HIGHER ED SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGERS AND THEIR MENTAL HEALTH

CASE SOCIAL MEDIA AND COMMUNITY #CASESMC
This is why I was inspired to do a research project.

Our timeline

FEBRUARY 3 (12:13 A.M.)
Shots fired near campus. No injuries.

FEBRUARY 28 (4:02 A.M.)
Shots fired at a University Apartment complex near campus. One student died.

MARCH 10 (1:35 P.M.)
Barricaded gunman near campus (close proximity to location of Feb. 28 shooting). No injuries.

MARCH 25 (2:49 P.M.)
Announced May Commencement will be held virtually; ceremony also in December for May graduates.

APRIL 8 (1:00 P.M.)
Announced summer terms would be taught online only due to COVID-19.

APRIL 17 (5:26 P.M.)
Announced plan for additional emergency financial assistance for students.

MAY 6 (9:05 A.M.)
Announced retrieval process of belongings from residence halls.

FEBRUARY 10 (4:06 P.M.)
A rock slide fell onto a main road near campus, striking a vehicle, a PRT car and injuring three students.

FEBRUARY 29 (1:38 A.M.)
Shots fired off-campus. One student injured.

MARCH 10 (9:31 P.M.)
Suspended classes for a week for online-instruction prep due to COVID-19.

MARCH 18 (6:39 P.M.)
Announced alternate delivery of classes for the remainder of the spring semester due to COVID-19.

APRIL 7 (10:09 A.M.)
Announced plan for emergency financial assistance for students.

APRIL 8 (8:37 P.M.)
Announced more than a dozen WVU students tested positive for COVID-19.

APRIL 12 (9:34 P.M.)
Announced a student had tested positive for COVID-19 in a residence hall; testing procedures for the hall.

MAY 1 (3:50 P.M.)
Announced that WVU has “every hope and expectation” of fall reopening.
“Every day has been a roller coaster.”

... so it’s hard to know where to begin.
“After a week of putting out nothing but bad news, I was burned out and anxious whenever I logged onto social media platforms. The anxiety and frustration from our community was hard to escape, even if they understood the reasoning behind our actions.”
I am left to wonder if the leadership had to read all the horrible name calling and messages sent both publicly and privately that social media managers have to sift through if that would cause them to handle the situation differently or with more empathy.”
WE SURVEYED HUNDREDS OF HIGHER ED SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGERS.

LET’S START BY LEARNING MORE ABOUT OUR COMMUNITY.
SIZE OF SOCIAL MEDIA TEAMS

- 51% are teams of one.
- 43% Teams of 2-4
- 6% Teams of 5 or more

67% have worked in higher ed for less than 5 years.

Most common titles: Social media specialist, social media manager, social media coordinator, assistant director, social media strategist.

Research conducted by West Virginia University | @WestVirginiaU | social.wvu.edu
ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

- Social listening/engagement: 96%
- Gathering/posting content: 96%
- Gathering/analyzing data: 90%
- Developing goals/strategies: 90%
- Crisis communications: 72%
- Social media advertising: 62%
- Photo/video production: 54%
- Managing websites: 39%
- Handling public relations: 33%
- Event planning/execution: 27%

Percentage of respondents who are responsible for tasks
FAVORITE THINGS

74% developing content
63% working with others
45% engaging with comments/mentions
41% ever-changing environment

39% analytics and data
37% new technology
26% fast-paced environment

Research conducted by West Virginia University / @WestVirginiaU / social.wvu.edu
BIGGEST STRUGGLES

79% receiving incomplete or late information
73% having a 24/7/365 job
70% lack of understanding of my role
56% lack of resources

49% not receiving clear direction or guidance
48% being underpaid
44% intercepting negative messages
GREATEST STRUGGLES OVER TIME

Percentage of respondents who struggle with certain tasks

- Receiving incomplete info.
- Having a job that is 24/7/365
- Lack of understanding from others about my role
- Not receiving clear direction
- Being underpaid for my role
- Intercepting negative messages
- Lack of buy-in from leadership
- Disseminating info during or after an emergency
- Monitoring, moderating, and responding to comments
- Lack of trust
- Other

Longevity in current role

- Less than 1 year
- 1-5 years
- More than 5 years
57% are NOT on a crisis comms team at their institution.

Individuals with 5 or more years of experience at an institution are more than two times more likely to be a member of a crisis team.

“Teams of 1” are less likely to be a member of crisis communications teams.

42% Receive info. from reps. of crisis comms team

14% Learn of info. when it’s announced

43% Member of a crisis comms team
On the days when we've made our biggest announcements ... I've not been part of the message crafting but have been handed a finished product ... only to have people freak out once it's done that they don't like the way it looks or have issues with certain wording.”
The feeling of never being able to turn off or put my phone down has been overwhelming.”
NOW ...
LET'S TALK MENTAL HEALTH.
ON AN AVERAGE DAY

6.35

Mental health rating (on 0-10 scale; 0 being low, 10 being high)

Research conducted by West Virginia University | @WestVirginiaU | social.wvu.edu
DURING A CRISIS SITUATION

Mental health rating (on 0-10 scale; 0 being low, 10 being high)

4.52

Research conducted by West Virginia University | @WestVirginiaU | social.wvu.edu
DURING COVID-19

Mental health rating (on 0-10 scale; 0 being low, 10 being high)

Research conducted by West Virginia University | @WestVirginiaU | social.wvu.edu
MENTAL HEALTH COMPARISON

On an average day: 6.35
In a crisis situation: 4.52
During COVID-19: 4.63

Mental health rating (on 0-10 scale; 0 being low, 10 being high)
ARE PART OF THEIR CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS TEAMS ARE MORE LIKELY TO HAVE BETTER MENTAL HEALTH.
Teams of one are more likely to struggle with their mental health.

These people are less likely to receive frequent check-ins from their supervisors, as well.
82% of social media managers are at least occasionally affected by negative comments.
NEGATIVE COMMENTS TAKE THEIR TOLL OVER TIME.

Data tells us that the longer you’re in your role, the more of an impact negative comments have on you.
We need social media managers with feelings, because it's important we have empathy, understanding, passion, etc., as we run accounts and engage with our audiences.

Those who are frequently affected by negative comments have nearly a 3-point drop in mental health on a 10-point scale when compared to those who are never affected.

IT’S OK FOR YOU TO FEEL NOT OK.
HOW HAS COVID-19 AFFECTED HIGHER ED SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGERS?
WORK DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

88% believe handling social media during the pandemic has made life harder.

52% believe working in isolation has caused more of a challenge.

45% believe working in isolation has been beneficial to their work.

57% say frequency has increased in check-ins from supervisors.

5% say frequency has decreased in check-ins from supervisors.

Why has life been harder?

/ There's more work to do
/ Lack of work-life balance
/ New approval/review process
/ Leaders lack knowledge and understanding of social media
/ Having to read constant negative posts and sentiment
/ Needing to develop completely new content
/ Work scrutiny has increased
/ Unable to provide answers to the many questions

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“The texts, calls, chat pings, and emails have doubled. It’s a symphony of sounds if I don’t turn off the volume.”
Social media is the first platform faculty, students, and parents turn to to complain about leadership decisions. When your job depends on answering these questions, it creates extreme anxiety.”
HOW DO SUPERVISORS AFFECT SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGERS’ MENTAL HEALTH?
**THOUGHTS ON SUPERVISORS**

Mental health rating (on 0-10 scale; 0 being low, 10 being high)

- **Average day**
- **In a crisis**
- **During COVID-19**

How often your supervisor checks on someone

- **Frequently**
- **Sometimes**
- **Occasionally**
- **Rarely**
- **Never**

- **34%** say their supervisors rarely or never check in on their mental health.
- **28%** say their supervisors check on them frequently. They have better than average mental health.
- **47%** say they do not have support and/or resources to ensure good mental health.
- **39%** of teams of one say their supervisor never or rarely checks on their mental health.

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HOW SUPERVISORS CAN HELP

- provide more updates/info.
- more concise communications
- clearer guidelines and expectations
- more autonomy and trust
- more full-time assistance
- learn basics of social media
- give breaks and time off

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THOUGHTS FROM A MENTAL HEALTH EXPERT

Yaping Anderson, Ph.D.
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A certain amount of stress is good to stay motivated and energized. However, sometimes we go along with our lives, and emotional baggage adds up. It’s tough to do this job on your own, especially if you don’t have a place to vent.

It’s normal to have negative mental health, but it’s important to notice changes in yourself when you experience too much stress. Changes include: fewer hours of sleep, increase in irritability, lack of productivity, headaches, stomach aches, etc.
Have compassion and empathy for yourself. Intentionally check in with yourself and ask: “How am I really feeling?”

It’s important to create a barrier between work and life to better balance yourself.

When it comes to negative comments, there’s a lot to hold consciously and emotionally. It’s important that you validate your initial reaction, find a way to calm down, and communicate with yourself not to take it personally.

When we’re anxious, we think – a lot. It takes up so much space, so it’s important for us to externalize things so they’re more tangible and visible.
It’s clear we’ve adapted to the unknown and developed our own creative self-care strategies. And we can learn from each other.

“This community is resilient.”
We must take care of ourselves.

Having to deal with crisis situations will elevate the mental pressures many of us already experience. Take breaks when you can. Balance work and life as best you can.

Supervisors have work to do.

Social media is a job that most feel they understand, but rarely is that the case. Supervisors need to better learn the pressures and stressors of social media managers.

Teams of 1 need the most support.

When you’re feeling especially alone, remember that we’re a community. Check out #HESM, #CASESMC, the #HigherEdSocial Facebook group and Slack channel, etc.

Social should be part of crisis comms teams.

For the sake of productivity and mental health, social media managers should be a key piece of crisis communications teams. They should not be afterthoughts in the process.
FULL RESEARCH STUDY RESULTS CAN BE FOUND AT SOCIAL.WVU.EDU.

QUESTIONS?

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