Beyond Social Media Presence: Rethinking the Strategic Integration of Social Media into Information Service Delivery in Academic Libraries

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Abstract

The increasing adoption of social media has transformed communication, information dissemination, and service delivery in academic libraries. Platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Telegram, and X provide opportunities for academic libraries to extend their services beyond the traditional library environment and respond to the changing information needs of students, researchers, and academic staff. This article examines the strategic integration of social media into information service delivery in academic libraries, focusing on its advantages, associated challenges, and strategies for effective utilisation. It discusses the potential benefits of social media, including improved access to information resources, enhanced user engagement, real-time communication, promotion of library services, research support, collaboration, and knowledge sharing. However, it argues that these benefits may be undermined by poor internet connectivity, inadequate ICT infrastructure, irregular electricity supply, insufficient staff digital competencies, privacy and security concerns, limited funding, and the absence of institutional social media policies. The paper advocates a strategic and user-centred approach to social media integration through continuous professional development, adequate technological infrastructure, institutional policy formulation, appropriate platform selection, interactive content development, and regular evaluation of service outcomes. It concludes by emphasising the need for evolving roles of academic librarians as digital information facilitators and online service providers to be intensified. The paper suggests among others that social media should be regarded not merely as a promotional and communication tool but as a complementary channel for delivering responsive, accessible, and effective academic library services.

Keywords: Academic, Digital, Competencies, Libraries, Service.

Introduction

The development of information and communication technologies (ICTs) has significantly transformed the ways in which information is created, organised, accessed, communicated, and utilised in academic environments. Academic libraries are increasingly

expected to provide services that respond to the changing information needs and digital expectations of students, researchers, and academic staff. Consequently, libraries are exploring digital platforms to improve communication, promote information resources, and extend the delivery of information services beyond the physical library environment. Social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, YouTube, Telegram, and X have become important communication channels in contemporary society. Their interactive features provide opportunities for academic libraries to disseminate information, promote electronic resources, respond to users' enquiries, support research activities, and maintain continuous communication with their communities. Unlike traditional communication channels, social media facilitates immediate interaction and enables users to participate in information-sharing activities. The integration of social media into academic library services is consistent with the broader transformation of libraries into digitally supported information environments. Okonkwo et al. (2025) discussed the changing roles and competencies of academic librarians in enhancing access to electronic resources, while Okonkwo and Ukoha (2026) emphasised the importance of digital skills in innovative library service delivery. These perspectives demonstrate that contemporary librarians must continually develop their technological and professional competencies to respond effectively to emerging information environments. Notwithstanding the opportunities offered by social media, its adoption by academic libraries does not necessarily translate into effective information service delivery. Some libraries concentrate mainly on announcements, publicity, and promotional activities without fully exploiting the platforms for reference services, user education, research support, and information literacy. This raises an important question about whether academic libraries are using social media strategically to improve information services or merely maintaining an online presence. This paper argues that social media should be treated as a complementary professional service channel and integrated into the core information service activities of academic libraries. It examines the changing landscape of social media use in academic libraries, its advantages, the challenges associated with its utilisation, and practical strategies for achieving effective integration into academic library services.

Social Media and the Changing Landscape of Academic Library Services

Social media refers to internet-based platforms and applications that enable users to create, share, exchange, and interact with information and digital content. These platforms support communication, collaboration, networking, and information dissemination among individuals and organisations. In academic libraries, social media provides an additional channel through which librarians can connect with users, promote information resources, provide guidance, and support teaching, learning, and research activities. The emergence of social networking applications has contributed to the development of more interactive approaches to library service delivery. Traditionally, library services were largely provided through physical reference desks, printed notices, face-to-face consultations, and conventional communication channels. However, the increasing use of digital technologies has created opportunities for libraries to reach users irrespective of their physical location. Ayu and Abrizah (2011) examined the use and applications of Facebook pages among academic libraries in Malaysia, while Boateng and Liu (2014) investigated Web 2.0 applications and

trends in leading United States academic libraries. These studies illustrate the growing relevance of social networking and interactive technologies to academic library operations. Social media also complements the broader movement towards digital information access and sharing. Okonkwo et al. (2023) examined the role of open access resources in facilitating information sharing in a changing world. Similarly, Okonkwo (2023) discussed institutional repositories as tools for research creation and effective information accessibility. These developments demonstrate the importance of providing users with convenient pathways to scholarly information. Social media can strengthen such efforts by directing users towards repositories, electronic databases, open access publications, and other relevant academic resources. However, the use of social media should not be considered an end in itself. Maintaining a Facebook page, WhatsApp group, or Instagram account does not automatically improve information service delivery. Its value depends on the relevance of the content shared, the quality of interaction with users, the professional capacity of librarians, and the extent to which the platforms support the library's service objectives. Choi (2024), in examining research on academic libraries and the social web, provides a relevant scholarly context for considering how libraries engage with social technologies.

Advantages of Social Media in Academic Library Service Delivery

Social media offers several opportunities for improving the accessibility, responsiveness, and visibility of academic library services. Its advantages extend beyond communication and publicity to include information dissemination, user engagement, research support, and collaboration.

i. Improved Access to Information Resources

Social media enables academic libraries to provide information about available resources and guide users towards relevant electronic materials. Through social media posts, links, messages, and digital announcements, librarians can direct students and researchers to electronic books, journals, databases, institutional repositories, and open educational resources.This function is particularly relevant to distance learners and users who may be unable to visit the physical library regularly. Okonkwo et al. (2026b) examined ICT-driven library services for enhancing distance learning, emphasising the importance of technology-supported access to library services. Social media can complement such services by providing additional communication channels through which users receive information about available resources.

ii. **Enhanced Communication and User Engagement**

One significant advantage of social media is its capacity to facilitate immediate communication between librarians and library users. Users can make enquiries, request assistance, provide feedback, and participate in discussions without necessarily visiting the library. The interactive nature of these platforms also allows librarians to understand users' information needs and respond to emerging concerns. Ta et al. (2025) proposed a framework for social media integration in libraries, emphasising the importance of user engagement in improving library services.

iii. Promotion and Marketing of Library Resources and Services

Social media provides academic libraries with cost-effective opportunities to promote their resources, programmes, and services. Libraries can publicise newly acquired materials, electronic databases, research guides, library orientation programmes, workshops, and information literacy activities. Regular and informative communication can increase awareness of available resources and encourage users to explore services that might otherwise remain underutilised. Social media therefore supports the visibility of academic libraries and strengthens their communication with institutional communities.

iv. Support for Teaching, Learning, and Research

Academic libraries can use social media to complement teaching, learning, and research activities. Librarians can share research resources, provide information about scholarly databases, circulate relevant academic announcements, and guide users towards reliable information sources. For distance learners, social media can provide additional opportunities for communication and academic support. Okonkwo et al. (2025b) discussed the use of internet-based adaptive pedagogies to foster collaboration among distance learners, while Okonkwo and Ukoha (2026) highlighted the importance of digital skills in innovative library service delivery. These perspectives reinforce the relevance of technology-supported communication to contemporary learning environments.

v. Real-Time Reference and Information Services

Social media can extend traditional reference services by allowing users to submit enquiries and receive assistance through digital communication channels. Librarians can respond to questions about library resources, guide users in locating information, and provide directions to appropriate databases and information sources. Adigun et al. (2015) discussed the integration of social networking into library reference services, demonstrating the potential of social platforms to support professional information assistance. Quadri and Adebayo Idowu (2016) also examined the use of social media by librarians for information dissemination in university libraries in South-West Nigeria.

vi. Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing

Social media provides opportunities for academic libraries to connect users with scholarly communities, professional networks, and information-sharing groups. Librarians can use appropriate platforms to share research information, publicise professional events, and facilitate communication among students, researchers, and academic staff. The contribution of digital information resources to knowledge sharing is also reflected in Okonkwo et al. (2023), who examined the role of open access resources in facilitating information sharing. Social media can complement open access

initiatives by improving awareness and directing users towards relevant scholarly materials.

vii. Increased Visibility and Institutional Outreach

Social media enables academic libraries to communicate their activities and contributions to a wider audience. Through regular engagement, libraries can demonstrate their relevance to institutional teaching, research, and community development objectives. This increased visibility may also strengthen relationships between libraries and their parent institutions. Nevertheless, visibility should not be measured only by the number of followers, likes, or comments. The more important consideration is whether social media engagement contributes to improved access to information and better user experiences.

Challenges Associated with Social Media Utilisation in Academic Libraries

In spite of its numerous advantages, the effective utilisation of social media in academic libraries is affected by technological, professional, financial, institutional, and ethical challenges. These challenges may limit the capacity of libraries to provide consistent and meaningful online services.

a. Poor Internet Connectivity and Irregular Electricity Supply

Reliable internet connectivity and electricity are essential for maintaining active social media services. Inadequate connectivity can delay responses to users' enquiries, interrupt communication, and prevent librarians from uploading or sharing information. Irregular electricity supply may further affect the availability of computers, mobile devices, and network facilities. These limitations are particularly significant in institutions where technological infrastructure is insufficient to support continuous digital service delivery.

b. Inadequate ICT Infrastructure

Some academic libraries lack adequate computers, mobile devices, internet facilities, and technical support required for effective social media management. Without appropriate infrastructure, librarians may find it difficult to maintain active accounts, develop digital content, and respond promptly to users. The development of ICT-driven library services requires institutional investment in technological facilities and operational support. Okonkwo et al. (2026b) highlighted the importance of technology-supported services in enhancing distance learning, reinforcing the need for adequate ICT infrastructure in modern library environments.

c. Insufficient Digital Skills and Staff Training

Effective social media management requires more than the ability to operate a mobile phone or create an online account. Librarians need competencies in digital communication, content development, information evaluation, online reference assistance, privacy protection, and responsible use of social platforms. Where staff lack

these competencies, social media activities may be poorly managed, irregular, or limited to basic announcements. Dube *et al.* (2024) reviewed the skills and competencies required by academic librarians to use information technology tools in the digital era. Similarly, Okonkwo and Ukoha (2026) emphasised the importance of digital skills for innovative library service delivery.

d. Privacy, Confidentiality, and Information Security Concerns

Social media interactions may expose users and libraries to privacy and information security risks. Users may unintentionally disclose personal information when making enquiries or participating in online discussions. Library accounts may also be exposed to unauthorised access, impersonation, or misuse. Academic libraries must therefore establish clear procedures for protecting users' information and managing official social media accounts. Sensitive enquiries should be handled through appropriate secure communication channels rather than public discussion spaces.

e. Copyright Infringement and Misinformation

The rapid sharing of information on social media creates the possibility of circulating inaccurate, misleading, or copyrighted materials without proper authorisation. Academic librarians have a professional responsibility to promote credible information and guide users towards reliable sources.Libraries should ensure that shared materials are appropriately evaluated and that copyright and licensing requirements are respected. Information literacy activities should also help users develop the ability to assess the credibility and accuracy of online information.

f. Inadequate Funding and Management Support

Effective social media integration requires financial and institutional support for internet subscriptions, digital devices, staff training, content development, and technical maintenance. Without adequate funding, social media activities may become irregular and unsustainable. Library management and university authorities must recognise social media as part of contemporary information service delivery and provide the necessary resources for its effective implementation.

g. Absence of Institutional Social Media Policies

The absence of clear institutional guidelines may result in inconsistent communication, inappropriate content sharing, unclear staff responsibilities, and inadequate protection of users' information. Academic libraries require policies that specify the purpose of official accounts, authorised administrators, professional communication standards, response procedures, privacy requirements, copyright responsibilities, and procedures for managing inappropriate content.

h. Low User Engagement and Evaluation Difficulties

The existence of a social media account does not guarantee active participation by library users. Some users may be unaware of the account, may prefer other

communication channels, or may not consider the information shared relevant to their academic needs. Libraries may also experience difficulties in determining whether online engagement translates into meaningful use of information resources. Consequently, social media activities should be evaluated through more than basic indicators such as likes and followers.

Strategies for Effective Integration of Social Media into Academic Library Services

To maximise the benefits of social media, academic libraries require deliberate strategies that address technological, professional, institutional, and user-related challenges. The following approaches are recommended.

i. **Continuous Digital Skills Development for Librarians**
Academic libraries should organise regular training and professional development programmes to improve librarians' competencies in social media management and digital service delivery. Training should cover digital communication, content development, online reference services, information literacy, privacy protection, copyright awareness, and evaluation of digital engagement. This recommendation is consistent with Okonkwo et al. (2025a), who discussed the changing roles and competencies of academic librarians in enhancing electronic resource access, and Okonkwo and Ukoha (2026), who emphasised the integration of digital skills into innovative library services.

ii. **Development of Institutional Social Media Policies**
Academic libraries should develop clear social media policies that guide the establishment, management, and use of official library accounts. These policies should identify authorised personnel, communication standards, content approval procedures, privacy requirements, copyright considerations, and responsibilities for responding to users' enquiries. A formal policy will promote consistency, accountability, and professionalism in online communication.

iii. **Provision of Reliable Internet and ICT Infrastructure**
University management should provide adequate internet facilities, electricity, digital devices, and technical support to sustain social media activities. Libraries should also make provision for the maintenance and replacement of technological equipment. Without reliable infrastructure, even well-designed social media strategies may not achieve their intended objectives.

iv. **Selection of Platforms Based on Users' Information Needs**
Libraries should select social media platforms according to their users' preferences, accessibility, and the nature of the services to be delivered. Rather than creating accounts on every available platform, librarians should identify the platforms that are most suitable for their institutional communities. For example, WhatsApp may support direct communication and group interaction, Facebook may facilitate announcements

and community engagement, YouTube may support instructional videos, while other platforms may be appropriate for professional networking and information dissemination.

v. **Integration with Reference, Research, and Information Literacy Services**
Social media should be incorporated into the broader information service framework of academic libraries. Librarians should use appropriate platforms to support reference assistance, current awareness services, research guidance, information literacy instruction, and selective dissemination of information. Adigun et al. (2015) provide a relevant basis for integrating social networking into reference services. This approach would help libraries move beyond promotional activities towards more functional and user-oriented service delivery.

vi. **Creation of Relevant and Engaging Digital Content**
Academic libraries should develop content that addresses the actual information needs of their users. Such content may include research tips, database access instructions, information literacy materials, electronic resource guides, new acquisitions, library orientation videos, and announcements of academic events. Content should be accurate, clear, timely, accessible, and professionally presented. Libraries should also encourage users to provide feedback and participate in appropriate online discussions.

vii. **Monitoring and Evaluation of Social Media Activities**
Academic libraries should establish mechanisms for assessing the effectiveness of their social media activities. Evaluation should consider the number and quality of enquiries addressed, response time, user engagement, referrals to library resources, participation in online learning activities, and user satisfaction. The purpose of evaluation should be to identify areas requiring improvement and ensure that social media contributes meaningfully to institutional information service objectives.

viii. **Institutional Collaboration and Management Support**
Successful social media integration requires cooperation among librarians, university management, ICT departments, academic departments, and other relevant institutional units. Library management should include social media activities in service plans and provide resources for their implementation. Collaboration with academic staff can also help librarians identify relevant information needs and develop content that supports teaching, learning, and research.

Changing Roles and Digital Competencies of Academic Librarians

The increasing use of social media and other digital technologies has expanded the professional responsibilities of academic librarians. Contemporary librarians are no longer expected to function only as custodians, organisers, and providers of physical information resources. They are increasingly required to facilitate access to electronic information, provide online assistance, support research activities, and guide users in navigating digital information

environments. In social media-supported library services, librarians may function as digital information facilitators, online reference providers, information literacy instructors, content developers, research support professionals, and managers of digital communication platforms. These responsibilities require appropriate digital competencies, communication skills, knowledge of information evaluation, and an understanding of users' information behaviour. Librarians must be able to identify credible information, guide users towards authoritative resources, and maintain professional standards in online interactions. Okonkwo et al. (2026a) examined digital librarians' roles and support in enhancing information resource sharing and services for distance learners. This contribution reinforces the importance of librarians' professional involvement in facilitating access to information in digitally mediated learning environments. Similarly, Okonkwo et al. (2025a) highlighted the need to redefine academic librarians' roles and competencies in enhancing access to electronic resources. The implication is that professional development must remain continuous. Academic librarians should be encouraged to acquire relevant digital competencies and adapt their professional practices to emerging technologies. Social media should therefore be viewed as one component of a wider digital transformation of academic library services.

Towards a Strategic Framework for Social Media Integration

For academic libraries to maximise the benefits of social media, its integration should be guided by a deliberate institutional framework. Such a framework should connect the library's objectives, available technological resources, professional competencies, user needs, and service evaluation mechanisms. The following components are proposed:

i. Clear service objectives: Libraries should identify the specific information services that social media will support, including reference assistance, information dissemination, research support, user education, and information literacy.

ii. User-centred platform selection: Social media platforms should be selected according to users' preferences, accessibility, and the nature of the services to be delivered.

iii. Professional development: Librarians should receive continuous training in digital communication, social media management, information evaluation, and online service delivery.

iv. Institutional policy: Libraries should establish guidelines for professional communication, privacy, copyright, information security, and responsible social media use.

v. Adequate technological infrastructure: Reliable internet connectivity, electricity, digital devices, and technical support should be provided to sustain online services.

vi. Integration with existing library resources: Social media should complement electronic databases, institutional repositories, open access resources, library catalogues, and other digital services.

vii. Continuous evaluation: Libraries should assess the effectiveness of their social media activities through user feedback, engagement measures, service outcomes, and the extent to which information needs are addressed.

viii. The proposed framework emphasises that effective social media integration requires more than the creation of online accounts. It requires a coordinated institutional approach in which technology, professional expertise, management support, and user needs are brought together to improve information service delivery.

ix. Academic libraries should consequently develop implementation plans that identify service priorities, allocate responsibilities, provide necessary resources, and establish measurable indicators for evaluating outcomes. This would help transform social media participation from an informal communication activity into a sustainable component of professional library services.

Conclusion

Social media offers academic libraries significant opportunities to improve information dissemination, communication, user engagement, and access to scholarly resources. Its interactive features can support reference services, research assistance, current awareness, user education, information literacy, and collaboration. However, the presence of academic libraries on social media does not necessarily translate into effective information service delivery. This paper has argued that academic libraries must move beyond the use of social media for announcements and publicity and integrate it into their core professional activities. The advantages of social media can only be maximised when libraries address challenges relating to internet connectivity, electricity, ICT infrastructure, digital competencies, privacy, funding, management support, and institutional policies. Effective integration therefore requires continuous professional development, adequate technological investment, user-centred platform selection, relevant content development, institutional collaboration, and regular evaluation of service outcomes.

Suggestions

From the afore discussions, the following suggestions were poised

1. Management of Academic Libraries should adopt a policy that links each platform to a clear service goal, such as reference help, current awareness, resource promotion or user feedback. It should name who is responsible, who approves content, how quickly queries must be answered and how performance is measured. This moves the library

from merely having accounts to using them on purpose, which is the shift the title calls for.

2. Libraries should connect their platforms to existing services, for example by offering virtual reference through direct messages, announcing new acquisitions and e-resources, posting research support and information literacy tips, and linking posts to the catalogue and institutional repository. Social media should be treated as a delivery channel for services and not as a bulletin board.

3. Management and professional bodies should organise regular training on content planning, engagement, analytics, copyright, privacy and handling user queries online. Staff who run the platforms should also receive time and recognition for this work, because it often depends on one enthusiastic person.

4. University management should fund reliable internet access, devices, data, design and scheduling tools, and where possible a dedicated social media or digital services role. Without these, strategic integration stays limited to occasional posts.

5. Libraries should track measures that show service value, such as queries answered, resource use traced to posts, reach among target user groups and satisfaction, and not only the number of followers or likes. Regular review, using user surveys and platform analytics, should guide which platforms and content to keep, change or drop.

6. Academic librarians must also recognise their expanding responsibilities as digital information facilitators and online service providers. Ultimately, the value of social media in academic libraries should not be determined by the number of online accounts, followers, or posts but by its contribution to meaningful access to information, effective communication, and improved user experience.

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