

Getting acquainted with social networks and apps: periscope up! Broadcasting via live streaming

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Getting acquainted with social networks and apps:

Periscope up!: Broadcasting via live streaming.

The tagline for the live broadcasting app Periscope is “explore the world in real time through someone else’s eyes” [1] While this sentence could describe any number of social media apps that allow a follower to experience events synchronously via text and pictures, live broadcasting applications such as Periscope and Facebook Live provide viewers with real time experiences via video. According to Pophal (2016), it is this real time interaction that makes lives streaming so compelling due to the fact that the live experience is viewed as more authentic, especially by younger generations. Watching a video after the fact does not have the same impact as witnessing it live via another’s actual experience. This interest in the spontaneous and unfiltered views is growing. Malik (2015) notes that traditional methods of consuming videos has changed with the ability of smartphones to bring more interactivity and immediacy. Evidence of this growth in popularity is reflected in news stories about live streaming events as well as a marked increase of video in most Facebook feeds and Twitter streams. News channels such as Washington Post and PBS are embracing the streaming both on Facebook Live and Periscope. Mander (2016) points out the potential of streaming in a report on the trends of 2016, noting the interest of young mobile users and their preferences towards type of live streaming broadcast such as concerts, news, education, etc..

Sharing videos of one’s experience is not a new concept to social media applications. YouTube has been giving people a platform to create and share videos since it began in 2005. Vine, before it was shut down in late 2016 was an extremely popular app where users shared six second looping videos through other social media platforms, specifically Twitter, its parent company (Rogers, 2016). Users could share 10 second videos on Snapchat 10 on both Android

and IOS by early 2013 (Crook, 2013). Instagram also added video in 2013 expanding on Vine and Snapchats time limits to allow for 15 seconds (Warren, 2013).

The ability to share video was quickly embraced by users of social media applications and continues to be a large portion of the content shared. It was predicted in 2015 that over 80% of internet traffic would be video by 2019 (Savage, 2015). This trend seems to be on track, with video making up a large portion of shared content on social media. It is not surprising that the next stage would involve longer videos in real-time.

One of the first big social media sharing sites to embrace live streaming was Google+. Expanding on the Google Hangout feature of Google+, Google announced Hangouts on Air in May of 2012 which allowed users to live stream content on their Google+ stream, YouTube channel or website (Hernandez, 2012). However, Google+ did not ever reach the popularity and adoption that other social media networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram did, and in the fall of 2016, Hangouts on Air were migrated to Google's more successful platform YouTube Live (O'Kane, 2016). While select users have been able to live stream video on YouTube Live since 2011, the ability to live stream videos by all content creators was added in 2013 (Protalinski, 2013). It should be noted however that despite YouTube's embracing of live streaming early on, mobile live streaming by YouTube however is still not yet available to all users (Titlow, 2017).

Even though the ability to live stream via a smartphone had been around for some time, mobile live streaming hit many radars in early 2015 when, according to Tech Crunch the livestream went mainstream (Perez, 2015). The mobile streaming app Meerkat appeared on the scene as the breakout star of the South by Southwest (SXSW) conference. This conference and music festival has been known to be the launching place for apps including Twitter and

FourSquare. Everyone was not only talking about Meerkat but also using it to stream their experiences at the conference (Newton, 2015). Meerkat allowed smartphone users to stream live video using the Twitter social graph, relying on previously established following/follower relationships and embedding the videos into tweets. Twitter actually ended up cutting Meerkat off from its graph which may have actually helped Meerkat's popularity. Despite its popularity and success early in 2015, the founders have moved on to other mobile app endeavors and, in September 2016, Meerkat was removed from the app store (Kumparak, 2016). Meerkat's only real competition during its glory months was Periscope, which appeared in the app store at the same time as Meerkat, March 2015. Periscope's current competition is Facebook Live which was released in April 2016.

According to Periscope's about page [2], "a picture may be worth a thousand words, but live video lets us explore the world together". Users have been exploring the world together on Periscope since the app was released in March of 2015. Periscope was founded in February 2014 by Kayvon Beykpour and Joe Bernstein, inspired by a desire to not only read about current events, but to see them and experience them as they occurred. Two months before the app made its debut, it was purchased by Twitter. The exact amount has not been disclosed, but has been reported anywhere between 75 and 120 million (Shontell, 2015). Four months after its release, the app was celebrating having over 10 million Periscope accounts and a stunning increase in the aggregate amount of time people spent watching video on the platform [3]. By the time the app was a year old it had already hosted 200 million broadcasts (Roettgers, 2015). The purchase of the app by Twitter placed Periscope in the position to be officially streamlined and embedded within Twitter, and thus unseat Meerkat from its place. This was proven by Periscope's selection as Apple's App of the Year (Grodin, 2015).

Periscope is the official video app for Twitter, and, with Meerkat out of the app store, the only one. The closest competition is Facebook Live, which has been growing steadily since its debut. Facebook Live mirrors Periscope in many of the options and capabilities for live streaming, but is only available within the Facebook app. Periscope is an app unto itself and, while it uses the Twitter social graph, it does not require a link to Twitter. Users can create a Periscope account without a Twitter account and still experience all of its features. This is an important distinction, because it makes it easier to have multiple and even anonymous accounts using Periscope than with other live-streaming applications.

The Periscope app is available for both IOS and Android in their respective marketplaces. While there is integration with Twitter, users do not have to have a Twitter account in order to use Periscope. There is the option to login with a Twitter account or with a phone number. As with most social media apps, a user can upload their address book to Periscope in order to find other Periscope users in their contact lists. When signing up with a Twitter account, Periscope automatically links to your Twitter contacts. Once an account is established, it is time to connect, explore and create. The following description is based on the Android version of the app.

As a social media platform integrated with Twitter, Periscope follows the same follow/follower dynamic as Twitter. There are four main icons on the Android version of the app; a TV, bullet points, a globe, and three figures. Clicking on the three figures begins the task of locating and following other Periscope users. One can choose to follow specific accounts while also garnering their own followers. Following need not be reciprocal in order to view or engage with a live video. As with most social media platforms, the user is presented with the option to “find your friends” by linking to an address book to identify those friends who have Periscope accounts. Other ways to identify people to follow include a featured users list and a

trending list to help one identify possible people of interest to follow. One of the featured users is Periscope itself, which provides videos on how to use the app. Trending users appear when those accounts have increased followers or engagement at that time. The accounts that show up in here are only Twitter accounts and do not necessarily indicate these people are using Periscope. There is a magnifying glass icon for searching for specific people. This search is an overall search functionality that also allows searching for broadcasts and places along with people using keywords or hashtags.

Who you are following and who follows you will show up on your profile page which is the single figure icon in the upper right. When signing up through Twitter all of the profile information, including icon, name, handle and description from that account appears in Periscope, though it can be fully edited once a Periscope account is established. The number and list of followers and those following can be viewed in the profile. The ability to block users carries over from Twitter and those users can be seen as well and those users appear in a blocked section. A “Superfans” options allows a user to find the viewers who watch them the most for the purposes of targeting their biggest audience. As with any social media the default for sharing is to the public, while this can be toggled to just followers, there is also an option to create groups of followers to target just those specific members. Additionally, the profile page is also where one can view their own broadcasts and see all the broadcasts that they have viewed. The profile screen also includes settings, help, ways to contact Periscope and legal notices.

The settings are rather clear, mostly notification settings for being alerted as to when certain people go LIVE, follow you, add you to a group or share a broadcast with you. Advanced settings are available for more sophisticated settings of the camera, continues synching and continues syncing with contacts. One of the more important settings is also located under

Advanced and this is the determination of how long your broadcasts are saved. Broadcasts are automatically set to delete after 24 hours, but this setting can be changed to so the broadcasts remain. The broadcast can also be set to auto save to the phone's gallery. These are important because they are options for making the content less ephemeral. Other advanced settings provide the option to moderate the comments on broadcasts or allow the viewers to moderate. This would be highly recommended in the case of streaming library content, as with any open social media site, the comments are not always positive.

Once settings and followers have been established the task of discovering and creating content begins. The first icon, the television highlights featured broadcasts in different categories such as news, travel, arts & culture, and lifestyle. Recent past broadcasts by those you follow also appear on this page. An intriguing and unpredictable feature of Periscope is also under the television icon and that is Teleport. When the teleport button is pressed a viewer is randomly brought to a current live stream anywhere in the world. This is a nice nod to random discovery, but at the same time can set the viewer up for some unexpected and not always welcome viewing, so proceed with caution.

The second icon, the bullet points is a more controlled space for discovering content. Users can choose to see suggested streams or recent streams. Suggested streams highlights a trending topic first, displaying multiple feeds from the same event. Other streams are world news, musicians, and a featured sports. Users can chose to hide any of these they do not wish to see. After that, and if recent is chosen there will simply be a list of the active streams with their names, number of viewers and status. Clicking on any of these brings the viewer directly into the live event.

The world icon is exactly that, a map of the world with the number of current live broadcasts (red) and recently completed ones (blue). Clicking on a numbered circle will give a list of the available broadcasts. This is another way to discover streaming content by geography without being taken directly into the broadcast.

Once in any of the live events, viewers have the ability to comment. This commenting is a feature that made Periscope unique from other competitors such like Meerkat. It allows the viewer and streamer to engage in real time. Touching the screen releases a floating heart for all to see. The commenting area shows when users join and any comments made. Sometimes, these comments can be inappropriate given the open nature of the stream. If the creator has selected moderation, random users will be selected to vote on whether to approve questionable comments. Clicking on the three dots brings up a menu with the options to follow the streamer, share the broadcast directly in Twitter, to your Periscope followers or via other social media. There is an option to hide the chat, which is useful when it is an actively scrolling chat box that can be distracting. Broadcasts with questionable content can also be reported under this menu. A small figure icon with a number indicates the number of viewers actively watching. Clicking on that icon will provide more information on the stream; title of the broadcast, start time of the broadcast, broadcaster information, total number of viewers during the time of the stream and user names of all the live viewers. When viewing an archived broadcast, the option to comment is disabled, but the comments and hearts show exactly as they did in real time. Hearts can still be sent on an archived broadcast, holding the screen enables fast forward and rewind of the video. There is also an option to play highlights of the video. Statistics on the total number of live viewers, replay viewers, total time watched and time watched per viewer are available on a completed stream.

Viewing of Periscope is not limited to the mobile app on a mobile device. Desktop users can view, comment on and heart live streams and also view and heart archived streams.

Discovery is limited to what is recommended, though users can choose specific channels or search by keyword or hashtag. Some settings can be modified and the profile can be changed via the website.

Creating a stream is straightforward, though may be harder for those not as accustomed to video using a smartphone in general. It is clear however in visiting many streams that this is a skill most people are still practicing. A red camera icon appears in the lower right hand corner of the first three icons. The first selection to make is the audience. The default is for the public, meaning anyone can teleport to your stream or discovery your stream through the many other ways described. In order to limit the audience, specific users can be selected or a group of users can be created at the time of the stream. Previously established groups also appear as an option. Other options are whether to share your precise location (off is thankfully the default), limit the chat to just your followers (default is off) or post the stream directly to Twitter (default is on). After selecting the audience and other settings, the broadcast should be named in the What's happening? Field. It is important to be descriptive with this as it is often the only way a viewer can determine if they wish to enter the stream. A red GO LIVE button will start the camera and the broadcast begins. Clicking on the three dots gives the streamer the option to request ask for followers, ask for a share or hide the chat box. While the ability to engage with one's audience is a nice feature, it is awkward to be streaming and watching the chat box at the same time in order to respond to the messages. Swiping down will give the option to end the broadcast. When the broadcast is completed there is an option to save it to the phone's gallery or delete the broadcast. If sharing via Twitter was selected, the broadcast is its own tweet and appears in the twitter

stream, possibly increasing the audience. The broadcast, if saved will appear under profile with statistics. It is also possible to access Periscope streaming from the Twitter app via the LIVE option.

At this time there is evidence of exploration and experimentation of Periscope by libraries and librarians. A blog post from the New Jersey State Libraries from December 2015 [4] provides a brief discussion of live-streaming apps including Periscope and acknowledges the potential stating that, “ The apps could be game changers if they can raise the levels of connectedness and interactivity between the public library and its users.” [4] In March 2016, blogger Chris Gower suggests some potential applications for live-streaming which include Ask a Librarian, events and introductions to library staff and faculty [5]. A presentation by librarians from Metropolitan State University include specific examples of what has been done at their library as well as how other libraries have used Periscope. They include suggestions for live-streaming such as behind the scenes tours, new books, events, and workshops [6] LeSure (2015) provides an overview of several live streaming applications and Periscope is included in this discussion of live streaming potential within libraries.

A search on library and libraries on the app itself reveals a few libraries with accounts. The ephemeral nature of the videos however makes it difficult to determine which libraries are active as only recent videos appear on the profiles. At the time of this writing only the National Library of Australia (@nlagovau) had recent videos which ranged from author talks to an in depth look at a rare book. There is certainly evidence that libraries and librarians are experimenting with these apps and exploring their potential.

A brief look at the literature does indicate that those in higher education are beginning to taking notice of this new technology. Fuller et al. (2016) discuss Periscope’s potential for Global

Pathology Education. They note that the live streaming app can better connect students and teachers and provide opportunities for discovery and sharing. Their article looks at some specific examples of Periscope being used in pathology education that highlight the reach and potential of the app. They include basic descriptions and how to on Periscope and conclude that the app has the potential to increase the reach and engagement of pathology educators to a global audience.

Saumdio (2016) discusses how social workers might consider using Facebook Live or Periscope to engage with clients and communities. The live streaming tools are described as tools to connect with clients and community in order to share resources and expertise. It is noted that these technologies affect the lives of client's and thus it is important for social workers to be aware of them in order to better assist their clients as they navigate online relationships and experiences. Pophal (2016) highlights the use of live streaming video by Trinity University in San Antonio through its Tiger Network. While not an example of mobile app use, it is an example of the success of streaming live events in higher education. Dowell and Duncan (2016) note that Periscope has not yet been capitalized on in the economics classroom. They describe how the use of a live streaming app would allow students to see life in other countries by connecting them to individuals throughout the world. The article includes specifics on the app as well as suggestions for integrating Periscope into the curriculum as an active learning assignment which would give the students the self-guidance to analyze the real world and improve their cultural competency and global awareness.

The popularity and growth of live streaming applications should not be overlooked by information professionals. Even if the library does not use the app itself, it is important to be aware that our patrons are using these tools to stream their lives to the world. We may be asked for assistance with, or explanation of these apps by patrons. Libraries must also be sensitive to

the privacy issues that surround live streaming in public places as these apps become more ubiquitous. The ability to provide unfiltered, authentic, spontaneous and ephemeral video to millions of people via a smartphone is only just beginning to have an impact on communities and society. Learning how to embrace the potential of mobile streaming apps should come naturally to librarians. The experience of exploring the world through someone else's eyes is something libraries are familiar with as communities where new stories and experiences are explored on a daily basis.

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