

PEER-REVIEWED RESEARCH

Effective Social Media Strategies for Business Libraries

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Established in 1907, HEC Montréal is one of the oldest business and management schools in North America offering undergraduate programs in French, English, and Spanish. With its 9,959 undergraduates, 3,175 graduate students, and 756 faculty members and lecturers, HEC Montréal is the only business school in North America to be certified by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business, the European Quality Improvement System, and the Association of MBAs—a status referred to as triple accreditation. The school is recognized as being an institution at the forefront of pedagogical and information technology infrastructure (HEC Montréal, 2017).

The HEC Montréal Library (HEC Library) has grown in parallel with its parent institution, offering increasingly rich and diverse collections which have developed alongside local and international research trends. Pursuing this tradition of innovation, the library administration took an opportunity to better connect with its user base when a social media implementation pilot project for academic libraries was announced among provincial universities in 2011. The HEC Library has now been active on social media for five years. As of February 12, 2018, they have 2,659 followers on Facebook, which is the library's most active account. Since the inception of the Facebook account, a team consisting of a librarian, two technicians and library-studies students have been responsible for posting and maintaining its content.

While building the audience for the library's social media accounts, we encountered a number of best-practices articles related to academic libraries, public libraries, and businesses, but found no specific recommendations directly relevant to the needs of business libraries serving business students. This article seeks to explain the results of an eight-month project where social media best practices were applied to the HEC Library Facebook account. We provide an overview of social media best practices and how well they apply to an audience of business students and professors.

Literature Review

There has been extensive research published on effective social media strategies, including much discussion of how libraries can effectively use social media. One of the most highly cited is Vassilakaki and Garoufallou's (2014) literature of the impact of social media on libraries and

librarians. The authors noted that, as more libraries established presences on Facebook and Twitter, the literature has evolved from discussion of personal experiences with social media to establishing guidelines and best practices—and this has increasingly related to specialized libraries (p. 230).

Vassilakaki and Garoufallou (2014) provided an overview of authors who have attempted to create guidelines for posting on Facebook and other social media platforms. Of these, Miller and Jensen (2007) recommended friending as many students as possible and suggest asking students to be your Facebook friend at the end of library instructional sessions and, in general, reaching out to students wherever possible to promote the account. They also discuss the importance of having a dynamic account where a wide variety of information is posted at regular intervals, to keep students interested. Fernandez (2009) discussed the importance of a common tone of voice between those responsible for updating the Facebook account and also recommended that content be updated regularly to maintain user interest. Landis (2007) provided basic information on how to best use Facebook from a technical perspective that is now outdated.

A select number of authors gave clearer guidelines for social media best practices. These articles most influenced our social media strategy in the HEC Library. One of the most influential was Jennings' (2012), which reported of the importance of a library having a dedicated staff member or staff members for all social media accounts (p. 214). The author discusses the necessity of finding a leader with a passion for social media and allowing them to be the voice guiding all library social media campaigns (p. 214). Jennings advises that without a strong leader possessing an active interest, a library's social media program is destined to fail. The author also advocates the importance of understanding the target audience before beginning a new social media account, cautioning against overextending activities across too many platforms (p. 215). Additionally, Jennings stresses the importance of a social media communication plan, where the type of content—news, celebrity retweets, and so forth—is decided before launch and posted at regular intervals, ensuring that the account does not grow stale and that followers are less likely to lose interest (p. 215).

Vasquez and Escamilla (2014) argued that understanding the target audience, as well as having a strong, well thought-out plan to attract members of this audience, are both extremely important factors in determining whether or not a social media program will be successful (p. 540). In this context, the most important aspect of a social media account is the ability to convey a strong message that not only draws the attention of the targeted audience, but also encourages regular engagement and interaction from them (p. 539).

On the subject of public library social media usage, Smeaton and Davis (2014) stressed the importance of having a clearly defined target audience and strategy for engaging with followers. They argued that a library social media account that creates new posts with the intent that they will only be read is not nearly as effective as an account that posts messages encouraging interaction. The authors found that, for the success of a social media program, it was also important to develop a library culture where supporting social media activities is seen as something important. Like Jennings, they argued for the necessity to actively encourage staff participation in social media activities, identify passionate leaders, and allow them to drive outreach efforts.

Further exploring the idea of audience interaction, Cromity (2012) wrote of the importance of providing immediate incentives for audience participation in order to encourage engagement. The author wrote that anyone commenting on a post needs to be able to receive likes or comments of their own, and that without this interaction between different audience members, audience participation overall will not be successful. The library, in this role, would thus need to not only promote their own posts, but encourage discussion among different followers engaged with these posts. In addition to the author's recommendations for encouraging audience interaction, Cromity also explained the importance of social media in providing information in emergency situations or journal or website outages.

Brookbank (2015) argued that the adoption of a social media strategy must be based on local needs and that the choice of social media platforms needs to be reassessed regularly so that a library's online presence does not become stagnant or irrelevant. Brookbank's recommendations came as a result of a Western Oregon University survey, in which students were asked how they wanted to receive library information and what type of information they wanted to receive. The majority of students replied that they wanted to receive library information on Twitter but used Facebook the most. Instagram was noted as being of growing importance, while Pinterest was not frequently used by students. The most requested content was information pertaining to campus-wide events; the second was research techniques and tips; the third was practical library information (such as opening hours, policies, and upcoming events); the fourth was instruction on using library resources; and, lastly, was information related to library collections and resources. Throughout their responses, students emphasized that they were looking for practical information that would help them with their studies. This preference is the main point in Brookbank's recommendation that library social media posts should be focused on sharing helpful, practical information with students.

Moran and Gossieaux (2010) provided detailed criteria for how an audience for a social media presence should be built. They defined their criteria as: the user's ability to connect with others in the community; the user's ability to help others in the community; the user's interest in the subjects discussed by the community; and the user's ability to receive constructive criticism on their ideas from the community. Similar to Cromity's recommendations, the authors noted that a user must experience positive interactions with the community, achieve status within the community, and view the community's treatment of them as fair. The authors claimed that in order to create a social media program where the audience is actively engaged, social media posts must be lively, and conversation must take place around the posts (p. 233).

Huy (2016) outlined four pillars necessary for a social media account to be present: authenticity, pride, attachment and fun. The author proposed these pillars as the foundation of successful social media posts and recommended that social media account administrators should ensure that these pillars are all elements of their social media activity.

Methodology

The HEC Montréal Library has been active on social media since 2003. As of February 2018, the library has 2,659 Facebook followers, while the larger institution of HEC Montréal (with an enrollment of 13,000) has 73,096 Facebook followers. These accounts have included a number of faculty, future students, and alumni followers, but the library has been less followed by alumni and future students than the accounts of the institution itself (HEC Library, 2017).

From the period of December 2015 to May 2016, in-depth statistical data were extracted from the HEC Library Facebook account on a weekly basis. The Facebook Insight tool provided extremely detailed information related to the number of shares, likes and comments attached to each post, and number and time of day of post views. In addition to the Facebook Insight statistics, to expand the overall time frame for this project, the NCapture plug-in for the qualitative analysis program NVivo was used to extract data from the HEC Library Facebook page for the months prior to May 2016. The extracted NCapture data included the total number of posts, likes and shares for each account, but excluded the number of views for each post. With the NCapture data, the timeline for the research project was expanded from May 2015 to May 2016, which provided a clearer picture of social activity throughout a full year.

Once gathered, the data were converted into Microsoft Excel for further analysis, including sum statements and frequency analyses over time, looking at daily, weekly and monthly averages to detect

the effect different strategies and content had on audience engagement and interaction. Social media posts were also sorted by post likes, shares, and comments in attempt to analyse what types of subjects or content generated the strongest response from audience members.

Sorting data in this way allowed for an understanding of engagement, based on views, likes, or comments on an article (Morrison, 2015). The weakness in this approach was that all the activity that took place on posts was considered as student interaction. This approach, therefore, did not take into consideration whether or not those commenting on, viewing or liking posts, were people outside of the HEC Montréal community, such as alumni or librarians from other institutions. Another unfortunate aspect of this approach was that the high-level Facebook Insight data were only available for second half of the year, so it was not possible to consider audience engagement and the number of views for each post over an entire academic year.

Analysis and Results

Since the first HEC Library Facebook post in 2013, the account has grown from less than twenty followers in its first year, to 2,659 in 2018, with a monthly growth rate of about fifty-five new followers every month. From the start of its creation, posts have been made to the Facebook account at a rate of about one or two posts every week day.

Between December 2015 and May 2016, when more detailed statistics were available, an average of 19.6 posts were made on Facebook each month, or about five posts per week. For each of these months there was an average of 124.2 likes, or about 31 likes per week. The average number of shares per month was 3.3 with less than one share per week. The breakdown of monthly statistics of the HEC Library Facebook account can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Monthly Facebook statistics

	Dec 2015	Jan 2016	Feb 2016	March 2016	Apr 2016	May 2016
Posts	15	19	26	23	21	14
Likes	114	139	192	78	123	99
Shares	0	3	4	3	2	8

During this same period, the HEC Library Facebook account gained an additional 109 new followers, at the rate of roughly 18.2 new followers per month, while 67 people un-liked the page, resulting in an overall increase of 42 new followers.

When each day was analyzed individually, no correlation was found between the number of new students following the HEC Library Facebook page and the popularity of same-day shared posts.

Only one post was made on the day that the HEC Library Facebook account received its most new followers (11), and the day that the account received the most unfollows (3) no posts were made at all. The number of followers seemed to steadily increase from week to week no matter how successful or unsuccessful posts were, with the highest number of followers coming at the start of the school year in August and September.

Between December 2015 and May 2016, the average engagement rate for the HEC Library was 227.9 engaged users every month, with an average of 7.6 engaged users per day. For this study, we apply the definition of engagement as “the number of interactions people have with your content (i.e.: likes, comments, shares, retweets, etc.)” (Morrison, 2015). Engaged users are thus defined as users who had interacted with Facebook posts in at least one of these ways during a monthly period. Looking at the more detailed monthly breakdown for the months of January and February—the first two months of the winter semester—these months had by far the most engaged users, with a total of 1,411 engaged users during January, and 1,684 engaged users during February, which was far above the overall average. Thus, students seemed much more engaged and active on the library Facebook account during the start of their semester but seemed to lose interest as the semester progressed. Monthly engaged user rates dropped down to 558 during the month of March before rising slightly to 884 engaged users during the month of April. The number of daily engaged users corresponded with the number of likes and shares that library Facebook posts received as well. The more regularly the Facebook page was viewed, the higher the number of likes, shares and comments that were received during this month. For this project it was also during the months of January and February, when engagement was at its highest level that the Facebook account’s posts received the highest overall numbers of likes and shares.

The time of day that Facebook posts were made did not seem to make any difference for the success of the posts. Posts with the most likes were shared at varying times of the day, and all posts seemed to accumulate a steady pace of likes and shares over two or three days. Post engagement rates were higher on Mondays and Tuesdays seemed to fare better than posts made later in the week, although day-of-week did not appear to have an effect on the success of successful posts.

Successful social media posts

The two most successful Facebook posts-- those that received the highest number of likes and shares--involved the retirement of two librarians. These posts were widely shared and received a

number of comments from the retirees' colleagues and friends, but the content of these posts was not relevant to the student-targeted study and thus omitted from analysis.

Among posts involving library services and collections, the most popular were about the library itself. One post about the current level of quiet in the library--and that it was a great time to study--received 43 likes and eight comments and was viewed by around 2,500 students (Figure 1).

Another post about library renovations and noise levels received 18 likes. A reminder of extended opening hours during finals received 17 likes. A post about how to access electronic resources received 9 likes. An announcement about an art installation showcasing the works of Don Etherington received 24 likes and 7 shares. A post promoting the visit of a traditional Mexican band to the library received 108 likes and 26 shares (Figure 2).

Figure 1

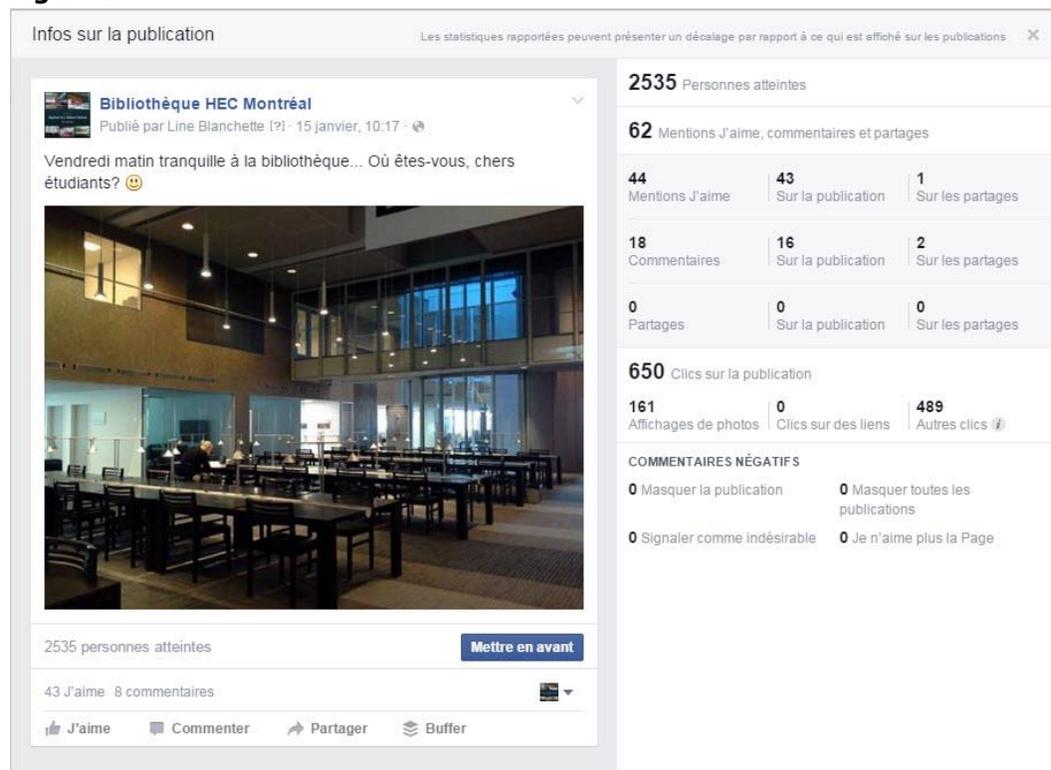
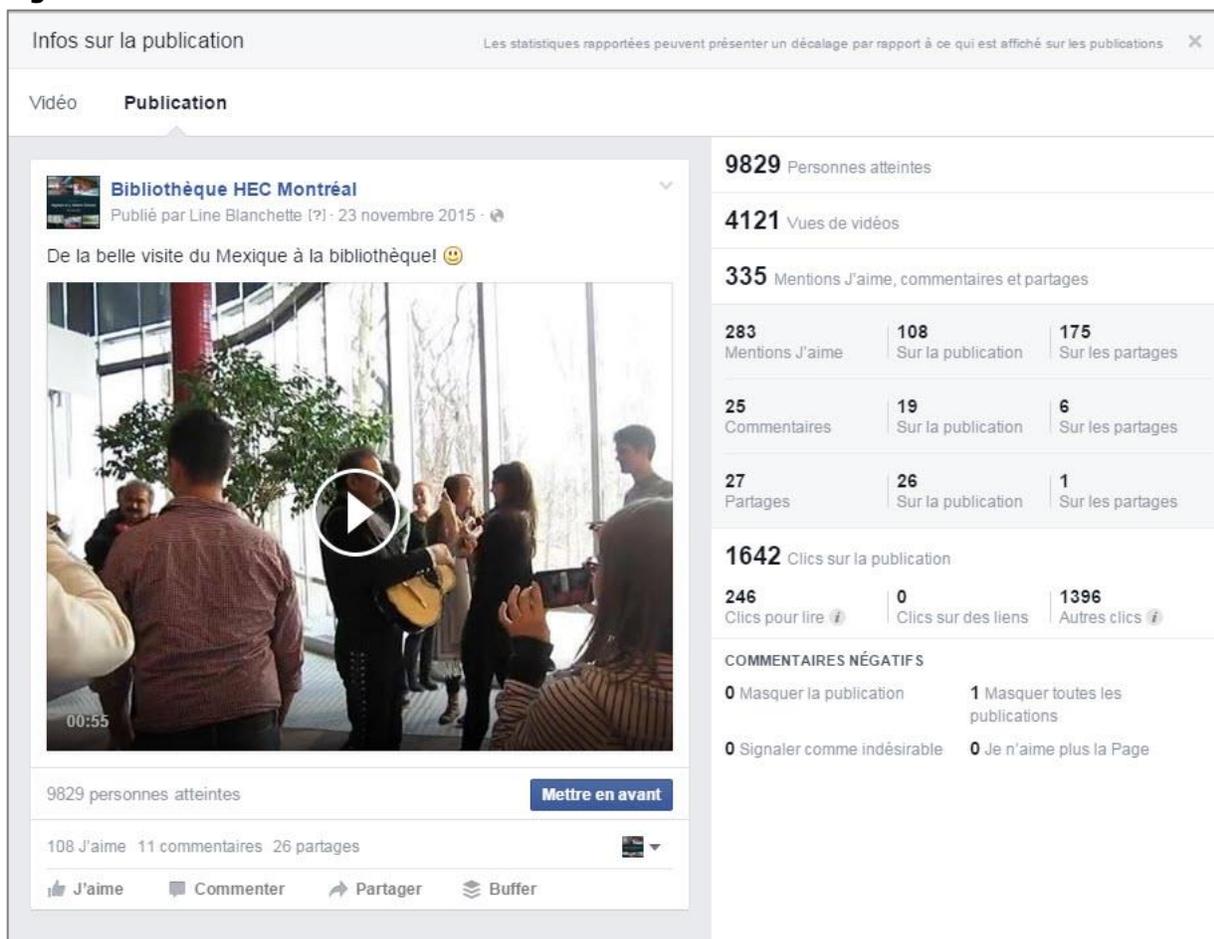


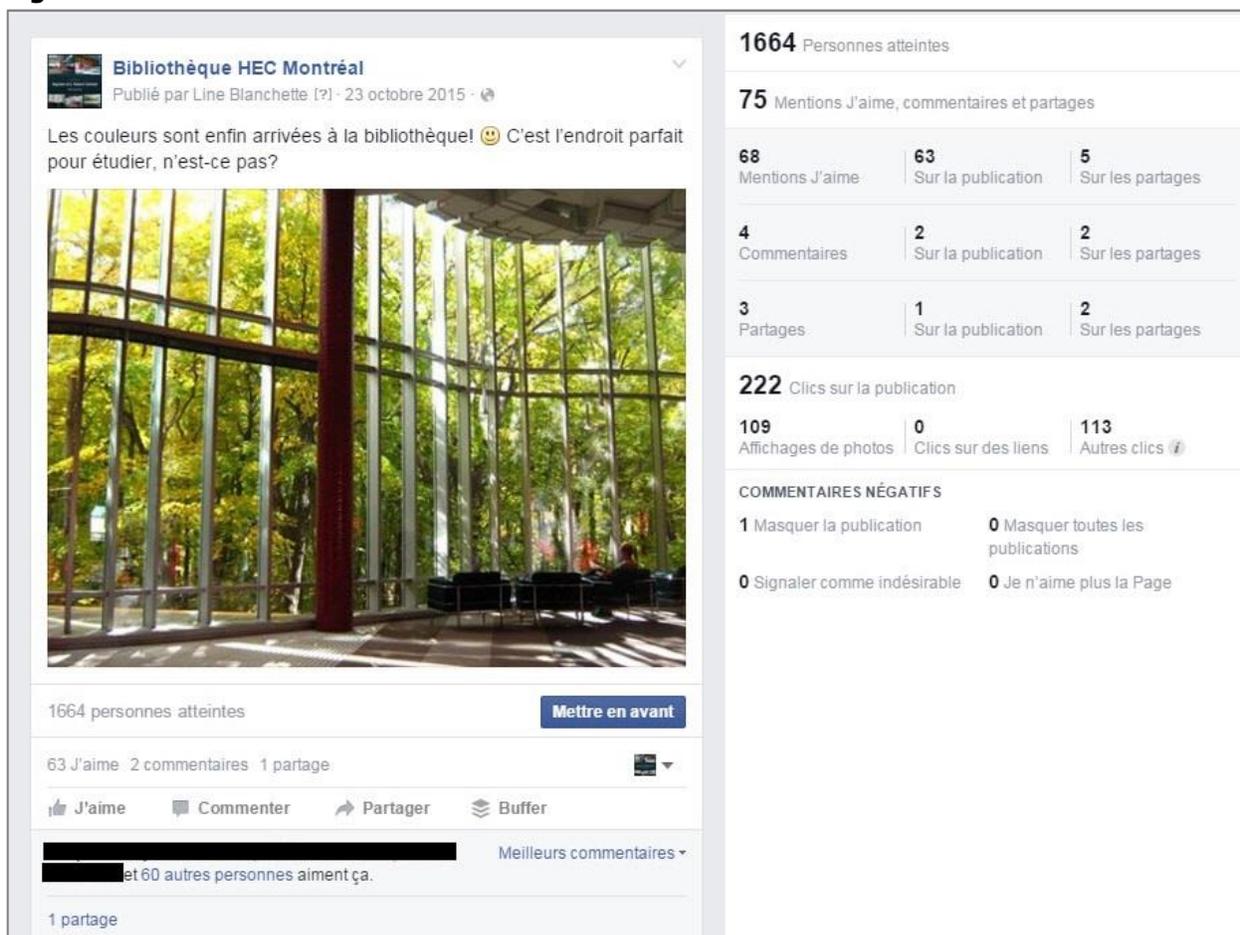
Figure 2



Very few posts received comments, no matter the number of likes or shares or how many users saw them. A post commenting on the fall colours, including a picture of the trees outside the library (Figure 3), received 63 likes and was one of the most popular posts and the one that received the most student comments. Other than this post, few others received more than two comments.

Posts that were seen by a large number of users did not always receive a large number of likes. One post regarding the availability of a new journal, and of a set time where students could speak with a librarian to learn more about accessing and searching the journal collections, only received 6 likes but was seen by 1,046 people. A photo about new chairs in the library received 83 likes and 19 shares and was seen by nearly 4,000 students (Figure 4).

Figure 3



There was a noticeable connection between users reading a post and interaction with it—either through comments, likes or shares. On February 29th, for example, 186 users visited the HEC Library Facebook page, when there had been a post about Mariachi performers in the library (Figure 2) was well received. A day later, a post about new furniture installations performed slightly less well—engaging 72 followers. After these two posts, the number of daily engaged users fell below thirty until the following week, when a shared post from HEC Montréal’s Entrepreneurship foundation announcement about a photo session in one of the study spaces brought the number of engaged users back up to 104.

It was extremely difficult to determine what posts would be successful. Posts that provided library-centered information or that aimed to make student lives easier, on average, received higher engagement rates and interaction levels. Also evident was that posts instilling school pride were typically high in likes and shares, and inviting of student comments. (See Table 2.)

Figure 4



Facebook posts focused on business-specific subjects

Facebook posts related to business resources and related training received a small number of likes and shares. Advertising new subscriptions and trials to business databases, research guides, training tools, and reference services all yielded minimal engagement. It was rare for this type of post to receive more than one or two likes.

Table 2: Overall statistics for popular Facebook posts

Post content	Likes	Shares	Comments	Views
Availability study space at the library	43	0	8	2535
Library renovations and noise levels	18	0	0	2202
How to access electronic resources	9	1	0	1019
Art installation	24	7	0	1169
Visit of a traditional Mexican band	108	26	11	9829
Fall colours in the view outside the library	63	3	75	1664
Availability of a new journal	6	0	0	1830
New chairs in the library	83	19	21	3968

Conclusion

The four pillars of social media success as described by Huy (2016)—authenticity, pride, attachment and fun—were clearly present in this assessment. All of the successful library posts seemed to involve one of these four pillars in some way. The post about the gorgeous view outside the windows of the HEC Library, for example, was very popular with students, many of whom commented with statements of school pride. The post about the Mariachi singers—an example of Huy’s pillar of fun—also engaged a large number of students.

Students also seemed to respond well to posts that helped them with their studies and day-to-day life. Information about library closings or the availability of study spaces were better received than most. A post promoting an EndNote training session received five likes and one share. Another post reminding students about extended hours for finals received five likes, and a post announcing the reopening of a collaboration space received seven likes. While student engagement with these posts was above average, these posts were nowhere near as successful as those that closely followed Huy’s four pillars of social media success, which often generated more than 50 likes and 10 shares.

Throughout this project, it was notably difficult getting students to interact and engage with the library’s social media. The data made clear that students were most engaged with the library’s social media accounts at the beginning of semesters, when they presumably seemed to be more readily seeking information. However, getting students to comment on or otherwise interact with social media posts became more difficult as the semester progressed. While there were successful posts later in the semester, it was hard to predict which posts or types of content would yield student response.

Based on the findings, the best recommendations would be to target the four pillars of pride, authenticity, fun and attachment. Posts involving significant events or alumni seemed to attract interest, as did posts about relaxing and stress-relieving events. Information that helps students with their studies, such as by promoting a new journal or reminding students of a library service, were less popular. This trend was especially apparent with posts on the subject of business databases, research help, and library workshops. Students are evidently most engaged with library social media at the beginning of semesters, so this is the best time to promote library events and services.

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