

Preface

Social media are the virtual networks used to communicate ideas between individuals. These social media networks can take many forms, from Facebook, to Pinterest, and beyond the big names to more niche websites and applications. In today's society, it seems like everyone has an account on at least one network, and often times, multiple networks, as they attempt to reach different people. An individual may have a Facebook account, to keep up with family and friends, a LinkedIn to keep track of their colleagues, and an Instagram account to follow the trends. The examples could continue, but the point is that a staggeringly large part of the population are using these networks, and they are gaining information from them, whether they know it or not. A Pew Internet Research (2018a) survey found that 69% of the adult American public uses some type of social media site, and further research into eight popular social media platforms found that 73% of social media users use more than one social media site (p. 7). In addition, these networks have all but replaced many more traditional means of communication – newsletters, bulletin boards, and the like – and the reason is simple and unsurprising. Social media networks allow users to engage in a way that they could not before. Unfortunately, as noted in the literature time and again, academic librarians have been slow to embrace social media (Charnigo & Barnett-Howard, 2007; OCLC, 2007; Huber, Carter, & Moore, 2018), though the numbers have increased dramatically in the last five years (Harrison, Burrress, Velasquez, & Schreiner, 2017). Virtually the only mode of non-internet mass communication still in substantial use is television, with about 49% of Americans reporting that they receive their news from TV (Pew Research Center, 2018b). This is to say nothing of how people gather non-news information, which is harder to track.

This rise in social media use combined with reticence to use those same networks, has created challenges in academic libraries in particular, because their users fit in the demographic most likely to use social media and other non-traditional modes of communication. These challenges are changing the way that academic libraries approach their entire patron population, but most notably their students, who are typically 18-24 years old. The demographic range into which they are typically categorized, 18-29-year-olds, has the highest percentage use of social media of all demographic ranges, with 88% of those surveyed reporting some type of social media use (Pew Research Center, 2018a, p. 4). 18-24-year-olds are also leading users of newer social media sites, such as Snapchat and Instagram (Pew Research Center, 2018a). This has forced libraries to consider social media as a way of reaching out to and engaging their users in meaningful ways that will help them stay connected to the library and aware of the resources that are available to them, and to broaden their use of social media networks. The awareness of the usage trends in social media, and the idea that all other libraries are using social media have resulted in an increase in social media presence by academic libraries (Harrison, Burrress, Velasquez, & Schreiner, 2017). This “normative influence” as described by Harrison, et al, has motivated libraries onto the social media scene, but there still challenges to navigating social media use.

THE CHALLENGES

Academic libraries need to have a presence in social media in order to reach and engage their users, because those traditional means of communication will not work. Many students are using the library's resources remotely, whether it is from the comfort of their dorm room, or from a place halfway around the world. Some institutions are even hiring remote instructors. In order to reach these patrons, the information that the library wants to present must be available online. Moreover, the information, and the means of acquiring it, should be interactive, because patrons expect it, having engaged with other accounts throughout the last decade, as social media has increased in use.

There are three types of social media initiatives:

1. Broadcasting, in which the institution simply pushes a message about services and events.
2. Communication, in which the institution uses social media not only to push a message, but to also answer questions, and
3. Engagement, in which the institution actively tries to get users to interact on social media in a meaningful way – though meaningful can mean different things to different people.

A study of these types of initiatives shows an evolution and sophistication of social media use in academic libraries over the last decade, even as some libraries lag behind the curve.

Unfortunately, it is not enough for libraries to simply create a message and then send it out into the world, especially if the institution is trying to reach a higher level of social media use. Social media use by institutions, who have a goal and a reputation to maintain, must have a plan. One common pitfall among academic libraries, for a variety of reasons, is to push the same exact message, often word-for-word and scheduled well in advance to all of the social media platforms that the library subscribes to. Despite being a time-saving practice, this is not the most effective way to promote the library's message, because different networks are used for different things by different people. Other common pitfalls include not having a regular schedule of content, such that posts become hidden from users' feeds, or not having content that is clearly aligned with the institutional goals. Swanson (2012) identifies a fear of content creation as one of the largest obstacles to social media use in libraries (academic or otherwise), but it does not have to be scary if the institution has clear goals in their social media use, because these goals can guide content creation, and better content creation will make it easier to reach the institutional goals. Beyond these common problems, though, there are more issues that the academic library must contend with. Social media managers or committees must concern themselves with legal issues, such as FERPA, social issues, such as diversity and inclusion, and economic issues of budget and staff time. Because of this, the use of social media and the selection of networks to participate in are decisions that should not be entered into lightly.

However, the problem set before academic libraries is two-fold. Yes, academic libraries need to use social media to interact with the student patron population, but they also need to consider social media as a tool for student learning and information gathering. Students are gaining information from their social media accounts indiscriminately and at an ever-increasing pace. This can lead to poor vetting practices and information overload. Previously, it has been the academic library's job to help students learn how to evaluate sources and fact-check information, and social media should not be any different. As centers for information and instructors in the methods and modes of gathering information, it is part of the academic library's charge to address the information issues surrounding social media. Further-

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more, by incorporating different types of social media platforms into the classroom, librarians are giving students a chance to learn about new platforms that they may not have heard of and might be useful for other classes, and can teach the students about best practices for social media use; after all, social media networks are a two-way exchange of information, something that students may not have thought about.

Because social media use looks different for every institution, and has such a wide application, the target audience of this book is all academic library personnel who engage with patrons, plan programming for patrons, market to patrons, or are interested in understanding how social media networks fit into the workflows and complement the mission statements of the modern academic library. It also may be useful to librarians in special or research libraries who have an interest in educating their patrons through social media. It will be most useful for librarians and library staff who have ideas, plans, and active implementations of social networking initiatives. It exists to inspire and guide these activities. Administrative personnel, too, would be interested to see how social media plans can support important institutional goals, such as diversity, assessment, and engagement.

POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

First, it is up to each institution to decide the stage in which their social media use falls, and start gathering ideas to evolve their interactions with patrons if they so choose. The evolution of social media use at an institution halts for a variety of reasons, including staffing, funding, legality, and sheer burnout, among others. It can be time consuming and complex on an emotional and intellectual level to maintain a robust social media program.

The urgency with which a library needs to develop a social media plan can also be impacted by the type of library it is. Digital libraries, for example, are likely to need a strong social media presence. Whereas modern traditional academic libraries will have an opportunity to interact physically with a large portion of their patrons, and can promote information that way, digital libraries have no opportunity to meet their patrons face to face. They rely entirely on making their information available to their patrons through virtual means, and consequently, may rely on social media networks more than physical libraries. This is an important concern for academic institutions, both non-profit and for profit, which consider themselves to be primarily or entirely online, because that forces the library to be online as well. Library outreach in this context can be difficult without using social media networks. It is important then, that the digital library not only have a social media presence, but evolve that social media presence quickly, in order to reach the engagement stage.

Once an organization has evaluated their current social media use, they can decide how much they want to change it and set goals. Their goals might be voiced in terms of some staff-side concerns, like consistency of posting schedules, or branding and messaging, or they may be voiced in terms of user-side concerns, like level of interaction and engagement with posts and events. An ideal plan, though, would take both of the aspects into consideration. Once these goals have been developed though, the hard part begins, because representatives of the institution – whether it is a social media manager or a committee – must begin to think about how to best achieve these goals, and also, what problems may lay ahead in reaching them. They may also need to consult the literature or even the social media feeds of other institutions to develop ideas about what kind of content they want to provide, what they are able to provide, and what will best align with their goals.

Even with the best planning though, problems will arise. It may be a complaint about content from a patron or an administrator. It may be the loss of staff. In these cases, it is important to refocus the institutional goals to address the problem with the least possible disruption to the message, so as not to lose any momentum gained. Social media is, to large extent, a medium of consistency of use, and on some platforms, most notably Facebook, consistency is imperative; the type of post, as well as how many people engage with the post, both affect where a post is seen in a users' feed (Facebook, 2019). Many of these issues and how deal with them are addressed in this book.

The engagement level is where it is easiest to marry the ideas of social media as a communication tool and social media as an instruction tool. This can be done in the classroom, addressing the topic head on in information literacy sessions and workshops, or it could be done on the social media networks themselves, with communication campaigns and interaction that rise to an instructional level. A study conducted by Purdue University found that their students most wanted to see their library on Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat and YouTube (Howard, et. Al, 2018), and though there are a few differences, this aligns closely with the popularity of the networks in general (Pew Research Center, 2018). The most notable differences in the two lists are Pinterest (which many libraries have tried with varying degrees of success) and LinkedIn, which would be better used by the institution as a whole, rather than just the library. All of these networks can be used to help strengthen library instruction, though some are better than others; see the chapter on Virginia Commonwealth University's Twitter campaign, #VetYourSources, in the book for an example.

ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

The book is organized into three sections with a total of 15 chapters. The 15 chapters are as follows:

Chapter 1 is a literature review of existing information available about social media networks in academic libraries, covering the use of social media from the identification of the Web 2.0 phenomenon in 2005, to the present day. This overview gives the reader an idea of where libraries have been and where they are going with regards to social media.

Chapter 2 focuses on the use of social media in digital libraries specifically. While digital libraries may be academic or non-academic in nature, they are different from libraries that have physical components, and their social media use will reflect this.

Chapter 3 delves into the first of many issues with social media use: finding a strategy for creating and maintain content on various networks that is achievable by the institution. It presents the steps toward achieving that goal and provides a case study of the steps in practice.

Chapter 4 expounds on strategizing by focusing on diversifying content to create campaigns best suited for the network on which they will be communicated. It presents content strategies and the real-world results of using those strategies.

Chapter 5 covers assessing social media use, both in instruction and marketing, laying out a project plan to guide institutions through the process. Through this project plan, libraries can ensure that not only are they are developing the best plan for their situation, but that the plan continues to serve them well, by emphasizing assessment.

Chapter 6 covers using application statistics and web analytics to assess the institution's reach and ultimately assess the social media plan, including information on gathering statistics from within many popular social media platforms.

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Chapter 7 is about biases and other social media blunders that could distort the institution's message, and how to best avoid them, with examples taken from the author's institution. It also includes a discussion on recruiting a diverse staff.

Chapter 8 is about legal problems that might arise from the use of social media at the institution. Two major pieces of legislation, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Family Educational Rights & Privacy Act are discussed with regards to social media.

Chapter 9 is about one institution's experience with peer-to-peer marketing and allowing students to create content for social media, and how it can help with the problems of understanding student preferences and maximizing the library's social media exposure.

Chapter 10 is about engaging with distance learners through social media, focusing on social media's capability to livestream events and engage learners at a distance in real-time, with an example from the Open University (UK) Library.

Chapter 11 is about one institution's experience with using Twitter to enhance information literacy skills. The aforementioned Virginia Commonwealth University's Twitter campaign, using the hashtag #VetYourSources is detailed in this chapter.

Chapter 12 is about creating a social media plan for special collections and archives, and how to best approach creating an adaptable and usable plan for social media use in the context of special collections and their unique audiences.

Chapter 13 is a case study about the Library of Congress's social media program, focusing on the four area studies divisions which have come together to create a collaborative social media program that benefits all of the participants.

Chapter 14 expands the topic of social media use internationally by discussing the opportunities and challenges of implementing a social media program in a developing country, and offers solutions to meet these challenges where possible, using social media use in Nigeria as its example.

Chapter 15 is about using social media, and specifically Twitter, at branch campus libraries and other institutions where the budget may be minimal. These strategies were developed at the Southampton Campus Library of Stony Brook University, but are applicable to any campus of similar size and resources.

As outlined, this book contains information on the short but important history of social media use in the academic library, common issues that might arise from the implementation and use of social media networks, and case studies of social network use that might inspire and energize the reader. So much of the literature readily available to the profession about social media is about public libraries; geared solely to academic and research libraries, it addresses issues that are unique to these types of libraries. This book is also updates the available literature, collating case studies and information about recent implementations and concerns that have arose as the use of social media has increased.

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