

# Doing More with a DM: A Survey on Library Social Media Engagement

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### Résumé de l'article

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**Methods** – In April and May of 2021, researchers conducted a nine-question survey (Appendix A) targeted to social media managers across various types of libraries in the United States, soliciting a mix of quantitative and qualitative results on prevalence of social media interactions, perceived changes to services and spaces as a result of those interactions, and how social media messaging fits within the library's question reporting or tracking workflow. The researchers then extracted a set of thematic codes from the qualitative data to perform further statistical analysis.

**Results** – The survey received 805 responses in total, with response rates varying from question to question. Of these, 362 reported receiving a question or suggestion via social media at least once per month, with 247 reporting a frequency of less than once per month. Respondents expressed a wide range of changes to their library services or spaces as a result, including themes of clarification, marketing, reach, restriction, collections, access, service, policy, and collaboration. Responses were garnered from all types of libraries, with public and academic libraries representing the majority.

**Conclusion** – While there remains a disparity in how different types of libraries utilize social media for soliciting questions and suggestions on library services and spaces, those libraries that participate in the social media conversation are using it as a resource to learn more from their patrons and communities and ultimately are better situated to serve their population.

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*Research Article*

## Doing More with a DM: A Survey on Library Social Media Engagement

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### Abstract

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## Introduction

Social media use by libraries as institutions is a well-established research topic. Existing published research tends to focus on content strategies at a practical level, such as case studies and how-tos. In contrast, this study intends to fill a gap within the literature about current practices of social media management and the direct engagement happening between libraries and the communities they serve. The literature review will focus on social media and libraries in terms of the current landscape, user engagement, and managers' perspectives.

## Literature Review

### *Current Landscape*

As a free communication tool, social media increases the capacity for companies, institutions and groups to promote themselves, view what people are saying about them, and converse with customers. According to Edison Research (2021), 82% of the total U.S. population over the age of 12 use social media, an increase from 79% in 2019 and 80% in 2020 (p. 20). The Pew Research Center (2021, April 7) reports usage as around 72% and that Facebook and YouTube are the most used platforms, also stating that those companies' "user base is broadly representative of the population as a whole." Institutions can use social media surveys like these to inform their strategy, depending on their intended audience and the content they produce.

Accordingly, libraries in the U.S. that manage social media accounts use Facebook more than any other social platform while "Twitter is the next most popular platform, used by 67% of libraries, followed by Instagram, used by 56% of libraries" (OCLC WebJunction, 2018, February 13). These platforms provide opportunities to share content widely and communicate one-on-one with people. Most libraries use their social media to share upcoming events and event photos, while some choose to engage directly with their communities by offering reader's advisory or research help (OCLC WebJunction, 2018, February 13). The American Library Association (ALA, 2018) approved a set of social media guidelines for libraries, including creating a social media policy, staffing and managing the platforms, and making strategic decisions about intended audience and one-way or two-way communication. The guidelines conclude

with the potential positive outcomes of libraries using social media, such as presenting the opportunity for “libraries to engage with users and to make significant contributions to shared knowledge. This robust civic engagement leads to an informed citizenry and a healthy society, while also demonstrating the great value of our institutions” (ALA, 2018). The ALA’s guidelines offer both encouragement and caution, striking a balance of outlining opportunities as well as consequences libraries could face.

### ***User Engagement***

The literature also weighs the opportunities, positives, and negatives of using social media to engage with users as individual institutions. Researchers conduct content analyses of social media accounts to arrive at conclusions about trends and strategies. A study by Kushniryk and Orlov (2021) analyzes the Twitter posts and interactions of 12 large public libraries in North America and concludes with suggestions of how libraries have opportunities to better leverage Twitter by engaging in dialogic communication. They suggest building better relationships by “replying to inquiries, providing feedback, commenting, and retweeting messages” (p. 6). Practitioners and researchers emphasize the importance of continuously developing a communication strategy, or keeping social media social, with practices such as such as surveying your intended audiences’ social media habits and preferences (Howard, Huber, Carter and Moore, 2018) and moving beyond simply broadcasting messages and towards building connections and having conversations to “develop relationships, improve real-world services and resources, affect policy, and meet target goals (Trucks, 2019, p. 12).

Some have compared traditional services to what’s now possible with social media. In the introduction to their study of academic librarians’ perspectives, Ahenkorah-Marfo and Akussah (2017) write “[reference librarians] employed face-to-face conversations with users. Of late, however, the service environment increasingly demands digital reference service, more especially, synchronous service” (p. 1). On the other hand, researchers express caution concerning the negative outcomes of using social media to engage with patrons. Katopol (2017) warns that it enables greedy behavior because a library’s social media presence needs constant attention and requires staff to be available 24/7 through cell phone and email (p. 3). Kliewer (2018) calls attention to privacy concerns and the problematic practices of social media companies. Social media engagement tactics can run counter to longstanding library ethics and principles.

### ***Managers’ Perspectives***

Some research, including this study, seeks out social media managers in libraries to ask about their practices and perspectives. One of the earliest surveys was presented by Rogers (2009, May 22) and reveals library use of blogs, social networking, and instant messaging to market and promote library services. The excitement and potential for reaching more people and meeting them online, where they were increasingly spending time, is a major theme of survey respondents (p. 6). Another theme is respondents’ perceiving the lack of staff time as a major barrier to participating in these tools (pp.6-7). In 2014, Taylor & Francis Group published a white paper about libraries’ practices and future opportunities with social media. Their survey results show that promoting events, services, and resources were all top priorities, followed by more engagement-centered objectives such as connecting with new students, engaging with the academic and local community, and as a customer service tool (p. 8). Social media tracking and assessment varied, some citing the fact that they don’t have a significant number of users to warrant writing a report, like other libraries choose to do (p. 21).

Other manager-specific perspectives are discussed in a study that surveyed art librarians; 71% agreed or strongly agreed that social media can increase visitors and collection use in their library (Sulkow et al., 2019, pp. 308-309) and in their case study, a manager cites that “content creation, regular engagement, image editing, and other time-consuming activities are forms of labor that are often hidden from coworkers and administration” (p. 315). Unlike the study presented below, these do not focus on direct messaging or engagement with social media users. The themes in this literature review, such as staff time, reporting, and providing services, are relevant to the survey results.

## **Aims**

This study’s aim was to determine the role social media messaging plays in shaping library services and spaces across all types of libraries. The authors sought to explore how and how often libraries of different types directly engage with their patrons on social media and how queries are managed.

## **Methods**

To better understand the current use of social media by libraries to solicit and respond to questions and feedback, the researchers wrote an online survey intended for managers of social media within all types of libraries in the United States. For this research, “managers of social media” was defined as any individual who is responsible for monitoring or posting on social media on a library’s behalf. All library social media managers were encouraged to respond; there was no limit per library.

Following IRB approval, the 9-question online survey (see appendix A) launched in April 2021. Each question was optional. Between April 28 and May 14, the researchers and their colleagues shared the invitation to participate, focusing the project’s initial communication on Ohio library workers through Ohio-specific electronic mailing lists. Between May 18 and June 4, the invitation was shared to a national audience by the researchers and their colleagues using the American Library Association’s discussion boards, library marketing-specific Facebook groups, and various professional association electronic mailing lists. The survey was intentionally distributed to professional organizations for multiple types of libraries to ensure data collection and representation from public, academic, school, government, and special libraries. Appendix B includes a timeline of the invitation sharing to each communication channel and their approximate reach.

Between April 28 and June 4, 2021, 805 people responded to the survey. The researchers independently analyzed and coded responses to the survey’s two open-ended questions using Qualtrics XM software for qualitative and quantitative analysis, identifying 12 themes within Q7 responses and 6 in Q8 after comparing findings and reconciling discrepancies.

## **Results**

Survey results revealed experiences and practices of social media managers in libraries. The first two questions filtered out respondents who were ineligible to participate. All 100% affirmed they were willing to take the survey. Of these, 23 respondents said they were not social media managers in response to question 3 and the survey ended for them. The remaining 763 participants, self-identified social media managers, continued the survey. Since the individual questions were optional, the total number of responses varied from question to question.

The subsequent questions inquired about the person's own engagement experiences while using their library's social media account(s). Of those who answered question 4 (n=615), nearly 92% reported receiving questions or suggestions; 8% have not. For the respondents of question 5 (n=614), nearly 97% reported that they respond to questions or suggestions. There were 29 people who answered Q5 affirmatively, but either skipped or said no to Q4.

The next section of the survey asked participants to report the frequency of engagement and practices related to questions or suggestions received on social media. It includes the survey's two open-ended questions that the researchers coded and analyzed.

Most commonly, respondents reported receiving questions or suggestions less than once a month (n=249). The next highest number of respondents (n=187) said they received questions or suggestions weekly. The remaining options presented in the survey were monthly (n=134), daily (n=33), and more than once a day (n=9). See Figure 1.

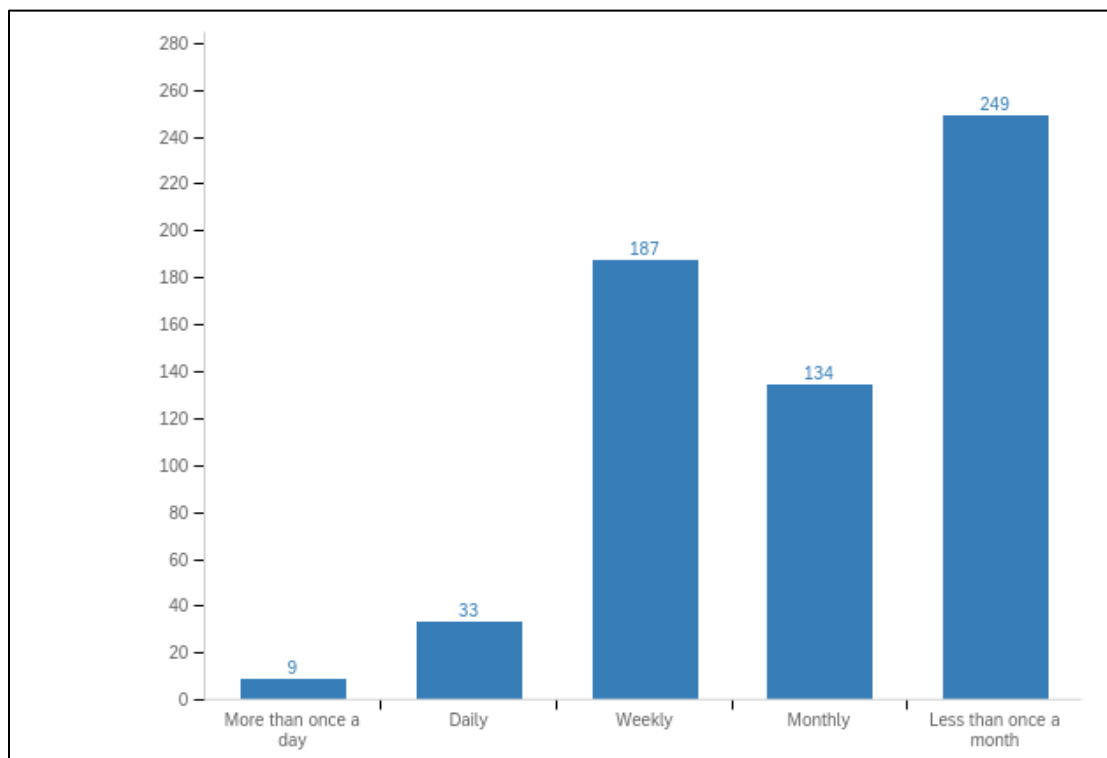


Figure 1

Q6: "Approximately how often do you receive questions on your library's social media?"

Question 7 asked survey respondents "what has changed in your library services or spaces as a direct result of questions or suggestions received via social media?" The 12 themes that emerged from the researchers' qualitative coding process on changes to library services or spaces are listed in the next section. Each individual response was given one or more of these codes, describing how the library's services or spaces changed or didn't change.

### *Description of Codes, With Representative Samples*

Samples have been abbreviated for clarity. The anonymized data set of responses is available upon request.

**Clarification (n=143):** A response to a question via social media. This includes quick, ready reference questions in addition to access-related questions. This is considered a change to services, as it represents a new platform by which to communicate with patrons.

- Public library in New York: "People want to verify services and hours of operations as well as ask questions about programs"
- Government library in Kentucky: "[The] majority of questions we receive are how to research, and we direct them to the appropriate page on our website."
- Academic library in Pennsylvania: "[Questions] are generally just basic ones like "Is the library open today?""

**Marketing (n=49):** An adjustment to messaging off social media. This includes changes to physical signage, website content, or advertising. This is considered a change to spaces, either physical or digital.

- Academic library in Ohio: "Mostly it has been people DMing questions or letting us know about noise complaints...We did increase signage as a result."
- Public library in Pennsylvania: "It helped me identify where we can improve communication with the public such as where and what we include on flyers and brochures"
- Public library in Massachusetts: "We became aware of people with autism preferring the term "Autism Acceptance," and changed our signs and SM accordingly."

**Reach (n=103):** An increase in usage of social media on the part of the library social media manager. This includes consciously increasing the content, maintenance, or monitoring of a library's social media. This is considered a change to services.

- Government library in Mississippi: "[Social] media is an easy way for people to contact us. It helps us to be available to all of our patrons, not just those who can make it into the building or call us on the phone."
- Public library in California: "Social media gives us a bit of a thermometer on what people know, want to know, and don't know about our services."

**Restriction (n=5):** A decrease in usage of social media. This includes automatic responses saying the library does not check social media messages, messaging redirecting users to traditional service points, or anything to dissuade users from contacting the library over social media. This is considered a change to services.

- Public library in Massachusetts: "We have more explicit autoresponders on social media telling people we don't monitor in realtime [sic], and alerting them to [phone, email,] chat options instead."
- Public library in Massachusetts: "[We] had an autoresponder asking folks to email us...especially so the more detailed requests that involve different people could have everything altogether"

instead of spread out through a chat. Also because messages sent to the page were easy to accidentally miss and often sent at odd times when no one was online.”

**Collections (n=33):** An addition to the library collection instigated by communications using social media. This includes physical and digital purchases and subscriptions as well as coordination for donations. This is considered a change to services.

- Public library in Pennsylvania: “We have purchased a couple books based off of some suggestions on social media.”
- Public library in Pennsylvania: “Sometimes patrons’ messages help us with collection development, as they message us through Facebook to ask us if a certain title is available or if we can purchase a certain title.”

**Access (n=33):** A change to the ways in which a patron might interact with the physical library space. This includes changes to hours, reconfiguration of seating, improved WiFi. This is considered a change to services or spaces.

- Public library in New York: “It’s hard to measure exactly, but we speeded up our timeline for reopening our doors to the public because of “suggestions” -- more like annoyed comments! -- from patrons.”

**Service (n=76):** A change to or addition of patron-facing programming. This includes in-person events, online versions of previously offered services, or the creation of new platforms for patron interaction. This is considered a change to services.

- Academic library in California: “We notice trends, when there is a preponderance of questions, it means that [we] have to address the topic, either on our social media or with addressing changes itself on our library space. For example, our campus has many parents, and since we received many questions about children in the library, we created a children’s space.”
- Public library in Pennsylvania: “We are able to handle more online reference questions and online programs due to social media”

**Policy (n=16):** An internal change to how the library—in whole or in part—responds to certain situations. This includes policies on social media, mindfulness and continuity in messaging, and procedures when it comes to recording social media messages as reference transactions. This is considered a change to services.

- Public library in Pennsylvania: “We have formed a team of public service staff responsible for monitoring and answering questions on social media. Previously this task was the responsibility of marketing.”
- Public library in New York: “We had many questions that we realized staff had different answers to. It made us rethink, rewrite, or write new procedures that made clarifications for both staff and patrons.”

**Collaboration (n=8):** A new connection between departments within the library or between the library and external partners, either instigated by or founded on social media communication.



- Academic library in Ohio: “Lots of partnerships with other departments on campus. The questions are in the forms of tagging us in an event or initiative to share with our audience. But we have had comments questioning our intent when posting about race. We took immediate internal action by meeting and consulting with the university social media contact.”

In addition, three “no-change” codes were identified:

**Nothing (n=124):** The respondent states that there has been no change to library spaces or services as a result of social media interaction.

- Public library in Maine: “Not much. Because I am technically not a member of our patrons services team, I let people know what is being said but not much changes.”
- Public library in Florida: “Very little. I report the suggestions and questions but it's rare department heads or administrators actually act on the feedback, unfortunately.”

**N/A (n=19):** The respondent claims that the question is not applicable to their library, and no further clarification is given. The authors considered this to be different from a “Nothing” response, in that it suggests there has been no opportunity for change, whereas “Nothing” suggests the opportunity existed, but no change was made.

**Unclear (n=9):** The wording of the response is ambiguous or uninterpretable.

- Academic library in Florida: “Unsure, information doesn't usually reach back to me.”

A total of 618 respondents elaborated on their experiences in response to this question. Overall, the top three themes across all libraries were Clarification, Nothing, and Reach.

Question 8 inquired “how are these questions and suggestions reported and/or tracked?” The six themes that emerged were:

- Not (n=289): They are not reported or tracked.
- Included (n=100): They are included in the library’s overall reporting or tracking mechanism.
- Referral (n=69): They are referred to the appropriate person or department.
- Separate (n=37): They are tracked separately as social media engagement.
- Yes, other (n=16): They are reported and tracked but in other ways.
- Unknown (n=2): The respondent does not know.

There were 513 responses to this question. The majority of participants (56%) stated that questions or suggestions are not reported and/or tracked. The other top themes showed that social media engagements are included in overall library counts (19%) or that questions and suggestions are referred to someone else by the social media manager (13%).

The final survey questions investigated the demographics of respondents. Question 9 asked “what type of library do you work for?” 612 participants answered this question; every type of library was represented by at least one respondent. The majority represented public libraries (61.60%) while workers in academic libraries (26.63%) represented the second largest group of participants.

Question 10 asked respondents to report the state where their library is located. Social media managers in Pennsylvania represented 26.6% of the respondents while libraries in Ohio and Texas had high representation as well.

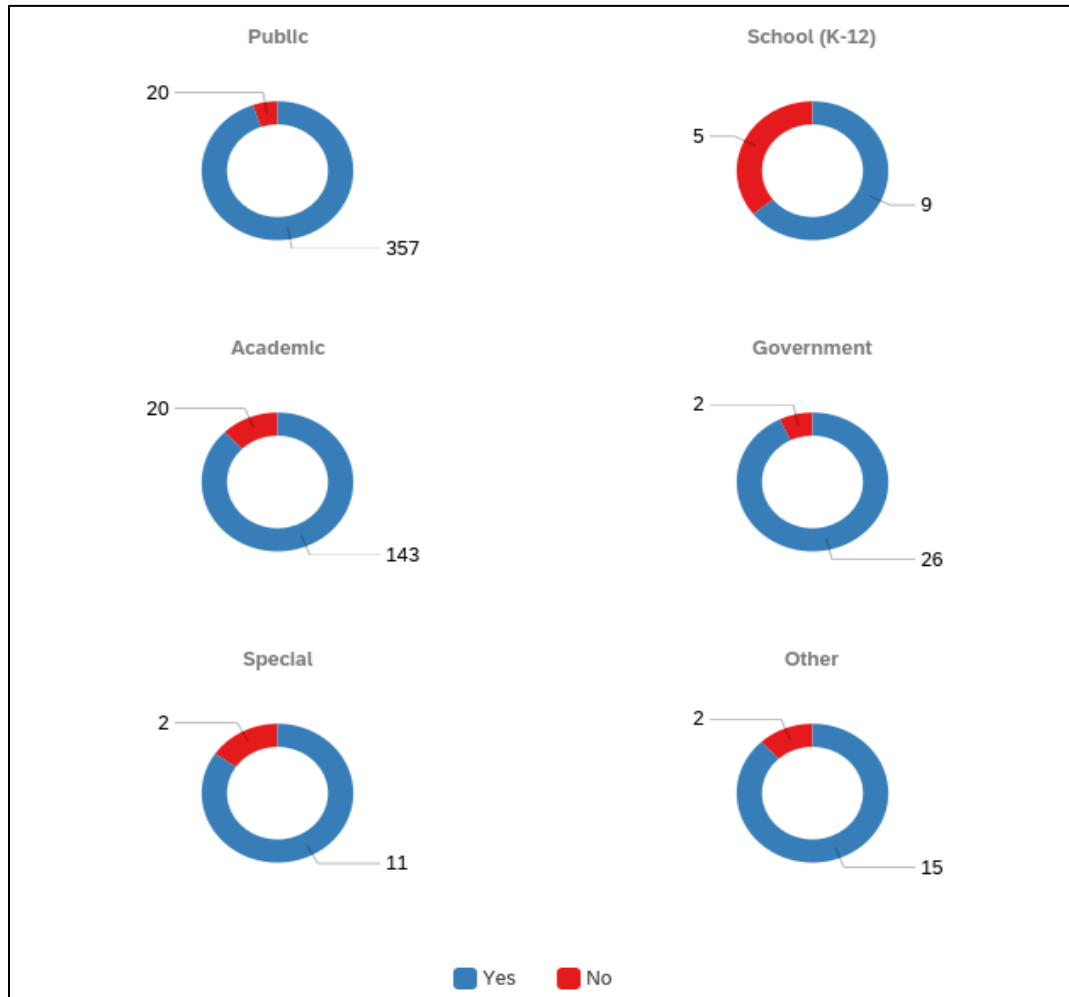


Figure 2

Q4: "Have you received questions or suggestions..." by library type.

The researchers also compared results across library types to explore any differences or similarities between them. Out of all types of libraries, public libraries were the most likely to receive messages over social media, and K-12 school libraries were the least likely. Figure 1 shows whether libraries receive questions or suggestions over social media, by library type. Apart from government libraries, for whom all of those who responded to the survey reported responding to social media questions or suggestions, public libraries were also the most likely to respond to these inquiries, as seen in Figure 3.



Figure 3

Q5: "Do you respond to questions or suggestions..." by library type.

In addition to receiving a greater percentage of messages over social media, public libraries also receive much more frequent communication, the most common response stating they receive messages weekly, whereas all other types of libraries predominantly reported receiving messages less than once a month. Figure 4 shows frequency by library type.

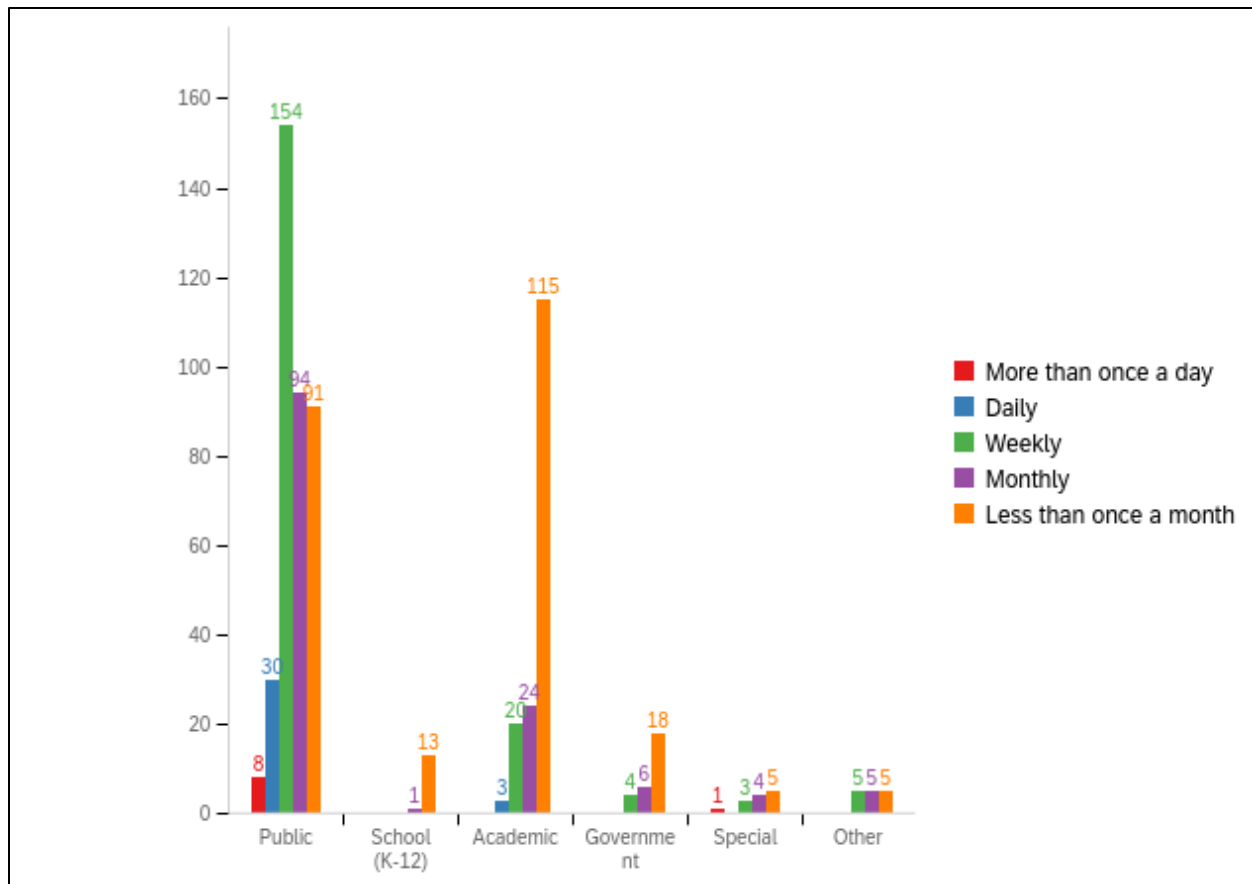


Figure 4

Q6: Social media contact frequency, by library type.

Types of libraries also differed in how they saw social media messaging as affecting change and how they reported or tracked questions or suggestions received over social media. Public libraries, for instance, ranked Clarification (n=98) and Reach (n=69) as their two most frequent changes, while academic libraries' most frequent change was Nothing (n=43). See Table 1 for the theme frequency according to library type.

Table 1

Q7: "What Has Changed in Your Library Services or Spaces..." by Library Type

Code	Public	School (K-12)	Academic	Government	Special	Other	Total
Clarification	98	2	31	5	2	5	143
Nothing	67	1	43	7	4	2	124
Reach	69	2	18	5	4	5	103
Service	57	1	13	3	0	2	76
Marketing	30	0	15	2	0	2	49
Collections	26	1	5	0	0	1	33
Access	19	1	12	0	0	1	33
N/A	10	0	8	1	0	0	19
Policy	9	0	6	1	0	0	16
Unclear	5	0	3	0	1	0	9
Collaboration	4	1	2	1	0	0	8
Restriction	2	0	2	0	0	1	5

Though more respondents from public libraries identified some manner of change resulting from social media messaging, they were less likely to report or track these messages in any formal way. Whereas around 45% of academic, government, and special libraries each report not tracking social media messages, 66% of public libraries neither track nor refer incoming questions or suggestions received on social media. Figure 5 shows percentages of how each type of library tracks or reports questions or suggestions received on social media.

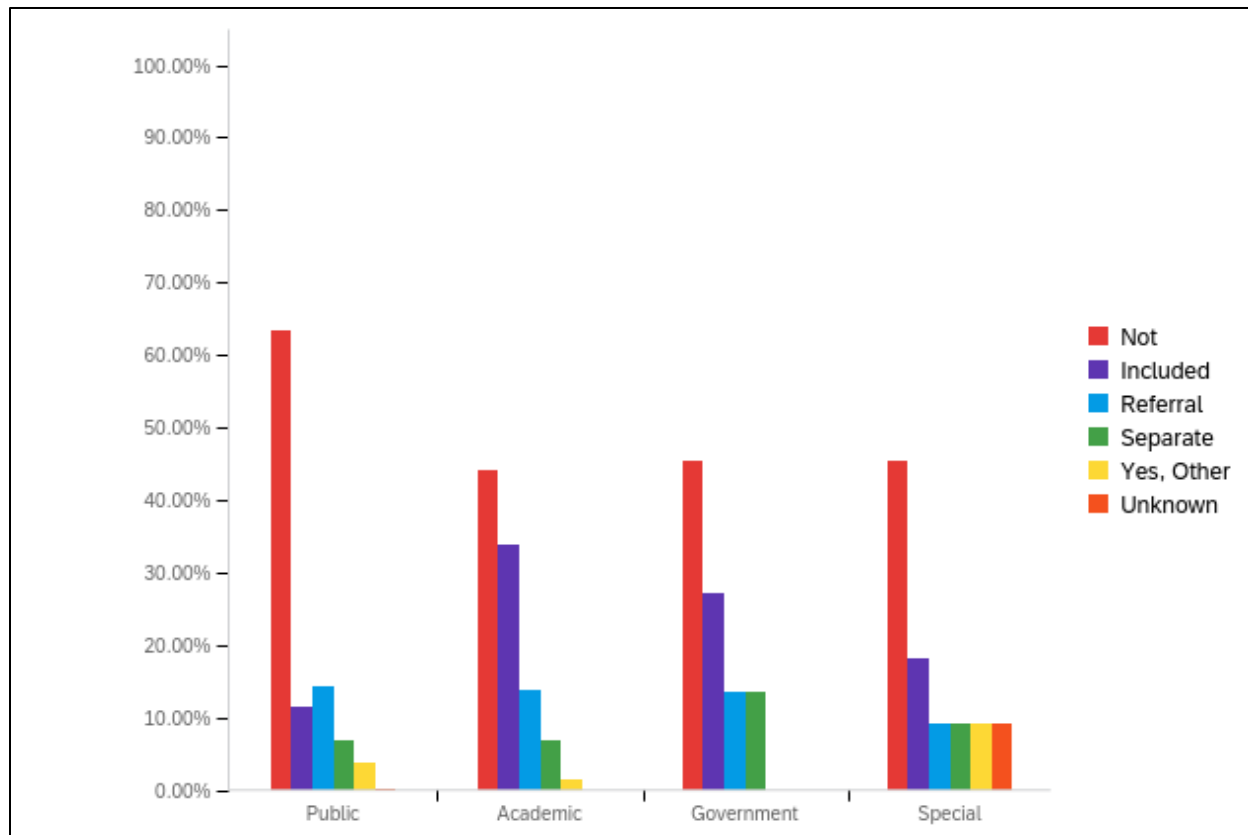


Figure 5  
Q8: Message tracking or reporting, by library type.

Table 2  
Q8: Message Tracking or Reporting, by Library Type

Q8	Public		School		Acad.		Gov.		Special		Other	
Not	63.29%	200	85.71%	6	44.14%	64	45.45%	10	45.45%	5	33.33%	4
Referral	14.24%	45	0.00%	0	13.79%	20	13.64%	3	9.09%	1	0.00%	0
Included	11.39%	36	0.00%	0	33.79%	49	27.27%	6	18.18%	2	58.33%	7
Separate	6.96%	22	0.00%	0	6.90%	10	13.64%	3	9.09%	1	8.33%	1
Yes, Other	3.80%	12	14.29%	1	1.38%	2	0.00%	0	9.09%	1	0.00%	0
Unknown	0.32%	1	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	9.09%	1	0.00%	0
Total		316		7		145		22		11		12

## Discussion

Survey results show that a library's social media presence provides a valuable patron interaction point beyond being a platform for simply sharing content and soliciting feedback. For many libraries, social media has joined other methods of interaction—such as phone, email, face-to-face, etc.—as an integral service point. Those libraries that provide even a modicum of interaction on a social media platform are better at reaching their patrons where they are, and the most engaged among them report connecting with their users in ways that might not happen otherwise. While nearly 92% of respondents of Q4 acknowledge receiving some manner of question or suggestion from a patron on social media, nearly 97%

of them report using their social media to address questions or suggestions. More respondents reported responding than receiving, which may suggest the use of social media to address questions or suggestions received elsewhere, or it may be a result of multiple individuals on a social media team having responsibility for receiving, reporting, and responding to messages. This uncertainty is discussed further in this study's limitations and opportunities for future research.

### *Engaging With Questions and Suggestions*

Across all libraries, 59% receive at least one question or suggestion via social media per month, and 37% receive at least one per week. For public libraries, communication over social media is more frequent, with nearly 51% receiving at least one question or suggestion per week. Other library types primarily report receiving fewer than one per month, though with the exception of K-12 school libraries, at least 25% report receiving one or more per month. Those libraries that engage in proactive methods to garner social media communications have a more positive experience in receiving and utilizing social media feedback. Among libraries the authors identified as increasing social media reach in response to messages received—a group including all types of libraries—the frequency of received messages is greater, with 72% receiving at least one message per month and 50% receiving at least one per week.

This study does not assess patron communication tendencies, but rather the libraries' response to social media interaction. In response to Q7, 20% of survey respondents claimed that nothing changed, but then went on to describe how social media has become a platform to receive and respond to ready reference questions. The act of responding to these questions constitutes a change in service: a new platform by which to communicate with a patron base that may not have reached out via other methods. This change is subtler than something collections or service-related, where a patron explicitly asks for something not previously offered, and as a result the library changes its offerings. Instead, the act of reaching out over social media is the implicit ask—"Will you respond?"—and as reported in the survey, the answer is not always "Yes."

In a minority of cases, older, more traditional methods of communication such as email or phone are preferred, and library social media services have been restricted to direct patrons to reach out through those official channels. A Wisconsin public library anticipated this tendency, writing, "We also offer direct links to our website/events/registration instead of just saying "go to our website.""

Some respondents also identified the tendency to attract bad-faith interactions with "trolls" or individuals using the anonymity of the internet to justify mean-spirited or hurtful criticism. Opening the door to interaction on social media also invites these individuals to participate. Across the board, survey respondents who identified this sort of behavior also report ignoring or blocking the offenders.

In some cases, social media served as an impetus to increase messaging mindfulness. Some survey respondents noted requests to change certain phrasing to more acceptable terminology, both in functional library tools—"feedback has influenced naming practices in our catalog" from a Texas academic library—and on public-facing media platforms—"We became aware of...the term "Autism Acceptance" and changed our signs and SM accordingly" from a Massachusetts public library. Others said their social media interactions led to including depictions of a wider variety of individuals when posting images.

The quick feedback afforded to and expected by users of social media often make it a good venue for suggestions, provided the library is open to receiving feedback in this way. Several libraries identified an

improvement in their communication style after receiving social media feedback. “It helped me identify where we can improve communication...what we include on flyers and brochures [and] information we make available through social media.” Others identify changing “where and when we post announcements,” with a goal of making services “more customer friendly.”

### *Tracking and Reporting Practices*

When it comes to incorporating social media comments and suggestions into a tracking or reporting workflow, there are some notable differences in how libraries handle this task. While public libraries report receiving the most frequent communication via social media, they also report having the least codified tracking structure for any questions or suggestions received in that way.

One Washington academic library notes, “So far they are few and far between, so not tracking currently.” This is a recurring theme throughout the responses: many libraries share that the volume of social media questions and suggestions is too low to warrant tracking. However, this suggests that should the number of social media interactions increase, it might be worth recording. As one Texas academic library responds: “I am in the process of developing a social media engagement reporting schedule to help track social media engagement in general. Since our engagement is typically very low, there is not much to report or track, which is why this hasn't been done in the past.”

Smaller libraries, too, identify less of a need to track or report social media interactions. One Minnesota public library responds: “If I received questions/suggestions, I would not track them. I might report them to the city administrator. I am the ONLY librarian in the library.” Similarly, from a Michigan public library, “We are small, so I report to our Interim Manager.” In these cases, where incorporating social media comments into reported reference statistics is perhaps unnecessary, they still see value in referring the social media feedback up to an administrator.

There is a trend of directly informing others about social media feedback but not incorporating it into existing structures. Several libraries refer social media suggestions directly to administration, with 17 responses sharing any feedback directly with their director, dean, or senior management. This may suggest that social media feedback carries more importance than feedback received through traditional channels since it is afforded a direct route to library administration.

One of the study’s goals was to find out how social media interactions are managed, including opportunities to track, report, and refer. Findings show that most social media managers do not track questions received through social media channels, such as through existing workflows like reference question reporting or referring to other departments. Without this information, how could library social media managers best support their continued use of these tools? Perhaps new parameters such as measuring the quantity and quality of engagements and changes to services or collections could be new, evidence-based parameters for success. This data would help showcase the impact and intentionality of a library’s social media presence, more so than other available analytics such as number of followers, likes, or views.

### *Timeliness*

Responses to this survey were clearly impacted by its timing, distributed as it was in the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic. During this worldwide event with major ramifications for the safety and



practicality of in-person library services, many libraries either added or expanded their online presence, and social media communications became an extension of this. One Pennsylvania public library remarked that social media "helped us innovate pandemic services and work toward keeping popular ones in a modified fashion." While this is one of 34 responses to Q7 or Q8 directly mentioning either COVID or the pandemic, any change to clarification, reach, or virtual services would be a benefit to a patron base that was incapable of visiting the library in person. Thus, we can assume that many more of the suggestions and comments received by librarians were a direct result of COVID-related communication needs.

As libraries have reopened (and while some never closed), COVID-19 also led to changes to physical spaces. One Minnesota K-12 school library received social media feedback from students who "commented that they liked the reduced seating in the learning commons" for COVID-related physical distancing requirements, which had the unintended effect of "[allowing] them a more quiet area to work." Other libraries variously reported boosting WiFi signals, adjusting hours of operation, incorporating pop-up outdoor events, and other demonstrations of flexibility in reaction to pandemic demands. What remains to be seen is how these services and communication channels will change in a post-pandemic world. Follow-up research is warranted to further explore the effects of COVID-19 on libraries' social media use.

### ***Limitations and Future Research***

First, while the authors were elated at the number and range of survey responses and the trends derived from commonalities in the qualitative portions, the low number of responses from school (K-12), government, special, and other libraries besides public and academic makes it difficult to draw generalized conclusions from those library types. Any future studies interested in one or more of those populations should target them directly via their professional organizations, mailing lists, and interest groups rather than large, generic organizations.

Also in relation to survey responses, study limitations arose since the researchers invited all who identified as library social media managers to participate; there was no limit per library. Survey respondents' self-identification as a social media manager presented the possibility of a wide range of job duties and expertise represented across all participants. In addition, multiple responses from the same library could have affected the sample size, and add an uncertainty about whether individuals responded according to their own experience or assumed they were answering on behalf of their library.

Lastly, the broad and exploratory nature of the qualitative portion of this survey led to some confusion among the respondents. Both Q7 and Q8 were written in an ambiguous way, so while some responses covered services, spaces, questions, and suggestions, many more addressed just one or two of those aspects. Additionally, there was room for interpretation when it came to our definitions of "what has changed" in library services or spaces and how social media interactions might be "tracked." Utilizing the coding data generated in this study, future exploration into this topic might limit the amount of open-ended questions and instead provide a list of options for both how things have changed and how social media interaction is reported, with limited space to write in explanations or examples.

The survey results and analysis reveal opportunities for deeper research regarding library social media management. Future research questions might include:

- The authors noted a theme of social media messages having a faster path directly to library administration. Do questions or suggestions from people using social media get higher priority over those received through traditional reference channels? A survey of library administrators as to their impression of social media effectiveness may reveal additional insight.
- There was little agreement among libraries as to how to best track and report on social media interaction. Further, there was great disparity between those libraries claiming to get a lot out of social media interaction and those claiming to get none. Are there trainings or competencies on library social media best practices that should be developed for library social media managers?

## Conclusion

This study shows a variety of practices related to communicating and social media, including sharing, listening, tracking, and making changes. Although social media is usually part of an overall communication strategy, it can become just another mechanism to just share news and updates. Many libraries, however, are using it as a resource to learn more from their patrons and communities to better serve their population. This increases a library's approachability and reach.

## Author Contributions

**Jason Wardell:** Conceptualization (equal), Data curation (equal), Formal analysis (equal), Investigation (equal), Visualization (lead), Writing – original draft (equal), Writing – review & editing (equal) **Katy Kelly:** Conceptualization (equal), Data curation (equal), Formal analysis (equal), Investigation (equal), Visualization (supporting), Writing – original draft (equal), Writing – review & editing (equal)

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## **Appendix A**

### **Survey**

#### **INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**

##### **Surveys and Interviews**

##### **Research Project Title: Library Social Media Management and Engagement**

You have been asked to participate in a research project conducted by (researchers) from (institution). We are looking for managers of social media at all types of libraries in the United States to answer a 5-minute survey with mostly yes or no questions. For the purposes of this survey, we are defining “managers of social media” as any individual who is responsible for monitoring or posting on social media on a library’s behalf. All library social media managers are encouraged to respond; there is no limit per library.

The purpose of this project is to better understand the current use of social media by libraries to solicit and respond to questions and feedback.

- You should read the information below, and ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate.
- Your participation in this research is voluntary. You have the right not to answer any question and to stop participating at any time for any reason. Answering the questions will take about 5 minutes.
- You will not be compensated for your participation.
- All of the information you tell us will be confidential.
- If this is a recorded interview, only the researcher and faculty advisor will have access to the recording and it will be kept in a secure place.
- If this is a written or online survey, only the researcher and faculty advisor will have access to your responses. If you are participating in an online survey: We will not collect identifying information, but we cannot guarantee the security of the computer you use or the security of data transfer between that computer and our data collection point. We urge you to consider this carefully when responding to these questions.
- I understand that I am ONLY eligible to participate if I am over the age of 18.

Please contact the following investigator with any questions or concerns:

(Researcher and contact information)

If you feel you have been treated unfairly, or you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please email (email address) or call (phone).

2. Do you agree to participate in this survey?

- Yes
- No

3. Are you a manager of a library's social media account(s)?

(Note: for the purposes of this survey, a "manager" is anyone responsible for monitoring or posting on social media on the library's behalf.)

- Yes
- No

4. Have you received questions or suggestions on your library's social media?

- Yes
- No

5. Do you respond to questions or suggestions on your library social media?

- Yes
- No

6. Approximately how often do you receive questions or suggestions on your library's social media?

- More than once a day
- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Less than once a month

7. What has changed in your library services or spaces as a direct result of questions or suggestions received via social media?

8. How are these questions and suggestions reported and/or tracked?

9. What type of library do you work for?

- Public
- School (K-12)
- Academic
- Government
- Special
- Other

10. In which state is your library located?

- Included all 50 states, Washington D.C., and Puerto Rico

**Appendix B****Timeline of the Survey Invitation Sharing to Each Communication Channel and Their Approximate Reach**

Invitation Date, 2021	Channel	Members at Invitation Date, approx., if known
April 28	Academic Library Association of Ohio (ALAO) listserv	645
April 28	Ohio Library Council (OLC) Marketing and PR Division	
April 28	Ohio Library Support Staff Institute (OLSSI)	
April 28	Society of Ohio Archivists	376
April 29	Academic Library Association of Ohio (ALAO) Programming, Outreach, and Marketing Interest Group (PROMIG) listserv	39
May 3	Ohio Educational Library Media Association (OELMA)	
May 3, May 10	OhioLINK May weekly updates	
May 6	OhioNET May newsletter	
May 18	Facebook Group: Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Library Marketing and Outreach Interest Group	5,400
May 18	Facebook Group: Libraries & Social Media	13,400
May 18	American Library Association (ALA) Connect: ALA All Members	45,000
May 18	ALA Connect: ACRL Library Marketing and Outreach Interest Group	1,400

May 19	Medical Library Association	
May 19	Society of American Archivists	6,369