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Social Media Strategies for Dynamic Library Service Development

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Chapter 13

Strategic Planning for Social Media in Libraries: The Case of Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

Like in any endeavor, adoption and use of social media requires planning. However, this is not the case in Zimbabwe. To assess the situation, a study was conducted among different type of libraries in the country. Purposive sampling technique was adopted. The objectives were to find out the libraries which had social media strategic plans, and, among those which had none, to establish the extent to which social media use policies and principles corresponded to the basic strategic plan model. Results indicated that adopted tools include Facebook, Wikis, YouTube, Blogs, Twitter, Skype, Flicr, Ning, and LinkedIn. Reasons for adoption included being trendy as well as to enhance the library’s efficiency, and goals included to continuously avail information in a variety of formats to clients within a short space of time and to effectively market library services. However, no library had a written social media strategic plan. The principles and policies for using social media covered strategies for implementation, surveillance, and monitoring of platforms for accountability.

INTRODUCTION

Technological advancements of the 21st century have continued to usher in new information technology (IT) tools for information dissemination in all sectors in society. Reports abound on how some of these technologies, especially social media tools, have become preferential tools for library service delivery in both developed and developing countries because of their ability to
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foster user-centered service. The tools are seen as offering a viable alternative that increases the value of service through interactivity and collaboration in real-time. Additionally, as pointed out by Luo, Wang and Hans (2013), libraries have adopted social media tools because this is where the users are. However, Mathews (2011) contends that the use of social media in libraries should not be about reaching a mass audience, but about “building brand loyalty . . . building an ambassadors program, a network of friends and allies . . . [for] enhancing the relationship with your core users” p.21.

Most studies, (e.g. Luo, Wang & Hans, 2013) especially in the developing world, have concentrated on establishing the types of social media adopted in libraries and the benefits of doing so. The authors did not come across any study that focused on the nature of planning and preparation that libraries undertake before adopting particular social media tools. However, the Internet is awash with social media strategic plans for libraries in the developed world. This paper, thus, contends that the adoption of social media tools in libraries in Zimbabwe has not followed a systematically laid down plan or strategy. The term social media used in this paper refers to Web 2.0 technologies that allow users operating in a social online environment, to generate content that includes text, audio, video or multimedia and to share it as well as to use other people’s content. Social media falls into six primary groups: collaborative projects, blogs, content communities, social networking sites, the virtual game world and the virtual social world, according to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) cited by Steiner (2012, pp. 1-2). Steiner went on to add that these groups are in-line with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s (OECD) (2007) criteria for genuinely user-generated content, which are as follows:

1. It must include “content made publicly available over the Internet,”

2. It must “[reflect] a certain amount of creative effort,” and

3. It must be “created outside of professional routines and practices”.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

The importance of strategic planning in the adoption of social media tools in libraries is highlighted by a number of authors (Choi 2012; Steiner 2012; Mathews 2011; Walker 2010), although others like Wolfe (2012) have called for the development of a philosophy on social media use in libraries than developing strategies. He argued that social media tools are fads that last, but for a while. Thus, where the adoption of social media is based on philosophy, it would be easy for libraries to drop the social media type which would have lost its luster and to move on to adopt an emerging technology that serves the library’s purpose. However, a strategic plan helps a library answer questions on the why and how of the processes in a library and looks at the whole organisation or a large part, and is “not just a plan for one particular product, project or program” (Lins, nd). It is a means through which an organization or community sets the goals it wishes to achieve, and the steps it will take to reach those goals; and involves both long and short-term planning (Browne, Lanine & Deo, 2006). It differs from a policy which is a guideline, principle, rule, regulation or law that is used as a reference point in decision making or choosing the appropriate behaviour to follow. A policy can act as a code of conduct. The aim of policies is to foster consistence and a common understanding. A strategic plan, however, enables an organisation to establish its current status as well as to streamline its goals and to envision its development and the future performance of the whole organisation with respect to attaining its goals (Steiner 2012, p.1). The development of a strategic plan is guided by the organisation’s mission, vision, values and culture. Referring to
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Johnson and Burclaff (2013) noted that because “libraries are mission-driven organizations”, hence use of social media should be based on “active reflection of the library’s mission and culture” (p. 399).

Strategic Planning Processes

A number of models for conducting the strategic planning process have been outlined. Lins (nd) mentions six models that include:

1. Vision- or goals-based model,
2. Issues-based planning,
3. Alignment model,
4. Scenario planning,
5. ‘Organic’ (or self-organising) planning and
6. Real-time planning.

McNamara (2006) lists five models that include:

1. “Basic” strategic planning;
2. Issue-based (or goal-based) planning,
3. Alignment model,
4. Scenario planning and
5. “Organic” (or self-organizing) planning.

This chapter is guided by the basic strategic planning model, which is equivalent to the vision- or goal-based model in Lin’s typology. The strategic planning process for this model goes through the following main steps:

1. Identifying the purpose and mission of the organisation,
2. Identifying the vision of the organisation or future state of customers,
3. Identifying the goals that the organization must reach so as to effectively attain its mission and vision,
4. Identifying the specific approaches or strategies for implementation in order to attain the goals,
5. Identifying the specific action plans to undertake under each approach or strategy,
6. Compile the strategic plan document by bringing together the mission and vision statements, approaches and action plans,
7. Monitoring and evaluation and updating the strategic plan, when necessary.

Adoption of Social Media in Zimbabwe Libraries

A descriptive qualitative study was conducted among 32 academic, public, school and special libraries throughout Zimbabwe; and responses were received from 12 libraries (6 academic, 4 school and 2 public libraries). Purposive sampling technique was adopted based on the likelihood of a library to have adopted a social media strategic plan. The specific objectives were to find out if there were any libraries which had developed social media strategic plans before adopting social media tools in their libraries; and, among those which had no strategic plans, to find out the extent to which the social media use policies and principles in place, tallied with the steps in the basic strategic plan model. Data was collected using a questionnaire in which most of the items were not structured. A sample of 12 librarians participated in the study meaning, one librarian from each of the 12 libraries that turned in their responses.

Preferred Social Media Tools and Accessibility

The social media tools that most of the libraries had adopted included Facebook, wikis, YouTube, blogs, Twitter, Skype, Flicr, Ning and LinkedIn. Tools that did not meet the definition outlined in the introduction section above were not considered during data analysis. These included Whatsapp, sms and emails.

About fifty percent of the librarian from academic libraries (4) one from public library and one from school library, indicated that the
social media tools were accessible through the library’s or their university’s/school’s website; and in the remainder, the tools were accessible from the Internet.

The social media tools adopted in most of the libraries were similar to those reported to be popular in other libraries in the previous related studies. For example, Ezeani and Igwesi (2012, p. 3) pointed out that social media tools that included Facebook, Myspace, Twitter and YouTube were some of those adopted in Nigerian libraries. The American Library Association ALA (2012), in a report in Colorado in the United States of America, noted that Facebook with 88.8% users, had the highest usage percentages, followed by Twitter with 48.8% users, blogging tools with 44.2% users, YouTube with 38.2% users, flickr with 35.4% users, google docs with 33.05% users and wikis with 20.1% users.

On the possession of a social media strategic plan, only one school library had a written down social media strategy. This strategic plan was at proposal stage and was yet to be endorsed by the school authorities. Another librarian from a school library said that their library had its own Internet Use Policy which was different from the Internet Use Policy that applied to the rest of the school that spelt out how students should conduct themselves when using the Internet and Web 2.0 tools. The other libraries did not have any written strategic plans or policies on social media use.

**Purpose and Mission for Using Social Media**

On what led the libraries to incorporate social media tools in their service provision, all the participating libraries indicated that it was because doing so was trendy; and also encouraged them to keep-up-to-date with emerging technologies. The social media enabled them to communicate with fellow professionals who were outside or inside their organisation as well as collaborate on projects. This was also observed by Choi (2012) in his study of Australian librarians where it was found that respondents thought that people who work in libraries should engage with colleagues within and outside their organisation using social media tools.

Another reason for adopting social media was because some of their users had enlightened the library on how the library’s services could be enhanced by adopting certain social media tools. Similarly, a school librarian thought that adopting social media tools would enhance the library’s efficiency. A librarian from an academic library said that the library where he works is an innovative and technology oriented university, hence; he felt compelled to stay abreast of modern technology and to apply it where possible in its various activities. Using technologies that included social media tools enabled the library to add value to the learning processes.

One of the librarian from the public library observed that the library had started to use Facebook as at the time when the library was embarking on fund raising activities after realizing the popularity of Facebook and the fact that it was used by almost all age groups. This was lead to the belief that Facebook would expand the targeted audience for the library.

**Vision and Image Attained by Using Social Media**

On the question of the image that the library is expected to create by adopting social media tools, it was said that using new and emerging technologies in the provision of services and information is a hallmark of a top class academic library. Thus, adopting social media would help the respondents attain this status. Another librarian thought that using social media helped the library to demonstrate an image of a techno-savvy library in an innovation and technology institution. Another respondent said that using social media helped them to live up to their vision of being “a dominant digital knowledge and information focal-point supporting scholarship in innovation in the Institute and elsewhere”.


The image building effect of social media on libraries was supported by Romero (2011). He pointed out that the issue of visibility was important for a library because it affects the extent of access to resources. Through this media, libraries can enhance their image when they publicize their activities and services, which at times are not valued simply because the services are not known (Luo & Han, 2013). Equally, social media can give libraries a new fresher image that contrasts with its older traditional image.

Goals to Be Achieved by Using Social Media

On what the use of social media tools have helped the libraries to achieve, the respondents said that social media helped them to continuously make information available in a variety of formats which helps them reach out to old, new and prospective clients and thus increasing the library’s patronage. The tools have also helped them to be effective in advertising and marketing some of the services offered by the libraries, largely because it is less expensive to market online than using the traditional medium like newspaper, television and radio. Similarly, it was indicated that social media allows one to reach a wide audience within a short space of time; broaden the participation of library patrons in library service provision in an interactive way; get feedback about library’s services; provide information literacy training to clients in remote places; enhance the visibility of the library and enable the library to maintain good relations with clients when they are able to inform the clients of their overdue fines in time because of improved communication between the library and its clients. A school library librarian said that social media helped them to impart, and nurture information technology skills to their young readers.

The above responses are similar to what has been reported in the literature as the reasons that drive libraries to adopt social media. For example, social media is used to market library services through provision of current awareness services (Johnson cited by Wasike, 2013), it is also used to provide technical instruction to library clients, to communicate with authors and in recruiting and managing volunteers as well as when communicating about special content and resources available to the library community and as a tool for reference transactions, that is, for receiving and resolving complaints (Luo & Han, 2013; Rogers 2011); to enhance a library’s access to information and knowledge, capability to disseminate information, as well as facilitate interconnectivity and seamless communication between users and librarians (Wasike); and to monitor what is being said about the library and provide feedback quickly (Collins & Quan-Haase 2012); expansion of professional networks, and thus potential collaborations with other professionals (Choi, 2012) and to reach the new audiences of potential users and publishing library news and press releases (Luo & Han, 2013). Additionally, Romero (2011) noted that social media tools can be used as platforms for the promotion of a reading culture.

The study also sought to find out the target community for social media use in libraries. The answers included library patrons, former, current and future library patrons, users are both on and off campus, other librarians; business partners including booksellers, suppliers of IT consumables and other library accessories; board members and stakeholders in industry.

The motive or intended benefits for reaching the audience indicated above using social media bordered largely on intention to engage the audience in an interactive way that would enable the audience to actively participate in library service provision. Active participation meant that the audience could be able to question as well as offer suggestions and feedback on the provision of library service; and because of this interactivity, the library would constantly gather detail on their patron needs and thus be able to tailor their services to meet those needs.
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Literature has highlighted benefits that accrue to libraries when using social media to include increased user participation, interaction and engagement (Choi, 2012); ability to reach new customers, gather feedback from customers and the community, building community networks and fundraising (Blackman & Brown as cited by Luo & Han (2013). However, Bradley, Macdonald and Golden (2011) and Golden (2011) cited by Choi (2012) point out that inspite of these benefits, some libraries have failed to adopt social media because they perceive it “as a triviality, a waste of employee work time, security risk, or lack of understanding of social media”.

Strategies for Implementation and Action Plans

On the strategies put in place for using social media, the libraries were asked if they targeted specific social media tools for specific clientele. Two academic and two school librarians said that they did and three academic librarians said that they did not. Those who targeted the tools said that they used blogs and microblogs to reach mostly the researchers as well as Part II to Part IV students as these would have started undertaking research projects. Those who did not target the tools said that they aimed to maximize reaching out to all students and staff this way.

Continuing on strategies in place for social media use, the librarians were asked if they used specific social media for specific library services. The results indicate that Facebook was being used as electronic notice board for announcing events, reminding and updating users on specific information, posting items of interest and notices such as on new book announcements, highlighting specific library projects such as upcoming visits by authors, workshops, seminars on current awareness services, lobbying for funding as well as a platform for responding to specific issues that clients may raise. One respondent had created inventories of new acquisitions that were accessible through Facebook. Twitter was used for sending short messages to inform students and staff on news and events in the library and reminders on specific calendar events. Skype was being used for video conferencing during information literacy skills instruction. LinkedIn was used for professional networking with other professionals.

Literature on the application of social media tools in libraries indicates similarities between what has been reported and the findings in this study. Studies by Benn and Mcoughlin (2013) reported that academic libraries used social media to conduct enquiry and reference services, to promote services, to disseminate news, to send out notifications to users and to get their feedback. The American Library Association (ALA) (2012) reported increase in the use of social media in promoting general library services, marketing specific adult programs or services, specific children and youth services and programs, providing quick updates to users and reaching out to new audiences and potential users.

Surveillance, Monitoring, and Moderation of Content

Surveillance as an implementation strategy focused on establishing whether the libraries systematically ‘kept an eye’ on activities taking place on the social media platforms and whether they had set times for monitoring comments and giving feedback. The results reveal that two academic and three school librarians limited their surveillance to any time during working hours only. Three academic librarians and one public library librarian said that they continued the surveillance throughout the day including weekends. About giving feedback, all the respondents said that they respond to queries at any time they could. One went further to say that when they initiated a discussion, they constantly looked out for feedback and when they envisaged some delay, they did some probing to generate interest. Another respondent pointed out that social media tools had
enabled the librarian to initiate discussion and get comments on particular topics which were then followed by in-depth discussion through email and other forms of communication.

Accountability

The other issue raised on implementation was on accountability. Under this theme, one of the questions raised was on the allocation of responsibility to staff for running the social media platforms. All the respondents reported having staff that was in-charge of the social media platforms, among their other duties. With respect to staff members being answerable to the content that they posted on the official platforms, all librarians except one said that their staff was answerable for what they posted on behalf of the library. It was emphasized that only content which would have been discussed by staff is posted.

Another accountability issue focused on the handling of content posted on the platforms. Five of the respondents said that they posted different contents on all the platforms they subscribed to. It was said that the library did this because it was difficult for them to separate content; and in another, the library had adopted only one platform and thus conducted all its business on this only one platform. The other respondents said that it was a deliberate choice not to separate content because having all the different content on different social media enabled them to reach out to all the patrons whether they were using Facebook or Twitter. One respondent said that they left the choice to the individual member of staff responsible for running the social media platforms to distribute the content as they saw it fit. Three respondents said that they targeted specific content for different social media platforms. Others said they targeted Facebook for announcing events and promotions with some while other used using it as tools for communication, marketing and advocacy. Similarly, blogs and wikis were set aside for open access blogging and contributions; Skype was used for video conferencing; YouTube was used for videos and video tutorials and Flickr for photosharing.

The other question on accountability focused on the extent to which staff set the tone on the type of content contained in a platform. In response, four academic librarians said they did and one was indifferent. Two school librarians said that it was the students who led the way in deciding the content on the social media platforms, but the students were not allowed to use Facebook for personal chats with their colleagues. Those who said their staff was responsible for setting the tone and to initiate dialogue said it was because they considered use of the social media platforms to be strictly for library business. Furthermore, one respondent said that the content needed to be communicated was first discussed and messages created. These messages could be checked by a supervisor before posting.

Further on accountability, respondents were requested to indicate whether they moderated comments from users on the social media platforms. Four academic librarians indicated that they monitored and moderated the comments. Others said they did not moderate because they did not have a person specifically earmarked for the activity. Among the school librarians, it was indicated that one respondent monitored and moderated the content and the other two did not.

Respondent from academic libraries said that they moderated comments and where it was considered necessary to give feedback to the patron who posted the comment, this is done. Other results indicate that librarians responded to comments from the social media platforms at the same time that they attend to queries and requests made by users in the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) because they did not have staff specifically in charge of this.

The absence of people specifically appointed for social media tasks was highlighted by Choi (2012). He concluded by calling on libraries to create positions of social media librarians to enable the libraries reap maximum benefits of using social media tools in their libraries.
Terms of Social Media Use Policy

Another implementation issue raised was on whether the libraries had any Terms of Use Policy that guided the use of the social media tools in their libraries. All respondents indicated did not have except for two school librarians, who indicated their library had an Internet Use Policy that specifically highlighted Web 2.0 technologies and another whose strategic plan was at proposal stage.

With respect to the Policy and Terms of Use, the libraries were asked if they had a plan for dealing with users who misuse the social media platforms. Five academic librarians and two school librarians said that they had such plans in place, one academic librarian and one public librarian did not have anything in place. Action that would be undertaken when a user posted inappropriate content include removing the content first followed by warning the user not to do it again and other users to refrain from doing the same. If the offence is serious, the user could be brought before a disciplinary committee. The library would sometimes comment about the inappropriate post to help save the image of the organisation. On this, one school librarian reported that he used monitoring software called LanSchool Lite v7.7 to monitor student activities on the Internet.

Archiving Policy of Social Media Content

The posterity of the social media content was also raised with the respondents being asked if they had any archiving plans. None of them had an archiving policy in place. Some said they had never thought about the issue of archiving content for social media tools let alone developing a policy to guide the activities. Others said that they did not have a policy yet because the use of social media tools in delivering service was still in its infancy.

Challenges Faced when Using Social Media

On challenges experienced when using social media tools, two school librarians said that they had experienced cyber bullying, time waster and trolling. They went on to add that they also faced challenges from their school administrators who blocked some of the social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter because they thought that the platforms would be used to communicate dirty jokes. Among the academic librarians, three said that they had experienced challenges that included the network being down at times and thus making the social media tools inaccessible, lack confidence in library staff to use the social media tools as well as resistance to change on the part of both users and library management.

Monitoring, Evaluating, and Updating the Strategic Plan

On how the libraries monitored and evaluated extent of use and effectiveness of the social media tools, two academic librarians said that they kept statistics from the website hits, another said that the library depended on assessing the feedback they got on the platforms and two said that they did not monitor anything. Among the school librarians, one kept statistics from website hits and the other two did not do anything to establish extent of usage.

The respondents were asked to state what they would do should they realise that the social media tools that they were currently using were not helping them attain their goals. In response, some said that they had not thought of that because they had no goals associated with the social media tools that they were using. In some cases, the goals had not been set because the use of the social media tools was being treated as a haphazard means of getting feedback and comments on the services the library offers. Some said they would enlighten their users on the social tools, train them on how to use the
social media (netiquette), and instill discipline on the appropriate use of social media. Some still said that they would try different sets of social media platforms that may help accomplish their goals. Others said that they would resort to other methods such as telephone, cellphone and emails contacts.

FUTURE PLANS

As a way of fostering sustainability in using social media and also to see if the study had affected the way the libraries view use of social media in libraries, the respondents were requested to indicate if they had any thoughts of enhancing the current ways in which their library was using social media tools. The results indicate that all the respondents agreed that they had some thoughts of improving their current situation. These according to them are:

- To increase the number of social media tools in use and to develop a social media policy.
- To advertise the social media tools and encourage staff to constructively make use of the tools in their communication.
- To ensure that each member of staff incorporates use of social media tools in their Key Performance Area (KPA) when the library develops its tactical plans for 2014 and that Performance monitoring would be based on the number of hits on the social media platforms.
- To have a dedicated librarian responsible for managing social media platforms.
- To respond promptly to user queries that comes through social media platforms so as to encourage the patrons to use the platforms.
- To set the tone on all issues which the librarian will post on the social media so that library staff retain ownership of the platforms.
- To continuously control and regulate the proper use of social media tools.
- To allow users to contribute positively on topics that the library is discussing.

SOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The researchers observed that libraries in Zimbabwe need to take courage in the use of social media tools in service provision. Follow-up on some of the librarians that did not respond to the questionnaire revealed that most libraries were not using social media tools officially because they, the librarians were not convinced or did not know how to go about adopting the tools in the formal environment. Discussions on the possible impact of emerging technologies on the librarians can go a long way in changing attitudes. This can be done at meetings of national library association, the Zimbabwe Library Association and those of sector specific groupings like the Zimbabwe Universities Libraries Consortium (ZULC) and the Colleges and Research Institutions Libraries Association.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Future research could consider focusing on the impact of the different social media tools for different types of libraries environments.

CONCLUSION

The paper noted that libraries in Zimbabwe, like their counterpart the world over, are keen to adopt the use of social media tools in service provision. They, however, need to follow a systematic way of doing so, which involves developing a strategic plan to guide their activities. A strategic plan would enable a library to streamline the vision and
goals that it intends to attain by adopting social media. Doing this, a library can be in a position to decide on the most appropriate social media tools to adopt. Where a tool fails to enable the library to meet its needs, the tool can be substituted. To do this effectively, a library should have focus on what it wants to achieve, possible means of achieving that which is intended and the means of constantly monitoring its progress as well as effecting the desired changes.

The main drawback to libraries adopting social media tools currently, in some quarters, includes the negative attitudes of staff, both within the libraries and in institutions that are served by the libraries. This is largely because some people do not yet appreciate the extent to which social media can be used for formal business. In other situations, challenges that relate to lack of physical access to IT tools have deterred extent to which libraries could use social media formally.

REFERENCES


Strategic Planning for Social Media in Libraries


ADDITIONAL READING


KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Academic Library: A library attached to an academic institution.

Digital Literacy: The ability to use technology in an information environment to find, evaluate and use ethically information in all facets of one’s life.

Goals: The overall objectives and mission of the organization that has been established by management.

Policy: A guideline, principle, rule, regulation or law that is used as a reference point in decision making or choosing the appropriate behaviour to follow. It can act as a code of conduct and is aimed to foster consistence and a common understanding.

Public Library: A library that is created to offer free public access to resources.

Social Media: Online communications channels that are Web 2.0 based whose thrust is to foster user content creation which can be done collaboratively and interaction by sharing the content among the channels user. The sharing is done in a social environment. The content can included video, audio, text or multimedia materials.

Special Library: A privately owned library that forms a unit of an organization.

Strategic Planning: A systematic process of envisioning a desired future and translating that vision into defined goal and a sequence of steps to achieve them.

Strategy: A method or plan chosen to bring about the desired future.

Vision: A description of what an organization would like to achieve or accomplish in the midterm or long-term.