

REPOSITIONING SOCIAL MEDIA FOR CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND SERVICE INNOVATION IN NIGERIAN PUBLIC LIBRARIES

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Abstract

Despite the growing adoption of social media platforms such as Facebook, X, Instagram, and WhatsApp by public libraries globally and within Nigeria, their utilisation have largely remained confined to promotional and informational functions, with limited emphasis on participatory engagement or service innovation. This paper examines the evolving role of social media in public libraries and interrogates the gap between its widespread adoption and its underutilisation as a tool for civic dialogue and collaborative knowledge creation. Adopting a conceptual and policy oriented approach, the study argues for the strategic repositioning of social media as an integral component of library service delivery in Nigerian public libraries. It draws on existing literature and theoretical perspectives, including participatory librarianship and communication for social change, to demonstrate how social media can facilitate inclusive dialogue, enhance community participation, and support co-creation of library services. The paper further identifies key barriers to effective utilisation, including the absence of coherent policy frameworks, limited digital competencies among library personnel, and infrastructural constraints. The study proposes a shift from routine, one way communication practices to a more structured, participatory, and policy driven model of digital engagement. It highlights the need for institutional commitment, strategic planning, and professional capacity development to fully harness the transformative potential of social media. The paper concludes that the sustained relevance of Nigerian public libraries in the digital age depends on their ability to embed participatory

communication practices and leverage social media as a catalyst for civic engagement, service innovation, and community empowerment.

Keywords: Social media, public libraries, civic engagement, service innovation, participatory communication, Nigeria.

Introduction

In contemporary society, social media has evolved into a central infrastructure for public discourse, civic engagement, and participatory governance. Across sectors, digital platforms increasingly shape how citizens access information and engage with social issues (McCook, 2020; Wardell & Kelly, 2021). As institutions historically committed to equitable information access and informed citizenship, public libraries must adapt to this shift, as their relevance in the digital age depends on their ability to engage communities within these emerging spaces.

Globally, libraries have adopted platforms such as Facebook, X, Instagram, and WhatsApp to enhance visibility and communication. However, both practice and scholarship continue to frame social media primarily as a promotional tool, limiting its use to information dissemination rather than leveraging its potential for dialogue, civic engagement, and collaborative service innovation (Aharony, 2020; Wardell & Kelly, 2021). Consequently, many libraries maintain a largely symbolic digital presence with limited user interaction.

This limitation is particularly evident in Nigeria, where public libraries actively use social media for announcements, event promotion, and basic user engagement.

While such use has improved service awareness and patron satisfaction, it rarely extends to participatory practices such as civic dialogue or collaborative service development. Beyond infrastructural challenges, this reflects a lack of strategic direction, professional orientation, and policy frameworks guiding digital engagement (Danbaki et al., 2020; Olaniyi, 2025).

Set against this context, the present paper advances a conceptual and policy driven argument for the deliberate repositioning of social media as a strategic instrument for promoting civic engagement and driving service innovation in Nigerian public libraries. It argues that the continued relevance and sustainability of public libraries in the digital era will not be determined merely by their presence on online platforms, but by their ability to meaningfully engage users through dialogue, stimulate active participation, and facilitate collaborative knowledge creation within dynamic digital spaces. In essence, social media should not be treated as a peripheral communication channel, but as an integrated component of library service delivery, capable of strengthening community relationships and enhancing the democratic role of libraries.

Furthermore, this paper makes a distinct contribution to the body of knowledge by moving beyond predominantly descriptive narratives that merely document the use of social media in libraries. Instead, it offers a forward-looking, policy oriented framework that underscores the need for strategic repositioning, institutional commitment, and structured implementation. By foregrounding civic engagement and

service innovation as core objectives, the study provides a more comprehensive lens through which social media can be understood not simply as a technological tool, but as a transformative mechanism for redefining the role of public libraries in Nigeria's evolving information and civic landscape.

Social Media and the Evolving Role of Public Libraries

The integration of social media into library services reflects a broader transformation in the information environment, where communication, knowledge exchange, and civic participation increasingly occur within digital spaces. Social media has evolved beyond a mere communication tool into a critical infrastructure for public interaction and engagement (Wardell & Kelly, 2021). For public libraries, this shift presents both an opportunity and a challenge in redefining their roles within contemporary society.

Existing studies indicate that libraries predominantly use social media for promotional and informational purposes rather than for interactive engagement (Aharony, 2020; Al-Daihani & AlAwadhi, 2015). This pattern is also evident in Nigeria, where platforms are widely used for announcements and publicity but rarely for sustained dialogue or collaborative service development (Danbaki et al., 2020; Olaniyi, 2025). As a result, many libraries maintain a symbolic digital presence that limits meaningful interaction with users.

Such limited application constrains the ability of public libraries to function as active digital spaces for community engagement. It reinforces a one-way communication model that undermines the participatory potential of social media and restricts its contribution to civic life and knowledge co-creation.

Public Libraries, Civic Engagement and Service Innovation

Public libraries have historically served as democratic institutions committed to promoting informed citizenship and equitable access to information. However, the nature of civic engagement has evolved significantly with the rise of digital technologies, requiring libraries to extend their roles into online spaces.

Scholars emphasise that libraries are increasingly required to reposition their roles within the evolving digital information landscape by not only providing access to credible and authoritative information but also by enhancing users' digital literacy skills and supporting inclusive public discourse. Contemporary scholars emphasize that libraries should move beyond their traditional passive roles to become active facilitators of knowledge exchange, civic engagement, and community empowerment (Paul T. Jaeger et al., 2014; R. David Lankes, 2016). In this context, the integration of social media platforms has created new opportunities for interactive communication, user participation, and collaborative knowledge production. Recent studies further affirm that social media enhances library visibility, strengthens user engagement, and supports participatory learning and civic dialogue among diverse user communities

(Pasipamire, 2026; Henez, 2024). By leveraging these platforms effectively, libraries can reinforce their position as trusted, community-centered institutions in the digital age.

Barriers to Strategic Social Media Utilisation in Nigerian Public Libraries

Despite its potential, the strategic use of social media in Nigerian public libraries remains constrained by several interrelated challenges. A major limitation is the absence of clear policy frameworks that guide the use of social media for civic engagement and participatory communication. Many libraries lack institutional strategies that define objectives and expectations for digital interaction, resulting in inconsistent practices.

Limited digital competencies among library personnel also hinder effective engagement. Without adequate training in digital communication and community interaction, libraries struggle to move beyond basic information dissemination. In addition, infrastructural challenges, including unreliable internet access and limited technological resources, further restrict effective utilisation.

These challenges collectively underscore the need for a shift from routine social media use toward a more strategic, policy-driven approach that aligns with the evolving roles of public libraries in the digital age.

Repositioning Social Media for Civic Engagement and Service Innovation: A Policy Perspective

The central argument of this paper is that the key challenge facing Nigerian public libraries is not the absence of social media adoption, but the lack of a clear strategic orientation guiding its use. While many libraries maintain an online presence, social media remains largely confined to publicity and routine communication.

Repositioning social media requires a deliberate shift from viewing it as a promotional tool to recognizing it as a platform for civic engagement, participatory communication, and service innovation. This transformation involves integrating social media into institutional strategies, aligning it with civic objectives, and embedding it within core service delivery frameworks.

Such a shift will enable libraries to foster meaningful interactions with their communities, support democratic participation, and co-create services that reflect user needs. It will also strengthen the role of public libraries as active contributors to national development and social cohesion.

Implications for Policy and Professional Practice

The repositioning of social media in public libraries has significant implications for policy, management, and professional development. Governments must recognize public libraries as components of national digital infrastructure and support their role in civic engagement through appropriate policies and investments.

Library management should adopt strategic approaches to digital engagement, including clear objectives, staff capacity development, and performance evaluation mechanisms. Professional bodies and training institutions must prioritize digital competencies and participatory approaches in librarian education and continuous professional development.

Through coordinated efforts, public libraries can enhance their relevance as inclusive, responsive, and innovative institutions capable of addressing contemporary societal challenges.

Conclusion

Conclusively, the paper argues that Nigerian public libraries must transcend a largely symbolic or perfunctory use of social media and embrace a more strategic, intentional, and participatory model of digital engagement. Although the adoption of social media platforms is increasingly evident across many public libraries, their transformative potential particularly in advancing civic dialogue, deepening community participation, and driving service innovation remains insufficiently harnessed. This gap underscores the need for a fundamental shift from passive information dissemination to active, user centered engagement practices.

Reconceptualizing social media as an integral component of library service delivery offers significant opportunities for enhancing the democratic and developmental roles of public libraries. When effectively deployed, these platforms can

facilitate inclusive conversations, strengthen relationships between libraries and their communities, and enable more responsive, needs-driven services. In this sense, social media becomes not merely a communication tool, but a catalyst for reimagining library services in ways that are collaborative, adaptive, and socially relevant.

Ultimately, the sustained relevance and impact of Nigerian public libraries in the digital era will depend on their capacity to institutionalize participatory communication frameworks and leverage social media as a vehicle for innovation and transformation. By embedding these practices within policy and operational structures, libraries can reposition themselves as dynamic hubs of knowledge exchange, civic engagement, and community empowerment in an increasingly networked society.

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