

# Engagement and Estrangement: How Teachers Navigate Connection and Boundaries in the Digital Space

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## ABSTRACT

Given the growing popularity of social media for information sharing, this study was based on a thesis to determine the obstacles teachers and teacher-librarians face when disseminating knowledge through school libraries. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study gathered data from fifty-three teachers through surveys and conducted interviews with two teacher-librarians to gain their perspectives. SPSS was used in analysing quantitative data, while Atlas. Ti was used to analyse qualitative data. The findings indicated that teachers and teacher-librarians encounter difficulties using social media for knowledge exchange. These included intermittent internet connection, incompetence, challenges with editing, expensive internet data plans, network issues, a deficiency of computers, power outages, copyright concerns with e-books, and a lack of social media expertise. The study suggests that further research is needed to investigate the integration of social media for knowledge sharing.

**Keywords:** social media, school libraries, Zimbabwe, teacher-librarians, teachers, knowledge sharing

## INTRODUCTION

### Social media integration in school libraries

Academics have endeavoured to define social media. According to Kapoor et al. (2017), social media refers to a range of user-driven platforms that enable the dissemination of engaging content, facilitate dialogue, and facilitate communication with a broader audience. These platforms allow unrestricted user interaction, information sharing, and discussion using a multimodal blend of voice, images, video, and text. Teachers and teacher-librarians are increasingly using social media in high schools, taking advantage of its ability to disseminate knowledge. Aydogmus, Tut, and Karadag (2023) revealed that educators can engage with students on social media to exchange information, share experiences and pursue other educational goals. Educators can use social media to build student relationships and exchange information and experiences. Sivakumar, Jahasingh and Shaik (2023) assert that social media can foster information exchange and boost students' motivation and output.

Despite social media's ability to augment the academic value of school libraries, teachers and teacher-librarians encounter several difficulties while attempting to use social media for knowledge exchange in libraries. Research by Mabweazara and Zinn (2016) reveals that even highly strategic academics have trouble leveraging social media to share knowledge in their libraries. According to Zanamwe, Rupere and Kufandirimbwa (2013), a substantial amount of information has been written about using social networking sites. Only very little research has been carried out in underdeveloped countries, and none of them prioritised the problems related to social media. Chiparausha, Onyancha and Ezema (2022) indicated that social media helps librarians do their jobs better. However, Sonawane and Patil (2015) highlight that using social media in libraries presents several difficulties. Kumar and Kumar (2025) noted that the obstacles involve inadequate training for library staff, the absence of effective strategic planning, and minimal institutional backing to maintain long-term social media involvement.

Nevertheless, Magoi, Aspura and Abrizah (2019) point out that not much research has been done on the difficulties that librarians in underdeveloped nations, including Zimbabwe, face when utilising social media.

"Minimum research has focused on the specific obstacles school librarians face in integrating social media tools into teaching and learning," according to Jeffrey and Weeks (2013:2). This study filled a vacuum by examining the difficulties that teachers and teacher-librarians in Zimbabwe had when utilising social media to spread knowledge in secondary schools.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Social media platforms are useful for teachers and teacher-librarians to exchange materials with students. They can also be used to reach students and other people quickly by simply clicking a button. However, there are obstacles in the way, and these will be covered in the literature review that follows. The challenges will be grouped into three major groups, which are technology, organisation and environment.

Technology, organisation and environment are the main components that bind the TOE theory, Technology Organisation Environment (TOE) model, designed by Oliveira and Martins (2010). The components were used to check if there are any challenges faced by teachers and teacher-librarians in the use of social media for sharing.

### Technology

Technology refers to its characteristics, including its functionality, complexity, compatibility with existing systems, and ease of use. Technology deals with the technology being implemented, the functionality of the technology and ease of use. According to research, teacher-librarians' ability to share knowledge can be hampered by a lack of skills. Williams et al. (2023) found that despite the usefulness of social media in libraries, librarians lack the skills and confidence for effective engagement strategies. According to Shava and Chinyamurindi (2018), some academic librarians lack the abilities necessary to interact with students on social media. Arif and Mahmood (2012) discovered that academic librarians in Pakistan were not computer literate and had limited social media proficiency. On the other hand, Ternenge and Agipu (2019) aver that librarians should receive competent social media usage training.

### Organisation

This is another challenge faced by teachers and teacher-librarians in sharing knowledge. Organisational factors comprise the size of the organisation, its structure, culture, and resources in which the technology is used. Organisation refers to organisational issues in which the technology is used, such as the size of the organisation, structure and the availability of resources. The use of social media for knowledge sharing in secondary school libraries is hampered by a lack of policies. According to research, many libraries lack explicit policies on the use of social media in secondary school libraries. Adu-Marfo, Asamoah, Aryeh-Adjei, and Miller-Young (2024) found that restrictive school policies limit the effective use of social media tools such as WhatsApp for teaching. These policies stipulate that learners may face punishment for using technology during school hours, and students are only allowed to use their phones with explicit teacher permission, which ultimately restricts their ability to fully benefit from social media platforms. According to Mabwezara and Zinn (2016) and Maisiri et al. (2015), many academic libraries in South Africa and Zimbabwe lack explicit policies for the social media implementation stage. While librarians may be prepared to utilise social media for service delivery, it is vital to have a social media policy to guide the usage thereof, according to Chiparousha et al. (2022), who advocate for significant social media policies in academic libraries.

Studies have unearthed a deficiency in institutional backing for the utilisation of social media platforms for information dissemination. According to some research (Adewojo and Mayowa-Adebra, 2016; Williams, 2020; Osinulu et al., 2018), a lack of managerial support is to blame for academic libraries' reduced uptake of social media.

### Environmental

These are external factors in which the organisation operates, with factors such as market conditions and regulatory requirements. The environmental factor of power cuts is another issue that can hinder teachers' and teacher-librarians' use of social media to share knowledge, such as power outages. On the other hand, the environment refers to the external factors in which the organisation operates, such as market conditions,

regulations, and social and cultural norms. Sonawane and Patil (2015) claim that people are deterred from engaging in online communities like social media by power outages. Agyekum et al. (2016) buttress this by finding that using social media is hampered by an unreliable power source. Lack of electricity to connect devices can impede social media knowledge sharing. Agyekum et al. (2016) also suggest that an unpredictable power supply may be the reason for low social media usage.

In addition to being unpredictable, internet data bundles can be costly, which presents a problem for teachers and teacher-librarians when it comes to information sharing. The cost of data can also have an impact on knowledge sharing through social media. According to Kaur and Manhas (2018), one of the main obstacles to knowledge sharing is the high cost of data, particularly in developing nations. Further, Dlamini and Mngwengwe (2020) reveal that one of the primary factors influencing Zululand University students' decision to select WhatsApp over other social media platforms is the app's inexpensive data plan. However, Nkomo (2022) finds that some students claimed data packages for Facebook and WhatsApp were less expensive since some schools require students to carry their own devices or do not permit them to use the school's Wi-Fi to access their social media accounts.

Since social media platforms rely on the internet, numerous internet-related issues impede the dissemination of knowledge through social media. Research findings have indicated that certain students face difficulties due to unstable internet connections. According to Agyekum et al. (2016), poor internet access or network issues are factors in why social media is not used in academic libraries. According to Chiparaushe et al. (2022), social media use is hampered in underdeveloped nations like Zimbabwe by sluggish internet connections. Williams et al. (2019) and Chitumbo and Chewa (2015) support the idea that inadequate internet networks affect the use of social media. Sonawane and Patil (2015) indicate a bandwidth problem in libraries where most institutions have limited bandwidth to support social media services. However, the Education Trust (2022) indicate that access to technology is influenced by socioeconomic factors, which can also lead to the digital divide, thereby affecting information sharing.

### Statement of the problem

Undoubtedly, social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram have become important tools in high schools for sharing knowledge because of their affordability, speed and convenience. The main reason for the proliferation in the use of social media is its speed, affordability and availability. Teachers and teacher-librarians use these platforms for sharing knowledge. Asterhan and Bouton (2017) indicate that the use of social media for sharing knowledge is now common in secondary schools, while Anderson (2019) reveals that the introduction of technologies is associated with some challenges. Despite social media being useful in sharing knowledge, some challenges might affect the sharing of knowledge using social media, especially among teachers and teacher-librarians in high schools. Chisango and Marongwe (2021) reported that school principals in Gauteng expressed concerns over students' limited ICT competencies, lack of Wi-Fi access, inability to afford data, and persistent connectivity challenges, all of which restrict the effective integration of ICT in teaching.

According to Otchie and Pedaste (2020:1), "most of the studies published on social media in education have focused on higher education (colleges and universities) with a relatively small body of literature on secondary education." Further, Magoi et al. (2019) claim that it is a new area of study, and very few studies have been conducted on the usefulness of social media and the challenges associated with using social media in academic libraries in developing countries. Therefore, the study exposes the challenges that teachers and teacher-librarians face in using social media to share knowledge in Zimbabwean secondary school libraries.

### Objectives

- I. To find out the social media platforms teachers and librarians use to share knowledge.
- II. To find out the challenges faced by teachers and teacher-librarians in sharing knowledge through social media.
- III. To unravel differences in the challenges faced by teachers and teacher-librarians in sharing knowledge through social media.

IV. To determine the strategies that can mitigate the challenges faced by teachers and teacher-librarians

## METHODOLOGY

This study used a cross-sectional mixed-methods survey to provide a thorough contextual analysis of the knowledge-sharing practices of social media in Zimbabwean secondary school libraries. A cross-sectional survey is described by Ployhart and Vandenberg (2010) as a study in which exposures and study results are observed or evaluated concurrently. Every time, the cross-sectional research design offered a momentary view of the results and the attributes of the schools that were the subject of the investigation. The two private schools which were under study are located in the same region, and flexible data collection via a survey approach was made possible in this study, where data were gathered using a cross-sectional method. Since teachers provided the data for this study, the information gathered only represented the actors in social media education as they interacted during that time. The target population consisted of eighty-two teachers and two teacher-librarians from two schools, which were Association of Trust Schools (ATS)-registered secondary schools in Zimbabwe. Only two teacher-librarians and fifty-three teachers participated in the study.

Regarding the respondents' gender, 67.9% were male, while 30.2% were female. The findings from the respondents indicated that the majority (92.4%) of teachers had access to the internet, whilst both participants also had access to the internet. Both participants were male and had a library science qualification.

The ethical clearance, which was used for collecting data, was issued on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of June 2021 by UNISA with certificate number 43425437\_\_CREC\_CHS\_2021. The participants and respondents voluntarily participated in the study. The researcher acquired permission to collect data from the schools from the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education in Zimbabwe.

## THE FINDINGS

The section below presents the research findings.

### Social media platforms that teachers and librarians use to share knowledge

As already indicated above, the study employed the TOE theory. The TOE framework is paramount in the assimilation of technologies in an organisation. Of the 50 respondents, 41 (82%) said they mostly utilised YouTube as a social media tool for learning. Additionally, 30 (60%) respondents said they used WhatsApp to learn. Five (10%) respondents said they utilised Twitter, while thirteen (26%) said they used Facebook for educational purposes. Similarly, five (10%) respondents said they utilised Instagram for learning. Four (8%) respondents used Snapchat, another social media platform. Of the responders, three (6%) revealed that they used TikTok for learning. Out of the total respondents, two (4%) said they utilised Skype for learning. Fuse is a school social networking platform, and only one (2%) responder said they utilised it for educational purposes.

The researcher also cross-examined the ease with which social media platforms were accessed; of the fifty individuals who reported using social media, twenty-four (48%) said YouTube was an easy-to-use tool. Only 10 (20%) of the respondents indicated that WhatsApp is a user-friendly social media network, while another 16 (32%) said Facebook was.

### Challenges faced by teachers in sharing knowledge through social media.

The study sought to find out the challenges that are faced by teachers and teacher-librarians in sharing knowledge using social media. A closed question was used to generate data. Table 1 below indicates the findings.

**Table 1: Challenges faced by teachers using social media for sharing knowledge (n=53)**

|       |     | Frequency | Percent | Valid percent | Cumulative percent |
|-------|-----|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | Yes | 33        | 62.3    | 66.0          | 66.0               |

|              |       |           |              |       |       |
|--------------|-------|-----------|--------------|-------|-------|
|              | No    | 17        | 32.1         | 34.0  | 100.0 |
|              | Total | 50        | 94.3         | 100.0 |       |
| No           | Reply | 3         | 5.7          |       |       |
| <b>Total</b> |       | <b>53</b> | <b>100.0</b> |       |       |

The findings reveal that 33 (62.3%) of the 53 respondents reported having trouble sharing knowledge on social media. However, 17 (32%) of the participants stated that they had no difficulties utilising social media. Three (5.7%) of the respondents chose not to answer the query.

The researcher found that thirty-three respondents (62.3%) had challenges. Table 1 revealed that these challenges ranged from bad connectivity from internet service providers, as reported by 4 (12.1%) out of thirty-three respondents. The findings indicated that some of the challenges emanated from the technology component of the TOE, since 12.1% of the teachers had challenges with uploading information on social media. Further, 3.0% of the teachers had challenges with sharing knowledge using social media, which indicates that platforms are not easy to use. "The main challenge is a poor internet connection," said one respondent (3.0%) in the survey. Additionally, one respondent (3.0%) mentioned that they needed assistance, either technically or otherwise, from a computer technician.

Environmental components also affected the sharing of knowledge using social media, since 12.1% of the teachers complained about poor internet connection. Further, three respondents (9.0%) expressed dissatisfaction with the high cost of devices such as computers that they used to access social media. Due to Zimbabwe's regular power outages, another respondent (3.0%) lamented the lack of electricity, and three respondents (9.0%) did not respond to the question. Since many social media platforms expose users to the public, one respondent (3.0%) expressed concerns about their privacy on these platforms. There is not enough time to use social media to exchange knowledge, according to three respondents (9.0%) in the survey. Six per cent of the respondents said they didn't trust social media and didn't receive their responses on time.

The organisational component of the TOE framework also affected the sharing of knowledge due to the issue of organisational policies, which were blamed by 9.0% of the teachers who complained about unclear policies on what to share on social media.

### Challenges faced by teacher-librarians in sharing knowledge through social media

The researcher wanted to find out if teacher-librarians faced any challenges in using social media in education. Teacher-librarian A responded as follows:

"There are several challenges we face in using social media. The challenges range from the high cost of Internet data, network challenges, a lack of equipment such as computers, power outages, copyright issues on e-books, a lack of skills in using social media for sharing knowledge, and distractions when sharing knowledge."

Teacher-librarian B responded as follows:

"Yes, there are challenges in using social media in education. The Internet network is very bad these days, Zimbabwe Electricity Supply Authority (ZESA) power cuts, lack of awareness on the use of social media in school libraries and copyright challenges. This affects my sharing big time because I cannot share knowledge in real-time."

This illustrates that the TOE components were also at the centre stage of the challenges faced by teacher-librarians in using social media for sharing knowledge. The technological component was affected by expensive data, a lack of skills in using social media, a lack of computers, and network problems. The environmental component is affected by copyright and electricity problems. Lack of awareness of the use of social media is an organisational component affecting the use of social media.

## Differences and similarities in the challenges faced by teachers and Teacher Librarians

The current study discovered a reasonable amount of overlap and divergence in the difficulties instructors and teacher-librarians encountered when disseminating information on social media. Teachers and teacher-librarians reported similar difficulties with ZESA power outages, a lack of devices and equipment to enable social media sharing to happen smoothly, network issues, and a lack of expertise in using social media for information sharing. The difficulties with copyright, the high cost of data, and the lack of knowledge about social media use in school libraries were the main differences in obstacles faced by teachers and teacher-librarians. These issues were raised by teacher-librarians, not teachers. Finding the appropriate platform to utilise and the lack of a social media use policy were two more areas where discrepancies were observed. Teachers brought these issues to the attention of teacher-librarians, but they were not listed among their challenges. The parallels and discrepancies experienced by educators and teacher-librarians are compiled in Table 2.

**Table 2 shares those similarities and differences.**

| Challenges                                                       | Teacher      | Teacher-librarian |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|-------------------|
| Power cuts                                                       | Reported     | Reported          |
| Lack of awareness of the use of social media in school libraries | Not reported | Reported          |
| Copyright challenges                                             | Not reported | Reported          |
| Lack of gadgets and equipment                                    | Reported     | Reported          |
| High cost of data                                                | Not reported | Reported          |
| Network challenges                                               | Reported     | Reported          |
| Lack of skills                                                   | Reported     | Reported          |
| Absence of a social media use policy                             | Reported     | Not reported      |
| Finding the right platform to use                                | Reported     | Not reported      |

## Strategies that can mitigate the challenges faced by teachers and teacher-librarians

Teachers were requested to suggest some tactics for reducing the difficulties in using social media for sharing knowledge. Of the 33 respondents, 12 (36.4%) said that using a reliable Internet Service Provider (ISP) with more bandwidth was necessary to counteract the inconsistent internet. Better internet connectivity and lower computer prices were mentioned by seven (21.2%) of the respondents. Additionally, two respondents (6.1%) suggested using emails if the files were too large to upload on WhatsApp, six respondents (18.2%) said that it was necessary to purchase teachers' data because it was too expensive, and two respondents (6.1%) said that better scheduling was needed to allot time for educational social media activities. One (3.0%) respondent proposed training teachers who could not share knowledge on social media to increase their capacity to enhance social media abilities. An additional participant (3.0%) proposed purchasing additional fuel for the generators in the event of power interruptions. Furthermore, according to one respondent (3.0%), there is a need to teach educators the value of social media by creating a welcoming climate in the classroom that permits the use of social media for learning and encourages greater sharing of practices to improve results. Just one (3.0%) responder chose not to respond to the question.

When librarians were asked to suggest strategies for the challenges identified, Teacher-librarian A responded as follows:

“The government should license more internet providers so that there is competition, and the data price can go down. Library users need to be very careful to avoid the problem of copyright, and what they can share without violating copyright rules. To address the challenge of poor internet connections, schools need to invest in fast internet broadband to avoid dampening teachers’ and learners’ spirits in the process of knowledge sharing.

Further, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE) and the Ministry of ICT should get together urgently and discuss how social media can be used in education. The challenge of power outages can be minimised using generators and solar energy.”

Teacher-librarian B responded as follows:

“To curb the problem of expensive data, the Postal and Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe (POTRAZ) must reduce the prices of data, or teacher-librarians need to be given monthly data or internet data allowances to use the money to buy data. Due to the lack of computers, I suggested to the Government of Zimbabwe that it seek support from international donor organisations such as Computer Aid International, UNESCO and UNICEF so that they can contribute funds to purchase such equipment and use the internet since they complain about the lack of computers.”

## DISCUSSION

According to the current study, teachers prefer to use YouTube (82%), WhatsApp (60%), Facebook (26%), Twitter (10%), Snapchat (8%), TikTok (6%), Skype (4%) and Fuse (2%), among other social media platforms, to share educational content with their students. This indicates that more teachers than any other platform use YouTube to impart knowledge to their students. This aligns with the findings of Szeto and Cheng (2014), who discovered that preservice teachers in Hong Kong considered YouTube beneficial during their teaching practicum in secondary schools.

Furthermore, teaching librarians frequently use WhatsApp as a social media tool to interact with library patrons. Because WhatsApp was widely utilised in social media, the teacher-librarians found it straightforward to employ it for work-related purposes. WhatsApp requires less internet data to function, making it an even more affordable communication option. Another factor contributing to the rapid increase in social media use for knowledge sharing could be the rapid increase in social media platform usage in general.

Slow internet was another challenge, indicated by 12.1% of the teachers and librarians in the study. This study adds to the body of literature established by Chiparaushe et al. (2022), which indicates that the utilisation of social media in developing nations like Zimbabwe is significantly hindered by inadequate internet connectivity. Rachman and Putri (2018) expressed similar views, noting that inadequate infrastructure and slow internet access in developing countries hinder academic librarians' use of social media.

The researcher found that 3% of teachers and librarians had challenges with power cuts in using social media for sharing knowledge. Similar sentiments were made by Agyekum et al. (2016) that power cuts affect the use of social media for sharing knowledge.

The findings indicated that 12.1% of the teachers lacked the skills to use social media to share knowledge. The findings also correspond to the study by Maisiri et al. (2015), which revealed that librarians lack the skills to use social media to share knowledge. However, Chigwada, Chiparausha and Musarurwa (2016) indicate that there is a need for training librarians on the use of social media in libraries since its implementation is still new. Similar sentiments were also put forward by Okeke and Asifor (2023) that the challenges encompass the necessity for librarians to undergo appropriate training and skill enhancement to utilize social media platforms effectively, concerns regarding data security and privacy, the issue of information overload due to the vast amount of accessible content, and the need for strategies to evaluate the outcomes and influence of social media activities (Okeke & Asifor, 2023).

The research findings indicated that 9.0% of the teachers reported a lack of policies regarding the use of social media for sharing knowledge. Similar sentiments were reported by Maisiri et al. (2015) that most libraries do not have policies on the use of social media for sharing knowledge. Makadi, Abdullah, and Musleh (2025) conducted a study on the role of social media networks in strengthening school libraries' community engagement, highlighting several obstacles that limit their success. These challenges encompass concerns about privacy and safety, disparities in technology and internet access, insufficient staff training, limited resources, and the lack of clear social media policies and guidelines.

The findings brought to light that the technologies that are used to access social media are expensive. According to Makori (2012) and Marks (2013), libraries face significant challenges in acquiring the necessary resources to access social media platforms, primarily due to costs that surpass their allocated budgets. Additionally, Makadi, Abdullah, and Musleh (2025) highlight a critical deficiency in social media policies and guidelines within educational institutions, which poses obstacles to the effective integration and utilisation of social media in schools.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings revealed that using social media to share knowledge was difficult for teachers and teacher-librarians, leading to the identification of several hurdles that were pointed out, such as network issues, copyright issues, and confusion over what to share with other mothers. The researcher suggested that the following are necessary:

- i. Teachers and teacher-librarians need to be trained in the use of social media in the classroom as a knowledge exchange tool. Staff meetings, seminars, and workshops can be used to do this.
- ii. Social media professionals' upskilling can help improve teachers' and teacher-librarians' technological proficiency. As was covered in the last chapter, inadequate training is the cause of some of the difficulties.
- iii. The MoPSE ought to enact regulations that promote knowledge sharing on social media in classrooms.
- iv. The Zimbabwean government should, through POTRAZ, reduce the cost of internet data bundles so that teachers and teacher-librarians can all have round-the-clock access to the internet. The findings indicated that mobile data is expensive in Zimbabwe. For citizens to afford the data they require to access social media networks and share knowledge, the government should regulate data prices. For its people to have access to the internet, Zimbabwe should, if possible, provide free internet.

## CONCLUSION

A recent development in knowledge sharing is the use of social media for information exchange. The results showed that several obstacles, including intermittent internet connections and a lack of devices for information sharing, hinder the effective use of social media for knowledge sharing. The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, headmasters, instructors and teacher-librarians must collaborate to prepare students for the digital age, so the problems are not insurmountable.

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