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Challenges and Opportunities of Managing Social Media Generated Records in Institutions of Learning: A case of the Midlands State University, Zimbabwe

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Abstract. The management of institutions of learning largely depends on the way their records are managed. Social media use and management of records created on social media is a subject that has raised a number of issues that require academic research to focus on. It has become inevitable for organizations and institutions of learning to embrace the use of several social media platforms in their conduct of business. The paper explores how the Midlands State University (MSU) in Zimbabwe has embraced the use of social media in the conduct of official business and how this has affected teaching and learning. The study employed a case study approach that used questionnaires and semi structured and structured interview questions. This research views social media generated records as records which must be managed well as they are part and parcel of the institution's assets and that if they are not properly managed this affects the provision of education. The paper is informed by the continuum concept. The objectives of the study were to identify the social media platforms used at the Midlands State University, challenges and opportunities brought in by social media as a learning platform as well as a communication platform. The study also aimed to develop a model that can be used to integrate social media generated records into the main records management system since such integration is key to the proper management of institutions of higher learning.

Keywords: social media, records management, Midlands State University

1 Introduction

Records are a vital tool that is used in the management of institutions of educational institutions. There has been an increase in the use of social media records for official business transactions in institutions of higher learning and other organizations in Zimbabwe. Apart from MSU, Social media is also used in other state universities such as Chinhoyi University of Technology (www.cut.ac.zw), University of Zimbabwe (www.uz.ac.zw) Great Zimbabwe University (www.gzu.ac.zw) Bindura University of Science Education (www.buse.ac.zw) and Zimbabwe Open University

(www.zou.ac.zw) among others. Teachers colleges and polytechnics have also adopted the use of social media generated records to communicate with their stakeholders as well disseminate study material to students. This has gone a long way in changing the way institutions conduct teaching and learning as well as the way they do business and socializing. Mavengere and Ruohonen [15] state, "Technology use in the tertiary education sector is of immense importance for educational development in Africa". In Zimbabwe social media use has been adopted as part and parcel of this drive to use technology for both academic and social use. The use of social media has come with challenges particularly in the area of the records management. These challenges include identification of authorship, control of data on social media, appraisal of these records as well the capture of content from social media records into records management systems.

The Midlands State University is one of the 13 state universities in Zimbabwe. It was established by the Midlands State University Act in 1999. The Midlands State University (MSU) has nine faculties, namely Arts, Education, Law, Commerce, Natural Resources Management and Agriculture, Social Sciences, Mining and Mineral Processing Engineering, Medicine and Science and Technology. These faculties use social media generated records in one way or another in the conduct of business. The use of social media records for doing official business at the Midlands State University is a relatively new development for example Facebook was first used at Midlands State University for doing official business in 2013. WhatsApp, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram were first used for official business in 2014 by the Midlands State University. Prior to the adoption of the use of social media, Midlands State University had been creating both paper and electronic records in its conduct of business. These records were and still continue to be managed using a hybrid records management system. This is a system in which some records are kept in their paper form while others are kept in the electronic form. Nakpodia [17] describes a hybrid records management system as one that makes use of records in both electronic and paper form.

In his speech at a Results Based Management workshop at Kadoma Ranch Motel from 19-21 December 2018, the Vice Chancellor of MSU indicated that there are challenges with regard the way the university is communicating on social media. The Herald of 3 January 2019 carried a story titled "MSU dismisses fees hike story" In this article the institution emphasised that what had circulated on social media regarding an increase in fees was not true. The Registrar commented, "The institution has its channels of communication which include its website, social media platforms and mainstream media"(Herald 3 January 2018). On 17 January 2018 the MSU Registrar released a statement to refute social media reports that claimed that MSU had failed to pay for licences of Turnitin, an anti-plagiarism software that is used to check plagiarism in students assignments and projects (Herald 17 January 2018). The use of social media in institutions of learning has grown tremendously and such records created on these platforms need to be managed well as there are key to the smooth running of these institutions.

2 Theoretical Background

This study is influenced by the continuum theory developed in 1990 by Frank Upward. It states that record keeping processes should be put in place before the records are created. This is to say record keeping requirements such as policies, systems, processes, social mandates and laws should be put in place first before records are created. The continuum concept is also based on the idea that records are not only created to serve the interests of future archivists or historians but they are created to serve immediate operational needs [1,2]. Shepherd and Yeo [20] also state that Archivists and Records Managers need to be involved together with Information Systems Designers in the creation of records keeping systems. Social media has of late been used as a means to deliver educational content. In as much as social media is indeed transforming education delivery and reshaping learning and teaching activities we cannot ignore the need to capture properly records created, used and maintained on social media platforms. This can effectively be done if learning institutions employ the use of the continuum concept in managing such records. The records continuum model encourages a participatory nature starting from the design phase whereby Archivists, Records Managers and Systems Designers all take part in the designing of the system that manages records from creation to disposition. This implies that the records that are created on social media platforms can be prospered managed if there is collaboration between record managers and archivists. Such well managed records positively impact the way learning institutions are managed. Thus the continuum theory was relevant to this study in that it appreciates the need to properly manage records from creation to disposal. Kemoni [12] observed that the continuum model is widely accepted for managing records both in paper and electronic form. The model is relevant to the study in the sense that it appreciates records starting from their creation up to disposal. It also becomes very relevant in that social media records are created in the electronic format and as such they can be managed using the continuum model.

3 Methodology

Through a case study of the Midlands State University, the study employed a qualitative methodology with an interpretivist paradigm to do an in depth analysis of the challenges and opportunities that are faced in the management of social media generated records and how this impacts on the management of institutions of learning. A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.

The design helped the researchers to have a clear picture on how the MSU staff, students and other stakeholders perceive their experience regarding the use of social media and how it impacts on the principles of records management. The researchers employed the use questionnaires and interviews to obtain information from the informants.

The study targeted a total of 50 participants comprising of staff members and students. Forty of these are people who are employed by the Midlands State University and they generate and use social media records in their day to day activities. Ten students were also part of the sample as they are in some cases consumers of the material posted on social media platforms.

3.1 Interviews

The researchers used both structured and unstructured interviews to solicit information from the entire population. According to Cohen et al [5] interviewing is “a valuable method for exploring the construction and negotiation of meanings in a natural setting”. Interviews are a relevant instrument in qualitative research. Structured and semi structured interview questions were used to get information from key informants such as Faculty Administrators, records clerks and managers and lecturers. Interviews enabled the researchers to get firsthand information from both students and staff members that create and use social media records.

3.2 Questionnaires

The research used questionnaires to examine the challenges that users and creators of social media records at MSU face. The researchers distributed 30 questionnaires to staff members who work closely with social media records. Members were purposively selected. 10 questionnaires were distributed to students who were randomly selected as they came to register for the new semester.

4 Results

4.1 Social media platforms used at MSU

This research revealed that there are several media platforms that are used at MSU for both personal and official university business. Questionnaire respondents (staff) were asked which social media platform they used the most to do official university business and the results are shown in the table 1 below:

Table 1. Social Media usage at MSU

Type of social media platform	Frequency	Percentage
Facebook	4	13.3
WhatsApp	20	66.7
Twitter	2	6.7
YouTube	3	10
Instagram	1	3.3

4.2 Challenges of managing social media records

There are many challenges that are associated with the use of social media generated records. This study revealed that MSU has faced the following challenges in creating, using and managing social media generated records:

Lack of policy regulating creation, use and maintenance of social media records

Records should be managed according to authorised policies. Mulati and Wasike [18] posit, “A policy is a governing principle, plan or course of action which guides the operation of a given entity” A Records management policy can also be described as an authoritative statement of intent to manage records in an appropriate and suitable manner for as long as they are required for business purposes. Existing records management laws (especially in Zimbabwe) do not accommodate social media records. In the absence of such recognition, social media records may be deleted before their time or permanently retained unnecessarily. In Zimbabwe there is no University that has a social media policy that addresses the way social media generated records should be managed. Even though The Midlands State University has a records Management policy, it does not explicitly cater for social media generated records and this has created problems in the way such records are managed. Many scholars have emphasized on the importance of a comprehensive records management policy. Kabata advances that most organisations do not take the management of social media records seriously as they take a sweeping approach to the management of their records. The absence of a social media policy at MSU is evidence that what Kabata claims is common in most institutions. Latham [14] emphasizes the need for a policy that regulates the management of records including digital records. He argues that a records management policy is essential in the management of institutional records in that it spells out what should and what should not be done. It is intended to form the initial framework or principles which express how records should be managed within the organization. It is therefore essential that the creation, management and disposal of records at MSU be guided by policy. This will make it easy for the integration of social media generated records to be integrated into the main hybrid system. This is in line with ISO 15489-1 (2016) which states that managing records should encompass taking appropriate effort to protect their authenticity, reliability, integrity and usability ISO 15489-1 (2016). Ihejirika et.al [23] posit that in some institutions social media is used in the promotion of academic material and content such as library material. This paper argues that if MSU wants to do the same this has to be guided by policy.

Anecdotal evidence used in this study revealed that the absence of policies that regulate the use of social media generated information has made it very difficult for the Midlands State University to manage the records generated from such platforms. 97% of administrators interviewed admitted that they were using social media in the conduct of official university business but they were not being guided by any policy.

The study revealed that there is great use of social media platforms outside business hours and in most cases use their personal social media accounts to do university business. This has resulted in confusion as there are multiple

communication channels which do not usually address an issue in the same way. Various stakeholders have been given different versions of the same issue thereby creating confusion.

While the University is run by a committee system, there is no committee dedicated to the management of social media generated information. There is however a Website committee but its duties are only restricted to what appears on the official MSU website (www.msu.ac.zw) This absence of a committee to regulate the use of social media has resulted in a number of challenges as officers have posted and removed post about the institution as they wish. The responsibility to post and remove items on Facebook, twitter and WhatsApp is left in the hands of two officers who work in the Information and Publicity Office. When asked how they chose what to post on social media platforms they indicated that they used their discretion to select what to post. This has an impact on the way such institutions conduct their business and the way such issues affect stakeholders such as students.

What constitutes a social media record?

Results from this study indicated that it is difficult to identify what constitutes a record on social media platforms. The situation is worsened by the rate of accumulation of social media records. The accumulation rate is very rapid such that organizations may be unable to identify the elements that constitute an authentic record like content, context, structure and associated metadata. This problem was found to very common at all the MSU campuses by this study. ISO 15489-2016 describes a record as information created, received and maintained as evidence and as an asset by an organization or person, in pursuit of legal obligations or in the transaction of business. So while there is confusion among users on what is a record, it must be noted that the ISO 15489-(2016) definition qualifies social media information to be records. It is therefore necessary for institutions to note that what they create on social media qualify to be defined as records and as such these records can be used as evidence of a transaction or conversation. Duranti [6] argued, “We consider a record to be a document made or received in the course of activity. As it takes part in some action, it is seen as evidence of it, that is, as its mirror and proof. The value of such evidence, in terms of validity and weight, depends on the RELIABILITY of the record. A record is considered reliable when it can be treated as a fact in itself, that is, as the entity of which it is evidence”.

Ownership and Control of Social Media Data

The study revealed that it is not clear as to who owns information that is on social media. The information generated on social media is usually managed by third parties and the organization or individuals who use or create it may not have total control on such records. These third parties usually have too much influence on how the information is created, circulated or kept. They may choose to terminate their services and users have no control over that. The host company may choose to use the information for purposes other than that which the creators intended to use it for. This

is possible because most social media platforms provide a generic “terms of service” agreement for all customers.

The researchers also found out that records created through the use of social media tools residing on third-party servers pose serious challenges such as proprietary file formats, tools to capture information, frequency of capture, questions regarding the boundaries of a record, and concerns over the ability to maintain the ‘context’ of the record. Social media has contributed in the creation of records that are born digital. Digital creation has allowed organizations to create records and provide information in a variety of new formats, but has also presented challenges to recordkeeping processes. The variety of applications and platforms used to create, transmit, and store records may complicate how organizations manage, retain, and retrieve their records because it is not certain, for example whether the devices and applications organizations currently use to create and retain digital records will be viable over long periods of time and ensure enduring access to information.

Lack of technical skills to manage social media generated records

Another challenge with regards the use of social media records is to do with technical skills to manage such records. People who manage such records require constant training so that they are better able to capture, manage and preserve them to ensure long-term access to such records. Out of the 10 Staff members interviewed at MSU, only 2 (20%) had technical skills to manage social media generated records. The rest indicated that they only used social media and were not able to capture and preserve content. (80%). This has an impact on the way the institution manages its social media records in that most of the valuable records that are created on social media platforms end up being mismanaged due to lack of technical skills to capture and preserve social media content.

90 % of questionnaire respondents indicated that they were not aware of any technical courses that they could undertake to ensure the proper management of records generated on social media. This is an indication that a lot needs to be done in the area of capacitating members of staff at the Midlands state university so that they can be able to manage social media generated records well.

Confidentiality

The confidentiality of records held by an institution or its employees is of paramount importance for as long as such records influence decision making within the institution. Social media compromises confidentiality. Information shared on most social media platforms contain personally identifiable information that includes work locations, employment information, education, hobbies and photos. In the traditional records management context such information ought to be managed properly to ensure appropriate confidentiality. However, with social media platforms such confidentiality is not always certain as it is possible to harvest information even in instances whereby particular organizations are not responsible for creation. This is compounded by the fact that most social media platforms are collaborative in the sense that a post on Facebook may contain links from YouTube. This presents challenges during capture if the techniques used to capture these records cannot

encapsulate the whole record, [9,13] 90 % of interviewed people admitted that they were aware that the use of social media such as Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp among others was not very safe as confidential information can be shared in social media groups and thereby compromising the confidentiality of such information.

Capture of social media Content

The capturing of the content of records that have been created by any organization is of paramount importance. Records are dependent upon the availability of the contextual information which confirms their relationship to administrative and operational activities (World Bank 2004). For that reason, it is necessary to make sure that the content of all records is captured correctly. Capturing records created by social media is one of the most paramount activities that record creators, managers and archivists should be able to do professionally. NARA posits, "Social media content capture is an emerging topic that has not consolidated around standards for capture" ISO 15489 stresses that managing records encompasses creating and capturing records to meet requirements for evidence of business activity. It also involves taking appropriate action to protect their authenticity, reliability, integrity and usability as their business context and requirements for their management change over time.

This means that as records are generated through the social media platforms it is necessary to capture their content. This is not an easy task as it involves a lot of work and commitment. Kaplan [11] argues that the retention of social media records can be very difficult, especially those that are frequently updated. In order to possess the necessary characteristics of public records, records must be captured or filed in the official recordkeeping system. The Midlands State University does not have clear strategy on how they will capture information emanating from social media. Records are created used and disposed without capturing their content for posterity. Capturing the correct content of social media records is essential in the management of institutions of learning as it enhances transparency and accountability.

Authenticity of social media records

Authentic records are the cornerstone of sound management of institutions of learning. A record must have basically four characteristics which are content, form, context and structure [20] it is when a record has these characteristics that it can be said to be authentic. This is quite important in that if the authenticity of a document is doubtful then it may not need to be integrated into a records management system. Rogers posits, "The assessment and protection of the authenticity of digital records and data are recognized as fundamental issues for the records' current use as well as for their long term preservation and dissemination." The idea of record authenticity is codified in ISO 15489-1:2016, the international records management standard as follows: "An authentic record is one that can be proven to be what it purports to be, to have been created or sent by the person purported to have created or sent it, and to have been created or sent at the time purported".

Durant [6] gives a detailed explanation of what record authenticity is by stating:

Legally authentic documents are those which bear witness on their own because of the intervention, during or after their creation, of a representative of a public authority guaranteeing their genuineness. Diplomatically authentic documents are those which were written according to the practice of the time and place indicated in the text and signed with the name(s) of the person(s) competent to create them. One factor that has proved very problematic at MSU and many other institutions regarding the authenticity of digital records is that they are vulnerable to unauthorized or inadvertent change and loss.

Some institutions have adopted the use of digital signatures to protect the authenticity and integrity of electronic documents. The use of digital signatures ICA Committee on Archival Legal Matters summed up the importance of authentic records by stating that authentic documents are “reliable not only at the moment when they are created but remain reliable for a long time to come”.

Several media generated records about the Midlands State University have been circulated on WhatsApp. The authenticity of some of the circulated documents is questionable as in most cases one can end up with several versions of the same story. The 2018 MSU graduation ceremony was ‘postponed’ several times in social media platforms. This resulted in confusion as to which date was the correct graduation date. Research also indicated that some students circulated fake news or fake notices on some social media groups claiming that lecturers had cancelled lectures.

Appraisal of social media records

Social media records, like any other records should be appraised Miller and Roper [16] define appraisal as “the process of determining the value of records for further use, for whatever purposes and the length of time for which that value will continue”. In an attempt to explain appraisal, Yiotis explains that, “Appraisal is done in order to determine which institutional activities create records that provide a true image of society”. The inability to appraise social media records results in misguided decisions by the institution. Appraisal has posed many challenges to records managers and archivists. In most cases when there are various versions of a document or record, it can be difficult to know the authentic version. This poses problems and makes it extremely difficult to integrate such records. This problem is compounded by the fact that most institutions have no control as to who posts on social media and when can information be posted. This has resulted in many versions of the same story being posted and commented on official sites. Thus to a larger extent one can argue that the use of traditional methods in the appraisal of records needs some revisiting in order to take into account changing contexts and formats in which these records are formed.

Lack of appropriate gadgets to access social media platforms

The adoption of the use of social media records by officials in the Midlands State University such as lecturers and administrators has been done on the assumption that all the students have a gadget that connects to the internet and can support social media platforms. Lecturers have posted learning material and assignment questions on social media yet 33% of the interviewed students indicated that they had challenges accessing such information as they did not have the appropriate gadgets such as smartphones and laptops. With 72% of Zimbabweans being said to be living in poverty smartphones are one of the luxuries that most students go without and such the use of social media for activities such as lesson delivery can turn out to be disastrous.

5 Opportunities for Midlands State University Presented by the Use of Social Media Records

In spite of the various challenges that are associated with the use of social media there are also a number of opportunities which come with the adoption of social media. In the case of Midlands State University which has adopted a multi campus system social media has enhanced quick information sharing across campuses and affiliate colleges. Social media has also allowed easy communication with stakeholders and potential stakeholders of the university allowing fast and easy dissemination of information with the same effect as mass media or even better. This has enabled the university to frequently update its stakeholders of the various developments taking place in the university in an endeavour to maintain transparency and accountability which is enshrined in its mission statement. Compared to mass media such as radio and television the use of social media is far more affordable and quick.

The core business of Midlands State University is teaching and learning and in this regard the adoption of social media has allowed lecturers to constantly communicate with their students updating them of any developments and distribute learning material. This at least decreases the chances of students being surprised by impromptu lectures and in-class examinations or tests. 90% of the lecturers interviewed indicated that they had used social media in one way or another. Some interviewees explained how convenient social media platforms were in terms of knowledge sharing amongst themselves as professionals and also in some cases between themselves and the students. Social media has also allowed the university's students to be able to share information amongst themselves and keeping abreast with the latest findings and researches in their field of study. Students can organise group discussions arrange researches and communicate findings on social media platforms.

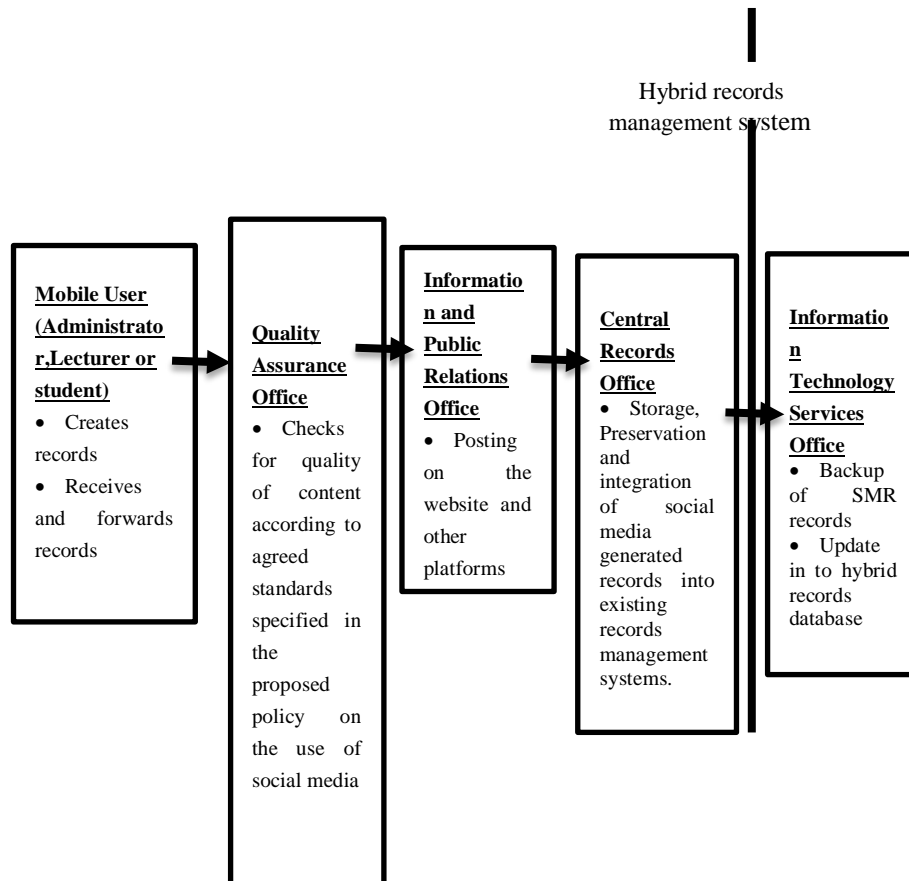


Fig. 1. Social Media Records integration Model

The above model proposes that MSU employees and in some isolated cases students using social media records to do official business should do it in a manner that is regulated as shown by the model. The model will operate well if there is a social media policy that regulates the way social media generated records are created, used and disposed. Vuori [22] argues that social media has the potential to give institutions competitive advantage over those that may not use it.

6 Conclusion

This study has shown that the Midlands state university has adopted the use of social media in the various business activities. The use of social media has been done without following any policy and as such the records created out of such transactions have not been properly integrated into the main records management systems. Apart

from the challenges that have been discussed in this paper, MSU can take advantages of opportunities that exist in the field of social media and gain competitive advantage through taking advantage of the fact that social media has reduced the world into one global village and as such knowledge sharing has been enhanced. However, the use of social media needs to be done in line with policies. MSU can also take advantage of the fact that social media has been widely accepted by user within and outside the university as 'official' communication platforms and utilise the model that the researchers developed to be used as a model to integrate social media generated records.

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