INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING AND LIBRARY WEBSITE DESIGN ON VISIBILITY OF LIBRARY SERVICES IN UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES IN BENUE STATE

[1] **ADEKOR, HEMBAFAN HELEN; ASHAVER, DOOSUUR & BEGI, DESMOND AONDOFA**

adekorhelen16@gmail.com; doosuurshater71@gmail.com & begidesmond@gmail.com; da-begi25@bsum.edu.ng
[1-3] **Department of Library and Information Science. Rev. Fr. Moses Orshio Adasu University, Makurdi**

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the influence of Social Media Marketing and Library Website Design on visibility of library services in university libraries in Benue State Nigeria. Two research questions and two hypotheses guided the study. It adopted a descriptive survey design. Four university libraries in Benue State including Rev. Fr. Moses Orshio Adasu University, Makurdi, Joseph Sarwuan Tarka University, Makurdi, Federal University of Health Sciences, Otukpo and University of Mkar, Mkar-Nigeria constituted its area. Using stratified sampling technique, a sample size of 100 respondents was drawn from a population of 235 library staff of the four institutions. Data collection was done using a structured questionnaire whose trial test yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.89 using Cronbach Alpha. Descriptive statistics of frequency counts, mean and standard deviation were used for data analysis while Chi-square was used to test hypotheses. The findings revealed that social media effectively enhance library visibility by facilitating real-time updates, attracting new users, improving communication and fostering user engagement. Also, library website design emerged as a paramount branding element, given the importance of an aesthetically pleasing, professionally designed, mobile-compatible and regularly updated website enriched with interactive features. The study concluded that employing social media marketing and library website design for branding of library services is not a peripheral activity but a central and multidimensional strategy that advances the visibility, relevance, credibility and sustainability of university libraries within the academic landscape. It was finally recommended that University libraries and their managements should invest in the development and sustainability of social media marketing and website design.

Keywords: media marketing**,** communication**,** managements, university libraries

Introduction

University libraries play a crucial role in higher education by providing access to information resources that support teaching, learning and research activities. They house a range of resources, including books, journals and digital content, which are essential for academic endeavours. In addition to traditional services like lending and reference assistance, university libraries provide modern services such as research recommendations, electronic document delivery services, current awareness services, selective dissemination of information, consultancy services, research support and data management among others. According to Edewor (2016) library services encompass all activities, facilities and programmes offered by libraries to ensure information resources are effectively utilised by diverse user groups. The author identified some of these services to include among others; library exhibition, document delivery, interlibrary loan services, open access publishing and support for authors, remote access to library resources through mobile applications, current awareness services, selective dissemination of information, consultancy services, research assistances, indexing and abstracting services. These services are designed to ensure access to knowledge and support academic, professional and personal growth. However, university libraries often face challenges in ensuring that their services are widely known and used by students and faculty due to ineffective or lack of branding.

In Nigerian university libraries, where infrastructural limitations and funding issues persist, university libraries may struggle with visibility and user engagement. The absence of strategic branding in university libraries often results in these services blending into the background, overshadowed by more dynamic and visible resources within the university ecosystem and beyond. This lack of visibility can have far-reaching consequences, including reduced library usage, diminished support for academic initiatives, and an overall perception that the library is not keeping pace with modern educational trends. Without active branding efforts, the relevance and impact of the library are significantly diminished, undermining its role as a central hub for learning and research (Akor, 2023). Thus, it has become increasingly important for libraries to adopt strategic branding efforts aimed at enhancing the visibility of their services.

Branding is a marketing concept that encompasses various strategies designed to create a unique and positive perception of an entity in the minds of consumers. Branding can be defined as the process of creating a unique identity and perception for a product or service to distinguish it from competitors and build trust and loyalty. According to Sahli, Alidousti and Neghshineh (2022), branding involves using visual, verbal and experiential elements to create an image that resonates with users and supports the organization's goals. Relatedly, branding is about building relationships and conveying value. Initially, emerging from the business world, branding has evolved from simple visual identification such as logos and names to a complex, multi-faceted strategy that conveys values, culture and experiences. Effective branding distinguishes an organization from its competitors and establishes a strong, recognizable identity. It includes both tangible and intangible elements, such as visual symbols, messaging and customer interactions.

Wengler (2018) observed that the principles of branding extend beyond the business sector and are applicable to non-profit organizations, educational institutions and service-based entities. Worley (2015) affirmed that this broad application highlights the universal importance of branding for visibility and competitiveness. Universities, for instance, use branding strategies to position themselves effectively, attract students, faculty and form strategic partnerships with public and private organizations. These efforts help present an image that aligns with the institution's mission, values and academic strengths.

The need for branding in libraries arises in an era where alternative sources of information and digital resources are highly accessible. Libraries must demonstrate their relevance amid competition from online resources and changing user expectations. Roughen (2015) noted that without strategic branding, university libraries may struggle to capture the attention of their users, leading to underutilized services. Branding in libraries involves more than just creating logos or slogans; it is about establishing a distinct identity that resonates with users and communicates the library's value in meeting their information needs (Smith, 2020).

Branding for university libraries can involve developing a cohesive visual identity, engaging in social media campaigns, hosting events and creating valuable user experiences. For example, branded campaigns can showcase digital resources, workshops and collaborative spaces, aligning these activities with a strong, cohesive brand to build recognition among students, faculty and even external stakeholders.

Social media marketing is one of the branding strategies that can significantly influence the visibility of library services. As platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube and Instagram have become integral to communication, libraries can leverage these channels to engage with users, share updates and promote their resources and events (Tella, 2019). Social media can help reach a wider audience beyond the traditional library

user base, thereby increasing awareness of the library's offerings. Thus, effective social media marketing campaigns can enhance user perception and promote library services as indispensable resources for academic and personal growth (Adeyemi, 2019). Through social media leveraging, libraries can reach a broader audience by sharing information about events, new arrivals, online readers advisory, really simple syndication (RSS) feeds, selective dissemination of information, current awareness services, personalised research recommendations, online instructions, electronic document delivery services and research tips on platforms like Facebook, X (Twitter), LinkedIn, YouTube, Instagram among others. This increases the library's presence online and keeps users informed about available resources, thus boosting visibility.

Library website design and content also play a vital role in branding efforts aimed at increasing visibility. A well-designed library website that is easy to navigate and rich in content can serve as a central point for accessing various library services, such as online catalogues, e-resources, and research guides (Adetimirin, 2017). The quality of the website's content and its user-friendliness can directly influence how users perceive the library and whether they choose to utilize its services. Research has indicated that when users find library websites to be informative and engaging, they are more likely to access library resources regularly (Shontz & Murray, 2017). Meanwhile, a well-designed and user-friendly website can serve as a virtual front door to the library, providing easy access to online resources, service information and digital collections. Thus, optimizing the website for better user experience and search engine visibility, libraries can attract more users globally.

Branding, while recognized as a powerful tool for improving the visibility of library services, is not without its challenges in the context of university libraries. Despite its potential to create a unique identity and communicate the value proposition of library services to users, various factors hinder the effective implementation of branding strategies in libraries. Some of these challenges include limited financial resources for branding initiatives, lack of trained personnel in marketing and branding, resistance to change among library staff and administrators, traditional perceptions of libraries as static repositories, inadequate technological infrastructure for digital branding, poor social media presence and online engagement, inability of libraries to create their official social media handles and effectively leverage them to create global visibility (Amusa & Iyoro, 2017; Nkiko & Yusuf, 2016; Igbinovia & Solanke, 2018, and Ukwoma & Okafor , 2020). Also, Wengler (2018) observed that effective branding of library services is hindered with numerous challenges such as inadequate technological facilities for digital inclusiveness, competition with other

institutional priorities within universities, lack of advocacy for the importance of branding in libraries, lack of cohesive and well-defined brand identities and minimal user awareness and engagement with library branding efforts. These challenges demonstrate the multifaceted nature of the obstacles libraries face in adopting branding strategies. Overcoming these barriers will require libraries to prioritize branding, advocate for increased funding, invest in staff capacity building and embrace modern technologies to enhance their visibility and relevance.

Statement of the Problem

University libraries are essential to supporting the academic missions of higher education institutions by providing services that enhance teaching, learning and research. Despite their importance, Nigerian university libraries face a significant challenge of low visibility. Preliminary investigations and discussions with library staff and students reveal that many of these services are underutilized due to a lack of awareness and ineffective promotional strategies. This limited visibility hinders the libraries' ability to fully support the academic community and undermines their impact.

Branding, which has been effectively used in other sectors to build recognition and engagement, holds potential for improving the visibility of library services. Through strategic branding initiatives such as social media marketing and website leveraging digital marketing tools, libraries can highlight their value and foster a stronger connection with their users. Effective branding can reposition libraries as active and indispensable centres of academic support, extending their reach within the university and beyond.

The adoption of social media marking and website design as branding strategies in university libraries in Benue State is probably low. This results in missed opportunities for enhancing their relevance and usage, leading to underappreciated and underutilized services. Without a clear brand identity and promotional effort, university libraries may risk becoming sidelined as passive entities, unable to compete for attention in an environment where digital resources and other campus services are more prominent.

A review of the current literature reveals that while branding has been explored in business and public institutions, its application within university libraries remains under-researched, especially in the context of Benue State. This represents a significant gap in understanding how branding could be tailored to improve library visibility and service utilization. This study seeks to bridge this gap by investigating the influence of social media marketing and website design on the visibility of library services in university libraries in Benue State.

Research Questions

The study sought answers to the following questions:

1. what is the influence of social media marketing on visibility of library services in university libraries in Benue State?
2. what is the influence of library website design on visibility of library services in university libraries in Benue State?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

H_1: Social media marketing does not significantly enhance the visibility of library services in university libraries in Benue state.

H_2: Library website design does not significantly enhance the visibility of library services in university libraries in Benue state.

Literature Review

Emiri and Lulu-Pokubo, (2019) studied the Application of Social Media for the Marketing of Library Products and Services in University Libraries in Nigeria. The results showed that most available virtual methods of service delivery are library websites, Twitter, e-bulletins, telephone calls, WhatsApp, and Facebook, while blogs, Flickr, YouTube, text messages, and emails are barely available for use. The major social media available (inclusive of the virtual methods) are MySpace, ResearchGate, Wikis, Instagram, SlideShare, LinkedIn, SMS, and online public catalogues, while Orkut, Picasa/Flickr, Pinterest, Delicious, RSS feeds, and social bookmarking are less available. Only Facebook, SlideShare, LinkedIn, SMS, and WhatsApp are used to a moderate extent, while others have either low or no extent of use in the marketing process.

Echedom and Ogonwa, (2021) assessed the extent of utilization of social media in rendering library and information services by librarians in university libraries in South-South Nigeria. The study aimed to determine the extent of utilization of social media in rendering library and information services by university librarians in South–South Nigeria. The findings of the study revealed that the use of Facebook and Twitter in rendering library and information services by librarians in university libraries is high.

Akporhonor and Olise (2015) assessed Librarians' Use of Social Media for Promoting Library and Information Resources and Services in University Libraries in South-South Nigeria. The study revealed that blogs and Facebook are the most commonly used social media to promote library and information resources and services in the libraries. Findings also showed librarians' use of social media promotes two-way communication, makes communication with library users easier, and provides a forum for feedback and increases library users/usage.

Abdulfatai (2024) assessed the Influence of Social Media Marketing on the Utilization of Library Resources and Services by Undergraduate Students in Universities in Kwara State. The study formulated four research questions and adopted a simple random sampling method to select the sample population for this study out of two thousand eight hundred and ten (2810) of the entire population. The study found that user education (orientation/instruction services), photocopying services, abstracting and indexing services, and extension/community services were the identified library resources and services marketed to undergraduate students using social media in university libraries. The social media used by undergraduate students for accessing library resources and services included Telegram, YouTube, Google Plus, Pinterest, Twitter, Instagram, Myspace, and Skype. The study concluded with recommendations that library staff should be trained and retrained to acquire the technical know-how of the various social media tools.

Research Methodology

The investigation adopted a descriptive survey design. Four university libraries in Benue State including Rev. Fr. Moses Orshio Adasu University, Makurdi, Joseph Sarwuan Tarka University, Makurdi, Federal University of Health Sciences, Otukpo and University of Mkar, Mkar-Nigeria constituted its area. Using stratified sampling technique, a sample size of 100 respondents was drawn from a population of 235 library staff of the four institutions. Data collection was done using a structured questionnaire titled: Influence of Branding on Visibility of Library Services (IBVLSQ). The instrument was validated by experts and trial tested. Its reliability coefficient was 0.89 using Cronbach Alpha. One hundred copies of the questionnaire were administered to library staff in across the four universities. Eighty two copies,representing 82% were returned in good state and used for analysis. Descriptive statistics of frequency counts, mean and standard deviation were used for data analysis while Chi-square was used to test hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

The analysis is ordered in line with the research questions and null hypotheses that guided the study.

Research Question 1: What is the influence of social media marketing on visibility of library services in university libraries in Benue state?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Respondents on Influence of Social Media Marketing on the Visibility of Library Services in University Libraries in Benue State.

S/N	Item Statement	SD	D	A	SA	Mean	StD	Decision
1	The library uses social media platforms to share updates on new resources	3	7	30	42	3.35	0.79	Agree
2	Social media posts by the library attract new users to its services	2	5	40	35	3.32	0.70	Agree
3	Social media marketing improves communication with library users	2	7	36	37	3.32	0.73	Agree
4	The library organizes online events or campaigns through social media	2	14	35	31	3.16	0.79	Agree
5	Users interact with the library frequently through social media platforms	5	9	43	25	3.07	0.81	Agree
6	Social media platforms are used to promote library services effectively	1	4	41	36	3.37	0.64	Agree
7	The library uses visuals (e.g., graphics or videos) on social media to create awareness	1	8	48	25	3.18	0.65	Agree
8	Social media posts are consistent and align with the library's branding	2	10	47	23	3.11	0.70	Agree
9	The library uses social media to gather feedback from users	2	7	42	31	3.24	0.71	Agree
10	The library collaborates with influencers or community leaders for promotions on social media	3	11	48	20	3.04	0.73	Agree
	Cluster Mean					3.23		Agree

Table 1: The result presented in Table 1 shows that items 1-10 have mean scores ranging from 3.07-3.35. The results indicate that respondents generally agreed that social media marketing plays a significant role in enhancing the visibility of library services. High levels of agreement were recorded for items such as the use of social media to share updates on new resources (88% agreed or strongly agreed), attracting new users through social media posts (91.5%), and effective promotion of library services on social media platforms (93.9%). Mean scores for all items ranged from 3.03 to 3.36, indicating a strong leaning towards agreement.

Research Question 2: What is the influence of library website design on visibility of library services in university libraries in Benue state?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of Respondents on Influence of Library Website Design on Visibility of Library Services in University Libraries in Benue State

S/N	Item Statement	SD	D	A	SA	Mean	StD	Decision
11	The library website has an attractive and professional design	2	5	43	32	3.17	0.70	Agree
12	The content on the library website is updated regularly	2	7	47	26	3.23	0.73	Agree
13	Users can easily navigate the library website	0	7	46	29	3.21	0.68	Agree
14	The website provides access to online databases and e-resources	1	6	47	28	3.26	0.61	Agree
15	The website has features for user interaction (e.g., chat or feedback forms)	4	7	47	24	3.06	0.74	Agree
16	Visual elements (e.g., banners or icons) on the website enhance its appeal	2	7	48	25	3.18	0.68	Agree
17	The website highlights library events and programmes effectively	3	5	41	33	3.18	0.65	Agree
18	Mobile compatibility of the library website enhances its usability	2	6	45	29	3.23	0.67	Agree
19	The website offers clear information about library policies and services	3	7	34	38	3.09	0.74	Agree
20	Library website content is optimized for search engines to increase visibility	2	7	40	33	3.20	0.64	Agree
	Cluster Mean					3.20		Agree

The result presented in Table 2 shows that items 11-20 have mean scores ranging from 3.06-3.26 showing that respondents agreed to the influence of library website design on visibility of library services in university libraries in Benue state. This implies that library website design has an influence on visibility of library services. Key indicators include "Mobile compatibility of the library website enhances its usability" ($\bar{x}$ =3.23, SD = 0.67), "website provides access to online databases and e-resources" ($\bar{x}$ =3.26, SD = 0.61) and "content on the library website is updated regularly" ($\bar{x}$ =3.23, SD = 0.73) which they agreed to. Overall, the findings highlight library website design's perceived effectiveness in enhancing visibility of library services.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Social media marketing does not significantly enhance the visibility of library services in university libraries in Benue state.

Table 7: Chi-Square Analysis on the Significance of Social Media Marketing on Visibility of Library Services in University Libraries in Benue State.

Responses	Fo	Fe	Df	x^2	P	Remark
Strongly Disagree	2	20.5				
Disagree	8	20.5				
Agree	41	20.5	3	40.927	0.02	Significant
Strongly Agree	31	20.5				
Total	82					

Table 7 shows that the Chi-Square (x^2) value is 40.927, with p-value of 0.02. Since the p-value is less than alpha value of 0.05, the null hypothesis is therefore rejected. This implies that use of social media marketing significantly influences library use by postgraduate students in universities in Benue State.

Hypothesis 2: Library website design does not significantly enhance the visibility of library services in university libraries in Benue State.

Table 8: Chi-Square Analysis on the Significance of Library website design on the visibility of library services in university libraries in Benue state.

Responses	Fo	Fe	Df	x^2	p	Remark
Strongly Disagree	3	20.5				
Disagree	5	20.5				
Agree	44	20.5	3	61.122	0.00	Significant
Strongly Agree	31	20.5				
Total	82					

Table 8 shows that the Chi-Square (x^2) value is 61.122, with p-value of 0.00. Since the p-value is less than alpha value of 0.05, the null hypothesis is not accepted. The empirical evidence supports the assertion that library website design enhances the visibility of library services in university libraries in Benue State, thereby necessitating the rejection of the null hypothesis (H_O2).

Discussion of Findings

This section provides an extensive discussion of the findings generated from the study on the influence of social media marketing and library website design on visibility of library services in university libraries in Benue State. The findings are in relation to the research questions and hypotheses of the study and they are meaningfully situated within the context of related empirical studies.

In the first objective of the study concerning social media marketing, the study reveals a strong consensus among respondents that social media platforms effectively enhance library visibility by facilitating real-time updates, attracting new users, improving communication and fostering user engagement. This finding is consistent with Emiri and Lulu-Pokubo's (2019) investigation, which highlighted Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter as major platforms facilitating interaction and information sharing, albeit their study also noted the underutilization of these digital tools in Nigerian university libraries. Similarly, Echedom and Ogonwa (2021) identified a high extent of Facebook and Twitter usage among librarians in South-South Nigeria, marking social media as critical in library service delivery. Akporhonor and Olise (2015) further reinforce this perspective, demonstrating that blogs and Facebook serve as key channels for two-way communication and user feedback that enhances library usage. The current study has advanced these insights by empirically demonstrating the statistically significant effect of social media marketing on library visibility specifically within Benue State, as supported by Chi-square analysis. Complementing these quantitative results, interviews with heads of libraries underscored social media's vital role in outreach efforts, they highlighted key areas of its influence of library visibility to include posting updates on library resources and events.

The second objective assessed the influence of library website design on visibility of library services. Library website design emerged as a paramount branding element, with respondents strongly agreeing on the importance of an aesthetically pleasing, professionally designed, mobile-compatible and regularly updated website enriched with interactive features. This finding has addressed a gap identified in previous research, such as the study by Echedom and Ogonwa (2021), which focused primarily on social media usage and did not investigate website design or user interface as part of strategic branding. Abdulfatai (2024) emphasized digital platforms but limited focus to social media marketing, omitting web design's role. The current study highlights the website's function as the "digital front door" to library services, critical for enhancing visibility and user accessibility. University library heads corroborated these findings by noting that library website design is essential in the digital era offering round-the-clock access, offering remote access, among others. The interview also gathered that library web design aids effective data collection and management about users with continuous user feedback used to refine navigation and content currency, thereby sustaining user trust and engagement.

Conclusion

The study establishes that branding constitutes a strategic imperative for enhancing the visibility of library services in university libraries in Benue State. The findings indicate that social media marketing facilitates real-time engagement, broadens user reach, and promotes active interaction with library services, while well-designed and regularly updated websites project institutional credibility, improve digital presence, and enhance access to resources. Taken together, these findings underscore that branding is not a peripheral activity but a central and multidimensional strategy that advances the relevance, credibility and sustainability of university libraries within the academic landscape.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made to improve the visibility of library services in university libraries in Benue State:

1. University libraries in Benue State should strengthen their social media presence by systematically using platforms such as Facebook, X (Twitter), Instagram and WhatsApp to engage users in real time and expand outreach. This is important because social media offers cost-effective visibility, aligns with students' communication preferences and creates opportunities for interactive service promotion.

2. Libraries should develop and maintain user-friendly, visually appealing and mobile-responsive websites that are regularly updated with relevant content. A well-designed website improves credibility, ensures seamless access to resources and positions the library as a vital academic and information hub.

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