

The Use of Social Media by Academic Librarians in State-Owned Universities in Cameroon and the Impact on Service Delivery

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Abstract: The exponential growths of information, coupled with the rapid growths in ICTs, have changed the way academic libraries provide services. Developments in technology particularly in social media tools have created convivial and collaborative environments for libraries, librarians and researchers, yet most academic libraries have not yet adopted social media to improve service delivery. This study set out to investigate the extent to which social media tools are used by academic librarians in seven state-owned universities of Cameroon to provide service delivery. A survey research design was used for the study. Structured questionnaire and interview guide were the instruments for data collection, while frequency counts and percentages were used to analyze data. Findings from the study indicated that social media tools were not optimally used by librarians for library services. Findings also indicated that only two social media tools were popularly used: WhatsApp and Facebook. Lack of technology skills, poor access to internet, and the absence of state-of-the-art equipment and facilities were some of the limitations in the effective use of social media tools for library services. The study recommended that librarians should be schooled on the importance, the availability, and the need to use social media tools in order to create valued library services. Top management and the library administration of sampled Universities should synergize and create a convivial environment needed for professional development with emphasis on formation and capacity building of librarians on ICTs, particularly a variety of social media tools; administration should provide free internet and free access with better bandwidth for better utilization and accessibility; library administration should lobby for funds to purchase generators or solar plants to curb constant power supply; library hierarchy should provide incentives to motivate librarians to accept the use of modern technology for library services.

Keywords: Social Media, Academic Libraries, Librarians, State Owned Universities, Service Delivery, Cameroon.

Introduction

Academic libraries of the twenty-first century have as primary goal to support its parent institutions by providing technical services that meet the objectives of teaching, learning, research and outreach of both staff and academia. By doing so, academic libraries have as obligation to capture, procure, process, store and disseminate both manual and electronic information on library resources that reflect the teaching in faculties, so that researchers and the entire university community would carry out research to produce quality research papers and quality graduates (Nnadozie & Onah, 2016). Before the coming of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), services in academic libraries were done manually and library resources were mostly in print format. Today academic libraries have

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witnessed an unprecedented upsurge of information production and dissemination crowding the environment in digital format resulting to a paradigm shift in information service. The cause of this has been attributed to modern technology. Modern technology has revolutionized the way information is being produced, accessed, stored and shared worldwide. The academic library is the greatest victim of this information revolution. The coming of the internet has given birth to several information aggregators, thus academic libraries are facing competition externally from a host of other information providers. Furthermore, the demands and expectations of today's users are changing constantly, most often requiring information in different format that best fits their need; library visits have reduced drastically as users now require instant and quick access to specific information anytime from anywhere.

Social media is providing academic librarians with methods, pathways and platforms to facilitate information dissemination to an incredible number of users within a short period of time. Social media tools are imposing delivery methods which are appreciated by modern scholars. Adopting the use of social media will become a new wave of providing innovative library services to meet the requests from present day scholars. The traditional ways of library services is systematically becoming redundant, changing to conventional methods largely dictated by technology. The traditional library has been portrayed as being limited in terms of space and resources amidst several inadequacies. As a result, academic libraries in state owned universities in Cameroon have seen the benefits of modern technology, thus have begun integrating social media tools in performing library activities in order to achieve their objective, and in order to adhere to the incessant changing information needs of their users. The primary advantages of using social media include communication and collaboration; their capabilities to create sustainable relationships, collective interactions and provide better opportunities to connect with library patrons at all times. Using social media platforms in an academic library facilitates interaction between librarians and users; it connect users with knowledge and information within an unimaginable short period of time, it helps connect users with other external users, at the same time bringing the expected added value to library activities. The use of some social media tools such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Blogs, Twitter, MySpace, Wikis and YouTube have become indispensable for innovation to provide better library services required of modern academic libraries. For example, social media tools such as Facebook provide librarians the opportunity to create a virtual account, to disseminate information on library activities, sources and services, and at the same time solicit feedback from users. This provides the participatory approach of library services expected from librarians. Twitter provides the platform for librarians to tweet latest news about library activities, events and services at all times. WhatsApp can be used to create different communities of users, improve students' engagement, and create specialized discussion groups, all with the goal to transform librarians' service delivery to suit modern demands. Academic libraries can use social media platforms to provide client services by creating and managing an "ask the librarian" initiative whereby users can chat with their peers who would quickly answer to enquiries at the same time collaborating with other academic libraries for the same purpose. Bakare (2018) reports that the information age has extended the roles of academic librarians to accommodate a wider range of services and resources that expand beyond the traditional library activities. The adoption, acceptability and usage of a combination of social media tools has extended the potentials of academic libraries to innovate and extensively reach out to patrons with a variety of digital and online services. There are several benefits that academic libraries would reap when social media tools are used. For example, easy marketing of their resources and activities such as: informing stakeholders of the variety of services and various resources available, shaping the perception of the library users, enhancing the visibility of the library and its institution, attracting institutional support thereby making the institution to see the bigger picture of the library (Estall & Stephens, 2011).

Cameroon presently has eight state-owned universities operating in eight out of ten regions of the country. State owned universities are public universities created by a presidential decree. Each university has a library which has as main objective ensuring the sharing of knowledge and information in various forms to staff, faculty and the entire academia of the university. These libraries are expected to play a key role in ensuring that the information needs of scholars are met. One way of doing this is by assisting in locating various credible sources and providing access to these sources online, in order to ensure mostly credible information sources are accessed. This can be facilitated by the acceptance and use of social media platforms designed for libraries, by librarians and IT librarians.

However, although academic libraries in state-owned universities in Cameroon thrive to remain current, innovative, proactive and are aware of some of the benefits of social media, a number of challenges are militating against its effective and efficient utilization. Some of the major challenges today cited in literature are inadequate access to internet services (Shafack, 2021); absence of state of the art technologies and lack of skills in use of technology (Bawack, 2019). Based on the above concerns, the objectives of the present study are threefold. First this study seeks to identify the technological skills that academic librarians in public universities in Cameroon have. It focuses in traditional and contemporary skills. Secondly, it seeks to investigate social media skills librarians have and the impact on service delivery, thirdly this work seeks to investigate the attitude of academic librarians with respect to the use of social media technologies.

Statement of the Problem

Although social media tools have been existing for about three decades now, and have become popular among the young generation who are mostly scholars, they have not been widely used in academic libraries in state owned Universities in Cameroon. Library services are still traditionally based, that is, they are essentially carried out manually. Manual services can be cumbersome and time-wasting. Traditional methods of providing library services is limited often only to users who have time to visit the library to search and request for specific library materials within the library collections only. This means that access to information is limited only to those who physically visit the library, only print books and print journals. Manual collections place users at a disadvantage because today information seeking behaviors is changing paradigm from print books and journals to electronic books and e-journals, amidst competition from other information service providers. It is therefore obvious that the predominant traditional library holdings and services need overhaul to catch-up with its limitations and inadequacies if they have to meet up with the exigencies of modern scholars. Therefore, there is an urgent need for academic libraries to re-designing services, incorporate modern technologies, become more innovative in order to embrace new methods of providing, distributing and packaging information. By doing these academic libraries would be satisfying users, they will remain operational, libraries will attract more users, and they will continue to enjoy the monopoly as major information providers on campus in this digital age. With the use of Social media, academic libraries have a greater these go as: librarians have better chances of connecting and getting in touch with the library stakeholders by designing a platform to communicate and interact with the library at all times. Therefore, the way forward is for academic libraries to quickly adopt and use popular ICTs that already exist like social media tools. This will bring about efficiency in library service delivery. This study, therefore, investigated the use of social media tools by academic librarians in seven state-owned universities of Cameroon

Objective of the Study

The general objective of this study was to investigate the use of social media by academic librarians in seven public universities in Cameroon

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The specific objectives were:

1. To investigate the technology skills that academic librarians have and the influence on service delivery in state owned universities in Cameroon,
2. To identify specific social media skills that academic librarians in state-owned universities in Cameroon have,
3. To investigate the attitude of academic librarians in state owned universities in Cameroon towards technology use for library services particularly social media tools.

Scope of the Study

The study focused on the use of social media tools used by librarians in state-owned universities in Cameroon. It covered academic librarians in seven public universities in Cameroon. These universities are the University of Bamenda in the North West region, the University of Buea in the South West region, the University of Douala in the Littoral region, the University of Dschang in the West region, the University of Maroua in the far North region, the University of Yaounde I, and the University of Yaounde II in the center region respectively.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant as the findings would provide academic librarians with evidence based statistics useful to develop strategies that would guide policy and decision making in the use of social media by librarians in libraries. University hierarchy and library management would use the findings for deciding making on the kinds of trainings and workshops needed to update skills of librarians. Moreover, the findings could be useful to library associations and library consortia to re-strategize in their professional development planning programs.

Literature Review

Social media tools are increasingly being deployed in academic libraries to innovate their services and resource packaging as part of aspirations of both current and prospective modern patrons, (Collins & Quan-Haase, 2012). Social media are inter-based online platforms which enable librarians to generate, distribute and share information in a variety of formats as in texts, videos, audios and images. Social media is described by Bashorunet. al., (2018) as a communication forum that permits users to share information electronically and share knowledge indiscriminately among members of the forum. According to (Dixon, 2012), social media involves the use of web applications to transform the traditional one-way communication into an interactive online conversation between two and more people. In other words, social media is an instrument that helps people to communicate with one another irrespective of period or location.

Social media use is essential in academic libraries today, partly because it helps library staff keep themselves abreast of new innovations in their profession, and as Adewoyin(2017) puts it, it facilitates the provision of a variety of new online services that are in high demand today by scholars, hence, the reason why much importance needs to be given to it (Anwar, et. al. (2021). Aras (2014) posits that the objectives of an academic library in using online platforms provided by social media are: to provide better and quick access to information, to solicit feedback from users, to promote and diversity library services and to propagate specific activities of the library. Promoting library services, activities and resources using social media supports the academic library in its efforts to innovate especially by marketing the library urgently needed to attract more information seekers and library users closer so that they may systematically be transformed to advocates for the library's new mission in the digital age (Adewoyin, 2017)

Adewojo&Mayowa (2016) in another study highlighted the quintessence of using social media tools in academic libraries. Their findings revealed that social media tools triggered innovation which helps academic libraries to develop new services that meet diversified interests, and enabled librarians in career development through self-paced and lifelong learning online platforms. In their research, Mamatha and Nikam (2016) reported that social media tools help academic libraries to easily locate and share information, connect with other specialized colleagues from diverse geographical areas and researchers during global events like international conferences, workshops and seminars. Rajesh &Michael (2015) researched on the effectiveness and benefits of using social media for better library services in terms of communication and collaboration among users. The study revealed that some social media tools were effective for better information literacy studies and knowledge sharing, fast communication like announcing new collections and other library updates, discussion groups among users, and invite followers and solicit comments, all of which culminate to improved service and performance.

The knowledge of academic librarians about social media tools and how they were used was examined by Olajide and Oyeniran (2014). Findings of his study revealed academic librarians were knowledgeable about some social media tools, however, findings further reveal that most librarians used social media tools for personal rather than for library services. Findings further revealed that social media tools were used for chatting, gisting, uploading, downloading, watching videos asking questions, sharing pictures and playing games. This finding contradicts that of Aras (2014), who stresses that the objectives of academic libraries in the use of social media should include: to disseminate library services, to provide quick access to digital information, to identify and increase user population, reach out to them and solicit feedback from users.

Prabhakar & Rani (2017) surveyed academic librarians' awareness, use and influence of social media networks for disseminating scientific communication in academic libraries in some universities in Nigeria. Findings revealed that majority of librarians indicated they were knowledgeable in the use of social media. On their part, Collins and Quan-Haase (2012) examined the adoption and use of social media tools by academic libraries in Canada. Their study showed that Facebook, Twitter and YouTube were among the most used social media tools among the sampled academic libraries. In a research conducted by Chu and Du (2013) to investigate the use of social media tools in enhancing networking in academic libraries, findings revealed that two social media tools most popularly used for networking were Facebook and Wikis. The authors stated that these tools were used specifically for online communication, user-interaction, collaboration, sharing of information among scholars and librarians, and finally for informed decision making.

A survey conducted by Mahmood and Richardson (2011) on use of social media among one hundred librarians revealed that most academic libraries were using social media such as Twitter to dispatch news, tweet announcements, and cable out other specific user services. Other authors (Akeriwa, Penzhorn, and Holmner, 2015), have presented social media technologies such as the RSS (Really Simple Syndication) as an excellent tool for monitoring and systematically obtaining latest information on a regular basis from a variety of news services, blogs, internet sites and databases. In a separate study by Akporhonor and Olise (2015) to determine the use of social media tools for promoting library resources in university libraries in South-South, Nigeria, findings revealed that Facebook and blogs were the most popular social media tools used to reach out to patrons with diverse information packages and services. The authors further stated that social media tools were equally used for the improvement of two-way communication, in order to make connecting with library users easier not only for information sharing but for obtaining feedback from users.

Mabewazara (2014) sought to investigate the use of social media tools in two universities in South Africa and Zimbabwe. Findings revealed that almost all librarians in these universities used a variety social media tools which included Facebook, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, Wikis, YouTube, Twitter, Blogs, and Skype. According to Mamatha and Nikam (2016), several advantages accrue from using Twitter in an academic library. Some of the advantages include: information sharing, librarians connecting with colleagues, friends and researchers during workshop and conferences without having to visit the library. Library patrons can also use twitter to send inquiries and assignment through requests and receive instant responses from the library. In the same vein, findings from a study conducted by Ezeani and Igwesi (2012) revealed that most social media tools are mostly used to provide recent and latest information to patrons, provide useful links to open source resources of the library and its affiliates, and announce new arrivals of e-books and e-journals in the library through specific platforms. Petiti (2011) opined that an active social media presence in academic libraries would be a sign of changing paradigm from traditional to modern libraries, hence would be fulfilling the expectations of most users and finding users who were missing or who might not be keen at getting connected.

Methodology

A descriptive survey design was employed for this study. The population consisted of 156 academic librarians from seven state-owned universities in Cameroon. The universities were: the University of Bamenda, the University of Buea, the University of Douala, the University of Dschang, the University of Maroua, the University of Yaounde I, and the University of Yaounde II. The total number of librarians sampled in these universities is 156 and as a result, total enumeration was used to cover the librarians.

Instruments for Data Collection

The research instrument that were used for data collection were questionnaire which was collected from academic librarians in public universities of Cameroon and interview schedule. A total of 156 copies of questionnaire were administered to the librarians in the public universities, of which 156 copies (100%) were returned. Frequency counts and percentages were used for the data analysis. Microsoft Excel was used to analyze data. Chief librarians and their deputies were interviewed.

Findings

Demographic information

The gender distribution of the respondents shows that 86 (55%) of the respondents are male while 70 (45%) are female. This shows the domination of male in the universities that were surveyed. 85% of respondents have worked for 10 years and above with a percentage of (54%). The second largest group of forty-one respondents (26%) indicated they have worked for between 6 to 10 years; twenty-eight respondents (18%) worked between 2 – 5 years and only two respondents (1%) indicated they were new with having just less than one year work experience.

The educational qualifications of respondents shows that 79 (51%) are holders of a bachelor degree in a variety of disciplines, four respondents (3%) were holders of a Ph.D, (3%) and only 1 (1%) had a Maitrise. Respondents with Ph.D. and Masters are expected to perform complex library services, unfortunately they are a minority. This finding shows that libraries in state-owned universities in Cameroon do not have many qualified professionals working in academic libraries.

Research Question 1: What technology skills do academic librarians in state-owned universities in Cameroon have to provide library services?

Skills in information technology were grouped under traditional skills and contemporary skills.

Traditional skills

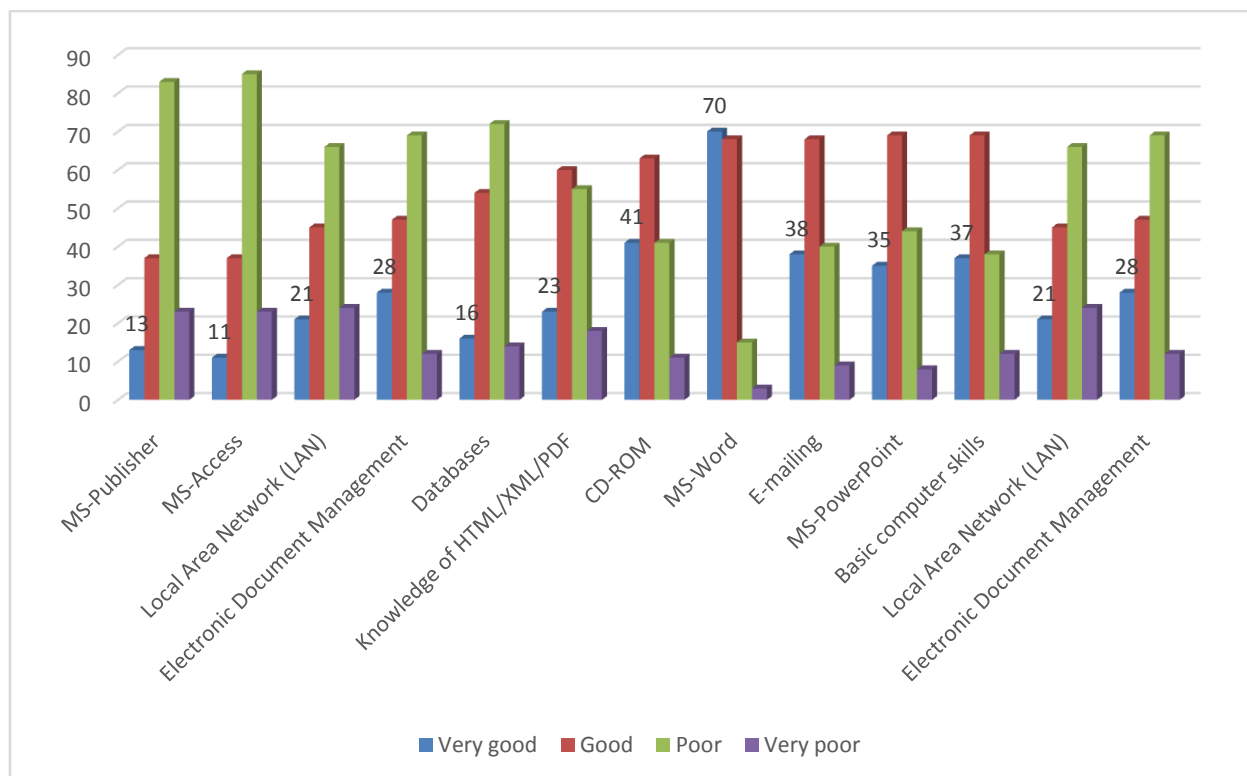


Figure 1: Traditional skills.

Source: Researcher's field work.

Figure I indicates that a high number of respondents 70 (44.9%) rated their skills in the use of MS-Word as very good, this was followed by 69 (44.2%) of respondents who rated their skills in the use of Microsoft PowerPoint as very good and 68 (43.6%) indicated that they had very good skills in the use of e-mails. Skills in the use of CD-ROM 63 (40.4%) were rated good as well as the use of MS Excel 61 (39.1%), which was rated as good. Though these technical skills had a high frequency, however, it also indicates that it is a minority of respondents who have rated these skills as either very good or good. Findings show that majority of respondents do not have the skills because most have been rated as poor and very poor. Furthermore, (54.5%) of respondents indicated that their skills in MS-Access were poor. The same percentage of respondents (54.5%) rated skills in use of Database as poor. Also (53.2%), indicated that knowledge in use of MS-publisher were poor and (44.2%), rated their skills in Electronic Document Management as poor, while those of HTML (40.4%) were rated poor, as well as skills in using Local Area Network were rated poor by (42.3%) of respondents. Conclusively, majority of academic librarians in Cameroon do not have the popular technology skills to carry out effective service delivery.

Contemporary skills that academic librarians presently have in carrying out service delivery

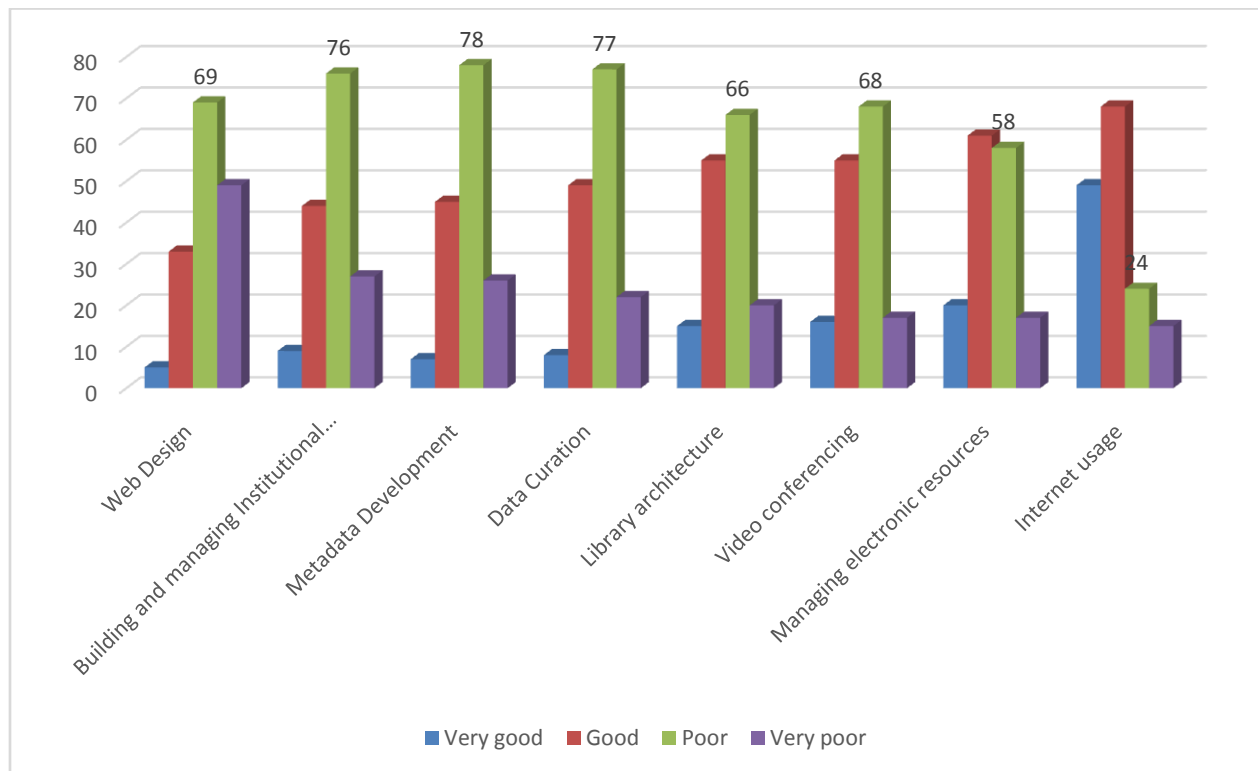


Figure 2: Contemporary skills that academic librarians have.

Source: Researcher's Field Work.

Results from respondents show that skills in Internet usage has been rated as good as indicated by 68 (43.6%) of respondents, and Open Educational Resources also rated as good 60 (38.5%) by a highest number of respondents. All the other contemporary skills listed were rated poor by a majority of respondents. Web design skills were rated poor 69 (44.2%), Building and Managing Institutional Repositories poor 76 (48.7%), data Curation poor 77 (49.4%), Library Architecture poor 66 (42.3%), Metadata Development average 78 (50.0%), Managing Electronic Resources poor 61 (39.1%), Video conferencing poor 68 (43.6%).

Research Question 2: What are the Skills that academic librarians have in using Social Media tools?

Being skilled in social media is an essential requirement for librarians to communicate and collaborate with users to facilitate and enhance service delivery.

Table 1: Social media skills.

Skills in Social Media	Very good		Good		Poor		Very poor		N
	freq	%	freq	%	freq	%	freq	%	
Facebook,	70	44.9	58	37.2	23	14.7	5	3.2	156
Twitter,	28	17.9	64	41.0	45	28.8	19	12.2	156
WhatsApp,	94	60.3	49	31.4	8	5.1	5	3.2	156
Instagram	25	16.0	55	35.3	54	34.6	22	14.1	156
Skype	23	14.7	47	30.1	61	39.1	25	16.0	156
Blogs	17	10.9	33	21.2	76	48.7	30	19.2	156

Wiki	18	11.5	36	23.1	73	46.8	29	18.6	156
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Source: Researchers Field Work

Table one shows that the ability to use common social media tools for library services by most respondents were good. WhatsApp was indicated to be the most popular social media tool used by respondents with a majority of 94 respondents (60.3%) rating their skills as good. Facebook was used by a minority of 70 (44.8%) respondents. Only 64 respondents (41%) used Twitter while 55 (35.3%) of respondents indicated they knew how to use Instagram. A minority of respondents (48.7%) indicated that their skills in the use of Blogs were poor, 73 respondents (46.8%) indicated that they did not know how to use WiKi while 61 respondents (39.1%) indicated that their skills in the use of Skype were also poor. Even though results indicate that a minority of respondents used social media tools, an interviewee said that social media technologies were made available to librarians but which unfortunately were not used for library services, rather it was used for personal communication. An interviewee from another university library contradicted this assertion by saying that poor skills in use of social media were due to the lack of technology and training.

Research Question 3: What is the attitude of academic librarians in state-owned universities in Cameroon towards the use of Social Media in providing services?

With respect to librarians' attitude towards Information Technology is a vis social media usage, respondents had to choose from a list of statements, barriers that hindered them from effectively adopting social media technology for service delivery. Figure 3 below shows the findings.

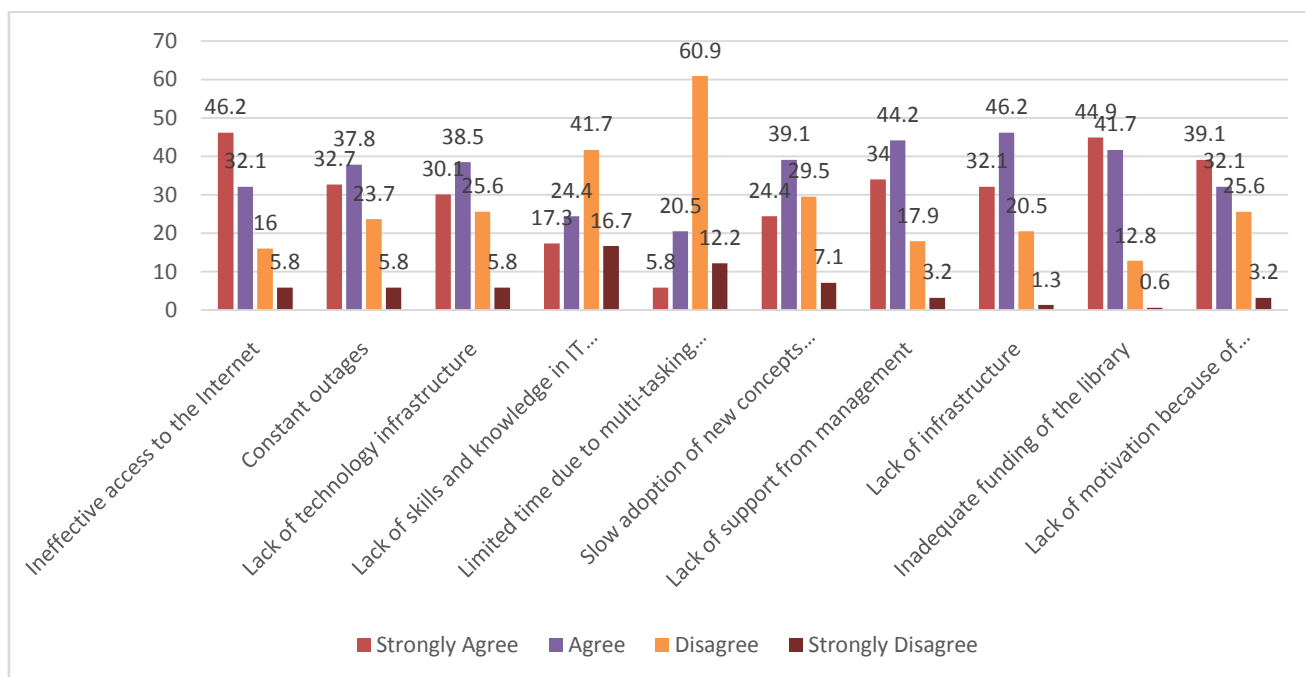


Figure 3: Contemporary skills.

Source: Researchers' Field work

Figure 3 above shows that a majority of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that they were lacking behind in use of technology for library services. Respondents indicated that slow adoption of new concepts within the library (61%), lack of technology infrastructure (46.2%), ineffective access to the Internet (46.2%), inadequate funding for the library (44.9%), and lack of support from management (44.2%) were among major barriers to their effective use of technologies for library services. Other reasons indicated by respondents were constant outages by 59 (37.8%) respondents,

lack of library infrastructure 60 (38.5%), and lack of motivation 61 (39.1%) as other causes for slow adoption of social media technologies in the library. However, respondents did not agree with the fact that lack of skills and knowledge on IT usage (40%) and limited time due to multi-tasking in different jobs (41.7%) constituted barriers for them to remain blocked from catching up with current trends in social media technology.

Discussions

Social media tools are used in academic libraries, amongst them WhatsApp and Facebook are most prominently used. This finding concurs with previous studies by Sharma & Sahu (2020) and Santosh (2017) who reported that the most popular social media tools used by librarians in university libraries were Facebook and WhatsApp. However, these authors further stated that most librarians used Facebook and WhatsApp on a daily basis for work. The finding contradicts that of this study which reveals that WhatsApp and Facebook were used for personal reasons rather than work purposes. This could be because these tools were considered easy to use. An interview with a chief librarian indicated that social media tools were used mostly by the younger generation of librarians whom she referred to as digital natives. Another interviewee said that the emergence of social media in the library (referred to in literature review as library 2.0) was a viable opportunity for academic librarians to become guru librarians. The interviewee further suggested that academic librarians should strive to become social media pundits otherwise known in research literature as librarians 2.0. in order to meet current user demands.

Other social media tools such as Twitter, Instagram, Skype, Wiki, and Blogs were less used by academic librarians. This could be attributed to several factors: lack of awareness of the importance of social media tools, lack of motivation and lack of knowledge and skills. Awareness needs to be created among library staff about what social media offers in terms of job performance. An interviewee said that Flickr, My Space and YouTube are indispensable in academic librarians to interact and communicate on various issues, which unfortunately are not used. This implies that academic librarians still prefer traditional library methods of services rather than embracing modern technology provided in the form of social media based services. Academic libraries in state-owned universities are yet to fully embrace emerging technologies.

Several constraints were identified as barriers to the use of social media for modern library services. The respondents agreed that inadequate funding, poor and limited access to Internet, inadequate ICT infrastructure and lack of state of the art facilities were barriers to the effective use of social media. These constraints, especially infrastructural problem in academic libraries in Cameroon has a negative effect on library performance. Erratic and unreliable electricity supply, would cause disruption in the flow and access of online services. It is bothersome that Internet supply in some public universities in Cameroon is still an illusion in the twenty first century. Almost all Internet applications including social media tools cannot be operated without internet connectivity, high bandwidth and stable power supply. Where Internet is available, it is very slow so much so that it takes a long time to download a web page or a PDF file from the Internet. This constraint is highlighted by Amina and Nwanne (2015) who posit that inconsistencies in power supply hindered librarians in Nigeria universities and the academic community from using online platforms, contributing in online discussions and e-training. It should be noted that sufficient financial package is required to design and manage sustainable innovative library projects like engaging in automation or building Institutional Repositories. Emezie and Nwaohiri (2013) reiterate that libraries need adequate funds for online subscriptions (e-resources books, e-journals), the acquisition of state of the art infrastructure, and professional development of staff, databases, maintenance and emolument. Funding is required to provide a variety of online services. Poor Internet access and low bandwidth were identified as constraint to the use of social media tools. According to Ezeani and Igwesi (2012) and Shafack (2017) most Africa universities still

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suffer from limited bandwidth and poor Internet connectivity. According to the authors, this was a major cause of frustration by librarians to provide effective online services. Other constraints revealed from the findings included lack of skilled personnel, and lack of technical knowledge on use of modern technology.

Conclusion

Academic libraries in public universities in Cameroon use social media tools. However, the social media tools are used more for private purposes rather than for library services for which they were employed. WhatsApp and Facebook are common among librarians but mostly used for private purposes. Instagram, Blogs, Wikis, You Tube and Twitter were at low ebb. Social media tools have emerged as facilitators to modern library services therefore, academic libraries in state-owned universities in Cameroon cannot afford to ignore the potentials of social media in innovating and improving services. Despite some constraints as obsolete infrastructure, insufficient ICT facilities lack of skills and low bandwidth as indicated by some libraries, academic libraries in state owned universities in Cameroon aware of the great potentials of social media and are called upon to change mind set and accept the use of social medial tools. It is important therefore, that library management provide necessary support to purchase facilities needed as they contribute significantly to efficiency and improved performance in service delivery.

Recommendations

University management should provide funds for professional development of librarians to acquire skills in modern technology. In this case staff should be encouraged and motivated to go back to Library and Information Science schools to acquire new knowledge that meets the demands of modern scholars. State-owned universities in Cameroon should provide adequate funding and internet facilities to their libraries, this will facilitate access to, and use of online library services. Library management should solicit funding to provide generators or solar plants to curb constant power supply that disrupt online library services.

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