Chapter 9

The Social Media Imperative: Adopting Social Media Usage Practices That Support Faculty Career Advancement

Elsa Camargo
University of Arkansas, USA

ABSTRACT

As the usage of social media among faculty increases, it has become pressing for institutions to find ways to monitor and support this activity. In some cases, academic administrators have responded by reprimanding faculty members through suspension and forced leaves of absence. This chapter focuses on the role social media play in the careers of faculty, the function a mature workforce (senior faculty and administrators) has in adequately supporting junior faculty’s use of social media, and on how institutions equip mature senior faculty and administrators (MSFAs) with the necessary skills to manage junior faculty’s use of social media for the purpose of balancing a mature workforce in academia.

INTRODUCTION

The internet has accelerated the dissemination of knowledge among higher education professionals. This is especially true for faculty members who, in addition to publishing in referred journals, can now disseminate their expertise using media platforms with a quicker and wider impact. Many faculty members develop blogs and have social media accounts. Through these platforms they share information about their research and views about existing social issues that may be tied to their
areas of investigation. But what happens when these views enter the public domain and are perceived as unpopular or controversial? What role does academic freedom play as faculty publicize their research expertise on social media platforms where they are subject to more scrutiny by a more varied audience?

Faculty members’ comments in social media have subjected some institutions to negative publicity. In many cases, academic administrators have responded by reprimanding faculty members through suspension and forced leaves of absence, which has resulted in outrage from other academics. Yet, the use of social media platforms especially among junior faculty members remains a necessary tool of the craft; emerging scholars rely heavily on social media to build their reputation as emerging experts in their fields and rely on platforms like Mendeley and Academia.edu to publicize their research (Mohammadi, 2014; Sugimoto, Work, Lariviere, & Haustein, 2017). The manner in which faculty members are being treated has called into question the validity of academic freedom and freedom of expression. Academic freedom’s volatility can make professors feel unprotected and censored. In some cases, academic freedom has been guarded in conjunction with the university’s reputation, limiting faculty’s ability to freely exchange ideas.

There are a variety of categories of social media and platforms within these categories, making it difficult to comprehensively discuss faculty’s use of social media. However, “most [academic context, definitions, and classifications] identify the following major social media categories as “social networking, social bookmarking, blogging, wikis, and media and data sharing” (Sugimoto, Work, Lariviere, & Haustein, 2017, p. 2038). Although many social media platforms cannot be easily classified, this chapter defines “social media” as online platforms that include and are not limited to Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Google+, Mendeley, ResearchGate, LinkedIn, blogs (e.g., Academia.org), where social networking, social bookmarking, blogging, wikis, and media and data sharing occur. Furthermore, in this chapter, mature workers are defined in alignment with the Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA) as anyone age 40 or older. “Mature faculty” are those 40 or older and with the rank of associate professor or professor. “Mature senior faculty and administrators (MSFAs)” are those 40 or older, with rank of associate or professor and who may also have administrative or leadership roles in the institution. In this chapter the term “mature workers” is used interchangeably with “MSFAs.”

### Purpose of Chapter

With the rise of social media usage among faculty, especially among those in early stages of their careers, it becomes important for MSFAs to be equipped with skills needed to lead institutions on these issues and mentor early career faculty on their use of social media. Such mentorship can contribute to early career faculty more
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