

Chapter 7

Diversity and Inclusion: How to Avoid Bias and Social Media Blunders

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ABSTRACT

The academic library profession has discussed the importance of diversity and inclusion, but has yet to explore their intersection with social media marketing. Given changing demographics and an increase in activism on college campuses, libraries must produce social media content that resonates with underrepresented groups. This chapter introduces strategies for effectively incorporating diversity and inclusion into social media and advice on avoiding mistakes. The author examines social media use at her library and lessons learned from a campaign that received criticism. The chapter concludes with challenges to practicing diversity in social media, including recruiting diverse staff and discrimination that emerges from new social media technologies.

INTRODUCTION

There has been no shortage of social media mishaps related to implicit bias. In October 2017, the soap company Dove posted an online video ad on Facebook showing a Black woman turning into a White woman. A few months later, the clothing retailer H&M featured an image on its website of a Black child wearing a hooded sweatshirt with the text “coolest monkey in the jungle.” Both incidents resulted in a viral backlash against the companies online and in stores. Although academic library social media may not have the audience of multinational companies, the potential negative virality of online content requires the staff responsible for social media content to be racially sensitive.

As college campuses become more diverse, library social media managers must be intentional not only in posting engaging content that encourages people to use the library, but also in creating content which resonates with people representing different social identities and backgrounds. Photos, graphic design, videos, and messages should empower underrepresented groups, not oppress them. By reinforcing social injustice, social media can lead to a communications disaster and repercussions for the library, as well as the academic institution.

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Diversity and Inclusion

Libraries have long had a central role in serving diverse populations. Diversity includes, but is not limited to, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, physical ability, religion, socioeconomic status, and national origin. When working with groups who currently suffer from injustices, or historically have been suppressed, it is essential to practice inclusion: the act of valuing them, respecting them, and making them feel welcome. Since the 2016 presidential election, diversity and inclusion have become prominent topics within the library discourse. There have been webinars on serving immigrants and refugees, conference presentations on neutrality, topical LibGuides, and strategic plans incorporating diversity. From collection development to staff recruitment and retention, librarians and library staff are critiquing and trying to remove systemic bias and inequities. Amid these efforts, the impact of marketing, especially social media, cannot be taken lightly. Social media is public-facing, and consequently it provides the first impression of the library that many students, parents, donors, and alumni see. In a time of increased budget pressures and accountability to the parent institution, public perception can work to the benefit or detriment of the library.

Although existing literature on library social media marketing includes case studies, discussion of best practices, and a number of surveys of how different organizations have used these platforms, discussion of diversity regarding content creation is lacking. This chapter argues for embedding diversity and inclusion in social media marketing, a critical practice in times of increasing political unrest, socioeconomic uncertainty, and a change in the demographic makeup and attitudes of users.

Attempting an intersectional perspective of identity, the author presents strategies for incorporating diversity and inclusion into social media, as well as tips on avoiding mistakes. She also presents an examination of social media use at her library and the criticism received when sharing historical photos of the university. The chapter concludes with challenges staff may face while championing diversity in social media, including discrimination emerging from new social media technologies such as targeted advertising and chatbots. A lack of staff resources, including diverse members, may also pose a problem when creating diverse and inclusive content.

BACKGROUND

Since Donald Trump was elected president and took office in January 2017, higher education has been impacted by: changes in immigration policy (Ayoub & Beydoun, 2017); a growing presence of white supremacy on college and university campuses (The Anti-Defamation League, 2018; Vasquez, 2018); harassment and intimidation of professors (Levy, 2018); and legislative efforts to hinder academic freedom (H.B. 2120, 2017). The academic library is often said to be the heart of campus, and thus, not immune from these threats to the community it serves.

Students and faculty of color have been especially affected by the changes in the political climate. The Muslim Ban has instilled fear and anxiety in immigrants from the countries it targets (Ayoub & Beydoun, 2017). The rescission of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) has left many students wondering if they will be deported. Amplifying these concerns is a rise in racism on college campuses. In 2016, there were 25% more hate crimes at 6,506 institutions compared to the year before (United States Department of Education, n.d.). At the time of writing, the Trump administration is rescinding guidance documents which encourage universities to consider race when admitting students to recruit a more diverse student population (United States Department of Education, 2018).

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