




Leveraging Content Strategy for Library Digital Media Platforms amongst Selected University Libraries in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

Many organisations have created websites and digital media platforms to communicate with patrons. University libraries have also embraced these digital ways of sharing resources and services. However, many times users have difficulty in finding information. There is also a lack of properly established policies on content creation, updating, and sometimes deletion. Some staff handling these digital media platforms may lack proper skills in making a strong social media presence for their organisations. Some libraries are therefore finding it difficult to have well-written content and maintain a viable and beneficial online presence. This work is based on a survey of twenty universities in Zimbabwe. An online questionnaire was sent to the university librarians involved in digital media technology creation and updating. A follow-up digital content analysis of the sixteen universities that responded to the questionnaire was conducted. The findings showed that all the libraries produce digital media content, although some do not have policies. The major challenge is updating the content. The authors recommend that librarians should continuously develop themselves so that they are able to deal with digital media content creation, maintenance and deletion.

Keywords: digital media, websites, content strategy, university libraries, digital.

Introduction

Libraries have adopted technology to enhance their services and resource delivery. The use of such technology has seen libraries developing digital platforms such as websites and social media pages. Web content is a valuable

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asset on the Internet (Tatar, Dias de Amorim, Fdida & Antoniadis, 2014). In Zimbabwe, many university libraries have social media pages and websites for communicating with their patrons. Such digital platforms have been created to enhance the services offered by these libraries. Often libraries post news and announcements on their digital platforms, e-resources collections, opening hours, visions and missions, services offered, guides, and various library programmes and activities (Pasquini, Amerini & Boato, 2021; Datig, 2018; Elsayed, 2017). However, some of the platforms seem to be created mainly for the sake of just having one. There is a lack of content updates, poorly crafted content, old information, and a deficit of proper policies for the creation and handling of these digital media platforms (Datig, 2018). Instead of harnessing such great tools for their advancement, some libraries are destroying their image. It is against this background that the study was conducted to achieve the following objectives:

- ◆ To discover the content posted on digital media platforms by university libraries in Zimbabwe.
- ◆ To examine the policies on content creation, updating and deletion in university libraries.
- ◆ To assess the challenges faced by university libraries in content creation and updating.

Literature review

The literature presents a complete communication shift from a traditional to a more contemporary approach where digital media usage can determine an organisation's or company's trajectory (Sundaram, 2017; Elsayed, 2017; Blakiston & Mayden, 2015). Libraries are using more digital media platforms to enhance their users' experience. Datig (2018) notes that many libraries are increasingly pursuing ways to make sure that they increase their online presence for marketing and outreach programmes. The need to ensure that libraries are fulfilling the demands of the twenty-first-century user has led to libraries developing effective marketing strategies. Sundaram (2017) notes that if organisations are to survive, there is a need for their marketers to improve the organisation's online marketing through social media platforms. Organisations need to ensure a vibrant content strategy for generating, uploading and deleting content (Blakiston, 2013).

Scholars (Datig, 2018; Elsayed, 2017; Quadri & Adebayo, 2016; Newton & Riggs, 2016; Blakiston & Mayden, 2015; Raward, 2001) show how mainly different projects have addressed the issue of content on websites. The main conclusions of these projects have been summed by Datig (2018) as "if the issue of content is left unmanaged, it may lead to potential loss of credibility

that can frustrate users”. Content communicates information about a product or service (Datig, 2018). According to Elsayed (2017), content is king, “everything is content”, “it’s all about content”, and “content comes first”. Content strategists try to make sure that they use words and data that will not create unambiguous content that supports meaningful and interactive experiences (Lovinger, 2007). Datig (2018) sees content strategy as a valuable tool for libraries looking to improve their marketing and the overall experience users have when interacting with the library.

Academic libraries use social media content to engage, collaborate and promote their services (McCallum, 2015). Further, Adetayo and Williams-Ilemobola (2021) note that libraries use social media platforms to market various library resources and services, provide news and announcements, and upload various videos and photos of user guides and events taking place at the library. Library websites and social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, blogs and discussion forums are popular digital tools. Elsayed (2017), using a quantitative approach, studied the strategies used by academic institutions to develop and upgrade their content. He surveyed website coordinators who participated in the study and found that none of the universities surveyed had a web-content strategy or were working on one.

Blakiston (2013) notes that many academic libraries have challenges in developing content. They end up developing content that is complex and sometimes old. The lack of such content strategy policies in many institutions has resulted in staff members being assigned to upload content but with very little guidance and experience in how to do it. In a study by Avemari and Bolarinwa (2012), they found that university websites could not meet the user’s information needs due to the shortcomings of their content. Elsayed (2017) surveyed university website coordinators and found that 35% had qualifications in fields unrelated to website design and thus may have the potential to contribute negatively towards content uploading. Tatar *et al.*, (2014) also note that democratising web content creation has led to mere consumers becoming creators and content distributors with fewer skills to upload content. Therefore, the importance of content creation and management highlighted by Datig (2018) led to this study to assess if librarians manage the content posted on various social media platforms. The lack of new content or the dormant nature of some social media platforms of some university libraries in Zimbabwe led the authors to find out if the librarians are facing challenges in content creation and management.

Methodology

An online survey was used to gather data whereby a census of all university libraries was conducted. The population of the study was composed of

librarians from twenty university libraries in Zimbabwe. Of these, fourteen are state universities, six are private universities, and all were chosen regardless of their ownership status. The twenty universities have functional academic libraries that are manned by professional librarians and thus were targeted. Due to its embedded data analysis feature, which would assist in the analysis phase, an online survey tool, Google Forms, was used to collect data from the respondents. The targeted respondents were librarians creating, updating, and posting content on social media, university websites, and other online digital platforms. Sixteen responses were obtained, showing an 80% response rate. A follow-up web content analysis of the sixteen universities that responded was conducted to check the type of content uploaded on library websites and official social media platforms to confirm the data obtained from the questionnaires. To ensure that the official social media platforms were used, only those with links to the library website were consulted. A six-point checklist schedule was designed to analyse the digital platforms. The checklist had the following points to be observed:

- ◆ when last was the content uploaded/added,
- ◆ how often is content uploaded,
- ◆ type of content uploaded,
- ◆ interactions with clients,
- ◆ the time taken to provide feedback, and
- ◆ any errors noted.

The collected data was then coded using this checklist and the analysis feature within Google Forms was used to analyse the data.

Findings and discussion

Respondents indicated they are utilising the library website, Facebook, Twitter and the e-learning portal. This is in line with what was stated by Adebowale and Williams-Ilemobola (2021), who indicated that libraries are now utilising digital media platforms for marketing library resources and services. The majority utilised the library website and Facebook, while only one used the e-learning portal to communicate with the clientele, as shown in Figure 8.1. This shows that the university libraries in Zimbabwe are moving along with the trending issues as a way of meeting the patrons where they are since most users are now making use of the various digital media platforms to obtain information and to communicate with the librarians (Pasquini et al., 2021; Datig, 2018; Elsayed, 2017). The e-learning portal has been pointed out as one of the platforms being utilised, since some chat features and discussion forums are more like social media platforms that users take advantage of to communicate with the librarians.

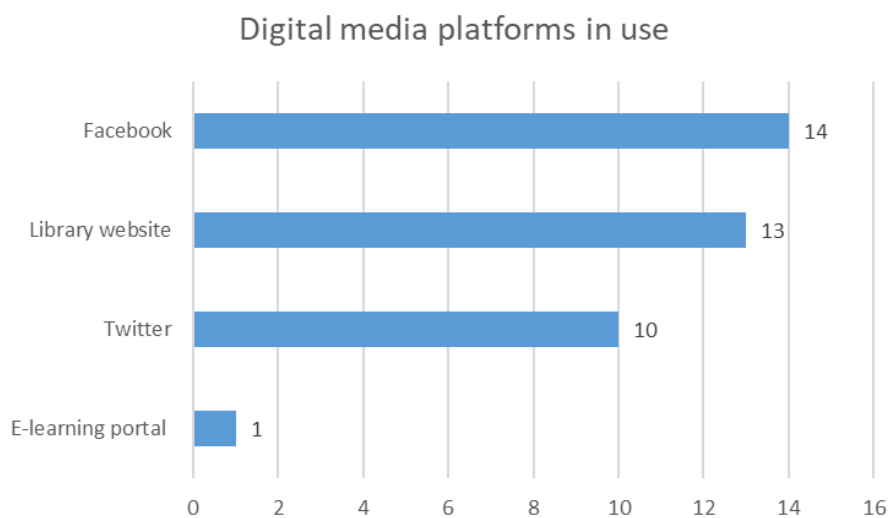


Figure 8.1: Digital media platforms used in libraries.

The posts normally posted on these digital media platforms include announcements, new databases and acquisitions, training calendars, information about opening hours, any new developments in the library, e-resources promotions, library events, tutorials, scholarly information, and upcoming events, as shown in Figure 8.2. This shows that university libraries are utilising social media and other digital platforms to dispatch urgent news that can benefit the clients to create awareness of the available services and products within the library, as supported by Datig (2018).

The findings showed that librarians use policies such as the university information and communication technology (ICT) policy, the library ICT policy, the social media policy, and the institutional repository policy to develop, upload and delete content. This supports what was pointed out by Blakiston (2013), who wrote about the importance of a vibrant content strategy when dealing with e-content. The majority of the libraries make use of the institutional repository policy, as shown in Figure 8.3. This shows that there are some guiding principles that should be put in place when utilising various social media platforms from the content creation stage to deal with challenges that might arise when using the platforms. Therefore, the findings showed that all the policies that deal with digital content management had been consulted by the librarians from the department to the university-crafted policies.

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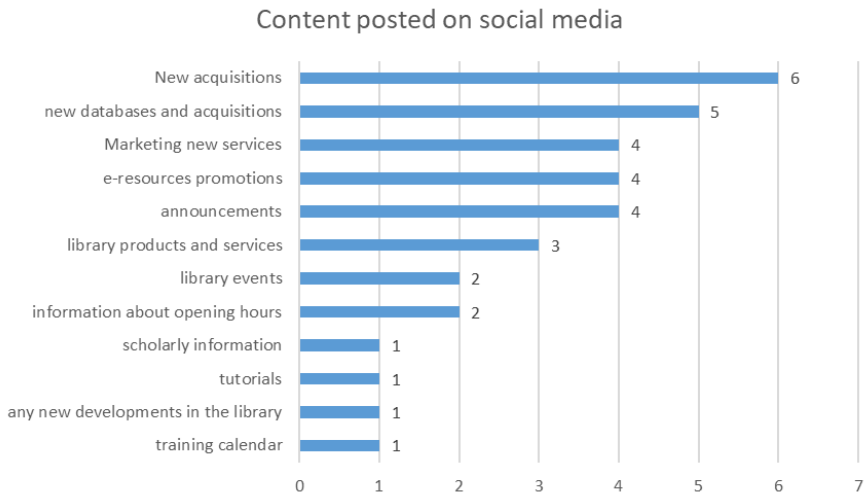


Figure 8.2: Types of content posted on digital media platforms.

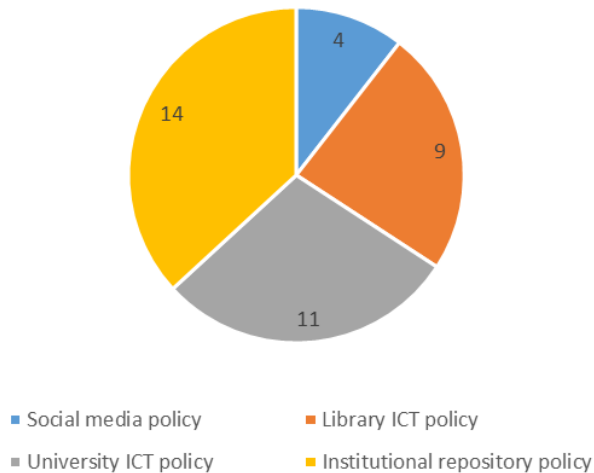


Figure 8.3: Policies for digital content creation.

In terms of frequency of updating content on the digital media platforms, the responses ranged from daily to monthly, while others indicated that they do not have a policy to that effect, as shown in Table 8.1. In terms of deleting content, the respondents stated that they do so yearly (1), weekly (2), monthly (3), and have no policy (10). This shows some variations within

the university libraries since some are not governed by any policy in terms of content creation and management, as supported by Elsayed (2017).

Table 8.1: Frequency of updating content on digital media platforms:

Frequency of updating content	Count
Daily	2
Weekly	8
Monthly	2
No policy	4

There are specific people dedicated to content creation, updating, and deletion on digital media platforms in fifteen institutions; only one did not have someone responsible for that. Three respondents indicated that the dedicated person is at the top management level, eleven at the middle management level, and one at the operational level.

The challenges are a lack of skilled personnel to run the section for digital media content creation, uploading, and deletion; lack of policies on updating and deleting content; too much bureaucracy; too much technical jargon, which might be difficult to understand for students. Elsayed (2017), Tatar *et al.*, (2014), Blakiston (2013), and Avemari and Bolarinwa (2012) documented the same sentiments in terms of the challenges being faced by academic libraries. However, Olajide and Alao (2015) noted a general problem of awareness in academic libraries on implementing and utilising social media digital platforms in developing countries. Figure 8.4 documents the challenges pointed out by the respondents.

Half of the respondents, eight, indicated that they were not trained in digital content management leading to the mentioned challenges when they carry out their duties. The other half, eight, stated that they received some form of training that gave them leverage in dealing with some of the challenges that might be experienced.

It was discovered that library websites are all encompassing for the library services, as stated by Sundaram (2017) and Datig (2018). However, most of them have dates of last updates ranging from 2016 to 2022. It was difficult to find the dates of when the content was updated on some websites. Four library websites were not accessible from the university home pages. Links for social media platforms ranged from Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, WhatsApp, Google+, and Pinterest. However, some were broken links from the library website. One of the Facebook pages was last updated on 19 August 2021. About six hours before the research was conducted, the latest had just

been uploaded. Some university libraries have challenges with their digital media platforms as some websites are inaccessible and have little and old content, as pointed out by Avemari and Bolarinwa (2012).

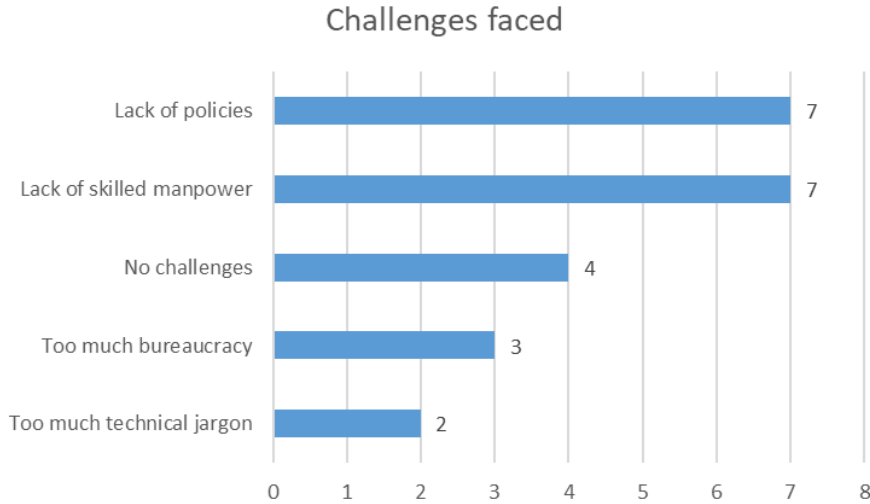


Figure 8.4: Challenges faced in creating, updating, and deleting digital media content.

Conclusion and recommendations

In conclusion, it can be noted that digital media content is available in the form of notices and library services, and libraries are using policies to create and upload content. All the academic libraries use various digital media platforms such as library websites, e-learning portals, and social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter to communicate with the clientele. However, the major challenge is updating the content on the websites and other digital media platforms. There is also a general lack of skills in content creation, updating, and deletion on these digital media platforms since most of those dedicated to the management of these platforms were not trained in digital content management. The authors recommend the need to upskill and reskill librarians to be able to continuously update the content on digital media platforms and to develop policies that assist librarians in creating, uploading, maintaining, and deleting content. Training can be on how to influence people using language and, as argued by Halvorson (2009), that people understand that more content may not necessarily mean better content and that less is more because it is easier to manage and is user-friendly. Policies should align with the trending issues in academic

librarianship that allow for the moderation of what is posted on digital media platforms as well as the roles and responsibilities of all those who utilise the platforms. Without these guiding principles, it would be difficult to ensure that the content is being managed on these platforms, which might deter users from frequently visiting and utilising them. This is very important as content is what users come to read, learn, see or experience (Halvorson, 2009).

Despite the challenges university libraries faced by in digital media content and management, the authors recommend the continuous use of these platforms to engage with the patrons and ensure that the digital media platforms are always updated. Similarly, Buchanan (2017) concurs that content strategy is an important aspect of the development of digital media platforms and libraries should continue to harness the potential offered by these tools. Content strategy can potentially improve both the user experience and the library itself (Datig, 2018).

Library users can be informed about the digital media platforms during library orientation as well as information literacy training sessions so that they are aware of the type of information they can obtain from these platforms. This would enhance the usage of these platforms and might be a motivation amongst librarians to continue posting new content and managing the platforms. Each university library should have a staff member responsible for content creation and management on digital media platforms and social media; it would be good to update the content daily in line with what would be happening within the library. These content creators can be at the middle management level so that they are able to implement the policies in place that govern the use of various digital media platforms.

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