Задачи и возможности в сфере изучения социальных сетей в университетах Африки. Спецкурсы в рамках программ школ библиотековедения и информатики

Challenges and opportunities of social media teaching and research in African universities. CMLIS perspective

Завдання та можливості у сфері вивчення соціальних мереж в університетах Африки. Спецкурси в рамках програм шкіл бібліотекознавства та інформатики

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Сегодня стала популярной концепция социальных сетей – электронных социальных сетей или альтернативных СМИ. Их популярность и влияние на жизнь людей во всем мире требует повышенного внимания со стороны исследователей. Распространение социальных медиа принимает все большие масштабы: от всем известных и популярных Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, блогов – до менее известных сетей. Популярность социальных сетей связывают с молодостью их пользователей, желанием общаться, делиться информацией, публиковаться, одиночеством, поиском друзей, развитием интернет/Всемирной сети, мобильных телефонов, грамотностью и образованием, политикой, материальным благополучием, урбанизацией, наличием свободного времени и пр. Не будет преувеличением сравнить этот феномен с такими изобретениями человечества, как письменность, книгопечатание, фотография и компьютер, Интернет и World Wide Web, мобильные телефоны, – тем, что, как правило, становилось предметом изучения и всестороннего исследования со стороны международного научного сообщества. Автор сообщает, что изучение социальных сетей в африканских университетах в рамках дисциплин факультетов массовых коммуникаций, библиотековедения и информатики (Media Communication Library and Information Science – MCLIS) уже происходит, но степень интеграции в учебные программы, широта и глубина охвата проблемы различается в рамках различных специализаций.

Автор задается вопросом: насколько глубоко преподавание и изучение социальных медиа в университетах, в целом, и в африканских университетах, в частности? Насколько глубоки современные исследования социальных сетей? Каковы задачи изучения и преподавания этих дисциплин? Каковы возможности? Чтобы ответить на эти вопросы, автор как прибегнул к методам кабинетного анализа, так и проводил опросы и анкетирование.

The concept of social media or electronic social media or alternative media has become a popular word today and is increasingly attracting research attention because of its popularity and impact on the lives of many people in the world. Social media scope is also widening from the known and popular media such as Facebook, twitter, you tube, blog to less known media. The popularity of social media is increasingly associated with the youth, networking, information sharing, electronic publishing, loneliness, companionship, the internet/web, mobile phones, literacy and education, politics, affluence, urbanisation, free time, among others. It would not be an exaggeration to compare the social media phenomenon with the popularity of such inventions like writing, the printing press, photography, the computers, the internet and WWW and the mobile phones, most of which are attracting teaching and international research in different ways. We argue that social media teaching in African universities and in Media Communication Library and Information Science (MCLIS) disciplines is on-going, but the level of integration of social media in the curriculum, in terms of breadth and depth, differ from one qualification programme to another in the MCLIS.
Our main questions in this paper are: To what extent is social media teaching taking place in universities generally and in Africa in particular? How much research on social media is on-going? What are the challenges of social media teaching and research? What are the opportunities? We combine desk research with surveys in order to answer these questions.

Keywords: Social media, on-line social media, social media research, social media education, library and information studies, African universities, Africa.

1. Introduction

Social media, or electronic/alternative media, is the buzzword today, and increasingly attracting research attention because of its global popularity and extensive impact on the lives of people. The scope of social media continues to widen from well-known and popular media such as Mxit, Facebook, Twitter, You Tube, and blogging, to lesser known emerging media. The popularity of social media is increasingly associated with the youth, networking, information sharing, electronic publishing, loneliness and companionship, the Internet/web, mobile phones, literacy and education, politics, affluence, urbanisation, and free time, to name a few. It would, however, not be an exaggeration to compare the social media phenomenon with the popularity of inventions such as writing, the printing press, photography, computers, the internet and WWW, and mobile phones, most of which are still attracting teaching and research internationally in different ways. We argue that while social media teaching and research in African universities and in the Media Communication and Library and Information Science (MCLIS) disciplines is taking place both directly and indirectly, the level of integration of social media in the curriculum in terms of breadth and depth differs from one qualification programme to the next in MCLIS. In this paper, we ask: to what extent is social media teaching and learning taking place in universities generally and in Africa in particular? How much research on social media is ongoing? What are the opportunities and challenges of social media teaching and research? We combine desk (content analysis) and survey research to answer these questions.

The term ‘social media’ is used to describe internet-based Web 2.0 and associated mobile technologies that “turn communication into interactive dialogue among organizations, communities, and individuals”. These internet-based applications “allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content” (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). According to Kaplan and Haenlein there are six different types of social media: collaborative projects (e.g. Wikipedia), blogs and micro-blogs (such as Twitter), content communities (for example YouTube), social networking sites (such as Facebook), virtual game worlds (e.g. World of Warcraft), and virtual social worlds (e.g. Second Life). Technologies include (and are in no way limited to) blogs, picture-sharing, vlogs (video blogs), wall-postings, email, instant messaging, music-sharing, crowdsourcing and voice over IP, and social media network websites such as Facebook, Twitter, Bebo and MySpace (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). The two authors define social media as "a group of
Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content” (Kaplan and Haenlin 2010:61).

2. The context

Social media access and use in Africa is escalating. For example, it is noted: “Of the 140M Internet users in Africa, almost 40M users are on Facebook - or just over 1 in 4. I would argue that by current numbers they are now neck and neck with Mxit as the largest social network in Africa (over 40M users). Although Mxit is clearly a leader in active users in South Africa (10M)” (Battle for Social Networking and Online Communities in Africa. Afrinnovator 2012: n.p.)

Chatterbox (Digital) a South African website founded in 2009 that supply social media and digital solutions for clients who are ready to join the online revolution, recently posted updated South African Social Statistics (http://www.junkmail.co.za/blog/updated-south-african-social-media-statistics-for-2012/2576) and a video (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ixgE8Ay99E) clip highlighting social media statistics in South Africa, as follows:

- “There are over 4.8 million South African Facebook users (9.86% penetration of the total South African population).
- 91% of South African Internet users have a Facebook account.
- 50% of South African Facebook users access it via their mobile phones.
- The average Facebook user spends 700 minutes a month on Facebook.
- There are 1.1 million Twitter users in South Africa (of which 405,000 users are actively tweeting)
- South African Twitter Users send 470,000 Tweets per month.
- Johannesburg is the city in South Africa that is the most active on Twitter.
- There are more than 1.5 million Linkedin users in South Africa.
- 29% of South African Internet users have a Linkedin Account.
- South African YouTube users upload 48 hours of video every minute onto the website.
- There are over 460,000 registered South African Google+ users.
- Mxit is still the biggest Social Network in South Africa, with 10 million users”.

Although social media access and usage is increasing, there does not seem to be identifiable or formal social media education for the effective exploitation of its functionalities and content, and for knowledge of its ethical dimensions.

3. Methodology

We combined desk research (content analysis) that involved background reading and a literature review, with the bibliometric analysis of documents retrieved from Current and Completed Research (C&CR), Union of Current Theses and Dissertations (UCTD), Library and Information Science Abstracts (LISTA), and SCOPUS databases from 2002 to 2012. ‘Online social media’ was used as the primary search term. A preliminary survey via email of ANIE participants from 18 institutions and 11 countries was also conducted. Responses were received from 13 respondents from 10 universities and four African countries. The respondents per institution were as follows: Adekunle Ajasin University - 1, Delta State University - 1, University of Fort Hare - 1, University of KwaZulu Natal – 1, University of Ibadan - 1, University of Ilorin - 1, Makerere University – 1, Nairobi University – 1, University of Pretoria – 1, and University of Zululand – 4. Thus far, we have analysed data from UCTD and C&CR from 2002 – 2012, and captured data from LISTA and SCOPUS (analysis in progress).

4. Preliminary results

The respondents answered nine questions as outlined below.

4.1. Is social media as a whole necessary in LIS schools?

All 13 of the respondents concurred that there is a need for social media education (teaching and learning) in LIS schools. The reasons that they provided were:

- Students spend most of their time using the media
- Staff increasingly use social media to communicate with students
Digital scholarship, which includes social media, is increasingly used for teaching and research.
Social media is an important component of information and communication literacy.
Education would provide essential communication skills for current survival.
Students also widely use social media to communicate among themselves.

4.2. Who should offer such education in terms of academic unit/department/faculty, and individual or expertise?

- According to 4 respondents, all departments/disciplines should offer social media education, perhaps collaboratively; of this group, 1 respectively felt that it could be part of IL or offered by a service unit.
- 4 mentioned IS/LIS Department, while 1 opted for Mass communication.
- 2 respondents felt that social media should be part of a compulsory course (e.g. computer science) or a general studies programme taken by all students (School of journalism).
- The main reason given for these responses is that social media is used by everybody and cuts across all disciplines.

4.3. Who offers such education?
While 11 of the respondents were not certain, at the Department of Information Studies at the University of Zululand, there are a number of modules that offer students the opportunity to use social media in the learning process, including courses such as Computer Mediated Communication, Computer Literacy for Information Studies, Assembling and Upgrading of Computers, Computer Troubleshooting and Repairs, Networks and Networking, Network and Computer Centre Management, Multimedia, multimedia-blogging cms systems (Wordpress, Joomla, etc) video (YouTube) etc. At the University of Pretoria (UP), social media education is offered by the Department of Information Science.

4.4. What is being offered by the academic unit, discipline or the individual?
Most (11) of the respondents were not certain in response to this question. The respondent from the UZ DIS mentioned the use of a Learning Management System (LMS), Moodle, that incorporates a number of social media tools, including email, chat, wiki's and blogs, and Joomla web development, which also incorporates some social media modules and outside resources like Facebook, Google docs, and Skype (UZ). The UP-IS respondent mentioned ethical issues of social networking.

4.5. Who should learn social media, length of social media education in a curriculum, and at what learning level should it be offered?
All the respondents to this question agreed that all students should receive social media education, but singled out Library and Information Studies students whose professional services would require using social media as well as supporting users with SM access and use. Regarding the length of social media education in the curriculum, there were divided opinions, with most of the respondents (6 in each case) supporting education to take place throughout (e.g. integrated in the curriculum) at different levels, and others (6) preferring semester long education. A few suggested quarterly (2) or short enough (1). In terms of the learning level at which it should be offered, there was more support for SM education at level 1/first year (4) than at all levels (2), level 1 and 2 (3), undergraduate (2), level 2 (1) and at PG level 1 for those admitted at that level (1).

4.6. What should be learnt or taught in social media (content)?
The course content for social media education received interesting reactions and suggestions. The following content was suggested:

- What social media entails, types of social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, etc.), outside resources such as Twitter, Facebook, Google docs and Skype.
- Social media epistemology and methodology.
- How they are used for communication and knowledge sharing.
- Social media ethics, e.g. responsible use of social media.
- How social media is used in teaching/learning and research, for example what social media sites are useful for research and teaching.
• Role of social media in education
• Social media application and use - how to exploit/benefit from social media tools, including Moodle, Joomla, email, chat, wiki’s and blogs
• Social media challenges and opportunities

4.7. What are the challenges of social media education/teaching in African universities?

The general feeling was that social media has not been fully adopted by African countries and universities. It was felt that African governments are unhappy with the use of social media because social media promotes freedom of speech, a right that most African governments deny their citizens. Bandwidth and cost were also identified as challenges. Others argued that social media is not yet accepted as a field of study, lacks a theoretical foundation, and the job market/expectations are ill defined. Another challenge was the ethical use, or rather misuse of social media, an issue that is growing in complexity, especially with respect to cybercrime and the protection of individual privacy. Noted as well was the challenge of access to resources such as hardware, enabling student access to ICTs, erratic power supplies, and improving Internet connectivity - #G, smart phones, etc – as well as rapid changes in technology. With respect to education, the knowledge and skills of staff/instructors/educators were said to be lacking, with unawareness of social media’s relevance, and a curriculum where social media lacks priority.

4.8. What are the opportunities of social media education?
• Social media is likely to produce a new teaching paradigm
• Enabling collaboration and a community of practice and networking
• Curriculum development and review
• Development of new technologies
• Job creation and training opportunities
• Enlightenment
• New discipline for exploration and use
• Social media is creating new research paradigms – altermetrics
• Inspiring interesting life skills
• Global visibility
• Knowledge and information access and sharing
• Electronic publishing

4.9. What are social media ethical issues?

The ethical issues affecting social media are articulated in recent studies by Mutula (2012) and Capurro (2013), mainly within the framework of Mason’s (1986) PAPA (privacy, accuracy, property and accessibility) model (see also Ponelis, 2013). Essentially, people interact with social media without the knowledge that their privacy is at stake. They do not know what to reveal and what to conceal as many social media platforms do not guarantee privacy in their policies of the content posted on their sites (Mutula, 2013). Social media is also used for many good and bad reasons. The respondents identified more wrong reasons than right reasons for social media interaction that further reiterate the need for social media education. Summarily, respondents identified the following issues:
• Using social media to commit crimes (stalking, cyber bullying, information theft, fraud, etc.)
• Privacy, information security (e.g. identity theft), safety of users (e.g. children)
• Language
• Moral, cultural issues. Values and misconceptions
• Visual or latent content – pornography, prostitution, etc.
• Information cycle issues and problems
• Lack of respect
• Social exclusion
• Unethical use of social space
• Mismanagement of official time
• Misuse of information, etc.
4.10. What are the research trends and issues?

A search conducted using Library and Information Science Abstracts (LISTA), which is one of the largest indexing databases of largely peer refereed journal articles in Library and Information Science, yielded the following for 2002 to 2011: the term ‘online social networks’ produced 1,448 results, including 654 academic journals; ‘social networks’ and Facebook produced 449; Facebook – 795; Twitter – 656; YouTube – 348; LinkedIn – 68; Blogs - 3,786; and ‘social media’ – 905. This suggests that some research work is being undertaken on the subject by the LIS sector.

Our case study is based on data collected thus far from two databases in the South African Bibliographical Network (SABINET), namely the Union of Completed Theses and Dissertations (UCT&D) and Current andCompleted Research (C&CR). These databases index research records emanating from the two (ongoing and completed research, theses and dissertations) categories in South Africa. The two tables below show the research output for “social media” from 2002 to 2012.

Table 1: Research Output-2002-2012: UCTD and CCR Database

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATABASE</th>
<th>AUTHOR</th>
<th>UNIVERSITY</th>
<th>YEAR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UCTD</td>
<td>Howe, Emmanuel Lungile.</td>
<td>Tshwane University of Technology</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCR - NRF</td>
<td>Kunzmann, RA</td>
<td>University of Pretoria</td>
<td>2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UCTD</td>
<td>Mohamed, Hassan</td>
<td>Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University</td>
<td>2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UCTD</td>
<td>Schoon, Alette Jeanne</td>
<td>Rhodes University</td>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UCTD</td>
<td>Tselo, Dumisani</td>
<td>Tshwane University of Technology</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UCTD</td>
<td>Visagie, Sonja</td>
<td>University of Pretoria</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UCTD</td>
<td>Chatora, Arther Tichaona</td>
<td>Rhodes University</td>
<td>2010</td>
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<tr>
<td>UCTD</td>
<td>Joshi, Hemali</td>
<td>University of Johannesburg</td>
<td>2010</td>
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<td>UCTD</td>
<td>Zdanow, Carla</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>2011</td>
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<tr>
<td>UCTD</td>
<td>Ferreira, Andrea</td>
<td>University of Johannesburg</td>
<td>2008</td>
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<tr>
<td>UCTD</td>
<td>Schlenkrich, Lara</td>
<td>Rhodes University</td>
<td>2008</td>
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<td>UCTD</td>
<td>Mayayise, Themekile Olivia</td>
<td>University of Pretoria</td>
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<tr>
<td>UCTD</td>
<td>Zaczek, Dominika</td>
<td>University of South Africa</td>
<td>2004</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table one shows that more records are indexed in the Union of Completed Theses and Dissertations (UCTDs); less than half (only 6) of the 23 public universities in South Africa have produced M and Ds in social media, with more activity at the University of Pretoria (UP), Rhodes University (RU), and at the University of Johannesburg (UJ); and most output appears in the last 5 years. Table two represents an index of subjects covered in the indexed research documents. There is, however, no distinct subject area that can be used to define the research domains. One may, perhaps, notice ‘online social networks’ (22) and place names such as South Africa (22 - perhaps reflecting case studies in the country), and Grahamstown (where Rhodes University is located - the leading media and publishing university in South Africa). We are likely to establish other patterns when this project is completed.

5. Conclusion

Many can argue that formal education in social media is not essential because the use of social media is growing rapidly without the formal education of its users. However, those of us who believed that information literacy, computer literacy, and other types of emerging literacy or education were not essential have been proved wrong, especially if we are to look at the prevalent digital divide spanning global, regional, national, institutional and domestic levels. Most of the respondents in this study felt that social media education should be a lifelong learning skill offered or available all the time, like Information Literacy (IL), Computer Literacy (CL) and Information Ethics education (Ocholla, 2009). Such education should take place at undergraduate level where it would target beginners. Social media content should include theory, application and ethics. For example, a social media ethical issue would include the unethical access to and use of SM space. We feel that social media education should adopt a multidisciplinary orientation involving many academic units working collaboratively, and be taught (preferably) as a foundation course. The respondents’ lack of knowledge about who offers social media content - al-
though some units/departments revealed that they offer some content - poses a major challenge that requires an institutional social media audit, such as the audit recently conducted at the University of KwaZulu Natal (Mutula, 2013) on ethics education. We note that what is currently offered is inadequate and not fully formalised into the curriculum, and support the idea that all students and staff should receive social media education.

Several challenges to social media education were noted in this study. Among them was that technology adoption will always have its laggards, as popularly discussed in Rogers Diffusion of Innovation theory (Rogers, 2003; Minishi-Majanja and Kiplang’at, 2005). Cost, connectivity, limited resources/infrastructure (e.g. expertise and technology), and the ethical access and use of information are also other challenges. Based on data presented at the beginning of this paper and the respondents’ observations, we also note that social media research in Africa is limited, and question whether the market for social media warrants serious investment in the domain.

Challenges do not exist without opportunities. We notice new/emerging research and teaching paradigms (e.g. Curriculum development) in the bibliometric study and in some of the institutions’ responses. There are opportunities for collaboration, networking, and sharing of knowledge and information in the social media domain at conferences, seminars, and workshops, and through collaborative research and publications. There is also the enabling environment for sharing within existing web spaces. As technologies advance and awareness of social media potential increases, jobs in social media are also increasing, thereby justifying training where Higher Education Institutions’ (HEIs) role in human resource development can be fundamental. The growing electronic publishing and self-publishing markets also provide opportunities for social media to thrive. We should acknowledge that social media is largely a cyberspace knowledge and information sharing activity that is increasingly challenged by information ethics issues, some of which we mentioned in this paper. How we deal with information ethics’ issues is crucial, and some initiatives taken in Africa by the African Network for Information Ethics (ANIE) are commendable.

References


Important website(s)

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_social_networking_websites