

Foreword

Social media, a term commonly used to refer to a variety of Web-based tools (especially Web 2.0), is increasingly being applied by people from all persuasions to connect, collaborate, create Web content, and share experiences with others. Though social media belong to a wider growing field of Web 2.0 technologies that incorporates wikis, blogs, social bookmarking, Internet forums, online communities, RSS feeds, tag-based folksonomies, podcasts, e-mail, virtual worlds, and instant messaging, among others (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), the social networking sites seem to be the most widely used technologies. Social media has caught the attention and imagination of people of all walks of life across race, gender, age, professional, socio-political, and economic backgrounds, and temporal and spatial boundaries in both developed and developing countries. Social media allow the users to create detailed online profiles and connect with other users with emphasis on social relationships. They allow the users to post short status updates in order to communicate with other users quickly. Social media also allow users to broadcast their real-time location, either as public or as an update viewable to authorized contact. They are in addition used to share content including verbal and text-based exchanges, music, photographs, and videos (Mutula, 2013; in Privacy Rights Clearinghouse, 2012).

Social media platforms are many and increasingly continuing to evolve, thus providing users with a wide spectrum to choose from, such as Facebook, Google+, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, MySpace, etc. Social media enable peer-to-peer communication between users and can be linked to each other, allowing users to transmit their ideas and images to large numbers of people. Social media defy boundaries, challenge governmental media censorship, and provide an alternative voice to traditional media outlets, governmental policies, and views. They enable the in-flow and out-flow of information simultaneously through virtually cyber systems that are boundless (Salmon, Fernandez, & Post, 2010). They serve as popular public platforms for social mobilization and advocacy.

This book on social media is therefore relevant in time and space, especially in Africa and the broader developing world. The book with 18 chapters covers diverse topics, such as competitive intelligence and marketing using social media, use and role of social media in libraries, Web 2.0, antisocial behavior and ethical dimension of social media, social media in education and training, use of Facebook in LIS, and social media in the professionalization of LIS. The book is most likely to stimulate broader policy, practical and theoretical debates, and interest from a wide spectrum of audience and fields, such as academia, policymakers, practitioners, politics, education, business, government, research, and corporate world. The relevance of this book to Africa and the developing world in general need not be overemphasized because as Capurro (2013), citing André-Michel Essoungou (2010), writes:

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A social media boom begins in Africa: Using mobile phones, Africans join the global conversation . . . Facebook—the major social media platform worldwide and currently the most visited website in most of Africa—has seen massive growth on the continent. The number of African Facebook users now stands at over 17 million, up from 10 million in 2009. More than 15 percent of people online in Africa are currently using the platform, compared to 11 percent in Asia” (Essoungou, 2010a). In 17 months, Kenya’s Facebook user rate has gone from 2% to 3%. South Africa’s is near 10% after increasing from 7%. This growth rate of 50% over 17 months for Kenya and South Africa is deemed “mature.

Erik Hersman, a prominent African social media blogger and entrepreneur in an e-mail to *Africa Renewal* (as cited by Capurro, 2013) notes that “with mobile phone penetration already high across the continent, and as we get to critical mass with Internet usage in some of Africa’s leading countries (Kenya, South Africa, Ghana, Nigeria, Egypt) . . . a seismic shift will happen with services, products and information.” This book is an important reading on social media use in the realm of library and information science with broader implications on the wider society.

The wide impact social media is having in our lives is borne out of the fact that it has rapidly proliferated in all spheres of life and has found acceptance in a relatively shorter period of time compared to other recent information communication technologies such as cellular phones. Social media is now regarded as the number one online activity, with its use accounting for 10% of all users’ time on the Web (Lindsay, 2010). In addition, social media is reportedly growing faster than the Internet’s growth globally (Nielsen, 2011). Arno (2012), citing eMarketer, predicted that there would be a massive 1.43 billion social network users in 2012, representing a 19.2 percent increase over the 2011 figure. Besides, while social media can be lauded as the long awaited panacea for C2C (Citizen-Citizen), G2C (Government-Citizen), B2G (Business-Government), G2G (Government-Government) engagement, etc., the spread of social media equally raises concerns, especially with regard to violation of people’s legitimate moral and ethical rights such as privacy, confidentiality, trust, security, and data protection. This book also looks at the ethical dimension of social media.

Social media, especially the social networking sites, are being applied to promote business as a new competitive tool with companies adopting the social networking platforms as strategic part of their IT investment. In addition, companies have embraced the social networking platforms to bring about integration of disparate organisational units and workforce free of geographic constraints (Mathen, 2012). In education, Rice (2011) points out that college students are using the social networking sites such as Facebook to communicate with each other about their coursework, writing status updates and posting pictures, and for social and educational purposes. Bob Collymore, the chief executive of Safaricom (the market leader mobile service provider in Kenya), observed that people join the social networking sites for three reasons, namely for identity, to get connections, and to socialize within a community (Oriodo, 2012). The social networking sites in particular, and social media in general, have therefore become important agents for social, economic, and political transformation.

This book has several strengths that make it a must-read for most people. Most of chapters are collaboratively written drawing on the experiences of people from different professional and disciplinary backgrounds who are in practice and others in academia. The book covers diverse topics on the application of social media in library and information science practice. Moreover, the book is rooted in the African environment that is experiencing a social networking boom. The book is recommended for those who

wish to learn and know more about the theoretical perspectives of social media and specifically library practitioners who want to know and understand how they can apply social media to improve delivery of information services. Students of LIS are strongly encouraged to read the book.

Stephen Mutula

University of KwaZulu Natal, South Africa

Stephen Mutula is a Full Professor of Information Science. He is Dean and Head of School of Social Sciences at the University of KwaZulu Natal, South Africa. He has several years of teaching and research for which he has won several local and international accolades. His areas of research include information ethics, digital and social exclusion, information society, e-government, ICT4D, and knowledge management, among others. He is a prolific author and researcher. He serves on several international and regional scholarly editorial boards.

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