

## APPLICATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE PROVISION OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICES IN NIGERIA: THE NEED FOR A POLICY

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### Abstract

Many libraries have created social media accounts without carefully considering how and why social media is important to their organization. As users look to social media to represent the organizations with which they interact, it is critical that libraries reconsider how and why they engage in social media. Creating a social media policy gives librarians the opportunity to consider those motivations and outline goals for social media within their library. Social media policies formalize a library's strategic direction and strengthen its position on social media. Libraries are mission-driven organizations and these missions serve as the fundamental drivers of the organization, and should guide planning and decision-making. When libraries engage with social media, it should be done based on active reflection of the library's mission and culture. The purpose of this paper is to explore the relationship between mission statements and social media policies in libraries.

**Keywords:** Libraries, Social media, Policy, web 2.0, Current Awareness Service

### Introduction

Social Media provides several opportunities to reach and interact with the community. Hence, Social Media and Social Networks have grown astoundingly over the past few years. According to a recent Social Media statistics, there are over 1.15 Billion Facebook users compared to 700 million in 2011; over 500 million Twitter users compared to 250 million in 2011; over 238 million LinkedIn users compared to 115 million in 2011 and there are over 500 million Google Plus users opposed to 25 million users in 2011 (Digital Insights, 2013; Rafiq, 2011). There are over 1 billion monthly visitors on You Tube; 4.2 billion people use mobile device to access Social Media sites; more than 23% marketers are investing in blogging and social Media 2011 (Digital Insights, 2013). A majority of 60% of consumers say that the incorporation of Social Media makes them more likely to buy product and services. Seventy four (74%) of marketers believe Facebook is important for

their lead generation strategy. Forty (40%) of marketers use Google+, 70% desire to learn more and 67% plan to increase Google+ activities. Social Media generates almost double the marketing leads of trade show, telemarketing or daily mail (Digital Insights, 2013). Like other organizations, increasingly, all types of libraries around the world are moving towards Social Media and Social Networking through various platforms; Blogs, Facebook, YouTube twitter, Myspace, Pinterest, Google Plus, Instagram, Mashup, Flickr, LinkedIn, and Wikis. Social Media is being used world-wide for diverse purposes in libraries and information centers: marketing, branding, building customer relationships, reference services, quick dissemination of news. Thus, the importance of advocating for a policy for the incorporation of social media in the provision of library services cannot be overemphasized. This paper aimed at advocating for a policy for the incorporation of social media in the provision of library services.

Many authors discuss and examine social media policies but very few look at social media policies in the context of libraries. Additionally, there has been no research into the role mission statements play when considering social media policies. This is a big gap in literature, considering the importance of clearly connecting libraries' values to their actions. Social media is growing as a tool for many libraries, and clearly linking a library's mission with a social media policy is necessary to make social media use more meaningful. The purpose of this paper is to explore the importance of social media policies in libraries.

### **Social Media: A Conceptual Approach**

Social Media has been defined in several ways. According to Bradley (2012), the term Social Media refers to "the use of web-based and mobile technologies to turn communication into an interactive dialogue". Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) described Social Media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content". Solis (2010) defines Social Media as "the democratization of information, transforming people from content readers into publishers. It is the shift from a broadcast mechanism, one-to-many, to a many-to-many model, rooted in conversations between authors, people, and peers." According to Dahl (2009), Social media are defined as "forms of electronic communication through which users creates online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (such as videos)." While there are different ways to categorize social media, its typology is often based on the main function and purpose of use, such as for blogging, microblogging (like Twitter), social

networking (for instance, Facebook), collaborative knowledge production and sharing (like Wikipedia), multimedia sharing (YouTube), and sharing reviews and opinions (such as social Q and A, user reviews).

### **Literature Review**

Many guides and tips for best practices on creating good social media policies in workplaces exist<sup>6</sup> however these articles focus on legal considerations, Internet etiquette guidelines, quality control, and employee management (Mello 2012; Bertot et al 2012 and Nadworny 2009). The purpose of a social media policy in many of these cases is to protect the company or organization from potential social media risks. Some risks are sharing confidential information, inappropriate posts, responding poorly to a customer's complaint and employees' lack of productivity due to social media use.

Flynn (2012) explains that employers must balance the need to stay relevant and engaged on social platforms while they also must "manage social media use effectively in order to protect [their] organization's assets, reputation, and future" by creating and enforcing a social media policy. Flynn provides steps to writing effective policies. Her recommendations include using clear language, which also means defining key concepts and terms; be brief and accurate; and implement the policy with staff education (Flynn, 2012). Flynn focuses on risk-aversion policies, but some organizations choose to let their social media policies form organically from situations as they arise. Organizations can provide brief expectations and guidelines, but should avoid "arbitrary rules without first seeing where the opportunities and risks really are" (Flynn, 2012).

Since social media tools were first available, libraries have been exploring the

opportunities and challenges of using different platforms (Mathews, 2006). Jacobson (2011) examined the results of a survey on how librarians' believed Facebook was being used at their library, such as "to be where the users are" and to share photos. This survey was then compared to an analysis of library Facebook pages to determine if librarians' perceptions of Facebook use were accurate. The researcher found that qualitatively, librarians' perceived uses of Facebook greatly differed from how their libraries' pages were actually being used (Jacobson, 2011). This mismatch can demonstrate a need for libraries to better articulate their purpose on social media, and use the social media tools strategically to meet that purpose.

Kooy and Steiner's (2010) survey with 51 respondents found that only seven academic libraries had a social software policy. Five of those seven were created because of librarian interest, one in response to inappropriate student behavior and one due to a lawsuit. In that same survey, the authors found that 82 percent of the respondents did not have a social software policy, and 24 percent of that group believed having a policy for that purpose was unnecessary. The authors recommended external and internal policies that "allow for flexibility, realization of the media's full potential, and legally sound service practice." They argue that social software policies are necessary to "inform librarians and patrons of their basic constitutional rights and provide legal guidelines for comment editing." From examining external library policies, the authors found similar elements such as statement of purpose, which explains the purpose of having a policy, the definition of social software, and a section giving guidelines on comments and posts (Kooy and Steiner, 2010).

An exploration of academic library policies on computing technologies provides

characteristics of and justifications for library-specific policies (Vaughan, 2004). Policies should be visible to their intended audience, and approved by some authoritative body. While academic libraries must follow larger university policies, whether it is for computing technologies or social media, a library-specific policy is useful because it provides links and adds visibility to the university policy. Library-specific policies also provide appropriate context for the resources managed by the library. Thirdly, specific policies allow libraries to address university affiliates and non-affiliates, the latter of which the library interacts with more than other campus entities (Vaughan, 2004). While this last point is in reference to computer use policies, it relates to general policy-writing guidelines, which should be aware of different audiences for different service points on a campus.

A publication from the American Library Association (ALA), *Creating Policies for Results*, discusses the link between library mission statements and policies. Since both policies and mission statements reflect the values of the libraries, policies must be "integrally connected to the library's priorities, mission, goals, and objectives" (ALA, 2003). Policies should be reviewed and revised to reflect changes to a library's mission statement or values.

### **The Need for Library Social Media Policy**

There is no doubt that social media is rapidly transforming the information sector worldwide, therefore the libraries in Nigeria as a matter of urgency and policy must understand it, embrace it and acquire the necessary skills to use it as a resource to transforming library services in the country. But social media as a resource that can help library services can only be promoted through programmes and policies.

It is usually the desire of government or authorities to address problems or issues by finding solutions to them. Shut (2005) stated that this is usually through the decision making process where policy options are adopted to address these problems. According to Shut (2005), a policy made by an individual is known as a “private policy”, but when policies are meant to address problems of a large number than one then we are talking about public policy.

Public policy as defined by Dimock et al (1983) is deciding at any time or place what objectives and substantive measures should be chosen in order to deal with a particular problem, issues or innovations. Therefore, social media policy if put in place and implemented would offer new opportunities for improved library service such as the following:

- Attract more library users considering the fact that this is its era. Generally speaking social media has a lot of appeal to the youths.
- It will improve in-house operations like selective dissemination of information (SDI) and current awareness service (CAS) offered by the library. For example, library can select certain information and send to users based on their research interests using social media platforms.
- Social media will offer marketing and public relations and also feedback opportunity for the library. This will help in building a good relationship between the library and clientele.
- It helps trigger knowledge revolution where the reading culture is poor as the social media will help in easy knowledge sharing.
- It increases Library Users: The online community is opened to all as long as there is internet connectivity. In Facebook, for instance, the activities of a

friend or fan of a library page are known by friends connected to that friend or fan. Hence, when a fan of a library page comments or likes a status/post put up by the library, others can come to the knowledge of the promotional activities carried out in a library. This can motivate a friend of a library fan to join the library. Also, social media can increase library patron’s satisfaction with the library. This is not to say that the services rendered in the library should not be effective otherwise promotion of such services would not attract more library users.

Common social media tools like Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, Youtube, LinkedIn, Foursquare, Tumblr, Vimeo, Pinterest, Wikipedia, Instagram, etc have been used by libraries for the promotion of their library services by universities libraries with the potential benefits and challenges (Kemrajh, 2013). Chu and Du (2013) stated that social networking tools allow you to teach library staff new technologies related to their profession, to follow the activities, and to keep resources up to date. As a result, students, researchers rely more on university libraries keeping pace with technology. Some objectives of libraries in actively using social media are:

- To promote library services, workshops and the events in order to increase library use.
- To provide better access to information.
- To be where the users are.
- To get feedback from users.
- To highlight specific features of the library.
- To create collaboration with other libraries and the users.
- To announce the library news (Aras, 2014).

Aras (2014) further stated that libraries are using social media to establish good

communication with users, to understand the issues and find solutions. By using social media, libraries want to give a message to their users about how they are innovative and solution-oriented. In addition, social networks aid in finding new user and colleagues to collaborate to librarians and disclose promotion of libraries and the importance of library services to communities (Buono and Kordeliski, 2013).

Aqil et al (2011) examine some important aspect of web 2.0 vis-à-vis library and information centres as blogs/weblogs, Wikis/Wikipedia, Live Streaming Media, Tagging Social Networking Sites, RSS feeds, Instant Messaging, Web Podcasting and Mash-up. They further stated that librarians can do many other things with social networks depending upon the specific requirements and changing needs of the library patrons and staff. Burgert and Nann (2014) research showed that academic libraries use SM tools to promote their libraries and interact with users. Because, today we are in the digital era and libraries worldwide have been adjusting to the shift from the printed era to the digital era (Nonthacumjane, 2011).

### Conclusion

Policies manifest an organization's beliefs, priorities and commitment. The development of thoughtful policies gives libraries an opportunity to revisit and demonstrate the intent of their mission. Mission-based goals and actions are particularly valuable in areas of rapid change, like social media. Few libraries have social media policies and when they do, they are rarely rooted in the library's mission. The library mission should drive the library's activities and should therefore be present in these guiding policies. Our paper indicates that general themes in library mission statements are not reflected in the policies they use for social media. We

recommend that libraries think carefully about why they use social media, how it reflects their overall mission, and creates a policy that reflects that purpose.

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