

## Getting acquainted with social networks and apps: Instagram's instant appeal

Rutgers University has made this article freely available. Please share how this access benefits you.  
Your story matters. [\[https://rucore.libraries.rutgers.edu/rutgers-lib/49448/story/\]](https://rucore.libraries.rutgers.edu/rutgers-lib/49448/story/)

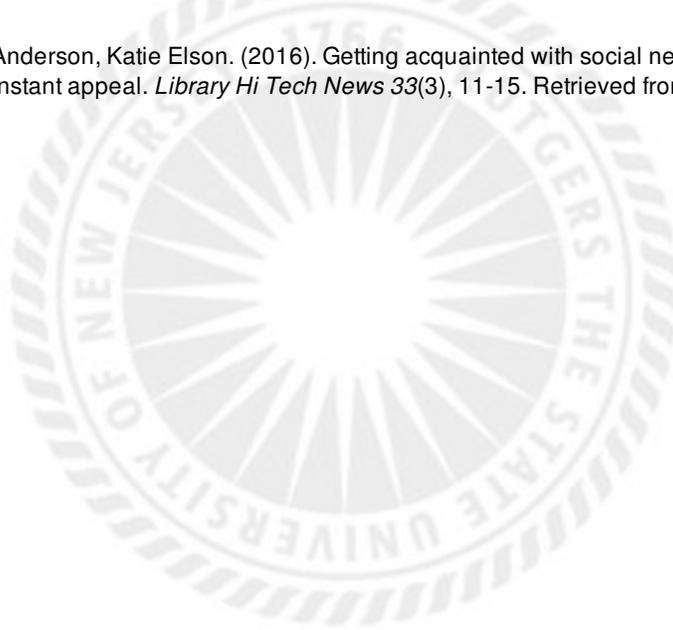
This work is an **ACCEPTED MANUSCRIPT (AM)**

This is the author's manuscript for a work that has been accepted for publication. Changes resulting from the publishing process, such as copyediting, final layout, and pagination, may not be reflected in this document. The publisher takes permanent responsibility for the work. Content and layout follow publisher's submission requirements.

Citation for this version and the definitive version are shown below.

**Citation to Publisher** Anderson, Katie Elson. (2016). Getting acquainted with social networks and apps: Instagram's instant appeal. *Library Hi Tech News* 33(3), 11-15. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/LHTN-03-2016-0011>.

**Citation to this Version:** Anderson, Katie Elson. (2016). Getting acquainted with social networks and apps: Instagram's instant appeal. *Library Hi Tech News* 33(3), 11-15. Retrieved from [doi:10.7282/T35T3NKJ](https://doi.org/10.7282/T35T3NKJ).



**Terms of Use:** Copyright for scholarly resources published in RUcore is retained by the copyright holder. By virtue of its appearance in this open access medium, you are free to use this resource, with proper attribution, in educational and other non-commercial settings. Other uses, such as reproduction or republication, may require the permission of the copyright holder.

*Article begins on next page*

## **Getting acquainted with social networks and apps:**

### **Instagram's Instant appeal**

The rise in popularity of smartphone apps is hard to ignore. People are accessing information and connecting through social media on their smartphones at increasing rates. Almost half the total digital media time spent by U.S. Adults is spent on smartphone apps (comScore, 2015, p. 6). Smartphone apps account for two-thirds of all growth in digital media engagement in the past two years (p.8), and those users spend the most time using Social Networking apps (p. 37). Photo apps were found to have some of the highest engagement in users, and the photo app Instagram is the second most used mobile app among U.S. adults age 18-34 (p.43).

Instagram is one of several mobile apps that are examples of “mobile-first” social networks. These networks and apps are created primarily for mobile use and, in many cases, focus on the smartphone's camera for content creation and dissemination (comScore 2014, p.18). Other apps in this category include Snapchat, Vine and Path. These mobile-first social networks are also part of a group of social networking platforms that make up the Visual Web, i.e., platforms that use images and videos as their primary content (Lewine,2014). Platforms such as Pinterest, Tumblr and Snapchat, while not all primarily mobile, join Instagram in representing a growing Visual Web presence on both smartphones and desktops.

For many iPhone users in the target demographic (18-34 year olds), Instagram is old news compared to newer Visual Web applications. In late 2010, the app with a logo resembling a polaroid camera appeared in the Apple app store. The app was created by Kevin Systrom in an effort to create technology that combined his love of photography with the location and sharing elements of social media (Bertoni, 2012). The name of that app was Instagram, and the original was inspired by the Polaroid OneStep SX-70 which includes a rainbow stripe and large camera

lens [1]. The premise of the app was straight-forward: provide a place for users to take a picture, edit the photo and share it with friends. Filters and options within the app expanded the iPhone camera's capabilities, allowing users to render their photos in the style of the original Polaroid camera; square and grainy. From its launch in October 2010 to December 2011 Instagram gained 10 million users [2] and also modified that original logo to be less like a camera, though still clearly inspired by the retro technology (D'Onfro, 2013). In just over a year from its initial appearance in the Apple App store, Instagram was presented with the iPhone App of the Year award in December 2011.

Android users would have to wait until April 2012 to enjoy the "fun and quirky way to share life with friends through a series of pictures" [3]. Only a few days after the release of the Android app, Instagram was purchased by Facebook for a reported one million dollars, though the actual amount appears to have been under that reported amount (Fox, 2012). The addition of Android users and streamlined integration with Facebook introduced the app to even more users, and by July 2012, Instagram could boast 80 million users. The popularity of Instagram continues to grow, with over 400 million users at this time [4], which surpasses Twitter and makes it the second biggest social network (Gaudin, 2015). Statistics from the Pew Research Center demonstrate instant appeal and fast growth, with Instagram users doubling from 2012 (13% of internet users) to 2015 (28% of internet users) [5].

According to Pew Internet, these 400 million users are primarily 13-29 years old, and heavily engaged. Of the 28% of adult internet users reporting use of Instagram, 55% are 18-29 years old [6] and 52% of teens 13-17 reported using Instagram, making it the second most popular social media platform for teens, below Facebook and above Snapchat [7]. These users report a high engagement with 59% of them accessing Instagram on a daily basis [8]. Instagram

reports that an average of 80 million photos are being shared by its users, 75% of whom are located outside of the United States [9]. This demonstrates a significant global reach in line with its parent, Facebook

This global reach has not been ignored by the marketing world: “it’s not news that customers are turning to image-based social media sites such as Instagram, Tumblr and Pinterest to document their lives” (Smilansky, 2015). Instagram also has recognized what marketers want from a social media platform and provides businesses with analytic tools. A report by marketing reporters eMarketer forecasts rapid growth in Instagram’s ad revenues even going so far as to predict that Instagram will have higher net mobile display ad revenues than both Google and Twitter in 2017 (eMarketer, 2015). Enhancements, such as displaying view counts on videos, are targeting marketers, and the option of 60 second advertising videos are luring brands as Instagram seeks to shift marketing budgets from televisions to smartphones (Johnson, 2016). Sponsored stories have begun appearing in newsfeeds, giving brands the opportunity to tell their stories via Instagram photo or video, while encouraging their followers to share their own stories about the products.

Libraries often look to marketing trends for useful tools for outreach and engagement. Telling a story is a concept libraries and librarians are quite familiar with, and Instagram is an excellent storytelling tool. Libraries using the platform connect with their audiences in a variety of ways, from highlighting collections to using it in instruction settings. While the numbers of Instagram users increase, so do the number of libraries with a presence on the platform. Almost 300 libraries using Instagram have been identified on a growing list compiled by the author through postings on social media sites where librarians share their institution’s Instagram names and in a search on the hashtag #librariesofinstagram [10] . This list is a work in progress and by

no means comprehensive, but does provide Instagram users with a list of libraries with Instagram accounts.

Following the libraries that are currently using Instagram is an excellent way to observe the different ways to use the app and identify frequently used libraryhashtags. The libraries using Instagram demonstrate unique and diverse ways to connect with an audience. The best way to learn a social networking site is to jump in and start using it, fortunately, there are several resources and articles addressing best practices to help one get started. The 5 Minute Librarian blog held a “31 Days of Instagram Challenge” in October of 2015, which gives ideas, hashtags and how to’s to other librarians using Instagram for their libraries [11]. Wetta (2016) provides instructions on how to engage young users with Instagram, from attracting followers to taking great pictures and ideas for content. LibraryLinkNJ, the New Jersey Library Cooperative provides a quick start guide for Instagram which includes useful links, along with tips for getting started [12]. Bell (2013) shares ideas for using Instagram in the classroom, while also introducing examples and considerations.

Academic librarians have been writing about their own experiences using Instagram to connect with students for several years. In 2013, Bond University hosted a panel session at the Australian Library and Information Association to discuss the use of Instagram in a library context and presented their success in engaging students using Instagram (Abbott *et al.*, 2013). Ennis (2013) describes a project at North Carolina State University Libraries (NCSU) that encouraged students to post pictures on Instagram of the new Hunt Library using the hashtag #HuntLibrary. The pictures were harvested and rebroadcast and are being preserved in the university’s archives. NCSU has shared the code they used for harvesting and moderation of the images so that other libraries can benefit from their successful experience. UCLA Powell Library

found Instagram to be the most successful social network for connecting with students. Soloman (2013) provides examples of how the UCLA Powell Library uses Instagram with suggestions on use, analytics and impact. Tekulve and Kelly (2013) describe Instagram and how to use it, while detailing their experiences using Instagram in their institutions. Wallis (2014) writes about a student-guided Instagram program for first-year English composition students. The program used Instagram to help students become familiar with the library, tasking them with finding and sharing their discoveries through the platform in an effort to decrease library anxiety. Instagram is described as “a good platform for reaching people if you want to showcase behind-the-scenes or process documentation” notes Severson (2014, p.17) in a discussion on promoting digital collections on the platform. Hild (2014, p.32) talks about successful strategies using Instagram in academic libraries and lessons learned from running the Herman B. Wells Library account at Indiana University, concluding that “Instagram offers a novel way to engage with users of academic libraries and receive feedback, direct or indirect, on how they are using the library spaces”. Hagman and Carlton (2014) collaborated with student employees on the Instagram account of Ohio University Libraries and Instagram is proposed as a tool for increased participatory culture in libraries by Hopkins *et al.* (2015).

Some of the literature on the topic goes beyond descriptions of using Instagram to addresses how libraries determined that Instagram would be a good place for student engagement. Burgert, *et al.* (2014) discuss the decision to add an Instagram account to the University of San Diego’s Copley Library based on the results of a survey of undergraduate students. Ramsey and Vecchoine (2014) discuss the assessment and eventual implementation of Instagram at Alberstons Library. Brookbank (2014) reports on the results of a survey asking

students about their social media preferences, finding that students were using Instagram and wished to see the libraries use it as well.

The studies, statistics and recent news stories point to Instagram as a recommended social network for engaging with audiences. The appeal of Instagram is its simplicity: create a photo or a video, edit and share. The options for doing this are not overwhelming, and the app is user-friendly. While there is some desktop presence available on the website, most of the platform is only available in its mobile form. Instagram accounts can be only created using the Instagram app, which is currently available for the IOS, Android and Windows phone operating systems. After downloading the app, users may choose to login with their Facebook account or with an email address. Logging in with a Facebook account streamlines the integration of Instagram with its parent company's products and connections.

As a social network, Instagram shares many of the features, options and settings that are familiar to users of other social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook; followers, sharing, liking, and commenting. Similar to other social media platforms, the default setting for post visibility is public; posts can be viewed by anyone using the Instagram app or on the [instagram.com](https://www.instagram.com) website. Users may choose to set their account to private, which will allow only their followers to view the shared posts. When an account is set to private, followers must be approved by the user. Users can identify other users to follow by user name or email, or by using the search function. Reciprocity exists between followers but is not required.

When opening the app, icons appear along the bottom of the screen, represented by a house, a magnifying glass, a camera, a quote bubble and a profile picture if using multiple accounts. The home button, represented by the house icon, provides the scrolling view of the posts by those being followed. The magnifying glass provides a search function for identifying

users, subjects and hashtags. This search functionality presents users with a single highlighted event, such as the Oscars or Milan Fashion week, along with trending hashtags and posts related to the user's recent activity. The camera icon is in the center as the main tool for creation content within the application. Social networks would not exist without the ability to comment or "like" a post and this is done in Instagram by choosing the chat bubble with a heart icon. An inbox icon in the upper right hand corner of the screen provides access to Instagram Direct, which allows for direct messaging of other Instagram users, individually or in groups. Unlike the direct message function on Twitter, here direct messaging does not require mutual following; anyone can direct message another Instagram users, regardless of whether they follow or are being followed.

Once a user has chosen other Instagram accounts to follow, that content will appear in the scrolling feed. Users may like a post by clicking on the heart icon. Comments can be made by clicking on the chat bubble. Other Instagram users can be tagged in the comments field using the @ sign before the user name. A post can be sent directly to specific users via Instagram Direct by clicking on the forwarding arrow. Additional options to report an inappropriate post or copy the URL appear when clicking on the three dots on the right hand side of the screen. Unlike other social media platforms like Facebook and Tumblr, a user may not share or repost another user's content from within the app.

Posting content to Instagram is a streamlined process. Clicking on the camera icon allows a user to choose whether to post existing content from the phone's library or create a new photo or video. Once content is selected or created the content can be edited using filters and tools. It is these filters that gained Instagram its early fame, providing users with easy ways to manipulate their photos in artistic ways with very little effort. These filters have proven so popular with

Instagram users that parents are naming their children after them (Sola, 2015). In addition to the filters, various tools for editing are available by clicking on the wrench icon. These editing tools allow a user to perform standard photo editing techniques; crop, adjust, brightness, contrast, etc. After an item is edited, it is ready to be shared with followers. A caption can be added, and this is where hashtags are added. Hashtags are an important part of Instagram, allowing for search and discovery, and, unlike Twitter, whose character limitations limit the number and length of hashtags, Instagram hashtags are numerous and varied in a single post. There is also an option to add a location and tag other Instagram users. In addition to sharing with Instagram followers, users may share their content with other linked social media sites: Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Swarm and Flickr.

The simplicity of Instagram has prompted work-arounds to its perceived limitations. There is no way to easily repost or share another user's content, which in the case of Tumblr is what brings a post its popularity. Third-party applications such as Repost and InstaRepost, have been developed in order to allow users to re-share other users content. In a nod to privacy, Instagram does not allow another user to download or save a user's post, though screenshots and the individual posts' url (if public) on the website do allow the image to be disseminated. The ability to make a collage of pictures or post pictures of different size and orientation were not original to the app. After third-party applications were developed to help users work around this limitation, Instagram now offers these options within the app. Many social media managers are interested in statistics and assessment, but Instagram's own are not robust unless you are a business. However there are some third-party tools, both paid and free, such as Iconosquare (formerly Statigram) and Simply Measured. The website Wordlcam (<http://worldc.am/>) makes finding photos tagged in a specific location easier than when attempted from within the app.

These are just a few of the many tools outside of the app that are recommended on sites and in articles, however, it should be noted they may not all be around in the future. There is evidence that Instagram is starting to limit third-party applications as they make changes to the guidelines on using the API (application program interface) (Bell, 2015).

Instagram is in period of growth and change, providing enhancements on a regular basis. While many of Instagram's recent changes were targeted towards businesses in order to gain ad revenue, everyone who uses it for engagement can benefit. A recent change that allows the switching back and forth between different accounts on a single device has been applauded by librarians using the platform. Prior to this change it was cumbersome to manage a personal and institutional account or multiple institutional accounts on a single device. These and future enhancements continue to make Instagram an appealing platform for libraries to consider adding to their social media palette.

## NOTES

1. [www.polaroid.com/products/onestep-sx70-instant-camera](http://www.polaroid.com/products/onestep-sx70-instant-camera)
2. [www.instagram.com/press/](http://www.instagram.com/press/), "Our Story"
3. [www.instagram.com/about/faq/](http://www.instagram.com/about/faq/)
4. [www.instagram.com/press/?hl=en](http://www.instagram.com/press/?hl=en)
5. [www.pewinternet.org/2015/08/19/mobile-messaging-and-social-media-2015/2015-08-19-social-media-update\\_02/](http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/08/19/mobile-messaging-and-social-media-2015/2015-08-19-social-media-update_02/)
6. [www.pewinternet.org/2015/08/19/mobile-messaging-and-social-media-2015/2015-08-19-social-media-update\\_09/](http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/08/19/mobile-messaging-and-social-media-2015/2015-08-19-social-media-update_09/)
7. [www.pewinternet.org/2015/04/09/teens-social-media-technology-overview-2015/pi\\_2015-04-09\\_teensandtech\\_01/](http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/04/09/teens-social-media-technology-overview-2015/pi_2015-04-09_teensandtech_01/)
8. [www.pewinternet.org/2015/08/19/mobile-messaging-and-social-media-2015/2015-08-19-social-media-update\\_12/](http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/08/19/mobile-messaging-and-social-media-2015/2015-08-19-social-media-update_12/)
9. [www.instagram.com/press/?hl=en](http://www.instagram.com/press/?hl=en)
10. [www.libraries.rutgers.edu/robeson/libraries\\_instagram](http://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/robeson/libraries_instagram)
11. [www.5minlib.com/2015/09/31-days-of-instagram-challenge.html](http://www.5minlib.com/2015/09/31-days-of-instagram-challenge.html)
12. [www.smore.com/ag65f-instagram-101-for-libraries](http://www.smore.com/ag65f-instagram-101-for-libraries)

## References

- Abbot, A., Donaghey, J., Hare, J., and Hopkins, P. (2013), "'An Instagram is worth a thousand words: an industry panel and audience Q&A", *Library Hi Tech News*, Vol. 30, No. 7, pp. 1-6.
- Bell, K. (2015), "Instagram is cracking down on third-party apps", *Mashable*, available at: <http://mashable.com/2015/11/19/instagram-third-party-apps/#MndVO9Mcz5qK> (accessed 28 February 2016).
- Bell, MA. (2013), "Picture this! Using Instagram with students", *Internet@Schools*, Vol. 20 No.4, pp.23-25.
- Bertoni, S. (2012), "How Stanford made Instagram an instant success", *Forbes*, Vol. 190, No. 3, pp. 56-63.
- Brookbank, E. (2015), "So much social media, so little time: Using student feedback to guide academic library social media strategy", *Journal of Electronic Resources Librarianship*, Vol. 27 No. 4, pp. 232-247
- Burgert, L., Nann, A. and Sterling, L., (2014), "Ventures in Social Media", *Codex: the Journal of the Louisiana Chapter of the ACRL*, 3(1), pp.21-44.
- comScore (2014), "U.S. digital future in focus 2014", *comScore.com*, available at: <https://www.comscore.com/Insights/Presentations-and-Whitepapers/2014/2014-US-Digital-Future-in-Focus> (accessed 15 November 2015).
- comScore (2015), "The 2015 US mobile app report", *comScore.com*, available at: [www.comscore.com/Insights/Presentations-and-Whitepapers/2015/The-2015-US-Mobile-App-Report](http://www.comscore.com/Insights/Presentations-and-Whitepapers/2015/The-2015-US-Mobile-App-Report) (accessed 24 February 2016).
- Enis, M. (2013), "My #HuntLibrary, now everybody's #cooltool", *Library Journal*, Suppl. 5
- eMarketer, (2015), "Instagram mobile ad revenues to reach \$2.81 billion worldwide in 2017", *eMarketer.com* available: <http://www.emarketer.com/Article/Instagram-Mobile-Ad-Revenues-Reach-281-Billion-Worldwide-2017/1012774> (accessed 28 February 2016).
- D'Onfro, J. (2013), "Kevin Systrom explains why he killed this old Instagram Logo that most people have never seen." *Business Insider*, available at: <http://www.businessinsider.com/old-instagram-icon-youve-never-seen-2013-9> (accessed 29 February 2016)
- Fox, Z. (2012). "Facebook's final price tag for Instagram falls under \$1 billion", *Mashable*, available at: <http://mashable.com/2012/10/24/instagram-facebook-price/#BRWzabyK5qS> (accessed 28 February 2016).

- Gaudin, S. (2015), "Instagram and its owner Facebook now own the top of the social networking world" *Computer World*, available: <http://www.computerworld.com/article/2985687/social-media/instagram-surges-past-twitter-to-become-2nd-biggest-social-network.html> (accessed 5 February 2016).
- Hagman, J. and Carleton, J., (2014), "Better together: Collaborating with students on library social media. *Public Services Quarterly*, Vol. 10 No.3, pp.238-244.
- Hamburger, Ellis (2011), "Instagram is Apple's iPhone app of the year." *Business Insider*, available at: <http://www.businessinsider.com/instagram-iphone-app-of-the-year-award-2011-12> (accessed 5 February 2016).
- Hild, K. (2014), "Outreach and engagement through Instagram: experiences with the Herman B. Wells library account", *Indiana Libraries*, Vol. 33 No. 2, pp. 30-32.
- Hopkins, P., Hare, J., Donaghey, J. and Abbott, W. (2015), "Geo, audio, video, photo: how digital convergence in mobile devices facilitates participatory culture in libraries. *The Australian Library Journal*, Vol. 64 No. 1, pp. 11-22.
- Johnson, L. (2016), "Instagram will start displaying video views in a push for more ads", *Adweek*, available at: <http://www.adweek.com/news/technology/instagram-will-start-counting-video-views-push-more-ads-169614> (accessed 28 February 2016).
- Lewine, A. (2014), "Outside voices: the visual web is changing everything in media and advertising", *The Wall Street Journal: CMO Today*, available at: <http://blogs.wsj.com/cmo/2014/06/24/outside-voices-the-visual-web-is-changing-everything-in-media-and-advertising/> (accessed 2 March 2016).
- Ramsey, E. and Vecchione, A., (2014), "Engaging library users through a social media strategy", *Journal of Library Innovation*, 5(2), p.71
- Salomon, D. (2013), "Moving on from Facebook", *College & Research Libraries News*, Vol. 74 No. 8, pp. 408-412.
- Severson, S. (2014), "Moving beyond the display case: Getting your (digital) collections out there", *Argus*, Vol. 43 No.1, pp.15-19
- Sola, K. (2015), "Millennial parents love Instagram so much they're naming their kids after filters", *Forbes.com*, available at: <http://www.forbes.com/sites/katiesola/2015/12/02/instagram-baby-names/#14b9ad7a1c0e> (accessed 5 February 2016).
- Smilansky, O. (2015), "Why Instagram, Tumblr and Pinterest matter to brands", *CRM Magazine*, Vol. 19 No. 8, pp. 21-22.
- Tekulve, N. and Kelly, K. (2013). "Worth 1,000 words: Using Instagram to engage library users" *Brick and Click: An academic library symposium*, pp. 1-8.

Wallis, L. (2014), “#shelfiesinthestacks: Sharing the Library with Instagram”, *Internet Reference Services Quarterly*, Vol. 19 No. 3/4, pp. 181-206.

Wetta, M. (2016), “Instagram Now”, *School Library Journal*, Vol. 2 No. 2, pp.30-32.