

DIGITAL LEADERSHIP IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Purposeful Social Media in a Connected World

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Sty/US

STERLING, VIRGINIA



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Published by Stylus Publishing, LLC.
22883 Quicksilver Drive
Sterling, Virginia 20166-2019

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Ahlquist, Josie, author.

Title: Digital leadership in higher education : purposeful social media in a connected world / Josie Ahlquist.

Description: Sterling, Virginia : Stylus Publishing, [2020] | Includes bibliographical references and index. |

Identifiers: LCCN 2020037650 | ISBN 9781620367520 (paperback) | ISBN 9781620367513 (hardcover) | ISBN 9781620367537 (pdf) | ISBN 9781620367544 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Internet in higher education. | Educational technology--Management. | Social media in education.

Classification: LCC LB2395.7 .A43 2020 | DDC 378.1/7344678--dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2020037650>

13-digit ISBN: 978-1-62036-751-3 (cloth)

13-digit ISBN: 978-1-62036-752-0 (paperback)

13-digit ISBN: 978-1-62036-753-7 (library networkable e-edition)

13-digit ISBN: 978-1-62036-754-4 (consumer e-edition)

Printed in the United States of America

All first editions printed on acid-free paper that meets the American National Standards Institute Z39-48 Standard.

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Call 1-800-232-0223

First Edition, 2020

WELCOME TO YOUR DIGITAL LEADERSHIP PURPOSE

Show me someone who puts a clear purpose before digital tactics or metrics, and we'll uncover a purpose-driven digital leader. This is true no matter your industry, campus position, or platform. Don't let metrics like numbers of likes, hearts, views, or subscribers distract you from your values. Instead, use social media to amplify the purpose and mission you and your organization are living and working toward every day. As you learned in the opening of this book, you're being called upon to bring it forward, and you already have within yourself the power to become a digital leader.

Tapping Into Superpowers

Lilly Singh is a self-proclaimed superhero, a *superwoman* to be exact. On her YouTube channels, *IIsuperwomanII* (www.youtube.com/IIsuperwomanII) and *superwomanvlogs* (www.youtube.com/superwomanvlogs), she produces comedy videos, vlogs, and overall inspiration for viewers/fans she warmly refers to as #TeamSuper. Singh started calling herself *superwoman* in childhood as a way to get through hard times ("Lilly Singh Talks Success," 2018). In her book *How to Be a Bawse: A Guide to Conquering Life*, Singh (2018) explained that she was driven to create YouTube videos and write a book because she wanted "to be a positive light in this world" (p. xii). Because Singh is fueled first by this purpose, her influence and leadership have naturally flowed. In internet terms, she has gone viral. However, before we get caught up in vanity metrics, let me tell you why I believe we need more leaders like Singh in higher ed.

Shortly after earning an undergraduate degree, Singh became depressed. As she shared with *People* magazine, she was stuck between graduate school or pursuing her childhood dream of a career in entertainment (Gomez, 2015). She opted for the latter, and through her YouTube channel Singh not only overcame her depression but also discovered her aforementioned life mission, being a light for others. In her

documentary *A Trip to Unicorn Island*, Singh shared how overcoming depression was a brain switch, and now she hopes her videos can help to trip the same switch for others (Gomez, 2015). She still has hard days that she documents on her YouTube channel, but according to its *About* section, Singh is “also a happy unicorn that believes in one love. Join me on my adventures!!” (IISuperwomanII, n.d., para. 1).

Singh’s adventures have taken her around the world as she spreads her light through philanthropy as part of her purpose. This happy unicorn is called upon by important causes bigger than herself, including education for kids, women’s rights, and girl love. A large majority of Singh’s subscribers have been girls and women, so she wanted to tackle girl-on-girl hate, especially in schools, at work, and online through an organization she created called #girllove (Me to We, 2019). Singh said, “It’s about time we got rid of this lame trend and came together to build women up” (IISuperwomanII, 2015, para. 1). Her campaign has supported nonprofit organizations like the Malala Fund and Me to We.

Another important part of Singh’s story goes beyond her positive purpose and impact to recognizing some of the challenges of amplifying leadership through social media. Some of the lessons Singh has learned more recently include measuring success beyond the metrics of digital engagement and reprioritizing mental health, even if it meant leaving YouTube for a short time. A glimmer of this came out in a February 2018 *Vogue* interview (“Lilly Singh Talks Success,” 2018). When asked if there was a downside to her work, Singh simply replied that “there’s a downside to everything. Everything is a double-edged sword” (“Lilly Singh Talks Success,” 2018, 6:10).

Then in May 2018, Singh was interviewed by Get the Gloss to promote her new makeup line. When asked what the negatives of being on YouTube were, Singh answered,

The only negative is that it can kind of hinder the way you look at success. You get into the habit of seeing yourself through your number of views and subscribers which is an unrealistic approach to success. You can’t compare yourself to a video of an adorable puppy! What I do is comedy sketches so I’ve had to change my definition of success to making content that makes me proud—not whether I’ve had good or bad views. I can’t define myself by views, it’s not a sustainable measure of success. (Muttucumar, 2018, para. 8)

Fast forward to November 2018, and subscribers to Singh’s channel received a notification for a new video titled *I’ll See You Soon* (IISuperwomanII, 2018, para. 1), which had the following description: “Mental health is important y’all. Loving yourself is a priority. I’m taking a break from YouTube, but I promise I’ll be back happier and healthier” (para. 1). In the video, Singh discussed being mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually exhausted after consistently creating content for 8 years. She also reflected that she wasn’t happy about the kind of videos she had been creating because “the thing about YouTube is in all of its glory it’s kind of a machine, and it makes creators believe that we have to pump out content consistently even at the cost

of our life and our mental health and our happiness,” and then declared, “YouTube does not make me happy” (IISuperwomanII, 2018, 3:39). This declaration sent a shock wave through #TeamSuper, who replied with support and their own stories of mental health struggles.

Singh ended up taking only a month off. Upon her return to YouTube, she released *The Channel Is Changing*, a video that documented her discoveries about fighting for her own happiness and how she’d be refocusing her purpose to align with them (IISuperwomanII, 2019). As a result, she planned to create fewer YouTube videos and content for platforms like Instagram, but her new material would focus more closely on concepts that really inspired her. As she looked to the future, Singh shared,

2019 is the year I wanna take risks. I wanna tell dope stories. I wanna put out stuff that I’m super proud of that excites me. I wanna be mentally healthy, physically healthy, drink some water, probably. Do all of those things, and I encourage you all to do the same because when you focus on yourself and you focus on your happiness, the possibilities are endless. (3:03)

These discoveries transformed both Singh as a person and her intended impact on the world. She had decided to cut out the distractions of the internet and get back to her core mission of being a light to the world, which is part of navigating digital leadership. There will be stumbling blocks and setbacks. Luckily for us, Singh has continued to mark the trail she blazed, and we can follow on her path.

I have often wondered if any higher ed professionals impacted Singh’s life and leadership while she was an undergraduate student. Did she visit the counseling center, try out her comedy at an open mic, or meet with an academic adviser who explored the pros and cons of graduate school or Hollywood with her? Did any of them contribute to the fact that today IISuperwomanII has received more than 2.4 billion YouTube views, and her main channel attracts 15 million subscribers, a number larger than the population of most countries. Now, a single tweet to her 5.8 million “unicorns” receives thousands of immediate reactions. A post on Instagram to her 9.3 million followers gets more “hearts” than you’d believe. I purposefully didn’t start Singh’s story with these metrics because they’re not the goal of digital leadership. Instead, the purpose should be the significance of its impact on the community you want to serve/support/help.

The latest status update on Lilly Singh includes a groundbreaking announcement: She was offered her very own NBC late night talk show, *A Little Late With Lilly Singh!* Singh lights up the screen while she claims the title of late night host as both the first woman of color and bisexual to do so. She has been disrupting the traditional definitions of *leadership* and *influence*, but nowhere on her social media profiles or bio does she call herself a leader. However, ask a teenage girl if Singh is a leader. Chances are very likely they will not only be excited to hear you know about her—an automatic cool card (you’re welcome)—but also smile in agreement. Her leadership journey has been fueled by personal struggles, for which YouTube has provided an outlet, and directed by her self-awareness, which has guided her to step away from it

to regroup when needed. The superpower of digital leadership is the ability to connect a purpose with platforms to help people.

Where Is the Lilly Singh of Higher Ed?

Is it too far-fetched to dream that educators can wield social media to empower, lift, laugh, celebrate? That they can be digital influencers, leading both on campus and online? I believe with a holistic and humanistic approach to technology and social media tools, educators can be digital leaders who strategically use influence online. This role, however, is dynamic. An educational leader's approach must not only consider their personality, position, power, and purpose alongside available platforms but also continuously evolve because the rules and roles of leadership change, just as the students who enter our institutions change each year.

The definition of *leadership* has been shaken to its core, and the entry point to influencing and impacting people around the globe is now an open invitation 24/7. Digital disruption has upended traditional leadership models, positions, and frameworks to the extent that a university's president may no longer be the most influential or well-known person on campus. One freshman who enters campus with 4 million YouTube subscribers has the potential to triple new applications because of their followership of young viewers. A noncommunity member, through a live stream at a controversial campus event fed directly to CNN, MSNBC, NPR, and Fox News, can necessitate an immediate response from campus administration. Our society is an all-access stream of information, whether it's factual or "fake news." Being social media savvy is no longer optional, yet the majority of educators are left to their own devices to navigate over time. My goal is to guide you along your digital leadership journey from confused to courageous.

The Power of Social and Mobile Today

Let's start with a quick review of present-day social media applications. Some advanced or experienced users may find this a bit basic, whereas others will discover a number of new platforms and features. Take what you need, and leave the rest—especially if you're reading this in 2030. Many social media apps are mentioned numerous times throughout this book, but by no means are they the same platforms that will be present in 10, 5, or even 2 years. I don't aim to teach you in-depth details or provide step-by-step tutorials for all of these apps; rather, I document current usage statistics and list their features, benefits, and risks for higher ed leaders. Equipped with this knowledge, you'll be able to more insightfully evaluate social media applications through your leadership lens, no matter how they work. Head to www.josieahlquist.com/digitalleadership for more resources on these apps, including tutorials and recent scholarship.

Facebook

At the time this book was published, if there was one social network to “rule them all,” it would be Facebook. Sixteen years after its creation at Harvard in 2004, it had 1.66 billion daily active users (Clement, 2020). Saeed et al. (2009) described Facebook as a fully interactive medium because it incorporates several technologies, including blogging, instant messaging, and video. However, that’s not the only way Facebook has been described. Critics are quick to note Facebook’s inaccurate ad reporting metrics, consumer data mining, and role in the spread of “fake news” in the 2016 election and beyond. Mark Zuckerberg himself noted Facebook’s role in spreading misinformation, and he has made efforts to implement fact-checking features in the platform to combat that spread (Zuckerberg, 2017).

Facebook provides a groups feature that allows users to create groups with varying levels of privacy and invite others to join them. Researchers have found that groups have benefited users who were looking for information on the following topics: maternity (Ruppel et al. 2017), smoking cessation (Thrul & Ramo, 2016), medical conditions (Zhang et al. 2014), response to natural disaster relief efforts (Silver & Matthews, 2017), and activism (Marichal, 2013). Eaton et al. (2020) researched a Facebook group in student affairs and found that although it had a reputation for conflict and negative discourse, its members provided one another significant social, personal, and professional support, which was “demonstrated through social solidarity, particularly in relation to topics of social justice, inclusion, and equity” (p. 18).

Twitter

This popular microblogging platform, which had more than 330 million active monthly users in the fourth quarter of 2017 (Statista, 2018), allows its users to publish *tweets*, posts that were originally limited to 140 characters, a figure based on the standard length of a text message. Twitter’s developers wanted users to be able to send tweets through text without spamming their friends’ phones. In 2017, a tweet’s character limit was expanded to 280.

Gruzd et al. (2011) declared that Twitter was “a good case to understand how people integrate information and communication technologies to form new social connections, collaboration and conversation” (p. 1313). As an example of collaboration, it allows users to add hashtags to their posts, which serves as a workaround for forming groups through built-in features. Twitter users create an intentional group hashtag, such as #sachat or #emchat, then add it to posts so that they appear in concentrated topics or weekly Twitter chats. Studies have documented that Twitter features like hashtags have allowed the platform to have a curricular application, with one experiential study finding that Twitter use led to improved student grades and increased connection among students and faculty (Junco et al., 2011, 2012). However, sometimes Twitter’s benefits are accompanied by challenges: It has faced outcry from its user base for how it handles occurrences of harassment, and it has been flooded with a massive number of bots and fake accounts in recent years.

YouTube

This video platform prides itself on its number of users (1.9 billion), which “amounts to almost one-third of the Internet” (YouTube, 2018, para. 2). Its users consume billions of hours of content daily, as 500 hours of video are uploaded to YouTube every minute (Hale, 2019). One can find a variety of content, from celebrity music videos to novice youngsters’ makeup tutorials. The number-one users of YouTube are young adults, specifically 15- to 25-year-olds (Clement, 2019); however, beyond number of views, it’s teens who dominate YouTube’s user base, including commenting, rating, and other methods of interaction (Chau, 2010). Researchers placed YouTube under the category of social networks early on. The social interaction within the platform (Lange, 2008), the sharing to circles outside of the platform (Haridakis & Hanson, 2009), and the active culture of member participation the platform fosters brought about belonging and identification (Chau, 2010).

Instagram

Despite being released only to iPhone users in 2010, Instagram has grown quickly over a relatively short time, from 300 million users in 2015 to more than 1 billion in 2020 (Instagram, 2020). At least 50% of “Insta” or “IG” users were teens and young adults (Duggan et al., 2015). Although Instagram has a desktop-view website, it’s really a mobile app. Users upload photos or videos with built-in editing effects such as color, lighting, and so on. Uploads to Instagram can also be directly posted to Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr; this feature allows Instagram activity to extend beyond just the users of the application itself.

In addition, as social media algorithms make it increasingly difficult to see posts chronologically, more and more users are opting in to the simpler interfaces and in-the-moment benefits of the stories feature provided by Instagram and other social media platforms. The stories feature gives users the chance to share moments from their day for only 24 hours, extending a story for a limited time beyond the moment it occurs. Within 1 year of its launch, the number of daily consumers of Instagram Stories grew to over 500 million (Newberry, 2019), and users with an average age of 25 were spending more than 32 minutes a day on it (Instagram, 2017).

Snapchat

This mobile-only app was created by Stanford University students in 2011 as a photo mobile messaging service. One detail about Snapchat posts, referred to as *snaps*, that differs vastly from any other platform is that content disappears after it’s viewed. The app extends beyond individual and group messaging to a story feature, like a news-feed, which disappears after 24 hours. As of May 2017, 166 million users log on to Snapchat daily (Constine, 2017). One study found snaps to be mostly funny pictures or selfies (Duggan, 2013). Similar to YouTube and Instagram, Snapchat has attracted a younger demographic, with its most active users ages 18 to 34 years (Reisinger,

2015). Snapchat's recent initial public release valued the company at \$24 billion, but as Facebook and Instagram have implemented Snapchat features, user growth has stalled, and profits have fallen.

LinkedIn

This web and mobile application, which was released in 2003, has 660 million global users (LinkedIn, 2020), with two new users joining every second. LinkedIn members have individual pages that include common résumé or portfolio elements, as well as a newsfeed function that updates a user's connections with content, and like Facebook, it has a groups feature that lets users come together and share information around specific interests. LinkedIn's number of users is much lower compared to previously mentioned platforms, but it has been growing, increasing from 25% to 29% of online adults in 1 year, and approximately half of its users have college degrees (Greenwood et al., 2016). The platform reports that 46 million of its users are students and recent graduates (LinkedIn, 2020). LinkedIn's ultimate goal is to help users create and grow their professional networks. It has also added job-board functionalities, hosting job postings to which users can apply directly on the site. LinkedIn's latest updates also include hosting video content, which has resulted in video-based résumés and pep talks from professionals.

Pinterest

Pinterest is aimed at finding and saving visual ideas. Users create *boards* on which they can *pin* their ideas. Each pin has an image, description, and link to its online source. Pinterest users skew female among adults in the United States, including 41% of women but only 16% of men (Pew Research Center, 2018). Pinterest has a significant number of older users, as 34% are 18- to 29-year-olds, 34% are 30- to 49-year-olds, and 26% are 50- to 64-year-olds (Pew Research Center, 2018). One study documented that Pinterest use in a course increased collaboration and helped communication among faculty and students (Mizelle & Beck, 2018).

Reddit

This platform is used primarily for content aggregation and ranking; it's known to some as the "front page of the internet." Users submit links and posts, which other users then upvote and downvote to dictate what shows up on Reddit's front page and as subreddits. Subreddits are collections of discussions on different topics that are moderated by the user who first posted them. If there's a topic you can think of, there's probably a subreddit for it, controversial topics included (although Reddit has banned some subreddits such as /r/jailbait, /r/creepshots, and others that promote hate speech and/or violence); however, there are active higher ed subreddits like /r/applytocollege. University officials have also taken to this platform to conduct an #AMA (Ask Me Anything), for example, UCLA Dean of Students Maria Blandizzi (www.reddit.com/r/ucla/comments/asfz8y).

Reddit's user demographics are difficult to report because the profiles are relatively anonymous. According to Reddit, there were 274 million unique visitors on the site as of January 2017 (Reddit, n.d.). Although only 6% of Americans have visited the site at least once, what's interesting is how long users stay on the site once they visit it. Reddit users spend an average of 16 minutes on the site per visit (Gaille, 2016). In comparison, users typically spend 1 minute per visit on Twitter and 15 minutes on Instagram (Cohen, 2017).

TikTok

TikTok (previously known as Musical.ly) is a popular digital media app for short-form mobile videos (TikTok, 2018). From its self-description, "TikTok's mission is to inspire creativity and bring joy. We are building a global community where users can create and share authentically, discover the world around them, and connect with others across the globe" (TikTok, 2020, para. 1). Users upload videos up to 15 seconds in length that they can sync to the app's audio library, which includes popular music and other pop culture sound bites. Users can edit their videos and add filters to customize their posts. Similar to the now-defunct Vine, these videos appear in the app's feed and loop continuously. A "challenge" culture exists on the platform, with popular challenges such as Pretend Instrument Challenge and Yeehaw Challenge.

TikTok's predecessor, Musical.ly, launched in 2014, and by November 2017, it boasted 60 million active users (Mozur, 2017). Among U.S. teen and young adult internet users, 14% were on the app (Chadha, 2017), and they uploaded a monthly average of 13 million videos (Robehmed, 2017). All of these users, whether they were active or not, became part of TikTok when it purchased Musical.ly in November 2017 (Lee, 2018). By November 2019, TikTok had become one of the most downloaded apps on Apple and Android devices, with a total of 1.5 billion downloads and 800 million monthly active users (Chapple, 2019; Doyle, 2020). The app's active usership is especially strong with teens and young adults, as 41% of its users are 16 to 24 years old (Beer, 2019). This is why I describe the app as, "TikTok is to Gen Z as Instagram is to millennials" (Ahlquist, 2019b, para. 12).

Twitch

Built on the ability to live stream is a stand-alone platform called Twitch, which provides users a place to work together to create entertainment for its 200 million viewers (Hernandez, 2018). Originally, Twitch was created as a streaming website for video games where subscribers were able to document their games to online viewers (Hamilton et al., 2014). *Streamers*, those who broadcast their gameplay to viewers, are also able to share live videos of themselves through video cameras while simultaneously playing video games. In 2017, Twitch allowed users to stream nongame-related content through the IRL (in real life) feature as an appeal to vloggers and to facilitate more enriching experiences for viewers (Carpenter, 2016). In addition, Twitch has been part of the equation for esports, or electronic sports, a "world of competitive, organized video gaming" (Willingham, 2018, para. 2). It offers competitive video

gamers the opportunity to play against each other, much like organized sports such as basketball or baseball. New university-based esports programs and facilities are sprouting up every year. The University of Akron opened not one but three gaming spaces, including an arena, a center in the student union, and a casual gaming café at the honors college (Morona, 2018).

YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter have added live streaming features to take advantage of its popularity. According to researcher Caroline Golum (n.d.), “81% of internet and mobile audiences watched more live video in 2016 than in 2015” (para. 2).

Platforms on Platforms

In the universe of social media, there are dozens of platforms, applications, and websites, which I’ve organized into major themes instead of giving detailed descriptions of each one. Head to the companion website www.josieahlquist.com/digitalleadership for more information on those listed here as well as tactics for using them as a higher ed professional.

Blogging

Blogging began decades ago with web-based platforms such as Open Diary (in 1998), Live Journal (in 1999), and Xanga (in 1999). Today, blogging platform options are growing fast, including but not limited to Wordpress, Medium, Blogger, and Tumblr. Blogging functions are also blended into previously mentioned platforms like Facebook and LinkedIn. Blogs are web based, but many times they also have a mobile application that blends a number of elements, including text, pictures, videos, and so on. This category offers advanced tools for digital storytelling and gives its users an opportunity to innovatively establish a presence and identity online (Ahlquist, 2015).

Group Text and Video Messaging Apps

All iPhone and Android mobile devices now come with native and/or third-party messaging apps that don’t accrue data fees and aren’t affected by limitations set by mobile carriers, including Kik, Telegram, GroupMe, WhatsApp, and WeChat. In addition, Facebook developed its own app, Facebook Messenger, which is connected to the platform and extends its functionality. Group text and video messaging apps are incredibly popular with millennials, which account for 66% of Kik’s 300 million users and 76% of GroupMe’s 4.6 million users (McAlone, 2016). Kik is popular largely due to its impressive breadth of features. Users can chat one-on-one or in group messages, and both kinds of chats include a variety of multimedia options, including video chats. The app has its own form of digital currency called *kin*, which can be used to buy “games, live video streams and other digital products” (De Vynck, 2017, para. 8). Video chat features are popular elements on many chat platforms, but there are also stand-alone video-based chat apps such as Marco Polo, which allows users to record videos and send them to someone for later rather than real-time viewing.

Collaborative Platforms

Similar in many ways to group messaging, collaborative platforms are hosted on stand-alone applications/websites such as Slack, Yammer, and Mighty Networks. Most were created with team, business, and enterprise functions in mind, hence why 65 of the Fortune 100 companies use Slack, which allows its users to create channels that are “a single place for messaging, tools and files—helping everyone save time and collaborate together” (Slack, 2020b, para. 1). In 2020, Slack had 12 million daily users (Slack, 2020a).

GroupMe and Telegram can be set up to serve the same purposes as Slack, as can Yammer, which is owned by Microsoft and integrated with Microsoft 365. Yammer’s priority is to “connect and engage across your organization” (Microsoft, 2020, para. 1). Mighty Networks is unique in comparison to other collaboration platforms in that it provides users the ability to grow niche brands or networks by creating groups to connect people, sell subscriptions, launch online courses, and expand blog or podcast audiences (Mighty Networks, n.d.).

Forums

Different from messaging, chat rooms, or online communities because posts are typically longer than a sentence, forums are archived, and a conversation is moderated by the user who started it and/or an administrator. Common forum platforms include Fandom wikis, Discord servers, Quora, some Reddit channels, Voat, and 4chan. The last three examples have had serious concerns; for example, the harassment campaign (including doxing and death threats) of prominent female gamers stemmed from 4chan and Reddit, fueling what is known as GamerGate. Often, 4chan is referred to as the teenager of the internet (Ellis, 2018); its content can sometimes be silly, like spawning some of the most recognized memes, but other times, it can be cruel, like spreading viral hoaxes. Arguably, this is true for just about anywhere on the internet, but the differentiator on these platforms is that your identity can be anonymous and/or you can create a nonidentifying avatar.

As a reminder, just because I’ve given an exhaustive list of applications, platforms, and websites, I am not saying to drop everything and sign up for all of them. Your number-one priority right now in the primer to digital leadership is awareness. Now, let’s gain clarity on how higher ed has been approaching social media.

The State of Social Media in Higher Ed

If I could pick one word for the current state of social media in higher ed beyond campus pages or department accounts that describes individual representatives/leaders on campus, it would be *inconsistent*. One campus may have an active and engaged university president, numerous administrators, and a variety of faculty on various digital channels, while the institution down the street may have no campus buy-in or any professionals who are embracing digital tools in a professional capacity. Although

it is increasingly unlikely that no one on your campus is highly engaged with digital communication tools, without allies and models within your division or college, adoption and amplification may prove challenging. This book expands traditional methods of leadership and outreach, pushing campus cultures, norms, and previously defined institutional values.

That isn't to say that colleges and universities do not have robust social media strategies and brands housed in central marketing and communications. In 2017, Hootsuite released a global study on social media in higher ed and found that 90% of institutions use social media with the primary aim of recruiting and marketing to new students (Chatterton, 2018). In 2019, usage increased to 98% of institutions with social media adoption found across all parts of the study journey, not just increasing brand awareness and recruitment to new students (Chatterton, 2018). Examples included promoting campus programs (94%), customer service (57%), crisis communications (62%), and alumni engagement (72%) (Chatterton, 2018).

In this study campuses platforms of choices included Facebook (99%) and Twitter (95%), with Instagram (93%) adoption increasing by 13% from 2017. However, Snapchat strategy in higher ed has decreased by 13%. These campus accounts are increasingly focused on user-generated content. Pulling from students' real experiences, 46% of these teams are experimenting with student takeovers of accounts, as well as fully student-run social media programs.

The Hootsuite study focused primarily on central communication offices or other campus roles tasked with managing social media; in doing so they left out the experiences of educational professionals throughout campus, from orientation coordinators to academic program directors. A key finding in this study points to a shift in campus culture regarding social media at the executive level. In 2017, more than half of executives at the participant institutions reported social media as a focus area, and 49% were active online. In 2019 this increased to 68% of executive teams prioritizing social media as instrumental to the campus and fulfilling its mission. Compared to Fortune 500 CEOs, higher ed executives were more likely to be active on social media (Barnes & Lescault, 2013). However, just getting your president or vice president on Twitter doesn't solve all your difficulties managing social media or getting buy-in. Across campuses, the challenges these professionals face daily include skills gaps, limited budgets and struggles with campus collaboration. Another struggle is pinning down the exact ROI from social media, which could include student enrollment (71%) and fundraising (67%) (Barnes & Lescault, 2013). In Barnes and Lescault's study, 41% of participants still questioned how to quantify the ROI of social media on higher ed.

Barnes and Lescault (2013) found higher ed professionals have focused on using social media for marketing and promotions; however, this text doesn't aim solely to teach strategy. Digital leadership is about amplifying your leadership capacity to live out your values online and on campus. This text emphasizes relationships, community building, and ethical discernment, because social media strategy for an individual looks very different from a centralized university communication strategy. You as

an individual are a major part of the equation, along with your position, department, and long-term purpose. There are no studies or texts that currently aid in this process for educators looking to make an impact. This text was developed to change that.

Filling the Social Media Skills Gap

To address the inconsistencies and concerns of educational professionals online, professional associations are attempting to give direction to professionals, especially those who work in marketing, advancement, technology, and student affairs. Some of this direction addresses competencies, outcomes, and recommended practices on ethical use of digital communication tools. For example, the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE, 2020) adopted principles of practice for communications and marketing professionals, including ethical and operational principles. They describe successful communication and marketing professionals using six outcomes, including the ability to “employ proven creative and strategic methods, as well as promising new approaches in the field, and ensure that plans, activities and outcomes can be reliably measured as part of a commitment to continuous improvement” (CASE, 2020, para. 8). In addition, CASE adopted the following ethical principles that communication professionals are obligated to live out:

- Advance the mission of their institutions in an ethical and socially responsible manner.
- Ensure their work is aligned with, and reflects, the basic values of educational institutions: discovery, creativity, an abiding respect for candor and diverse viewpoints and a firm commitment to the open exchange of ideas.
- Reinforce through words and actions the principles of honesty, integrity, accountability, respect for others, quality and trust, which form the basis for long-term, supportive relationships with the institution’s publics.
- Place the welfare of the institution above personal gain, avoid conflicts of interest, maintain professional standards in all communication channels, take responsibility for their decisions and treat colleagues and the public with courtesy and respect. (CASE, 2020, paras. 3–6)

Although not everyone on campus is a marketing and communications professional (even if you do manage social media), these ethical principles need to be adopted and adapted widely, especially if you plan to take social media tools into your capacity and practice as a higher ed professional. Connecting ethics to digital communication tools and their impact on leadership is a significant competency that must be addressed; for this reason, it comes up several times in the text. Twitter, a live stream, or Reddit will call into question or celebrate your ethical decisions based on the actions and words you enact. Your community will hold you to them.

Two other associations that have attempted to formalize competencies around technology are Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA) and College Student Educators International (ACPA). The second edition of these

associations' joint *Professional Competency Areas for Student Affairs Practitioners* included a stand-alone competency on technology and defined *competence* in this area as:

The use of digital tools, resources, and technologies for the advancement of student learning, development, and success as well as the improved performance of student affairs professionals. Included within this area are knowledge, skills, and dispositions that lead to the generation of digital literacy and digital citizenship within communities of students, student affairs professionals, faculty members, and colleges and universities as a whole. (ACPA & NASPA, 2015, p. 15)

A variety of skills, attitudes, and dispositions is encouraged around technology, but the shift documented in this competency is the mission of technology grounded in student learning, development, and success, not just technology advancement or adoption. This shouldn't be a huge surprise considering the service delivery mission of student affairs; however, it is a challenge for all areas of campus to consider. You can argue about whether higher ed is a business, but there is a deeper mission to the work that we do that has to be more than marketing.

The technology competency also touches on a number of terms that may have been included in conference educational sessions, articles, or journals, but never formally delineated within a seminal document—which I wrote about in the second edition of *Contested Issues in Troubled Times: Student Affairs Dialogues on Equity, Civility, and Safety*:

Digital identity is basically what you are posting in digital spaces and what others have posted about you; the aggregate of all this digital content is your digital identity.

Digital reputation is others' perceptions of your digital identity, in addition to your intentional curation of what you want this to be.

Digital communities are networks in local, national, and global virtual environments, many times facilitated by social media platforms. (Ahlquist, 2019a, p. 415)

A foundational-level grasp of technology includes the ability to “demonstrate awareness of one's digital identity and engage students in learning activities related to responsible digital communications and virtual community engagement as related to their digital reputation and identity” (ACPA & NASPA, 2015, p. 15). Advanced competence calls for not only awareness but also action and alignment to the values of the institution. Furthermore, “the primary themes threaded through all of these (digital identity) skill levels are knowledge of digital presence, role modeling for students, and educating the campus community on online engagement” (Ahlquist, 2019a, p. 416).

The education of self, community, and the campus addresses the social media skills gap that remains hidden in day-to-day administration but with the potential to explode into the headlines if or when a student, staff member, or faculty member slips in public mediums that play out online. As a result, instead of focusing on education

and dialogue, campuses may set policies and guidelines that restrict or silence their employees; reinforce branding or marketing strategies; or, as is discussed in chapter 2, simply fail to offer any training, dialogue, or development at all. However, the digital gap remains, and it has roots in how we develop future campus leaders, starting in graduate school. The disruption of this pattern will come from digital leaders in higher ed—which hopefully includes you, no matter your position, institution, or organization. Whether you’re a leader on or off campus, you need an open tech mind-set.

An Open Tech Mind-Set

Ed Cabellon has been speaking, researching, and consulting on technology in higher ed since 2006. His influence on digital engagement in higher ed was documented in the early days of a Twitter chat called #sachat; when he was a host on the Higher Ed Live show *Student Affairs Live*; and as the creator of the Student Affairs Technology UnConferences, which were held in the early 2010s. He knows all too well that tech and social media communication adoption in higher ed hasn’t been the easiest sell. On *Josie and The Podcast*, he stated, “Most campuses are falling asleep at the wheel when it comes to engaging current students on social media” (Ahlquist, 2017a, 42:25). Seeing this obvious need, Cabellon discovered in his 2016 doctoral research study, *Redefining Student Affairs Through Digital Technology: A Ten-Year Historiography of Digital Technology Use by Student Affairs Administrators*, that technology itself has not been the main issue in higher ed. Instead, it has been navigating the politics behind it.

To maneuver the relational side of tech, Cabellon uses frameworks in organizational theory to explain stakeholders, adoption, implementation, and evaluation of technology. Specifically, he uses Bolman and Deal’s (2013) organizational frames to ground strategy regarding digital technology and communication tools, focusing on the following questions:

- Structural. What guidance does the institution provide for digital use? Will I have a personal, professional, and/or a mix of account types? What am I trying to accomplish by using digital tools?
- Human resources. How do I engage individuals in digital spaces, and will it be congruent with how I would have similar interactions in person? How can I help make connections for others? What online communities am I part of and why?
- Political. How could my digital use help or hinder myself and my institution? How could my position/role affect how my digital messages are perceived?
- Symbolic. How can my digital use broaden or deepen the view of the institution’s various public symbols (e.g., people, spaces, buildings, mascots, etc.), culture, ceremonies, and stories?

These questions are a wonderful warm-up as you develop your current mind-set. In chapter 5, I apply a similar approach; instead of organizational theories,

we apply leadership theories and examples throughout the field of higher ed. Exercises and applications have the ability to transform your view and integration of technology.

Digital Transformation

This chapter opened with and has focused primarily on presenting technology tools, but digital leadership places the priority on developing people. This is also the purpose of digital transformation of higher ed, also referred to as Dx. EDUCAUSE, an association advancing information technology in higher ed, champions Dx. Dx is defined as “a series of deep and coordinated culture, workforce, and technology shifts that enable new educational and operating models and transform an institution’s operations, strategic directions, and value proposition” (EDUCAUSE, n.d, para. 1). Change management is at the core of Dx, testing a leader’s ability to be agile and flexible while the world around them rapidly changes (Grajek & Reinitz, 2019). As you’ll learn in chapter 4, change is a guiding principle of digital leadership, and leaders must be able to navigate and strategize technology as individuals simultaneously guide their institutions. This may end up being the ultimate test of higher ed leaders and campuses going into the next decade.

Dx also connects core values to technology, another guiding principle you’ll apply to digital leadership. “Embracing digital transformation is about building on the core values of higher ed and developing new and significantly more effective ways to enrich and expand higher ed’s mission” (Wetzel et al., 2018, para. 1). Dx is not just the work of the chief information officer and information technology professionals. Dx presents clear language and new competencies and calls for strategic and coordinated efforts throughout the institution to address shifts in culture, workforce, and technology that higher ed must quickly address (Grajek & Reinitz, 2019).

The state of technology in higher ed is going through seismic shifts. This book primarily focuses on social media, while organizations like EDUCAUSE address tools like blockchain, artificial intelligence, cloud-based services, data management, and much more. However, knowing and applying the framework of Dx collectively strengthens the importance and relevance of technology while connecting values and the greater mission of higher ed. To navigate these shifts in community with one another, we must have relatable peers to learn from.

Each chapter of this book introduces you to digital leaders who demonstrate the material through their unique application. These professionals, who serve in a variety of positions at different types of institutions, can function as role models, mentors, or advisers along your digital leadership journey. Learn more about the professionals featured in this book and their current digital leadership practices at this book’s companion website. In this chapter, one role model of cultivating and leading with an open tech-mind-set by nature and by professional position using digital transformation is Joe Sabado, associate chief information officer at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

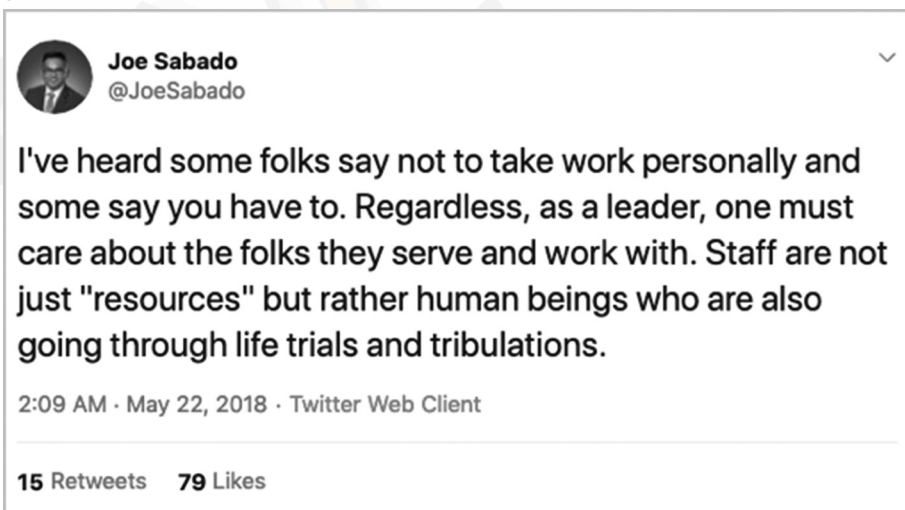
Leading With Gratitude

Authenticity, optimism, and constantly finding ways to add value to other people's lives are just a few ways that Joe Sabado uses digital communication tools. This philosophy serves him well as the associate chief information officer for student affairs and executive director for student information systems and technology at the University of California, Santa Barbara. He's responsible for leading a team of 65 software developers, engineers, designers, and business analysts, including 10 managers/directors of teams who manage information systems for enrollment services, the graduate division, and student services. Despite the fact that Joe is in charge of 150 information systems/websites for more than 22 departments, he shifts focus from roles and tech tools to understanding others as human beings (see Figure 1.1).

Joe calls himself blessed to have a job that combines his two passions: technology and seeing students develop from the first day of college to when they graduate and beyond. Because he practices this mind-set online and offline, he approaches everything from a values-first perspective. Joe stated: "I share my values/perspectives so folks I engage with feel like they're valued and they get something positive from our interactions, even when our perspectives may differ" (personal communication, June 23, 2017).

Documenting gratefulness through storytelling has been pivotal for Joe as a leader on his campus, allowing him to build relationships with students and colleagues in professional associations. So far, Joe has spent his professional career at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and as he has transitioned into roles higher in the organization, one of his priorities has been to remain relatable and approachable to students. He shares his personal experience online, including successes, struggles,

Figure 1.1. Joe Sabado tweet.



Note: Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/JoeSabado/status/998808087707369473>

and aspirations. For example, as a college student he taught himself HTML, which later qualified him for his first on-campus job. Joe noted:

As a Filipinx-American student affairs [information technology] administrator, I've found that by sharing my experiences, students on my campus have found me to be one they can relate with and one they can trust. This is especially true with the Filipinx-American and Asian-American students. When I have my weekly lunches with students, we often talk about what's going on with our lives and these conversations often start by referring to our social media posts. (Personal communication, June 23, 2017)

Joe has also documented digital leadership by embracing the roles of digital explorer, educator, and influencer. He has shared through social media his use of Oculus Go and Oculus Quest, mostly from pure curiosity and enjoyment. He noted that given how “the pace of how technology changes, there is not a single person who knows how everything works. What used to work in the past may no longer work today and in the future” (personal communication, June 23, 2017). Joe constantly calls on students to open his mind-set and awareness of tech tools and help him understand how those tools may or may not impact their student experience.

In addition to *authenticity*, *optimism*, and *value*, another word that comes up a lot for Joe when talking about leadership and social media is *vulnerability*. On *Josie and The Podcast*, Joe shared that he is a Filipinx American immigrant and first-generation college student, and he once felt silenced because of his accent. But he discovered that the more he was vulnerable in places like his blog and on Twitter the more others engaged with him. “There have been several times when I would get an email from a reader who came across my blog posts months after I wrote [them] expressing their gratitude for the posts because the posts validate their experience” (personal communication, June 23, 2017).

Joe wants to remain real and relevant in his career and as social media continues to evolve. Now that he feels more empowered, he's driven to give a voice to those who are marginalized because he once felt silenced. In his podcast episode, Joe shared that he is very intentional about blending questions, reflections, and actions with an attitude of gratitude online. These actions continually call his community to join conversations and celebrations.

Family has been a huge driver for Joe's leadership approach, fueled from values such as gratitude. He stated, “I look at my parents, and I think about what they have given up. How am I not supposed to be grateful?” (Ahlquist, 2017, 48:36). He has declared his life to be a miracle.

Joe makes a daily imprint on the internet with a consistent and values-driven approach, and it really isn't orchestrated for more likes or comments. This philosophy is a spoiler for the purpose-driven framework of digital leadership in higher ed. Joe declares that his purpose in life is to lift others up and hopes that his mission can be documented everywhere, including on social media. What imprint will you leave behind?

Kicking Off Your Digital Leadership Journey

The rest of this book is a roadmap that guides and inspires your purpose-driven digital leadership journey. The rules of leadership have been disrupted, and access to technology tools has rocked the traditional brick-and-mortar hierarchies to split power structures wide open, empowering; educating; and, heck, even entertaining all members of our communities. The gap that has resulted is an opportunity for you to make an impact. You can be widely seen and heard, not with marketing and strategy overload, but with a holistic and humanistic approach—one that connects technology with leadership. Before moving on to chapter 2, in which I share data and tell stories about administrators and faculty who are figuring out how to integrate digital communication tools into their formal campus roles, let's start to tell *your* story.

Your next stop on this journey is completing a digital checkup, which is included in Application Exercise 1.1. You will create a technology timeline, inspired by my own in the preface. We'll reflect on your experiences as far back as you can remember. Let's also get very clear with your current platform preferences, people with whom you're connected and any immediate reactions that come to mind about these tools. Because of the interactive and participatory nature of this activity and many others in this book, I have made them available via the book companion website (www.josieahlquist.com/digitalleadership). I also encourage you to head to our book digital community, Digital Leadership Network, hosted on Mighty Networks to share your results from each activity (<http://bit.ly/DigitalLeadershipNetwork>).



APPLICATION EXERCISE 1.1 *Schedule Your Digital Checkup*

Just like you'd visit a doctor for an annual physical, the goal of your digital checkup is to make a holistic connection and full-body diagnosis. By completing a technology timeline and tracking your present-day platform use, you'll begin to recognize the physical, mental, and emotional sides of technology and social media in your life.

This exercise has four parts. In Part A (Table E1.1.1), create your timeline. I encourage you to follow several guidelines when creating your timeline:

- Only add a tool to your timeline when it entered your life and/or you have a memory of it, even though it was available earlier.
- Think about who influenced your decision to try out a tool, especially if they taught you how to use it.
- Think about whether a tool had any influence on you (both then and today) and whether it was good or bad.

To help you get started, I list one example that I haven't previously shared, how I ended up in the Judicial Affairs Office as a graduate student because of my Napster account. For additional examples, you can check out my technology timeline, which starts in the 1970s.

TABLE E1.1.1
Part A: Your Technology Timeline

<i>Year</i>	<i>Tech Tool</i>	<i>Usage Notes</i>	<i>Impact</i>
		<p><i>When did you first use the tool?</i></p> <p><i>What do you remember about it?</i></p> <p><i>Who influenced its adoption and/or how did you learn to use it?</i></p>	<p><i>What impact did as this tool have on you then?</i></p> <p><i>Does it still influence you today?</i></p>
2001 (Josie's example)	Napster	<p>I learned about Napster from another woman in my residence hall. I quickly downloaded hundreds of songs and overloaded my Gateway computer. I stopped using Napster in 2002, as lawsuits against users pirating content became common.</p>	<p>To my horror, my Napster account stayed active, and in 2004 while serving as a graduate assistant at Northern Arizona University, I received a notification from the Judicial Affairs Office. I had been breaking the student code of conduct due to the so-called popularity of my Napster account. My computer was confiscated, and the files were removed.</p> <p>I now ensure I review all digital places in which I have been active and check terms and conditions of platforms.</p>
1960s			
1970s			
1980s			

1990s			
2000–2005			
2005–2010			
2010–2015			
2015–2020			
2020–2025			

In Part B (Table E1.1.2), take your timeline to the next level. Reflect on it, then jot down the three most prominent examples of technology playing a significant role in your life (personal or professional, positive or negative). The examples can be from childhood or adulthood. Be specific in sharing what that technology tool was and the impact it had on you.

TABLE E1.1.2
Part B: Times Technology Played a Significant Role in Your Life

<p>Example 1</p>

Example 2

Example 3

In Part C (Table E1.1.3), think about current relevant platforms—how often you use each tool (if at all), who you do (or do not) connect with, and what you like and dislike about the tool. I’ve listed one example of how I would answer for Twitter.

TABLE E1.1.3
Part C: Present-Day Platform Tracking

<i>Platform</i>	<i>How Often Do You Use It?</i>	<i>Who Do You Connect With on It?</i>	<i>What Do You Like About This Platform?</i>	<i>What Do You Dislike About This Platform?</i>
Twitter (Josie’s example)	Daily	It’s a public account, open to all connections.	Real-time conversations, focused conversations through hashtags, use in teaching my online courses.	My identity has been stolen, fake accounts follow me, it’s difficult to find posts that are from years ago.
Facebook				
Twitter				

YouTube				
Instagram				
Snapchat				
LinkedIn				
Pinterest				
Reddit				
TikTok				
Blogging Platforms				
Live Streaming				
Social Media "Stories"				

Messaging/ Video Chat				
Groups and Forums				
Other				

In Part D (Table E1.1.4), reflect on your timeline. Did you make any discoveries by doing this exercise? Did you forget about a platform on which you had created an account? Was it more difficult to explain who you choose to connect with (or not) on specific platforms?

TABLE E1.1.4

Part D: Times Technology Played a Significant Role in Your Life

With your digital checkup now complete, it's time for you to see what other readers had to say as well as share your own story. Head to our book community, the Digital Leadership Network found at <http://bit.ly/DigitalLeadershipNetwork>, and find the chapter 1 topic, where you can share a few of your reflections and discoveries on any of these exercises.