

# Trends and issues relating to social media utilisation in academic libraries: Experiences from the University of Limpopo subject librarians

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**Background:** As social media tools spread across every aspect of human life, academic librarians were apt to be their early adopters to boost the service provision in academic libraries.

**Objective:** Guided by Technology Acceptance Model, this article examined a variety of social media tools used by academic librarians; usage and usefulness of social media; organisational support provided to academic librarians to use social media; and the factors that impede usage of social media in academic libraries.

**Methodology:** This article employed a qualitative research methodology through semi-structured interviews with 10 purposively selected academic librarians attached to the University of Limpopo library.

**Results:** The results showed that respondents were mostly familiar with WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, which they used in their personal capacity. However, in their work environment, they utilised the library blog and Facebook to market and promote library services and to liaise with their users in schools or faculties. Restrictions of access to social media platforms during working hours, lack of skills, own social media policy and management support in the form of training were found to be factors that impede social media usage by academic librarians.

**Conclusion:** Social media have a great deal of potential to contribute immensely towards the delivery of information services in academic libraries, though they are neglected.

**Contribution:** Incorporation of social media in library work environment requires social media policies and subject librarians to be well equipped with different kinds of social media platforms for the advantage of academic libraries and their users.

**Keywords:** social media; Facebook; Instagram; Twitter; library blog; subject librarians; academic libraries; University of Limpopo.

## Introduction

Ever since the appearance of social media in the late 2000s, their adoption and usage in both public and private establishments has grown remarkably. Social media are considered the quickest growing web technological application in every aspect of human life in the current 21st century (Kolan & Dzandza 2018). This innovation allows people across the world to freely interrelate with one another and has offered various means for businesses to reach their clients and engage with them in large numbers (Appel et al. 2020). During its initial stages, a number of futurists have long anticipated the significance for the acceptance of social media by institutions of higher learning as a new innovation in teaching and learning, research and community engagement programmes. Dumpit and Fernandez (2017) acknowledged that the current crop of university students are technologically savvy and proactive users of social media. Therefore, those who are responsible for students' well-being, that is, educators, librarians, counsellors and administrators, are inclined to ceaselessly adapt to the new social media to improve students' education, academic performance and contentment through the use of information and communications technology (ICT). Information and communications technology usage in the institutions of higher learning in the 21st century was long associated with 'development of life-long learning, more equity of access, and quality improvement of teaching methods, diversification for collaborative and autonomous learning, as well as troubleshooting of the physical environment', according to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO 1998:84).

An academic library is regarded as 'the heart of higher education institutions'. It exists to serve the academic community, that is, students (both undergraduate and postgraduate), academics and support services staff and researchers, with information for education, research and community outreach projects (Jordan 2017). As academic libraries endeavour to remain viable in their support for the teaching and learning, research and community outreach goals of their parent institutions, the adoption and utilisation of social media as the new channel of communicating with library users has also gained momentum. In addition, as a result of their interactive nature, social media provide prospects for subject librarians to touch base with many library users at a time, to interrelate with them and seek opinions and feedback from them (Appel et al. 2020). Well-known and common social media platforms that can enhance the provision and sharing of academic and educational information and materials include Google Plus, Flickr, Instagram, Pinterest, WhatsApp, Twitter, Myspace, blogs, Facebook, LibraryThing, Tumblr and many more (Vodrazka 2019). Therefore, it is of crucial significance for university libraries to adapt and change at the same speed with the new developments in ICT for the sustenance of premeditated intentions and assignments of the universities in which they operate.

Inasmuch as there is a need to accept social media prominence in university libraries, it is also of extreme importance for the development and implementation of social media policies and guidelines in academic institutions (Rabatseta, Maluleka & Onyancha 2021). Currently, it appears that there are different opinions among academic information professionals on the formalised social media policies and guidelines in university libraries. It seems there is no agreement that has been reached among academic subject librarians about how much social media can or should be under the control of the academic library as against their parent institutions (Johnson & Burclaff 2013). However, an explanation and real-world display of the effectiveness and benefits that come along with social media adoption and usage should be seen as an effort to influence the hearts of not only library administrators and library directors but also institutional top management to give a green light to unrestricted social media use in academic libraries.

However, social media acceptance and subsequent adoption and usage in university libraries entail ardent and enthusiastic library and information professionals who have an insight into these new technological advances. The level of skill and intense attention to social media usage among subject librarians are among the influences that might have a helping hand in the acceptance, implementation and usage thereof. With the growing usage of social media in academia, it is inevitable that subject librarians must learn to optimally exploit a variety of social media in order to retain and inspire their ever-growing numbers of sophisticated library users. Subject librarians must be proactive and enthusiastic to take part in this means of communication on a continual basis.

They are also expected to relish social media expertise in order to identify appropriate platforms that are working to the benefit of the library users in university libraries (Jones & Harvey 2019).

Despite the widespread use of social media by university students and its increased usage in higher education, 'very little empirical evidence is available concerning the popularity of its usage among subject librarians' (Zohoorian-Fooladi & Abrizah 2014:159). It appears that there is little or no empirical scholarship that has glanced into the opinions from librarians or information professionals on the usage and usefulness of social media platforms and on the challenges that they come across in their undertaking to implement the usage of social media in boosting the provision of academic library and information services. Some other academic subject librarians might have, in their personal capacity, attempted to adopt and use several social media platforms, but the usage of these platforms in their work environment might have prevented them from adopting social media to their full potential.

The University of Limpopo (UL), located in Mankweng village, is about 30 km east of Polokwane in the Limpopo province, South Africa. The academic structure of the university is composed of four faculties that offer a variety of learning programmes, leading to certificates, diplomas, degrees and postgraduate degrees up to the doctoral level. These learning programmes prepare graduates with knowledge and skills and values needed towards the improvement of the quality of life in their communities. For the faculties and schools to achieve their academic projects and goals, services of academic librarians or subject librarians are crucial. These are people who facilitate access to information through ensuring that library information resources are collected, organised for easy access and disseminated for the sustenance of academic teaching, learning, research and community outreach projects of the university. Provision of access to information through the use of social media is among the means of providing a library service to library users in the current technological environment. This article is therefore prompted by the UL library's aspiration for the adjustment to the directives of remodelling teaching, learning, research and community engagement projects in the institutions of higher learning, while taking cognisance of evolving technologies, as remarked in the welcome message by the UL's executive director of library and information services. The outcomes of these articles are perhaps a step in the right direction to accomplish this aspiration.

## Purpose of the study

This study examines trends and issues relating to the utilisation of social media in providing library and information services to library users by subject librarians attached to the UL library. The study is directed by the following objectives:

- to establish the current types of social media platforms used by subject librarians at UL in providing library and information services to their users
- to determine the usefulness of a variety of social media platforms to subject librarians attached to the UL library
- to evaluate the organisational support provided to subject librarians in social media usage at UL library
- to identify factors that affect effective usage of social media by subject librarians attached to UL library.

## Literature review

The literature review for this article is based mainly on the theoretical model that guides the study, namely the technology acceptance model (TAM). This theoretical model is intertwined with an overview of the current social media platforms used, the usefulness and usage of social media in academic libraries and an account of the organisational support provided to subject librarians in using social media. The literature review also covers factors that affect the usage of social media in academic libraries. The technology acceptance model, which was proposed by Davis (1989), postulates that 'perceived usefulness' and 'perceived ease of use' have an influence on the attitudes of users towards computer technologies and their subsequent adoption and usage. 'Perceived usefulness' is defined as the 'prospective users' subjective probability that using a specific technological application will increase his or her job performance within an organisational context' (Davis 1989:320). This concept 'relates to job effectiveness, productivity (time saving) and the relative importance of the system to one's job' (Yang & Yoo 2004:19). In this study, 'perceived usefulness' is about the extent to which adoption and use of social media can improve on the facilitation of access to information for library users in the academic library. Along these lines, there is a remarkable number of types of social media tools in the world, which are:

[C]ategorised into six types, namely, collaborative projects such as Wikipedia; blogs and microblogs such as Twitter; content communication such as you-tube; social networking sites such as Facebook; virtual gaming worlds and virtual social worlds. (Bello & Kolawole-Ismail 2017:3)

Willems et al. (2018:135) observed that 'the main features of all social media include the capability to produce and to consume content in a networked environment'. Therefore, based on their usefulness, many people use several concepts to refer to different forms of social media into different classifications, such as publication platforms, sharing platforms, discussion platforms, virtual worlds, social and online gaming. Participation, openness, conversations, community and connectivity are considered as the most important and basic characteristics of social media (Baker, Wentz & Woods 2009). To emphasise their 'perceived usefulness':

[S]ocial media platforms can be used for various purposes within the library, including the marketing of library services, activities and events; the enhancement of library user education programmes, and more importantly, their ability to engage library users. (Penzhorn 2013:56)

Almost all social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Pinterest, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, blogs and wikis, etc., can be used mostly to feed library users with up-to-date information, links to other freely accessible library resources and to provide information about newly purchased information sources through the link to the online library catalogue and updated lists of journals (Gohel 2021; Tofi 2019). This entails that the erstwhile top-to-bottom approach to the provision of information services, where the librarian would pass the required information across to library users without any form of feedback from them, is no longer suitable for the current crop of library users (Ezeani & Igwezi 2012). Rogers (2009) showed that librarians in the United States of America were very much impressed with the advancements in library technological applications, and they believed that social media can be utilised optimally in marketing library services such as virtual reference and information services, selective dissemination of information (SDI), alert services and updates on the arrival of new library information materials, referred to as current awareness service.

'Perceived ease of use' is defined as 'the degree to which an individual believes that using a particular technology or system would be free of mental and physical effort' (Davis 1989:320). The concept relates to the idea that if subject librarians recognise that a particular information technology application can be used with ease, they are more expected to adopt and use that application (Rauniar et al. 2014). Relating this reasoning to the perspective of this study advocates that subject librarians who use social media platforms are receptive to the purported benefits of social media and their use in the provision of academic library and information services to the users. To this end, TAM also emphasises the perspectives of users towards a particular information technology. These perspectives should ascertain whether users are happy and convinced that a particular social media platform is likely to make their jobs easier than the traditional methods, by giving room for resourceful interactions between library users and library staff. The technological application must reduce the restrictions in terms of time and location and assist library staff to communicate with their users. Similar statements are shared by Khan and Bhatti's (2012) study, which focused on two university libraries in Pakistan, whereby it was established that the attitudes and perspectives of librarians towards social media are encouraging because of their nature of being easy to use. Therefore, in order to determine 'ease of use' of social media in this article, subject librarians were also asked about their perspectives towards the most effective social media platform in academic libraries because of its relation to TAM.

The extended TAM emphasises satisfaction with and organisational support in using a particular information technology application (Mohammadi & Isanejad 2018). Satisfaction with the use of ICT applications strongly depends on the background of the users, which includes their past involvement and familiarity with ICT and the skills acquired to use the ICT applications (Chatterjee & Kar 2017). This is the reason for the inclusion of subject librarians' demographic

profiles in this article and, most importantly, their highest qualifications and work experience. This implies that past involvement and competencies of using social media in a person's life are positively connected to user gratification and satisfaction. Therefore, librarians with less understanding and who are lacking skills in using social media platforms are less likely to use the same in academic libraries. Organisational support, on the other hand, is regarded as the approach shown by an organisation to which the individual is attached towards a new ICT application. The kind of support shown by an organisation or support that an employee receives from his or her organisation may inspire his or her adoption and use of a new technological application. This support shown by the organisation may be in the form of providing the required facilities and infrastructure, incentives, teaching and preparation (training) to individuals attached to it. This is about the creation of a conducive environment that encourages individuals to adopt and use social media. For this reason, the kind of training that librarians received on the use of social media platforms also forms part of the variables examined in this article. Factors that may impede the adoption and usage of social media also reveal the extent to which the parent organisation provides support in the usage of social media. The main reasons behind limited or disuse of social media in academic libraries elsewhere were found to be because of the 'absence of training and funding, poor technological infrastructure and lack of skills or interest among library staff' (Collins & Quan-Haase 2012; Mabweazara & Zinn 2016:9). Hesitation among library staff and nonparticipation of library users were also found to be major barriers to the usage of social media in academic libraries (Chu & Du 2013:1).

## Research methodology

This article employed a qualitative research methodology through direct semistructured interviews with 10 subject librarians from UL library. These respondents (referred to as respondents) were purposively selected by virtue of their daily tasks being to communicate and interact with library users. The research design adopted in this study is phenomenological, whereby respondents were requested to disclose the underlying structure of their experiences, views and opinions regarding social media usage in academic libraries. The ethical clearance certificate to collect data from the respondents was granted by the Tufloop Research Ethics Committee (TREC) at UL. Thematic analysis, whereby similar responses are categorised into themes, was employed for data analysis purposes in this article. Table 1 depicts demographic characteristics of respondents in terms of gender, age, highest qualification and number of years working in the library.

Table 1 shows that the study revolves around four male and six female respondents. While none of the respondents is under the age of 25 years, most of them fluctuated between 36–45 and 26–35 years with four and three respondents, respectively. Two respondents were between 46 and 55 years,

followed by one respondent who is above 56 years. With regard to qualifications, most of the respondents (that is, seven) have obtained honours degrees in Information Studies. This is followed by two with master's degrees in Information Studies. One respondent each has a B.Tech in Business and Information Systems and one has an honours degree in Political Science. Four respondents have 9–16 years of experience, while three respondents have less than 8 years of experience, followed by three respondents who have more than 26 years of experience.

## Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was obtained from the Tufloop Research Ethics Committee of the University of Limpopo (ref. no. TREC/47/2018: PG).

## Results

### Social media used by respondents

The first question that was posed to respondents relates to the social media tools which they personally use. Some respondents said the following with regard to social media platforms used: 'I use Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and WhatsApp' (Respondent 9). 'I use WhatsApp, Facebook and e-mail' (Respondent 10). 'I personally use Twitter, Facebook, blog, Instagram and WhatsApp' (Respondent 6). 'I use Instagram, WhatsApp and Facebook' (Respondent 3).

The social media platforms with high incidences are WhatsApp and Facebook, followed by Instagram and then Twitter. The library blog has only one incidence. The outcomes show that most of the respondents use WhatsApp and Facebook in their personal capacity. The next question related to social media tools that respondents use in their work environment. Respondents showed that they use Facebook and the library blog more than any other social media platforms. It was, however, also shown by some respondents that the Facebook account was not opened by the library, but it was a university Facebook account which

**TABLE 1:** Demographic profile of respondents.

Respondent	Gender	Age	Highest qualification	Experience
1	Male	36–45 years	Honours degree in information studies or information science	Between 9 and 16 years
2	Female	26–35 years	Honours degree in information studies	Less than 8 years
3	Female	26–35 years	Honours degree in information studies	Less than 8 years
4	Male	36–45 years	Honours degree in information studies	Between 9 and 16 years
5	Male	26–35 years	Honours degree in information studies	Less than 8 years
6	Female	36–45 years	B.Tech business and information systems	Between 9 and 16 years
7	Male	Above 56 years	Honours degree in political science	Above 26 years
8	Female	46–55 years	Master's degree in information studies	Above 26 years
9	Female	46–55 years	Master's degree in information studies	Above 26 years
10	Female	36–45 years	Honours degree in information studies	Between 9 and 16 years

can only be accessed via the marketing department of the university. This is evidenced by the respondent who said: 'Facebook, but through university page' (Respondent 6). The library blog was also specified to be utilised not only for the interaction with library users but also with library staff regarding meetings and other library events and activities such as Library Week and World Book Day. One respondent said, 'Library blog, but I am not sure it's operational; past events such as Library Week and World Book Day are communicated only to library staff' (Respondent 2). Furthermore, others showed that they used the library guide (LibGuides), e-mail and social media for the purpose of communicating with library users.

### Purposes for usage of social media

In order to determine usefulness of social media, the respondents were further asked about the purposes for which they use social media in the academic library. It was revealed that the majority of them acknowledged using social media for marketing and promotional purposes. This is what some of the respondents said: 'To market library services and create awareness of our services' (Respondents 5, 2, 3). 'We use the social media to attract library customers and market ourselves' (Respondent 8). 'We promote our library materials' (Respondent 7).

Some respondents specified that they used social media to notify their library users on all new things and activities about to take place. By implication, UL library users are at all times kept abreast of library events and activities through social media. 'Social media is used to inform students about library rules and regulations and library calendar' (Respondent 2). 'To alert students of the things that are happening in the library' (Respondent 10). Other respondents indicated that social media platforms in the library are employed to interconnect with the members of the University community (staff and students). 'It is robust platforms that can be used to communicate instantly with library users and staff' (Respondent 4) – 'To send out messages to reach larger group' (Respondent 3).

When asked about the most effective social media tool suited for the delivery of library services, most of the respondents acknowledged that Facebook is the most effective tool in the academic library, whereas few acknowledged that Twitter and blogs are convenient tools to be used in the academic library. This is what they said: 'because majority of students are on Facebook and they prefer it, the library should go where their potential users are' (Respondent 5). 'Facebook is easy to use' (Respondent 7). 'It will help us to inform and communicate with students and allow them to participate in library events' (Respondent 1). 'Because Facebook is less costly in terms of data bundles, unlike Instagram' (Respondent 4). 'Many people have it on their social media smartphones' (Respondent 8). 'With Facebook, you can paste pictures, PDF articles, videos (training material, Library Online Public Access Catalogue [OPAC], short tutorials, etc.), go live during library events' (Respondent 9). 'Facebook

gives option to post long messages as oppose[d] to Twitter' (Respondent 3). However, other respondents showed that WhatsApp, Instagram and LibGuides also have a vital role to play in delivering academic library and information services.

### Organisational support on the use of social media

In order to determine the extent of organisational support on the use of social media, respondents were asked to indicate if they received any type of formal training in this regard. This is what five respondents said: 'No, the library does not offer such' (Respondent 4). 'No, we train ourselves on how to [use] social media' (Respondent 1). 'No, university restricted social media platforms during working hours; we access it after hours' (Respondent 8). 'No, it's my personal knowledge, and it is an appropriate tool to reach my clients' (Respondent 2). 'No, never used. We don't use social media to market library; they block the use of social media during working hours' (Respondent 6). This entails that almost all respondents showed that they never acquired formal training related to social media use in the library. Nonetheless, one respondent specified having acquired training about social media usage by the Library and Information Association of South Africa (LIASA): 'No, never offered but got it through LIASA' (Respondent 9).

To further evaluate organisational support, respondents were asked to indicate factors that impede their usage of social media. Some of the respondents showed that they are constrained to have access to social media during working hours. Here are some of their verbatim responses: 'Social media are blocked by ICT during working hours and are accessible after 1700 h' (Respondent 10); 'Some of the social media platforms are not available during the day, and this has a negative impact on our users' (Respondent 7); 'We have Wi-Fi but accessible all over the library building, some spot is available and others are not available' (Respondent 9).

Some of the respondents showed that because of lack of their own library accounts, they find it hard to exploit social media platforms. Their responses are as follows: 'We don't have social media account that we manage on our own' (Respondent 5). However, other respondents showed that they lack sufficient skills to use social media. One of the respondents said: 'Some of us do not have skill of the use of social media, and some do not prefer to use social media as a platform of communication' (Respondent 8). The other respondents specified that that the institution does not have a policy and guidelines on the use of social media. Two of the respondents said the following: 'We do not have the support from the management on incorporating social media in the library' (Respondent 7); 'University does not have social media policy' (Respondent 2).

## Discussion

### Demographic profile of respondents

The demographic profiles of respondents were encompassed in this article because of their importance as

variables that influence the usage of social media. Such factors include gender, age, educational level, experience and the job performed by the respondents. It found that this study is dominated by female respondents, which shows that librarianship in South Africa is a mostly female profession (Bopape 2005; Hoskins 2013). With regard to age, it was apparent that library and information profession is dominated by middle-aged librarians. It appears that there is a dearth of youth who have a potential to adopt and use social media, by virtue of the behaviour and attitudes towards social media that are lacking in academic libraries. It was also found that more subject librarians have honours degrees in library and information studies. The need for improvement of qualifications for library staff to meet the present and future needs is essential (Nkondo et al. 2014:32). The results further showed that the library is also dominated by proficient employees, because most of them had more than 8 years of working experience.

### Social media used

The results of this study reveal that social media platforms utilised by subject librarians are dominated by WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Similarly, it was also revealed that Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp are utilised mainly for communicating with library users and for entertainment purposes in most academic libraries in South Africa (Rabatseta et al. 2021:22). Ansari (2016:58) embraced that the advantage of WhatsApp over and above other social media platforms is the fact that 'it enables users to send and receive information, images, videos, audio and text messages to individuals and groups instantly and at no costs'. Numerous publications, that is, journals, magazines and newspapers, have shown that Facebook has more than one billion active consumers or users, who created their profiles with photographs and pictures, lists of individual special interests and hobbies, social interactions information, unforgettable life stories, experiences, occasions and happenings, and other personal information such as occupational status. South Africa is reputed to have become the 10th largest Twitter user across the world (Sysomos 2014), while Instagram has also gained popularity and preference, with more than 200 million users across the world (Al-Kandari, Al-Hunaiyyan & Al-Hajri 2016). However, when asked about the social media that they used in their work environment, the respondents showed that they used Facebook and the library blog. Facebook and library blogs are two major social media platforms to be adopted by academic libraries because of their flexibility and their ability to collect feedback from intended target library users (Nfila 2010). These platforms can also enable academic libraries to post lectures, online tutorials and course materials for user education and information literacy purposes (Guo & Huang 2021), research-related literature for users and even marketing for library services and resources.

### Purposes for utilising social media

On the usefulness or purposes for using social media in academic libraries, the results showed that respondents utilised social media platforms for marketing and promoting library resources and services to library users. Similar opinions and feelings are shared by Chan (2012) that using social media technologies in the academic library comes with reduced costs towards publicising and promotion of library services and resources. Therefore, the elements of 'perceived usefulness' and 'perceived ease of use' in TAM are visible because of the fact that acceptance and use of social media platforms in academic libraries helps massively in making it easy in the promotion of library services in order to continue to remain relevant in the 21st century. The academic library can easily follow new developments and utilise these new tools to publicise its services and to be on par with its competitors, that is, other libraries in other universities. From the results on the most effective social media platform, respondents strongly believe that Facebook has become the social media tool which every academic library should optimally utilise to its advantage. Facebook has contributed immensely to academic libraries because it enhances libraries' social visibility (Vállez & Ventura 2020). Facebook is also of assistance to academic libraries in the collection and sharing of academic content to a variety of library users timeously. Ballard (2012:29) established that academic subject librarians and library users are sharing a common notion that 'adoption of Facebook in academic libraries would renovate and improve channels of communication and the provision of library and information services'. Mbatha and Manana (2012) specified that:

[S]tudents at the University of South Africa (UNISA) spend most of their time socialising on Facebook. The students also showed that they would like to see UNISA's academic content posted on Facebook because that is where many of them spend most of their time. (p. 13)

### Organisational support towards the use of social media

Based on responses that were received, it is evident from respondents that the environment is not conducive for them to use social media to its full potential. The study discovered that no formal training was provided to the subject librarians with regard to the utilisation of social media platforms by the parent institution. These results conflict with the outcomes of the investigation that was conducted by Bhardwaj (2014:80) in India, in which it was found that 'half (50%) of LIS professionals indicated to have found out about social media platforms through workshops, conferences and training programmes'. Therefore, the absence of training and funding are among the major reasons for little or nonadoption of social media tools in most academic libraries (Collins & Quan-Haase 2012). It was also noticeable that the limitation of access to social media platforms in universities is the foremost obstacle that prohibits subject librarians from using social media in the academic library. Banda (2011) shared a similar idea that the ICT department prohibits librarians from accessing social media platforms, while the

findings by Mabweazara and Zinn (2016) specified that the key concerns that hinder the utilisation of social media by library and information professionals in Zimbabwe and South Africa are dearth of expertise with social media tools and absence of curiosity and insight into how social media are helpful in their daily tasks. Mundt (2013) also endorsed that shortage of staff proficiency, privacy concerns and overall hesitancy and reluctance concerning the probable paybacks of social media and the deficiency of social media policies and guidelines make it challenging for German public and academic libraries to effectively and efficiently use social media in their realms. With regard to social media policies and guidelines, Kooy and Steiner (2010) discovered that 50, that is, 61% of academic institutions are without appropriate social media policies, 18% were not sure if the policy exists in their libraries and 71% of people assigned to eradicate intolerable and unpleasant posts on their social media pages had no stated policy that supported their decisions. This entails that a good social media policy should provide safeguards for subject librarians and a clear account for the use of social media (Cadell 2013). McCallum (2015) found that:

28% of libraries elsewhere have already implemented social media policy, whereas 30% were planning to implement it. However, the majority (42%) of libraries had no plans to introduce any policy. (p. 18)

## Conclusion

Major findings reveal that respondents are familiar with a number of social media tools that they used in their personal capacity such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. For their work environment, they have utilised the library blog and Facebook to market and promote library services and to liaise with their users in schools or faculties. However, the Facebook account used is not an official account of the library but of the marketing division. Restrictions of access to social media platforms during working hours, lack of skills, lack of own social media policy and lack of management support in the form of training were found to be factors that impede social media usage by subject librarians.

In conclusion, it is apparent that social media have a great deal of potential to contribute immensely towards the provision of library and information services in academic libraries. Hence, academic subject librarians have their own social media accounts that are convenient and useful in their daily life and in the work environment. Therefore, the incorporation of social media in the work environment requires librarians to be well equipped with different kinds of social media platforms and tools to effectively and efficiently utilise them to the advantage of the library and its users. What emerged in this study is that although subject librarians are familiar with social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, they only use Facebook and the library blog to communicate with library users. Lack of social media policy designed and controlled by the academic library appears to be of a great concern among subject librarians at UL.

Adapting the findings of this study to the theoretical framework shows that social media have potential for *usefulness* in academic libraries. Facebook, Twitter and Instagram appear to have bright potential for usage in academic libraries. Among these platforms, Facebook remained the most effective method because it is *easy to use*, and it is convenient because it is used by many students, that is, according to responses received from respondents. In terms of organisational support, it is concluded that subject librarians did not receive formal training on the use of social media. Social media training interventions and institutional social media policies need to be clearly and unambiguously clarified, not only to librarians but also to other stakeholders as well. This study recommends that the UL department of ICT should create or have a publicised policy on the use of social media in the library, assist with network problems and provide librarians with workshops on the use of social media. Hence, social media in academic libraries are embedded in the learning management system used by the university. This will improve visibility of the library among students and staff.

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## Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

## Authors' contributions

M.P.M. wrote the article, collected the data, contributed data or analysis tools, performed analysis and conceived and designed the analysis. S.B. is the supervisor and assisted with review, guidance and editing.

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## Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available at the University of Limpopo Library repository.

## Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors.

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