

Introduction

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Welcome to the 2012 edition of the McMaster Journal of Communication (MJC). As editors of this special issue we are delighted to present social media themed papers authored by alumni and current students of the McMaster-Syracuse Master of Communications Management (MCM) program.

Social media is changing the way we communicate, relate and connect with customers, employees, media and other stakeholders. It has become the primary channel of communication for an entire generation. The integration of traditional and social media is the daily challenge of public relations professionals. How we employ social media will further define our profession and provide us with a difficult but desirable opportunity to strategically guide organizations in the digital age.

While the fundamentals of building and maintaining relationships have not changed—critical transformations related to the rise of social media challenge our profession. Gone are the days of weekly traditional media monitoring to measure and influence stakeholder perspectives. With today's 24/7 news cycle, Twitter feeds and viral videos, public relations practitioners live in an environment of endless messaging and measurement, where the rules of engagement are in constant flux. How we lead our organizations and give voice to the publics we represent, while providing strategic direction in navigating new technologies, will further define our role as communicators and public relations professionals.

The articles in this issue demonstrate a solid collection of opinion and research related to social media and its impact on the public relations profession, the organizations we serve and the general public.

The comparative book review of Erik Qualman's "Socialnomics" and Philip Sheldrake's "The Business of Influence" by Rebecca Edgar, M.C.M. highlights the adoption rates of social media and how it relates to Rogers' Diffusion of Innovation Theory.

Sylvie Plante's opinion piece (in French) reviews different approaches to social media, offering a 'potpourri' approach to social media communications.

Joseph Distel reminds us of the negative human consequences of the “Digital Age” with his social commentary on the dark side of social media, with a look at cyber bullying, invasion of privacy, and online deceptions.

Case studies by Anne- Marie Males, Karen Humphreys-Blake, and Nii Sackeyfio Sackey look at the implications of social media communications within the context of healthcare communications including hospitals, mental health services and naturopathic medicine.

The challenges and opportunities of not-for-profit communications are explored in the case studies by Katharine Blanchard and Wendy McLean-Cobban, who offer strategic plans to merge traditional and social media. Susan Emigh looks at the impact of social media on an educational institution. Finally, Jennifer Thomlinson examines social media use and success within the scope television in the public interest.

As students, the MCM program has allowed us to examine academic theory, expand our knowledge of the public relations profession, and enhance our business acumen. We would like to thank Dr. Alex Sévigny for his guidance and encouragement in the development of this issue of MJC, and Meaghan Niewland for her contribution of the creative cover art.

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Co-Editors, MJC 2012