

Social Media Strategies for E-resources Marketing in University Library and Information Services: Undergraduate User Attitude and Motivation for Engagement

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Abstract

Marketing has become an invaluable tool organisations employ to cope with changes in the environment. Libraries are no exception. With the emergence of social media platforms, the idea of social media marketing has assumed a front burner role in information studies research and its application by library practitioners especially in the university setting. They adopt these platforms to market resources and services to their target audience (undergraduate students) who known to underutilize these offerings and often do not share the sentiment of engaging the library in a conversation on social media spaces. This research in progress seeks to explore ways libraries utilize social media to effect attitude change among undergraduate students in Nigeria and elicit conversational engagement with them that leads to the use of library e-resources. The Diffusion of Innovation Theory and Elaboration Likelihood Model of Persuasion will be drawn upon as theoretical lens. It is essentially a case study research which will adopt instrument such as interview, questionnaire and observation to develop a theoretical model with practical and scientific implication.

Introduction

The lack of awareness and underutilization of university library e-resources by undergraduate students is a universal phenomenon well documented in the literature. This assumes an undesirable proportion among university libraries in Nigeria (Orji, 2010). Scholars have attributed this to lack of adequate marketing (Kwanya & Stilwell, 2015). Given that libraries in general and the university library in particular operate in a changing environment characterized by competition by alternative sources of information, budget cuts and fast paced technological development, they strive to remain relevant. Marketing has become interestingly vital for this purpose.

Recently, the concept of social media marketing has been elevated to the forefront of public discourse. Libraries are increasingly seeking ways to leverage these tools with the popular phrase “let us hang out where the patrons are”. However, research has shown that majority of social media users are in the age range of 18-29 (Pew Research Center, 2017), who use these platforms to connect with family and friends and often do not share the sentiment of engaging with the library (Jones & Harvey, 2016). This apathy and non-engagement has invariably led to the abandonment of social media profiles by libraries with negative effects on library image, wasted effort and time.

Hence, this study poses the question: how do university libraries utilize social media to foster user engagement and increase in e-resources utilization? Social media are predicted to be part of the library in the foreseeable future. Therefore, it becomes important to undertake a study to outline an effective measure and framework for exploiting these technologies in Nigerian university library context. Previous research on social media marketing in libraries have focused mainly on

Europe and North America with minimal studies highlighting the reality from Africa. Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa with a youth population of over 50% (National Population Commission, 2017) whose uptake of social media is massive. This burgeoning youth population consists of mostly high school, college and undergraduate students. A study of library social media marketing targeted at these category of users will reveal important insights that can be applied to other African countries and beyond. More so, the exploration of the possible way to engage users in these spaces will be a significant contribution aimed at changing the attitudes of university library users and by extension other libraries.

Research Question

The central research question that will guide this study is: how do university libraries utilize social media to foster user engagement and increase in e-resources utilization?

Research Design/ Theoretical Framework

Case study is the research design that will be adopted for this study. Case study is defined by Eisenhardt (1989) as a research strategy which focuses on understanding the dynamics present within a single setting. This is appropriate for this study because it will enable the researcher to study the case of social media marketing in a natural setting of university libraries. This strategy is also suitable for addressing a “how” research question and the investigation of a process. Given that this study is interested in developing a model persuasion through social media marketing, a case study will be well-suited for capturing the knowledge of practitioners (librarians) and developing a model which can subsequently be refined into a theory.

Drawing on the Diffusion of Innovation Theory and the Elaboration Likelihood Model, this study will explore how university libraries are utilizing social media platforms to persuade their users to engage them in a conversation and how this results in the increase of library e-resource usage. These theories will be employed as tools for analytic generalization (Yin, 2014)

Building Theory from Cases

The roadmap proposed by Eisenhardt (1989) for building theory from cases will be adopted in this study. These guidelines are explained below.

Case Selection by Theoretical Sampling

The case selection will be driven by the research question and the goal of the study to build theory. As a result, libraries who have a clear social media strategic marketing plan and are driven by this plan in their marketing strategy will be suitable for case selection. In addition, these libraries would have been engaged in social media marketing for at least the last 3 years which is a possible timeframe to attain a substantial success on the platform. To enhance generalizability, diverse case approach will be adopted. Hence, cases will be selected from 6 academic libraries, each representing the 6 geopolitical zones of Nigeria.

3.2 Instrument for Data Collection

Multiple sources of data collection are generally advocated for theory building from cases. In this case, observation, interviews and questionnaire responses will be relied upon. First, the observation technique will be employed to examine social media posts of libraries, users’

comments and reactions, as well as the statistics of library services use. The interview will be conducted on librarians who are directly connected with social media marketing in the library. The interview protocol will be semi-structured consisting of questions such as understanding of marketing concepts and application on social media, social media strategic plan, implementation process, communication patterns and success. Also, a questionnaire will be designed for undergraduate students to gain insight into their motivation for utilizing social media and how they prefer to interact with the library on social media.

3.3 Entering the Field

In case research for theory building, it is recommended for overlap in data analysis and collection to allow researchers take advantage of flexible data collection. To achieve, this study will maintain a field note that constantly quizzes the data from each site to gain newer insight about its peculiarity from others.

3.4 Analyzing Data/ Searching for Cross Case Patterns

The heart of building theory from cases is the analysis. Prior to this, transcript of interviews will be compiled as well as notes of observation. Then, a within case analysis will be adopted by describing the case study write-ups for each site (library). Since there is no general standard, this study will adopt a tabular display and graphs of information about each site to allow the unique pattern in each site to emerge before generalizing across sites. From this, categories will be selected. This can be suggested by the research problem or idea from the literature. This approach is highly iterative and will enable the researcher to cope with the large amount of data.

3.5 Shaping Hypotheses

From the within-site analysis plus various cross-site tactics, tentative themes, concepts and a possible relationship between variables will begin to emerge. The next step will be to compare the emergent frame with evidence from each case in order to assess how well or poorly it fits with data. The central idea is to constantly compare theory and data. To shape the hypotheses, the researcher will sharpen the constructs by refining the definitions and building evidence which measures the construct in each case.

3.6 Enfolding Literature/Theoretical Saturation

The emergent concepts, hypothesis and theory will be compared with extant literature to discover similarities and contradiction. This is important to increase the confidence in the findings and the prospect of generalizability. Theoretical saturation will be achieved when incremental learning has become minimal because the researcher is observing the phenomena seen before in the data.

1.0 Contribution to Knowledge

It is envisaged that this study will contribute to theoretical and practical and scientific knowledge. Theoretically, the expected model that will emerge from this study is a process model and based on the classification by Gregor (2006), it will seek to explain the process of social media marketing and predict the likelihood of success (attitude change leading to engagement) when necessary effective persuasive communication technique are put in place. The theoretical contribution of this study will be examined in light of the criteria proposed by Corley & Gioia (2011).

According to Corley and Gioia (2011), originality and utility are the core of theoretical contribution. The originality of this study is hinged on the novel move for the development of a framework for social media marketing in organisations which in the best knowledge of the researcher has not been attempted. The building of theory from cases in information studies is very rare and this singular move is a clear indication of originality especially with the exploration of diverse types of libraries to reveal insights hitherto unknown. More so, the utility of this study can be approached from practical and scientific perspectives. Practically, the framework which will emerge from the study will be a useful tool for librarians as well as other marketing managers in organizations who are wary of adopting social media platform for marketing efforts. It will give them a richer understanding of this process involved to build a better and stronger relationship with their customers. Scientifically, the study will propose hypotheses which can be refined by further studies to gain new insights and strengthen the generalizability of the emergent theory.

2.0 Conclusion

In sum, this study is an attempt to explore the marketing strategy of libraries on social media platforms aimed at eliciting engagement and use of library services. Its value lies in the approach to the study which is a case study, a rare approach in the study of library processes. The additional move to develop a framework from the case is an invaluable theoretical contribution which can be further refined through empirical testing to develop a theory generalizable to other nonprofit organisation. The study adopted a roadmap proposed by Eisenhardt for theory building from cases and by so doing, outlined the guideline for replication by other researchers in the future.

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