

USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA FOR DIGITAL REFERENCE SERVICES AMONG STAFF IN FEDERAL UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES IN SOUTHEAST, NIGERIA

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Abstracts

This study examined the use of social media for digital reference services among staff in federal university libraries in South-East Nigeria. The study was motivated by the increasing relevance of social media platforms in enhancing library service delivery and bridging communication gaps between librarians and users in a digital age. A descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population comprised 296 professional and para-professional staff from five federal university libraries in the region, with no sampling due to the manageable size. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and analyzed using mean and standard deviation. Findings revealed that a variety of social media platforms are utilized for digital reference services, with WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter emerging as the most frequently used tools. The extent of use of social media for digital reference services was generally high among library staff, indicating growing acceptance and integration into library operations. However, the study identified several challenges hindering effective utilization, including poor funding, epileptic power supply, inadequate internet access, techno phobia, and lack of adequate training. These challenges limit the full potential of social media in delivering efficient and timely reference services. The study concluded that while social media has significantly improved digital reference service delivery, addressing infrastructural and capacity-related constraints is essential for optimal utilization. It was recommended that library management should invest in staff training, improve ICT infrastructure, and ensure reliable power supply to enhance service delivery.

Keywords: Social Media, Digital Reference Services, University Libraries, Library Staff

Introduction

In recent years, social media has emerged as an essential tool for enhancing communication, engagement, and information sharing across various sectors, including education and library services. For university libraries, especially those in Southeast Nigeria, social media offers a valuable opportunity to expand digital reference services, enabling libraries to reach patrons easily and deliver timely responses to their inquiries. Nevertheless, despite this potential, the successful use of social media for digital reference services remains challenging for numerous federal university libraries in the region. Obstacles such as technological limitations, inadequate infrastructure, limited funding, and a lack of sufficient training present significant barriers to fully incorporating social media into digital reference practices. This paper examines the main challenges impacting social media use for digital reference in federal university libraries in Southeast Nigeria, shedding light on the issues library staff encounter in providing smooth, digitally-driven services to their users.

University libraries in line with Olorunfemi and Ipadeola (2018) are at the forefront of providing information services to their respective communities which comprise the students, lecturers, and researchers to support their learning, teaching, and research purposes. To scholars, Jibrin (2021) states that university library is an indispensable tool without which an academic institution cannot breath. University library is the academic heart of the university system and its basic purpose is to provide university staff, students, and other researchers with material assistance and an enabling environment that would facilitate teaching, learning and research.

Social media in view of Omini and Osuolale (2019) is a form of electronic communication through which patrons interact among their peers in order to create, share, exchange and discuss information. Social media are web-based services that give individuals the opportunity to create a public profile within a bounded system. On the other hand, Van Looy (2022) social media is a digital tool and platform that enable people to communicate, share content, and participate in online communities. Social media play many role in providing services in library. Additionally, social media can be used as a tool for feedback and evaluation. The potential of social media for digital reference service delivery in university libraries can be of benefit to librarians if they utilize. University libraries can use social media to promote their service, events, and program, and to share information about new acquisitions, research resources, and other library related topics. Social media can also be used to create and participate in online communities such as book clubs and to connect with patrons, authors, and other libraries. Social media play many role in providing services in library.

In support of this, Iwuagwu (2023) attested that the utilization of social media in libraries is now a global phenomenon and varies from one library to another depending on the extent of ICT integration to library and information services. Use refer to the act of utilizing something or making something for a specific purpose. Library Staff use the social media tools to deliver digital reference services.

Digital reference is one of the fastest- growing and most innovative services developed in Libraries. Also, Oyewole and Oladepo (2017) states that

digital reference service is defined as the provision of reference and information services involving collaboration between user and librarian in a computer- based medium. This type of reference service can be refer to as network of subject expertise, inter-mediation, and information resources used by a user seeking answers in an online environment.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the growing adoption of digital technologies in libraries globally, many federal university libraries in Southeast Nigeria continue to encounter obstacles in utilizing social media for digital reference services. Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and Instagram hold significant potential to narrow the gap between library patrons and librarians by offering prompt access to information, encouraging interaction, and improving user experiences.

Various challenges impede the effective adoption of social media for digital reference in these libraries. These include insufficient training for library personnel on using social media tools, inconsistent internet connectivity, inadequate institutional backing, and limited infrastructure. Additionally, there are concerns about data security, the technological proficiency of users, and the accuracy of information disseminated through these platforms.

This knowledge gap represents a significant issue for federal university libraries in Southeast Nigeria, as it hinders their capacity to fully exploit the potential of social media to enhance library services. Thus, it is essential to explore the awareness, accessibility, and utilization of social media for digital reference services, as well as the hurdles and prospects it offers. Tackling these

concerns is vital for improving service delivery, boosting user satisfaction, and establishing libraries as vibrant and innovative centers for learning and research.

Objectives of the Study

1. To identify the types of social media platforms used by staff for digital reference services in federal university libraries in South-East, Nigeria.
2. To ascertain the extent of use of social media for digital reference services among staff in federal university libraries in South-East, Nigeria.
3. To examine the challenges associated with the use of social media for digital reference services among staff in federal university libraries in South-East, Nigeria.

Research Questions

1. What types of social media platforms used by staff for delivering digital reference services in federal university libraries in South-East, Nigeria?
2. To what extent do staff use social media for digital reference services in federal university libraries in South-East Nigeria?
3. What challenges associated with the use of social media for digital reference services among staff in federal university libraries, South-East Nigeria?

Literature Review

Social media has become an important component of modern library service delivery, particularly in the digital era. Social media refers to web-based platforms that enable users to create, share and exchange information in virtual communities. Furthermore, Shyla and Johnson (2021) states that social media is one of the cheapest and most effective ways to promote library activities. It is a

free channel to communicate information about acquisition books, art exhibits, book clubs, meetings, new books, and so on. Social media manner of communication according to Ellison, Pyle and Vitak (2022) in distinguishing social media from other media, the key facts to note are: Allows social interactions among people, uses interactive technology, and encourages connectivity among people. Today, social media technologies have contributed opportunities for learning beyond the physical library, they provide open communication between librarians and users at remote locations. These technologies offer great potential for libraries to share information, connect with their users and promote their services. Social media promotes the idea of sharing human activity. Social media are diverse and targeted toward achieving objectives. Relatively, Akinboro and Olayinka (2023) social media is categorized into social networking, micro-blogging, content sharing, and blogging.

YouTube: YouTube is one of the most popular social media tools and many users subscribe to many YouTube channels. Based on Adeyinka, Okemute and Tella (2018) Libraries can use their YouTube channel to enhance outreach activities.

WhatsApp: WhatsApp in line with Purkayastha and Chanda (2018) was developed by Brian Acton and Jan Koum in 2009. It is an encrypted platform for instant messaging mainly through smartphones and is used to send audio messages, photos, videos, documents, images, etc. through the internet.

Flicker: This is a website for sharing videos and photos. Based on Akagha, (2021) flicker is a good marketing tool used to sensitize library patrons on the resources and services offered by the library, update patrons on current

developments regarding services and events in the library and render strategic dissemination of information (SDI) services. In summary, Nigerian academic libraries not only use social media for marketing services but also as a channel for delivering real-time information services, including reference services. . Social media is one of the online tools that library staff used for digital reference service delivery in the library.

The digital age has brought changes in the practice of librarianship and reference services in particular. According to Tutu (2016) digital reference service is a service that allows librarians and library users to interact with each other through the internet by chat, e-mail, or instant messaging. Digital reference is one of the fastest-growing and most innovative services developed in libraries. In accordance to Sinhababu and Kumar (2022) the modes for digital reference services can be divided into two broad which are asynchronous digital reference services and synchronous digital reference services.

Asynchronous Digital Reference Services: based on Mkulama, Mwiinga, Chisunka-Mwila and Daka (2020), an Asynchronous digital reference service is a service characterized by communication in one direction at a time, generally by e-mail or web forms. It involves the use of FAQs (frequently asked questions), e-resources, which comprise subject guides, lists, journals, and other content, and e-mail, which may be forms- based or address-based. Asynchronous digital reference service tools used in the library are:

E-mail Reference Service: In this method, information users/seekers send an e-mail to the library with a reference query, supplying whatever information they need.

Web Forms: A web form is visited from the library homepage or the reference web page and is sent back to the library after the user has filled in. The reference librarian provides an answer to the user's question through e-mail, phone, fax or post.

Ask-A Service: These services are usually corporate-funded websites that allow users to ask questions and receive answers for free from public information sites mainly on the World Wide Web. The significance of this is that it portrays the library as relevant to the users irrespective of distance. They have immediate feedback on any query and information needs are satisfied.

Synchronous Digital Reference Service in view of Arumuru (2021) takes place in 'real time' characterized by an immediate response to the query. It is also a two-way communication between a library user and a librarian over the Internet. Relatively, Bukar (2021) synchronous service is a situation where real-time communication takes place between a library user and the librarian sitting in a library and using interactive technologies. This is seen in a situation where a library user clicks a button on a web page to exchange messages with a librarian and gets feedback on his question instantly. Some of the synchronous digital reference service tools are:

Web Chat: Chat over the Internet allows the user to communicate with the reference librarian through brief written messages in real time (Bera, 2019). Both the librarian and the user are online at the same time and can answer each other during the chat.

Video Conferencing or Web Cam Services: According to Isaac and Omame, (2020) said video conferencing gets rid of communication issues connected with

text-based services, as it includes a visual element. Videoconferencing uses both text and speech and can be used for reference transactions.

Instant Messaging (IM) in accordance to Malik (2024) is a type of chat communication which is commonly used. Libraries have been using instant messaging for digital reference service for some time. Instant Messaging is very useful for DRS as it has become very popular among library users.

Digital reference robots: This involves using principles of artificial intelligence to respond to questions when the reference librarian is not available. The most popular type is Ask Jeeves which is available on the Internet.

The emergence of social media technologies has transformed the delivery of digital reference services in academic libraries by providing platforms for real-time communication, user engagement, remote assistance and information dissemination. Social media tools such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Telegram and Twitter have become valuable tools for extending reference services beyond the physical library environment. Despite these benefits, librarians in Federal University Libraries in South-East Nigeria encounter numerous challenges that hinder the effective utilization of social media for digital reference service delivery. One of the major challenges in view of Nduka, Adekanye and Adedokun (2021) is inadequate information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure. Effective social media based reference services require reliable internet connectivity, functional computer systems and adequate digital facilities. However, many university libraries in Nigeria. Another significant challenge is insufficient digital literacy and ICT competencies among library staff. Although social media platforms are widely

available, some librarians lack the advanced technical skills required to manage digital reference interactions effectively. Inadequate expertise in the use of emerging technologies, social networking tools and online communication platforms often limits service effectiveness and innovation. Furthermore, Madu et. al. (2020) stated that epileptic power supply poses a serious challenge to digital reference service delivery. Also, electricity outages disrupt internet connectivity and access to social media platforms, thereby reducing service efficiency and user satisfaction.

Methods

The descriptive survey research was adopted for the study. The population of the study is 296. It comprises all the Professionals (Librarians) and Para-Professional (Non-Librarians) of the five Federal University Libraries in South- East, Nigeria. No sampling technique was used because the sample size is manageable. The questionnaire was structured based on a 4-point rating scale, with responses labeled Strongly Agree (SA), Highly Used (HU), Very High Extent (VHE), Agree (A), High Extent (HE), Moderately Used (MU), Strongly Disagree (SD), Low Extent (LE), Rarely Used (RU), Disagree (D), Not Used (NU) and Very Low Extent (VLE). A criterion mean score of 2.5 was used as the benchmark for decision-making, where items with a mean score greater than or equal to 2.5 were accepted, and items with a mean score less than 2.5 were rejected. The research questions were answered using descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation scores obtained from the data analysis.

Results and Discussion

The results of the data collected from the study are presented in Table 1, 2 and 3.

Research Question 1: What types of social media platforms used by staff for digital reference services in federal university libraries in South-East, Nigeria?

Table 1: Mean Responses on the types of social media platforms used by staff for digital reference services
N= 296

S/N	ITEMS	HU	MU	RU	NU	X	S.D	D	R
1	Facebook	148	86	44	18	3,2	.91	MU	2 nd
2	Whatsapp	169	65	43	19	3.3	.94	MU	1 st
3	Twitter	149	81	52	14	3.2	.90	MU	3 rd
4	You Tube	132	96	44	24	3.1	.99	MU	4 th
5	Flicker	74	71	95	56	2.6	1.0	MU	8 th
6	Instagram	88	94	69	45	2.8	1.0	MU	6 th
7	Telegram	86	87	72	51	2.7	1.0	MU	7 th
8	Blogs	98	116	58	24	3.0	.92	MU	5 th
9	Wikis	83	69	84	60	2.6	1.1	MU	9 th
10	Tik Tok	73	80	95	48	2.6	1.0	MU	10 th

The results presented in Table 1 revealed that staff of federal university libraries in South-East Nigeria moderately use a variety of social media platforms for digital reference services. Among the platforms, Whatsapp (X=3.3) ranked first, followed by Facebook (X=3.2) indicating that these platforms are the most preferred tools for digital reference service delivery. The findings of the study revealed that, majority of the staff use social media to deliver digital reference service to a high extent. This is because the staff use Whatsapp, Facebook, Twitter, Telegram, Instagram, YouTube, and Blogs for digital reference service to a high extent while they use Wikis a low extent for digital reference service. The findings of this study based on Tofi (2019) is in contrast with the present study which said Whatsapp, Twitter, You Tube, Instagram, Blogs, and Instagram were

used to a low extent. From the findings of this study ten (10) items of social media are used to a high extent by the staff.

Research Question 2: To what extent do staff use social media for digital reference services in federal university libraries in South-East Nigeria?

Table 2: Mean responses of the extent university library staff use social media for digital reference services

N=296

S/N	ITEMS	VHE	HE	LE	VLE	X	S.D	D	R
1	Facebook	165	67	43	21	3.3	.96	HE	2 nd
2	Whatsapp	190	63	29	14	3.4	.86	HE	1 st
3	Twitter	140	84	54	18	3.2	.93	HE	3 rd
4	You Tube	100	88	62	24	2.7	.97	HE	6 th
5	Flicker	71	105	63	57	2.6	1.05	HE	8 th
6	Instagram	94	79	78	45	2.8	1.01	HE	5 th
7	Telegram	108	99	50	39	2.9	1.04	HE	4 th
8	Blogs	103	117	51	25	2.6	1.01.	HE	9 th
9	Wikis	75	79	96	48	2.4	1.05	LE	10 th
10	Tik Tok	83	81	83	49	2.7	1.01	MU	7 th

Table 2 indicates that the extent of use of social media for digital reference services among staff is generally high. Whatsapp (X=3.4) ranked first, followed by Facebook (X=3.3), all within the high extent. However, Wikis (X=2.4) fell within the low extent, indicating limited utilization for digital reference services.

Research Question 3: What challenges associated with the use of social media for digital reference services among staff in federal university libraries, South-East Nigeria?

Table 3: Mean responses on challenges associated with the use of social media for digital reference services in libraries.

N=296

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	X	S.D	D	R
1	Poor Funding	198	56	22	20	3.5	.90	SA	1 st
2	Poor internet access	162	82	24	28	3.3	.97	A	3 rd

3	Epileptic power supply	186	69	16	25	3.4	.93	A	2 nd
4	Identity theft/hacking	145	97	31	23	3.2	.93	A	4 th
5	No feedback from users	118	116	41	21	3.1	.90	A	7 th
6	Lack of qualified staff in the library	115	106	61	14	3.1	.88	A	8 th
7	Lack of infrastructural facilities	145	94	35	22	3.2	.93	A	5 th
8	Technophobia	126	112	35	28	3.2	.96	A	6 th

Findings from Table 3 revealed that several challenges hinder the effective use of social media for digital reference services. Poor funding (X=3.5) ranked first among the challenges, followed by epileptic power supply (X=3.4). The findings of the study revealed that major challenges affecting the use of social media for digital reference services in Federal University Libraries in South- East, Nigeria are poor funding, epileptic power supply, poor internet access, inadequate training of library staff, poor internet access, technophobia, lack of infrastructural facilities etc. The above findings correspond with that of Adayi, Neboh and Edeh (2023) which found that, there is erratic power supply and techno phobia.

Recommendation

- University library management should organize workshops, conferences and seminars to provide staff with adequate training, where ideas, knowledge, information and innovations on use of social media for digital reference service can be highlighted.
- The management of the university library should train and retrain librarians in the university libraries on the required technical and communication skills to effectively use of social media tools to deliver digital reference service in the libraries.

- Provision of alternative source of power should be provided by academic institutions.
- University library management should provide adequate internet service in the library for effective digital reference service.

Conclusions

This study examined the use of social media for digital reference services among staff in federal university libraries in South-East Nigeria. The findings revealed that social media platforms have become important tools for delivering digital reference services in university libraries. Platforms such as Whatsapp, Facebook and Twitter emerged as the most commonly used and most effective channels due to their interactive features, accessibility and ability to support real-time communication with library users.

However, despite the notable level of use, the study identified several challenges hindering optimal use of social media for digital reference services. These include poor funding, epileptic power supply, poor internet access. Addressing these challenges through improved funding, technological support will be essential for strengthening digital reference services and ensuring effective information service delivery in the evolving digital environment.

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