

STRATEGIES TOWARD EFFECTIVE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN NIGERIA'S LIBRARIES

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ABSTRACT

The advent of social media (SM) has revolutionized library and information services across the globe. Libraries and librarians had in the last two decades, discovered the significance of SM in facilitating provision of effective library services. Today, regardless of types, libraries in Nigeria have adopted SM platforms and are using them in reaching out to their users. Nevertheless, reports have indicated little successes in reaching out and engaging library users. In order to overcome this problem, so that libraries in Nigeria derive much benefits from their use of SM, they need to establish and formulate SM strategy. This paper therefore discussed the concept of SM platforms and their use by libraries. It also touched on the concept of SM strategy, its components and stages. A model on library SM strategy was proposed for Nigerian libraries. Finally, the paper concludes with recommendations on how Nigerian libraries should have a good SM strategy.

Keywords: Social media, Social media strategy, Libraries, Nigeria

Introduction

The advent of social media (SM) has changed the way people live and interact with each other. It enables individuals and organizations to have direct and real time interactivity with their colleagues and customers. SM, which is simply defined as Internet-based platform that provides users with opportunities to create and exchange content (information, opinions, and interests) in a many-to-many context (Khan, 2017), brought a lot of opportunities to libraries and librarians across the globe. SM platforms are easy to use, very much available and affordable, which according to Mohsin (2020), made their adoption irresistible by libraries and librarians. Libraries were among the early adopters of SM, leveraging it to quickly and easily engage, connect, network and share information and knowledge with their patrons (Crawford, 2014).

The adoption and use of SM for promotion and provision of library services began at a slow pace. Libraries initially felt that they had little or nothing to do with SM. With the discovery of their advantages, SM tools were adopted and used for the provision of library and information services by libraries and librarians. Interestingly, within the past ten years, SM have become an integral part of libraries (Howard, Huber, Carter, & Moore, 2018) and their adoption and use by libraries is ever-increasing. Taylor and Francis (2014),

reported that over 70% of libraries worldwide are using social media tools. In a more recent study, Jones and Harvey (2019) added that more and more libraries are using SM to connect with patrons. From Facebook and *Twitter* to *Pinterest* and *YouTube*, libraries are opening a wide range of accounts to engage users and market local resources.

Despite the influx of adoption and use of SM by libraries across the globe, many libraries have not been able to achieve the desired results in terms of *like*, *comment*, *interaction* and so on, by and with their patrons (Crawford, 2014). Many libraries use Facebook effectively while many others may not be effectively reaching and engaging their patrons, added Crawford (2014). Academic libraries also complained of not having followers in their SM pages, students neither follow nor like their pages (King, 2015). There are hundreds of cases, where librarians are wasting their time on SM due to lack of planning, wrong choice of platforms or failure to understand the needs of their patrons, pointed Crawford (2014). This negative development may not be unconnected with the approach employed in the adoption and use of SM by libraries. In other words, there is lack of SM strategy among some librarians (Kwayu, Lal & Abubakre, 2017). SM strategy informs how to make best choice of SM platforms as well as composing and disseminating appropriate content, to mention but a few.

Dodd (n.d) believes that SM strategy is critical to a library's success in today's highly digital world. It is however a double-edged sword, which can create solutions and problems as well (Jennifer, 2015). A strategic approach, according to Effing (2014), can help to address opportunities and risks that come from using SM, in both commercial and non-profit domains. Therefore, in order to achieve the desired result of adopting and using SM, this paper outlines social media strategies that will help libraries reap the positive benefits of SM, and at the same time, avoid its negative consequences. Conforming by the outline strategies by libraries will enable libraries reach out to their users effectively and efficiently through their adopted SM.

Social Media and Libraries

There is no universally accepted definition of SM, due to its newness and continuous re-evolvment. Papacharissi (2015) observed that "How we have defined social media in societies has changed, and will continue to change" (p.1). The term SM, even though used interchangeably, with social networking sites (SNS), online social networks and Web 2.0, they have differences. Sloan and Quan-Haase (2017) observed that SM, is a wider term that includes, for example, *blogging* and platforms such as *Twitter*, *Instagram*, *Pinterest*, and *Snapchat*. On the other hand, SNS, is specifically associated with the use of sites such as *Facebook*, *MySpace*, and *hi5*. SM, was defined by Mon (2015) as "A new type of media that is shared and participatory in nature, involving others in the information lifecycle of creation, organization, sharing, finding, and use" (p.1). In an attempt to come up with a standard definition, analysis of six definitions of SM was carried out and based on common features of all the definitions, Quan-Haase and McCay-Peet (2017) defined SM as:

Web-based services that allow individuals, communities, and organizations to collaborate, connect, interact, and build community by enabling them to create, co-create, modifies, share, and engage

with user-generated content that is easily accessible
(p.17).

The features of SM, motivated libraries to adopt and use them in the provision of library services. Libraries across the globe adopted and used various types of SM platforms, ranging from *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *Instagram*, *Pinterest*, *LinkedIn* and so on (Agyekum, Arthur, & Trivedi, 2016). The most commonly used SM platform by libraries was Facebook while SM platforms such as *Digg*, *Vimeo*, *YouTube* are not commonly used (Olajide, Otunla & Omotayo, 2017).

The pace of using SM, differs in different countries and among various library types. Generally, libraries use SM, to advertise and promote their services and resources to their customers as well as share and exchange vital information with their communities (ALA Intellectual Freedom Committee, 2018). Other common usages were promotion of library information and educational resources, libraries' events and services (Sonawane & Patil, 2015). According to Suraweera (2011), SM becomes a tool for communicating with more potential library users. Libraries communicate and collaborate between librarians and students, provide information that is not available on the catalogue and search engines, help in serving and attracting distance education students via SM platforms (Aras, 2014).

Literature on the use of SM in the United States of America (USA), revealed that libraries were using them to fulfill a range of objectives which include promotion of library services and resources (Taylor & Francis Group, 2014). Facebook and other platforms were used for outreach services, marketing, advertisement and dissemination of current information (Kumbhar, 2014; Taylor & Francis Group, 2014) The authors added that some academic libraries embed the library catalog to allow students to access the contents of the library catalog without actually visiting the library's Web site. Libraries of University of Michigan had created a *Facebook* page incorporating a catalog search function, "*ask-a-librarian*," *LibGuides*, a *WorldCat* search, and links to all essential library Web pages. Essentially, the goal of creating a *Facebook* page is to provide customized library services within *Facebook* itself rather than merely redirecting users to the official Web site.

Studies on the use of SM by libraries of Asian countries were very impressive. For example, in a study on application of SM in Indonesian academic libraries, Rachman and Putri (2018), reported that "The academic libraries in Indonesia apply social media to promote the library (its services, facilities and collections) and to disseminate information" (p. 26). In a literature review on academic libraries engagement with SM, Trucks (2019), reported that academic libraries mostly use SM, for library promotion, information literacy and user collaborations. Alvanoudi and Vozana (2019) mentioned that libraries use SM to attend users and interact with them, enable patrons to ask questions pertaining to the use of their libraries, teach basic search tools and send brief updates to patrons. Arumugam and Balasubramani (2019) added that libraries use SM, to increase their connections with potential customers and serves as a platform supporting social relations among individual staff as well as enables interaction between professionals.

The use of SM by public libraries was mainly for posting information about new books and media purchases, advertising library programs, and events, providing reference and readers' advisory via the sites' instant messaging (IM) or email systems (Hrituparna & Bhattacharjee, 2018). SM tools, were used according to Jones and Harvey (2019) for library marketing, announcement of library programmes, interact and respond

to users' questions, teach basic search tools as well as paste new books information on the wall.

In Nigeria, the use of SM was mostly by academic libraries. Academic libraries in Nigeria provide different services to their users through SM platforms (Okoroma, 2018; Adewoyin, Onuoha, & Ikonne, 2017). In a study on utilization of SM by academic libraries in Nigeria, Omini and Ayanlade (2019) reported that they use the platforms in the promotion of their services and interaction with their users, as well as provide up-to date information in campus. Akporhonor, and Olise, (2015) and Bichi (2018) reported the use of SM tools in Nigerian libraries for marketing of library services, information about new collections, introduction of new services as well as announcement of events and programmes. Some few libraries added Okoroma (2018), use SM in the provision of reference services.

Social Media Strategy

SM strategy is a social science concept that is just unfolding, there are few available definitions of the concept (Effing, 2014). SM strategy is defined by Newberry and Lepage (2020) as, "a summary of everything you plan to do and hope to achieve on social media. It guides your action and lets you know whether you are succeeding or failing." SM strategy, according to Neidlinger (2018), documents how a business or organization will plan, execute, and measure all SM, marketing activities. Strategy is very important for an organisation (Hursh, 2019), observed that "any success in the social media space centers on strategy. A strategy lets you take your library's overall strategy and use social media to make those goals a reality."

Strategies are achieved through initiatives that involve various tactical steps (Golden, 2011). SM strategies involve set goals (purpose), information to be shared, SM tool and audience, with whom relationships are developed (Golden, 2011). Alejandra and Verishagen (2019) argued that to effectively manage SM, libraries must consider their audience, evaluate and select platforms, and develop the library's voice that is, content. However, the authors are of the opinion that effective SM strategy starts with formation of SM Committee (SMC). Libraries' tactical steps and resources are the driving force of SM strategy and are outlined and discussed below:

Social Media Committee

Library's SM strategy, observed Alejandra (2019), commences with the establishment of a SMC with a clearly defined terms of reference, as well as information and guidelines related to its membership. SMC are saddled with the entire running of a library's SM. Goals and objectives are very critical in a library's SM strategy. The goals and objectives of having SM tool(s), have to be very clear right from the beginning, what a library seeks to accomplish with the tool(s) needs to be clearly stated (Newberry & Lepage, 2020). The main purpose of SM must be for advancing library's overall goals. The goals have to be measurable to enable library determines its return on investment (RoI) (Boniface, 2013). Goals should be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART). A good goal is an outcome, not an activity. What does the library need to achieve in the next year? For example, a library's goal may be, to achieve an increase in the use of its electronic resources or, a rise in the use of children's resources,

as in the case of public library. It is important for libraries to “translate a social media goal for an area where you can move the needle (Krakauer, 2020).

Social media strategy requires an entire shift in mindset—one that is more oriented around the consumer or user (Quesenberry, 2019). The achievement of user oriented services requires analysis and understanding of the needs of the library users. Dodd (n.d) recommends that libraries should among other things find out the needs of their community members in order to package and disseminate relevant information that is required by their users. Boniface (2013) recommends having conversations with users both in person and through SM, arguing that talking with people allows you to get to know them better and more important serve them better.

Social Media Platforms

Understanding the channels and how they work and what you can get out of them is fundamental (Carvill, 2018). SM, is considered as the most effective free marketing tool in the library and the easiest tool for library to share information to its users. However, with so many platforms intended for different audiences, it is very necessary to identify and choose which platform(s) best suit library needs Hursh (2019). A library has to integrate SM platform(s) that will best serve its goals and objectives. It has to investigate from different platforms and select the more appropriate one(s). Among factors library should consider, suggested Alejandra (2019) are:

- i. How were other libraries using the platform?
- ii. Which features would benefit our library?
- iii. Are the benefits of the platform equal to the effort required to administer it? (p. 18)

Crawford (2014) suggested that library should gauge their users’ expectations when choosing SM. Library’s goal should be to increase community involvement, engagement with, and support of the library—not to be an intrusion into areas where patrons don’t think the library belongs. Do your patrons expect or want to see you on this network?

Social Media Content

Content is very important in SM strategy. King (2015) sees content as king in SM strategy; it is the first most important factor to consider among SM strategy tactics. Everything is content, quality over quantity; library should post content that will influence its audience (Carvill, 2018). King (2015) concludes that “The content you present under the moniker of the library will make or break your social media channel” (p.16). For library to make its content strategic in SM it has to be compelling and interesting, relevant, consistent, human, short, visual and helpful (King, 2015). SM content should always be relevant to your audience. SM content according to Carvill (2018) should be authentic, informative, engaging, useful, relevant and purposive.

Evaluation

Evaluation is an important component of SM strategy. It enables organizations to measure the extent to which they achieve their set goals. Krakauer (2020) recommends periodic evaluation of the entire components of SM strategy. The author, suggested that

four key questions about the process and performance of your social media program should be asked;

- i. what worked / what should we keep doing?
- ii. what didn't / what should we stop doing?
- iii. what did we learn / what should we try next?
- iv. what puzzles us?

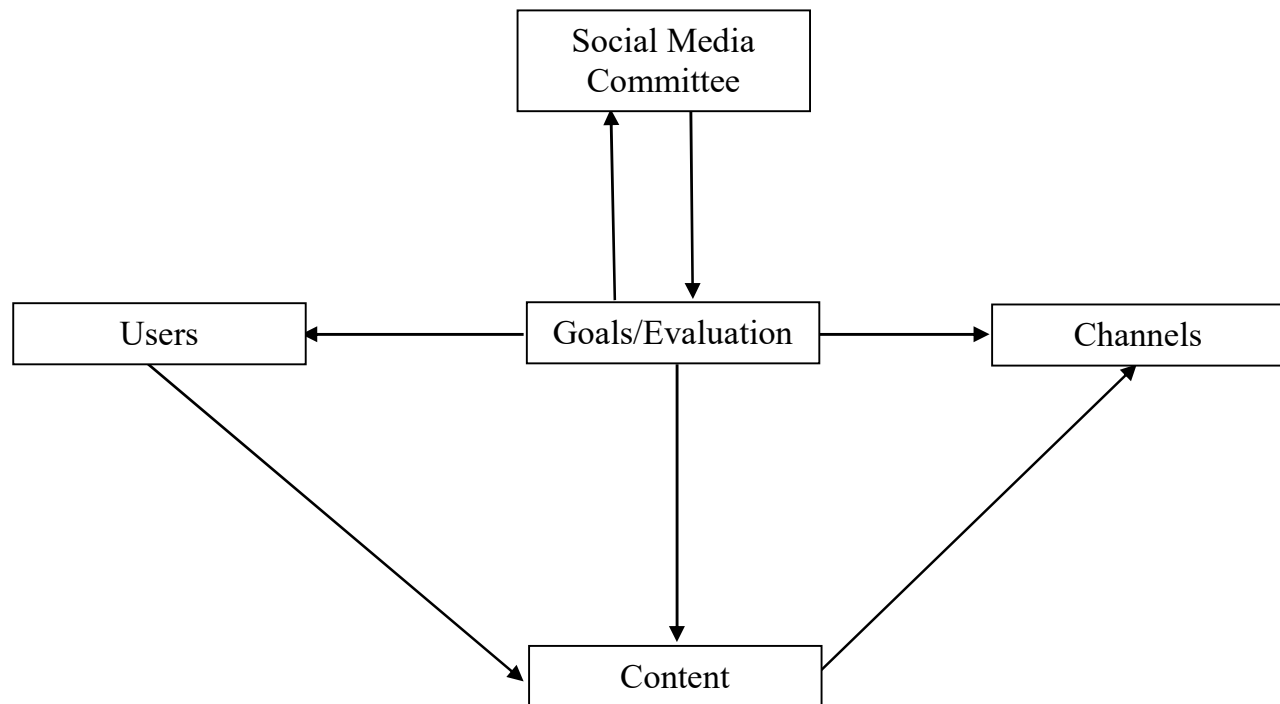


Figure I: Proposed Social Media Strategy Model

Proposed Social Media Strategy Model

The proposed model is meant as a guide, which helps libraries work through a process in a structured way. It tackles the questions, which help us define the answers that turn make up the strategy. The first task of SM Committee (SMC) is to develop a Terms of Reference that included the committee's purpose, as well as information and guidelines related to membership and roles. The SMC identifies the "why" of the SM, identifies the goal, which library wants to achieve with SM. No strategy makes sense without clear goals. What goals does the library want to achieve with the help of social media? Next are the users, who do the library, want to serve, engage with? What is there to know about them? About their interests, their goals, their lives, their behavior, etc.? The content library feeds on its SM platforms comes after identification and user analysis. What does the library want to post or talk about? What are the topics and ideas? The next task of the SMC is selection of relevant SM platform. Where will the library post the content and engage with its users? Which platforms are the best for the people it wants to reach and the content it wants to talk about? Evaluation is the next, to measure what library's strategy achieves. Assess what was done so far and improve the approach

through review of the goals and other components. What changes occurred to your users and platforms and re-modifies the strategy.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Libraries and librarians are always at the forefront in the adoption and use of technology. This is very necessary for the profession to remain relevant in today's dynamic society. Like their names suggest, emerging/evolving technologies keep on changing each and every day. SM is one of emerging/evolving technologies, it keeps on evolving and re-evolving. Libraries and librarians should continue to follow the trend, study the changes and re-strategise for continuity and sustained relevance.

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