On Networking the Writing Center: Social Media Usage and Non-Usage

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Abstract   This article presents findings from an IRB-approved study about writing center social media use and nonuse using survey data keyed to five factors: reasons for nonuse; purposes for use; platforms used; approaches to use that consider platforms and target audiences; and recommendations to other writing centers to use or not use social media. While the 91 writing centers not using social media commonly cited a lack of time, lack of staff, and lack of experience as reasons, the majority of writing centers in this study maintained a social media presence. These 153 writing centers tended to use multiple platforms, commonly to promote the center and reach other writing centers, and often perceived students and faculty as their target audiences. A majority of the 244 respondents recommend social media use to other writing centers regardless of their own center's usage or non-usage. The study not only aimed to provide more and more in-depth data about writing center social media use and nonuse; it also considered conversations about writing center purpose as presented to a diverse audience that included administrators outside of writing centers and underscores the potential for writing centers to produce multimodal writing on such platforms.

Keywords   writing centers, technology, social media, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, multimodality

Introduction

As far back as 2009, scholars and practitioners in the writing center field were considering such facilities' use of social media. In that year, Rebecca Jackson and Jackie Grutsch McKinney (2012) collected survey data about services writing centers offered outside of one-to-one tutoring. One category of labor they identified, digital community building/social networking, highlighted writing center social media use. Of the 141 administrators that responded, 52 (37%) worked at writing centers participating in at least one such online network. Most commonly, writing centers were using Facebook (25, or 18%), and some (12, or 8%) were blogging, but several also reported Twitter (3, or 2%) and MySpace (3, or 2%) usage. Since then, two additional studies of writing center social media usage have been published: Grutsch McKinney's (2010) mini-study of Twitter and her 2011 framework of writing center Facebook usage.

Despite limited published scholarship, writing center social media usage continues to be widely discussed in three key venues. First, in 2013, Lee Ann Glowzenski (@lglowzenski) posted an invitation on WLN's blog *Connecting Writing Centers Across Borders* (*CWCAB*) for writing centers to respond with their social media

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handles. This post resulted in the creation of *CWCAB*'s Social Media Directory that to date features 49 national and international writing centers. The second venue, similar to *CWCAB*, is writing center blogs, a form of social media themselves. Between 2012 and 2018, three different writing centers featured blog posts about writing center social media usage. The four total posts include Jennifer Marciniak's (2012) observations of writing center Twitter usage, Mike Shapiro's (2013) history of his writing center's Twitter handle, Mark Jacob's (2013) general best practices, and Jennifer Fandel's (2018) post about utilizing images on various social media platforms. Third and finally, social media continues to be a topic of discussion at writing center conferences. Between 2010 and 2019, the International Writing Center Association (IWCA) and National Council for Peer Tutoring in Writing (NCPTW) hosted 34 conference offerings about writing center social media use, including individual presentations, panels, roundtables, special interest groups, and poster sessions. In connection with these publications and discussions, the current study relies on survey data collected in the summer of 2019 to create a more up-to-date national portrait of writing center social media usage and non-usage and to draw unpublished conversations about writing center social media use into a more formal venue. The survey, distributed as part of an IRB-approved study of American postsecondary writing centers and their social media use and nonuse, aimed to collect more in-depth data about social media usage and non-usage by writing centers by considering reasons for nonuse, purposes for use, approaches to use that accounted for single and multiple platforms and target audiences, and recommendations to other centers to use or not use social media.

Beyond the immediate context of the limited publications and discussions about writing center social media use, the exigence for this study arose from several foundational ideas in writing center scholarship. First, in its consideration of purpose, this study connects to a need both Michael Pemberton (1995) and Robert W. Barnett (1997) emphasized in earlier scholarship: the need to justify writing center purposes to outside audiences, especially

postsecondary administrators in other departments. Social media allow writing centers to reach multiple audiences who have varying levels of expertise of or experience with such facilities, including students, other departments, and campus constituents. The relevance of justifying the writing center's purpose to outside communities, as raised by both Pemberton (1995) and Barnett (1997), connects to Grutsch McKinney's (2010) mini-study of Twitter, which she concluded by questioning writing center purposes for using Twitter, and to this study, which extends this question of purpose to other social media. Second, and likewise, such media allow writing centers to portray their work and purposes to those outside writing center work. In other words, in much the same way that universities (Peruta & Shields, 2017; Peruta & Shields, 2018; Veletsianos et al., 2017) and other campus services like libraries (e.g., Fiander, 2012) use social media to write about and represent themselves, writing centers can likewise rely on social media to compose texts portraying their work to broader audiences.

I divide the remainder of this article into five sections. The first, prior research, considers the limited studies on writing center social media usage alongside that from other postsecondary contexts. In the second section, methods, I briefly describe survey distribution and data analysis. Thereafter, the third section, results, presents relevant survey data related to writing center social media use and nonuse. Following these results, I provide a discussion of findings in context with writing center literature. Finally, in the conclusion, I highlight limitations and possibilities for future research.

Prior Research

Because research on writing center social media usage is limited, it is worthwhile to consider social media use in related contexts, specifically postsecondary institutions (Bellucci et al., 2017; Peruta & Shields, 2017; Peruta & Shields, 2018; Veletsianos et al., 2017) and departments like libraries (Datig & Herkner, 2017; Fiander, 2012) and teaching and learning centers (Atkins et al., 2017) that, like writing

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centers, support full campus populations and communities. Such studies contribute four key considerations for the current research: single- and multiplatform approaches to use, communicative purposes that include both broadcast and more dialogic approaches, potential audiences, and finally multimedia content like images.

In contrast with the immediate context of writing centers, research on postsecondary institutional social media use is abundant and draws on large data sets of social media posts. However, like Grutsch McKinney's publications on Twitter (2010) and Facebook (2011), and like Shapiro's (2013) and Marciniak's (2012) blog posts, many studies consider a single platform, typically Facebook (Peruta & Shields, 2017; Peruta & Shields, 2018), Twitter (Veletsianos et al., 2017), or Instagram (Primary Research Staff Group, 2017), while Julia Bleakney and colleagues (2021) examine writing center blogs across various platforms including WordPress.

Likewise, as Grutsch McKinney (2010) did in writing centers, these studies considered the communicative purposes of information going out on these platforms. Therein, she aimed to identify the platform's purpose "for a group or organization like the writing center" by using 25 tweets from writing center accounts (p. 7) and, through analysis, identified six categories: open-closed status (8 tweets), link-sharing (9 tweets), daily chatter (4 tweets), campus information (2 tweets), retweet (1 tweet), and writing advice (1 tweet). However, her study also revealed two common issues with writing center Twitter usage. First, the 25 writing centers in Grutsch McKinney's (2010) sample were not consistent in their Twitter use; just over half (14) tweeted in a two-week period preceding her September 2010 data collection; slightly under half (12) had not tweeted in over four months; and of those, 6 had not tweeted since the beginning of 2010. Second, the categories themselves suggested that writing centers using Twitter did so to broadcast various bits of information, a behavior that Grutsch McKinney (2010) calls "un-writing center-like" in its emphasis on information-sharing versus information-seeking or engagement in conversation (p. 9). Such concerns do not carry over to postsecondary institutions writ large (e.g.,

Bellucci et al., 2017) or to writing center publications using Twitter, as Elisabeth H. Buck shows in *Open-Access, Multimodality, and Writing Center Studies* (2018). The three journals she considers, *Writing Center Journal*, *WLN: A Journal of Writing Center Scholarship*, and *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal*, utilize Twitter to publicize information like writing and tutoring resources, as well as conferences and events. However, in addition to these broadcast-like posts, each journal also used their Twitter accounts to retweet and reply to others' posts, with the amount ranging from 19% for @WLNewsletter to 50% for @amphersandWCJ. These figures suggest that, in contrast to the writing centers Grutsch McKinney (2010) examined on Twitter, these publications tend to have a more engaging approach.

Practitioners describing and discussing social media usage by writing centers in unpublished venues concur with the purposes for social media Grutsch McKinney (2010) outlined. Through such media, writing centers could broadcast information about the writing center (Marciniak, 2012), market their services (Boshela & Berger, 2017; Jacobs, 2013), and network with writers and other campus units (Fandel, 2018; Shapiro, 2013). Regarding the first purpose, broadcast, some writing centers used Twitter to share information about daily writing center business, such as changes in location or information about the services writing centers offer (Marciniak, 2012). They also broadcasted open appointments (Shapiro, 2013) and workshops offered by the center (Fandel, 2018). Thus, like Grutsch McKinney (2010), practitioners identified information-sharing as one approach to writing center social media use. However, as Mark Jacobs (2013) pointed out, social media also function as low-cost marketing tools, which he and others (e.g., Boshela & Berger, 2017) framed as a benefit. In the broader context, researchers in both postsecondary institutional social media usage and in library and teaching and learning center (TLC) social media usage focus on purpose similarly, albeit with much larger data sets. Further, unlike Grutsch McKinney (2010), these researchers acknowledged the ability for social media to serve multiple communicative purposes, among them broadcast. As several

examples, Adam Peruta and Allison B. Shields (2017, 2018), James Pringle and Samantha Fritz (2019), and the Primary Research Group (2017) all described how postsecondary institutions used Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram to broadcast information, but this finding does not eliminate the possibility for more dialogic implementations. As Pringle and Fritz (2019) pointed out in their research on Canadian postsecondary Facebook and Twitter usage, it can be a matter of difference in platforms: where the institutions in their sample used Twitter to "broadcast" information, as writing centers in Grutsch McKinney's (2010) study of writing center Twitter usage did, the schools used Facebook for "casual conversation" (p. 39).

Departmental research in postsecondary libraries and teaching and learning communities (TLCs) likewise underscore social media's potential for multiple communicative purposes, including customer service for library patrons unable to visit the physical space (Fiander, 2012), as well as promotion and resource-sharing (Park & Fowler, 2019). Within libraries, David Fiander (2012) framed Facebook and Twitter "not [as] broadcast media [but as] places to engage in conversations with your community," and the "social" aspect of social media; that is, their ability to facilitate engagement, differentiates such media from broadcast media like newsletters (p. 194). Libraries using social media have likewise collaborated with writing centers and have utilized social media for various purposes. These collaborations, in opposition to many studies of postsecondary institutional social media usage and Grutsch McKinney (2010, 2011) but like Jackson and Grutsch McKinney's (2012) survey data, consider multiple platforms as avenues for promoting an event and providing a live feed (Datig & Herkner, 2014) or as a way to bolster student engagement with online content (Park & Fowler, 2019).

Much like purposes, and in conjunction with Grutsch McKinney (2010, 2011), research on postsecondary social media use, both institutional and departmental, discusses possible audiences. For postsecondary institutions, Peruta and Shields (2018) highlighted several potential audiences, all of which should be considered when creating content: students,

alumni, and parents. Grutsch McKinney's (2010) research on Twitter revealed multiple purposes for writing center posts, most of which she noted seemed geared toward student audiences. However, practitioners have underscored additional potential audiences in online venues, including other institutional departments (Jacobs, 2013) and other writing centers (Fandel, 2018; Jacobs, 2013; Shapiro, 2013). Relatedly, practitioners indicated a need for writing centers to participate as audiences by (1) paying attention to other social media users to build networks (Jacobs, 2013; Marciniak, 2012; Shapiro, 2013); (2) following other social media users (Jacobs, 2013; Shapiro, 2013); and (3) sharing others' posts without oversharing (Jacobs, 2013; Marciniak, 2012).

Finally, research on social media in postsecondary settings explores such media's multimodal affordances, a point several writing center practitioners explored on a more local level. Studies of postsecondary institutional social media usage have considered how the inclusion of images impacts engagement on Facebook (Peruta & Shields, 2017) and how images and videos on Twitter portray brand identity (Veletsianos et al., 2017). Some platforms, like Instagram and Pinterest, even centralize visual content. Practitioners within writing centers likewise value images by highlighting the circulation of memes (Marciniak, 2012) or by discussing visual content (Fandel, 2018). However, in contrast to writing center blog posts, Alair Boshela and Daniel Berger's (2017) IWCA presentation advocated for a focus on verbal content, as that seemed most relevant to writing center work. This is very much in line with the continued preference for print journals among those in the writing center field, which Elisabeth H. Buck identified in *Open-Access, Multimodality, and Writing Center Studies*. As well, a majority of participants in her research did not view the ability to include multimodal content like images or videos as important when publishing. Despite these tensions among practitioners, Lindsey Sabatino and Brian Fallon (2018) value numerous forms of multimodal composing, albeit in the context of sessions with writers. Nonetheless, they framed such sessions as valuable writing center work, as these give tutors opportunities to

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consider the relation of multimodal composing to audience and purpose.

Ultimately, this brief review of literature underscores four topics related to the current study. First, in contrast with much of the existing research, it considers both single and multiple platform use. While Grutsch McKinney's examinations of Twitter (2010) and Facebook (2011) focus on a single platform, I herein follow Jackson and Grutsch McKinney's (2012) approaches, with increased attention to what and how many platforms writing centers are using. Second, the survey considers multiple purposes for social media use, which include "un-writing center-like" broadcast as well as outreach and attempts to network and collaborate with other campus departments. Third, following both writing center scholars and practitioners, as well as those in postsecondary education, this study considers the audiences these posts are intended for. Fourth and finally, though the survey does not consider multiple modes, social media present opportunities for writing centers to rely on images, videos, and other multimodal content to communicate with multiple audiences.

While this research draws on the contributions of prior studies, I also work to address a gap that both the immediate context of writing center scholarship on social media and studies of the broader postsecondary context exhibit. While Grutsch McKinney (2010) expressed skepticism about Twitter's long-term usefulness and Marciniak (2012) echoed her concerns, data about social media nonuse do not exist. This study thus works to represent writing centers that opt not to use social media, as well as their reasons for not doing so.

Methods

The survey distributed as part of this study was created using Qualtrics and targeted writing center administrators working at postsecondary institutions in the United States. It included four sections, which respondents completed depending on whether or not their writing center used social media. The first, demographics, asked about institutional type and features, as well as general social media use or nonuse. The second, social media involvement and usage, asked administrators to identify their writing center's platforms. Thereafter, the third section, social media content, collected information about what writing centers were posting and what audiences they were targeting. The fourth and final section gauged respondents' interest in interviews as part of the larger study.[1] Administrators at social media using sites completed all four sections of the survey, where administrators at writing centers not using social media completed sections one and four, as well as questions in the first section about prior usage.

I identified potential respondents, including writing center directors and assistant or associate directors, using the St. Cloud State Writing Center Directory, an extensive but incomplete list of writing centers that I selected for my sample because it often includes contact information for administrators. If the contact information listed therein was outdated or incorrect, I searched writing center, departmental, and institutional websites or emailed the writing center to request the administrator's contact information. In total, I distributed the survey to 850 writing center administrators between May 4, 2019, and June 25, 2019. Following the initial invitation, I sent a follow-up email one to two weeks after the initial invite. Distributing the survey link directly to writing center administrators ensured each center would be represented by a single response. For large city or state-wide networks of universities like the State University of New York, one survey was provided to the writing center administrator at each site.

In total, 321 writing center administrators responded to the survey, yielding a response rate of 37.8%. Responses were excluded from data analysis under two circumstances. First, if respondents did not provide at least a partial response to each question, their responses were excluded. For instance, some questions included both closed response and open response parts. If respondents answered neither part, their whole survey response was excluded. However, if they provided a closed response and no open one (or vice versa), their responses were included in data analysis. A second criterion for exclusion was duplicate

IP addresses. In total, 77 responses were excluded from data analysis due to one of these conditions, leaving a sample of 244 survey responses.

My approaches to analyzing this data were largely descriptive because data on writing center social media usage is limited and because outside Jackson and Grutsch McKinney's (2012) survey, data on non-usage does not exist in published literature. Select questions about use and nonuse are aggregated by institutional type because of contextual differences in writing center work highlighted by previous scholarship (e.g., Caswell et al., 2017).

Results

The 244 survey respondents represented writing centers serving a variety of institutional types (research, comprehensive, baccalaureate, and community college). While 82 respondents (33.61%) either identified multiple institutional types or instead selected only defining features, meaning their institutional type could not be identified, the remaining 66.39% indicated their institutional type. Among these writing centers, the most common is bachelor's institutions, of which there are 64 (26.23%), followed by research institutions (42, or 17.21% of respondents), community colleges (36, or 14.75% of the total respondents), and finally comprehensive universities (20, or 8.20% of respondents). Among the 164 writing centers that indicated their institution's public/private

status, there was a slight majority (84, or 51.21% of respondents) of public institutions. Twenty-two writing centers in this study represented religiously affiliated institutions, and 11 served specialized mission institutions.

A majority of respondents worked at writing centers currently using social media: 153 (62.7%) were using social media at the time the survey was distributed, while 91 (37.3%) were not. Figure 1 aggregates social media use by institutional type and includes a separate category for respondents whose institutional type could not be identified based on their responses.

As Figure 1 indicates, except for those at community colleges, a majority of writing centers across institutional types, and a majority of those at institutions whose types could not be identified based on the data provided, were using social media.

Social Media Non-Using Writing Centers

Administrators at 91 non-using writing centers provided additional information about two aspects of their writing center's non-usage: prior usage and reasons for nonuse. Of the 91 non-using writing centers, a majority (60, or 65.93%) had never used social media. Table 1 aggregates this data by institutional type and shows that, except for those serving research universities, writing centers that were not using social media at the time of survey distribution commonly never had.
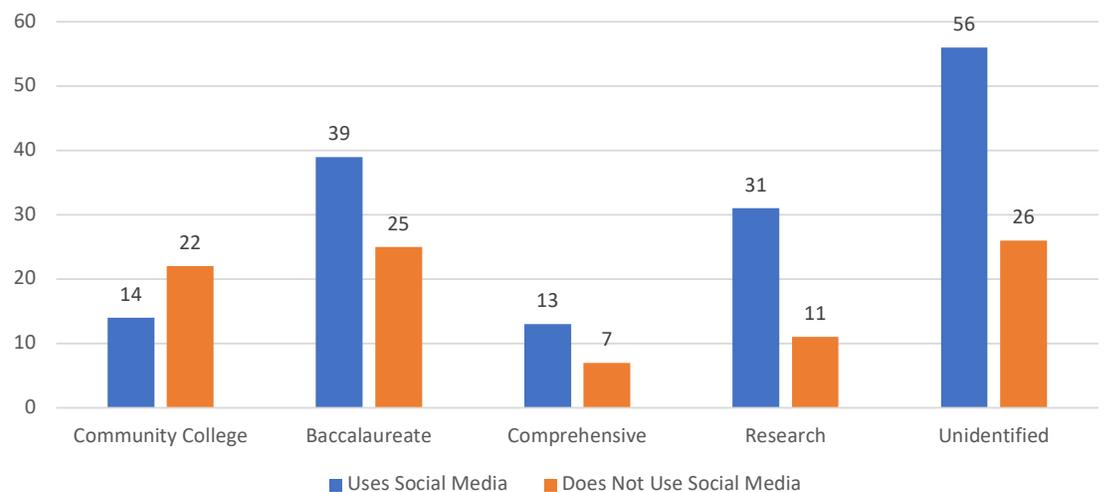

Figure 1. Social media use and nonuse by institutional type (N = 244).

Table 1. Prior Use by Institutional Type

Institutional Type	Prior Use	Percent	No Prior Use	Percent	No Response	Percent	Total
Community College	4	18.18%	18	81.82%	0	0.00%	22
Baccalaureate	7	28.00%	18	72.00%	0	0.00%	25
Comprehensive	2	28.57%	5	71.43%	0	0.00%	7
Research	7	63.64%	4	36.36%	0	0.00%	11
Unidentified	9	34.62%	15	57.69%	2[2]	7.69%	26

Table 2. Platforms Used by Writing Centers (n = 153)

Platform	Used		Still Used	
Blogs	36	23.53%	23	15.03%
Facebook	145	94.77%	136	88.89%
Twitter	98	64.05%	83	54.25%
Instagram	93	60.78%	88	57.52%
Pinterest	5	3.27%	2	1.31%
YouTube	39	25.49%	33	21.57%
Snapchat	7	4.58%	4	2.61%
Other[3]	3	1.96%	3	1.96%

These 91 writing center administrators indicated three common reasons for their writing center's social media nonuse, two of which were reported by over half of respondents: (1) a lack of staff members (51, or 56.04%), (2) a lack of time (50, or 54.95%), and (3) a lack of interest among writing center personnel (45, or 49.45%). Twenty-nine respondents expressed their belief that social media use would not be beneficial in their center, and 13 indicated that institutional policies prevented them from using social media. Among the 26 writing centers that indicated other reasons, 24 included open responses that revealed four trends. The first two, time and staffing (7, or 29.16% of other responses) and priorities (3, or 12.5% of other responses), reflected the closed options provided. The second two items, expertise (4, or 16.67% of other responses) and general perceptions of unusefulness (6, or 24% of other responses), point to reasons beyond the closed options.

Social Media–Using Writing Centers

The 153 writing center administrators working at writing centers using social media indicated both the platforms they had used in the past and those they were still using at the time of the study. Table 2 shows the near ubiquity of Facebook among these writing centers. As well, it shows Instagram and Twitter were also used by more than half of respondents. The data also indicates a decrease in usage across platforms, but the shifts in usage have resulted in Instagram's popularity surpassing Twitter's slightly among the writing centers represented by this study.

While single-platform usage increased from 22 writing centers (14.38%) to 31 (20.26%) due to discontinuation of platforms, the remaining 121 writing centers (79.14%) used two or more platforms at the time of survey distribution. Single-platform usage was the third most common approach to social media; the writing centers in this study more commonly used two platforms (58, or 37.91%) or three platforms (39, or 25.49%). In total, including single-platform usage, survey data represented 33 platforms and combinations of platforms. The five most popular, displayed in Table 3, all include Facebook usage, and the four multiplatform combinations all include Twitter and/or Instagram.

Table 3. Five Most Common Platforms/Combinations Used by Writing Centers (*n* = 153)

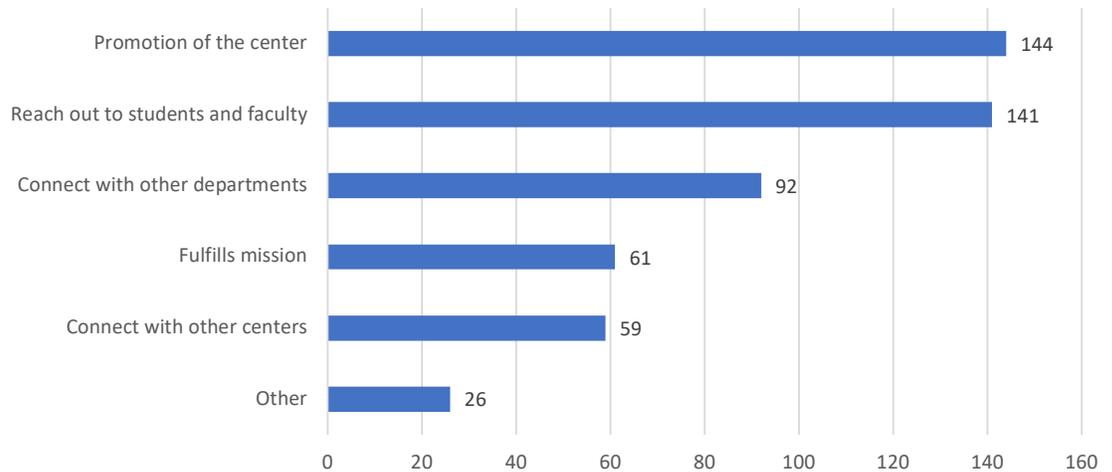| Platform/s Used	Used in Past	Percent	Still Used	Percent
Facebook, Twitter, Instagram	28	18.30%	24	15.69%
Facebook	18	11.76%	22	14.38%
Facebook, Twitter	18	11.76%	21	13.73%
Facebook, Instagram	12	7.84%	20	13.07%
Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube	10	6.54%	10	6.54%

Figure 2. Purposes for using social media (*n* = 153).

The writing centers using social media also had various purposes. As Figure 2 shows, two uses, promotion of the center (144, or 94.12%) and outreach to students and faculty on campus (141, or 92.16%), were nearly universal, but over half of the writing centers using social media (92, or 59.48%) also did so to connect with other departments. In addition to these closed responses, the 26 open responses to Other indicated three additional purposes: (1) professional development for tutors (6, or 23.07%), (2) communication with alumni (5, or 19.23%), and (3) creation or extension of a community, either within the writing center, via collaboration, or on campus (6, or 23.07%).[4]

In addition to general purposes, writing center administrators also indicated differences in purpose between platforms. Among the 135 responses,[5] 55 (40.74%) noted that their writing center used different platforms to target different stakeholders. More commonly, writing centers used different platforms to provide different information (79, or 58.52%), and an equal number used different platforms with different frequency.

Administrators at social media-using writing centers also identified their target audiences by ranking six—current students, current faculty, current tutors, other departments, alumni, and professional associations (e.g., IWCA)—for each platform they used on a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 being the least targeted audience and 6 being the most targeted.[6] Table 4[7] shows the two most highly ranked audiences for each platform. The table demonstrates that, across platforms, current students and current faculty were commonly the most targeted audiences. On Twitter and Instagram, as well as Snapchat and WeChat, current tutors were considered target audiences, where writing centers used Pinterest to target alumni.

Social Media Recommendations

All survey respondents were asked whether or not they would recommend social media use to other writing centers. The data regarding recommendations for social media use underscore two points (Table 5). First, a majority of

Table 4. Target Audiences

		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Blank	Average
Blogs n = 40	*Current Students*	0	9	2	2	4	7	12	4	3.55
	Current Faculty	0	1	3	8	8	10	5	5	3.58
Facebook n = 134	*Current Students*	0	24	5	6	6	11	80	2	4.56
	Current Faculty	0	7	17	26	25	34	13	12	3.49
Twitter n = 82	*Current Students*	0	17	5	1	5	8	47	0	4.48
	Current Faculty	0	4	13	12	23	22	2	7	3.37
	Current Tutors	1	4	13	12	23	22	2	6	3.37
Instagram n = 83	*Current Students*	0	14	0	0	4	7	57	0	4.96
	Current Tutors	2	5	8	16	14	24	6	7	3.43
Pinterest n = 5	*Current Students*	0	1	1	0	1	0	2	0	3.80
	Current Tutors	0	1	0	1	0	3	0	0	3.80
	Alumni	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	1	3.20
YouTube n = 31	*Current Students*	0	7	2	3	2	0	17	0	4.19
	Current Faculty	0	1	5	5	6	8	2	4	3.29
Snapchat n = 7	*Current Students*	0	1	1	0	0	0	5	0	4.71
	Current Tutors	0	0	1	2	1	2	0	1	3.14
Other (WeChat) n = 1	*Current Students*	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	6.00
	Current Tutors	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	5.00

Table 5. Recommendations for Social Media Use

	Yes	No	Blank*	Total
Users	148	2	3	153
Nonusers	65	19	7	91
Total	213	21	10	254

* "Blank" refers to someone who did not provide a closed response for this survey question but did provide a written response.

both social media users (148, or 96.73%) and nonusers (65 of 91, or 71.43%) recommended that writing centers use social media. Second, in all 10 instances where no closed response was given, individuals indicated in their open responses that they were unsure or did not want to provide recommendations because that decision, given that writing centers are often shaped by their institutional contexts, should be a local one.

The survey data underscore six relevant findings, two about writing center social media non-usage and four about usage. First, a majority of writing centers in this study were using social media in May/June 2019, but non-use was not uncommon, with over one-third of the writing centers not using social media, many of which never had. Second, those that did not use social media cited labor issues, particularly a lack of time and staff, as reasons, but also indicated a lack of social media expertise.

The remaining four findings relate to social media–using writing centers, particularly the platforms they are using. Third, nearly 80% of the writing centers in this study were using Facebook when the survey was distributed, often in conjunction with other platforms. Fourth, writing centers commonly used social media for both outreach and connection. Regarding target audiences, a fifth finding shows that many administrators typically perceived students and current faculty as target audiences. Sixth and finally, a majority of writing center administrators recommended social media to other writing centers.

Discussion

Beginning with all 244 respondents, a majority of writing centers in this study (153, or 62.7%) were using social media in summer 2019, when the survey was distributed, a larger percentage than the writing centers represented in Jackson and Grutsch McKinney's (2012) survey data. Likewise, these survey results indicate a long-standing tension in writing centers Buck (2018) mentions between traditional print forms of communication and innovative technological ones. Although the data sets are different in terms of time, and while there is no

way to identify how survey respondents overlap, this study nonetheless suggests a possible increase in social media usage among writing centers. However, writing centers that did not use social media were not uncommon, as 91 were not using social media when this survey was distributed, partly because, as Grutsch McKinney (2010) and Marciniak (2012) questioned, not all writing centers needed Twitter, a point that extends to other social media for these non-using writing centers. I begin my discussion of the survey results with the minority: social media nonusers. I then shift my attention to social media users and close with respondents' recommendations.

Social Media Non-Using Writing Centers

One notable possibility for nonusers is the effect of institutional type on writing center social media usage. Among the writing centers represented in the survey data, nonusers were a minority across institutional types with one notable exception: community colleges. Twenty-two of the 35 community colleges (62.87%) did not use social media in May/June 2019. Connecting to Caswell et al. (2017), such decisions suggest potential labor issues or fewer resources—both employees and time—across writing centers serving at community colleges.

Relatedly, an analysis of reasons that writing centers do not use social media reveals three that are common: a lack of staff members, which 51 (56.04%) respondents cited; a lack of time (50, or 54.95%); and a lack of interest among current staff (45, or 49.95%) because writing centers tend to identify their primary task as assisting writers (e.g., Lunsford, 1991; North, 1984) and because administrators are often inundated with other tasks (Caswell et al., 2017), it may simply be impractical for some writing centers to prioritize social media usage.

Beyond these reasons, several writing center administrators in open responses took issue with (1) how social media was used for the writing center (7 of 26 respondents) and (2) an absence of expertise among administrators (6 of 26 respondents). While none of

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the writing center administrators mentioned the issues that Grutsch McKinney (2011) did—unsanctioned use by tutors potentially contributing to misperceptions about the writing center, digital collusion between administrators and tutors in online spaces like Facebook, and surveillance of tutors at the writing center by other tutors—respondents reported concerns like tutors using social media to "get subs!" and anxieties about how such media could "replace" more meaningful writing center interactions, once again echoing the continued focus on writers both Lunsford (1991) and North (1984) advocated for. Other responses highlight a third issue: a lack of expertise with social media. Two respondents noted that they do not use social media as individuals, and thus lack the expertise to implement such media as part of their center. This suggests that within writing centers, administrators or tutors need experience and familiarity with social media to compose successfully on these informal, public platforms.

Social Media–Using Writing Centers

Shifting to the social media users, this study contributes to the platforms used and that we could further research. Within existing literature and discussions, reports of platforms writing centers have used come from three sources: (1) Jackson and Grutsch McKinney's (2012) survey data, (2) directories like *CWCAB*'s "Social Media Directory," and (3) discussions on blogs and in conferences, mostly of Twitter (Marciniak, 2012; Shapiro, 2013). While Boshela and Berger (2017) and to an extent Fandel (2018) mentioned Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram, Twitter has garnered the most attention, as Grutsch McKinney's (2010) "Geek in the Center" is the only published scholarship about social media usage and purposes. This study adds two additional platforms to those mentioned: Snapchat, whose usage is fairly uncommon, and the outlier WeChat, mentioned once in the sample.

The survey results from this study yield three relevant findings about the platforms being used, the first of which relates to Facebook, the second to Instagram and Twitter, and the third and final to multiple platforms. First,

like the Writing Center Social Media Directory on *CWCAB* and Jackson and Grutsch McKinney's (2012) 2009 survey, the most common form of social media used by writing centers in this study is Facebook. In contrast with the earlier studies, the majority is much larger—in fact, Facebook use was almost ubiquitous among the writing centers using social media in this sample, with 94.77% of the 153 social media users noting that they used Facebook at one point and only 9 of those users (6.21%) discontinuing usage.

Second, Instagram usage was slightly more common than Twitter usage among survey respondents, which highlights a shift in social media platform usage over time. Although the number of writing centers that have used Twitter before is higher by five than those that have used Instagram, the current users of Instagram outnumber Twitter by five. In contrast with *CWCAB's* Writing Center Social Media Directory, last updated in 2017, where only 6 of the 47 institutions listed include a link to Instagram, over half of this study's 153 social media users (88, or 57.52%) used Instagram. This shift in popularity occurred because 15 respondents discontinued Twitter usage. This is triple the number of users that discontinued Instagram use (5) and two and a half times the number of individuals that discontinued Facebook (6). This shift important because it connects with the anxiety Grutsch McKinney (2010) about discontinued Twitter usage by providing quantifiable evidence about Twitter's discontinuation among writing centers represented by this sample. Further, the amount of discontinuation among participants may highlight a field-wide decline in Twitter's popularity and a rise in Instagram usage, this despite Boshela and Berger's (2017) valuing verbal words over images and other forms of media. In connection to Sabatino and Fallon (2018), this suggests that some writing centers may privilege visuals in these online spaces, meaning that they are not only engaging in writing about themselves to portray their purpose to diverse audiences; they may also be doing so by drawing on multiple modes.

Third, the survey data revealed that among respondents, only 20.26% of writing centers used a single platform; most used two (55,

or 35.95%) or three (42, or 27.25%) platforms, with nearly four-fifths of the respondents in this study (79.54%) reporting use of multiple platforms. These results, in the context of writing center literature (Grutsch McKinney, 2010, 2011) and discussions (e.g., Marciniak, 2012; Shapiro, 2013) showing a one-platform practice, show that multiple platform use was common among the writing centers represented by this survey, and of the 47 listed in *CWCAB*'s Social Media Directory, nearly half list multiple social media accounts. Thus, writing center social media practices are expanding in terms of platforms, and combinations of platforms, used.

Likewise, they are also expanding in purpose for social media use, which Grutsch McKinney (2010) and Jacobs (2013) both highlighted as important. The writing centers represented by this study identified three common purposes for social media use. First, writing centers use social media for promotions and engagement. This finding is in line with much of the research about social media usage in postsecondary contexts and within departments, yet it is in tension with Grutsch McKinney (2010) and with Marciniak's (2012) claim that Twitter is broadcast. More specifically, where the literature and discussions of writing center social media usage tend to portray usage as only broadcast, the survey respondents viewed social media as both an information-sharing tool and a tool for engaging various audiences online.

Despite the tension Grutsch McKinney (2010) saw between writing center values and social media's broadcast tendencies, some respondents indicated that they valued social media because it allowed them, beyond broadcast, to connect not only with students but also with other stakeholders, as shown by open responses underscoring (1) social media's potential to help writing centers connect with alumni and (2) overt mentions of community and collaboration in open responses. Regarding alumni, six writing center administrators mentioned maintaining connections with alumni in their open responses, and writing centers using Pinterest identified alumni as the strongest targeted audience. Although this is a small part of the sample, it does highlight that some writing centers use social media to maintain connections with alumni. In addition, within their open responses about purpose, six respondents directly mention campus communities or collaboration, referring to both community within the center and community on campus. The mention of campus communities is in line with the library research that mentions collaborations with writing centers on social media (Datig & Herkner, 2014; Park & Fowler, 2019), both of which occur because of a strong sense of community on campus.

A less common purpose identified is connecting to other writing centers, often framed by writing center practitioners (Jacobs, 2013; Marciniak, 2012; Shapiro, 2013) as a practice that will help writing centers learn about social media practices. About one-third of the 153 writing centers using social media (59, or 38.56%) did so to connect with other centers. Thus, while following other centers to learn has been framed as a general social media best practice (Jacobs, 2013; Shapiro, 2013), it is a practice that one-third of respondents follow. Notably, however, the survey did not indicate why these writing centers engaged in the practice of following others, so while they may do so to learn from other centers, as Jacobs (2013) and Shapiro (2013) suggested, they may also do so for other reasons, including to exchange information about writing and writing center work.

Relating to purpose respondents in this study frame social media in a unique way, one unmentioned in the literature on or discussions about writing center social media usage: as a professional opportunity for their tutors. Six respondents indicated in their open responses that part of their purpose for using social media was to allow their tutors to gain experience working with such platforms. This purpose differs from the existing research and conversations of social media usage in writing centers and from earlier theories of writing center work (Lunsford, 1991; North, 1984), as it highlights a benefit to those who create social media posts rather than to the students who use the writing center's services, much like Sabatino and Fallon (2018) do in the preface to their edited collection.

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Recommendations for Use

Although social media nonuse was not uncommon, a majority of administrators at both writing centers that used social media and those that did not recommended social media use for other writing centers. This suggests that administrators in both situations can see the potential benefits of social media to writing centers. However, in line with the prevalent idea that writing center work is contextual (e.g., Caswell et al., 2017), three administrators declined to make recommendations, highlighting that ultimately, the choice to use social media falls to each writing center.

Conclusion

This survey of writing center social media usage and non-usage aimed to contribute to writing center scholarship in four senses. First, it aimed to provide a national portrait of writing center social media use and non-usage, one more detailed than prior studies of writing centers. Second, it worked to expand a consideration of purpose in two senses. In identifying purposes for social media non/use, this study first sought to expand our understandings of such media as they can function for writing centers. Third, related to the idea of target audience and to earlier emphasis on the importance of justifying writing center work to those outside of writing centers (Barnett, 1997; Pemberton, 1995), this study explored how writing center administrators perceive their posts' target audiences. While a majority of respondents were using social media, social media nonuse was not uncommon, as over one-third of respondents were not relying on social media at the time this study was conducted. Fourth, and additionally, writing centers commonly do not use social media for three reasons: a lack of time, a lack of staff, and a resulting lack of sustainability. Those using social media highlighted motives related to both information sharing and building connections with audiences. In addition, this study revealed the prevalence of Facebook use among writing centers in this study, shifts in popularity between Twitter and Instagram,

and the prevalence of multiple platform usage among writing centers in this sample. In both cases, the data contribute to ongoing conversations about writing centers and social media by elucidating both purposes for nonuse and purposes for and approaches to use.

While the data presented herein help extend these conversations, the study has four key limitations. First, it focused solely on American postsecondary writing centers listed in the St. Cloud State Writing Center Directory, a fairly comprehensive but incomplete directory. In addition to writing centers not listed therein, this leaves out three key demographics that could be explored in future studies: (1) middle school writing centers, (2) high school writing centers, and (3) international writing centers. Notably, Caswell et al. (2017) represent all three of these writing centers in their case studies, and future studies of writing center social media usage and non-usage could account for them.

Second, while the survey collected data about institutional type and features, the structure of the question resulted in about one-third of respondents' institutional types being unidentifiable, which may affect the accuracy of data about social media usage and non-usage aggregated by institutional type. Nonetheless, these data are important, as institutional context affects many aspects of writing center work (Caswell et al., 2017). Future studies could more deeply investigate the impact of institutional context on social media.

Third, unlike practitioners and researchers alike, the survey data herein does not examine social media posts themselves to identify what approaches writing centers are using in their content. Although Instagram was the second most popular platform among the writing centers represented in this survey, and although practitioners value visual content in their blog posts (Marciniak, 2012; Fandel, 2018), this study does not reveal whether or how writing centers are utilizing such content on social media. This tactic, employed by Grutsch McKinney (2010) and used by both Shapiro (2013) and Marciniak (2012), could help us better understand how writing centers act as multimodal composers in online spaces and

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could thus further extend Sabatino and Fallon's (2018) work by framing writing centers not only as sites that support multimodal composers, but also as sites that produce multimodal composing themselves.

Fourth and finally, I acknowledge that the social media landscape often changes rapidly, and that changes arise not only from the development of new platforms and the changes in existing ones, but also from real-life circumstances like the COVID-19 pandemic, during which writing centers are operating in a purely online state that has drastically altered tutoring pedagogies and labor conditions. Thus, future studies could explore how the pandemic has changed the face of social media use and nonuse within writing centers.

Notes

1. I plan to present these interview findings in a future publication.

2. These respondents did not provide a closed response for this question but did respond to part of the survey question concerning prior usage. Thus, they were retained in data analysis.

3. Originally, 12 respondents indicated "Other" for prior use and 7 for current use. However, the text responses provided sometimes indicated the use of something outside of this study's definition of social media (e.g., college website, podcast); indicated future plans for usage (e.g., plans to establish an Instagram account); or highlighted patterns of use (e.g., posting frequency).

4. There are also three less common trends that are still notable among open responses: (1) uncertainty about social media, (2) branding/sharing, and (3) narrative.

5. Differences in purpose, like prior social media use, was part of a larger survey question, so those who provided a response to part of this question were retained in data analysis.

6. Of the 153 responses, eight answers were eliminated from consideration because they used only one or two ranks for all audiences when describing at least one platform. Although outside the bounds of the question, respondents who used 0 in their responses were retained because it suggested that writing centers were not targeting an audience at all.

7. In the event of a tie in average ranking, figures for both audiences are displayed. Blanks were excluded from average calculations because in these instances, while individuals ranked other audiences

within the platform, they did not provide responses for all audiences.

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