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Analyzing Library Marketing & Communication Efforts at Liberal Arts Colleges

Laurel Post, '17

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Introduction

Marketing & communication in academic libraries is an area that has received growing attention in recent years, with many institutions devoting increased staff time to these efforts; however, most literature focuses on projects at larger institutions. This study surveyed small liberal arts college libraries' usage of social media & other promotional materials for outreach, communication, & marketing, as well as the staffing levels needed for this work, & documents how it impacted practice at one liberal arts college.

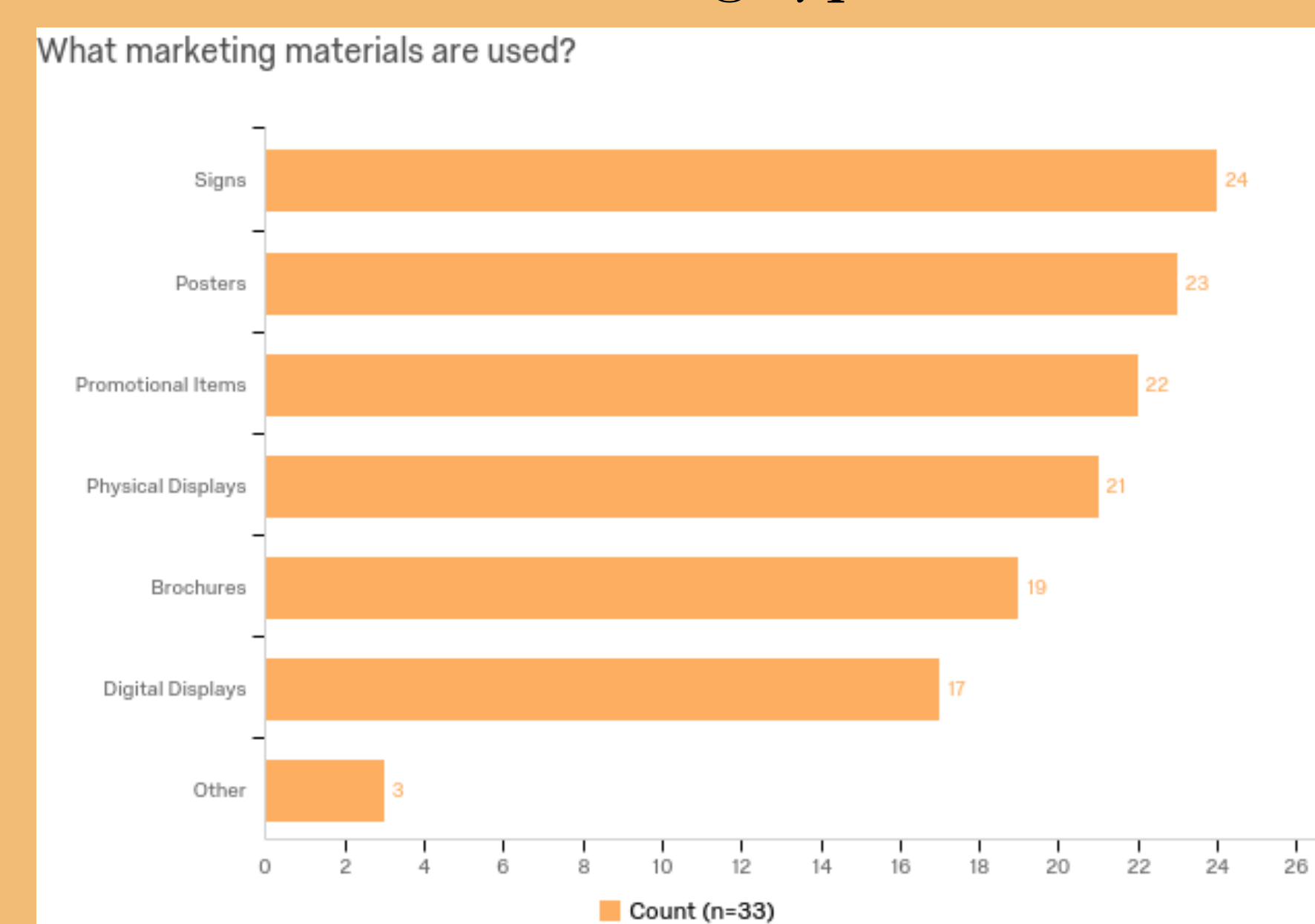
Method

Participants: The 80 members of The Oberlin Group Consortium of Liberal Arts College Libraries.

Procedure: An online survey was administered to a convenience sample of participants via email. A total of 33 surveys were completed, for a response rate of 41%.

Results: Marketing Material

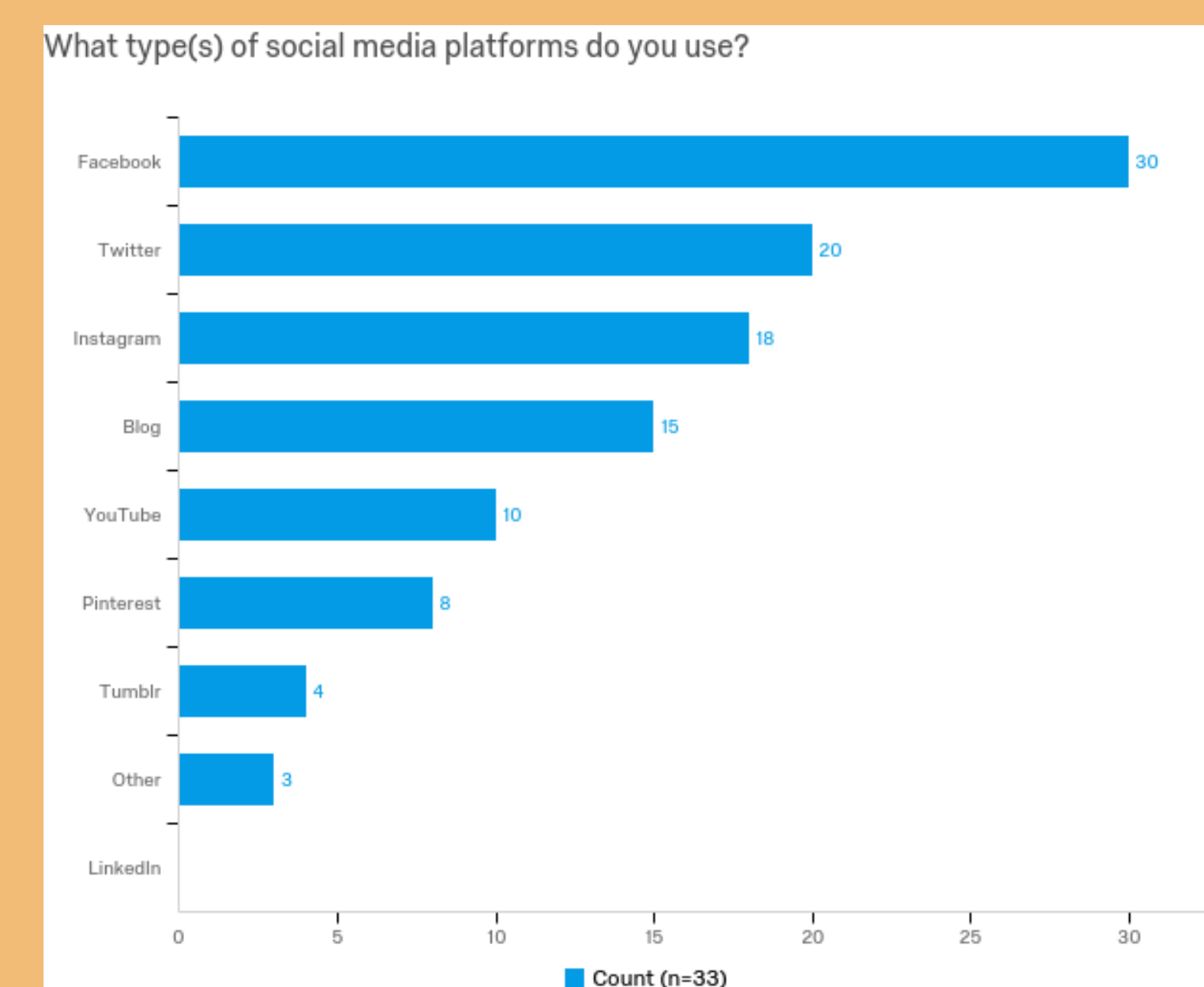
- 84.4% responded that yes, they do use marketing materials of the following types:



- The most popular marketing material is signs at 92.3%, then posters (88.5%), followed closely by promotional items (84.6%), & physical displays (80.8%). Many also used brochures (73.1%) & digital displays (65.4%)

Results: Social Media

- Out of the 33 libraries who completed the survey, 97% use social media as an outreach tool
- 30 out of the original 33 stated that they use Facebook, the next popular being Twitter (66.7%) & then Instagram at 60%. Following Instagram libraries were most likely to use a blog (50%), then YouTube (33.3%), Pinterest (26.7%), & lastly Tumblr (13.3%)
- It was found that most libraries (73.3%) spend five hours or less weekly creating, posting, & managing social media



Results: Staffing & Budget

- The majority of those involved in marketing materials, social media accounts, & newsletters are staff & librarians. Others leveraged the help of students, outside help (communication/marketing department, design services, etc.), or a mixed committee
- 11 out of 31 libraries stated they had a budget
- 5 libraries said that their budget was less than \$1,000, another 5 said it was between \$2,000 & \$5,000 & only 1 said that their budget was between \$5,000 & \$10,000
- Some libraries stated that the budget was flexible, informal or that the library used the program's general budget or the budget for printing & supplies. The rest stated that they did not have a budget for this area

Results: Newsletter

- 13 out 31 (46.7%) do publish a newsletter.
- In regards to how much time per week a library spends on the newsletter, write-in answers included:
 - 15 hours once a semester,
 - 40 hours per issue (per semester)
 - 10 hours per week for two to three weeks
 - 20-30 hours preparing a seasonal publication

Success & Challenges

- Many of the success stories revolved around events that the libraries had done, promotional videos, collaborations with different departments or administrators on campus & hiring students to help
- When asked about particular challenges with marketing and communication, most responses focused on allocating enough time and money, coming up with creative content, staying consistent, getting librarians & staff involved, as well as developing interest from students

Moving Forward

- At Hope, a User Experience committee has been formed, made up of 1 librarian & 3 staff members that meet monthly.
- One staff member has had 25% of her time reallocated to devote to marketing & outreach, including creating content for new digital displays
- This staff member & a student oversee the Facebook page, the Twitter account, & the blog
- Student spent 2-4 hrs. per week creating, posting, & managing social media content

Future Research:

- Look into other social media platforms (Instagram, Snapchat, etc.)
- Continuing interaction with various departments on campus via social media – connecting what we have with what they're doing