



Applications of Social Media and Web 2.0 for Research Support in Selected African Academic Institutions

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ABSTRACT

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This study examined the use of Social Media/Web 2.0 for research support and it is guided by three objectives namely: a) to ascertain the uses social media in academic institutions; b) to identify the challenges associated with social media use for research purposes and c) to provide experiences of social media application in selected African academic institutions. The study makes use of literature analysis in combination with personal and professional work experiences on the use of social media from librarians in four different countries. Institutional experiences by the four librarians showed that it is only Rhodes University Library that uses social media in its library, which is as a result of a formal social media strategy. For the other three universities, University of Education, Winneba Library in Ghana, Makerere University Library in Uganda and the University of Nigeria Library, the use of social media is not encouraging. They use it mostly for communication and interaction with colleagues. It was also discovered that there is no social media strategy available in these university libraries. Based on these findings, the study recommended the implementation of social media strategy, appointment of social media librarians in these libraries, and continuing professional development of librarians to keep abreast with current trends. Web 2.0/Social Media is a new technology offering new options for African academic librarians in their research support role.

Keywords: Social media, Web 2.0, Research support.

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I. Introduction

Social Media involves social relations amongst people who have some type of relationship or affiliation (Wellman, 2001). Social media does not only provide information, it also provides a forum for individuals to interact with each other (Wasike, 2013). The term Social Media is sometimes referred to as Social Networking Sites (SNS) as these tools are essentially for networking. They are also called Web 2.0 due to their value added functionalities. The phrase “Web 2.0” was coined by Tim O’Reilly of O’Reilly Media in 2004. O’Reilly (2005) as cited in Lwoga (2014) defines Web 2.0 as:

[...] a network platform, spanning all connected devices. Web 2.0 applications are those that make the most of the intrinsic advantages of that platform: delivering software as a continually-updated service that

gets better the more people use it, consuming and remixing data from multiple sources, including individual users, while providing their own data and services in a form that allows remixing by others, creating network effects through an “architecture of participation,” and going beyond the page metaphor of Web 1.0 to deliver rich user experience.

In this study therefore, Web 2.0, Library 2.0, Social Networking Sites (SNS) and Social Media are used interchangeably to describe the same concept and these include a number of tools and technologies, ranging from wikis, blogs, and syndication feeds to social and virtual networking (Lwoga, 2014). These terms have lately been applied to “Library 2.0” because it has become a standard technology that is used in the delivery of library services. Library 2.0 is a “change in interaction between users and libraries in a new culture of participation catalysed by social web technologies” (Holmberg et al., 2009). Library

2.0 enables libraries to change and provide demand-led services by concentrating on the needs of users already using the library and non-users who the library may reach out to bring into the library (Lwoga, 2014).

Chua and Goh (2010) classified Web 2.0 tools used by libraries into four categories. These included information acquisition tools that are used to gather information from sources outside libraries (e.g. blogs and wikis), information dissemination tools that are used to distribute content and information to patrons (e.g. RSS feeds), information organization tools that facilitate storage and subsequent retrieval of information (e.g. social bookmarking and tagging), and information sharing tools that facilitate the bilateral flow of information between libraries and patrons (e.g. social networking and media sharing sites).

Reviewing the works of a number of authors on web 2.0 applications in academic libraries, Boateng and Liu (2013) identified a number of web 2.0 tools and grouped them into several categories: Real simple syndication (RSS)- an XML-based format usually used for content distribution of news and news headlines on a website; blog- a website that usually has a collection of brief posts, articles, essays, photos, or other writings and is cared for by an individual or an organization; Wiki-a tool for the collaborative creation of a community document, a document that is authored, edited, and modified by the collective endeavours of multiple authors"; Podcast/vodcast-Podcast-digital audio file which has been converted to an audio file format (most commonly mp3) that enables it to be posted to a website and downloaded from there to a computer or digital music player"; A vodcast is the video matching part of a podcast; Instant messaging (IM)-IM is a live online communication between two or more people using text-based short messages; Social bookmarking / tagging-Social bookmarking is a method for internet users to store, organize, search, and manage bookmarks of web pages on the internet with the help of user-driven metadata (uncontrolled vocabularies); Social Networking Sites (SNS)-web-based services that allow people to:

1. Create a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system;
2. Make a list of other users with whom they share a connection; and
3. View and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system.

Boyd & Ellison (2007) define Social Networking Sites as web based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. There are many social networking tools in existence, but it is worth noting that there are some that are mainly applicable in libraries today. This is what this study has mainly put into consideration.

Dickson and Holley (2010) note that the common social network tools used in academic libraries are the mainstream websites like blogs, wikis, social media websites and social bookmarking websites. This paper

draws on the experiences of four African academic libraries namely University of Education, Winneba in Ghana, Rhodes University in South Africa, Makerere University Library in Uganda and the University of Nigeria Library. This is being done in order to establish how these social media applications are utilized to support research activities in these institutions.

Studies and anecdotal evidence suggest that Social Media has not been exploited in African academic institutions to support teaching, learning and research. This may be as a result of lack of knowledge and skills involved in the use of these new media, as well as awareness of their educational benefits. Again, the lack of guidance on the use of social media for educational purposes results in disinterest and appreciation of social media tools in terms of their potential uses and benefits in education. On the other hand, librarians as information providers for research also lack some core social media skills, and in some cases are far behind users in terms of these skills to engage in the social media revolution.

II. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine applications of social media in academic libraries and how these applications contribute to research development in the parent institutions of these libraries.

The specific objectives of this study were to:

1. Ascertain the purposes of social media in education.
2. Identify the challenges associated with social media use for research purposes.
3. Provide experiences of social media applications in selected academic institutions in Africa.

III. Methodology

This study is the result of the final project completed by the authors during a Carnegie sponsored Continuing Professional Development programme held at the University of Pretoria in South Africa for selected African academic librarians and faculty in June 2014. The programme was expected to equip the participants with Information and Communication Technology (ICT) skills to support researchers and research groups in their home institutions. As part of their programme of study, the authors were expected to share their experiences on the use of web 2.0 and social media in the provision of academic library services in support of research in their institutions. Consequently, this study is a desk study that makes use of extensive review of relevant literature to buttress the authors' experiences of social media in their individual academic libraries in support of research and research groups.

IV. Social Media and Scholarly Communication

Social media plays an important role in scholarly communication. It is said to be a more interactive and user-centred communications technology (Wasike, 2013). It enables participatory curation of knowledge and knowledge sharing in a simple and convenient way, for

example Researchgate enables interaction and collaboration amongst researchers (Wasike, 2013). Social media is a multidimensional instrument which enables knowledge sharing to satisfy researcher needs in discussions and communications with others on interdisciplinary subjects. A variety of social media communication tools help to save researchers energy and offer wider channels to communication processes (Wasike, 2013).

According to Musser and O'Reilly (2007), social media platforms and tools exhibit these seven (7) key characteristics. These features also represent some of the important advantages of social media to research activities of research groups like faculty and postgraduate researchers.

1. Social media enables web users to do more than just retrieve information. It enables users to actively interact with the content as well as its creators. This is the foundation of user-generated content.
2. Social media enables users to execute applications straight from their browsers and they can own and subsequently control data on the social media platform.
3. Social networking allows users to add value to the content they are accessing. This facility leads to a seamless exchange of information building a robust body of knowledge that is sometimes called collective intelligence.
4. Social media makes use of simple, user friendly and "lightweight" interfaces that does not require specialist knowledge to apply.
5. Social media tools are greatly decentralized with no centre of control or gates under conventional media systems.
6. It is transparent and uses open technology standards that rapidly grow into open ecosystems of loosely coupled applications built on open data and reusable components.
7. It is emergent and does not rely on fully predefined application structures. Social media structures and behaviors are allowed to emerge over time. This flexible, adaptive strategy permits appropriate solutions to evolve in response to real world usage and needs. It recognizes the fact that real success comes from cooperation and not control.

V. Uses of Social Media in Education

Social media are interactive and communication tools that are used by individuals, organizations and institutions for different purposes. It can be used for social interactions or for educational purposes. Dickson and Holley (2010) in their study outlined that with the popularity of web 2.0 and social networking platforms, libraries have embraced them as methods of promoting themselves within their user community. It therefore implies that libraries use social media to promote their contents and reach their user community. It is important to note that in this 21st century, librarians should be proactive in order to satisfy the needs their user

community. The authors further outlined that videos can be used for classroom instructions and academic librarians can also post photos of library staff to provide virtual library tour. This is an indication that majority of librarians have understood the use of social media in reaching out to students and as a means of providing Current Awareness Services and Selective Dissemination of Information effectively. In the study of Ruleman (2012) it was discovered that 59% of students and 41% of faculty download add-ons and toolbars, but 33% of students and 30% of faculty are interested in library extension toolbars. The author also discovered that students are interested in SMS-library services.

On the other hand, Ekwelem, Okafor and Ukwoma (2013) in their study on the use of social networking sites (SNS) by librarians discovered that majority of the librarians studied use SNS to find useful research materials, interact with friends and communicate with each other. It shows that librarians have realized the need to use social media for teaching. They should also advocate using social media to teach users information literacy skills. This implies meeting our users where they are through the use of social media. In addition to the above Madhusudham (2012) in his study discovered that SNS is used by librarians to search for relevant materials and also find other researchers. Other authors such as Roblyer et al. (2010) in their work highlighted that SNS are used by librarians to market the library services since many of the students are on Facebook. Moreover many academic libraries have found these SNS as an avenue to key in and get students interested in their services. Other purposes of using social media as identified by the authors include faculty uses which are perceived as an attempt to foster positive relationship between the lecturers and students. It should be recalled that, interacting using social media is less formal and it creates a friendly environment between the students and faculty members, such interactions will motivate the students and encourage effective learning. Such interaction encourages the students to ask questions and express themselves more than in the classroom especially the shy ones.

Furthermore, Bosch (2009) studied into the use of Facebook at the University of Cape Town and found out that Facebook is used for connecting members of student societies, student groups and halls of residence. Other purposes of using Facebook as identified by the author include; sharing information about social events, pictures and videos; academic purposes such as finding learning materials on the internet; sharing information about holiday programmes; and sharing lecture and study notes during holidays. This study shows students' understanding and use of social media to enhance their academic work. It is important that both librarians and academics also utilize these social media more for teaching and learning since students have understood the importance of Social Media in their academic work as opposed to the negative uses of these sites. A proper direction by librarians and faculty will reduce the negative use of these social media.

Libraries use social media to market library services through provision of current awareness services; wider access to information and knowledge; dissemination of

information; quick and ready access to information; easy updating of information and services (Johnson, 2001 as cited in Wasike, 2013). Mutula (2011) suggests other purposes of social media which include enabling knowledge generation and use; enhanced interactivity between users and librarians; facilitate seamless communication and feedback loop; library services to where the user community is already in need; create an information-sharing culture; enrich the information services with multimedia experiences; create library environments that are fun to work and use; empower users to contribute library content; and facilitate the users to participate in the management of the libraries by making suggestions.

VI. Challenges Associated with Social Media Use in Academic Libraries

Though web 2.0s have so many benefits for academic libraries, just as discussed above, several studies have shown that there are many challenges that are associated with the use of these sites. These challenges include lack of librarians' support and time; and lack of awareness among librarians, low usage rates, among others.

Dickson and Holley (2010) note that social networks require continuous updating, knowledge of changes to the social tools and monitoring users' comments. Thus academic librarians must be willing to dedicate their time to social network based student outreach for these methods to be successful. Cvetkovic (2009) also echoes this by noting that the duties librarians have are fixed in their job and these include cataloguing, collection development, coordination among others and these keep them busy and so blogs, wikis etc are often seen as 'unessential'. He also adds that it takes just a few minutes to start a blog, a wiki, or a MySpace page. But keeping all these technologies going takes significantly more time and effort: Blogs need posts, wikis need content, and MySpace pages need updates.

Another challenge is the low usage of the social networking sites. A study focusing on wiki use in the academic library found that 6 out of 21 librarians, reported difficulty with low participation rates (Chu 2009). This situation implies that if the librarians are not using them, then there is no way the researchers will benefit from them. This is corroborated by Charnigo and Barnett-Ellis (2007) who reported in their survey of academic librarians about their Facebook attitudes that the majority of librarians considered Facebook outside the scope of professional librarianship.

Baro, Idioid and Godfrey (2012) in a study carried out in Nigeria noted that many librarians do not know or use these web 2.0s. They also cited more challenges that made it worse like lack of human resources in information technology, lack of computers with constant internet access and these hinder the use of these web 2.0 technologies. This relates to what Cao (2009) mentioned as issues in implementing Web 2.0 technologies in Chinese libraries as management buy-in, lack of awareness, lack of user participation, and lack of technology staff. This highlights the fact that institutional

challenges have a major impact on how social media tools can be utilised by the users.

Morris and Allen (2008) summarized potential barriers to the successful implementation of Library 2.0 in academic libraries as: a perceived lack of privacy on the part of students; the possibility of identity theft; lack of peer-reviewed content; the perception that such services might create information overload; copyright infringement; the breaching of licensing agreements if students outside the organization are able to access the content; legal implications if individuals post illegal materials such as race hate, defamatory, pornographic or terrorist-encouraging materials; librarians and academic staff lacking the necessary skills to develop and use the system; and the difficulties and extra cost associated in making such systems Phillips (2009) noted the problem of addiction to Web 2.0 technologies, particularly among young adults. Mullan (2009) mentioned concerns associated with using social media by law librarians as lack of privacy, time consuming and information overload. Miranda et al. (2010) mentioned the cons of Web 2.0 for librarians. They include: Too many different tools, doubts about the reliability of tools, difficulties in standardization, low level of security & privacy, low level of cataloguing information, the lifespan of tools, confidentiality concerns, ownership of data, and legal concerns.

They also mentioned the disadvantages of such technologies for library users. They are "rumors, security and legal concerns, dependence, second-hand information, data loss, and data misuse". According to Nogueira (2010), many organizations associate Web 2.0 applications with personal leisure. They do not recognize these applications as "official" or valid. The other disadvantages, she mentioned, include data protection issue, possibility of anonymous users using abusive language, and the time-consuming nature of these applications.

Another problem is that user accounts can attract a wide range of unwanted connections and inappropriate material. Some blogging sites require money for additional space. Additional equipment may be needed. More staff time is required to run and monitor such services. Security and privacy are also serious issues. Joint (2010) stated concerns related to Web 2.0 technologies as being poor quality of information on social networking sites and lack of data protection and privacy.

Rudman (2010) listed risks related to the application of Web 2.0 technologies as: security threats relating to electronic intrusion by hackers or malicious software; placing reliance on external software; continuous changes in user interface; shortages of technical skills and resources; software and websites may not be adequately tested; data leakage and loss of confidentiality and privacy; untrustworthy information sources; unproductive use of organizational resources and time; and exposing an organization to legal liability and financial penalties from regulatory compliance breaches, such as copyright breaches or plagiarism. This is made worse due to the fact that information on social media can be published anytime and in anyway, this is a challenge for research

because it is hard to authenticate the information on these social media tools, this makes it hard for the information seekers to utilize them for research, this is one of the aspects that this study will consider as it recommends ways in which the selected academic institutions can utilise social media for research support.

VII. Use of Social Media in Selected African Academic Libraries

a. The Library of University of Education Winneba, Ghana

The University Library System of the University of Education, Winneba, consists of the libraries of the Winneba South Campus (Osagyefo Library), the North Campus Library, and the Akumako Campus Library all in the Central Region of Ghana. The rest are the Kumasi Campus Library (COLTEK) and the Mampong Campus Library (NASKA) located in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. These libraries serve the information and research needs of over 36,000 students who include full time, distance, sandwich (May-August/long vacation) and part-time (evening) students spread across the four (4) main campuses and twenty-three distance education centers in the ten (10) administrative regions of Ghana.

The vision of the Library is to contribute to the university's aim of becoming an internationally reputable institution for teacher education and research. The mission and goals of the University library system is to facilitate access to all forms of information in the University by continuous improvement of resources and expertise, teaching of information literacy skills and co-operating through networking for the purposes of training of competent professional teachers for all levels of education.

The library provides a range of services intended to contribute to the research output of the university. These services include access to the World Wide Web, academic electronic databases and e-mail services. In the 2012/13 academic year, a total number of eight thousand, three hundred and eighty-nine (8,389) users including faculty and students made use of electronic resources at the Library.

The library employs various methods in offering research assistance to faculty and researchers. These methods include occasional workshops in database searches and awareness creation in special interest databases. The library also employs the use of Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI) to relay important information related to the research interests of researchers in the university.

The university library does not currently make use of social media technologies to support researchers. There is however, active use of social media by library staff at the individual level for various purposes. It is not clear if these purposes include providing support for academic and in particular research work.

The library however maintains its presence on Facebook, an important social media platform. This platform has not been particularly used to engage with researchers, but to enable the library maintain visibility to

the academic community in general and of course to engage with library clients on general issues. Occasionally, there have been requests for some library materials like books or information for closing hours and others requests that have not been of particular research significance.

In conclusion, even though the library of the University of Education Winneba recognizes the importance of social media in enhancing its service to the research community of the university, there is as yet no social media strategy and policy to encourage substantial engagement with researchers through social media for the purposes of achieving the goals of the university.

b. Rhodes University Library, South Africa

Rhodes University is known to be strategic, forward-thinking and innovative amongst South Africa's research intensive Universities. Even though Rhodes University is the smallest University in South Africa with a student population of around 8000, it is among the top six research intensive universities in the country.

The Rhodes University Library is committed to the pursuit of knowledge by connecting people to resources that contribute to the intellectual development of future responsible citizens.

The Library culture

Rhodes University Library aspires to a shared culture, 'A way of being both in mind and in action', in support of a positive academic outcome for the Rhodes University community, while also creating a positive work environment for all. The library thus strives to promote human dignity, equality, non-racialism, and non-sexism in the library workplace and when providing information and research services to its users. It is committed to quality service-focused service, fairness, innovation, professional integrity and social responsibility.

Rhodes University Library has 39 staff. The 6 Faculty Liaison Librarians at Rhodes are each responsible for each individual department at Rhodes University. The library's overarching goal is to develop and maintain efficient, reliable and responsive library and scholarly communication services that promote, support and enhance the research, teaching and learning endeavors of Rhodes University. The library has in many areas succeeded in its efforts to reach its users. This makes it easier for Rhodes Librarians to take advantage of the different Social Media platforms that are freely available to support their work.

One of the most exciting experiences of being a Rhodes Librarian is the liberty to be innovative. Rhodes Library has just formalized the Social Media Strategy in 2013, 60% of the Faculty Services Libraries are actively using one or more Social Media tools to reach its users. All 6 Faculty Liaison Librarians use at least three or four Social Media platforms with the aim of promoting the Faculty/departments research that they support. The official Social Media platforms that the Library have

implemented include Facebook, Twitter, RSS feeds, Wiki and the Staff blog.

Twitter

Rhodes has an official Twitter account that has gained more than 300 followers. Some librarians have embedded Twitter in their LibGuides. Topics relating to the specific subjects are being followed. This means that these librarians set time aside each day to retweet articles of interests to the academics of the departments they are serving. Very careful thought went into planning this way of using Twitter for the benefit of the academic departments. The topics followed were discussed with the academics before they could be marked for interest. This collaboration assisted in improving communication channels between the library and the departments. Twitter has played a major role in ensuring that Rhodes librarians stay abreast of global research trends. Another benefit of using Twitter this way is that it often triggers librarians and academics to converse about issues that arise in their specific fields. An obvious observation that Rhodes librarians who tweet have realized is that these initiatives have brought about improved relationships between librarians and faculty.

Facebook

Facebook has become the most popular means of interactive communication amongst the Library and students. The Library has its formal Facebook page which all Faculty Liaison Librarians have been granted full Administration rights. The Librarians are able to post, comment on posts, create and manage pages etc. The Facebook page gets updated each time there is an activity whether its news, announcements etc. There is a main administrator who oversees the page. For more information please visit the following page: <https://www.facebook.com/RhodesUniversityLibrary>

RSS feeds

Librarians have taken the initiative to communicate with their individual departments to find out about the research interests of the senior researchers and academics. The different databases e.g. Ebsco, Emerald, Science Direct etc are prompted to notify the researchers each time there is a new article published in their areas of interest. There has been mixed responses from the departments regarding the feeds. The impact of the feeds at Rhodes University Library has not yet been established.

Staff wiki and blog

The Library has a staff Wiki which 50% of staff contributes to. This currently is a one way communication tool where the library documents concerning staff are loaded e.g. staff job profiles. This can be accessed by means of a password by all the Library staff at Rhodes University. Rhodes also has a staff blog. This is meant to be an interactive way of communication. All Library staff are encouraged to contribute to the blog. Occasionally, articles are contributed on the staff blog.

In conclusion, Social Media at Rhodes has taken off tremendously; Librarians have taken advantage of the tools available to them. The Rhodes University Library

(RUL) acknowledges that information technology (IT) permeates every aspect of the Library, hence the formulation of the eStrategy. To ensure the correct implementation of this strategy the RUL IT committee was convened.

RUL acquired several mobile devices such as iPad, Samsung Tablet, Kindle, ePad etc to enable staff to familiarise themselves with these technologies so that they may assist students accordingly as the incorporation of these technologies in the academic environment becomes more prevalent. The main challenge was the of lack staff with relevant ICTs skills to assist the users using mobile devices and applications with confidence. Therefore, attendance of the Carnegie CPD is recommended for Rhodes for re-skilling themselves.

A task team will be engaging with student focus groups to initiate discussions on the mobile devices used and how the library site may be accessed and utilised on mobile devices. Rhodes University Library is forward thinking, therefore it has embraced most of the mobile applications needed to reach our users' needs.

Over the last two years the Business School has issued ASUS mobile devices to each of their students. The MBA students are remote students who only attend classes for two blocks a year over a period of two weeks per block period. The tablets have eBooks preloaded on them. This has had an impact to the Commerce Librarians who are supporting the MBA students as they had re-skill themselves regarding the use of mobile devices. The training that is being provided has to be specific to the needs of this user group. The mobile device itself has brought its own challenges that demanded the library to relook at the way they communicate with the MBA students. A new way is being investigated and we are looking at the possibility of creating a Facebook group which the class will belong to in order to address the problems that emerge regarding the use of the tablet itself and accessing the Library through the tablet.

Rhodes Library runs Continuing Professional Development (CPD) sessions twice a term in order to discuss topics that are of interest, to share knowledge and to share experiences and successes of the different teams.

c. Library of Makerere University, Uganda

The status quo for Uganda's case is discussed in the context of the Makerere University Main Library and East African School of Library and Information Science (EASLIS), the training school for LIS in Makerere University.

Today, Makerere University is constituted of nine Colleges and one school offering programmes for about 30,000 undergraduates and 3,000 postgraduates. Makerere University library has eight branch libraries (in the 9 colleges) and has eight sections namely: Technical Services, Periodicals/Serials, Reference and Circulation (including the Law collection and IDA/Basic textbook Reserve collection), Africana Section, Information and Communication Technology (ICT), Microfilming and Digitisation, Book Bank and Bindery.

Seven of the College Libraries are situated at the Main Campus and the rest are located away from the Main campus. The Mission of Makerere University Library is to meet the study, teaching, research and outreach information needs for sustainable development. The University is mandated by the Universities and other Tertiary Institutions Act 2001 to develop, collect, manage, disseminate, control and coordinate all library and information services of Makerere University.

On the other hand, The East African School of Library and Information Science is one of the oldest faculties (schools) in Makerere University. It is the only Institute that is in charge of training Librarians in Makerere University, and one of the few LIS training institutions in Uganda. It is located adjacent to Makerere University Main Library.

Concerning the use of social networking sites in the Library and EASLIS, the Library has a Facebook page: (<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Makerere-University-Main-Library/219624524785150>). However, this page is not very actively used because of the Social media policy which is still in the process of compilation. In addition, the library has a web page on Google Sites and a Twitter account (<https://twitter.com/Maklib>, with only 36 followers (as at 3rd June 2014)). However, this account is not active too, because of the same reason concerning the Library's Social Media Policy which is still in the process of completion. The Staff are of the view that more postings and maintenance of the site would be done once the policy is in place. It is important to note at this stage, that once the policy is up and running, all these will be able to smoothly be put into place.

At EASLIS, the Teaching staff are mainly subscribed to three main social media sites which are: Facebook, twitter and LinkedIn. However, of these, Facebook is the most commonly used. Most of the staff has Facebook accounts which they use both for personal use and for academic purposes. The reason why they use Facebook is for forming groups for the particular classes they instruct; and in these groups, they conduct discussion forums, provide updates on when assessments will be done, and also upload of marks and any other information. This implies that they use Facebook for communication but do not use it for research based work.

The staff also uses LinkedIn to collaborate with other members of staff and professionals. They form networks for example with the Uganda Library and Information Association (ULIA) and other professionals in the Library and Information Science field. Twitter is rarely used by the staff, because only a few are subscribed onto twitter. Some of them are also using media sharing tools like YouTube, which they use to download videos to supplement their teaching and instruction. It is worth noting that most of them are not subscribed to the emerging social networking tools like Researchgate, academia.edu and yet these are the sites that would enable them link with other researchers and professionals in the field. Such applications would also enable them publish their research and scholarly output. This situation is rarely surprising and it is confirmed by Aharony (2012) who

advises that academic librarians change their minds about Facebook (and for that matter social networking) being out of the professional librarianship scope, but rather view it as a venue for a real interactive dialog with their patrons.

It is worth concluding that a lot needs to be done in ensuring that the Makerere University Library and EASLIS staff can be encouraged to join and use the social media tools. The CPD programme is one of the ways in which this can be achieved; since some of the participants are members of staff from both the Main Library and EASLIS, these will be able to share experiences with colleagues and encourage them to use social media tools for research support.

d. University of Nigeria Library

The use of social media in University of Nigeria has been on the increase, many of the staff and students use it for communication, interaction with friends and for other personal uses. On the university website the following pages are available: RSS feed

Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/universityofnigeria>

YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/user/UNIVERSITYOFNIGERIA>

A

Flicker:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/universityofnigeria>

Twitter:

<https://twitter.com/unnpide>

These platforms are used to showcase the activities of the university, though it is managed by the Information and Communication Technology Unit of the University. The university library serves the university community and it has four branch libraries. The library's vision is to become a world class centre of excellence in support of learning, teaching, research, and scholarship geared toward the restoration of the dignity of man. While the mission statement is to evolve an ICT-driven world class academic and research library; to become an access point institution to global information resources and services in all subject fields; and to create a Heritage Library. The library provide consultancy services to both staff and students, this involves teaching information literacy and selective dissemination of information. The library has a blog and Facebook page which is managed by a librarian but it is not as active as it should be, the Facebook link is <https://www.facebook.com/events/1461588110753104/?ref=22>.

In addition to that, a discussion group was created for the library staff as a medium for sharing of knowledge and information but not many of them participate actively. Almost all the library staff have one social media or another but it is used mostly for personal communication, research and interactions as many of them have not started using it as a platform for teaching information literacy and marketing the library services.

Many of the junior lecturers within the university create one form of social media to send messages to their

students; most times they interact with students through groups created by the class leaders. They also use the platform to schedule for classes. Students on their part have found this platform very useful to communicate with each other. A good example is the Google group created by third year students of the Library and Information Science Department of the University. They use it to communicate with the lecturers and some of their lecturers use that platform to post class assignments for the students and discuss topics with the students. This is a very encouraging experience; students are more aware and familiar with using these social media for communication and interaction.

From the experiences and discussion above, it is clear that the university library should re-strategize to reactivate the use of social media in assisting users not just for their personal use. For a more radical approach, having a social media policy to specify who manages it and the contents to be posted will help to achieve this. The trend in teaching learning and research is changing, the emphasis is based mostly on access and use not ownership so it will be wise to meet these students where they are through social media. It is believed that the status of social media as a medium to deliver library services and teach information literacy skills should be improved.

VIII. Conclusion and Recommendations

Social Networking Sites are new technologies offering promising new outreach options for academic librarians. They provide a new platform for reaching students beyond the traditional library building and web site by allowing students to access librarians and the library's resources without leaving the comfort of the websites they use the most (Dickson & Holley, 2010). Our study has been able to demonstrate that social media tools can be used to effectively support research initiatives and activities as evidenced in three of three of the four universities in the study.

Among others, the study found that different academic libraries in Africa are at different levels at initiating and implementing social media applications for library services. The study also discovered that existing social media initiatives of academic libraries in the study are not necessarily targeted to the research needs of research groups, but mainly to maintain their social media presence and engage with general users. The study also shows that a considerable number of academic librarians are aware of Social Media but do not view it as a relevant academic tool partly due to the fact that they have not kept themselves abreast with new tools. Wasike (2013) affirms this view by suggesting that successful librarians in the social media environment need to be aware of emerging technologies. He continues that librarians must be willing to learn, hence "walk the talk" by becoming leaders in lifelong social media learning activities.

It was also interesting to find in the literature that some academic librarians view keeping and maintaining Social Media as an activity outside of their professional realm. Finally, the study has also shown that academic libraries

that have implemented Social Media initiatives usually employ multiple tools to reach diverse user groups.

On the basis of the findings of this study, the following recommendations are being proffered to academic libraries to implement or improve their social media services to effectively support research groups and activities in higher education:

1. The development of Social Media Policies to enable academic libraries use social media as effective communication channels to achieve research goals. This is an important requirement that librarians in African academic institutions need to have to ensure that social media tools are fully utilized for research.
2. It is also recommended that existing or new dedicated Social Media librarians be appointed to coordinate social media activities of academic libraries. From the studies reviewed and the authors' experiences, it is clear that staff that have the skills to use social media are lacking in these libraries.
3. The study proposes that academic librarians must view Social Media as a complementary tool to improve their research support and advocacy role. For example, young researchers could be trained in the use of social media applications in their research works. In the end, these researchers could become social media advocates for researchers and research groups in their institutions.
4. There is a need for academic librarians to keep up to date with emerging trends in research and information provision and how social media can be used to meet the requirements of new research trends.
5. The study also recommends that social media could be used to reach out to remote and distance learners. For example, in the case of Rhodes Business School, MBA students who only attend two block sessions a year, online workshops through social media could be held for them. Again, in the case of Winneba, which also runs distance learning programmes, online workshops through social media are recommended for research students. Tools like Youtube, Slideshare and Facebook could be used to broadcast workshops and tutorials, as well as communicate with its remote research students.
6. There is an urgent need for academic librarians to keep up with new social media tools in order to effectively employ them to support research activities. For instance, the librarian could empower research groups with skills for collaborative social media tools for research.
7. The study also recommends Continuous Professional Development (CPD) Programmes in Social Media Use for academic librarians. This is against the backdrop of the experience and training received from the Carnegie-Sponsored CPD programme at the University of Pretoria, which participants believe would provide them with the required capacity in Social Media use to enable them provide research support. These participants

could become change leaders in using social media in their institutions.

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