

Work related WhatsApp groups as knowledge sharing platforms among librarians in selected federal universities in Nigeria

Esharenana E. Adomi
Federal University of Petroleum Resources Library
Effurun, Delta State, Nigeria

Blessing Solomon-Uwakwe, *PhD*
Readers' Services Librarian
Imo State University Library
Owerri, Nigeria

Abstract

The purpose of the study was to explore work related WhatsApp groups as knowledge sharing platforms among librarians in selected federal universities in Nigerian. The study adopted the descriptive survey design. A total of 58 librarians who received and filled questionnaire in five federal universities constituted the sample of the study. Data were collected through questionnaire while frequency counts and percentages were used to analyse the data obtained. Findings revealed that a majority of the librarians were members professional association WhatsApp group, followed by group that serves the entire library, staff union group and group created by colleagues; ICT ranked highest as area the librarians shared work related knowledge followed by job opening/vacancies and publication/research; ease of use, immediate feedback, sharing knowledge with wide audience and available always were key reasons for sharing work related knowledge via WhatsApp groups; videos, audios and texts were the major formats of sharing knowledge through work related WhatsApp groups while non-adherence to group guidelines was a major drawback to knowledge sharing via the WhatsApp groups. Adhering to guidelines by members, frequent visits to WhatsApp group platforms to keep track of shared knowledge as well as increasing WhatsApp group contact limit from the current 256 members are recommended in the light of the results of the study.

Keywords: Knowledge sharing, Knowledge sharing platforms, Work related, WhatsApp groups, Librarians, Federal universities, Nigeria

Introduction

Librarians work in knowledge access settings which require the use of relevant work related knowledge to perform their tasks. In the current knowledge driven society, access to relevant and timely knowledge is essential for proper functioning in all aspects of life, including the work environment, which the libraries are part of. The work of librarians in the university is very challenging – they are required to meet the information needs of divers users (students, faculty, researchers, etc), create, acquire, process, manage and provide access to information/knowledge in

diverse formats; use technologies, which are always evolving in service provision; conduct research and publish for promotion, etc. These activities are knowledge driven and can only effectively be performed with access to knowledge. They therefore need to take part in sharing of knowledge in order for them to acquire the knowledge and skills that would enable them to meet the demands of their roles as librarians.

Knowledge sharing is the activity of relating, transferring, imparting, disseminating ideas, facts, information, experiences, skills, strategies by a person/group /organization/ community/system to other person/group/ organization/community/system. Knowledge

sharing has to do with exchange of ideas, data, information and know-how between people.

Knowledge sharing is the act of information (understanding) exchange between individuals, teams, communities or organizations. Knowledge may be explicit (processes and documents) or tacit (intuitive and experience-based). Sharing knowledge is a deliberate process that not only enhances an individual's understanding, but assists to create an archive of knowledge accessible for others. The concept of knowledge sharing is very essential because it enables individuals and businesses to be more responsive and adaptable in the face of change, and helps to ensure continued development and existence (Hendricks, 2018).

As noted by Montcalm (2013), though knowledge sharing in organisation is not new, the recent increase in networked computers has made it possible to store and share certain kinds of knowledge in ways that were never imagined before; that technologies that can facilitate knowledge sharing vary from basic (telephone, e-mail, databases, web conferencing, intranet, wikis, repositories and instant messaging applications) to more complex and elaborate (knowledge management systems, workflow technology and knowledge sharing products). Knowledge sharing between individuals and enterprises is achieved by knowledge sharing technology, enabling tools that provide communication and knowledge capture in the form of wikis, blogs, online repositories, and instant messaging applications (Hedgebeth, 2007). Social media platforms have transformed how people communicate, share content, interact, and collaborate. Currently, social media (SM) is increasingly becoming veritable channel for facilitating knowledge sharing (KS) and communication, on personal and organizational levels. (Ahmed, Ahmad, Ahmad, Zakaria, 2018).

Zande (n. d.) investigated the motivations of employees regarding the use of social media for work purposes and whether this use had an effect on knowledge sharing within organizations. The research was executed with the assistance of three organizations for youth care. A total of 392 employees participated by completing a questionnaire and two focus groups were conducted. It was discovered that regarding what motivated employees to use social media for work purposes, 20.4% of the actual use, and 42.7% of the intended use of social media were motivated by information, social interaction, personal identity, entertainment and knowledge sharing; that the search for information and entertainment were motivations that significantly predicted the use of social media in the work place; also, private life experience with social media and the workplace attitude towards social media for work purposes also had a direct effect on use.

WhatsApp is a mobile instant messaging platform. Beal (2018) defines mobile instant messaging as a mobile phone messaging service which allows the user to use special versions of instant messaging clients through their mobile device and not desktop personal computer. WhatsApp was the most popular mobile messaging app with monthly user population of 1500 million, followed by Facebook Messenger with 1300 users, WeChat 1040, QQ Mobile 806 million users, Skype 300 million users, Viber 260, Snapchat 255 million, LINE 203 million users, while Telegram recorded 200 million monthly users (Statista, 2018). As a popular mobile instant messaging app, WhatsApp is used by various categories of people all over the world.

. A study was conducted by Tiwari and Sharma (n. d.) using 100 youths of Delhi-National Capital Region (NCR) in the age range of 18 - 28 years and discovered that they were using WhatsApp for

knowledge sharing, photo updates, for communication purpose only and promotional activities in that order. Purkayastha and Chanda (2018) conducted a survey of the use of WhatsApp among LIS professionals in North-East India and found that the professionals use WhatsApp to share knowledge content, connect with friends, chatting, sharing photos and videos and forwarding messages in that order. WhatsApp is used by librarians. However, one is not sure whether it is used as a work related knowledge sharing channel particularly by librarians in federal universities in Nigeria, hence this study.

Objectives of the study

The main objective of this study was to explore work related group WhatsApp as knowledge sharing platforms among librarians in selected federal universities in Nigerian. Specifically, the study set out to find out the:

1. demographic characteristics of the librarians in selected federal universities in Nigeria;
2. types of work related WhatsApp group the librarians currently belong to,
3. work related areas knowledge is shared via the WhatsApp groups by the librarians;
4. reasons for using work related WhatsApp groups by the librarian;
5. format through which knowledge is shared via WhatsApp groups; and
6. drawbacks to sharing of knowledge via work related WhatsApp groups among the librarians.

Methods

The study adopted the descriptive survey design. This was to enable the researcher to explore the current status of the librarians' knowledge sharing through WhatsApp groups in federal universities in Nigeria. The

population consisted of all librarians in five federal universities in Nigeria. The five universities were selected purposively. A total of 58 librarians who received and filled questionnaire constituted the sample of the study. The study was conducted in September – October, 2018. Data were collected through questionnaire while frequency counts and percentages were used to analyse the data collected.

Results and discussion

The results of the study are presented in this section using tables. Table 1 depicts the respondents by library. Kenneth Dike Library, University of Ibadan attracted the highest numbers of respondents – 24(41.4). This is probably because it is the oldest as well as the library with the highest number of librarians among the five university libraries used.

More males participate in this study than females as revealed in Table 2.

It is not surprising that a majority of the respondents shown in Table 3 possessed higher degrees – MLIS/MSc 35(60%) and PhD 9(15.5%) respondents. This is because the university libraries are academic libraries where librarians are required to possess higher degrees in order to progress on the job. MLIS and PhD degrees are usually needed by those who are interested in careers as academic librarians (Study.com, 2019).

The data in Table 4 imply that a majority of the respondents have had work experience of over 10 years. This implies that most of the respondents have had adequate knowledge to share with their colleagues via WhatsApp group.

In work settings (university libraries inclusive), staff normally create various types of work related WhatsApp groups in order to share knowledge. The group created is determined by the purpose it is intended to serve, the type of knowledge/information to

be shared, the number of people to be reached etc. For the purpose of this study, eight library work related WhatsApp groups were identified and included in the research instrument for the respondents. Table 5 reveals that professional association WhatsApp group attracted the highest responses of 46 (79.3%). The possible reason for this is that the Nigerian Library Association State Chapters and sections have created WhatsApp platforms for their members to share professional/work related knowledge/information. Such platforms are used by the members of executive to share information on activities, programmes, events etc of the Association. Members also share and react to information that of career nature in the platforms.

As a Social media platform, Whatsapp is increasingly being used as a great source for information sharing and receiving as it provides a good platform for interaction among people who belong to any setting in the society (Purkayastha & Chanda, 2018).

WhatsApp group the serves the entire library ranks second with 40(69%) respondents. Creating WhatsApp groups for knowledge/information sharing in the library has become the norm as it enables library management to pass official information to staff fast, easily and at any time. Such platform permits management and staff to share, react/contributed to knowledge/information that is shared.

The government-owned university library staff in Nigeria are members of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), the umbrella union of academic staff of universities in Nigeria. Every university has a branch of ASUU. The members of executive of each branch create a WhatsApp group which serves as knowledge/information sharing platform for members of the branch. A total of 29 (50%) of the respondents indicated that they are members of such WhatsApp group as

revealed in Table 5. This is also true of group created by colleagues.

As can be seen in Table 6, ICT ranked highest as work related area knowledge is shared through WhatsApp group platform. It has been noted by Seenaa and Pillaib (2014) that information and communication technologies (ICTs) offer libraries an opportunity to provide value-added information access and services to a wide variety of digital based information resources to their patrons. Librarians are working in a setting that is ICT driven. Virtually all the services rendered by librarians are ICT mediated, make it imperative for them keep current in ICT skills and applications. A veritable means of keeping updated in ICT development is through sharing of knowledge via work related WhatsApp platforms.

Job openings/vacancies ranked second with 36(62%) respondents followed by knowledge management with 31(53.4%).

Table 7 shows that ease of use/knowledge sharing attracted the highest response of 52(89.7%) as reason for using work related WhatsApp group. Whatsapp is easy to use because it concentrates on using an Interface which most users are familiar with and the major trick on it's good design is sticking to the design specifications of Android and iOS and not frequently changing its design; WhatsApp as one of the most used app all over the world introduces changes slowly and more with functionality so that people are not left without clues on what to do (Borkar, 2015).

Immediate feedback ranked second with 47(81%) respondents followed by speed of sharing knowledge 43(74.1%).

Multimedia files can be shared through WhatsApp. As can be seen in Table 8, the respondents share files of diverse formats. Videos attracted highest response of 49(84.5%) closely followed by text and audios with 48(82.8) each. It should be

pointed that some of the files shared are not self-originated but what were received from other contacts which are re-shared/forwarded.

The most outstanding drawback to knowledge sharing through work related group WhatsApp platform, indicated by 46(79.3%) of the respondents. In order to ensure decorum of WhatsApp groups, guidelines are set forth by group administrators. In most cases, such rules are debated by members and generally agreed upon by members. Sanctions are usually included in such guidelines for erring members of the group. In spite of the

guidelines and sanctions, some members of the group can inadvertently or deliberately post messages that are not permitted. This can spark spontaneous mixed reactions from other members especially when the post is from a member that incessantly brakes the rules.

There is usually avalanche of posts from members of active and heavily populated groups, which make it difficult for people to keep tract of knowledge shared. Thus 40(69%) of the respondents experience problem of inability to keep tract of knowledge shared due to increasing volume of posts.

Table 1: Libraries of the respondents

Library	Freq.	%
Federal University, Otuoke	8	13.8
Federal University of Petroleum Resources, Effurun	7	12.1
John Harris, University of Benin, Benin City	10	17.2
Kenneth Dike, University of Ibadan	24	41.4
University of PortHarcourt	9	15.5
Total	58	100

Table 2: Sex of the respondents

Sex	Freq.	%
Male	31	53.4
Female	25	43.1
No response	2	3.4
Total	58	100

Table 3: Qualifications of respondents

Qualification	Freq.	%
BLIS/BSc	11	19.0
MLIS/MSc	35	60.3
PhD	9	15.5
No response	3	5.2
Total	58	100

Table 4: Work experience of respondents

Work experience	Freq.	%
5years and below	10	17.2
6-10 years	13	22.4
11-15 years	14	24.1
16-20 years	6	10.3
Above 20 years	13	22.4
No response	2	3.4
Total	58	100

Table 5: Types of work related WhatsApp groups respondents currently belong to

Work related WhatsApp groups	Freq.	%
Professional association group	46	79.3
Staff union group	29	50.0
Institution wide group	13	22.4
Main library group/group that serves the entire library	40	69.0
Library unit/section/division group	19	32.8
Group created by colleagues	29	50.0
Self-created group	15	25.9
Task/project (group created for particular work activity {e.g. committee, etc.})	4	6.9

Table 6: Work related areas knowledge is shared via the WhatsApp groups

Areas knowledge is shared	Freq.	%
Administration	28	48.3
ICT	38	65.5
Acquisition	26	44.8
Cataloguing	20	34.5
Circulation	16	27.6
Reference	23	39.7
Continuing professional development, e.g. conferences, seminars, workshop, formal education, etc.	19	32.8
Reprography	13	22.4
Knowledge management	31	53.4
Preservation and conservation	19	32.8
Research/publication	31	53.4
Job openings/vacancies	36	62.1
Promotion/advancement	26	44.8

Table 7: Reasons for using work related WhatsApp groups

Reasons	Freq.	%
Enables me to share knowledge with wide audience	42	72.4
Immediate feedback	47	81
Available always	40	69
Ease of use/ knowledge sharing	52	89.7
Speed of knowledge sharing	43	74.1
Permits one to send/share knowledge/information of large size	34	58.6
Permits work/research cooperation and collaboration	32	55.2
Opportunity to re-share knowledge/files	30	51.7

Table 8: Format through which knowledge is shared via group WhatsApp

Format	Freq.	%
Text	48	82.8
Pictures/photos	19	32.8
Audios	48	82.8
Videos	49	84.5
Animated gifs	23	39.7
Word doc.	38	65.5
Pdf	39	67.2
Spreadsheets	15	25.9
Zip	8	13.8

Table 9: Drawbacks to sharing of knowledge via work related WhatsApp groups

Drawbacks	Freq.	%
Abrupt/frequent change/disruption of subjects	32	55.2
Occasional negative responses/contradictory opinions to knowledge shared	35	60.3
Inability to keep track of knowledge being shared by group members because of increasing volume of posts	40	69.0
Non-adherence to group guidelines by some members	46	79.3
Obsession to the group WhatsApp	33	56.9
Not able to be connected all the time because cost of data	42	72.4
Not able to have control over membership of the group except one is the administrator	34	58.6
Limited number of members permitted in a group	24	41.4

Conclusion

Universities and their libraries are knowledge creation, management and utilization institutions and therefore knowledge driven. Thus, librarians in university libraries work in knowledge settings that facilitate users' access to knowledge in diverse fields. Librarians are continually expected to engage in knowledge sharing not only with patrons but among themselves. In this technologically driven era, there is proliferation of WhatsApp groups which have been adopted as knowledge sharing platforms. Various work related WhatsApp groups are used as platforms for knowledge sharing among librarians in selected federal universities in Nigeria due to their ease of use, immediate feedback, opportunity to reach wide audience among other reasons; though non-adherence to guidelines by some members, inability to keep track of knowledge shared due to increasing volume of posts among others were indicated as drawbacks to sharing of knowledge via work related WhatsApp groups.

The following are recommended in the light of the results of this study:

1. To ensure decorum in work related WhatsApp group, members should make every effort to adhere to guidelines. Administrators should ensure that the rules are posted from time to time so as to acquaint members with the guidelines to minimize the incidence of non-adherence to the guiding rules.
2. In order to keep track of increasing numbers of knowledge shared, members should regularly visit the WhatsApp platforms to read posts.
3. WhatsApp should increase the group contacts' limit from the current 256 to over 1000 members. This will enable institutions, associations etc with large membership to be able to

add all the contacts of their members.

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Esharenana E. Adomi and Blessing Solomon-Uwakwe: Work related WhatsApp groups as knowledge sharing platforms among librarians in selected federal universities in Nigerian

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About the authors

Esharenana E. Adomi is a Professor and current University Librarian of the Federal University of Petroleum Resources, Effurun, Nigeria. He holds BEd. and MLS from University of Ibadan; MEd. And PhD from Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria. He had twice served as Head, Department of Library and Information Science, Delta State University, Abraka; served as Secretary, Nigerian Library Association (NLA), Delta State Chapter, 2000 – 2004; Chairman,

NLA, Delta State Chapter, 2008 – 2012. He has over 80 publications (which include papers in reputable national and international journals, authored textbooks, chapters in books, edited textbooks and reference materials). He is editor of journals and on editorial boards of several national and international journals. He can be contacted via e-mail: esharenana.adomi@fu-pre.edu.ng; esharenana.adomi@gmail.com; cell: +234 803 236 9560.

Dr Blessing Solomon-Uwakwe is a Senior Librarian at Imo State University Library, Owerri, Nigeria. She attended Federal Polytechnic, Nekede, Owerri and Imo State University, Owerri. She holds HND in Library and Information Science, Post Graduate Diploma in Education, MLS and PhD in Library and Information Science. She is a certified librarian, a member of the Nigerian library Association and International Federation of Library Associations and currently the Reader's Services Librarian in the University Library. Her areas research lie in library management and information and communication technology. She can be contacted via: e-mail: ihechisol@yahoo.com; cell: +2348063905005