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Collecting to the Core — Social Media in Education, Healthcare, and Marketing

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Column Editor's Note: The "Collecting to the Core" column highlights monographic works that are essential to the academic library within a particular discipline, inspired by the *Resources for College Libraries* bibliography (online at <http://www.rclweb.net>). In each essay, subject specialists introduce and explain the classic titles and topics that continue to remain relevant to the undergraduate curriculum and library collection. Disciplinary trends may shift, but some classics never go out of style. — AD

Social media is broadly defined as any website or web-based service that allows users to generate their own content. The potential of social media via websites and apps has been embraced by many sectors, including education, healthcare, and marketing. In the education sector, social media plays an important role in providing a collaborative platform for students and instructors. Students can discuss topics of interest and share information online with peers while educators can have a presence in the digital tools students use. In the health sector, social media can be used for mass communication and allow health service providers to stay abreast of current innovations, practices, and information. The marketing industry has adopted social media to promote products, events, and programs to a global customer base, taking advantage of the near-instant ability to reach, connect, and capitalize on social networks. Although social media platforms and functionality may seem ubiquitous, it is evident that social media is adopted and used for different purposes by different sectors, as well as used more frequently in some sectors than others. As social media evolves into a topic ripe for critical study, library collections should reflect emerging research across platforms, technologies, and sectors. The following sections present selected resources on social media in education, health services, and marketing.

Education

Educators may use social media for both professional and instructional purposes. A 2011 survey conducted by **Mike Moran**, **Jeff Seaman**, and **Hester Tinti-Kane** found that 78% of all faculty use social media for professional career activities.¹ They also use social media to complement online and face-to-face instruction. According to **Albert Bandura's** *Social Learning Theory*, learning is a cognitive process that takes place in a social context through observation, imitation, and modeling.² Social media can extend social learning by providing a platform for social interactions

beyond the classroom and enhance collaborative learning among students. Depending on the discipline, course objectives, and learning technology, instructors may require that students read, watch, and review materials from social media sites and encourage students to engage with social media in ways that promote learning. However, not all social media is used equally. In education, online videos, blogs, wikis, and podcasts are some of the applications most commonly used by faculty for teaching purposes. There are a number of books written on the strategic integration of social media into classroom instruction. One, *Technology and Digital Media in the Early Years: Tools for Teaching and Learning* is a compilation of articles written by various authors on the use of digital media for children.³ The book is divided into three parts: the first section focuses on children's use of digital media; the second part covers strategic use of learning technologies in classrooms including STEM, simple robotics, and programming; the third addresses the use of media to strengthen the home-school connection and to develop connected learners and educators. Authors present educational activities using technological tools that are grounded in learning theories. This is an important book for early childhood educators, giving them insights into learning theories, media designed for educational purposes, and their effective integration into educational activities.

Mainstream social media such as **Facebook**, **Pinterest**, **Instagram**, **Flickr**, **YouTube**, **Twitter**, **Yelp**, and **delicio.us** are also used outside the classroom by educational institutions for recruitment, marketing, and communications. They allow users to post and share comments, videos, and images that are monitored by the institutions' social media communications teams. As **Rachel Rueben** notes, "Online social network users are three times more likely to trust their peers' opinions over advertising when making decisions."⁴ Studies have found that institutions use the two-way communication tools of social media to engage their audience, clarify misconceptions, promote genuine feedback, and enable peer-to-peer marketing.

Healthcare

Social media is used for a variety of purposes in healthcare sectors. It is used for professional networking and education, organizational promotion, patient care and education, and public health programs. In "Social Media in Healthcare: Connect, Communicate, Collab-

orate," **Christina Beach Thielst** emphasizes the need to harness the power of social media in health industries.⁵ She argues that social media can be used to enhance connection, communication, and collaboration between various stakeholders and details the blogs, microblogs, social networking sites, podcasts, wikis, bookmarking sites, photo and video sharing platforms, widgets, and apps that are widely used by patients and healthcare workers. Social media sites designed for health professionals for networking and professional education allow users to listen to experts, talk to colleagues, and discuss issues related to patient care, politics and ethics in healthcare, biostatistics, practice management, and career strategies.⁶ Most of these social media sites are closed to the public and solely available to healthcare professionals.

For the purpose of organizational promotion, patient education, and public health programs, health care organizations have increasingly used social media such as **Twitter**, **Facebook**, and **YouTube**, as well as blogs, to communicate to customers via mainstream social media platforms. Hospitals, medical centers, and pharmacies use them to simultaneously communicate with large groups of customers, to conduct surveys, and to promote patient empowerment by offering information and emotional support.⁷ Discussions on these sites are often between patients, helping them gain knowledge and support from each other. The authors of *Participatory Health through Social Media* discuss the influence of social media on patients' confidence in communicating with healthcare professionals and in selecting healthcare options.⁸

It is important to note that while studies have repeatedly documented benefits of social media use in health services, there are disparities in information sharing for multiple reasons. In *Social Networks and Popular Understanding of Science and Health: Sharing Disparities*, **Brian Southwell** talks about inequality in information sharing because of individual-level, community-level, and content-level factors.⁹ In the health sciences, information-sharing behaviors include interpersonal talk, forwarding of e-messages, peer referral, overt endorsement, electronic protest and denigration, as well as commentary and cooptation. **Southwell** points out that the strength of community ties plays an important role in how people within the community are affected by the messages being shared. Several studies have revealed the negative effects of social media use on the

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relationship between patients and health-care professionals. Patients who rely on information gathered from discussions and ratings on social media tend to frequently switch doctors and also tend to bring social media content to physician consultations, leading to increased time spent on sorting and substantiating information.¹⁰

Marketing

The most commonly used social media platforms in marketing are **Facebook**, **Twitter**, **LinkedIn**, **YouTube**, **Google+**, **Instagram**, and **Pinterest**.¹¹ Other less popular media are online forums, social review sites, **Slideshare**, social bookmarking, geo-location, and **Snapchat**. Social media contributes to the global exposure of products and services and increased traffic to commercial sites. They help in developing loyal fans, provide marketplace insights, reduce marketing cost, and help establish business partnerships.

One of the most discussed topics in social media marketing is customer engagement as it relates to buyers' behaviors. **Felix** et al. argue that there are two approaches to social media marketing: defenders and explorers.¹² The defender approach uses social media to mainly push contents to customers, the community, and their employees. The explorer approach is more successful as it uses the interactive and collaborative features of social media technology to create and maintain reciprocal relationships with stakeholders. Such marketers engage with customers by answering questions from potential buyers, and responding to positive and negative reviews with sincerity. In *Understanding Digital Marketing: Marketing Strategies for Engaging the Digital Generation*, sections titled "What's in it for Marketers" describe the use of different forms of social media including social bookmarking, social media submission sites, forums and discussion sites, media-sharing sites, reviews and ratings sites, social networking sites, blogs, podcasts, microblogs, and wikis.¹³ Studies have shown that a two-way communication between companies and customers can influence buyers' decisions positively even when there are negative reviews.

Social media features such as instant information sharing, the visibility of individuals' social networks, and often-unmediated customer feedback can be used by marketers to influence the consumer's purchasing decisions. In *Influence Marketing: How to Create, Manage, and Measure Brand Influencers in Social Media Marketing*, authors **Brown** and **Fiorella** claim that there is a correlation between word-of-mouth advertising and social media communications, which is why it has become a part of the marketing strategy for businesses. They argue, "There's

no question social media has introduced some key factors into today's business world — open dialogue, increased consumer awareness, and accountability."¹⁴ These factors affect social scoring via the use of emoticons, comments, sharing, and revisits, adding to the value of influence marketing. However, the struggle remains in connecting influence measures to sales revenues.

Although measuring influence based on transactional data is difficult, there are other data analytics that justify the value of social media in marketing. **Eric Brown** discusses social platform analytics such as number of unique visitors, number of page views, time spent on the site, and user demographics.¹⁵ He underscores that while marketers depend upon these metrics, tracking this data is complicated due to differences in the analytic functions offered by different platforms. For instance, in the case of unique visitors **Facebook** only provides numbers on accounts reached, **YouTube** tracks unique cookies, and **Instagram** does not collect such data. Marketers traditionally relied on tracking data through **Google Analytics** and **Omniture** for their entire site, but now they also have to rely on data collected by multiple social media apps. The issue lies in developing a systematic method to de-duplicate unique visitors from all the social media apps. Additionally, it is difficult to track a company's overall reach because social media apps use their own definitions for reach. Data tracked by independent companies such as **comScore**, **Nielsen**, and **Quantcast** often give different numbers for the same metric due to differences in methodologies.

While social media usage is prevalent in the educational, healthcare, and marketing sectors, critical scholarship across these sectors is still emerging. As social media use becomes ubiquitous across personal and professional spheres, it is concerning that the ethical use of social media is a seldom-discussed subject, especially in marketing. As **Peggy Kreshel** says, "Ethics is an inherent component of our cultural understanding of what it means to be a professional. It seems that for a variety of reasons, ethical thinking actively enters into advertising decision making only rarely."¹⁶ Social media enable global connections with consumers and generate enormous amounts of data on personal activities and behaviors. These data, commonly known as big data, are often tracked and retooled without much transparency, raising questions of privacy, surveillance, and security. For information professionals, familiarity with social media applications, usage, and user behaviors is important across outreach services, digital literacy initiatives, and library collections. As the selections discussed here illustrate, embracing the potential of social media networks while understanding their vulnerabilities is critical. 🌱

Endnotes

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Editor's note: An asterisk () denotes a title selected for *Resources for College Libraries*.