration
- Network awareness
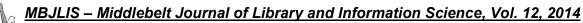- Critical consumption

(Jenkins, 2009; Rheingold, 2010)

Attention: Attention is the fundamental building block for how individuals think, how humans create tools and teach each other to use them, how groups socialize, and how people transform civilizations. It can be summed up as the ability to identify when focused attention is required and to recognize when multitasking is beneficial (Brigdes, 2012). So maybe it's simply that many students have not yet learned how to exercise their attention. Because of the attentional demands of wirelessly webbed always-on media, they need to learn to turn on the high-beam light of focused attention when necessary and recognize when it is truly beneficial to task-switch. It may be noted that, humans share highly evolved attentional mechanisms with other species, but humans are particularly distinguished by the way we use our attention and other cognitive faculties differently from all other creatures. Sometimes we need to be vigilant to information outside our focal area, and at other times, we need to block out distractions and narrow our attention to a spotlight (Rheingold, 2010). This shows the need to learn how to exercise mindful deployment of attention online if one intends to become a critical consumer of digital media; and tap into the array of available information.

Participation: There is something to be learned about how to participate in a way that is valuable to all connected users, participating, when you participate, you become an active citizen rather than simply a passive consumer of what is sold to you, what is taught to you, and what your government wants you to believe. This speaks to the importance of participation. The technologies that we have in our pockets today are powerful engines for participation. Computers are literally millions of times more powerful than what was available a couple decades ago, networked at speeds millions of times faster than the first online networks. Librarians can also create and author online, whether by customizing their Facebook page, MySpace page, or running a blog, or running a YouTube channel ((Lenhart and Madden, 2005). That does not mean, however, that all forms of participation are beneficial to the participant or others. Further to this, it may be a wrong assumption that the digital natives who are fluent in the use of social media simply because they carry laptops, they are never far from their phones, they are gamers, and as such know how to use technologies. Today's media enable people to inform, persuade, and influence the beliefs of others and, most important, help them to organize action on all scales. In doing so, people move from the literacy of participation to the literacy of collaboration. On a final note, the whole notion of participation is to make users more than consumers, participate actively, and to know when and how to participate.

Collaboration: Using the technologies and techniques of attention and participation allows people to work together collaboratively in ways that were too difficult or expensive to attempt before the advent of social media. Though collaboration has a slightly different definition from cooperation and collective action, in general doing things together gives us more power than doing things alone. There was an instance during the fuel subsidy removal on 1st January 2013, people collaborated on social media and staged a peaceful protest that yielded positive result. Implicit in the notion of collaboration is that users can achieve more by working together than when working alone. Social media is not just about conversations, it is also about collaboration with like minds. Social media collaboration enables academic librarians to tap into the expertise

of fellow librarians in other part of the world and give them the opportunity to explore new culture to improve and expand their services without huge financial cost (Hug and Puterbough, 2013). It is important to search a specific social media platform for pages and feeds from institutions similar to yours with regards to location or types. They might provide local content that maybe similar to what you need for your users. Hug and Puterbough, (2013) opined that Librarians can search for academic libraries and public libraries on twitter or Facebook to check areas of similarities. Libraries can also check some libraries blogs, so as to see areas where they can collaborate. Furthermore, librarians need to identify posts that match with their own social media goals by scanning their social media feeds to generate a list of posts that are applicable to what will be very useful for library users.

Network Awareness: Collaboration phases into network awareness, thus network awareness is a bit more complicated. Whereas we lived in an industrialized society in the 19th century and in an information society in the 20th century, we live in a networked society today in the 21st century. Of the many computer networks that have been developed, the most prominent and widespread is the Internet, a global network of networks that enables computers of all kinds to directly and transparently communicate throughout the world. This 'global network of networks' has been described as the 'Information Super-highway' or 'Infobahn' because it constitutes a shared global resource of knowledge, and means of collaboration and co-operation in diverse communities (the internet society, 2002 cited in Ajuwon, 2003). Social networks are an essential part of being human, but in the past, there were physical limitations on which people and how many people we could include in our network. Now, technological networks ranging from the telephone to the Internet have vastly expanded the number and the variety of the people we can contact. These networks multiply our innate human capacity for social networking, allowing us to contact people on the other side of the world in a matter of seconds.

Rheingold (2010) opines that people who post on blogs, Facebook and Twitter. They understand how small-world and long-tail networks function. They also understand the notions of reputation and diffuse reciprocity, which are increasingly important online. Both educators and learners use these notions to tune and feed their networks, to build their personal learning networks. Clearly, "network awareness" social media literacy gives a vivid understanding of social and technical networks.

However, when online, you have to decide which people you are going to allow into your attention sphere. Who is going to take up your mind, your space? Is the person trustworthy? Entertaining? Useful? An expert? Answering these questions leads to the final literacy: critical consumption.

Critical Consumption: Critical consumption is the literacy of trying to figure out what and who is trustworthy and what and who is not trustworthy online. However, Jenkins (2009) sees compelling dimension of this 21st-century skills and defined as the capacity to critically consume and produce technology-rich media in a social context. Rheingold (2010) explains that, If you find people, whether you know them or not, who you can trust to be an authority on something or another, add them to your personal network. Consult them personally, consult what they have written, and consult their opinion about the subject. When we get information

online today, there is no guarantee that it is accurate or even that it's not totally bogus. The authority is no longer vested in the writer and the publisher. The consumer of information has to be a critic and has to inquire about the reality of the information presented. The know-how of this is to ask the primary questions: Who is the author, and what do other people say about that author? Google scholar may prove useful in this regard. Furthermore, Rheingold (2010) posits that critical consumption takes us back, full circle, to the literacy of attention. Social media is not a queue; it's a flow, we have to learn to sample the flow, and doing so involves knowing how to focus our attention. On the overall, the most important fluency is not in mastering a particular literacy but in being able to put all five of these literacies together into a way of being in digital culture.

Likely Challenges that can inhibit social media literacy

1) *Bandwidth problem* – Most institutions have limited bandwidth to support this practice. Poor connectivity can frustrate effective online participation.
2) *Teaching of curriculum not tailored to meet proliferation of digital technologies:* it is still surprising that with the way social media has permeated our everyday lives, its potential benefits in knowledge sharing, reference service, etc some library schools in Nigeria are yet to include it in their curriculum.
3) *Poor funding:* Academic libraries in Nigeria are yet to be well funded and the paucity of fund sometimes render novel project useless.
4) *Technophobia:* Some librarians are afraid of handling computers. They make the traditional library services their comfort zone and are not eager to embrace change.
5) *Lack of maintenance culture:* Maintenance culture is seriously lacking in most institutions in developing countries. The few available technologies are in a bad shape that may not support real-time activities and remote access to information.
6) *Unreliable power supply***:** The low supply of electricity discourage people from participating in the online forum.
7) *Poor training of staff on IT related tools:* Most librarians lack the 21st century skills that would be required to adopt the social media tools for effective library services. Most academic libraries may sponsor staff for Master and PhD degrees but will hardly give intensive training to staff on ICT tools.

Conclusion

Change has taken place so rapidly in the last decade that it has become nearly impossible for librarians to perform their onerous responsibilities without going with the flow and adapt to the next level of new technology. The social media technologies and literacy will shape the cognitive, social, and cultural environments of the 21st century. Education and information literacy training that acknowledges the full impact of networked publics and digital media must recognize a completely new way of looking at learning. If we want to discover how we can engage students as well as ourselves in the 21st century, we must move beyond skills and technologies. We must explore also the interconnected social media literacies of attention, participation, cooperation, awareness, and critical consumption.

Although most students are social media consumers, very few have had scholarly conversations about social and technical networks; critical consumption of social media; multi-tasking vs. focused attention; when and how to participate in online conversations; and the benefits of online collaboration. Librarians are in a unique position, with their extensive knowledge about information literacy and positioning within the university culture, to help students become social media literate

Recommendation made include
1. Relevant training for patrons in which they should be intimated of the objectives, and the ways in which the training is can be applied, however, this should not be without supervision from social media literate librarians.
2. Librarians should not wait for the government or employers to train them in ICT, they can self-finance basic training in ICT on part-time mode of study.
3. Librarians must be able to learn, unlearn and relearn to match-up with evolving technologies.
4. Library schools should continually review ICT courses offered to ensure its applicable to librarianship so as to broaden the intellectual capacity and cognitive bandwidth of Librarians in training ICT wise.
5. It is important to imbibe a maintenance culture to manage the few available ICT facilities effectively.
6. A stable electricity system is indispensable infrastructure in the proper functioning of computer systems and other ICT facilities and good effort should be made toward such.
7. To improve power supply, library managers can meet with management to reach a power supply agreement with the power holding company, in terms of the number of hours of power supply during Library hours and the rest power supply can be supplemented with generating set or inverters.

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