

Engagement Levels on Social Media: A Case Study of
Sojourner Truth Library's Instagram

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Abstract

Recently, libraries have begun utilizing social media to market their materials and services to the general public. Identifying best practices that lead to increased engagement between followers and library social media accounts can assist libraries to welcome more patrons. This study sought to identify what libraries can do to increase the amount of engagement with followers. This research explores the amount of engagement on Sojourner Truth Library's social media. Amount of engagement was determined by the number of likes and comments per post. Using data compiled from the library's social media, the relationship between amount of engagement and the content of posted photos was examined. Findings suggest that featuring human faces on Instagram affects the amount of engagement positively. Overall, it was found that featuring human faces in a social media post will increase engagement levels.

Introduction

Social media provides the opportunity to create, and share ideas. Social media platforms are accessed by countless users such as organizations, business, and increasingly, libraries. These platforms allow ideas to be debated, and provide knowledge and information for internet users. The role of the library is to obtain, preserve, and organize information in a physical setting and its success is "measured on the basis of their traditional services, completeness, and balance of collection" (Manhas et al., 2016). However, the rise of the technology poses challenges to libraries because technology has revolutionized the efficiency of obtaining information. According to Manhas, information must possess "relevance, accuracy, timeliness, currency completeness, clarity, and cost effectiveness" (Manhas et al., 2016). The traditional library system is becoming obsolete in terms of providing information in comparison to

technology. Libraries have responded to the changes by increasing their services by loaning out technology (such as laptops and iPads), offering digital inter-library loan, and increasing hours to accommodate more patrons. Social media has become an important tool for libraries to market their services. Libraries have turned to social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to advertise their services to create potential closer relationships with patrons (Peacemaker, et al., 2016). Engaging patrons with the library's social media is important because it informs users of library services.

Additionally, libraries are facing challenges running their social media, specifically and most importantly, low engagement levels. Libraries tend to receive a low number of likes and comments on their social media posts. It is important for libraries to receive likes and comments on their postings because it establishes online rapport with patrons. Virginia Commonwealth University's (VCU) literature review of social media and libraries revealed 71.1% of academic libraries across Asia, North America, and Europe use social media, with Facebook and Twitter revealed to be most popular (Peacemaker, et al., 2016). However, a study revealed a study of 20 libraries showed 73% had no interaction and 91% had no comments on their social media sites (Peacemaker, et al., 2016).

Libraries aren't receiving the reward (multitudes of likes and comments) for the effort put into their social media. The content promoted on the social media site may be information users are least likely to respond to resulting in the low engagement levels. Libraries' social media sites are mostly used to announce library programs, provide the opportunity for students to ask questions, teach basic searching tools, promote new books, and opportunities to ask a librarian via the web (Manhas et al., 2016). The challenge of low engagement has led to many academic libraries wondering how libraries can increase the amount of engagement with followers.

Developing content strategies provides a way to combat low engagement levels. Content strategies focus on a defined audience, purpose, and tone for the social media account. A specific audience is chosen to help establish the reason why a particular social media account exist. The tone is the digital voice of the social media site; it is how your captions will “sound” to the reader. Content strategies incorporating “key themes and messages and recommended topics” (Peacemaker, et al., 2016) into social media posts are highly recommended to increase engagement. An academic library’s content strategy may include topics regarding campus, the physical library building, study spaces, books, special collections items, and anything concerning grades (Salomon, 2013).

It’s important to understand what types of content increase engagement in order to create a successful content strategy. Featuring human faces in photos is an effective content strategy to increase engagement levels, especially for Instagram. Faces play a key role in combating low engagement on social media, because studies reveal likes and comments are significantly higher when at least one face is in the photo (Bakhshi et al., 2014). According to Bakhshi and colleagues, a photo with a face is 38% more likely to receive likes and 32% to receive comments compared to a photo without a face (Bakhshi et al., 2014). Bakhshi and colleagues came to this conclusion by randomly sampling one million photos with a face detection software.

The human brain is fascinated by faces, humans spend more time looking at faces that anything else. Faces are the first thing we notice, and faces tell us more about a person than any other physical attribute (Solso, 2004). Faces are so important to us, we have a highly specialized region of the temporal lobe solely dedicated for facial recognition known as the fusiform face area (FFA). Faces are powerful means of non-verbal communication that provide us with special social cues through facial expressions relaying emotion, age, humor, regional and national

background. Special social cues found in faces play a key role in photos because they provide more definition to a photo. The viewer uses the social cues to understand the photo.

The Sojourner Truth Library's Instagram was created by Morgan Gwenwald and Victoria Falco in 2014. It currently has 1,549 followers and is run by a team of Social Media and Graphic Design Interns. Next, I introduce the collection of data from the Instagram and describe the statistical method used to analyze the results. Finally, I interpret my findings within the frame of the existing work.

Methods

Data was collected over the course of one semester (16 weeks). Likes and comments of photos from the Sojourner Truth Library's Instagram (@sunynplibrary) were recorded once a week onto a Google spreadsheet. A description of the post was created followed by the number of likes and then comments. Last, keywords from the caption of the photo were recorded. At the end of the Fall 2017 semester, the likes, comments, and engagement levels were analyzed.

Figures 1 and 2 are examples of photos with and without faces I compared:



Fig.1 A post with a face received 150 likes



Fig.2 A post without a face received 41 likes

Different types of media were used on the library's Instagram: Boomerangs, graphics, pictures with graphics, videos, reposting pictures, and carousel. A carousel post is an option to post up to 10 photos or videos in a single post on Instagram. Boomerang is a social media app

that takes short, fast burst of pictures and then creates a video that loops forwards and backwards with the photos. After all the likes, comments, and keywords were recorded, the data were analyzed via T-test. This analysis compared the likes and comments of photos with faces and photos without faces.

Results

A total of 132 photos were posted on Instagram. The number of likes totaled 9,658 with an average of 73.7 likes per photo. All comments totaled 143 with an average of 1.09 comments per photo. The sum of all engagement levels in 4,972 with an average of 37.95 per photo. The lowest number of likes was 24 with the highest being 159. The lowest number of comments was 0 and the highest was 10. The lowest engagement level was 14 with the highest being 83.5 (two photos were tied for the highest engagement level). Figures 3 shows the average number of likes for the media format.

Average # of Likes

Boomerang	87.25
Graphics	48.59
Hyperlapse video	103
Multiple repost	108
Picture	79.37
Pictures with graphic	80
Repost picture	147
Carousel	84
Videos	89

Fig.3

The data was further analyzed using T-test which compare the means of two groups. T-test compares one variable (likes) between two groups (photos with faces and photos without faces). Likes and comments from photos with faces and likes from photos without faces were analyzed separately. Collectively, 42 photos were posted without faces and 39 photos were posted with faces. Figures 4 and 5 demonstrate the full results of the T-test.

Group	No Faces	Faces
Mean	65.62	84.43
SD	26.72	27.83
SEM	3.13	3.65
N	42	39

Fig. 4 (likes)

Figure 4 outlines the T-test results for likes of photos with and without faces. The mean for likes of photos with faces totaled 84.43. The mean value for likes for photos without faces totaled 65.62. The mean number of likes of photos with faces minus photos without faces equals 18.1. The standard deviation (SD) for likes without photos valued at 26.72 and 27.83 for photos with faces. The standard error of the mean (SEM) for photos without faces equaled 3.13 and photos with faces equaled 3.65.

Group	No Faces	Faces
Mean	0.84	1.54
SD	1.43	2.22
SEM	0.17	0.29
N	42	39

Fig. 5 (comments)

Figure 5 outlines the T-test results for comments of photos with and without faces. The mean for comments of photos with faces totaled 1.26. The mean for comments of photos without faces totaled 0.64. The SD for pictures with faces valued at 1.65. The SD for pictures with no faces valued at 1.35. The SEM for picture with faces was 0.26 and for pictures without faces was 0.22.

In order for the data to be considered significant, the value must equate to 0.5 or less. The P-value for likes of photos with faces was extremely statistically significant at 0.0001. The P-values for comments photos without faces was significant at 0.0287. Overall, this indicates featuring a face in a photo will increase likes and comments.

Discussion

Using Instagram as the research context, I set out to investigate how photos with faces relate to engagement compared to those without faces. The data collected from SUNY New Paltz Sojourner Truth Library's Instagram suggests featuring faces in content increases engagement with patrons. The quantitative data demonstrates that photos with faces receive considerably more likes and comments than photos without faces.

The findings are further supported by the T-test results which show the difference between photos with faces and photos without faces were significantly different. The data shows that people respond positively to posts containing faces; social media users will like photos with faces in them. These results make sense in light of the results of Solso (2004) who highlighted that faces are the first thing we notice and they tell us more about a person than any other physical attribute. Photos with faces provide more definition to a photo for viewers on social media. Viewers receive a more complete understanding of the context, purpose, and meaning of the photo through the featured face's emotion, position, and action. A happy smiling face featured in an Instagram post works as great advertisement for the library.

Conclusion

Libraries have turned to social media platforms to market their services to create rapport with patrons. Nonetheless, libraries are struggling to build and maintain that rapport. Creating

content strategies with themes and recommended topics can help libraries combat low engagement levels. The data collected and T-test results demonstrate that faces in a photo on social media will increase engagement. Future studies of online user behavior and social engagement should consider the content of the photo and more specifically the presence of faces. Future studies should be conducted to determine if posting a photo with faces will physically bring more people to the library. Lastly, libraries should increase featuring faces in social media posts to increase engagement with patrons.

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