



A social media strategy for academic libraries

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ABSTRACT

This study was carried out to analyse strategies regarding the use of social media for academic library services in Ghana. The research design was quantitative and adopted the survey approach. Questionnaires served as the main data collection instrument. The study population comprised of one hundred and ten library staff from public and private universities in Ghana. As indicated by the study results, the library staff agreed that there was a need for a well-formulated social media strategy to help academic libraries identify the most appropriate social media tools, establish contact with targeted audience, and increase engagement rates to enable an effective and efficient distribution of its resources and services. The results also indicated that the academic libraries, however, seem to neglect these strategies which could drive patrons' use of such platforms. Recommendations therefore suggest the need to implement social media plans and policies, user engagement, social media update, and dedicated staff with the requisite skills in the use of social media platforms for library services delivery.

Introduction

Academic libraries have over the years been making varied use of social media tools especially for disseminating library services and resources to its patrons. Popular among them include Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instant Messaging and YouTube (Fasae, 2020). Indeed, today, it is almost unimaginable to find an academic library without a social media presence (Deodato, 2018). Yet, the adoption and use of varied social media applications by academic libraries especially in the developing world seem to be unplanned (Chaputula, Abdullah, & Mwale, 2020; Fong, Au, Lam, & Chiu, 2020).

Indeed, scholarship on the adoption and use of social media in academic libraries has focused primarily on identifying and studying tools adopted and used, as well as their perceptions and influences to adopt such tools. Nevertheless, academic libraries must understand the purposes for which social media are deployed and formulate measurable goals and objectives before the decision to choose appropriate and suitable social media tools. In this regard, Winn, Rivosecchi, Bjerke, and Groenendyk (2017) proposed that a well-formulated social media strategy can help academic libraries identify the most appropriate social media tools, establish contact with the targeted audience, and increase engagement rates to enable an effective and efficient distribution of resources and services.

Certainly, academic libraries can better measure the extent of use of

adopted social media platforms for its intended purposes when its users engage with the libraries on such platforms. As such, there is the need for academic libraries to formulate comprehensive social media strategies which they believe drives patrons use of such platforms for library services activities. This study therefore sets out to analyse the strategies regarding the use of social media in academic libraries in Ghana.

Literature review

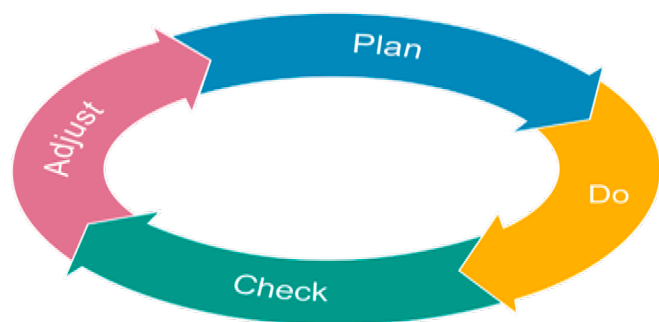
Social media strategy

Basically, a social media strategy is a simple statement that defines the intention, goals, measurable objectives and intended outcomes for adopting and using social media (Persson & Svenningsson, 2016). Having a social media strategy, Ramsey and Vecchione (2014) revealed, is helpful in increasing visibility and a well-formulated approach to establish connections with the right people while networking and identifying the most appropriate social media tools to channel one's communication.

Schaffer (2013) outlined the words 'Plan', 'Do', 'Check', and 'Adjust' as suitable facets for setting up a social media strategy. As shown in Fig. 1, Schaffer's (2013) social media strategy cycle is infinite and has repetitive functions. Schaffer (2013) explained that developing a comprehensive social media strategy involves the creation and

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Source: Schaffer (2013)

Fig. 1. Social media strategy cycle.

Source: Schaffer (2013)

definition of objectives, identification of target groups and choice of tools to use, implementation of measurable goals after analysis, and adjusting and repetition of processes until the desired outcome is attained. Relating Schaffer's (2013) social media strategy cycle to the academic libraries environment, implies, that, academic libraries need to plan towards their social media adoption decisions by assessing the varied social media platforms available and choose those which effectively serve the purpose and objectives of the library, taking into account the available staff to implement such decisions, users views, volume of work, and issues of sustainability and maintenance.

Comparable to Schaffer's (2013) cycle, Barnes (2014) outlined: (1) Involvement of students, staff and librarians, (2) tailoring appropriate messages to a target group through their preferred social media platforms, (3) listening to patrons, (4) creating a schedule sheet to specify roles and (5) setting goals and targets as facets of a social media strategy to help enhance and accomplish the overall goal of its adoption in academic libraries. Consequently, an effective social media strategy to aid in increasing visibility and impact in academic libraries according to the present study requires a social media policy, human resources with the requisite skills and knowledge in social media, user engagement in the choice of social media platforms, continuous update of social media sites, and encouragement of user feedback.

Planning the use of social media

With the dynamic and complex social media environs, it is essential for organisations to plan their social media investments carefully, and academic libraries are no exception. Academic libraries' approach to social media implementation, management and growth of adopted social media platforms should not rely only on anecdotal evidence but also on planning on how best to efficiently and effectively manage these platforms within the constraints of the library's expertise, time, and human resources. Indeed, McCann and Barlow (2015) indicated that a comprehensive planning process is essential for the intended purpose of adopting and using social media successful for positive and intended outcomes. Accordingly, it is important to plan and assess social media efforts beyond the current research defining best-practices in social media adoption and use. The problem is however not on the type of social media application to adopt or use, but on identifying what set of applications can be used to achieve set goals and objectives for which those platforms have been adopted. Jennings (2012) contends that drawing up a social media communication plan is essential because, an organisation can only decide on suitable social media, as well as identify the scope and timing of content posted on such platforms, once it has a plan that sets its goals and objectives. On the other hand, there seems to be a gap in the literature regarding planning and overall management of social media in academic libraries (Persson & Svenningsson, 2016). Nevertheless, Romero (2011) recognised planning as an essential aspect of social media use, and specified that although the plan needs not be exhaustive or strict; it should focus on setting realistic objectives and

choosing tools which can be used to achieve set objectives.

Social media policy

A major challenge facing most academic libraries in their social media endeavours is the lack of policy document with clear guidelines on what and how to use such platforms (Magoi, Aspura, & Abrizah, 2019). In a survey of 240 academic libraries, findings disclosed the lack of formal social media policies in most of the libraries (Peacemaker, Robinson, & Hurst, 2016). Similarly, in Africa, the absence of social media policy has been reported as one of the significant factors that discourages adoption and use of social media in academic libraries (Lwoga, 2014). Conversely, Levesque (2016) put forward that an essential component of any social media strategy is the development of a policy that outlines the procedures of its management to help instil a mandate. Like all other policy documents, a policy on social media use in academic libraries can assist the establishment of clear procedures for staff who are designated to post on behalf of the library.

Staff competency

Innovations such as social media are dynamic and will therefore require human resource skills in the library to move along with the change. Essentially, an account manager plays a vital role in a social media strategy (Winn et al., 2017). So, in addition to a comprehensive plan academic libraries must have a dedicated person responsible for the maintenance of its social media accounts before an initial decision to adopt them (Jennings, 2012). 'Dedicated', because social media accounts when created and managed by multiple individuals' risk appearing inconsistent or unreliable (Peacemaker et al., 2016). Nevertheless, having staff solely devoted to managing adopted social media accounts may be challenging for all academic libraries. In these circumstances, Peacemaker et al. (2016) recommend that, academic libraries should adopt best practices for the management of social media accounts to realise an atmosphere of a singular voice as a representation for its social media accounts. Accordingly, for librarians to remain relevant in this technology era, they need to be trained and retrained. Witte (2014) maintains that there is a remarkable change from the use of social media as the voice of the organisation to being the voice of a librarian within the organisation. Accordingly, to successfully embrace the requirements of social media, competency in its usage has become a requirement for the present-day librarian.

Users engagement in the choice of social media tools

Even though social media enables the academic library to meet users in their own spaces wherever they may be, many academic libraries are still challenged in determining which tools to use, which ones to maintain, and how to assess outreach effectiveness (Gaha & Hall, 2015). Indeed, few academic libraries have deployed social media that link directly with the libraries' mandate (Xie & Stevenson, 2014). Jennings (2012) emphasised the consequence of selecting social media platforms and noted that libraries must concentrate and choose social media applications that are pertinent to their community. Thus, a key approach to achieving social media objectives in academic libraries is to focus on platforms that are most relevant to patrons (Peacemaker et al., 2016). Accordingly, it is no more sufficient for libraries to simply provide services on social media platforms they recognise as adequate for their patrons, but rather focus on the development of strategies that contributes to increasing the relationship with its patrons. Academic libraries must therefore focus on a vision that integrates the vision of the community that supports it. This implies that libraries must understand and appreciate the needs of their user community and decide on what products and services to offer to support these needs.

Frequent update of social media platforms

With the dynamic and ever changing nature of social media applications, libraries communicating via social media must remain open to change (Levesque, 2016). As social media tools and methods of use keep

changing, frequently reviewing, and updating platforms is a necessity (Persson & Svenningsson, 2016). According to Brookbank (2015) an essential aspect of academic libraries social media strategy is the willingness to adapt and evolve as often as necessary to reach patrons successfully. Academic libraries must therefore understand the dynamic nature of social media platforms and take the necessary measures to keep them up to date to reach as many patrons as possible.

Encouraging user feedback

Social media has undeniably necessitated new ways for individuals to engage in real-time communication (McCann & Barlow, 2015) and has offered academic libraries the opportunity to collect feedback from users (Aras, 2014). Undeniably, feedback from intended recipients of information is the only way to verify whether or not the intended message has been received or understood. Feedback in the library social media communication process is critical because the feedback from the intended recipient of a service is the only way to verify whether or not the intended service has been received or understood. Through feedback from patrons, academic libraries would have the opportunity to respond to user queries quickly, obtain user opinions, and listen to them (Del Bosque, Leif, & Skarl, 2012). Accordingly, as Hagman (2012) cautioned, the use of social media only as a marketing tool by academic libraries results in loss of opportunity to interact, engage and gather relevant and valuable information about patrons needs and opinions.

Materials and methods

The study was quantitative and hence adopted the survey approach. The study is focused on libraries within tertiary educational institutions, designated as academic libraries in Ghana. These constitute libraries of accredited public universities, private universities and technical universities. Ghana has 93 academic libraries consisting of 10 public, 75 private, and 8 technical universities spread across ten regions (Ghana National Accreditation Board, 2020). Of the 93 academic libraries, the multi-stage sampling technique was used to select four (4) academic libraries. The multi-stage selection technique is a strategy used when conducting studies involving large cases to create a more representative sample of the population. Therefore, in multi-stage, the sample size selection process starts with the selection of large sample and continues with the selection of subsequent samples selected in succession from the larger sample to aid the selection of a more sizeable sample (Sarantakos, 2012, p. 7).

For this study, cases were selected purposively and conveniently based in conformity to some criteria set by the researcher. As presented in Table 1, the purposive sampling technique was used in two phases. The first was the selection of academic libraries that had an active social media presence on at least one social media platform. This was done to avoid unanswered questions during data collection, since academic libraries without any presence on social media are unable to participate in the study. After this criterion, twenty-five (25) academic libraries comprising of 6 public, 4 technical and 15 private university libraries qualified as the primary sampling units (PSU).

The second level of the purposive sampling involved the selection of academic libraries from the twenty-five (25) that had been present on

Table 1
Selection of academic libraries.

Academic library category	Number of cases	Selection criteria		
		Purposive (SM presence)	Purposive (presence; not < 5 yrs)	Convenience (willingness)
Public	10	6	1	1
Private	75	15	3	2
Technical	8	4	1	1
Totals	93	25	5	4

the adopted social media platform(s) for at least a minimum of five years. This criterion was set to ensure that the academic libraries selected would have had enough time to be abreast with the social media platform(s) adopted to support the provision of library services and resources on such platforms to its patrons. As a result of these criteria, five (5) academic libraries made up of three (3) from the private and one each from the public and technical universities qualified as the secondary sampling units (SSU).

Lastly, the convenience sampling technique was used to select universities among the five (5) which were willing to participate in the study. All cases apart from one (1) from the private universities were willing to participate. Thus, the actual sampling units (ASU) were four (4) academic libraries. These included the University of Ghana (UG) from the public university category, the Kumasi Technical University (KsTU) from the technical university category, and Ghana Telecom University College (GTUC), and Ashesi University College (AUC) from the private university category.

The study population comprised of 110 professional and para-professional library staff, from the selected academic libraries (see Table 2), whose core duties were directly related to library services provision and library social media activities. Adopting the census technique, data was collected using questionnaires administered to all 110 subjects when were considered as the study sample. Of the 110 questionnaires administered, 99 were returned. Of the 99 questionnaires returned, a total of 5 were not completed fully, and were therefore considered as invalid to be used for analysis. As such, questionnaires returned in their complete and usable forms for analysis were 94, giving a total response rate of 85.5%.

The development of the questionnaire was influenced by a review of extent literature in the area of social media strategies which were geared towards answering the research objective. The questionnaire was in three sections (see Appendix 1). The first section was on the respondents' demographics. The second and third sections were similar but distinct. Whilst the second section was structured to solicit respondents' views on the need for a social media strategy, the third section sought to seek information on the availability of such requirements in the libraries. Data collected were analysed using the 23rd version of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Respondents were not forced to partake in the study and were informed of the option to discontinue their participation at any given point.

Table 2
Descriptive statistics of library staff demographic characteristics (N = 94)

Demographic characteristics	Frequencies	Percentages
Department		
Reader services	7	7.4
Reference services	29	30.9
Circulation services	24	25.5
Acquisitions	4	4.3
Electronic resources services	19	20.2
Cataloguing	5	5.3
Library ICT unit	6	6.4
Job tenure		
Less than 1 year	7	7.4
1–5 years	21	22.3
6–10 years	33	35.1
11–15 years	18	19.1
16–24 years	8	8.5
25 years+	7	7.4
Job title		
University librarian	3	3.3
Assistant librarian	11	11.7
Senior library assistant	51	54.3
Library assistant	23	24.4
Library ICT officers	6	6.3
Gender		
Male	53	56.4
Female	41	43.6

Results

Participants demographics

Table 2 presents the demographics of the respondents.

Social media strategy

Statements used to measure social media strategy in the academic libraries were in two parts. These have been denoted as Social Media Strategy1 (SMS1) and Social Media Strategy 2 (SMS2). Whilst statements under SMS1 were to find out respondents' opinions on the need to have a social media strategy in the academic libraries, statements under SMS2 sort to examine the existence of such strategies for effective social media use in the libraries. Concepts for statements under both SMS1 and SMS2 included: planning the use of social media, social media policy, patrons' involvement in the academic libraries choice of social media, staff with requisite knowledge and skills in the use of the academic libraries social media platforms for their intended purposes, constant update of the libraries social media platforms, and encouragement of user feedback.

Statements used to measure each concept under SMS1 and SMS2 were self-rated on a five point Likert scale where '1 = strongly disagree', '2 = moderately disagree', '3 = moderately agree' '4 = agree' and '5 = strongly agree'. For the descriptive analysis, the "mean score (\bar{x}) s" were used to determine respondents' level of agreement or disagreement with a particular statement on each concept under SMS1 and SMS2. Thus, a score of '1' indicates that respondents 'strongly disagree' with a statement used to measure a particular concept, whilst a score of '5' demonstrates that respondents strongly agree with the statement. Findings have been summarised and presented in Tables 3 and 4 for SMS1 and SMS2 respectively.

Social media strategy1 (SMS1)

As displayed in Table 3, for concepts under SMS1 all statements on the need for planning on social media were very much appreciated, with the statement reflecting the need for a social media communication plan scoring the highest mean (\bar{x}) score of 4.81, suggesting that respondents either 'agree' and/or 'strongly agree'. Likewise, statements relating to setting of realistic social media use objectives, and evaluation of content published on social media also each had \bar{x} scores of 4.75 and 4.73 respectively. In all, the need for planning the adoption and use of social media was high. On the need for a social media policy, the mean and standard deviation values from the responses as displayed in Table 3 again revealed the respondents' affirmation of a policy as a social media use strategy. In order of importance, statements on the need for: 'a policy on social media use', 'clear guidelines on what is acceptable to post', and 'mandatory guidelines on the do's and don'ts in the use of the libraries' social media platforms' recorded \bar{x} scores above 4, showing that the respondents either 'agreed' and/or 'strongly agreed' with the statements on the need for a social media policy in the academic libraries.

Furthermore, on patrons having a say in the choice of social media adopted and used in the libraries, responses analysed and presented in Table 3, indicates that most respondents 'agreed' and or 'strongly agreed' with the need for the academic libraries to focus on social media accounts relevant to their users (\bar{x} =4.78, SD = 0.621), and 'the need for the libraries to tailor appropriate information to target users on their preferred social media platforms (\bar{x} =4.72, sd = 0.611). These were followed by the need to direct social media towards user needs and preferences with a mean score (\bar{x}) of 4.69, and a standard deviation of 0.795. A lot of the respondents were also in agreement with the statement relating to the need for users' influence on social media platforms adopted by the academic libraries as shown in the \bar{x} score of 4.67(sd = 0.690). Likewise, majority of respondents 'strongly agreed' and had positive responses relative to the need for library staff with requites skills and knowledge to manage their social media platforms, since all

Table 3

Descriptive statistical analysis on the need for social media strategy concepts in Academic Libraries in Ghana (SMS1).

Constructs	Measurement statements	\bar{x}	SD
Planning the use of social media	The library should have a social media communication plan to identify the scope and timing of posts	4.81	0.541
	The library should set realistic social media use objectives and choose platforms which can be used to achieve set objectives	4.75	0.604
Social media policy	Content published on social media platforms should be evaluated	4.73	0.651
	The library should have a policy on the use of social media	4.53	0.704
	The library should develop and establish clear guidelines on what is acceptable to post on social media platforms adopted	4.51	0.833
Patrons involvement in choice of social media	Guidelines on social media use should be mandatory for patrons and staff to read before accessing and using these services	4.51	0.833
	Library users should have a say in the choice of social media adopted and used by the library	4.67	0.690
	The library should tailor the appropriate information to target users through their preferred social media platforms	4.72	0.611
	The library should decide which social media platform(s) to use based on an understanding of the needs of their users	4.69	0.795
Library staff competencies	The library need to focus on the social media accounts that are relevant to their users	4.78	0.621
	Library staff must be well trained on the use of social media for library services delivery	4.98	0.496
	The library should have dedicated staff responsible for maintaining its social media platforms	4.83	0.584
Social media update	Social media platforms adopted and used by the library should be frequently updated	4.89	0.569
	Social media platforms should be kept up to date to reach as many library users as possible	4.87	0.698
User feedback	The library Social media policy should be updated to cater for technological developments as well as ethical concerns	4.84	0.609
	The library should provide every opportunity to its users to give feedback, both positive and negative	4.58	0.984
	The library users should be encouraged to make constructive comments on library services through adopted social platforms	4.69	0.782
	The library should make efforts to reward users who make the most constructive comments on different social media platforms adopted.	4.87	0.624

Valid N (listwise) = 94, Minimum = 1, Maximum = 5, \bar{x} =Mean Values; SD=Standard Deviation.

statements recorded mean score (\bar{x}) s above 4.7 as presented in Table 3.

Similarly, responses analysed on the need for a frequent update of the academic libraries' social media platforms revealed this was an important factor of social media use strategy in academic libraries in Ghana, with a highest \bar{x} score of 4.89 and a standard deviation of 0.569, showing that the respondents largely 'strongly agreed'. The second most significant statement had to do with the need to keep the academic libraries social media platforms up-to-date to reach as many library users

Table 4
Descriptive statistical analysis on the availability of social media strategy concepts in Academic Libraries in Ghana (SM2).

Constructs	Measurement statements	\bar{x}	SD
Planning the use of social media	The library Has A Social Media Communication Plan to identify the scope and timing of posts	2.16	1.065
	The library has set realistic social media use objectives and choose platforms which can be used to achieve set objectives	2.43	1.071
Social media policy	Content published on the library social media platforms are often evaluated	2.45	1.169
	The library has a policy on the use of social media	1.24	1.194
	The library has developed and established clear guidelines on what is acceptable to post on its social media platforms	1.52	1.186
Patrons involvement in the choice of social media	Guidelines on social media use is mandatory for patrons and staff to read before accessing and using these services	1.69	1.158
	Library users have a say in the choice of social media adopted and used by the library	1.26	1.178
	The library tailors the appropriate information to target users through their preferred social media platforms	1.59	1.189
Library staff competencies	The libraries decides which social media platform(s) to use based on an understanding of the needs and preferences of their library users	3.25	1.121
	The library focuses on the social media accounts that are relevant to their users	1.98	1.168
	Library staff are well trained on the use of social media for library services delivery	1.51	1.186
Social media update	The library has dedicated staff responsible for its activities on adopted social media platforms	1.21	1.197
	The library Social media platforms are frequently updated	3.48	0.166
	The library Social media platforms are kept up to date to reach as many library users as possible	3.58	0.791
User feedback	Social media policy should be updated to cater for technological developments as well as ethical concerns	3.25	0.169
	The library provides every opportunity to its users to provide feedback, both positive and negative on the use of its adopted social media platforms	3.25	0.175
	Users are encouraged to make constructive comments on library services through adopted social platforms	3.84	0.158
	The library makes effort to reward users who make the most constructive comments on different social media platforms adopted.	3.1	0.183

Valid N (listwise) = 94, Minimum = 1, Maximum = 5, \bar{x} =Mean Values; SD=Standard Deviation.

as possible, with a \bar{x} score of 4.87 and standard deviation of 0.698, again showing that the respondents ‘strongly agree’ with this statement. The findings as displayed in Table 3 also revealed that most of the respondents ‘strongly agree’ on the need for the academic libraries’ social media platforms to be updated to cater for technological and ethical developments, with a \bar{x} score of 4.84 and standard deviation of 0.609. Lastly, the analysis of responses presented on the need for user feedback as shown in Table 3 generally depict that most of the respondents

perceive feedback from library users as a vital social media use strategy. In fact, all three statements used to measure ‘user feedback’ had \bar{x} values higher than ‘4.5’, demonstrating a strong level of agreement with the items on the scale.

Social media strategy2 (SMS2)

Generally, results of the analysis of statements used to measure respondents’ views on the existence of strategies for effective social media use in the libraries depicts that the academic libraries surveyed seem to have failed in observing strategies which could drive patrons’ use of such platforms. As shown in Table 4, all the statements used to measure the availability of a social media plan recorded an \bar{x} values less than ‘3’, an indication of the respondents’ level of disagreement (moderately disagree) with the items on the scale. In other words, within the set of statements, the mean score (\bar{x}) ranging between 2.16 and 2.45 clearly demonstrate that, by and large, all the respondents ‘moderately disagreed’ with the assertion of the libraries planning its social media approach.

Similarly, the descriptive statistics as presented in Table 4, on statements used to measure the existence of a social media policy clearly indicates the absence of a social media policy in the academic libraries as all statements recorded \bar{x} scores ranging from 1.24–1.69, reflecting the respondents’ disagreement with the presence of a policy or guidelines for its social media activities. Equally, findings from the responses provided in Table 4, on statements used to measure the library staff views on the libraries involvement of its patrons in the choice of social media platform to adopt and use for the provision of services, seem to reveal that the academic libraries largely do not involve its patrons in their social media activities as all the statements except for the statement “library focuses on the social media accounts that are relevant to their users” recorded \bar{x} scores below 2. Moreover, the analysis of responses presented in Table 4 again shows that, generally, the academic libraries surveyed did not have staff with the requisite skills (\bar{x} =1.51; SD = 1.186) nor dedicated to the use of adopted social media applications (\bar{x} =1.21; SD = 1.197) for the provision of its services to patrons. Additionally, findings presented in Table 4 shows that academic libraries surveyed ‘moderately agreed’ with the statements relative to the update of social media activities in the libraries as all statements as displayed in the table recorded \bar{x} scores ranging from 3.25–3.58. Lastly, the mean scores obtained from the analyses of statements used to measure the academic libraries support of user feedback relative to the use of its social media platforms for library services provision gave an indication of the libraries encouragement of user opinions and comments on the use of such platforms. In other words, all statements used to measure user feedback recorded \bar{x} values ranging from 3.1–3.84, suggesting that the academic libraries surveyed ‘moderately agreed’ with all measurement statements.

Discussions

Planning the use of social media in the academic libraries

In the academic libraries surveyed, the need for a social media plan was rated as very vital by the majority of the respondents, with all statements relative to the requirement of a social media plan resulting in a mean score (\bar{x}) above ‘4’. Conversely, given that the library staff appreciated the need for planning the library social media, the study findings again indicated that the academic libraries do not seem to have a plan for their social media approaches. The literature however highlights how important a comprehensive planning and assessment approach is to the successful achievement of social media adoption and use if it is to achieve its intended adoption objective (McCann & Barlow, 2015). Consequently, planning on how best to manage social media platforms within the constraints of the library’s time, expertise, and human resources is an important indicator of effective and efficient social media management and growth. Indeed, planning on the use of

social media should go beyond considering what social media tools to adopt or use, but on how best the academic libraries can set goals and define objectives to outline suitable measures in their social media efforts, because once the academic libraries have a social media plan specifying set goals and objectives, only then will these libraries be in a position to choose the suitable social media platforms for providing and accessing library services.

Social media policy in the academic libraries

Regarding the need for a policy document as a social media adoption and use strategy, findings commend the need for such policy, but yet there is the absence of such policies to direct the use of such platforms in the academic libraries. In concurrence with this finding, the literature alludes that since the advent of social media for library services and access to resources, policy issues have become an inherent weakness in most academic libraries. This, [Peacemaker et al. \(2016\)](#) explained, is because most academic libraries perceive the adoption and use of social media as a general phenomenon, and not as a strategic process, and as such do not give much premium to the development of policies on its use. This myopic view of social media has probably resulted in issues of social media policy largely being overlooked in academic libraries. From another angle, [Gaha and Hall \(2015\)](#) observed that, even though a library policy for the application of social media is prominently reorganised when a considerate and comprehensive policy exists at the university level, these decisions are always not the case for developing library social media policies, since such policies are sometimes delayed due to evaluation of forthcoming legal interpretation and precedent. [Gaha and Hall \(2015\)](#) however advised libraries to put together a social media policy specifically for the library, pending an all-embracing university-wide policy. This according to [Gaha and Hall \(2015\)](#) ensures fairness among users of adopted social media sites and provides clear guiding principles on acceptable and unacceptable online behaviours.

Engaging patrons in the academic libraries' choice of social media platforms

The library staff of the academic libraries surveyed largely appreciated the need for the academic libraries to focus on social media accounts relevant to its users', 'the need for the libraries to tailor appropriate information to target users on their preferred social media platforms', 'the need to direct social media towards user needs and preferences' and 'the need for users' influence on social media platform adopted by the academic libraries' and hence fully supported the need for the involvement of patrons in the academic libraries' social media selection decisions. Supportive of this finding, [Brookbank \(2015\)](#) accentuated that libraries must dialogue with its users to ascertain their social media preferences, and decide on which platforms to use based on an understanding of their users, to avoid the possibilities of channelling efforts in a wrong direction. As [Hagman \(2012\)](#) wrote, the key goal of investing in social media in academic libraries is to engage patrons with the library. It is therefore essential to assess patrons' awareness, ownership, and interest in using social media to communicate with the library.

Conversely, this study's findings seem to further indicate that the academic libraries do not appear to be involving its patrons in its social media decision processes. This finding corroborates with the studies on academic libraries' use of social media that seem to indicate that most academic libraries do not appear to be compelled by the vision that is incorporated into that of its user community ([Deodato, 2018](#); [Howard, Huber, Carter, & Moore, 2018](#); [Jones & Harvey, 2019](#); [Kircaburun, Alhabash, Tosuntaş, & Griffiths, 2018](#)). [Kircaburun et al. \(2018\)](#) for instance explicated that, because most library patrons have generally fit into the social media age, and are familiar and comfortable with the use of varied social media platforms; libraries often tend to make social media assumptions about their users, often without consulting them.

The assumption that the use of social media for social purposes will generate into the use of such platforms for accessing library services is a tall tale ([Jones & Harvey, 2019](#)), and may result in academic libraries' inability to effectively reach its patrons where they are with the numerous social media tools adopted.

Library staff competencies in the use of the academic libraries' social media tools

Majority of respondents in this study were very much in agreement and had positive responses on the need for library staff who are well trained on the use of social media for library services delivery, as well as a dedicated staff responsible for maintaining the academic libraries' social media platforms, but indicated the neglect of such facets in the academic libraries. Similar to this study, almost 70.5% of the librarians sampled by [Baro, Ebiagbe, and Godfrey \(2013\)](#) in Nigeria indicated lack of skills as a barrier faced in the adoption and use of Web 2.0 technologies in their respective academic libraries. Equally, studies from Africa (e.g. [Lwoga, 2014](#)) have reported lack of staff with the required knowledge and skills in the use of social media as one of the obstacles for effectively using social media to achieve its adoption objectives. Nevertheless, innovations such as social media are dynamic and will therefore require human resource skills in the library to move along with the change. As such, the need for a dedicated staff with the requisite skills and knowledge in the use of such platforms is critical.

Frequent update of the academic libraries' social media platforms

Findings from this study on respondents' views on the constant update of the academic libraries' social media platforms as a strategy to enhance the use of such platforms in the provision and access to its services as well as contacting the libraries supported the assertions in the literature (e.g. [Persson & Svenningsson, 2016](#)) on the notion that the effective and efficient use of social media by academic libraries is dependent on the dynamic nature of such platforms, and the need to take the necessary measures to keep them up-to-date. As [Brookbank \(2015\)](#) puts it, at the centre of the academic libraries social media strategy is the preparedness to adjust and advance as a need to interact with patrons effectively. Contrariwise, like the findings from this study on the actual update of the academic libraries social media platforms, [Fasola \(2015\)](#) in an attempt to examine the perceptions of librarians on the adoption and use of social media applications for the promotion of library services in Oyo state, Nigeria, revealed that although most of the participating libraries had presence on social media accounts such as Facebook and Twitter, these accounts were mostly inactive or dormant and had either not been updated for at least between six months and two years, or never been updated since created. [Fasola \(2015\)](#) further disclosed that most of the librarians when interviewed attributed the infrequent update of the libraries' social media platforms to not having a librarian specially dedicated to updating these platforms.

Encouraging feedback from patrons

Findings from this study also approve that encouraging feedback from library patrons on the use of the libraries' social media platforms is very important, and hence the library staff strongly agreed on the need for the academic libraries surveyed to: provide every opportunity to its users to provide feedback, both positive and negative, encourage patrons to make constructive comments on library services through adopted social platforms, and make efforts to reward users who make the most constructive comments on such platforms. On the contrary, findings relative to the existence of feedback mechanisms from its patrons on the use of social media for services provision, this study like that of ([Deodato, 2018](#)) and [Jones and Harvey \(2019\)](#) among others, suggests that interaction with library users on social media tends to remain quite low, resulting in weak user interactions and lack of user feedback. For

instance, [Aharony \(2012\)](#) pointed out that libraries use social media basically as an avenue to convey news and information to patrons, instead of a venue for interacting and engaging discussion. Further, weak user communication resulting from librarians not encouraging interactions among its patrons were reported by [Xie and Stevenson \(2014\)](#) as one of the challenges of social media application in digital libraries.

Recommendations/strategies for academic libraries

Findings from this study realised the necessity of social media application strategies relative to planning, policy, staff competency, user engagement, and user feedback to improve the use of such platforms in the academic libraries, but also records the neglect of such in the academic libraries surveyed. Social media best practice however indicates that organisations should make available satisfactory evidence of their compliance with standards and practices. Academic libraries would therefore need to make sure that they have adequately planned the entire social media adoption and use process, developed appropriate social media policies and/or guidelines, and have library staff with the competency to lead the process before implementing a social media process.

Firstly, careful planning and policy are essential in monitoring and tracking the academic libraries' activities on such platforms in an efficient and systematic way. There is therefore the need for academic libraries in Ghana to develop social media plans as well as comprehensive social media policies to provide a mandate and direction to social media practices. These policies should form part of the overall policy of the academic libraries, and should be monitored like all other policies, because failure to do so may result in non-use or abuse of such platforms and the risks associated with it. Hence, the use of social media in academic libraries should be considered a strategic function, with a continuing programme that is effective library wide. These policies when developed can define responsibilities and provide the guidelines to explicate the rules that adequately document the academic libraries' activities in social media. Academic libraries are therefore advised to develop social media policies mandatory for patrons and staff to read before accessing and using these services.

Likewise, appropriate skills and hands-on training on the latest trends of social media application is an essential part of launching a social media presence. As there are many social media tools and applications available with different features and benefits, the library staff in charge of social media in the academic libraries should be equipped with the skills, experiences, and knowledge to optimise the available resources and services using social media, and be adaptable to new social media conditions to proactively meet their patrons across time and generations. Additionally, a special dedicated team, if not already in place, is desirable to design a good social media programme in the respective academic libraries. Library staff already in charge of the libraries social media activities should be given adequate on-the-job training to ensure that they are fully aware of the protocols and potential of the tools and are comfortable using them for the provision of library services to patrons. The academic libraries could also consult social media experts, or seek assistance from other service delivery organisations that have chalked successes in the use of social media for service provision to its clientele to develop short term programmes to train the library staff.

Moreover, as the literature refers, beyond a marketing tool, social media permits a feedback function as a conduit through which users can report grievances, compliment, inquire, and suggest ([Enis, 2017](#)). The assessments of the library staff alone may not fully explain the factors

that contribute to the acceptance and use of social media platforms in academic libraries, because the user (patrons) constitutes the focal point and reason for which these service delivery tools are deployed, and as such their level of acceptance and use of such platforms to access library resources and services is very critical. It is therefore not sufficient for libraries to merely talk on social media; they are also required to listen.

As set forth in the literature reviewed, social media services are functions performed through the collective support of all stakeholders. Successful social media programmes require stakeholder involvement in determining which tools to use, which ones to discard or maintain and how to assess outreach effectiveness. Today, meeting patrons in their own space undoubtedly is an important decision to be made by academic libraries. However, the provision of library services using new innovations such as social media should be based on the needs and desires of its primary patrons which, in the case of academic libraries, are teaching staff and students. More especially, with the limited time and resources to allocate to activities like the promotion of social media, the probable interest, and the level of engagement of the library patron is critical. It is therefore important for the academic libraries to find out whether its patrons use a social media platform prior to a decision to adopt or not to adopt it. In other words, the academic libraries must have a dialogue with its user community to find out their social media preferences, and subsequently adopt these platforms. In effect, the academic libraries should not deploy social media simply because it is fashionable, but because it serves their needs and are of interest to the library and its patrons. Those of interest to the academic library will comprise of those tools which provide the library with a space for dialogue and sharing of information and content. Accordingly, the academic libraries should not be using every social media platform, because different libraries may require some unique types of content. So, as the academic libraries adopt one platform or the other, there is the need to decide on which ones best serve their needs.

Conclusion

The strength of social media in academic libraries lie in its ability as one of the most powerful communication tools in this information age. Findings from this study affirm the importance of a social media strategy including: planning, policy, patrons' engagement, staff competency and user feedback, as critical factors that would improve and act as a positive influence on the use of social media for its intended purposes in the academic libraries. Nevertheless, the study findings again revealed the absence of these practices in the academic libraries surveyed. Findings of this present study however, makes practical contributions to academic libraries that use social media for delivering services to patrons, and may serve as a guide for future researchers in their understanding and implementation of the guidelines for the effective development of social media strategies to encourage the adoption and use of such platforms especially in academic libraries in developing countries. Such academic libraries could use these findings to make informed decisions that are related to the adoption and use of social media for the provision and access to library services and resources and thereby improve patron's engagement in the use of such platforms. Further the current study can be implemented as the guideline for the effective development of a social media strategy to encourage the adoption and use of such platforms especially in academic libraries in developing countries. On the other hand, given that present study was largely quantitative, upcoming studies could employ both quantitative and qualitative research approaches to explore other important constructs that could be deemed as strategies for optimising the use of social media in academic libraries.

Appendix 1. Questionnaire

1. Please indicate your Unit/Department.
 - Reader services []
 - Reference services []
 - Circulation services []
 - Electronic resources services []
 - Cataloguing and classification []
 - Library ICT unit []
2. How long have you worked in this library?
 - Less than 1 year []
 - 1–5 years []
 - 6–10 years []
 - 11–15 years []
 - 16–24 years []
 - 25 years+ []
3. Please indicate your job title/status
 - University Librarian []
 - Assistant Librarian []
 - Senior Library Assistant []
 - Library Assistant []
 - Library ICT Officer []
 - Any other, please specify.....
4. What is your highest level of educational qualification?
 - Senior Secondary School Certificate (SSCE) []
 - Higher National Diploma (HND) []
 - Diploma []
 - Advanced–Level Certificate (A-level) []
 - Bachelor of Arts (BA) []
 - Master of Arts (MA) []
 - Master of Science (MSc) []
 - Master of Philosophy (MPHIL) []
 - Master of Business Administration (MBA) []
 - Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) []
 - Any other, please specify.....
5. Please tick as appropriate regarding your gender
 - Male []
 - Female []
6. In which age category do you belong?
 - Below 30 years []
 - 31–35 []
 - 36–40 []
 - 41–45 []
 - 46–50 []
 - 51–55 []
 - 56–60 []
 - 60+

Section B: the need for A social media strategy

On a scale of 1–5 where 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Moderately Disagree, 3 = Moderately Agree, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree, please answer questions 7–12 by indicating the appropriate response that reflects your level of agreement with the statements provided in relation to your opinion on the need to have a social media strategy relative planning the use of social media, social media policy, patrons involvement in the academic libraries choice of social media, staff with requisite knowledge and skills in the use of the academic libraries social media platforms for their intended purposes, constant update of the libraries social media platforms, and encouragement of user feedback.

	1	2	3	4	5
7. Planning					
The library should have a social media communication plan to identify the scope and timing of posts					
The library should set realistic social media use objectives and choose platforms which can be used to achieve set objectives					

(continued on next page)

(continued)

	1	2	3	4	5
Content published on social media platforms should be evaluated					
8. Social media policy					
The library should have a policy on the use of social media					
The library should develop and establish clear guidelines on what is acceptable to post on social media platforms adopted					
Guidelines on social media use should be mandatory for patrons and staff to read before accessing and using these services					
9. Patrons involvement in the choice of library social media platforms					
Library users should have a say in the choice of social media adopted and used by the library					
The library should tailor the appropriate information to target users through their preferred social media platforms					
The library should decide which social media platform(s) to use based on an understanding of the needs of their users					
The library need to focus on the social media accounts that are relevant to their users					
10. Library staff competencies					
Library staff must be well trained on the use of social media for library services delivery					
The library should have dedicated staff responsible for maintaining its social media platforms					
11. Library social media update					
Social media platforms adopted and used by the library should be frequently updated					
Social media platforms should be kept up to date to reach as many library users as possible					
The library social media policy should be updated to cater for technological developments as well as ethical concerns					
12. User feedback					
The library should give every opportunity to its users to provide feedback, both positive and negative					
The library users should be encouraged to make constructive comments on library services through adopted social platforms					
The library should make effort to reward users who make the most constructive comments on different social media platforms adopted.					

Section C: availability of A social media strategy

On a scale of 1–5 where 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Moderately Disagree, 3 = Moderately Agree, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree, please answer questions 13–18 by indicating the appropriate response that reflects your level of agreement with the statements provided in relation to your opinion on the availability of a social media strategy relative planning the use of social media, social media policy, patrons involvement in the academic libraries choice of social media, staff with requisite knowledge and skills in the use of the academic libraries social media platforms for their intended purposes, constant update of the libraries social media platforms, and encouragement of user feedback.

	1	2	3	4	5
13 Planning					
The library has a social media communication plan to identify the scope and timing of posts					
The library sets realistic social media use objectives and choose platforms which can be used to achieve set objectives					
Content published on social media platforms are evaluated					
14. Social media policy					
The library has a policy on the use of social media					
The library has develop and establish clear guidelines on what is acceptable to post on Social media platforms adopted					
Guidelines on social media use are mandatory for patrons and staff to read before accessing and using these services					
15. Patrons involvement in the Choice of Library Social Media Platforms					
Library users have a say in the choice of social media adopted and used by the library					
The library tailors the appropriate information to target users through their preferred social media platforms					
The library decides on which social media platform(s) to use based on an understanding of the needs of their users					
The library focuses on the social media accounts that are relevant to their users					
16. Library staff competencies					
Library staff are well trained on the use of social media for library services delivery					
The library has dedicated staff responsible for maintaining its social media platforms					
17. Library social media update					
Social media platforms adopted and used by the library are frequently updated					
Social media platforms are kept up to date to reach as many library users as possible					
The library social media policy is updated to cater for technological developments as well as ethical concerns					
18. User feedback					
The library provides every opportunity to its users to provide feedback, both positive and negative					
The library users are encouraged to make constructive comments on library services through adopted social platforms					
The library makes efforts to reward users who make the most constructive comments on different social media platforms adopted.					

Please use this space if you wish to make any additional comments

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Thank you very much; your time and effort in filling out the questionnaire are very much appreciated.

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