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The Role of Social Media in Delivering Reference Services in Public Libraries

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the transformative role of social media in delivering reference services in public libraries in Nigeria. Amid evolving digital practices, libraries have increasingly leveraged platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp to provide real-time, interactive reference support. Employing a qualitative research design, semi-structured interviews were conducted with librarians and patrons from six public libraries across Nigeria's geopolitical zones. Thematic analysis revealed three central themes: the evolution from traditional, face-to-face and email-based services to dynamic, multi-channel digital models; improved service efficiency and extended operating hours contrasted with challenges in digital literacy and equitable access; and effective strategies including continuous professional development, integrated communication systems, and proactive outreach initiatives. Librarians reported significantly reduced response times and enhanced user engagement, while patrons appreciated the immediacy of digital responses yet noted difficulties navigating complex interfaces. These findings corroborate existing literature on digital transformation in library services and underscore the need for robust training and resource investments to bridge the digital divide. The study offers practical recommendations for optimizing social media strategies in public libraries, ensuring that enhanced reference services are accessible, efficient, and responsive to diverse user needs in the post-pandemic era.

Keywords: Social Media, Reference Services, Digital Transformation, Public Libraries, Digital Literacy, User Engagement

INTRODUCTION

The role of social media in delivering reference services in public libraries has become increasingly significant in recent years. Reference services, traditionally characterized by direct interaction between librarians and patrons, have evolved to incorporate digital platforms, particularly social media. This transformation is driven by the need for libraries to adapt to changing user behaviors and preferences, especially among younger demographics who predominantly engage with social media. Libraries are leveraging these platforms not only for marketing purposes but also to enhance service delivery, engage with their communities, and

provide timely information (Masizana & Salubi, 2022; Hamad et al., 2016; Smeaton & Davis, 2014).

The rationale for this study stems from the recognition that while there is a growing body of literature on the use of social media in libraries, there remains a gap in understanding how these platforms specifically enhance reference services. Many studies have focused on marketing and outreach, but fewer have examined the nuances of how social media can facilitate real-time reference interactions and information dissemination (Hill & Oswald, 2023; Faba-Pérez & Infante-Fernández, 2019). The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption of social media as a primary communication tool, highlighting its potential to serve as an emergency information hub (Choi & Kim, 2022; Joo et al., 2019). This study aims to explore these dimensions, providing a comprehensive overview of the current landscape and identifying areas for future research. Public libraries have increasingly recognized the importance of social media as a tool for engaging with patrons. As noted by Masizana and Salubi, social media platforms are effective for marketing library services and reaching out to both current and potential users (Masizana & Salubi, 2022). The findings from their study indicate that librarians view social media as a vital component of their outreach strategies, particularly in promoting library events and resources.

Similarly, Hamad et al. emphasize that social networks serve as a robust communication channel for libraries, enabling them to enhance service delivery and foster community engagement (Hamad et al., 2016). This aligns with the findings of Smeaton and Davis, who argue that libraries must thoughtfully engage with social media to develop their brand and create participatory services (Smeaton & Davis, 2014). The COVID-19 pandemic has further underscored the necessity of utilizing social media for reference services. Choi and Kim's longitudinal study reveals that public libraries adapted their social media strategies during the pandemic, using platforms like Twitter to disseminate critical information and maintain connections with users (Choi & Kim, 2022).

This shift illustrates how libraries can pivot their communication strategies to meet the immediate needs of their communities during crises. Li's research on the National Library of China also highlights the effectiveness of social media in compensating for the physical closure of libraries, allowing for continued engagement and service promotion (Li, 2022). Moreover, the skills and knowledge of library staff play a crucial role in the successful implementation of social media for reference services. Joo et al. found that perceived behavioral control significantly influences librarians' intentions to use social media, suggesting that training and professional development are essential for effective engagement (Joo et al., 2019). This is echoed by Vanwynsberghe et al., who identify social media literacy as a key competency for modern librarians (Alajmi & Albudaiwi, 2020).

As libraries continue to navigate the digital landscape, equipping staff with the necessary skills will be vital for maximizing the potential of social media in reference services. The content shared by libraries on social media also reflects broader societal trends and user interests. Faba-Pérez and Infante-Fernández argue that the content disseminated by libraries can serve as a mirror of societal values and needs, particularly in educational contexts (Hill & Oswald, 2023). This perspective is supported by Joo and Lü, who conducted a content analysis of Facebook posts from public libraries, identifying various content types that engage users and promote library services (Vanwynsberghe et al., 2014). By curating relevant and timely content, libraries can foster a sense of community and encourage user participation in library activities. Engagement metrics are another critical aspect of social media use in libraries. Kooy's analysis of the Vancouver Public

Library's social media presence highlights the importance of measuring engagement through likes, shares, and comments, which can inform future content strategies (Joo & Lü, 2017). Similarly, Phillips emphasizes the need for libraries to actively engage with young adults through social media, recognizing that this demographic is particularly responsive to online interactions (Kooy, 2021).

By understanding and analyzing engagement patterns, libraries can tailor their reference services to better meet the needs of their users. The participatory nature of social media also aligns with the concept of Library 2.0, which advocates for collaborative content development and user engagement (Phillips, 2015). This approach encourages libraries to invite feedback and participation from their communities, ultimately shaping services that are more responsive to user needs. As noted by Abdullah et al., social media provides a platform for libraries to engage in outreach activities that promote social inclusion and community involvement (Phillips, 2015). This participatory model not only enhances reference services but also strengthens the overall relationship between libraries and their patrons.

Despite the benefits of social media, challenges remain in its implementation within public libraries. Joo and Kim's study identifies various barriers, including staff reluctance and lack of resources, which can hinder effective social media use (Abdullah et al., 2015). Additionally, the rapid evolution of social media platforms poses a challenge for libraries to keep up with changing technologies and user preferences. As highlighted by Harisanty et al., libraries must continuously adapt their strategies to maintain relevance in an increasingly digital world (Choi & Joo, 2018). This adaptability is crucial for ensuring that reference services remain effective and accessible to all users. In conclusion, social media plays a transformative role in delivering reference services in public libraries. By leveraging these platforms, libraries can enhance their outreach efforts, engage with diverse communities, and provide timely information to users. However, to fully realize the potential of social media, libraries must invest in staff training, develop effective content strategies, and remain adaptable to the evolving digital landscape. Future research should continue to explore the impact of social media on reference services, particularly in the context of emerging technologies and changing user behaviors.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The integration of social media into public library reference services presents a multifaceted challenge that warrants thorough investigation. While libraries increasingly recognize the potential of social media platforms for enhancing user engagement and service delivery, many still struggle with effective implementation. A significant issue is the lack of training and skills among library staff, which hampers their ability to utilize social media effectively for marketing and reference purposes (Anwar & Tang (2019)Joo et al., 2019). Furthermore, the disparity in user engagement levels poses another challenge; libraries often find that their social media efforts do not translate into meaningful interactions with patrons, leading to underutilization of these platforms (Masizana & Salubi, 2022; Smeaton & Davis, 2014).

Moreover, the rapid evolution of social media technologies complicates the landscape, as libraries must continuously adapt their strategies to remain relevant (Li, 2022; Kari & Oyeniran, 2019). This is particularly critical in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has accelerated the shift towards digital engagement, making it imperative for libraries to establish robust online presences (Li, 2022). Additionally, the effectiveness of social media as a tool for reference services

is often undermined by management issues and a lack of clear objectives, resulting in inconsistent messaging and engagement strategies (Masizana & Salubi, 2022; Kari & Oyeniran, 2019). Addressing these challenges is essential for libraries to fully leverage social media as a means of enhancing reference services and fostering community connections.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To explore how public libraries employ social media platforms for delivering reference services.
2. To examine the experiences and perspectives of librarians and patrons regarding social media-based reference support.
3. To identify factors that help or hinder effective social media delivery of reference services in public libraries.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Traditional Reference Service Models in Public Libraries

Traditional reference service models in public libraries have historically centered around in-person interactions at dedicated reference desks, where librarians provide assistance to patrons seeking information. Despite a general decline in reference transactions, many urban public libraries continue to maintain these dedicated services, adapting them to meet evolving user needs Saunders et al. (2023). The reference desk model has been the predominant approach, characterized by face-to-face interactions that allow librarians to address a wide range of inquiries, from directional questions to complex research needs (Pinto & Manso, 2012). However, this model faces challenges, including changing user behaviors and the increasing availability of information online, which has led some libraries to reconsider the necessity of physical reference desks (Alexander & Wakimoto, 2019; Dawson, 2011).

Recent studies indicate a shift towards more flexible service models, such as roving reference, where librarians engage with patrons throughout the library rather than being confined to a desk (Throgmorton et al., 2020; Barratt et al., 2010). This approach aims to enhance accessibility and create a more welcoming environment for users, particularly in academic settings where students may prefer informal interactions (Vakkari, 2011). Additionally, the integration of technology has facilitated the development of virtual reference services, allowing libraries to extend their reach beyond physical boundaries and cater to a broader audience (Onyeisi et al., 2019). These transformations reflect a growing recognition that traditional models must evolve to remain relevant in a digital age.

Recent Studies on Social Media Usage for Reference Services

The emergence of social media as a communication tool has prompted libraries to explore its potential for enhancing reference services. Recent studies have highlighted the effectiveness of

social media platforms in facilitating real-time interactions between librarians and patrons, thereby improving access to information (Tesema & Bekele, 2017; Yoon & Donaldson, 2019). For instance, libraries have utilized platforms like Twitter and Facebook to provide quick responses to user inquiries, promote events, and disseminate information about resources (Saunders, 2012). This shift towards digital engagement aligns with the broader trend of libraries adapting to the preferences of younger generations who predominantly use social media for information seeking (Yoon & Donaldson, 2019). Moreover, research indicates that social media can serve as an effective platform for outreach, enabling libraries to connect with underserved communities and promote inclusivity (Miles, 2013).

However, challenges remain in effectively measuring the impact of social media on reference services, as engagement metrics can vary significantly across platforms (Arndt, 2010). Furthermore, the skills and training of library staff play a crucial role in the successful implementation of social media strategies, as librarians must be equipped to navigate these platforms effectively (Arroyo, 2015; Faix, 2014). Overall, while social media presents opportunities for enhancing reference services, it also necessitates a reevaluation of traditional practices and the development of new competencies among library staff.

Theoretical Perspectives on Online Communication and Information Delivery

The theoretical frameworks surrounding online communication and information delivery provide valuable insights into the evolving landscape of reference services in public libraries. Contemporary practice theory emphasizes the relational and contextual aspects of information work, suggesting that reference services should be understood as dynamic interactions rather than static transactions (Cavanagh, 2013). This perspective aligns with the notion of participatory librarianship, where libraries actively engage users in the co-creation of services and resources (Stevens, 2013).

The diffusion of innovations theory can be applied to understand how libraries adopt and adapt new technologies, including social media, to enhance reference services. This theory posits that the successful adoption of innovations is influenced by factors such as perceived usefulness, ease of use, and the social context in which the technology is implemented (Bonang & Fitriyah, 2022). As libraries increasingly integrate social media into their reference services, understanding these theoretical frameworks can guide the development of effective strategies that resonate with users' needs and preferences.

Unanswered Questions Addressed by This Study

Despite the growing body of literature on social media usage in public libraries, several unanswered questions remain that this study aims to address. First, there is a need to explore the specific factors that influence the effectiveness of social media as a tool for reference services, including user engagement strategies and the role of library staff competencies (Si & Liu, 2019). Additionally, the impact of social media on the traditional reference desk model warrants further investigation, particularly in terms of how libraries can balance in-person and digital interactions to optimize service delivery (Tyckoson, 2017). Furthermore, the study seeks to examine the perceptions of library patrons regarding the use of social media for reference services, including

their preferences for communication channels and the types of information they seek (Wang & Henson, 2011). Understanding these user perspectives is crucial for developing tailored strategies that enhance the overall reference experience. Lastly, this research aims to identify best practices for integrating social media into existing reference service models, providing a framework for libraries to navigate the complexities of digital engagement while maintaining the core values of librarianship (Guo et al., 2022; Faix et al., 2010).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore the role of social media in delivering reference services in public libraries. To achieve a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena, the study integrates semi-structured interviews with public library librarians and patrons, focus group discussions with active users of social media reference services, and content analysis of library social media posts. This multi-method approach allows for triangulation of data and the development of rich, context-specific insights into the experiences and practices of both service providers and users.

Target Population and Sampling Technique

The target population consists of two groups:

Public Library Staff: Librarians responsible for managing and delivering reference services via social media platforms.

Library Patrons: Users who have engaged with public library reference services through social media.

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to select participants from six public libraries, chosen to represent diverse settings and varying levels of social media engagement. Within each library, two librarians (who actively manage or coordinate social media reference services) and two patrons (who have used these services at least twice in the past six months) was recruited. This sampling plan is designed to capture varied perspectives across different contexts and to ensure depth of insight into both service delivery and user experience.

Data Collection Methods

Data was collected using Semi-Structured Interviews:

Individual interviews with selected librarians and patrons were conducted using a video conferencing platform (Zoom) to facilitate in-depth discussions.

Interview guides were open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed accounts of participants' experiences, perceptions, and suggestions regarding social media reference services.

Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and will be audio-recorded (with participant consent) for transcription and subsequent analysis.

Data Analysis

Interview and focus group transcripts were analyzed using thematic content analysis. The analysis will follow these steps:

Coding: Transcripts were imported into qualitative data analysis software and coded inductively to identify recurring themes and patterns. Initial codes may include terms such as “service evolution,” “user engagement,” “training and support,” “barriers to access,” and “content strategies.”

Theme Development: Codes were grouped into higher-order themes that correspond to the research objectives namely, the evolution of digital reference models, the impact on efficiency and satisfaction, and effective strategies for service delivery.

Integration of Participant Codes: Each participant will be assigned a unique code reflecting their library’s region (e.g., for urban libraries: PL-Urban-01 for librarians and PP-Urban-01 for patrons; for rural libraries: PL-Rural-01, PP-Rural-01, etc.) to facilitate systematic cross-case comparisons while preserving anonymity.

- For clarity and systematic analysis, participants were assigned codes based on their library and role:
- National Library of Nigeria, Abuja (North Central): Librarians: PL-NLN-01, PL-NLN-02; Patrons: PP-NLN-01, PP-NLN-02
- Lagos State Library Board, Lagos (South West): Librarians: PL-LSLB-01, PL-LSLB-02; Patrons: PP-LSLB-01, PP-LSLB-02
- Enugu State Library Board, Enugu (South East): Librarians: PL-ESLB-01, PL-ESLB-02; Patrons: PP-ESLB-01, PP-ESLB-02
- Rivers State Library Board, Port Harcourt (South South): Librarians: PL-RSLB-01, PL-RSLB-02; Patrons: PP-RSLB-01, PP-RSLB-02
- Kano State Library Board, Kano (North West): Librarians: PL-KSLB-01, PL-KSLB-02; Patrons: PP-KSLB-01, PP-KSLB-02
- Borno State Library Board, Maiduguri (North East): Librarians: PL-BSLB-01, PL-BSLB-02; Patrons: PP-BSLB-01, PP-BSLB-02

These codes were consistently used during analysis to draw cross-case comparisons and highlight regional differences in the adoption and adaptation of social media for reference services.

Ethical Considerations

Prior to data collection, ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the researcher’s institution. All participants were provided with an informed consent form detailing the study’s purpose, procedures, confidentiality measures, and their rights to withdraw at any time without penalty. Data was anonymized using the assigned participant codes, and all recordings and transcripts were stored securely on password-protected devices. Any sensitive data will be handled under data protection guidelines and will be used solely for research purposes.

Limitations

This study acknowledges potential limitations such as the reliance on self-reported data from interviews, which may be subject to recall bias. The purposive sampling approach, while providing rich detail, may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research could consider larger, more diverse samples or longitudinal designs to assess changes over time.

Selection Rationale

To capture a comprehensive view of how social media is used in delivering reference services across Nigeria, we selected public libraries from each of Nigeria's six geopolitical zones. This approach ensures representation from diverse regions with varying socio-economic and technological infrastructures. The selected libraries are prominent in their respective zones and serve as key public reference institutions.

Selected Public Libraries:

S/N	Name of Library	Zone	Brief Information
1.	National Library of Nigeria, Abuja	North-Central	As Nigeria's flagship public library located in the Federal Capital Territory, it serves as a central hub for national information services and sets the standard for digital and social media engagement in the region.
2.	Lagos State Library Board, Lagos	South-West	Located in Nigeria's most populous and economically vibrant state, this library represents urban digital engagement and is known for its active social media presence and innovative service delivery.
3.	Enugu State Library Board, Enugu	South-East	Enugu State Library Board is a key institution that reflects the evolving digital practices and community outreach efforts through social media in a culturally rich environment.
4.	Rivers State Library Board, Port Harcourt	South-South	In the oil-rich South-South region, this library is pivotal in delivering reference services to a diverse and dynamic urban population, with increasing use of social media as a communication tool.

5.	Kano State Library Board	North-West	This library illustrates how public institutions in densely populated northern urban centers are leveraging digital platforms to extend reference services despite resource challenges.
6.	Borno State Library Board	North-East	As a key public library in the North East, it provides a perspective from a region facing unique infrastructural and security challenges while adopting social media to maintain user engagement during and after crises.

These six libraries served as the focal points for our data collection, enabling the study to draw comparisons and identify best practices in social media-based reference service delivery across Nigeria's diverse contexts.

RESULTS

The thematic analysis of our semi-structured interviews with librarians and patrons from six public libraries across Nigeria each identified by unique participant codes revealed three overarching themes: the evolution of digital reference service models through social media, the impact on service efficiency, accessibility, and user satisfaction, and the strategies along with challenges in implementing these services.

Theme 1: Evolution of Social Media Reference Service Models

Participants described a marked transition from traditional reference services to a predominantly digital model facilitated by social media platforms. Pre-pandemic, many libraries maintained a hybrid model where digital tools like email and basic web forms played a supplementary role to in-person interactions. For example, PL-NLN-01 (librarian from the National Library of Nigeria, Abuja, North Central) remarked:

“Before COVID-19, our reference service was largely desk-based. Email was our main digital tool, but it was never the primary mode of interaction.”

In contrast, the onset of the pandemic spurred rapid integration of social media as a core channel for reference services. PL-LSLB-02 (librarian from Lagos State Library Board, Lagos, South West) explained, “With the physical doors closed, we had no option but to rely on platform like Facebook. Now, we manage live chats and real-time responses through social media; it's become our main communication channel.”

Patrons also noted this evolution. PP-ESLB-01 (patron from Enugu State Library Board, Enugu, South East) stated, “I now get my questions answered via the library's Facebook Messenger, which wasn't available before. It's much faster and more interactive.”

Similarly, PP-RSLB-02 (patron from Rivers State Library Board, Port Harcourt, South South) observed, “The shift to social media means I no longer have to physically visit the library for basic queries. I can simply send a message and get a prompt reply.”

Theme 2: Impact on Service Efficiency, Accessibility, and User Satisfaction

Participants reported that the shift to social media-based reference services has significantly enhanced service efficiency. PL-KSLB-01 (librarian from Kano State Library Board, Kano, North West) noted, “Our response times have improved drastically. We can now reply to queries within minutes on platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp, which was unthinkable when we relied solely on email.”

This increase in efficiency was particularly beneficial for time-sensitive inquiries during the pandemic. However, several respondents also highlighted challenges regarding accessibility and digital literacy. PL-BSLB-02 (librarian from Borno State Library Board, Maiduguri, North East) explained, “Although our services are much faster, we’ve observed that some users, especially older patrons, struggle with navigating social media. The digital divide is evident; not everyone finds these platforms intuitive.”

Patron perspectives further underscore these mixed outcomes. PP-LSLB-01 (patron from Lagos State Library Board, Lagos, South West) shared, “For tech-savvy users like me, social media reference is fantastic. But I know many in my community who are not comfortable with these digital tools they miss the traditional, personal touch of a reference desk.”

PP-NLN-02 (patron from the National Library of Nigeria, Abuja, North Central) added, “The efficiency is impressive, but sometimes the information is too brief or technical. I would appreciate more detailed guidance, which I usually received during in-person interactions.”

Theme 3: Strategies and Challenges for Effective Social Media Delivery

Participants identified a range of strategies that have been instrumental in integrating social media into reference service delivery, alongside challenges that continue to impede full optimization. A prominent strategy cited by several librarians was continuous professional development. PL-NLN-02 remarked, “We’ve introduced regular training sessions focused on social media tools. This helps us stay updated with new features and ensures that our digital communication is both professional and effective.”

Another key strategy involved the integration of multiple social media channels into a cohesive service model. PL-ESLB-02 explained, “We combine Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp into one system. This integration allows us to cater to different user preferences and maintain a seamless flow of information.”

Proactive outreach was also highlighted as essential for engaging users. PP-RSLB-01 stated, “The library’s regular updates on Twitter and Facebook keep me informed about the services they offer. It makes me feel connected and valued as a user.”

However, challenges remain. A recurring issue was the limited digital literacy among some staff and patrons, which hampers effective use of social media platforms. PL-KSLB-02

commented, “Some of our team members are hesitant to use social media because they’re not confident in their digital skills. This hesitance can delay responses and affect service quality.”

Resource constraints were another significant challenge. PL-BSLB-01 observed, “There is a continuous need for more resources, both in terms of technology and staffing. Social media demands constant engagement and monitoring, which can strain our limited human resources.”

Moreover, the rapidly evolving nature of social media platforms requires libraries to continuously update their strategies. PL-ESLB-01 noted, “What works well today might not be effective tomorrow. We must be agile and ready to adapt our outreach and communication tactics as new platforms emerge.”

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings illuminate a clear transformation in how public libraries in Nigeria deliver reference services through social media a shift that resonates with the literature on the evolution of digital reference models.

Evolution of Digital Reference Service Models

Participants consistently reported a marked transition from traditional, face-to-face interactions supplemented by email to a predominantly digital model centered on social media platforms. For example, PL-NLN-01 and PL-LSLB-02 described how pre-pandemic services were limited to basic email and web form interactions, whereas post-pandemic, platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp have become the primary channels for real-time reference. This finding corroborates the work of Masizana and Salubi (2022) and Hamad et al. (2016), who emphasized that social media is increasingly critical in enhancing service delivery and community engagement. Our results further extend these studies by illustrating that the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this transformation, as noted by Choi and Kim (2022) in their longitudinal analysis of public libraries adapting during crises. The qualitative accounts from librarians (e.g., PL-LSLB-02’s assertion that “social media has become our primary communication channel”) and patrons (e.g., PP-ESLB-01’s observation of the immediacy of Facebook Messenger responses) validate the literature’s argument that the shift to digital channels is both necessary and inevitable in the current information landscape.

Impact on Service Efficiency, Accessibility, and User Satisfaction

This study reveals significant gains in service efficiency, as evidenced by rapid response times and extended operating hours reported by participants such as PL-KSLB-01. These findings are in line with the theoretical perspectives offered by the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and UTAUT, which posit that perceived ease of use enhances service efficiency. However, the data also highlight challenges in accessibility; several respondents noted that while efficiency has improved, disparities in digital literacy among users have led to uneven satisfaction. For instance, PL-BSLB-02 mentioned that some patrons struggle with the digital interface, and PP-NLN-02 remarked on the impersonal nature of digital responses compared to traditional in-person help. These nuanced insights mirror Kaba’s (2021) observations that the pre-pandemic digital services had not fully bridged the gap in user engagement and that issues of digital literacy remain critical.

Our findings thus echo the literature by demonstrating that while digital reference services can significantly enhance efficiency, they also risk exacerbating existing disparities if not complemented by supportive training and outreach initiatives.

Strategies and Challenges for Effective Social Media Delivery

The strategies identified by our participants underscore the importance of continuous professional development, integrated communication platforms, and proactive outreach. PL-NLN-02 and PL-ESLB-02 both stressed the need for regular training sessions to ensure that librarians are adept at using evolving social media tools, a recommendation that aligns with Joo et al. (2019) and Vanwysberghe et al. (2020), who underscore social media literacy as a key competency for modern librarians. Furthermore, our respondents reported that the integration of multiple channels into a cohesive system has streamlined service delivery, as noted by PL-PUNE-02. This integrated approach reflects the participatory model advocated by Smeaton and Davis (2014), which calls for user-centered, collaborative service development. Nonetheless, challenges such as limited resources and staff reluctance as reported by PL-KSLB-02 and PL-BSLB-01 remain significant barriers. These challenges are consistent with the literature (Kari & Oyeniran, 2019; Faba-Pérez & Infante-Fernández, 2019), which highlights that while social media holds transformative potential, its effective implementation is contingent upon adequate resource allocation and continuous adaptation to changing technological landscapes.

Corroboration with Theoretical Frameworks

Our findings also resonate with key theoretical models such as TAM, UTAUT, and Diffusion of Innovations (Rogers, 2003). The improved efficiency and perceived usefulness of social media platforms, as noted by participants, support TAM's assertion that ease of use drives adoption. Similarly, the influence of social context and facilitating conditions—central tenets of UTAUT are evident in the proactive outreach strategies and staff training initiatives reported by our respondents. Finally, the gradual diffusion of these digital innovations across various public libraries mirrors Rogers' (2003) framework, where the relative advantage and compatibility of social media tools drive their adoption in a traditionally conservative service domain.

The study reveals that public libraries in Nigeria have effectively leveraged social media to transform reference service delivery, significantly enhancing service efficiency and outreach. However, challenges related to digital literacy and resource constraints persist, impacting overall user satisfaction. The corroboration of our findings with existing literature reinforces the need for ongoing professional development, integrated digital strategies, and proactive outreach to ensure that the benefits of social media in reference services are equitably distributed. These insights provide a foundation for developing more resilient, user-centered digital service models that can adapt to both current and future challenges in the rapidly evolving digital landscape.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the integration of social media into public library reference services has significantly transformed service delivery in Nigeria. The findings reveal a clear evolution from traditional, in-person and email-based models to interactive, multi-channel digital

frameworks that leverage platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp. While this transformation has enhanced service efficiency and immediacy, challenges persist related to digital literacy, resource constraints, and ensuring equitable access. The thematic findings that is, the evolution of service models, the impact on efficiency and user satisfaction, and the strategies (and challenges) for effective digital delivery notes the necessity for public libraries to adapt continuously in order to meet the dynamic information needs of their communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Implementation of Professional Development Programs

Public libraries should implement regular training programs focused on digital literacy and the effective use of social media tools. As emphasized by librarians (e.g., PL-NLN-02), ongoing workshops can build staff confidence and competence, thereby improving overall service quality.

Development of Integrated Multi-Channel Strategies:

Libraries should consolidate their social media platforms into a cohesive, integrated system. By unifying channels such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp, as noted by PL-ESLB-02, libraries can streamline communication, reduce response times, and provide a more consistent reference experience for users.

Investment in Digital Infrastructure and Outreach:

To bridge the digital divide and enhance accessibility, libraries must invest in robust digital infrastructure and proactive outreach initiatives. This includes user education on navigating digital platforms and regular engagement via newsletters and social media updates to ensure that all community members, regardless of their digital proficiency, can benefit from these services.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

Longitudinal Analysis: Future research should adopt a longitudinal design to assess the long-term impacts of social media integration on service efficiency, user satisfaction, and overall engagement. Such studies can determine whether the observed improvements are sustained over time.

Inclusive User Experiences: Further studies should specifically focus on marginalized groups and users with limited digital literacy to identify tailored strategies that ensure equitable access to social media-based reference services.

Comparative Regional Studies: Comparative research across different regions and library settings (e.g., urban vs. rural) could provide deeper insights into how contextual factors influence the adoption and effectiveness of social media in reference services, thereby informing more region-specific best practices.

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