

Chapter 1

Making Social Media More Social: A Literature Review of Academic Libraries' Engagement and Connections Through Social Media Platforms

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores how academic libraries have used social media for broadcasting information, responsive communication, and engagement. Many libraries focus on the marketing aspect of social media, since it is a successful method of promoting events, services, and resources. However, exclusively using social media as a marketing tool ignores the best part of social media: the connections it fosters between people. The online community is just an extension of the in-person community that the academic library serves. This chapter examines the state of the literature on libraries' use of social media through the lens of increasing engagement and connections with the community as the key to successful social media.

INTRODUCTION

Social media is ubiquitous and pervasive on the digital landscape today, including in higher education and academic libraries. One only has to turn on the television to see any commercial promoting the company's Facebook presence or website for details. Despite the differences among the multitude of social media platforms, the main commonality they share is that they are used to connect people with other people. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube are among the many tools people use to reach out to old friends, make new friends over a shared interest, and learn more about hot topics and current events.

The massive scale of the Internet has made it necessary for academic libraries to have an online social media presence to meet users where they are. The biggest social media platform in use at the time of this writing is Facebook, with 2.196 billion active users monthly. Other major platforms include You-

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Tube with 1.9 billion users, Instagram with 1 billion users, and Twitter with 336 million users (We Are Social, n.d.). This chapter will focus on Facebook and Twitter as the primary networks that libraries are using or can use to reach their communities, but the rising popularity of Instagram and YouTube will also be discussed. There are many different networks currently in use by public, academic, and special libraries. Gonzalez, Marks, and Westgate (2018) launched a Social Media Directory of Academic Libraries that lists accounts associated with various academic libraries across the globe, along with contact information for the librarian or representative responsible for the accounts. At the time of this writing, the directory includes 173 libraries on Facebook, 157 libraries on Twitter, 128 libraries on Instagram, and 101 libraries on YouTube.

The boundaries between online and offline have blurred significantly since the Internet has become a pervasive influence in society. A library's community exists in both online and offline spaces simultaneously, and it is necessary to bridge the gap between these spaces to create a holistic experience for the community. Young and Rossmann (2015) emphasize the need to integrate the offline presence of the library into the online world. Social media is "a tool that enables users to join together and share in the commonalities of research, learning, and the university community" (p. 22). Social media can bring together individuals in a community, and libraries must learn to use these tools more effectively to bridge the gaps.

This crossover between the digital and physical worlds has become even more enmeshed with the rise of mobile technology. The Pew Research Center (2018, February 5) reports that 95% of Americans own a cellphone, and 77% own smartphones. This instant connection to social media, news, businesses, and information has changed behaviors. New Media Consortium's (2017) Horizon Report indicates that mobile learning is a major trend for higher education. Convenience and communication drive this trend, and ease of access can improve learning outcomes for students all over the world (Adams Becker, et al, 2017).

This chapter's objectives are to determine how academic libraries have used social media in less than effective ways, how they are using social media for communication or engagement with their communities, and how to incorporate best practices for readers to improve user engagement on social media. This narrative literature review examines the state of academic libraries' social media presence and their use for engagement with students. A search of the Library Information Science and Technology Abstracts database (LISTA) with the keywords "social media" and "libraries" brings back over 2,800 results. A search adding the keyword "engagement" to the previous search string returns only 141 results. A further limitation using the search string "social media AND academic libraries AND engagement," reflecting the focus of this review, returned only 31 articles. Focusing on these articles and examining their references for relevant materials became the basis for this chapter. The search was limited to articles published between 2011 and 2018, but relevant references cited by more than one paper were also examined and included for context. College and Research Libraries News offers additional resources of interest, since many of these are not "scholarly" peer review articles but focus on trends in the field that are important for working professionals. A similar search of "social media" on the College and Research Libraries News archive returned 262 items, comprising many "how-to" articles, strategy tips, and descriptions of successful campaigns or promotions.

In order to share a common vocabulary, the following are some definitions of popular terms used at length in this chapter:

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