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Social Media and Persuasion - Great Expectations

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Social Media and Persuasion - Great Expectations

Abstract

"Using social media is often considered a standard, and any time you're not using a standard, you ought to have good reason."

Posting about the appropriate use of new forms of communication from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/social-media-and-persuasion-great-expectations/>

Keywords

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Disciplines

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Comments

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Social Media and Persuasion – Great Expectations

▫ inallthings.org/social-media-and-persuasion-great-expectations/

Bruce Kuiper

I asked a few students this month whether or not we should use social media in public relations work, and the response was fairly telling – “Why wouldn’t you use social media?! You have to use social media!” Even in 2016, such responses might be a bit debatable or examples of blind acceptance, but they also highlight the main advantage of using social media in a communication campaign – using social media is often considered a standard, and any time you’re not using a standard, you ought to have good reason.

These new media are not just new forms of communication; Hayes, Hendrix, and Kumar (2013) say they are “technology that change the very nature of communication.”¹ With such an inherent consideration of the impact of social media, we cannot ignore them when constructing a campaign, or when we are doing any sort of communication, really. Part of this same aspect is the “connection” ability of social media. As Hayes, Hendrix, and Kumar state, social media enable society to maintain connections with those we wish to.² Making and maintaining connections is a strong point with social media, and such networking has obvious benefits for developing a campaign.

However exciting or useful social media are, there are also a few potential problems. For example, the sheer number of social media platforms and corresponding voices means that it can become difficult to have your message or even your voice heard over the hubbub. Hays, Hendrix, and Kumar echo this sentiment, saying that differentiating between opinion and information is challenging and that confrontation is often more important than actual, useful, pertinent content.³ In this bewildering sea of media, “organizations think they must jump into the social media pond because so many of their friends are happily splashing about. However, they may not even own a swimsuit, social media skills, or even know if their prime audience likes to swim” (p. 95). This analogy is a great image for us to use when thinking organizationally or even in our personal lives.

By way of this analogy, we could ask the same question – “Why wouldn’t you use social media?” – for other areas of life. Such questioning enables us to examine more closely why we use the communication tools we do. Teaching, dating, parenting, playing, and working are just a few of many areas we could assume that we absolutely need to integrate with social media in the 21st century. The presence of mobile platforms for social media are so ubiquitous that not using them might be seen as odd. Such non-usage, if played right, could be an interesting strategy for a marketing or public relations campaign. The key would be remembering that social media are not the only type of media to use, and that ultimately the most effective spread of ideas comes from key opinion leaders rather than a generic mass media effect.

Often, organizations do have policies for usage, though. For example, a public relations department might request to be at least notified if any other department develops a Facebook page or Twitter account, which echoes what Breakenridge says about public relations policy makers being responsible for monitoring and implementing social media tactics.⁴ In addition, policies of public communication carried over from media contacts and e-mail have informed the ways in which organizations handle more recent media forms. In another light, organizations are often tempted to use social media in unethical ways. Macnamara suggests that several marketing and public relations companies have engaged in posting false Facebook posts, Twitter feeds, blogs, and other social media postings in order to raise awareness of themselves or their clients, basically “using social media and social networks in naive and even deceitful ways.”⁵ It is a little incomprehensible to me how such people think they won’t be caught in these actions, but perhaps nothing

should be terribly surprising anymore. At any rate, if this is a trend or even if it is a rare temptation, reminders to stick to truth are always good.

Despite this seeming dependence on social media in most of life today, many organizations still depend on one particular type of communication tool: e-mail. Beashel⁶ reminds us that despite the perception that Facebook and Twitter dominate modern communication technology, e-mail accounts still outnumber social media accounts by a wide margin. For example, in considering the social media use at many colleges right now, it would become fairly clear to most visitors that the actual amount of social media used for organizational purposes is fairly minimal. Often, admissions offices use Facebook and other similar platforms to connect with prospective students, alumni offices do something similar to connect with alumni, and other departments have other limited social media practices as well. But in terms of an organization-wide, common use of social media for information and communication, it seems like social media are often neglected in favor of e-mail.

Speaking specifically to the communication needs of college faculty, the main method for collaboration on many campuses is, again, e-mail. While the speed and the record-keeping aspects make this medium appealing, the ability to modify, clarify, and broadcast in an efficient way seems lacking. For example, in several settings with students and with faculty we have had to coordinate some debriefing type of materials from the various mission trips I've been on. And the communication medium of choice? E-mail. However, even in a small group, the "Reply All" feature quickly filled our inboxes as we developed the ways in which we were going to tackle schedules and events. A different kind of tool would have been much more efficient and synchronous and left our inboxes alone – or at least emptier. In this case, Breakenridge would perhaps remind us that social media is not ever a finished product; media products and uses are always changing, always in process.⁷

The major problem I see for using e-mail in teaching is that students often feel as though the primary method of communication, e-mail, is at best passé and at worst terribly ineffective. Student groups have not really come up with a viable alternative to e-mail for internal communication, but there is a fairly constant disquiet about using such an "ancient" technology. Trottier, for example, looks at the ways in which parties using social media monitor themselves, stating, "social media policing is an assemblage of top-down and bottom-up efforts."⁸ The give-and-take nature of new media is thus seen clearly and can be utilized to foster two-way communication between teachers and students. On the other hand, e-mail as a campaign, marketing, teaching, or interpersonal tool could still be one of the most effective media. Beashel, for one, argues that it is difficult to find a marketing campaign as effective as e-mail is.⁹

In light of this way of using social media, organizations should look beyond the status quo to look at fresh ways to communicate and to deal with various tasks. As Chaney suggests, social media are not only for external uses.¹⁰ In other words, aiming for a "requisite variety" in our communication that matches needs with media types and audiences with proper channels.

When we can get past the idea that Facebook, Twitter, and other social media are not just for contacting those on the outside of the organization but can be used very effectively for increasing in-house efficiency, we might be able to develop collaboration in ways we've not yet imagined. Or we might discover that the traditional ways of communicating work best for our needs. In either case, broadening our imagination for communication ultimately is more key than simply broadening our usage of technology.

Footnotes

1. Hayes, D. C., Hendrix, J. A., & Kumar, P. D. (2013). *Public relations cases* (9th ed.). Boston, MA: Wadsworth Publishing. p. 95 ↩
2. p. 93 ↩
3. p. 95 ↩
4. Breakenridge, D. K. (2012). *Social media and public relations: Eight new practices for the PR professional*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc. p.12 ↩
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8. Trottier, D. (November 01, 2012). *Policing social media*. *Canadian Review of Sociology/revue Canadienne De Sociologie*, 49, 4, 411-425. ↩
9. Beashel, A. (2014, July 1). Email marketing vs social media: Are you focusing on the wrong channel? *Campaign Monitor*. Retrieved from <https://www.campaignmonitor.com/blog/email-marketing/2014/07/email-marketing-vs-social-media/>. ↩
10. Chaney, P. (2013, Oct. 16). The rise of social intranets: Social media for internal communications. Bizzuka, Retrieved from <http://www.bizzuka.com/company-blog/the-rise-of-social-intranets-social-media-for-internal-communications>) For Van der Kleij, et al (2009), the challenge becomes how to overcome communication hurdles in various environments – for example, how to achieve similar communication results in a video conference that might be achieved in a face-to-face meeting. ((Van der Kleij, R., Maarten, S. J., Werkhoven, P., & De Dreu, C. K. W. (January 01, 2009). How conversations change over time in face-to-face and video-mediated communication. *Small Group Research*, 40, 4, 355-381. ↩