



Measuring Global Service-learning Alumni Facebook Communication



Samuel Ikendi, Michael Retallick, and Gail Nonnecke

Need for Research

- Maintaining communication with student alumni is an asset. The alumni are ambassadors who form the public-facing persona of their institutions.
- The most common loops of communication among alumni are social media platforms including Facebook^{1, 2}.
- The purpose of this inquiry was to gain knowledge into the purpose, frequency of communication, and rate of engagement of Iowa State and Makerere universities alumni who participated in a service-learning program in Uganda.

Conceptual Framework

- This study was based on Communities of Practice (CoP)³. The CoP is premised on three factors including:



- Social media communication involves a post and feedback
- On Facebook, posts are written by the administrator or a member and posted on the group's timeline¹.
- The posts appear as a newsfeed to all members. Posts are of different forms including 'texts', 'photos', 'videos', 'links', 'hashtags' ...
- Feedbacks are user responses¹. The feedback takes different forms:

- Emojis - graphic facial expressions.



- Comments on posts - constructive verbal reply.
- Sharing of posts - a feeling of spreading the message.

Methodology

- This was a qualitative inquiry into the Uganda service-learning alumni Facebook page⁴ between 1st January 2015 to 31st December 2019.
- This Facebook page was started in 2013. The years 2015-2019 show robust use.
- Data were collected between 15–20th October 2020.
- Our inquiry was based on constructivism⁵.

Methodology Conti...

- A case study design was used to conduct a content analysis⁶. The Facebook posts were the units of analysis.
- During analysis, we began with naïve reading. Further employed an in-depth reading and analysis.
- We wrote analytic memos on emerging unique ideas which formed our themes⁷.
- Also, we critically observed the artifacts and pictures and took notes that we used to generate new themes as a form of triangulation.
- We shared drafts among ourselves for peer reviews.



Results and Findings

We established eight alumni Facebook communication themes including: seminars (orientations, presentations); family (marriage engagements, weddings); academics (admissions, graduations); identity (profiles, murals); awards (to faculty, students); fundraising (for programs, sickness); travels (for students, faculty); and anniversaries (ceremonies, celebrations) [Table 1].

Table 1: Emerged Facebook Themes and Associated Posts

Themes	Percent of Total Posts		Percent of Types of Posts Under Each Theme			
	Posts (n=89)	Photos (n=191)	Text Only (n=28)	Text + Photos (n=26)	T+@+#+Is With (n=19)	Links (n=16)
Seminars	28.1	36.1	42.9	15.4	15.8	31.3
Family	19.1	15.2	3.6	34.6	36.8	-
Academics	16.9	23.6	25.0	11.5	26.3	-
Identity	14.6	19.9	7.1	26.9	5.3	25.0
Awards	9.0	3.1	7.1	7.7	10.5	12.5
Fundraising	5.6	1.6	-	-	-	31.3
Travels	4.5	0.5	7.1	3.8	5.3	-
Anniversary	2.2	-	7.1	-	-	-

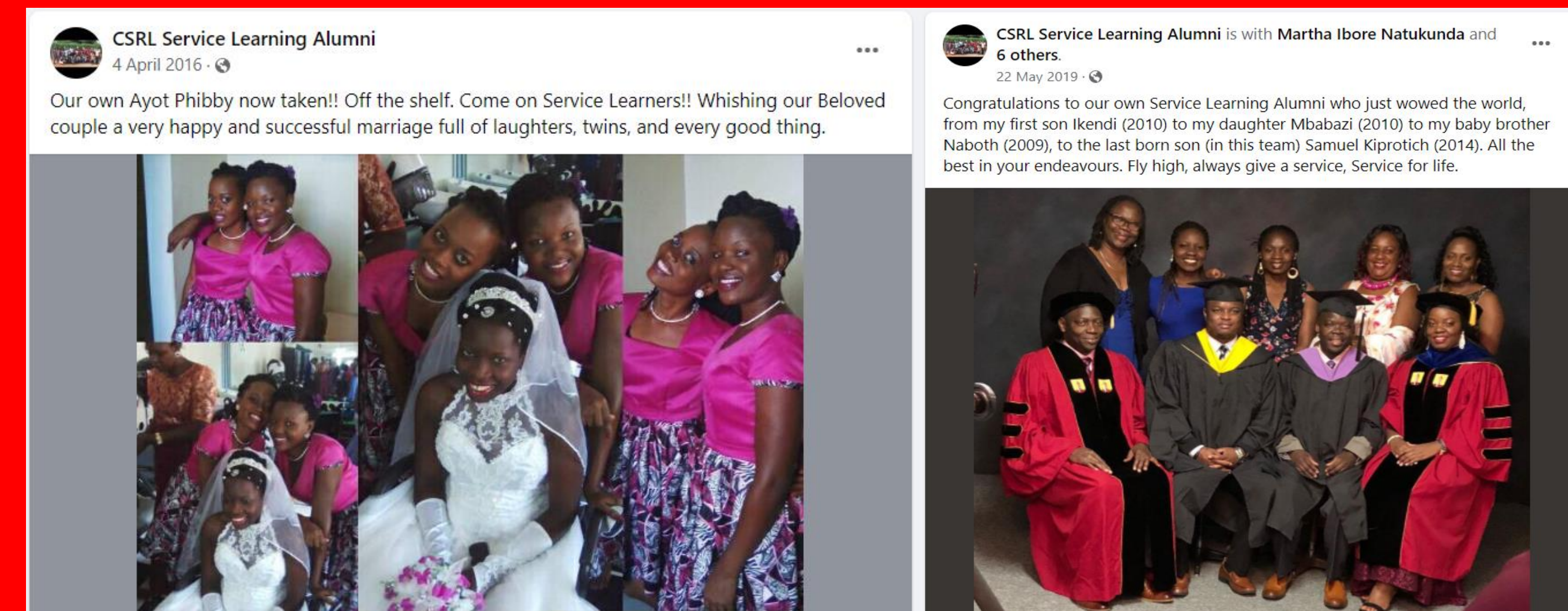


Results and Findings Conti...

There was 980 feedback. More than half were categorized as low-level engagement feedback (Table 2).

Table 2: Alumni Facebook Feedback and Themes

Themes	Percent of Low Engagement Feedback			Percent of High Engagement Feedback		
	Likes (n=832)	Love (n=33)	Wow (n=11)	Comment (n=88)	Share (n=11)	Interested (n=5)
Seminars	14.8	-	9.1	12.5	36.4	100
Family	36.9	63.6	27.3	43.2	-	-
Academics	20.6	27.3	18.2	29.5	36.4	-
Identity	15.6	6.1	18.2	11.4	18.2	-
Awards	5.5	-	27.3	1.1	-	-
Fundraising	0.7	3.0	-	1.1	9.1	-
Travels	4.1	-	-	-	-	-
Anniversary	1.8	-	-	1.1	-	-



Conclusions

- Facebook has been an important platform for alumni to share their achievements.
- The platform promoted social identity, centered on belongingness to a large group.
- Administrators have used the page as a communication platform for the program.
- The page has mobilized funds for program development and emergencies.
- Social engagements show the development of CoP and continued comradeship.

Implications

- Social media creates alumni ambassadors of a global service-learning program.
- Facebook adds value and transcends physical communication barriers.
- Additional qualitative inquiry is required to understand why members participate in either low and/or high engagement feedback loops on the posts.

References

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