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USING SOCIAL MEDIA TO PROMOTE SCHOLARSHIP

Amplify, Magnify, Clarify

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In the computing world, scientists often talk about the singularity – the concept that technological advances take place at an exponential, rather than linear, rate.[1] Regardless of whether you work in technology or not, you've witnessed this – and it's the precise reason why your computer or smartphone is obsolete much faster than it was ten years ago. Perhaps this is best observed in the arena of social media. When a classmate of mine at the Harvard Graduate School of Education suggested I join "the online Facebook" back in 2004, I thought it was a neat idea but not terribly practical. A decade later, Mark Zuckerberg's creation boasts 1.32 billion active users – that's one sixth of the world's population![2] And while many Facebook users

spend time posting Internet memes and sharing pet photos, there are robust intellectual communities emerging on a daily basis. Simply put, a social media presence is a 21st century literacy, much like having access to traditional media was in the late 20th century. Too often, however, scholars are on the periphery of this phenomenon. The intent of this chapter, therefore, is to provide insight regarding how academics can utilize social media to draw attention to their scholarly contributions, highlight when one's research is shared in traditional media, and contribute to robust conversations on topics of note. Or, in a Twitter-friendly 140 characters or less, how to amplify, magnify, and clarify scholarship via social media.

The Lay of the Land

It's often said that the worse reason to do something is because everyone is doing it – but social media might be an exception. In 2014, 74 percent of online adults used social media.[3] With the exception of age, usage is fairly consistent across gender, educational attainment level, and income level. When it comes to race, Blacks and Latinos actually lead Whites in their use of social media on mobile devices.[4]

What social media sites are most utilized by online adults? The figure below illustrates that Facebook is the runaway favorite, followed by a fairly equal distribution among LinkedIn (a business-oriented networking site), Pinterest (a visual discovery, collection, sharing, and storage site), Twitter (a microblogging service), and Instagram (a mobile photo-sharing, video-sharing and social networking service). Of these top five, the oldest is LinkedIn, established in 2002, and the most recent are Instagram and Pinterest, established in 2010.[5] In other words, nobody reading this in 2016 "grew up" with these social media sites – they literally became part of the media fabric overnight.

Specifically, what is the impact of social media on the academic community? It is very similar to online adults generally. In 2013, 70.3 percent of faculty reported using social media for personal purposes, and 55 percent reported using social media in a professional context – a portion that has grown 11 percent from 2012.[6] To drill down deeper, let's take a look at Twitter, one of the top 10
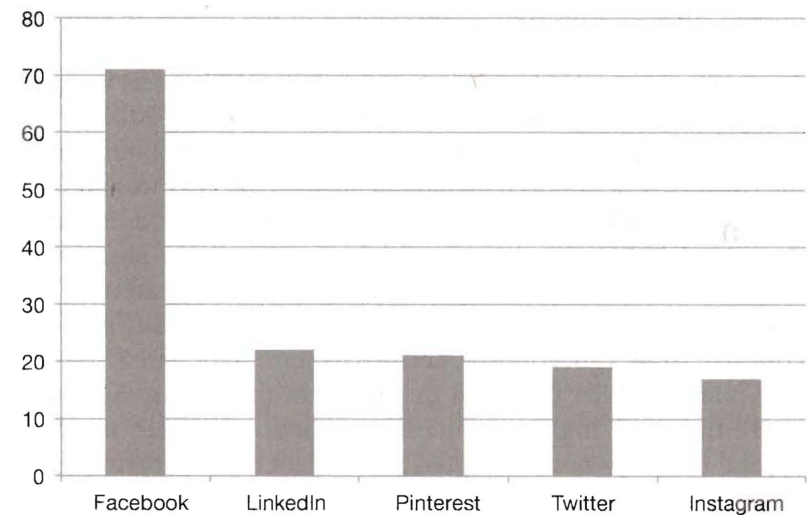
Figure 5.1 Social media usage of online U.S. adults, 2013

Source: Pew Research Internet Project, "Social Networking Fact Sheet," http://www.pew internet.org/fact-sheets/social-networking-fact-sheet/ (accessed October 24, 2014).

most visited sites on the Internet, sometimes labeled as "the SMS of the internet."[7] A 2009 survey of 2,000 faculty members revealed that 30.7 percent of faculty surveyed use Twitter, while 56.4 percent did not, with most reporting that they used Twitter for news/trends and networking with colleagues.[8] A more recent study on a sample of 1,600 researchers revealed that only 15 percent reported using Twitter; 28 percent used YouTube, and 39 percent used Facebook.[9]

The Hazards of Social Media Engagement

What this reveals is how the academic community seemingly dichotomizes social media use. In their personal lives, scholars seem to embrace social media at similar rates to other online adult populations – but when it comes to using social media for professional purposes, academics seem to be hesitant to engage with these platforms. There are undoubtedly manifest reasons why, but I'm certain one has to do with very public misuses and missteps with social media, and Twitter in particular. Geoffrey Miller, a University

of New Mexico professor, found himself in the middle of a media firestorm for sending a fat-shaming tweet in June 2013; he was eventually censured by the university for claiming the tweet was part of a study.[10] Perhaps most famously, in the summer of 2014 Steven Salaita, a Virginia Tech professor, was offered an appointment at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, but later was notified by the university chancellor that his appointment would not go to the university's trustees – after he had resigned his position at Virginia Tech. The speculated reasoning for the revocation of the offer centers on Salaita's Twitter account, which contained tweets critical of Israel's government, deemed by some to be anti-Semitic.[11]

While the Miller case, and in particular, the Salaita case, raise interesting and important questions about academic freedom beyond the scope of this chapter, it is evident that the permanence of statements on social media that can be archived and redistributed ad infinitum should reside in the minds of scholars using social media. In Salaita's case, he argues that many of the messages were taken out of context.[12] In short, given the various issues that scholars engage in en route to tenure and promotion, and in the public intellectual space – why risk having one's career, or research trajectory derailed with an ill-conceived or misconstrued Facebook post or tweet?

Reconceptualizing Scholarly Identity and Privacy in the Age of Social Media

Returning to the dichotomy I mentioned earlier, I think scholars typically categorize their social media engagement in two silos: private and public. This is simply an extension of how many of us engage in life: some of us are uncomfortable sharing aspects of our day-to-day activities outside of our scholarly output (if you cringe when students or colleagues see you at the supermarket or the gym, this might be you), while others feel that the role of a scholar is to operate visibly in the public sphere (if you have more than ten bumper stickers on the back of your car, this might be you). While these categories might work well in the real world, they are somewhat difficult to manage in the realm of social media. In fact, I would argue that the age of social media has ushered new conceptualizations of what is public and what is private. The idea that social media blurs public and private boundaries has been explored by others;[13] in fact Katz and Rice describe the Internet as a "panopticon," using the metaphor of the 18th century prison design in which one warden could observe all prisoners without their knowledge.[14]

Social media, by its design, has created a hybridized social status. While Facebook and LinkedIn require the user to confirm friendships and connections, Twitter and Instagram, for instance, allow any user to "follow" another. Hence, messages on matters of great societal import – such as sharing the latest research on educational inequity – are visible to everyone. As is one's opinions about fashion or the latest episode of *Scandal*. One must be comfortable with this blurring of private and public to engage in social media deeply. However, there are ways to participate in social media that ameliorate this somewhat: you can opt to participate in sites that allow some control over how you connect to others, or you can connect to only close friends and colleagues. Yet other scholars maintain "public" social media accounts, slotted for research finding and academic discourse, and "private" accounts for their friends and family.

While these approaches may provide some level of comfort and control, my personal experience conveys that there are "seepages" that make maintaining these boundaries difficult. For instance, many professors do not allow students into their social media networks. But the student-professor dynamic is temporary, so at what point would a former student be an eligible Facebook friend? I think the appropriate analogy for social media is the coffee shop/food court: certainly, it is possible (and desirable) to engage in discussion in this context. However, the people sitting next to you can hear you, and due to the acoustics of this particular building, even someone across the room can pick up on your conversation.

Such a conceptualization of identity is useful, and in a policy context in which the societal impact of academics is openly questioned, there is a need for scholars to engage in the marketplace of ideas *beyond* academic conferences. *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof recently made this point in a February 2014 opinion column.[15] Noting that "some of the smartest thinkers on problems

at home and around the world are university professors, but most of them just don't matter in today's great debates,"[16] Kristof further stated:

> Professors today have a growing number of tools available to educate the public, from online courses to blogs to social media. Yet academics have been slow to cast pearls through Twitter and Facebook.[17]

The last exhortation from this column should cement the academic's commitment to engaging in scholarly discourse via social media: "So, professors, don't cloister yourselves like medieval monks – we need you!"[18]

Using Social Media to Promote Research – Magnifying

Perhaps the easiest way to leap into the social media fray is to utilize these networks to announce when scholarship is published. Most journals offer previews of published manuscripts (abstracts, introductory paragraphs, etc.) via their web portal, so a Facebook post or tweet announcing the arrival of one's most recent work is a simple way of directing people to one's scholarship. (Note that it's wise to test links from a non-university network, to ensure that the link is publically accessible to all – links that are behind firewalls won't allow followers to view your work.) Some of the more social media savvy publishers (journals, publishing houses, etc.) have Twitter accounts and a Facebook presence; it's logical and wise to connect to them so they can endorse your message as well via a "like" or retweet.

As a general rule, I use Facebook and Twitter to announce my publications. This isn't simply flaunting success: through those two social networking sites, I can reach over a thousand people – many of whom will find the information interesting, and perhaps share with people in their networks. As a scholar wedded to seeing my research impact people in the communities that I research, it's imperative that I spread the word outside of the ivy walls of academe.

There is also a bevy of social media sites directed at academic audiences that one can utilize to announce papers, chapters, and other scholarly output. Academia.edu, mendeley.com, and bepress.com are all sites that allow researchers to easily create pages detailing one's work. Most of these sites operate in the manner of Facebook, so one can follow and link to researchers in similar fields and institutions. In some cases, publishers allow authors to post manuscripts to these sites so other members can access full articles: this is entirely dependent on the publisher's policies, so it is wise to inquire about posting a manuscript before doing so. An additional virtual homestead is Google Scholar (scholar.google.com), which allows researchers to create a homepage, link to co-authors and collaborators, and even perform rudimentary scholarly impact statistics (number of citations, citations by year, etc.).

There are rules of thumb and good "netiquette" to follow. Always mention collaborators in social media messaging, and many sites allow one to tag colleagues to draw their attention to research that is of interest. Many of the links to scholarly articles are lengthy, so consider using a URL shortener such as bit.ly to make the links shorter (and fit into the message window on social media sites). I always find it polite to mention the publisher in the message as well. Occasionally other people may use social media to share your work; it is a good idea to retweet or like these messages. On Twitter, for instance, most clients have a search function so one can easily use keywords to see if others are discussing a topic. With this information, it is easy to use appropriate hashtags or signal users who are interested in the topic.

Reaching Invested and Interested Parties – Amplifying

To this point, I've discussed scholarship in the narrowest sense: works published in journals or by presses, and the utility of using social media to share this research. Many scholars are increasingly seeing their work circulated in the press and other media venues (blogs, websites, etc.). These information streams are another way to bring one's research to a larger audience. Researchers in fields like political science, economics, and education, to name a few, are often sought out for their perspectives on news stories. Social media is a terrific way to circulate and broadcast interviews and news stories, for instance, in which one is the subject or expressing an

expert opinion. In the present day, with omnipresent news and information, it's likely expert analysis can sink to the bottom of the pile – unless, of course, scholars find ways to keep their work at the forefront of one's networks.

Posting about upcoming media appearances seems obvious, but I would additionally emphasize archived interviews, news stories, and the like. Regarding audiovisual media, it is typically a good idea to ask for a digital copy of the interview for personal use and archiving – many news organizations keep these media for a short time only on their sites. With archival media sites like YouTube and SoundCloud, these appearances can be kept and referenced to well after the original airdate.

I would also offer another suggestion with a small caveat – visiting the comments section that allows readers, listeners, and viewers to opine on one's perspectives. At times, other experts and commenters of note (public figures, other academics) will join the discussion – providing another opportunity to link to their thoughts (and even connect to them via social networks such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter). However, there is a reason that the comments section is oft-referred to as the cesspool of the Internet.[19] Some level of discernment is wise; I personally do not suggest engaging in "flame wars" and other tit-for-tat commentary. First, it's rarely productive – some people seem to spend all waking hours debating on the Internet, and such discussions infrequently end up changing perspectives. Second, it's an incredible time sink, and can become annoyingly addictive – the temptation to see what "tempest9817" has to say after one's last witticism is ultimately an enemy of productivity.

I learned this firsthand when my professorial colleague and Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Incorporated brother Gregory Vincent, vice-president of the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement at UT-Austin, and I collaborated on an op-ed in the *Austin American-Statesman* reflecting on our work with 100 Black men of Austin. We thoughtfully wrote about the policy and practices that led to the death of Michael Brown in Missouri, and many other young men of color.[20] We were proud of our work and grateful for the opportunity to share our perspectives with the community at large. Greg called the morning the op-ed was published,

congratulated me for a strong editorial, and ended the call with, "Don't look at the comments section." So of course, I did: it was sobering to see our reflections answered with *bon mots* such as, "This is literally the dumbest thing I've ever read" (a moderator removed the comment shortly after I read it).

On occasion, however, a provocative media appearance may spark others to use their social media platforms to respond. After an appearance on National Public Radio's *Talk of the Nation* where I discussed the upcoming Black Marriage Day,[21] one blogger took me to task for noting that Black families exist in many forms, not simply heterosexual marriages.[22] I didn't have the time to respond to his thoughts, but it was good to know that my research with my co-author and mentor Charles V. Willie sparked a debate.[23] This exchange demonstrated that our work was impacting people outside of academia. In a time where it is becoming more and more imperative that scholars find ways to partake in "academic engagement" with communities and the public at large, social media is a lever that people in the academy can use to magnify their contributions outside of the sometimes narrow confines of scholarly venues.

Just the Facts: Using Social Media as a Means of Clarifying

One of the consequences of the constant data cycle we now live in is that social media is the bleeding edge frontier of (mis)information. While there are undeniable advantages to using social media as sources of news, there are many times when rumors and misinformation have been fueled via social networks: perhaps most notably, Reddit, Twitter, and Facebook users contributed to the misidentification of missing Brown student Sunil Tripathi as a suspect in the Boston Marathon bombing in April 2013 [24] (sadly, Tripathi was found dead later that month).[25] Such an example illustrates the downside of depending on social media as the solitary source for information. Conversely, academics can use social media to bring clarity to a discussion.

One particularly adept clarifier on social media is Ivory Toldson, associate professor of counseling psychology at Howard University, editor-in-chief of the *Journal of Negro Education*, and deputy

director for the White House Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Toldson leveraged social media to debunk one of the most enduring mistruths in higher education research with a column that appeared on TheRoot.com in February 2013 entitled "More Black Men in Jail than in College? Wrong."[26] The column itself is worth a read, not only for Toldson's admission that he, too, had repeated this erroneous statement and his precise analysis of statistical data, but also for this incredibly funny yet telling introduction:

> What does the line "There are more black men in jail than in college" have in common with the Jheri curl? Answer: They were invented by white men (Jheri Redding and Vincent Schiraldi, respectively) and adopted enthusiastically by black people, and they left a nasty stain on the shoulders of millions of black men. It's been more than 20 years since the Jheri curl faded away into infamy, and I'm proud to say that even in the 1980s, I never sported a curl. Unfortunately, I can't say the same about the line "There are more black men in jail than in college."[27]

Indeed, Toldson's TheRoot.com column includes a Twitter exchange, where he engages a Twitter user that challenges his data. Using state figures, Toldson reifies that in the state of New Jersey, there are more Black men in college than prison, signing off, "My numbers aren't pretty, but they're real."[28] Toldson has leveraged social media to bury this myth in recent months: on January 2, 2014, he tweeted a YouTube link to over 3,000 followers.[29] This is an example of using social media to not only to clarify misinformation, but also to keep pertinent research findings in the marketplace of ideas.

Scholars can also leverage social media to redirect conversations that spiral out of control in the virtual marketplace of ideas. During the emotionally charged aftermath of the shooting of Michael Brown, an unarmed Black young man at the hands of a White police officer in Ferguson, Missouri, the Twitter hashtag #Ferguson became a way that academics, activists, and concerned citizens communicated the facts about the situation – many times clarifying misinformation about peaceful protests portrayed by the media as

"riots."[30] Social media, in fact, helped clarify that police forces often escalated tensions by tear-gassing and arresting members of the media from organizations such as Al Jazeera and the *Washington Post*.[31] Some of the clarification aspect of social media has certainly affected students, faculty, and staff in my community at the University of Texas at Austin. The 2011–2012 academic year was a nadir for the College Republicans chapter on campus, particularly in regard to the irresponsible use of social media. In November, the president of the organization, Lauren Pierce, tweeted the following:

> Y'all as tempting as it may be, don't shoot Obama. We need him to go down in history as the WORST president we've EVER had! #2012[32]

Social media acted quickly. Many blogs immediately posted these comments, and Pierce stepped down. Ironically, however, the next president of the organization, Cassie Wright, found herself in hot water a month later when she tweeted, "My president is black. He smokes a lot of crack. Holla. #2012 #Obama."[33] Again, the reaction was swift, with scholars such as Boyce Watkins using the blogosphere to respond:

> Both the University of Texas and Texas A&M are well-known for the racism being spewed by their College Republican organizations. What saddens me as an educator is the fact that these students are peculiar reflections of the learning environment from which they came . . . Given that the students at the University of Texas are continuously making national news for producing a multitude of creative manifestations of ugly racial hatred, one has to wonder what the university is doing to stop the flow of this kind of pathetically [un-American] language.[34]

In fairness to the UT community, there were many tweets condemning these exchanges and clarifying that these comments did not reflect the perspectives of the community as a whole. Texas Exes, the university's alumni association, tweeted, "Embarrassing: a second @UTAustin College Repub prez fails at Twitter http://txex.es/rwhwsl @cassienwright @laurenepierce #fail."[35] UT alumnus Chad Stanton responded by tweeting comparative data regarding

the impact of President Bush's and President Obama's policies.[36] These clarifications demonstrated that as much as the irresponsible use of social media has the ability to inflict pain and harm, responsible clarifying statements can be empowering and more accurately convey public sentiment.

If we liken social media to Pandora's box – an apt metaphor, considering the reluctance of scholars in general to engage in scholarly discourse via the medium, as well as the prominent missteps of scholars – some readers may feel it's best to keep the social media box nailed shut. Doubtless, a modicum of caution is advised to avoid the pitfalls of social media misuse. However, academics are potentially missing out on an opportunity to engage with an expanded audience of colleagues and the public at large. It is ironic, in a sense, because academics have so many ways to enter the marketplace of ideas, as Kristof noted earlier in this chapter.[37]

Social media can be a key lever in bringing research to the public sphere, and it is possible to maintain one's dignity and scholarly presence while doing so. I also believe social media engagement can help to bring the personalities of academicians to the fore – and that's not a bad thing. In many ways, when we engage in thoughtful discussions on issues of societal importance, perhaps sprinkled with observations about our favorite sports team's performance, or exhorting our colleagues to bring their scholarly observation to a film we watched, I believe we are unveiling and opening academia to not just the public at large, but to young people in particular – many of whom never interact with professors and researchers unless they are on the receiving end of a lecture in a large hall on a college campus. Frankly, we are missing a golden opportunity to demonstrate the worth of the life of the mind if we only communicate with others in the academy.

Let's commit to use social media to magnify, amplify, and clarify discourse on our passions and predilections, and urge our colleagues in the academic realm to do the same. Rudyard Kipling might have best expressed the value of social media engagement in a Twitter-friendly 140 word couplet in 1895: "Scholars, If u can talk w/crowds & keep ur virtue, Or walk w/Kings-nor lose the common touch-then Urs is the Earth & everything that's in it!"[38]

Quick Tips List

1. Create an online social media presence – even if you don't think you have anything to say or post at the moment. When you *do* have something to say, you don't want to have to scramble to get a presence up and going.

2. Partner with your institution's communications or public relations department, as well as publishers, conferences, and organizations you are affiliated with. Ask them to endorse your posts. In this community, find a social media mentor – perhaps a colleague or fellow scholar/practitioner. Observe how they engage in the use of the media. Repost, reply, or retweet their work (so they will do the same for you).

3. Decide how you want to handle personal opinions – will you share them on social media, or not? Will you set up a "private" account (in quotes because in the world of social media, there is no such thing as true privacy) for friends and peers? Or will you incorporate personal perspectives along with your professional and academic views. This is a personal choice with significant consequences – consider the impact of your decision.

4. Follow and link to media (news agencies, bloggers, websites) that you are interested in participating with. Think of these social media presences as local, regional, national, and international, and tag or mention these accounts when sharing your research.

5. Be very cautious of posting to social media when you are experiencing high levels of emotion. There is no true "eraser" on social media. Outbursts or regrettable statements can be captured with screenshots. Also, be careful about who you friend, follow, and retweet/respond to. Resist the temptation to get involved with "flame wars" and instead use your research and scholarship to opine on policy and political issues.

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