

Facebook as an Information Service Delivery Tool: Perspectives of Library Staff at the University of Benin, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study investigated the effectiveness of Facebook as a tool for information service delivery (ISD) in libraries. The descriptive survey method was adopted for the study which was based on the perceptual experience of 49 of University of Benin Library staff who had Facebook accounts and took part in the library's Facebook group activities. The closed-ended questionnaire with a 4-point rating scale was used for data collection, and data were analysed using simple percentages. The results revealed that Facebook is an effective tool for ISD. In Conclusion, the study provides an understanding of how libraries can use Facebook for ISD.

Key words: Facebook; Information Service Delivery (ISD); Library Staff Perspective

Introduction

The Internet today has revolutionised the way people communicate and disseminate information. Contemporary “www” and non-www Internet products and services amaze the world. Among today's most used and most celebrated Internet products and services are social networking services. However, the configuration of people connected to one another through interpersonal means such as friendship, common interests or ideas,

otherwise known as social networking, was not created in the age of the Internet, it existed long before, because humans are societal, and require relationships with other humans in order to survive (Coyle and Vaughn, 2008). Nevertheless, networked computers and the Internet most especially, immensely contributed to the rapid expansion of social networks in unanticipated and unprecedented ways.

Among social networking services, Facebook Incorporated, the privately owned social networking service and website of Facebook, stands out. As Facebook expands and dominates the social networking environment, more libraries around the world are expanding alongside by creating Facebook pages and groups for awareness, marketing and service delivery. A quick Facebook ‘page search’ using the keyword “library” (i.e. in the Facebook search bar, type the word ‘library’ and click the option below which reads: “Find all pages named ” library ”) will reveal a long list of libraries that have Facebook Pages, and a click on any of the libraries’ pages will show how their Page activities point towards awareness creation, marketing and service delivery.

For the John Harris Library, University of Benin, taking advantage of the new level of communication Facebook has brought about would mean professional uprightness, which implies compliance with library and information associations’/institutions’ clamour for libraries to embrace social media, and reach out to their user communities through the same. Facebook is also an easy way to reach out and market the library for free. In the light of that, the library created a page and a group on Facebook for effective marketing of the library and efficient information service delivery. The page is strictly for professional and academic purposes, as it was intended to be an alternative to the library’s website. The group was intended to foster information dissemination and easy communication between librarians and current and

potential patrons, and provide a means for easy interaction among library staff.

When the group was created in October, 2011, membership was made open only to library staff as a way of fostering easy and free communication of official information among staff. This yielded an encouraging result from the onset as many staff, even those who were on leave as at the time of the group's creation, testified that the group was a good and timely way of communicating beneficial official information. Furthermore, this interesting way of communication prompted other staff to create and operate active Facebook accounts. However, considering the influx of membership requests from students, other library patrons, and alumni of the University of Benin, and because of certain information communicated among library staff which were considered valuable information for patrons as well, the group was made open to the public in November, 2011, barely one month after its creation. Membership, thus, currently cuts across library staff, students and staff of the University of Benin, the University alumni, potential students of the University, and friends of the library and the University around the globe.

Subsequent to operating an open group:

- many information needs have been met, as members of the group post questions on the group's wall and get answers to their questions from other members;
- professional practices among librarians have been boosted, as many librarians see the group as a good platform to carry out professional services like online reference service, selective dissemination of information, information service delivery, etc.;
- positive views about the library have enhanced, as members of the group commend the library for creating such a group where they are sure to get assistance;
- a "feel-very-free" meeting point between students and library staff has been created, as students who for one reason or the other cannot ask questions in the library take advantage of the group;
- a good feedback channel about the library's products and services has emerged, as members of the group regularly update on the

group's wall their good and bad experiences in the library on a particular day.

Developments which cut across mobile and web technologies are constantly impacting library and information services. Evolving service provision to support these technological advancements is now of greater importance. Among web technologies libraries take advantage of to advance information services are social media; and obviously, Facebook is one social medium which cannot be underestimated because of its popularity and vast usage.

In February, 2004, Facebook was launched to help people stay connected with friends and family, discover what is going on in the world, and share and express what matters to them. Summarily, Facebook was intended to make the world more open and connected (Facebook, 2013). From its inception, Facebook has experienced an astounding number of views and users. As at December 2013, Facebook had 1.23 billion monthly active users, which implies an average of 757 million daily active users, and 945 million monthly active mobile users (Facebook, 2014). These striking statistics can be attributed to its popularity which is worldwide, and its services, products and features which are multilingual. According to Alexa, a subsidiary company of Amazon.com which provides commercial web traffic data, Facebook is the most-trafficked social networking site in the world and the second most-trafficked website on the web after Google (Alexa, 2013). For its popularity, Wise, Alhabash and Park (2010) say Facebook has become "not only a technological phenomenon, but also a realm of interest for scholars exploring the processes and effects of computer-mediated communication and social networking." From inception also, Facebook has competed favourably with earlier-existing social networking services like Bolt.com, hi5, Kiwibox, LinkedIn, MySpace, etc., and its users cut across individuals, interest groups, government, business ventures, religious bodies, academic and non-academic institutions, and other forms of organisations – corporate and non-corporate.

Following its launching in 2004, many things have been written and said about Facebook and its use by libraries. Among other speeches and write ups, using Facebook as a channel of communication between librarians and patrons and using Facebook

as a marketing tool for libraries are issues which have been given great audience. According to Gerolimos (2011), the debate about Facebook has only just begun and academia has been fertile ground for exploring the possibilities that it presents as an educational tool, in general, as well as a tool to publicise services offered by academic libraries. Graham, Faix, and Hartman (2009), from their experience of using Facebook affirmed that Facebook is a professional tool to publicise library services. According to O'Dell (2010), social networking sites (SNS) like Facebook provide an innovative and effective way of connecting users, and features of SNS enable users to generate interpersonal connections based on common grounds (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009). Hence, Lawson (2007) says a Facebook group's presence does have one significant practical advantage, which is one member's ability to send a message to all other members of the group at once. From their great perks of having a Facebook page, the University of South Florida School of Information, in their Annual Newsletter of 2012, say that with Facebook, libraries can share information for free, communicate with patrons and patrons with other patrons, carry out customer service, and get feedback.

In the past few years, libraries have begun to examine the possibilities available to them through social networking sites like Twitter and Facebook as a tool for library awareness and marketing. As Facebook has come to dominate the social networking site arena, more libraries have created their own library pages on Facebook to create library awareness, to function as a marketing tool (Jacobson, 2011), and for information service delivery.

Statement of the Problem

In John Harris Library, University of Benin, Information Service Delivery (ISD) is usually a "physical" practice, where the library user who needs help, or their representative has to come to the library and meet face-to-face with the library staff rendering the service. This is somewhat cumbersome as both parties have to be present, irrespective of distance, time, and financial constraints before the service is rendered. As a way of making the service less stressful for both parties, a Facebook group was

created, among other reasons, to enhance ISD, as the service could be rendered over the Internet, beating the associated constraints mentioned above.

Objective of the Study

The objective of the study is to ascertain if the Group is living up to expectations. This study was prompted, hence its purpose is to investigate the effectiveness of Facebook as a tool for Information Service Delivery (ISD) in libraries.

Methodology

The descriptive survey method was adopted for the study. The study was based on the perceptual experiences of John Harris Library's staff who had Facebook accounts and took part in the library's Facebook group activities. The library had a total of 202 staff as of the period data were collected for the study, but only 49 were involved with the Facebook group, and all 49 were surveyed. The closed-ended questionnaire with a 4-point rating scale was used as the instrument for data collection. Though closed-ended, the questionnaire also gave room for respondents' other opinions where necessary. After distribution, all 49 copies of the questionnaire designed for the study were retrieved as the researchers kept close contact with respondents who were also fellow colleagues. Data collected were analysed using simple percentages.

Findings and Discussion

The respondents comprised librarians and library officers who were also the modal class, as against two percent senior librarians and were distributed all the units and sections of the library, as well as the faculty libraries.

Purpose of Facebook

The purpose for which Facebook is used is shown in table 1. The table reveals that connecting with colleagues and students ranked highest as all the respondents engaged in this. Also, results show that more respondents agreed strongly and lightly to the reasons for which the group is used, compared with the number of respondents who were on the disagreement sides. This shows that the group is actually a platform for information service delivery.

Table 1 : Usage of Facebook

Usage	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
To share personal opinion with colleagues	38(78%)	11(22%)	-	-
To pass official information to colleagues	31(63%)	15(31%)	3(6%)	-
To pass information to students	23(47%)	10(20.4%)	7(14.2%)	9(18.4%)
To be abreast of latest information posted by other members of the group	41(84%)	5(10%)	3(6%)	-
To ask questions	33(67.35%)	11(22.45%)	3(6.12%)	2(4.08%)
To connect with colleagues and students	49(100%)	-	-	-

However, 18.4% of the respondents strongly disagreed that they pass information to students via the group. The reason for this could be inferred from the first two options which reveal that respondents, being colleagues, communicated more among themselves rather than with students. This corroborates the perk of the University of South

Florida School of Information (2012) that Facebook is a great platform for all forms of library communication. All the respondents (100%) rated Provision of factual answers to queries as excellent and 80% rated current awareness service as excellent and 20% good as revealed in table 2.

Table 2: Facebook Services

Service rendered in the group	Excellent	Good	Fair	Unsatisfactory
Current awareness service	39(80%)	10(20%)	-	-
Selective Dissemination of Information	14(29%)	19(39%)	16(32%)	-
Instruction in the use of the library	23(47%)	22(45%)	4(8%)	-
Provision of factual answers to queries	49(100%)	-	-	-

Quality of Information

Table 3 shows that all the respondents were satisfied with the provision of factual answers to members' queries. The table also shows that 80% of the respondents rated that current awareness service via the group was excellent. On the contrary, only 29% agreed that selective dissemination of information was excellent, while 39% saw it as good, and 32% said it was fair. Similarly, most of the respondents saw instruction in the use of the library

as positive, as 47% ranked it excellent, and 45%, good. The rating of the services outlined in the table shows the services were actually being delivered, and the selection of services delivered in the group is in line with the recommendation of the Reference and User Services Association (2000) that information services should be of varying forms. Also, the results confirm the posits of Gerolimos (2011) and Graham, et al. (2009), who affirmed that Facebook is a tool to publicize library services.

Table 3: Information Quality

Quality of information Content	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Highly informative	30(61%)	-	19(39%)	-
Informative	19(39%)	-	30(61%)	-
Not informative	-	-	-	49(100%)
Unsatisfactory	-	-	-	49(100%)

Results shown in table 5 reveal that 61% of the respondents strongly agreed that the group was highly informative, while 39% preferred to rate the group as just informative. On the contrary, the same percentage which rated the group as highly informative disagreed that the group was just informative, and vice versa. However, all the respondents strongly disagreed that the group was not informative or unsatisfactory. This also implies the group's appropriateness for information service delivery. The above findings are supported by the position of the Reference and User Services Association (2000), which impresses on libraries the fact that they need to develop information services appropriate to their community; hence, user satisfaction is inevitable.

All the respondents agreed that the way most services were rendered in the group was excellent as revealed in table 4. This is evident in the results which show that assistance was always available; queries were attended to in timely manner; pieces of information disseminated were of high quality, and the manner of response to members' queries and posts was polite. However, 71% of the respondents agreed that feedback which emanated

from information delivered was excellent; 29% preferred to say that feedback was just good, and none rated any form of service performance as fair or unsatisfactory. Though, it seems like the respondents were evaluating themselves here, however, it is important to mention that not all of them were involved in the provision of service in the group, as some of them were more of recipients who benefitted from the information and assistance given by others. It is also important to mention that as an interactive group, some members of the group who are not library staff were also involved in giving assistance to other members of the group, as students provided answers to questions asked by their fellow students, and faculty members also provided answers to students' queries. So, evaluating service performance here does not imply services rendered by library staff alone, but services rendered in the group as whole, irrespective of who renders the service. Thus, service performance in the group is in line with Ranganathan's five laws of Library Science which basically promote quick and easy access to information, and also in line with libraries' and library associations' etiquette which promote politeness as a matter of great importance among librarians.

Table 4: Service Performance Rating

Service Performance	Excellent	Good	Fair	Unsatisfactory
Availability of assistance	49(100%)	-	-	-
Timely response to queries	49(100%)	-	-	-
Quality of information	49(100%)	-	-	-
Politeness in response	49(100%)	-	-	-
Feedback	35(71%)	14(29%)	-	-

Challenges of Using Facebook

As shown in table 5, all the respondents disagreed to varying degrees to all the problems anticipated to be likely hindrances to members' effective participation in the group. However, 29% of the

respondents agreed that administrative caution and sanction of members who did not abide by the rules of the group was poor. Also, a small number of respondents constituting four percent agreed as well that responses to their queries were delayed.

Table 5: Problems Encountered Using Facebook

Problem	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Poor quality information in the group	-	-	19(39%)	30(61%)
Poor administrative prohibition of derogatory, defamatory, religious, vulgar, casual and trivial posts	-	-	15(31%)	34(69%)
Poor administrative caution and sanction to members who do not abide by the rules of the group	-	14(29%)	23(47%)	12(24%)
Delayed response to your queries	-	2(4%)	16(33%)	31(63%)
No feedback to your posts	-	-	15(31%)	34(69%)
Rude comments from members	-	-	-	49(100%)

These results behold administrators of the group to look into their etiquette and come up with more satisfactory cautionary measures. Also, rather than neglecting the opinion of the relatively low percentage of respondents who indicated that they experienced delay in response to their queries, administrators should take the opinion into cognisance and improve on response timing.

From results shown in table 6, 77.6% of the respondents agreed strongly that they were very satisfied with the services delivered in the group, while 22.4% agreed strongly that they were just satisfied with same. Imposingly, 37% and 63%

disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively that they were dissatisfied with the overall services delivered in the group. However, all the respondents strongly disagreed that they were very dissatisfied with the services delivered in the group. Even though the group is not the library in itself where users come to for their information needs, it is a tool that supports the library's goal of satisfying users' needs. This is evident in the words of Aina (2004) who states that library users are the focal point of all library and information services, as the library primarily exists to satisfy the user.

Table 6: Satisfaction

Overall satisfaction	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Very satisfied	38(77.6%)	-	-	-
Satisfied	11(22.4%)	-	-	-
Dissatisfied	-	-	18(37%)	31(63%)
Very Dissatisfied	-	-	-	49(100%)

Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings of the study and other literature reviewed show that Facebook is a good platform for information service delivery. Facebook, as exposed in the study, proved to be a professional tool for marketing the library, communication across staff and patrons, and rendering information service.

The results of the study show that creating a Facebook group where librarians meet with themselves and with other patrons is of great importance as it creates a convivial atmosphere for all forms of library and information communication, and delivery of all forms of information service, irrespective of members' designation and location. The results also show that apart from extraneous hindering factors which may be particular to individual members of the group, or beyond the group's administrators' help range, a Facebook group can be a very appropriate arena for dissemination of high quality information, and the group can be a surrogate classroom, library or information centre.

Taking the following about Facebook into consideration – its striking usage statistics, phenomenal growth rate, impressive popularity, amazing multilingual feature, interoperability with several technological devices, usability for library and information services, and above all, its “create-a-free-account” characteristic, libraries should wake up from their slumber and embrace this new level of awareness creation, communication, marketing, and service delivery that Facebook has brought about.

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