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The Role of Academic Social Media in Enhancing Collaborative Research Activities of Library and Information Science Educators in Nigerian Universities

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Abstract:

The study examined the role of academic social media (ASM) in enhancing collaborative research activities of library and information science educators (LISE) in Nigerian universities. The objectives of the study were to determine the perception of LISE on the use of ASM in enhancing collaborative research activities, identify the types of ASM used for collaborative research activities, and the level of use of ASM in enhancing collaborative research activities. The study adopted a survey research method and qualitative research design respectively. The population of the study was 348 LISE in 37 university-based Federal, State, and Private library schools in Nigeria. The questionnaire was administered to a sample of 258 LISE selected from 28 library and information science schools in Nigerian universities through a multi-stage sampling technique such as cluster and random samplings. Data were analyzed using frequency, percentages, and mean scores. The findings from the study revealed that Research gate was the most utilized ASM for enhancing collaborative research activities by respondents. The findings equally revealed that most respondents did not utilize ASM as a medium to co-author with colleagues abroad and in other disciplines. The study concluded that LISE in Nigerian universities does not utilize ASM as a medium to co-author with colleagues abroad and in other disciplines, because they may not have contacted these researchers using ASM for co-authoring. The study recommended that LISE should endeavor to familiarise themselves with other social media platforms to enhance their collaborative research activities.

Keywords: Academic Social Media, Research Collaboration, LISE, Universities, Nigeria

Introduction

Library and information science education has witnessed immense growth in curriculum development, training of skilled manpower, and improvement in library practice as a result of researches carried out by library and information science educators. Today, the story is that different researches carried out in the 21st century have witnessed a lot of challenges as a result of rapid expansion of knowledge, continuous change in Information

Communication Technology, government policies and regulations, changes in users' expectations, inadequate fund and new research skills demand. These challenges have resulted in more complex research problems that are knowledge, capital, and skills intensive. Despite these global changes, researches conducted by LISE have not witnessed much evolution. This view was corroborated by Manir (2007) when the author observed that publication and research outputs of LISE are less valued or are seen as less research-oriented

than those of other disciplines in Nigeria. It is now required that the best available knowledge and skills are used systematically to proffer solutions to problems in library and information science education in Nigeria.

To create a new path for research in the field of library and information science, LISE in Nigerian Universities needs to engage in collaborative research activities. Through research collaboration library and information science, educators can come together with their colleagues in Nigeria and outside the country with their different skills, ideas and, resources to accelerate the research process and provide innovative solutions to research problems through information sharing and co-authoring. Research collaboration enhances research and also increases the quantity and quality of research available to stakeholders. Al-Sugri (2010) in this direction, stressed that without collaborating with others LISE would be unlikely to keep up with new developments and deliver international standards as it relates to research.

Research collaborative activities are not new trends among LISE in Nigeria. In the past, research collaboration was majorly through sharing information and co-authoring within their departments and attending conferences, seminars, and workshops. These traditional methods of collaboration were mainly one way in nature, for information was only shared from a single point. This view was also supported by Maluleka and Onyenacha (2016) and Onuoha, Enula, Obiamo, and Odeh (2020) when the authors observed that LIS educators in South Africa and Nigeria respectively, mainly participate in a research collaboration between colleagues from the same department and institution. They rarely engage in research collaboration at other levels such as international collaboration. These do not

foster cross-fertilization of sharing of ideas, skills, and techniques with colleagues outside the country and other disciplines. To create a new path for research collaboration in library and information science there is the need to utilize Information and Communication Technology (ICT) tools and techniques such as the academic social media platforms.

ASM is a platform that provides a forum for researchers across the globe to interact, share, co-author, and discuss research among one another. Ali and Richardson (2017) on this note stressed that as a result of the utilization of academic social media by researchers, geographical barriers have been reduced among them. Today, every researcher can interact, communicate and collaborate to conduct research regardless of their geographical locations through interaction, exchange of ideas and critique ASM complement the roles played by the orthodox methods and speed of research collaboration among researchers. Onifade, Opeleand Awolowo (2015) agreed to this view when the author posited that social media promotes research collaboration for it enables researchers to obtain up-to-date information from fellow researchers through the exchange of knowledge which results in improvement of research output. Andrade, Lopez, and Martin(2009) supported the above position when the author argued that Social media provides avenues for researchers to have access to expertise, access to various equipment or resources, access to funding opportunities, showcase expertise, increase research visibility, and acquiring knowledge to undertake large or complex research problems.

There are various ASM platforms that could be employed in enhancing research collaborative activities. These according to Tai and Pieterse (2017)

include Mendeley, Academirwa.edu, Research gate, Google scholar, LinkedIn, and ORCID among others. This research, therefore, sought to determine the role of ASM in enhancing research collaborative activities among LISE in Nigerian universities.

Problem Statement

Research collaboration aims to foster information sharing co-authoring and research creativity among researchers all over the globe. This would, in the long run, enhance research productivity. However, it has been observed that LISE does not maximally engage in international and multi-disciplinary collaboration. This may be attributed to the inadequate utilization of modern research collaborative tools such as academic social media that provides a medium for researchers to collaborate.

It is against this situation that the researcher seeks to find out the role of academic social media in enhancing the research collaborative activities of library and information science educators in Nigerian universities.

Objectives of the Study

This study aims to determine the role of academic social media in research collaborative activities of Library and Information Science Educators in Nigerian universities. The specific objectives are to:

1. determine the perceptions of library and information science educators on the use of academic social media in enhancing collaborative research activities of library and information science in Nigerian universities
2. find out the types of academic social media utilized in enhancing collaborative research activities among library and information science educators

3. examine the level of use of academic social media in enhancing collaborative research activities among library and information science educators in Nigerian universities

Literature Review

Research in the field of Library and Information Science has grown geometrically. This has led to researchers exploring innovative ways such as collaborative research to find a way forward. Lai (2011) defined research collaboration as mutual commitment among researchers through coordinated efforts to solve a research problem. Dormans (2009) maintained that research collaboration is common research focus among researchers in a particular field or multi-disciplinary fields that are likely to be known or unknown to each other. Collaborative research is increasing among scholars because it helps researchers to improve their popularity, visibility, change the pattern of research funding, and increase specialization in different areas of disciplines.

There are various reasons why collaboration is necessary for LIS education. Gichygu (2018) advocated that LISE needs continuous collaboration due to the changing patterns of funding research, the desire by researchers to increase their popularity and visibility, the need to gain experience. LISE needs continuous collaboration to gain experience and to train library and information science students on research methodology in the most effective ways possible. The author contributed to state that LISE needs continuous collaboration due to the following reasons: changing patterns of funding research, the desire by researchers to increase their popularity and visibility, the need to gain experience. Sacchanand (2012) equally pointed out that research collaboration will

enable LISE to contribute to the development and advancement of Library and Information Science as a field and a profession because it strengthens the ability of faculty members in LIS schools to improve the quality of teaching, learning, and research.

Collaboration may be mirrored towards multi-disciplinary and interdisciplinary research groups. Jones (2017) stressed that the increasing specialization of skills in the world means that researchers need bigger groups with more and more specialists to come out with novel research findings. Collaborations can be more effective if library and information scientists create research groups among colleagues within the profession and/ or outside the profession and are active participants. Togla and Malliari (2017) maintained that collaboration between LISE and professionals on one hand and other research fields can positively influence research orientation, development, methodology, and theoretical perspective of LIS research. Collaboration could take the form of co-authoring, knowledge creation, knowledge sharing, and data sharing (Gichygu, 2018).

Collaborative research has not been fully embraced by LIS educators because of poor access to connectivity with fellow researchers. Ochalla (2012) also noted that collaborative research among LISE is relatively low as a result of poor networking. However, with the new trend in research, there appears to be a lot of potential in the growth of collaborative research among LISE in Nigerian universities. Generally, Information networking among researchers connotes cooperation and sharing of information among professionals to improve their skills, performances, and outcome of their research findings for maximum use by stakeholders.

Collaboration can be enhanced through the utilization of academic social media platforms by LISE. Academic social media connotes social relationships among researchers who have some kind of affiliation. Tai and Pieterse (2017) opine that research activities have become networked and collaborative in recent times; it has been argued that one-person research has virtually disappeared. ASM provides opportunities for cross-border and cross-disciplinary research activities. Ffloulkes and Vare (2018) emphasized that academic social media boost the collaborative activities of a researcher within a chosen field by creating opportunities for greater interaction and collaboration with other experts in one's field on a global scale, and provides an opportunity for the researcher to benefit from the expertise of other researchers. These collaborative activities can provide a sounding board for one's ideas before, during, or after the research process. Ali and Richardson (2017) stressed that as a result of the utilization of academic social media by researchers, geographical barriers have been reduced among them. Today, every researcher can interact, communicate and collaborate to conduct research regardless of their geographical locations through interaction, exchange of ideas, and critique.

ASM enhances research collaborative activities by improving the quality of research carried out by LIS educators. In this direction, Onifade *et al.* (2015) posited that social media promotes research collaboration for it enables researchers to obtain up-to-date information from fellow researchers through the exchange of knowledge which results in improvement of research output. Social media provides avenues for researchers to have access to expertise, access to unavailable equipment or resources, access to funding opportunities,

showcase expertise, increase research visibility, and acquire knowledge to undertake large or complex research problems, (Andrade *et al*; 2009). Kwanya and Stillwell (2015) similarly, maintained that the focus of academic social media is interaction and developing a relationship through unrestricted conversations. The power of academic social media does not originate from what each of the participants does individually but from what they do collectively. Examples of ASM that can be employed in enhancing research collaborative activities include Mendeley, Academia.edu, Research-gate, Google-scholar, LinkedIn, and ORCID among others (Tai & Pieterse, 2017).

Several studies have been conducted on the use of ASM in enhancing research collaborative activities. In a related study, Sheikh (2016) investigated the awareness of academic social networking websites by faculty of COMSATS Institute of Information and Technology Islamabad. The findings revealed that lecturers in CIIT used academic social media sites mostly for interacting with experts, promotion/sharing of their research output, participation in discussion to get ideas about the latest research trends, and to get help in solving research problems. In a related study, Collins, Shiffiman, and Rock (2016) studied how scientists used social media in their workplaces in the United States of America, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Australia, and Canada. The authors further argued that they used these tools to exchange scientific knowledge and for personal communication. The researchers also found out that the widely used platform was LinkedIn. In a related study, Sokoya *et al*; (2012) equally examines whether agricultural researchers in the agricultural industry use social media among agricultural researchers in six agricultural research institute and a

university of agriculture in southwest Nigeria. Their reason for using social media was to establish a connection with their professional colleagues. In another study, Onuoha *et al*. (2020) carried out a study on the use of social media as a collaborative tool for research among library and information science professionals in Nigeria. The findings of the study revealed that all the respondents agreed that social media platform tools enable researchers to enhance their research collaborative activities

Research Methodology

The study used survey research method to seek for information on the views and opinions of LISE on the roles of ASM in enhancing their collaborative research activities. The study further adopted descriptive research design. Descriptive research design was utilized because the study involved systematic and comprehensive collection and analysis of data. The design also enabled the researchers to establish the current role of ASM in enhancing collaborative research activities of LISE in Nigerian Universities. The population of the study comprised of 348 LISE library schools based in 37 Federal, State and Private Universities in Nigeria as at June; 2020. Multistage sampling technique was used to select LISE for the study. In the first stage, cluster sampling was used to group the university-based library schools in Nigeria into 6 based on the geo political zones they were situated. The geo political zones include North- Central, North -East, North- West, South -East, South- South and South -West. In the second stage, the researchers adopted random sampling technique through lottery method to select 80% of university-based library schools situated in each geo-political zone summing up to 28 library schools. The third stage was a total enumeration of LISE educators working in

the selected universities amounting to a total of 258 LISE. An online questionnaire (Google form) was used to collect data. The data gathered for the study were scored and analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequency counts, percentages and mean score.

A total of 258 copies of the questionnaire were sent using Google form to library and information science educators in the sampled universities in Nigeria. However, only 190 copies representing 74 % of the questionnaire were received and found usable.

Findings and Discussion

Table 1: Perceptions on the Use of Academic social Media in Enhancing Research Collaborative Activities

Key: SA = Strongly Agree, A= Agree; U= Undecided; D=Disagree and SD=Strongly Disagree

S/ N	Perception	SA	A	U	D	SD
1	Academic social media when utilised will enhance my collaborative research activities	70 (37%)	104 (55%)	14 (6%)	1 (1%)	1(1%)

Source: Fieldwork, 2021

Table 1 reveals that majority of the respondents strongly agreed 70(37%) and 104(55%) agreed that academic social media platform when utilised can enhance their collaborative research activities. This may be attributed to awareness as researchers and educators that ASM platforms have potential power to facilitate research collaborative activities. It is commendable that LISE in Nigerian universities have positive attitude towards the utilisation of academic social media platforms in enhancing their collaborative

research activities. There is no doubt therefore that ASM has various specific tools that provide various ways to collaborate such as knowledge sharing, co-authoring and enhances relationship development among researchers. This view is in compliance with Onuaha *et al.* (2020) who remarked that library and information science professionals in Nigeria agreed that social media tools enable researchers to enhance their research collaborative activities.

Table 2: Types of Academic Social Media Utilised in Enhancing Research Collaborative Activities

S/N	Academic Social Media	Frequency	Percentages (%)
1	Researchgate	125	66
2	Linkedin	101	53
3	Academia.edu	40	21
4	Google scholar	19	10
5	Mendeley	7	4

6	ORCID	4	2
7	Methodspace	3	2
8	Impact story	2	1

Source: Fieldwork, 2021

Table 2 shows that among the various academic social media Research gate 125 (66%) was the most utilised platform in enhancing research collaborative activities by majority of the respondents. This is followed by LinkedIn with 101 (53%) of the respondents that utilised the platform for research collaboration. The table further reveals that several academic social media such as Academia.edu, Google scholar Mendeley, ORCID. Method space and Impact story were not utilised in enhancing research collaborative activities. Researchgate may have been utilised more by respondents because it is very popular and also facilitate collaboration among researchers all over the world. The platforms facilitate

collaboration by providing a forum for researchers to enlarge their scholarly relationship through sharing scientific knowledge with fellow researchers from different cultures and disciplines. The low utilisation of other platforms by respondents may be attributed to lack of awareness of the various services provided by these platforms in enhancing research collaborative activities. These findings is in disagreement with that of Collins *et al.*(2016) who observed that LinkedIn was the most utilised academic social media in facilitating collaborative activities among scientists in United States of America, United Kingdom, New Zealand, Australia and Canada.

Table 3: Level of use of Academic Social Media in Enhancing Research Collaborative Activities

S/N	Collaborative Research Activities	Very High	High	Moderate	Low	Very Low	Mean
Research Information Sharing							
1	Connecting with people who have similar research interest	36	70	60	17	7	3.58
2	Seek advice from fellow colleagues	24	74	54	34	4	3.42
3	Sharing research findings	18	51	86	33	2	3.26
4	Belonging to a research group	24	59	53	45	9	3.23
5	Participate in group discussions	24	52	59	38	17	3.15
6	Sharing information on new research trends	17	29	35	88	21	2.65
7	Uploading manuscript for other colleagues to assess	2	7	48	35	98	2.55
8	Sharing data	19	31	38	41	61	2.51
9	Co-authoring with colleagues within Nigeria	21	77	61	28	3	3.45
10	Co-authoring with colleagues outside Nigeria	9	4	63	74	40	2.31

11	Co-authoring with colleagues in other disciplines	10	21	25	68	66	2.16
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Source: Fieldwork, 2021

Table 4 reveals that the level of use of academic social media in enhancing research collaborative activities was low (mean=2.87). The data further shows that academic social media was actively used by respondents for connecting with people who had similar research interest (mean=3.58). It is worthy to note that most respondents have been able to utilise academic social media to connect with fellow researchers. This might be because most academic social media platforms provide a forum for researchers to come together and share common interest. The benefits of connecting with other researchers across the globe includes: it brings about recognition, engagement with various audiences such as experts, fellow researchers, policy makers, funding agencies, promotion of one's expertise and brings exposure as a researcher. Data in table 3 reveals that majority of the respondents do not upload their manuscript for other colleagues to assess. (Mean=2.55). This may be as a result of fear of other people plagiarising their work. Researchers may likely not plagiarise peoples' works that are sent to them for review through academic social media because of the consequences such as paper extractions and loss of author's credibility and reputation. The data further reveals that co-authoring with colleagues outside Nigeria (mean=2.31) and co-authoring with colleagues in other disciplines (mean=2.16) had the lowest mean rating. Respondents may not have co-authored with colleagues in other disciplines and countries because they have not contacted fellow researchers through academic social media platforms to participate in collaborative research.

Modern research is now complex and demands new skills which no single

person can acquire. If library and information educators collaborate with other researchers outside their field or country there is greater probability that they will be able to undergo bigger projects that might result to improvement of LIS education in Nigeria. Moreover, when LISE participate in collaborative researches, it will provide them with opportunities to learn various approaches to research from other disciplines and countries which when applied will lead to innovation. These findings are in agreement with the findings of Sokoya *et al.* (2012) who remarked that agricultural scientists in South West Nigeria use social media to connect with their professional colleagues in the agricultural industry.

Conclusion

Academic social media has emerged as a powerful vehicle for enhancing research collaborative activities. The study has shown that library and information science educators in Nigeria have a positive perception on the use of academic social media in enhancing their research collaborative activities. It was discovered that Research gate was the most utilised academic social media in facilitating research collaboration and several academic social media were not utilised. Finally, the study found out that the level of use of academic social media in enhancing research collaborative activities was low and it is mostly used for connecting with people who had similar research interest. The study also found out that library and information science educators do not utilise the opportunity provided by various academic social media to upload their manuscript for other colleagues to assess and to co-author with

colleagues from other nations and disciplines

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on the findings of study;

- Library and information lecturers in universities in Nigeria should endeavour to employ other academic social media platforms such as Academia.edu, Google scholar, Mendeley, ORCID, Method space and Impact story for they also provide unique services in enhancing research collaborative activities.
- Library and information science educators should seize the opportunities provided by academic social media to circulate their manuscript to fellow researchers before publication in order to improve the quality of researches they undertake.
- Library and information science educators should endeavour to engage with other colleagues in various countries and disciplines for the purpose of co-authoring.

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