# PAPERS

## Content Creation vs. Curation

### Strategies for Theological Library Social Media Coordinators

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**ABSTRACT** In 2017, the position "Social Media Manager" ranked no. 42 in CNNMoney/PayScale's "Top 100 Careers with Big Growth," the increased evidence of which we see today as organizations introduce a digital presence in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The title "Social Media Manager" might not be explicit in the job descriptions of theological librarians; however, this critical "other duty as assigned" if improperly managed can constitute an overwhelming amount of time and work. This paper will discuss drivers behind social media fatigue and burnout, distinguish between a content creator versus curator, and suggest strategies to establish the latter as an equitable and efficient model for social media coordinators in theological libraries.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic forced organizations to establish strong social media presences, managers and coordinators of digital marking content were on the rise. In 2017, the position "Social Media Manager" ranked number 42 in CNNMoney/PayScale's 2017 "Top 100 Careers with Big Growth" (Braverman 2017). During the global pandemic, consumers increasingly sought to connect with brands in new ways through social sharing platforms from home (Sutherland 2020). For academic libraries too, social media became

a critical microphone to announce policies, explain service changes, promote resources, and stay connected to students, faculty, staff, and community members.

Interestingly enough, when an online search was conducted on June 2, 2022, for mentions of "social media" in job descriptions, the American Library Association (*https://joblist.ala.org*) boasted 28 matches, while Atla (*https://www.atla.com/jobs/*) identified none. However, where there is content, there is a coordinator, so it's fair to assume that social media falls under "other duties as assigned" for many librarians or other staff in theological libraries. For those who juggle a variety of duties, this seemingly trivial two-word assignment has the capacity to lead to stale outreach, workplace burnout, and information overload.

Thus we come to the concept of *social media fatigue*, which "refers to a host of negative emotional responses to activities on social networking sites, such as tiredness, burnout, exhaustion, frustration, disinterest toward communication…" as defined by Han Zheng and Rich Ling in their article "Drivers of Social Media Fatigue: A Systematic Review" (2021). In fact, the concept showed its face in a variety of scholarly articles and contexts. In a review of Sarah Roberts's *Behind the Screen: Content Moderation in the Shadows of Social Media,* Natalia Kovalyova (University of Texas at Austin) observes that the author's "interviews with content moderators unearth several common themes across locations…: precarious work, pervasive stress and burnout, job insecurity, [and] disparity in status and treatment" (Kovalyova 2020).

However, we don't have to look at academic literature to identify these sentiments. In the "Libraries & Social Media" Facebook group, a simple post search for "social media burnout" spoke for itself (names and accounts shall remain anonymous):

> "I have recently taken over our Libraries Social Media and I feel like I am drowning!"
>
> "How do you all avoid burnout with handling social media? I've been at it almost 5 years, and I'm in a rut. Is it just me?"
>
> "I don't have 'Facebook' magic (yes actual phrased used). Please don't stroke my ego by asking me to 'do your thing, you're so good at it' because you think I can produce the response you want. I am a marketing staff of one. This year has stretched me to my limits."

This gradual depletion of creative energy portends stale or repetitive content, missed deadlines, and burnout in the workplace. The strategy this paper proposes to combat the above originated with a suggested curation model from the Pitts Library's Head of Public Services in early 2019. At that moment in time, the library's social media accounts were split between departments—Instagram for Special Collections and Facebook/Twitter for Public Services. In efforts to ensure timely, consistent content across platforms, account management was consolidated to the Reference Librarian and Outreach Coordinator (RLOC). The Head of Public Services encouraged the RLOC to act as a *curator* of social media content rather than the sole *creator*.

But what is the difference between a content curator and creator? The term *Content Creator* originally traces back to YouTube's first designation of its users as "Creators," but is now understood as an overarching term for digital creators ("Let's Define Influencer and Other Content Creator Terms" 2017). Content creators consult with subject specialists and bring together images or video, branding, and words that effectively deliver a message. Creators might take time to make several versions of the same content to release periodically or to present as alternative design options. Creators work project by project to meet specific needs of the institution or employer at that moment in time.

The trouble arises when a content coordinator is hired under one pretense and then pushed into also taking on content creation without the time, resources, or expertise to do so. One Twitter user effectively sums up the problem in 180 characters or less:

> "Companies hir[e] social media managers and expect them to do photography, videography, graphic design, copywriting, brand strategy, monitor metrics, host YouTube, make tiktok dances. The work of an entire marketing team." (June 22, 2022)

This onslaught of responsibilities not only poses a risk to employee wellbeing, but also limits the entire institution's social media brand and voice to one person's views and experience. The content quality suffers as a result, and it is also unlikely that any time is left for the actual curation of content buried in today's age of information overload.

So how do we distinguish content *curation* from *creation*? Several definitions have emerged in the past few years, but Joyce Kasman Valenza and others in ALA's *Library Technology Reports* define *social media curation* as "activities that leverage the power of social media

to collect, organize, share, and interpret content to tell a digital story for a particular audience" (Valenza, Boyer, and Curtis 2014). Valenza goes on to explain that "Social media curators make sense of the vast flood of digital content. They deliberately and continually scout, identify relevance, evaluate, classify, organize, aggregate, personalize, and add value to content" (Valenza, Boyer, and Curtis 2014). Rather than having to *produce* the content that constitutes the "vast flood," content curators use their creative power to wrangle and help make sense of it in an institutional setting. This includes but is not limited to retweeting, sharing, moderating, editing, and assessing content. While content curators are still working with "flexible and virtually limitless containers" in this model, they aren't having to contribute to those containers while also curating (Valenza, Boyer, and Curtis 2014).

The definition sounds ideal, but what does this mean for social media coordinators on the ground? The first "rule" this paper proposes for content curation is **don't curate in isolation**. This is not to suggest that one conducts their work in a busy Starbucks setting, but rather takes into account existing content and potential partners that curators can capitalize on. For example, instead of attempting to address every major holiday or week of recognition, find existing content and share or recycle it within your own institutional context. For example, Pitts Theology Library might not take the time to post about Denim Day (www.peaceoverviolence.org/about-us), since its larger affiliate institution, Emory University, runs an organized campaign every year accompanied by suggested content. The same can be said for major academic events such as convocation or commencement—Candler School of Theology is sure to cover these events, so why not share and attribute their content as a baseline for library posts? Other collaboration partners might include professional guilds like the Society of Biblical Literature, academic publishers, local churches, formal social media committees, other theology libraries, or even yourself! Identifying evergreen content published by your institution in the past can go a long way when you need a quick template for finals reminders or a fun tidbit about Aldersgate Day.

While the first rule encourages content curators to share and reuse existing content, the second adds a bit of finesse by strongly suggesting you both **attribute content and make it your own**. As masters of bibliography and citation, source attribution for theological librarians is self-explanatory. While we might not insert a footnote into a Facebook post, an informal "mention" of the source by "Quote

Tweeting" or a share with comments acknowledges the original creator, maintaining a mutually beneficial partnership while allowing for slight alterations to transform the content. This, in turn, will assure that other content managers treat your posts with the same care and consideration.

The third rule is to **be cognizant of new and developing content and trends**. Social media curation can be both proactive and reactive—the reactive a key strategy and challenge for staff in smaller institutions with fewer staff and resources devoted to communications. As anyone in a social media role already knows, scheduling content is an excellent strategy until the next big "thing" hits, whether that's weather, breaking news, a trending hashtag, or policy changes and updates. In these cases, curators must proactively seek out this content and react to it prudently. This could be something as big as communicating university shutdowns for a global pandemic, or as trivial as finding a connection between the highly debated 2015 gold or green dress and resources on church vestments (*BBC News* 2015). Challenges that come with this "reactive" element of social media curation are negotiating institutional responses to a large-scale event in addition to maintaining a healthy work/life balance. The former arises when a polarizing event or issue calls for an institutional response, for example a Supreme Court decision or a humanitarian crisis. Curators must caution against preemptively publishing a reaction that might contradict an existing or forthcoming statement from the institutional hierarchy. Inconsistent messaging can confuse readers, highlight disparities in the institutional network, and even call for disciplinary action in high-stakes cases. The second challenge is just as tricky to navigate. Content curation itself calls for boundaries and a guaranteed work/life balance for coordinators; however, social media does not stop at the end of the workday. Strategies for addressing content that falls outside the normal business week should be in place to ensure employee wellbeing, whether that be assigning other moderators during off-hours or instating a "no-post" policy outside of Monday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Rule number four, and perhaps the most challenging, is **establish a method for internal collaboration**. Internal collaboration refers to shared work of the immediate staff of the library or organization as opposed to external affiliates or partners. The Reference and Outreach Librarian at Pitts experimented with methods over the course of four years, gaining insights from both successes and failures. The

first attempt sought to create a shared Excel sheet or calendar with mapped-out content in hopes that staff would take initiative to sign up for content creation for a special event or resource. This approach failed for several reasons, the first resting on the assumption that employees would actively take on extra work with little or no incentive. Designated communications or social media committees often fail for the same reason—staff members already buried in their own job duties find little to no benefit to a one-sided *quid pro quo*. In addition, the reactive nature of social media discussed will likely disrupt a set content calendar, so even if the posts were written and ready, they might not appear at the designated time and throw off the entire planner.

What *did* work for Pitts's Reference Librarian and Outreach Coordinator was developing individual relationships and workflows with different members of staff to ensure a steady stream of content. Mass emails or announcements are often ignored with the assumption that "someone else will do it." Reducing communication to one-on-one settings guarantees that the desired content contributor/creator is clear. This can be done a variety of ways, from writing a personal email to catching a colleague in the hall to congratulate them on winning the coveted staff award. These suggestions can be enhanced with the acknowledgement of what you need: subject expertise. Reaffirming your role as the content curator and your colleagues' unique specialties and talents develops trust and respect in creator-curator relationships. The promise that the creator will be acknowledged and their expertise showcased puts a cap on the bargain, ensuring an equal exchange of work and recognition. This paper suggests that setting firm deadlines with helpful reminders and offers for support, in addition to providing post-publishing reports (e.g., number of likes/shares, positive comments), will further strengthen internal collaboration between colleagues.

The final rule for content curation success is to **advocate for the tools you need to be successful**. It may be the case that your supervisor or director is unaware of what tools and resources a coordinator needs to make the institutional social media presence worthwhile. Below are just a few suggestions for your content curation toolkit:

1. **Shared storage:** Content curation requires a place to store said content, and high-resolution images, audio, and video files call for a substantial amount of storage space. Check with your IT department to see if there is an exception to the capped storage on your hard drive, or an option to use

an external backup. In addition, take advantage of any cloud sharing resources providing by your institution as places to share and store large files, whether that be SharePoint, Hightail, Google Drive, OneDrive, Box, Dropbox, etc.

2. **Social media aggregators:** These are tools that allow users to collate posts and updates from a variety of different social media feeds, with special features allowing for an organized view of posts in a particular category, tag and share notifications, and advanced analytics. New options come out every day, but a few existing platforms include Walls.io, HeyOrca, Curator, and Hootsuite. As trends change and develop, the most important goal is to find a tool you're comfortable with and use it to its full potential.
3. **Networking and professional development:** As with any profession, it is necessary to work with fellow experts in the field to share ideas and establish connections in social media curation. One might attend events like the Library Marketing and Communications Conference (*www.librarymarketingconference.org/*), join a Libraries and Social Media Facebook group, or take courses for certificates in graphic design, digital marketing, or other tangential topics. Networking and professional development might require funding, so work with your institution to affirm its importance and acquire the financial assistance it calls for. If institutional funding isn't an option, take advantage of free resources online like YouTube how-to videos, listservs, blogs, and more!
4. **Time:** Just as with teaching, the time it takes to prepare and curate content for publication is disproportionate to the actual event of "posting." It can take an entire business day to align blog, social media, and newsletter content featuring only three points or containers. Content solicitation alone can take weeks, given its complexity and the capacity of the contributor/creator. Set boundaries with your supervisor or work them into your job description sooner rather than later; that way you'll have precedent to fall upon and to reassess as the eb and flow of work changes. Designating one day for social media curation, limiting platforms, or setting a two-week deliverable for content will protect you from overworking to meet unrealistic expectations.

With these suggestions in mind, this paper acknowledges certain limitations. The feasibility of these recommendations will vary from

institution to institution. Staffing and resources might be limited due to budget constraints or employee contracts, leaving a coordinator no option but to both create and curate content. Funding may limit the professional development opportunities or software subscriptions available. The dynamic nature of technology might present a wrench in the entire model (what if, for example, there emerges one dominant publishing platform, leaving content duplication unnecessary?). In the best-case scenario, advances in technology will make content curation easier, but there is no guarantee. In the meantime, content curators must emphasize their work's importance, collaborate effectively with others to maximize efficiency, set clear boundaries, and advocate for the resources they need to succeed in curating an institutional presence against the backdrop of a dynamic, digital world.

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