



Social Networking: a tool to use for effective service delivery to clients by African Libraries

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Abstract:

Social Networking sites are one of the new technologies offering libraries the opportunity to reach out to its clients. The use of this platform has affected the operations and service delivery of all organizations. Based on this fact most International University Libraries have attached a link of a social networking site to their library's web pages, same cannot be said of most African University Libraries. The idea of having a social networking site linked to a University library's web page is to enable patrons' have a live discussion with a professional on issues pertaining to the use of the library and also allow the libraries to advertise their programmes and activities. A descriptive survey research was conducted to establish the possibility of linking a social networking site to the library's web page. Five hundred and forty one (541) students were purposely sampled from University of Education, Winneba (Osagyefo Library). A questionnaire was used to gather information on accessing the library's services on social networking sites. Findings indicated that students endorse the linking of social networking site to the Library's web page to facilitate collaborations between the library and the University community.

Keywords: Social Networking Sites, Academic Libraries, Technologies, Service Delivery

Introduction

According to Sadeh (2007), developments in web technology are creating more friendly, social and fun environments for retrieving and sharing information and one of such is Social networking websites. These sites typically allow users to create a "profile" describing themselves, exchange public or private messages and list other users or groups they are connected to in the same way. These social networking sites may contain set rules and regulations to be followed as per their editorial policy or may be entirely user-driven. Some of the most popular social networking websites are: Academia.edu, Flickr, Facebook,

Friendster, Hi5, Twitter, LinkedIn, blogs, YouTube, Myspace.

This platform is used for social activities by organizations, academia and the general public specifically the youth. The use of this platform has compelled modern day students to spend a lot of time at these sites. It is against this background that Academic Libraries in Africa need to adjust their operations to suit the changing trends of their clientele and society.

Research Objectives:

The basis of this research is to:

- identify the availability of Social Networking sites in African University Libraries;
- find out the usefulness of social networking sites to Academic Libraries in Africa
- give an overview of usage of social networking sites by students of University of Education, Winneba;
- find out the most visited social networking sites and
- solicit views from students on having a social networking site Linked to University of Education Library's web page

Literature Review

The library as an organization is a collection of information resources with the specific purpose of obtaining, preserving and making available recorded knowledge. The efficiency and effectiveness of the library as a tool of Research and Learning is determined by the success of providing patrons with relevant and timely information. Previously, libraries measured their successes based on completeness and balance of collection. In recent times, the focus has changed towards technology driven service delivery. O'Brien (1996) and Dadzie (2005) assert that for information to be of optimal use, it must have the following qualities: relevance, accuracy, timeliness, currency, completeness, clarity and cost effectiveness.

Traditional Library processes and structures are proving unsatisfactory to respond quickly enough to technology driven environment. However, change is not desirable but also mandatory as technology has much potential that cannot be ignored. The biggest change in today's patrons from those in the past is their intense reliance on technology such as cell phones, computers, and access to the Internet etc.

Definition of Social Networking

According to Computing Dictionary (2011), Social networking site as any website designed to allow multiple users to publish content of themselves. The information may be on any subject and may be for consumption by friends, mates, employers, employees just to mention a few.

Boyd and Ellison (2007) define social networking sites as web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, to view and navigate their list of connections and those made by others within the system. Powell (2009) defines social networking as a community in which individuals are somehow connected through friendship, values, working relationships, idea and so on.

Seufert et al (1999) defines social networking in terms of knowledge networking as signifying a number of people, resources and relationships among them, who are assembled in order to accumulate and use knowledge primarily by means of knowledge creation and transfer processes, for the purpose of creating value. The concept of social networking is one of the tools of Web 2.0, which also forms the basis of library 2.0.

Deducing from the above definitions, the term social networking can be referred to as a web platform where people from different cultural settings can connect and interact with each other.

Uses of Social Networking sites by the International University Libraries

International University Libraries and other business organizations are using social networking platform to interact and reach out to their patrons or clients. This platform has been embraced by International University libraries in their service delivery even though resources available to them abound. It has also become a level playing ground for academics and students to interact on issues pertaining to course work. Students also use this platform to share information amongst themselves on any subject and topic. The use of these tools has been affirmed by Bell (2007), that Academic libraries do not only use social media for communication purposes, but had adapted their research strategies to this environment.

Yale Science Libraries, Adelphi University Libraries, Carnegie Mellon University Libraries, Cambridge University Library and Norwegian University of Science and Technology Library are just a few examples of the International University Libraries with social networking wall. The walls are mostly used to:

1. announce programmes of the library
2. give students the opportunity to ask questions pertaining to the use of the library
3. teach basic search tools
4. paste new books on the wall to inform the University Community
5. send brief updates to patrons
6. ask a Librarian

Academic Libraries in Africa can also respond to the needs of modern day patrons by applying efficient technologies such as social networking, mobile application, and online check in/check outs to their service delivery.

These developments in the operations of library service delivery should encourage African Libraries to reinvent itself to respond adequately to this call by investing in technologies that have direct effect on the operations of the library. To achieve this, African libraries must upgrade library staff skills in information Technology (IT) so as to be able to understand and use Social Networking sites to their maximum.

Social Networking sites in African University Libraries

As at April 2011 Association of African Universities (AAU) had 180 Universities from 30 member Countries in good standing as per AAU site. A search on the Universities at AAU site revealed that some of the Universities do not even have University websites, which means that their libraries cannot have a web page. Some of the Universities have the websites but the websites are inactive and non accessible. The rest of the Universities have websites

and their University libraries too have their own web pages. A handful of African University Libraries have social networking sites linked to their Library's web page examples include; University of the Witwatersrand Library, University of Pretoria Library and Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University Library all from South Africa. These results should not discourage us but use it as a starting point in our quest of inculcating technology into every fabric of our operations.

Benefits of Social Networking sites to African University Libraries

Social networking sites have its own advantages to Librarians and Clients. Some of the benefits are as follows:

- Social networking sites will facilitate collaborations and promote effective communication between Librarians and their patrons.
- It will generate a flow of information excluded from search engines and Library Catalogues.
- Some writers as cited in Scale (2008) suggest that social networking sites will lead future delivery of information to meet search queries
- The crucial aim of librarians is to make library resources available to patrons so if social networking sites will help achieve this goal then it should be pursued vigorously.
- Social networking sites wall linked to a library's web page has the potential of reaping great results by attracting and serving Distance Education Students. Watts et al (2002) stress that it is through social networking sites that any person is capable of communicating and delivering a message to a distant target person.
- It will help African Librarians and Libraries to keep pace with technologies and compete effectively with the developed World.

In all social networking sites can be beneficial to librarians and their clients. The few shortcomings should not discourage African Librarians in their quest of taking the library to the level. As Bailenson et al (2008), suggest that positive social actions and deeds established online can be transferred to our daily lives.

Social networking sites if instituted in African Academic Libraries will go a long way to solve some of the pertinent issues confronting them. Most of the African Academic Libraries lack skilled labour, this can be attributed to the few schools available to train Librarians coupled with lack of incentives for them. Social Networking can help minimize the impact of insufficient Professional Librarians in the running of these Libraries, by serving some of the patrons online by Professional; having to answer queries from different people at the same time reducing their physical presence in the libraries. Limited space African Academic Libraries can go unnoticed if the necessary information can be accessed in the comfort of their rooms. African Academic Libraries can use social networking sites to deliver effective services to clients with limited resources. The use of this tool does not require any special equipment apart from computer, Internet connectivity and a trained professional to manage.

The literature related to social networking in Academic Libraries in Africa reveals many gaps in the use of this tool for service delivery. While much of the existing literature deals with the use of social networking sites by International University Libraries to promote collaborations and connections between librarians and their clients. This has been confirmed by Hardy (2006), that the web has evolved considerably from a read-only technology to an

interactive and participatory platform that allows users to create and share information. This study is to find out the usefulness of linking social networking sites to a library's web page.

The 180 Universities in Africa are in good standing via the AAU sites. Out of this 15 Universities that are in Ghana 8 are Public and 7 are Private.

Table 1: Universities in Ghana

Universities in Ghana	Number
Public Universities	8
Private Universities	7

This part of the paper focuses on five (5) out of seven (7) Public University libraries in Ghana with specific reference to University of Education Winneba. Table 1 gives an overview of the student population as against library capacity in these 5 public University libraries.

Seating Capacity Statistics of Five Public Universities in Ghana

Table 2: Statistics on Public Universities

Name of University	Student population	Library seating capacity	Electronic seating capacity	ICT Centres with computers
University of Ghana	29,754	500	29	800
Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology	25,922	900	35	245
University of Education Winneba.	36206	814	25	200
University of Development Studies	12000	600	110	----
University of Cape Coast	30,000	2000	215	----

Accessed Universities website July 2011/ V.C Annual reports 2010

Table 2 gives an overview of the student's enrollment as against the main library's capacity and other facility available to them. This overview establishes the fact that library facilities are not sufficient for all students Academic Libraries in Ghana are at the cross road of making use of what is readily available to librarians and their clients; social networking sites can be used to bridge this gap.

On the five Public Universities chosen, the libraries have a section for electronic services. These sections are supposed to add up to the limited resources in the libraries by giving students the opportunity and the necessary guidelines to search the databases purchased or

search sites that are of much interest to them. The Universities on Table 1, on their part have established ICT centre furnished them with computers connected to the Internet where students can go and surf on the Internet.

A search on the web pages of Academic libraries in Ghana shows the absence of social networking sites link attached to any of them. The University of Education Winneba was selected for this research. This research is undertaken to seek the views of clients on having social networking sites link on the library's page to serve clients effectively.

Brief information on University of Education, Winneba and Osagyefo Library

As stated in the Investiture and Induction of the second Vice-Chancellor Professor Akwasi Asabere-Ameyaw (2007), University of Education, Winneba is a multi Campus University with the College of Technology Education located in Kumasi; College of Agriculture Education in Mampong-Ashanti; the main campus in Winneba (North, Central and South Campuses); recently Ajumako Campus for Languages and lastly 12 study centers across the 10 regions of Ghana.

The University of Education Winneba has a current student enrolment of 36,206 made up of 14,623 regular and 21,583 Distance and Sandwich students. The University College was opened in 1992. The University was established by the University of Education, Winneba Act 672 on May 14, 2004, the University was charged with the responsibility of producing professional educators who will spearhead a new national vision of education aimed at redirecting Ghana's efforts along the path of rapid economic and social development.

The Osagyefo Library is the central library for University of Education, Winneba. The University of Education, Winneba now has over 102,307 collections of books and 1,593 serials on education and education related subjects. The University of Education, Winneba library provides instant access to useful and relevant information for research and academic work of which Osagyefo Library has the largest.

Methodology

A questionnaire was administered to students who visited the electronic section of Osagyefo Library in University of Education, Winneba. The researchers also visited Association of African Universities (AAU) site to access all Universities in Africa. The researchers then went further to take the Universities one after the other to access their Library's web pages. Again, the researchers observed some students using their laptops in the reading rooms of Osagyefo library for the period under discussion. Data was obtained over a period of three months; between February to April 2011 from University of Education, Winneba Library.

Population

The population of the study consisted of the number of users that visited Osagyefo library electronic section for the period under study. The sample size was obtained from the number of users that visited the electronic section of Osagyefo library of University of Education, Winneba.

OSAGYEFO LIBRARY ELECTRONIC SERVICE UNIT, USAGE STATISTICS

Table 3: Statistics on Internet Usage at University of Education Winneba

Month	Male Research in Databases	Female Research In Databases	Male Search Engines	Female Search Engines	Total
February	733	212	1151	177	2273
March	1051	201	2124	193	3569
April	823	421	1452	346	3032
Total	2607	834	4727	706	8874

Table 3 represents the total usage of the databases and search engines that students accessed under period of study. The electronic section of the Osagyefo Library has a policy that gives students the opportunity to do only academic searches either in the Databases purchased or in any of the search engines which applies to all the 5 five Public Universities. The idea is to maximize the use of these limited resources to achieve the core purpose of the library.

Table 4:

Months	Male Social Network/ Email	Female Social Network/ Email	Total
February	1151	177	1328
March	2124	193	2317
April	1452	336	1788
Total	4727	706	5433

Data Analysis and Discussions

The analysis of data presented here was based on information provided by respondent of the questionnaires administered by the researchers. In all 550 questionnaires were given out, out of which 541 were received. The analysis is therefore based on the 541 questionnaires received.

Table 5: Data about Respondents

Year of Study	Respondent	Percentage (%)
Diploma	81	15%
Undergraduate	360	66.5%
Postgraduate	100	18%
Total	541	100%

The sample studied comprised of 81 Diploma Students representing (15%); Undergraduate students of 360 representing (66.5%) and Postgraduate students 100 representing 18%. They were drawn from a cross –section of students in different years of study as illustrated in table 5.

Data was analyzed and presented under various headings and subheadings derived from the objectives of the research using the questionnaire as the structural guide for the analysis and findings.

Overview of usage of Social Networking sites by Students

Table 6: Usage of Social Networking sites by students

Use of the Internet	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Often	335	62%
Some how often	146	27%
Not often	60	11%

Questions were based on what they do with their time outside the library premises. In response to the frequent use of any of the social networking sites by students 335 (62%) of the respondent indicated frequent usage of the Internet. 146 respondents representing, 27% indicated that they do not use the social networking sites always but goes there when the need arises. 60 representing, 11% indicated that they are not keen in visiting these social networking sites since it waste their time. The study found out that more students use social networking sites for different reasons. Some students indicted that the electronic section of Osagyefo Library allows them 30 minutes free of charge to do academic research; it is not enough to meet their needs. As such some use their laptops or go to internet cafes for further searches mostly going to social networking sites and other search engines.

Table 7: Purpose of Internet Use

	Respondents	Percentage
Mails and Social network	312	57%
Social network and Research	135	24%
Social network only	68	12%
Email only	26	4.8%

When respondent were asked to indicate the purpose of Internet use, 312 representing, 57.7% indicated the use of the Internet mainly for visiting social network site and for checking mails. Another 135 representing, 24.9% respondent indicated they use it for social networking and research. However, 68 representing, 12.6% respondent answered they use the Internet for social networking only. While 26 (4.8%) mentioned email only. This showed that respondents basically use the Internet for connecting to social networking sites and for checking emails. Based on these figures averagely, social network usage was higher than the other purposes of Internet use.

Table 8: Popular Social Network

	Respondents	Percentage
Facebook	508	93.9%
Facebook and Twitter	16	3%
Facebook and MySpace	7	1.3%
Facebook and Hi5	5	0.9%
Other(Linkedin, flickr, tagged)	5	0.9%

Researchers also sought respondents view on the most visited social network site. In all 508 representing, 93.9% of the respondent indicated Facebook as the most visited social networking site. Furthermore 16 corresponding to 3% indicated Facebook and Twitter, while 7 representing, 1.3% indicated Facebook and MySpace. Another 5 denoting, 0.9% respondent indicated Facebook and Hi5. The remaining 5 constituting, 0.9% indicated other. Raskin (2006) writes that Facebook is the most interesting social networking sites as it attracts and provides user generated content for searching. According Goldman (2011) as cited in Wikipedia that as at July 2011 update, Facebook had more than 750 million active users. This confirms the popularity of Facebook among respondents. Other social network sites were patronised by few respondents. This may be due to the popularity of Facebook among Ghanaians. Other social networks are not so popular, some could be said to be unknown to most students.

Why students visits social networking websites

Table 9: Purpose of visiting social networking sites

Purpose of Visiting Social networking sites	Respondents	Percentage
Connect with friends	217	40%
Chart with friends	145	27%
Make new friends	81	15%
Visit pages of interest	98	18%

In response to the main purpose of visiting social network sites 217 representing, 40% indicated their main purpose as to connect with friends. Again 145 constituting, 27% indicated that they visit the site to chat with friends while another 81 representing, 15% indicated their main purpose as to make new friends. However 98 (18%) indicated their main purpose was to visit pages of interest. These findings indicated that the main purposes of

visiting the social network are to connect with friends, to chat with friends as well as to visit pages of interest.

Access Library’s web page

When asked ‘would you like accessing the library on your social network’. 400 students constituting, 73.9% answered that it would be interesting to access library services on a social. They further implied that it will make learning easier since they will be learning at the same time entertaining themselves on their social network. However 110 students representing, 20% answered that they would not like to do so since they access the social network to relax away from studies. Furthermore, 31 students representing, 5.7% were unsure of how they would feel about accessing library services on their social network. Findings show that majority, 73.9% of the respondents would be interested in accessing their library on a social network. Again, majority agreed to the notion that, it will make learning easier since they will be entertaining themselves at the same time learning through their various social networks.

Table: 10 Accessing Library on Social Network.

Accessing Library on Social network	Respondents	Percentage
Yes	400	73.9%
No	110	20%
Unsure	31	5.7%

When respondents were asked ‘would you like having access to new books in the library through their social networking sites’? 420 students representing, 77.6% indicated that they would like such a service. 39 denoting, 7.2% indicated they would not like such a service since they might be able to get it on the libraries web-page. While 82 students constituting, 15.2% were unsure of having access to new books in the library on their social network. On the issue of having access to new books on a social network, most of the respondents, 77.6% indicated that such information will be most appreciated. Few respondents did not think it would be such a good idea to have something like that on their social network. Some however were unsure about having such provision on a social network site.

Table: 11 Accessing new books on Social Network site

Accessing new books title	Respondents	Percentage
Yes	420	77.6%
No	39	7.2%
Unsure	82	15.2%

In response to ‘would you prefer accessing library information on your social network than the library website?’ 389 constituting, 71.9% of the members of the group responded that

since they spend more time on their social networking sites that it will be more interesting to access study materials alongside interacting with friends on their social network than accessing those same services on the library website. 102 representing, 18.9% respondent said they would rather prefer the library website to the social network. 50 representing, 9.2% did not respond to this question. In addition, in response to the preferred option in accessing library information on social network as against visiting the library webpage for the same information, majority of the respondents constituting, 71.9% of the respondents mentioned they would rather have such information on their social network than on the library webpage.

When asked ‘Would you like interacting with the reference librarian on your social network?’ 410 representing, 75.8% said they would appreciate such a service since it would enable them interact with the reference librarian on pertinent issues such as how to use the OPAC when it is eventually launched and how to search for information in scholarly databases. 95 representing, 17.6% still indicated they would rather interact with the reference librarian in person than online since they might not get the right inclination of the conversation online. 36 constituting, 6.6% were indifferent to the question. This analysis shows that respondents would rather appreciate interacting with reference librarian on their social network than doing so in person. Some of the reasons given were that, in this age of technological advancement it is important to incorporate the use of technology in the way things are done in order to save time.

Table: 12 Charting with Reference Librarian on Social network

Interacting with the Reference Librarian	Respondents	Percentage
Yes	410	75.8%
No	95	17.6%
Unsure	36	6.6%

Views from students on having social networking sites

The question of ‘Would you like accessing the library’s page on a social network sites like Facebook?’ 430 constituting, 79.5% said they would like to access the library’s page on a social network since they would be able to post comments and send suggestions on relevant issues on such a page. 84 denoting, 15.5% indicated they would not want to visit the library’s wall on a social network. 27(5%) was indifferent to the question. On the issue of having a library wall on a social network like Facebook, majority, and 79.5% indicated that they would like to access the library wall on their social network. Few of the respondents did indicate they would not like to see a library wall on their social network. Some however were not sure if they would like that or not.

Summary of the Findings

These are the summary of the findings:

1. Social networking sites usage was higher than the other purposes of Internet use.
2. Library services on social networking sites will be appreciated by these students, as they learn they will be entertaining themselves at the same time.
3. That the main purposes of visiting the social networking sites are to connect with friends, to chat with friends as well as to visit pages of interest.

4. Almost Seventy two percent, 71.9% of the respondents preferred accessing the library's web page on social networking sites than the library's web page. because there they can comment on issues
5. On the issue of having University of Education, Winneba library wall on a social networking sites majority (79.5%) indicated that they would like to access the library wall on their social networking sites, this will help them comment on issues the need arises.

Conclusion

From the above discussions and analyses it has been established that access to Internet connectivity and computers are on the increase. University of Education, Winneba has moved on with the introduction of wireless facility on their campuses given students and the university community access to Internet in the comfort of their hall of residence and homes. It is understandable that Twenty-First century student is not interested in printed work; for librarians to make libraries interesting innovations such as social networking site should be introduced to attract them to the library environment. Social networking sites would help establish a cordial relationship between librarians and patrons; market the library's services; announce library programmes on the wall and so on.

This technology provides the enabling platform that goes beyond the traditional service delivery by allowing patrons to interact in real time with librarians in the comfort of their hall of residence or homes. Librarians must acquire the necessary skills in information technology to meet the challenging demands of social networking sites.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this research, the following recommendations are suggested for adoption in an effort to improve library services by African University librarians to patrons.

- We advocate African University librarians should formulate policies on the use of social networking sites. Such a policy should be designed in a way to include: a designated member of staff at a senior management level, with appropriate professional qualifications, to be responsible for the planning, implementation, operation and monitoring of services of the social network site of the library.
- It is recommended education and publicize of this tool to librarians and our clientele.
- Expertise should be sought from International Universities for assistance in the design for the University Libraries.
- It is recommended that University of Education, Winneba should spearhead the implementation of this tool in our Universities in Ghana and Africa.
- Periodic evaluation of the social networking sites should be carried out to determine areas requiring attention. Evaluation is important because it helps to match objectives of the social networking sites with performance.

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