

BOOK REVIEW

Social Media and Genre Studies

Kenny, T. (2023). *Social Media and Genre Studies: An Investigation of Facebook and Twitter Higher Education Web Pages*. Lexington Books. ISBN 9781666907353. 214pp. Listed price: \$100 (Hardcover). Also available as eBook: \$45.

Review by J. Drew Edwards, Reference Librarian, St. Philip's College, San Antonio

Social Media and Genre Studies explores the use of higher education social media accounts to determine if they have a consistent set of genre rules and what these may be. The author notes that their definition for genre is “a kind of communication that has similar purpose, form, and functionality in professional and academic environments as a way for employees to interact, post content, and complete tasks and responsibilities.” The research includes a quantitative analysis of one hundred different institutions’ Facebook and Twitter posts over a one-month period, along with interviews of individuals in social media roles at these institutions. Themes are created from both datasets to analyze the purpose, form, and function of both Facebook and Twitter (now X) in this setting.

The work is thorough, providing similar conclusions across different sections that make it convenient, if somewhat repetitive, as a reference. For researchers interested in specific aspects of Kenny’s findings, the format eliminates searching through the title for evidence or analysis. For instance, in one chapter presenting the number of posts in ten distinct categories, three tables are conveniently supplied: one for Twitter, one for Facebook, and one comparing the data from the previous two tables side by side. This enables a researcher to have a quick reference to the author’s current analysis without

searching for previously displayed material. However, occasional repetitiveness in the writing, along with some minor grammatical errors, makes it clear that a final round of editing is needed. An example of close repetition of an idea through paraphrase is on pages 120-121 (the first and third sentences below):

Timing relates to how quickly the institution's online community (social media users on Facebook and Twitter following a college or university) respond or react to a post on the institutional page. The post is created and published by the employee tasked with social media at the college or university. Additionally, timing represents how quickly a user engages with the post or tweet and writes a message responding to the institution's post.

While this example is the most egregious, similar errors do occur throughout the text.

The largest concern for the practicality of this text is how volatile the current social media environment is. The data collection occurred from January to February of 2019, before the purchase of Twitter by Elon Musk and its subsequent change to X. Since this time, generative artificial intelligence (in the form of tools such as ChatGPT) has proliferated. It is unknown how much these resources are utilized by those in social media management roles. Although outside the scope of this title, the U.S. regulation of TikTok also demonstrates how unstable these platforms can be. Creating an analysis of genre to encompass form and function for this shifting landscape seems prone to obsolescence.

Although the sample size is small, with only ten respondents, the personal interviews with social media managers are the most engaging material. These interviews highlight not only the larger institutional goals and policies for social media channels, but how these are put into practice. Employees discuss how content is made, considerations for whether material is shared or exclusive between platforms, and what moderation policies are in effect for community engagement. As genre's form and function are defined by real world cases, these interviews are crucial to understanding how both are developing. By analyzing word frequency, Kelly offers evidence of the primary areas of focus for these managers, although the presentation of this evidence could be made clearer. The most apparent themes to emerge are the differences in content for Facebook and Twitter. Facebook appears to have a more academic focus, while campus life is more central to an institution's Twitter presence.

Social Media's opening chapter demonstrates that Kenny is familiar with the field of genre studies, offering an overview from its origins to current developments that inspired the title's topic. This title is a logical progression to the existing research on genres, in terms of both documents and communications in higher education as well as research on social media accounts from professional/academic settings. While there are interviews from professionals included, the focus of the research is more academic than practical. Both the interviews and the post analysis consider what kind of content is being shared regularly, both in terms of the information contained in each post and what media are being used: text, images, videos, etc. Professionals in the field will not learn anything new from this content, but it does provide statistics for further research.

For those interested in this field of study—social media and its uses in higher education—this is a worthwhile text. It provides a foundation upon which further research can build and includes the full transcripts of the interviews conducted, so researchers could possibly do their own analysis with this data. However, despite the interviews being focused on real-world concerns and practices, the effectiveness of the social media accounts included is not meaningfully accounted for. There is no focus on engagement rates, nor for any specific posts on either platform, and there's no discussion of audience growth rate. Social media managers in academia who are hoping for insights into developing better policies or workflows should not consider this title.