

**THE USE OF WHATSAPP FOR EFFECTIVE SERVICE DELIVERY IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup>  
CENTURY NIGERIA ACADEMIC LIBRARY**

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**Abstract**

Academic libraries are expected to collect, store, and provide access to different types of information for all categories of users in the parent institution. This paper highlights academic library of an institution as the central point of knowledge sharing and dissemination. It also examines the use of Whatsapp for effective library services in Nigeria. Today, for the library to achieve its duties and functions of sharing information timely and accurately, it is relying heavily on Whatsapp and other social networks to reach the target audience.

**Introduction**

The idea of the library as real space located and operated within a geographical area has been redefined by the introduction of Information and Communication Technology into library processes and routine activities. The concept of the library as virtual space has significantly widened and redefined both the nature of the library existence and the mode of operation. The library which is like a living organism grows and changes with time and trend in the society. Technology, social and political views, colors the face of the library in every age.

There is no time in the history of academic libraries that technological innovations have affected the library so much as in our contemporary time. As it was earlier mentioned, the innovation made in ICT has tremendous impact on the way the library packages and also presented itself. The mobile technology belongs to the generic term web 2.0 or library 2.0 as one of the technological innovations that tremendously affected the library and its services to users.

Academic library of an institution are the central point of knowledge sharing and dissemination. In this knowledge age, academic libraries are using social media to reach as many library users as possible and they apply the contemporary technology in information dissemination and service delivery. The librarians are continually interacting with the students and members of the faculty using social media. Actually the duty and functions of the libraries is to share information timely and accurately. The social media is currently the most available and best suitable technology to achieve this purpose. The trust of this paper is therefore to examine the use of Whatsapp for academic library service in Nigerian in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **The Social Media**

There are many ways the social media can be used in academic libraries, Sahu, K.M. (2016) noted three ways social media can be applied to academic libraries.

- a) Information communication
- b) Information distribution
- c) Knowledge organization

Social media does not only limit itself only to the three above, it can also be used to create as well as, acquired information. These are basic functions of any library in any given academic set-up. With this in mind, any academic library worth its name will seek to explore the best way to reach its users and facilitate learning among users of academic libraries.

Web 2.0 was initially conceived and made popular by Tim O'Reilly media in 2004, he used it to describe the trend and business models that survive the technology sector market clash of the 90s (O'Reilly 2005). The argument here is that the companies, services that survive the clash as certain characteristics that are peculiar to them, namely: there are collaborative in nature, interactive, dynamic and the difference between the creator and consumption of content in this environment is not create- users create as well as consume the content. Web 2.0 is a web of multi sensory communication (Manes 2016)

Miller (2005) dates back the linkages of library 2.0 to Michael Casey on his library crunch blog. Casey (2006) defined the term very broadly, arguing that it applies beyond technological innovations and services. Manes (2016) like many others attempted, provided a more encompassing definition and theory of library 2.0, as well as providing examples of its substantial implication for librarianship. The idea of a more exerts definition for the term and theory is necessary to focus discussion and explanation within the community and will be valuable in the implementation of new web based services in the next several years. Manes (2006) defined library 2.0 as the application of interactive collaboration and multi-media web based technologies to web based library services and collection. The idea here is to ensure that we don't let library 2.0 spill off into all the library services but web based library services. He thus marshal out the characteristics of library 2.0 as follows:

- 1) **It is user centered:** Users participate in the creation of the content and services, they review within the library web presence, OPAC etc. the consumption and creation of content is dynamic and thus the role of librarian and users are not always clear.
- 2) **It provides a multi-media experience:** Both the collection and services of library 2.0 contain video and audio component.
- 3) **It is communally innovative:** This is perhaps the single most important part of library 2.0. It rests on the foundation of libraries as a community service, but understand that as the community change, libraries must not only change with them, they must allow the user to change the library.
- 4) **It is equally rich:** The library web presence includes user presences. There are both synchronous (e.g. IM) and asynchronous (e.g. wikis) ways for users to communicate with one another and librarians.

### **Whatsapp: Historical Background**

Whatsapp was founded in 2009 by Brian Acton and Joe Konn, both of who were formal employees of Yahoo. After leaving the company, both of them traveled to South America to take a break from work and that was where they created Whatsapp. Whatsapp Inc. was later acquired by facebook in February 2014 for approximately US\$19.3 Billion. As at February 2018, Whatsapp has a user base of over one billion and half making it the most popular messenger app as at that time (Constine 2018)

It is freeware and cross-platform message and voice over IP (VOIP) service owned by facebook (Metz 2016). According to Ansan (2017), Whatsapp is one of the most interesting mobile instant messaging applications in the market today. It is a cross platform instant messaging application for smart phones. It enables users to send and receive location information images video audio and text messages in real time to individuals and groups of users at no cost.

Whatsapp requires a mobile internet connection and both parties (users) must have the software installed on their mobile phone. Whatsapp also has some other social features like: contacts can see when their friends are online, when they are typing, when they last access the application, when information is sent, delivered, and read by the recipient. It has privacy features like hide last seen, profile pictures and status.

### **Specifications of Whatsapp**

The operating systems that support the running of Whatsapp on mobile system include:

1 phone (os3.1 or newer)

Android (052.1 or newer)

Blackberry (054.5 or newer)

Nokia symbian S560 (3<sup>rd</sup> edition feature pack 1 or newer)

Widow phone (0S7.5 or newer)

Whatsapp web (Through web direct)

## **Library Services Which Can Be Delivered on Whatsapp**

Ansari (2016) enumerated eleven library services that can be delivered on Whatsapp among which are the following:

**Current Awareness Services:** current awareness keeps library users aware of arrival of new document to the library stock using Whatsapp. Library users are kept currently aware of new arrivals: books, journals, table of content, maps, etc without physically visit the library.

**Selectiveness Dissemination of Information:** selective dissemination of information is a current awareness service which a personalized service meant for the individual or group of users having similar information needs.

**Reference Service:** user can seek for information from the reference librarian and receive feedbacks through Whatsapp.

**User Discussion:** a group created by the library to provide SDI can be a good platform to share ideas information with each other.

**Document Reservation:** Documents can be asked to be reserved by a user and will be notified of its availability using Whatsapp.

**Abstracting services:** Whatsapp can be veritable platform to provide abstracting services to library user.

**Library Instruction:** Libraries can offer library instruction like orientation, rules and regulation, library tour to users by making video of this and sending to library users.

**Acquisition Feedback:** Acquisition librarian can seek suggestion from readers on best documents to acquire by simply uploading the catalogue into Whatsapp platform and then get feedbacks from them. Users can also send the new arrival of their subject. This process will help make best acquisition as well as save money.

**Reminder and Notification:** Whatsapp can be used by libraries to send notification and reminder for items, information on availability of materials and due date to many users at the same time.

**Library News:** Whatsapp can be a very good platform to inform users about upcoming events in the library.

**E-Book Searching:** Whatsapp can become a good place to use and send links about e-resources.

**Mobile collection:** Audio books, audio language course, streaming music, films, images and other multi- media resources can be delivered through Whatsapp.

**Reprography:** Reprography services from the library can be requested using Whatsapp and subsequently it will be collected from library.

Sigh and Sigh categorized the library services that should be rendered through Whatsapp into five:

Information sharing

Information dissemination

Knowledge sharing

Communication

Other assistance

**Information Sharing:** This is the interaction between the librarian and the users on available services in the library and the users feedback.

**Information Dissemination:** This involves wide range of information including library news, future events, organized specifically for library users and other current awareness services.

**Knowledge Sharing:** This stands out as the major use of Whatsapp in library. Knowledge are shared to users in the following ways: hyperlink and URLs of useful educational websites, library institutions, database use instructions, book reviews or its links, exhibition of special collections and information literacy.

**Others:** This may include library audio tour, library video tour and personalized assistance to users.

### **Whatsapp Application in Academic Library**

Topper (2007) found that libraries will have to reach users in their preferred methods in communication. The most common means of communication today among the many users of the library is the social media. In our context, the most common social media is the Whatsapp; this platform is not only an instant message app, but a reliable and a cheap app that is very easy to



use. The features appeals to both the librarians and the library user. It does not need much tailoring or mentoring but one also learns to use it as one start using it.

Bakare (2018) maintains that librarians can send instant messages to users using Whatsapp and get instant responds. Urgent messages that require library users attention can be communicated to users, even documents and materials can be sent at anytime even outside the library rush hour. This calls for every academic library to set up the office of the social librarian whose work is to interact continuously with the library users. Thus information will adequately be communicated and read to the end user timely. Neglecting this very important feature of our contemporary technology and practice means sending the library back to the analogue era when one has to visit the library in other to consult the necessary information. Finally, Bakare (2018) noted that this can also be a good means of making money for the library, especially in our own time when the library budget is very limited and lean. These are numerous benefits academic librarians will derive by using Whatsapp application in discharging library services to users in academic library.

Ansari (2016) listed twelve benefits of using Whatsapp in academic library, among which include:

- 1. Cost:** Ones the annual charge is paid, there is no more charge and no limit to what one can send using Whatsapp charges including text, pictures, video, audio, location information.
- 2. Switching:** Users can easily switch their phone device, reinstall or upgrade the software as long as their service remains with Whatsapp.

- 3. No limitation:** Whatsapp messages are free and not limited in terms of characters and content.
- 4. Group sharing:** Whatsapp allows user to create group or a broadcast to send messages in bulk
- 5. Privacy features:** a person has right to add, block or leave a group even to hide some features.
- 6. Immediate delivery:** The delivery of Whatsapp file is fast and immediate when compared to other applications.
- 7. Visual feedbacks:** It uses ticks to notify means sent, two tick means delivery, green two tick means read.
- 8. Multi-media file sharing:** It supports audio, video, images and location information along with messaging services.
- 9. Choice of technology:** Whatsapp can work comfortable on many operating systems of different smart phones
- 10. Calling facility:** It provides calling facility to users. These facilities are not geographical bound and attract no additional charges.

Considering all these attractive features, it is imperative in this 21<sup>st</sup> century that an academic librarian needs this application not only to function effectively but also to satisfy its users needs highly. The Whatsapp application combines both social interactions with user satisfaction simultaneously. As a collaborative application, both the user and the academic librarian can mutually interact, thus creating room for innovative in user need satisfaction.

### **Challenges of using Whatsapp for library service.**

Despite all the numerous prospect and benefits from the use of Whatsapp in service delivery in academic library, a number of challenges still present itself in the process.

Ansan and Tripatti (2017) present the following challenges:

1. It also requires technological expertise for using Whatsapp web client system to deliver services.
2. Whatsapp requires considerable time commitment from library staff
3. The level of interest and skill for service provided by Whatsapp vary across library staff.
4. There are limited funds available to libraries to support more advanced social media tools and the training that would be required to enable this.
5. A library needs to work hard to maintain engagement of staff with users. It is also difficult to maintain popularity by delivering satisfactory services.
6. It can be difficult to maintain library branding for resources made available via Whatsapp.
7. External factors such as internet connectivity, hardware issues, lack of training and technological infrastructure.

### **Conclusion**

The benefits of using Whatsapp are so much to be neglected by any academic library in our current digitized and networked environment. As already noted, Whatsapp delivers instant messages in real time and its ability in delivering voice, picture and video messages is unrivalled. The academic librarians should utilize these features of the Whatsapp in its service delivery to its various users. It can be very useful in current awareness services, announcement and many other services to the library users.

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