Using Social Media to Enhance Community Participation

Temple University Collaborative
On Community Inclusion of Individuals with Psychiatric Disabilities

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This manual provides a brief overview of social media and how it can be used to enhance community participation. It was written by:

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Introduction

Social Media has changed the way people express themselves, get information, and communicate with each other. It is an innovational tool that has added unique opportunities to interacting with others, however social media can be used for a multitude of things other than simply talking with friends. Finding jobs, searching for community events, joining groups of peers, reviewing businesses, expressing points of view, and sharing news articles are just some of the great community-based features social media offers. At the Temple University Collaborative on Community Inclusion we believe social media can be a viable tool to aid community living and participation if used correctly. This document will explain some features of various social media websites that can aid someone in integrating into the community.

Social media use has risen drastically in recent years. As of 2018, 69% of all adults in the United States have at least one social media account. That is up from just 5% of adults in 2005 (1). However, research has shown that social media use among individuals with serious mental illnesses is not as high as it is in the general population. In a study conducted by Temple University, showed that only 33% of participants with serious mental illnesses had a social media account (2). A similar study of those with Bipolar Disorder showed that individuals that suffered from bipolar disorder had poorer knowledge of social networking sites, and were less familiar with them (3). In a recent study of people with schizophrenia, only 27% used social media daily, and 53% did not use social media at all (4).

In a general sense, social media acts as a platform to express yourself and engage with others. More specifically, people use social media for various reasons ranging from talking with family to expressing themselves, to shopping, to finding events. Facebook acts as a great way to interact with loved ones and other community members whom cannot otherwise be reached. People may use Twitter as a source of news, and to keep up with what their favorite community members, organizations, or famous celebrities are doing. People may use other social media websites as a way to message others, review places and businesses, document social interactions, enjoy content, organize groups, find community events, make friends, and search for jobs.

While social media has shown to have both positive and negative effects, if used right, it can be a vital community tool to aid someone who may be looking to take advantage of community resources, get out more, find things to do, find other people to do them with, and explore activities they are interested in. Sharing, liking, checking in, reviewing, finding events, etc. are all aspects of social media that make it easier to get out into the community. This document will explain each of those specific factors of social media, and how they can aid in community participation. It will then talk about specific social media networks, how to use them, and what they can offer to someone looking to integrate into the community.

Along with reading this document, we encourage consumers to talk to their providers to gain some further insight in using social media and get help determining how social
media can benefit you. While we attempt to cover all areas of social media, further discussion is necessary for those who intend to use these sites. Social media sites can be used in a multitude of ways, and should be talked about on a case-by-case basis. Social media also has some faults, and these faults should be thoroughly discussed and put in their proper context. Be sure to talk to your provider before getting started with social media.
Social Media Features

Adding friends/followers
Adding friends, followers, or contacts is a great way to expand your network of people. It allows you to connect with other people in your community that you may not otherwise have the chance to connect to. This promotes networking by allowing you to access other people and make yourself known. This makes it much easier to find events, activities, and peers. Not only is it a great opportunity to network with individuals but it also allows for diversity. It enables you to connect to groups of people from all walks of life which proves to be very helpful when going out in the community.

Chatting
One of the foundational features of social media, chatting, is a great way to stay connected with other users. It allows you to have conversation and connections that may not otherwise happen. Chatting promotes cohesion by allowing you to stay connected and informed, it also promotes self-esteem by way of social approval from others. The consistent option for conversation enabled by social networking helps build upon your sense of self.

Chatting also promotes a feeling of connection, engagement, and support. Having a meeting online before physical interaction leads to a higher sense of connectedness, especially if you are confined to your residence. It eases the anxiety of meeting someone new. Meeting with someone for the first time after talking with them on the internet can seem much more comfortable due to the fact that you already have an idea of who they are. Chatting allows you to experience engagement and support by reinforcement of social connectedness and affirmation from peers. Talking to someone is a great way to get feedback from a peer, it allows you to feel more comfortable in conversation which in turn makes it easier to get out in the community.

Sharing
Sharing on social media can be a great tool to express yourself and inform others about activities you have done or things you find interesting. It promotes cohesion by keeping you informed and working with others toward a similar goal. When you share yourself with others, it promotes self-esteem.

Sharing allows you to feel of connected, and engaged. Looking back on something and remembering it provides a sense of joy, along with connection. It also allows you to stay informed and learn from others with the same interests.

Sharing the things you have done creates a social identity, it gives you the opportunity to present yourself and choose who sees it. By sharing these things you are telling people your interests, and who you are. This can prove worthy when attempting to find people, or things to do in the community. Not only will you have a better sense of who you are, but you will also have a better sense of who they are and vice versa.
Liking
Liking is another way to connect to people who enjoy similar things and allows you to establish similar interests. This connection through similar interests allows you to experience the cohesion of connecting with someone through similar interests, and it also helps your self-esteem with the approval of shared information. Liking something can be a way of showing that you are a fan of a page or post whatever is being shown. Liking a page or an account is a great way to tailor your social media accounts to your interests. This, along with sharing, is a great way to show people your interests and who you are which leads to a better sense of self and sense of others and results in engaging in the community much easier.

Checking In
Checking in is a great way to feel mentally and physically connected to your community. It allows you to connect with and build cohesion with others who have checked in to the same place. It is a unique way to see who frequently visits similar places, and serves as a good way to remember where you have gone, and how much you enjoyed it. It can also serve self-esteem and memory. Checking in somewhere can serve as a “badge” so to speak, and prove useful as a reminder of past participation, which encourages future community participation.

Reviews
Reviews are a great way to document what you have done. They allow for you to reflect and rate places you have been or events you have gone to. They promote independence and connectedness to the community. Reviewing can also help you feel like you’re connecting with others who may consider your review before going to a location or business. Not only is reviewing a great tool when you are trying to figure out where to go but they also serve as a good opportunity to formulate your own opinions and preferences. They allow you to see what other people did or did not enjoy. This makes it easier when deciding where to go in the community, and where you do not wish to return to.

Groups
Groups are a great way to surround yourself with similar people. There are support groups, event groups, hobby groups, and area groups. It is a fascinating way to find people with similar interests, desires, or problems whom you may of otherwise not find in your everyday life. This is a great opportunity to makes friends with peers and provides you with more options when you wish to head out with others in the community.

Events
Events provide exposure to upcoming activities and are a great tool for community participation. Concerts, park days, markets, yard sales, celebrations, sporting events, get-togethers’, and civic activities are just a few examples. These offer you access to events that you may of not previously known about and make it easier to see who is going, where it is, and how you can attend.
Information Seeking/Sharing
Social media also provides information that can help increase your feelings of connectedness, engagement, and support. If you have questions, concerns, curiosities, or even some information to share yourself you will be able to do it on social media. This can be extremely helpful when you are looking at specific activities, people, or places to go in the community.
**Social Media Websites**

With social media’s rapid expansion, more websites specializing in a multitude of areas have begun to arise. There are websites that focus on connecting with friends and family, websites that focus on reaching others, websites that focus on meeting up in the community, websites that focus on employment and jobs, and websites that focus on following and reviewing businesses and community organizations. Here are some features of specific social media sites:

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<th>Feature</th>
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**Facebook** is the most widely used social media network that aims to specialize in deep meaningful connections with its users. On Facebook you are able to add friends, chat, share, like, check in, etc.
**Twitter** aims to specialize in expression of self, and the ability to reach others who you would not otherwise be able to.

**Instagram** is based on photo and video sharing and allows for a great opportunity to document community participation.

**LinkedIn** is based on job and career networking, and is geared toward connecting with possible and past employers and coworkers.

**Meetup** is based on meeting up with others in the community for community events.

**Yelp** is a review-based website that allows you to read and write reviews on community organizations and businesses.

In the next section we will take a deeper look at all of the different social media websites that can aide in community engagement, and highlight the strengths of each one.
Facebook is widely considered the most popular social networking site with 2.2 billion monthly users as of March 2018 (5). Facebook can be used in a variety of ways to access community resources, find community events, and connect with other users who have similar aspirations. Liking, sharing, messaging, commenting, checking in, events, groups, reviews, marketplace, and business pages are some aspects that make getting out into the community much easier. Below are some of the main features Facebook has to offer.

**Friends**
Adding/having friends on Facebook is a great way to keep in touch with those that you’d otherwise not be able to. It helps ease the distance gap and the separation that develops when not seeing someone in your day-to-day life. Having someone that you can reach out to on Facebook, or that can reach out to you can make it easier to plan community-activity-dates with them. It is a great tool to associate with others.

**Chatting**
Chatting/Messaging on Facebook is a great tool for conversing with others whom you may not otherwise talk to. It allows for an easy and simple route to reach out to others, and have them reach out to you, which results in more communication and more options for conversations, activities, and events.

**Liking**
Liking on Facebook gives an opportunity for you to show that you enjoy a place, event, or page. This can make it easier to learn about the park you wanted to go to, or see what movie is playing. It can also be a good tool to see who else likes similar things and who may be available to do certain activities with.

**Sharing**
Sharing allows you to spread a page, place, event, or message to your friends. This can be an event you want to go to or a place you have been. Sharing is a great way to find out if anyone else is interested in the same things, events, or places that you are which can make it easier to have friends to go out to these events and places with.
**Events**

Events on Facebook are an easy way to find out what is happening, where it is, and who is interested in it. This makes it simple to invite your friends to events, show people you are going, and find out any details needed.

**Groups**

Groups are a great way to establish common connections with others. They allow for you to connect to other people with similar interests, demographics, or histories. They can prove to be vital when looking for information, support, or companionship.
Reviews
Giving and reading reviews allows for a rating system of places and events. This can come in handy when deciding on an event to attend or a place to go. It also allows you to provide input on somewhere you have been which helps others when deciding where to go in the community.

Facebook can be used as a vital tool in community participation. It can help someone, talk with others, find places, find people, participate in events, and feel more connected to their community. It is a tool worth considering for anyone trying to become more active in the community, especially those with serious mental illnesses. To create a Facebook account, or for more information visit the “How do I create a Facebook account?” At the Facebook Help Center.
Twitter is a social network involving “Tweets” in which users post to their account. Twitter is known for its 280 character-limit posting style (expanded from 140 characters in 2017) in that a user must limit their post to 280 characters or less. According to PEW research, 24% of adults in the United States use Twitter as of January 2018. Twitter can be used to express yourself, interact with others, follow people and places, and discover anything from news to events to people. Here are some of the features Twitter has to offer.

Followers
Following people, places, or businesses is a great way to expand your network and gain exposure to a multitude of opportunities that are going on in the community. By following someone, you allow yourself to be able to see what they post or share on their account. This could result in you finding out about that concert you did not know existed, or that the local library offers free job training. Following is another tool that opens an avenue for connection and information that may otherwise not exist. Gaining followers allows for you to expand your social network, and helps you gain connection and engagement with others. When someone follows you they are interested in what you have to say, therefore giving you a unique platform to share what you see fit with your peers. This could make it much easier when looking for someone to go somewhere with. Instead of having to call each friend individually and ask them if they would like to come with you, you can openly message or tweet it to all of your friends/followers with one click of a button.

Tweeting/Retweeting
Tweeting and retweeting is the main form of interaction on Twitter. With 280 characters or less, you are able to express yourself, share something you enjoy or did, or reach out to followers. This is a great way to express your opinion on certain topics or places. Perhaps you may want to tweet about how you enjoyed a movie or how you feel about the restaurant you went to with your family. You are also able to share what others say in “retweets,” which allow you to share something and say something when sharing it. Such as your
local politician tweeting something you agree with; retweeting it allows you to share it with your followers. You are also able to read other tweets from who you follow, this could mean seeing the weekly events from the local park that shares them on their twitter. This form of expression on twitter can lead to a sense of independence and help you to participate in your community.

**Hashtags**

Hashtags are what Twitter uses to index words. This allows you to easily follow certain things based on a hashtag. If you type in #biking on Twitter, you are able to see all the recent and popular tweets that have had “#biking” in them. This could prove useful when trying to track specific events. Businesses and events will encourage guests to use a specific hashtag during the events to implement a conversation on Twitter. This allows for anyone to go through and see what people are tweeting about that specific event. This can prove useful when trying to find out what’s going on at your local library’s job fair, or how everyone is enjoying the new gym you were debating on going to.

Twitter is a great opportunity to express yourself, keep up with certain people, topics, or businesses, and gather information that can make being active in the community much easier. Eliminating the necessity for face to face contact to listen to peers, and voice opinions can prove to be extremely helpful in getting out in the community. It can be useful for anyone, especially those with serious mental illnesses. To sign up for Twitter visit the “Signing up with Twitter,” page.
Instagram is a picture and video sharing social networking website for cell phones. It specializes in the ability to customize and edit images and videos that you can share with your network. According to PEW, 35% of adults in the United States use Instagram as of January 2018 (1). Instagram can be used to take and share photos and videos of your page, and view photos and videos that others post to their page.

**Following/Followers**
Following and Followers on Instagram are similar to that of Twitter in which you choose who to follow, and can allow people to follow you. This is yet another opportunity you could use to expand your social network and become exposed to not only your peers, but businesses, places, bands, artists, sports figures, and countless other entities that could assist you in exploring your community.

**Liking**
Similar to Facebook, liking posts on Instagram gives you an opportunity to show you enjoy a place, event, or page. It can be a way of endorsing a person, place, event, activity, or image. Instagram also has a feed that shows who you follow, and their recent likes. This is a great opportunity to see which of your followers has similar tastes, and can be a facilitator in going out with peers who have similar interests.

**Hashtags**
Hashtags are what Instagram uses to index words, similar to Twitter. This allows you to easily follow certain people, places, or events based on a hashtag. If you type in #communityinclusion on Instagram, recent posts with that hashtag will fill up your screen. This could prove useful when trying to see if there is any rock concerts near you, or if you want to see how any recent rock concerts were experienced by others. Businesses and events will encourage guests
to use a specific hashtag during the events to gain a conversation on Instagram just as they do on Twitter. This allows for anyone to go through and see what people are tweeting about that specific event.

**Checking In**
Checking in is a feature in posting that allows you to document where you were when the image was taken or posted. By checking in, you can openly state where you were, and easily connect with others who checked into the same place. By searching the location where you checked in, your post will be associated with all the other posts with the same check in location. This also serves as a nice reminder to look back on in the future.

Instagram can help with community participation in several ways. Interacting with others, documenting participation, searching keywords, and checking in to places are just a few of them. It can be a helpful application for anyone interested in socializing and community participation. Allowing to see what others are up to, and posting what you are doing limits the difficulties of reaching out to others in person, and talking about yourself that some people have, including those with serious mental illnesses. To sign up for Instagram, visit the “How do I create an Instagram account?” page.
LinkedIn is a social network website specializing in business, career, and employee networking. It can be used to stay connected with coworkers, seek employment, and to find and hire employees. Nearly one in four (25%) of adults in the United States use LinkedIn as of January 2018 (1). LinkedIn can be a vital tool regarding employment.

**Network/Connections**
LinkedIn allows you to connect with friends, family, and businesses with an emphasis on your career, work history, and future employment. This is a unique website that allows you to further expand your occupation-related network which can assist when looking for a new job, promotion, or career.

**Jobs**
The unique facet of LinkedIn is the ability to search for jobs and be contacted for job opportunities. The “Jobs” section of the site allows you to look through companies, job titles, and even allows you to apply. There is also an option to “make yourself available” for job opportunities in which you can let job recruiters know you are interested in being contacted for open positions.

LinkedIn can be useful for connecting with coworkers, interacting with potential employers, and finding new jobs. It can be vital in to anyone interested in employment
in the community, including those with serious mental illnesses. LinkedIn can inhibit the challenge, awkwardness, and difficulty of reaching out to businesses to search for employment. This is helpful to everyone, especially those with serious mental illnesses. To sign up for LinkedIn, visit the “Signing Up to Join LinkedIn” page.
Meetup is a social networking site that specializes in meeting with others in the community. It allows people to search for groups, and group meetings and also allows people to start and organize groups with the intent of meeting in person. Groups consist of a variety of things from hobby groups, to exercise groups, to career groups, to age groups. Meetup has a group for just about everybody. According to MeetUp CEO Scott Heiferman, Meetup has 40 million group members and there are 20,000 Meetup group meetings a day as of June 2017 (6).

**Events**
The events or “Meetups” are what the website was based on. It can be difficult in trying to find peers to get out in the community with, and that is why Meetup can be useful. By simply joining groups, or searching for locations around your home you can see a list of “Meetups” in which groups are getting together. There are even some events that do not require being a group member to attend the event.

![Find a Meetup](image-url)
Groups
Groups are the backbone of the Meetup website. They are made by users who share common interests such as the “Philadelphia Bicycling club,” or the “Fishtown Saturday Book Club.” This is a very unique and specific feature of Meetup that allows you to connect with people with similar interests, and set dates to get together with in the community. Once you join a group, you can join in on their get-togethers and meetings.

Conversations
Although Meetup is on the internet, it can still be somewhat intimidating to look for groups and events and attempt to join them without knowing anyone. This is why Meetup also has a message option in which you can message other users or groups to get some more information. This makes it easier when trying to reach out to a group member about a meeting or a group. You can ask more questions before deciding to join, or you can reach out to that group member and ask if they will head to the meeting with you.

Meetup is a unique network that makes meeting up with others in the community easier with their groups and events. It can be vital to anyone interested in interacting with others who share similar interests. It breaks down the difficulty and uncomfortable feelings when reaching out to others. To sign up for Meetup, visit the “Signing up for a Meetup account” page.
Yelp is a network site that allows users to publish and read reviews about businesses and places. This is an extraordinary tool in determining where to go, and what people are saying about specific businesses or places. Yelp allows you to read reviews, write reviews, see events, and join in on conversations surrounding topics in a specific geographical area. According to Yelp, the website and mobile application combined average about 144 million users per month as of March 2018.

**Searching**
Yelp allows you to search for specific keywords such as “parks,” or “cheap dinner,” near whatever location you are planning to head to. You can limit the search to a number of miles, and limit the locations to certain miles, the price can also be set to a certain limit, and sorted by the highest reviews from other users. If it is food you are looking for, they even have options to order delivery or take out. This provides a useful tool in figuring out places to go into the community, and choosing between similar options.

**Reviews**
When looking at a business, whether it is a place to eat, a library, a park, a movie theater, an exercise club, or a school; Yelp has a list of reviewers who have previously been there, and gave their opinion about their visit. You can see whether most people enjoyed their time at the local park, or did not have as much fun as they’d wished. The reviews even include price ranges for those with budgets and want to know how much...
they can expect to spend when they go out. You can also review places you visit for others to read. Whether you had a great experience at the movie theater, or felt the restaurant was a bit too expensive, you can let others know by giving your own review.

**Events**
Along with businesses, Yelp also has an event feature in which you can search for upcoming events in your area such as tours, parades, get-togethers, or celebrations. These events are usually posted by businesses. You may even “respond” to these events and mark yourself as going. This can make it easier to find things going on in the community.

**Talk/Conversations**
Another interesting feature of Yelp is the ability to join in conversations with other users. Instead of searching through places or reviews, you can just post a question on the website asking for the best local dance club, or a good place to eat breakfast. This
gives another added option when attempting to decide what the best options are in the community, and can also help develop relationships with other Yelp users in your area.

Yelp is a great opportunity to read reviews about business/places and write about your own experiences. It can be very helpful when looking for places to go in the community and it helps dim down the possibility of bad experiences. This is useful for anyone, especially those with serious mental illnesses. To sign up for Yelp visit the “How do I sign up for Yelp?” page.
Considerations

**Talk with Provider**
Before embarking on a social media journey, you should consult your provider for tips, suggestions, pointers, and possible negative implications. Social media can be overwhelming and you should make sure you have some support and experience before getting involved.

**Social Media Disclosure**
With being on social media, and the internet in general, comes a greater sense of exposure. Your online profile being exposed to a vast array of people does carry some risks. Implications may include some not-as-friendly interactions with others who may be quick to judge, argue, or criticize by means of anonymity. Such negative interactions should be taken with a grain of salt, as they do not reflect the majority of social media users and community members alike.

**Time**
It does take time to get used to social media, and each specific website. One cannot expect to build an instant social media network in their community. These sites can take a bit of time to master, and therefore requires you to be patient when learning the layout of each social media site. Once you feel comfortable navigating and interacting on each website, community engagement opportunities will be much easier to take advantage of.

**Social Media as a Tool**
Social media is widely considered to be a tool. Due to this, it can be have both positive and negative effects. This must be kept in consideration when you are using social media. Recent research has shown that extended periods of time spent browsing social media as opposed to using it as a means to interact and connect with can have negative side effects. Therefore, social media should be used as just that, a tool to help you connect, and interact with others and the community around you.

In the next section, we have provided a number of links to resources and information on using social media. Some of these include research related to the potential risks of social media. If you are interested or concerned about these, please review the additional resources and talk with your provider about your concerns.
Social Media Resources and Information

This document is just a brief overview of how different social media networks and features can aid community engagement, there is much more to social media than what we have covered in this toolkit. For more in-depth looks at the benefits, downsides, and risks associated with social media use, read some of these helpful studies and reports:

Using Social Media

Which Social Network is Right for Your Personal Goals?

Figuring out which social networks work best for you

Protect Your Privacy on Social Media

What you can do to protect your privacy when using social media

Managing Your Personal and Professional Online Profiles

Examining different options in using social media for both personal and professional uses

10 Ways to Use Social Media for Your Career – Not Just for Killing Time

Links to 10 different articles that tell how one can use social media to further their career.

Mental Health and Social Media

Online Social Networking and Mental Health

This literature review looks at online social networking and how it can both negatively and positively affect mental health

Hard Questions: Is Spending Time on Social Media Bad for Us?

This report, published by Facebook examines current research, reviews the bad and the good of social media, and provides recommendations for users.
The Relationship between Facebook Use and Well-Being Depends on Communication Type and Tie Strength

This literature review looks at different social media theories on well-being, and determine what communication styles and how they can positively or negatively affect different psychological factors of social media use.

Is social media bad for you? The evidence and the unknowns

This BBC (UK) article examines what science suggests so far about the impact of platforms on mental well-being.

Potential Risks and Dangers of Social Media

Facebook Use Predicts Declines in Subjective Well-Being in Young Adults:

This study texted participants five times a day during a two week period to examine how Facebook use influences subjective well-being. They found that Facebook use predicts a decline in well-being among young adults.

Six Ways Social Media Negatively affects your Mental Health

From the Independent (UK), April 2018.

Royal Society for Public Health Social Media Report:

A 30 page report done by the Royal Society of Public Health (UK) that examines social media and young people's mental health and well-being.

Social Media and Teens How does Social Media affect Teenagers’ Mental Health:

This article, written by Katie Hurley, LCSW of Psycom examines downsides of social media use by teens.

Association of Facebook Use with Compromised Well-Being: A Longitudinal Study

This study found that the negative associations of Facebook use were greater than or equal to the positive impact of offline interactions.
Conclusion

Social media has greatly affected the way we interact with each other and our communities. It is a growing platform that can greatly aide your efforts in community living and participation. The various features of all social media accounts allow for faster, simpler, and less stressful communication and interaction. Along with this, each social media network carries its own strengths:

- **Facebook** is the largest social media network that specializes in connecting with family, friends, businesses, organizations, and current events.
- **Twitter** specializes in expressing yourself in brief form while also reaching and keeping up with others.
- **Instagram** is great for photo sharing and documenting community participation.
- **LinkedIn** is the premiere career and employment network.
- **Meetup** is great for finding, attending, and organizing community events with others.
- **Yelp** is great to read, and review business, organizations, places, and events.

While all of these networks can greatly aide community participation, you should keep in mind some potential downsides of social media such as:

- The minority of people who intend to spread negativity.
- The amount of time one spends on social media which can lead to negative side effects.
- The potential negative psychological side effects such as loneliness, and comparing to others.
- The risks associated with exposure on these websites such as anyone can see things you post, share, or comment on.
- The giving away of personal information that can be used for marketing and advertisement purposes.

All of these factors should be further discussed with providers before opening a social media account. Social media can be useful for anyone interested in participating in the community and should be at the very least, considered and reviewed as a trending strategy towards engaging with your community.
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