Stakeholder communication in academic libraries: An exploration of annual reports and Instagram

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A B S T R A C T

Annual reports are an opportunity to demonstrate transparency and communicate with stakeholders. This article presents an exploratory content analysis of library annual reports and Instagram accounts in a state university system. The researchers synthesized common themes in content and structure developing archetypal formats of annual reports. These archetypes clarify the interplay between audience, purpose, content and design in developing a cohesive product. Findings indicate that libraries are neglecting opportunities to repurpose content between Instagram and annual reports. Information collected for the annual report provides content that can be tailored for Instagram posts, which in turn directs interested audience members to the full annual report. Finally, the best practices and strategies to improve communication and engagement with stakeholders identified by the researchers will be shared.

Introduction

Annual reports are a staple in many academic libraries. Most libraries gather the same data every year, tracking their progress by comparing the current year to the previous one. Compiling door counts and the number of reference transactions is an easy task resulting in an efficient annual routine requiring minimal revisions from year to year. However, this complacency can remove any value that comes from annual report preparation.

The researchers' library had used the same annual report data collection and structure since 2011. The average report was 69.25 pages and was quite detailed. The report provides a rich, narrative glimpse into the previous year's activities. However, it was so detailed as to be overwhelming to an external audience. For example, it lacked an executive summary. In looking critically at our own annual report, we realized it had transitioned into an internal document, written by librarians for librarians.

In 2022, two librarians started exploring how we could translate our traditional annual report into an effective marketing and communications tool. As a first effort, in addition to the traditional annual report, the marketing librarian created a single-page infographic highlighting compelling statistics demonstrating how the library benefits students and faculty. The infographic was well-received by the provost and library administration. Later, the infographic was shared widely with

faculty and the response was positive with anecdotal feedback that indicated they liked the format and information included. However, creating both documents simultaneously was difficult as the data from the full annual report was required for the creation of the infographic. Additionally, the time between the end of the fiscal year and the deadline for departmental meetings communications was short. Finally, the infographic version could not stand alone, provided an incomplete picture of the library's accomplishments, lacked important historical data, but created a compelling story when communicating with faculty. The question remained; how could we improve the annual report? We established a goal to develop a more efficient report preparation process yielding a detailed, yet readable report with enhanced versatility for different audiences and purposes.

An initial review of the recent literature on academic library-focused annual reports resulted in more questions. Was our perception of the annual report as a tool to communicate value to stakeholders shared by similar institutions in the same university system? What actions were other academic libraries taking? This research article is a content analysis of the publicly available annual reports and Instagram accounts of academic libraries in the state university system to determine how academic libraries are designing and utilizing the information in their annual reports.

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Literature review

Evolutions in the purpose of library annual reports

Annual reports traditionally have been a means of communicating a library's activities over the year to libraries, patrons, employees, and other stakeholders. The intent of the author results in variability in design and purpose. An annual report designed to collect data in a central location for use in decision-making will look different from one designed to share the library's value to stakeholders than one designed with advocacy and fundraising in mind. Thus, the purpose of the annual report determines what information is included, how the contents are organized, and the communication style. The purpose of the library annual report has shifted over time.

Lear (2006) provides a comprehensive overview of the history of library annual reports. Libraries have been creating annual reports since at least the nineteenth century. Before the mid-1900s, annual reports were a way for libraries to share information and innovative practices with each other and the public. However, starting in the 1920s, several shifts took place including the internalization of the documents and differentiation of reports depending on the audience (Lear, 2006, p.471). The design, collection of information, and purpose of the annual report have all been regularly debated in the profession. Rarely, if ever, has a consensus been reached.

A clear dichotomy exists in annual reports based on whether this communication tool exists for internal or external audiences (Lear, 2006; Sauer, 2006). Sauer (2006) suggests annual reports are either used for managerial purposes (internal audience) or used for public relations and advocacy (external audience). An internal annual report collects data that library administrators can use to make informed decisions. In contrast, an external annual report exists to build support and advocacy among stakeholders. Considering the recent precariousness in library funding and support, annual reports must utilize aspects of both internal and external strategies. Effective advocacy is built on objective data which is communicated in a way meaningful to the intended audience (Killick & Wilson, 2019, Chapter 8; Martin & Grinstead, 2019; Murray & Ireland, 2018).

Communication with stakeholders

Annual reports are an opportunity to communicate the library's value and how it supports the institution's mission and goals (Hall et al., 2019). It is essential that libraries communicate how they support institutional priorities given that administrators may not be aware of the role and impact of the library. Without effective communication to campus constituents, the library may lose opportunities to highlight their contributions to student success initiatives and subsequent funding (Hall et al., 2019; Murray & Ireland, 2018; Saunders, 2015).

Making connections with assessment

The library's strategic plan is another opportunity to connect library activities to the institution's mission and strategic plan (Hursh, 2021; Saunders, 2015). Creating these connections is important in communicating the library's value to the institution. One way to create this connection is through assessment, which is a critical component in both annual reports and strategic plans (Killick & Wilson, 2019, Chapter 8; Saunders, 2015). Assessment data are essential to establish benchmarks to the library's and institution's goals, foster a positive environment of advocacy, and communicate effectively with stakeholders. Advocacy for support and funding is more compelling when it is based on assessment data that is tailored to the stakeholder's interests and needs (Killick & Wilson, 2019, Chapter 8; Murray & Ireland, 2018). In addition, provosts value annual reports and accompanying data demonstrating correlations between library use and measures of student success, retention, enrollment, and faculty research productivity are the most influential on funding requests (Murray & Ireland, 2018). For most academic libraries,

a provost is a crucial stakeholder as well as a readily available recipient of targeted library communication. Additional channels of communication are necessary to reach other stakeholders, such as students and faculty. Libraries can take advantage of their existing website and social media to share information from the annual report with these stakeholders.

Website as conversation

Making annual reports, assessment data, strategic plans, and similar information accessible on the library website is a tenet of transparency and shows a willingness to both share information and engage stakeholders in a conversation (Clunie & Parrish, 2018; Pacios & Serna, 2020; Springmier et al., 2018). This willingness to share information serves as the first step in building support for the library. One way to measure transparency is assessing the visibility or ease of accessing information on the library website, as well as the quality of the information included in the report (Pacios & Serna, 2020). A well-designed annual report includes details on activities supported with evidence like assessment or statistical data, as well as describes goals, achievements, projects, activities, and regular operations (Killick & Wilson, 2019, Chapter 8; Pacios & Serna, 2020; Sauer, 2006). In addition, the depth and breadth of information shared on the library website can demonstrate the library's commitment to accountability and using data for evidence-based decisions (Clunie & Parrish, 2018). The library's website can also connect stakeholders to additional communication channels by incorporating direct links to social media, making it easier to identify and find legitimate accounts (Lei et al., 2019; Rachman, 2020; Şengel et al., 2022).

Social media use

Transitioning the conversation with stakeholders from the library website to relevant social media can facilitate engagement with students, faculty, staff, and the surrounding campus community due to the structure of social networking platforms (SNPs). The use of social media platforms can vary depending on certain demographics like age. Identifying which stakeholders to communicate with can help with selecting a social media platform and information to share. For example, an academic library might want to select a platform that is popular with college students. While 47 % of American adults use Instagram that number grows to 78 % when looking at users in the 18–29 age range (Pew Research Center, 2024). Therefore, Instagram could be an important platform to target these college-aged users. Social media also offers the opportunity to reduce information overload from the library website or annual report especially through the incorporation of visual elements (Lock & Araujo, 2020).

Previous literature has examined the use of various social networking platforms by corporations to share and engage stakeholders in specific types of communication, for example, corporate social responsibility (Lock & Araujo, 2020; Quiles-Soler et al., 2023) and voluntary corporate political disclosure (Lei et al., 2019). Literature focused on academic libraries has explored the types of information shared (Rachman, 2020) and the importance of social media in sharing the assessment and value of an academic library (Clunie & Parrish, 2018). Further, SNPs can add robustness to the corporate identity, increase transparency, and strengthen relationships with stakeholders (Devereaux et al., 2017; Lei et al., 2019; Quiles-Soler et al., 2023). Despite the benefits of social media to connect with stakeholders to communicate important information, many companies do not take full advantage of the platforms. Researchers cite the challenges of increased transparency, accountability, communication, and decrease in control as reasons why corporations hesitate to post information that could invite criticism (Quiles-Soler et al., 2023; Şengel et al., 2022).

Comprehension, design, and the hub and spoke model

Annual reports should be tailored to the intended audience to be an effective communication strategy for marketing and outreach

(Browning & Freedman, 2021; Killick & Wilson, 2019, Chapter 8; Martin & Grinstead, 2019). Annual reports with a focus on statistics and limited context can be difficult for stakeholders to understand (Springmier et al., 2018). The most effective way to communicate with stakeholders is to create a narrative that is engaging and easy to comprehend (Killick & Wilson, 2019). Incorporating visuals and infographics can be a useful and important tool to boost comprehension, aid recall, and draw attention (Hursh, 2021; Lock & Araujo, 2020; Martin & Grinstead, 2019). Using a hub and spoke model and repurposing existing annual reports for different communication channels like social media can increase visibility, efficacy, and create efficiencies in the workflow (Browning & Freedman, 2021; Huber, 2021; Hursh, 2021). This model encourages the reuse of information to increase communication across multiple channels and supports refinement of materials for each stakeholder group. The initial investment in planning, data collection, and composing an annual report often requires significant time and effort from multiple librarians. Reusing the content to reach multiple stakeholder audiences across different communication channels increases the return on investment.

Methodology

The researchers conducted an exploratory content analysis of the library websites, publicly available library annual reports, and library Instagram accounts of the state university system's institutions which consists of four research universities, four comprehensive universities, nine state universities, and nine state colleges. The research was completed in three phases. Initial analysis focused on availability and location of the annual report on the library website or institutional repository, the contents and structure, design elements, and potential audience. The second phase was a content analysis of the located annual reports. The third phase focused on library communication of annual report information with stakeholders through social media.

Phase 1

This study started in the summer of 2023 with a search for the annual reports from each institution's library or main library if it was a multi-library system. The initial search also included searching Google for the library's annual report. The researchers noted the presence and location of the annual report on the library website and which years' reports were available online. Out of 26 institutions, 11 had publicly available library annual reports. The two most recent annual reports were downloaded for review and content analysis. In one case, the annual report appeared to have been replaced by an interactive online-only impact report. In this instance, the two most recent annual reports were downloaded. An Excel spreadsheet was created to record this information.

Phase 2

The researchers independently reviewed the two most recent annual reports for the 11 institutions and performed a content analysis with objective and subjective categories. Objectively, the researchers noted the nomenclature of the document, file format, length, the presence of a table of contents, statistics, and mentions of a strategic plan, vision, goals, or mission of the library. Subjectively, the researchers analyzed the skimmability, content, design, first impression, and tentative classification. Subsequently, the researchers developed categories to describe the annual report's format, potential audience, content, and purpose.

Phase 3

To analyze stakeholder communication through Instagram, the researchers needed to identify the applicable academic library Instagram accounts. First, the researchers visited the academic library's website to ascertain if there was a link to the social media account for the library. If no accounts were linked, the researchers then searched on Instagram. The researchers also referred to the Libraries on Instagram directory (https://katieanderson.camden.rutgers.edu/libraries_instagram/). Once accounts were identified, the researchers reviewed Instagram posts, excluding stories and reels, to determine if annual-report-like data had been shared on the platform. Posts were reviewed from January 2019, or the earliest post available, through May 2024. Links to posts referencing annual-report-like data that demonstrated evidence of an assessment culture were recorded in an Excel spreadsheet.

Findings

Phase 1

When analyzing academic library websites for annual reports in the summer of 2023, only 11 of 26 institutions had posted reports, specifically titled annual reports, publicly online. Annual reports were not the only way that libraries shared data. Two libraries provided LibGuides with assessment dashboards or library statistics and one library shared their strategic plan. However, these three libraries and their respective documents were outside the scope of our analysis. In the state university system, six academic libraries made their annual reports accessible from the About the Library or About Us pages. From About, annual reports were found under pages like Dean's Welcome, Library Assessment, Mission and Assessment, Fiscal Year Highlights, and more. The remaining annual reports were in institutional repositories. For the most comprehensive analysis, the researchers included the two most recent annual reports available from each library no matter the age. The annual reports ranged in date from 2007 to 2022. Six institutions had annual reports posted from 2020 or newer (2020–2022). Five institutions had a history of sharing annual reports with the most recent reports ranging from 2007 to 2019. If one annual report was shared online, there was a high likelihood that additional annual reports existed online suggesting an organizational culture prioritizing transparency and accountability.

Phase 2

The researchers independently reviewed a total of 22 annual reports from 11 academic libraries analyzing the following:

Purpose and classification

Each annual report was reviewed for format, content, design, audience, and other factors. Three defining factors emerged: audience, purpose, and strategic information. The purpose was determined by examining the contents of the annual report, including types of information, level of detail of the information, organization of the document, and written tone. Three different purposes were identified: administrative, accountability, outreach and marketing.

Administrative. Administrative annual reports record the library's activities in-depth, creating a detailed institutional record that can be used to track activities and changes over time or for administrative decisions and planning.

Accountability. Accountability annual reports exist to provide transparency in the library's performance by sharing selected statistics. These reports are very brief, with little to no narrative content. They consist primarily of tables or infographics.

Outreach & marketing. Outreach annual reports include selected library activities, emphasizing particular accomplishments. Marketing annual reports focused on strategic communication and building brand recognition. In addition to highlighting selected accomplishments, these

reports include human-interest stories, events, and how the library supports the institution's mission. Both outreach and marketing annual reports emphasize library accomplishments by sharing selected information. These reports are not comprehensive and are not designed to be used for administrative decisions.

Nomenclature

Of the analyzed reports, 73 % (n = 16) included the words "annual report" in the title of the document. Other terms used were *fiscal highlights* and *impact report*. Two reports had no title except for the library name, year, and branding.

File format

Most annual reports were available as PDF documents (91 %) (n = 20).

Length

The average length of the reports was 22 pages. The shortest annual report was 2 pages; the longest was 73 pages.

Table of contents and statistics

Of the reports analyzed, 41 % (n = 9) included a table of contents. All the annual reports incorporated statistics in the document. The presence of statistics is notable considering the preference of stakeholders like provosts for statistics (Murray & Ireland, 2018).

Strategic plan, vision, goals, mission

Strategic information was defined as including the strategic plan, initiatives, goals, mission, or vision in the annual report. Only 32 % (n = 7) made mention of the library's strategic plan, vision, goals, or mission. Demonstrating the work that the academic library performs in support of institutional initiatives like retention can be an important message to communicate with stakeholders and administrators as it can showcase the library's value (Murray & Ireland, 2018; Saunders, 2015).

Skimmability, content, and design

Skimmability was assessed based on the inclusion of formatting, including headings, bullet points, graphs, tables, etc. Annual reports that contain mostly narrative content with little to no formatting were determined to be less skimmable. Most of the reports (77 %) (n = 17) were classified as skimmable, with content that was easy to skim and digest. Design elements, such as infographics, tables, graphs, and photographs can help stakeholders make sense of the documentation or add an emotional connection (Hursh, 2021; Lock & Araujo, 2020; Martin & Grinstead, 2019).

Audience

Audiences were defined as internal (73 %, n = 16) or external (27 %, n = 6) based on commonly recognized design conventions. Reports with detailed statistics, data, analysis, library jargon, and professional commentary were scored as internal audience (Browning & Freedman, 2021; Martin & Grinstead, 2019; Sauer, 2006). Reports written in approachable style without library jargon or in a conversational tone, with focused content, colorful thematic or infographic elements were scored as external audience (Browning & Freedman, 2021; Martin & Grinstead, 2019; Sauer, 2006).

Annual report formats

The defining factors were combined with the analysis of format and design to identify five annual report formats with distinct characteristics: report, newsletter, magazine, infographic, and fact sheet. These five formats provide a helpful way to categorize annual report styles.

Report style. Report style annual reports have an internal audience, serve an administrative purpose, consist primarily of written content, and may include tables, charts, or graphs as demonstrated in Fig. 1. The advantage of report style is that it provides a detailed institutional record that tracks activities and changes over time. The disadvantage of report style is the amount of detailed information included is overwhelming for external audiences, including campus stakeholders. Information overload makes it difficult to emphasize library accomplishments. Of the reports analyzed, 45 % (n = 10) were determined to have a report-style format and the average length of these documents was 33 pages.

Newsletter style. In the newsletter style, we begin to see the incorporation of small-scale graphics like photographs and clipart as demonstrated in Fig. 2. Of the reports analyzed, 9 % (n = 2) had a newsletter-style format. The text has more formatting including columns and bolding for emphasis. The average length of the newsletter format was 15 pages. The formatting, graphics, and more digestible length suggest that this is a document with a wider circulation but still focused on an audience of stakeholders associated with the library, such as employees or a Friends of the Library group. The newsletter format is well-executed but has a distinct sense of being an "in-house production" with limited marketing usage. The graphics included are small, qualitative representations of library activities and accomplishments like attendance at a workshop or library staff and their respective awards. An advantage of the newsletter-style report is that it emphasizes the library's accomplishments by sharing selected information. The disadvantage of the newsletter style is that it provides an incomplete record of library activities and thus cannot be used for administrative decision-making.

Magazine style. Magazine style is the most visually appealing of the formats and requires the greatest investment in time and resources to create. Of the reports analyzed, 27 % (n = 6) had a magazine-style format. The average length of the magazine style format was 19 pages. This style has a high production value which is reflected in the professional photography, advanced document layouts, and other features indicative of the time and expertise required to produce a high-quality product as demonstrated in Fig. 3. Content is carefully selected to highlight the library's accomplishments. Human interest pieces, such as quotes or stories about students, librarians, or faculty are included to demonstrate library impact. The overall format and design encourage a pleasant reading experience that supports skipping around and skimming the document. The advantage of magazine style is that it is attractive and appealing to an external (non-librarian) audience and balances the resources spent with a potential enhanced return on investment in the form of reader engagement and follow-through on calls-to-action. The disadvantage of magazine style is that it requires the most resources to design, plan, and produce compared to the other formats. Due to the focus on library accomplishments, human interest stories, calls to action, and other marketable content, magazine style provides an incomplete record of library activities and thus cannot be used for administrative decision-making.

Fact sheet style and infographic style. Fact sheet and infographic styles are remarkably similar; both are composed primarily of statistical or numerical information accompanied by a smaller amount of text. The main difference between the two styles is the way the data is displayed. Infographic style (Fig. 4) is enhanced with visual representation of the data, while fact sheet style (Fig. 5) relies on data tables. The main audience is internal, although infographic style annual reports can reach a more external audience if more context is provided for the reader through meticulous design and formatting. The advantage of these styles is the efficiency in which the document communicates the library's value. The disadvantage of these styles is they are limited to the accomplishments that can be measured in numbers or statistical formats, and readers are left to interpret the contents themselves, due to the lack of context or explanation. Of the reports analyzed, 9 % (n = 2) were fact

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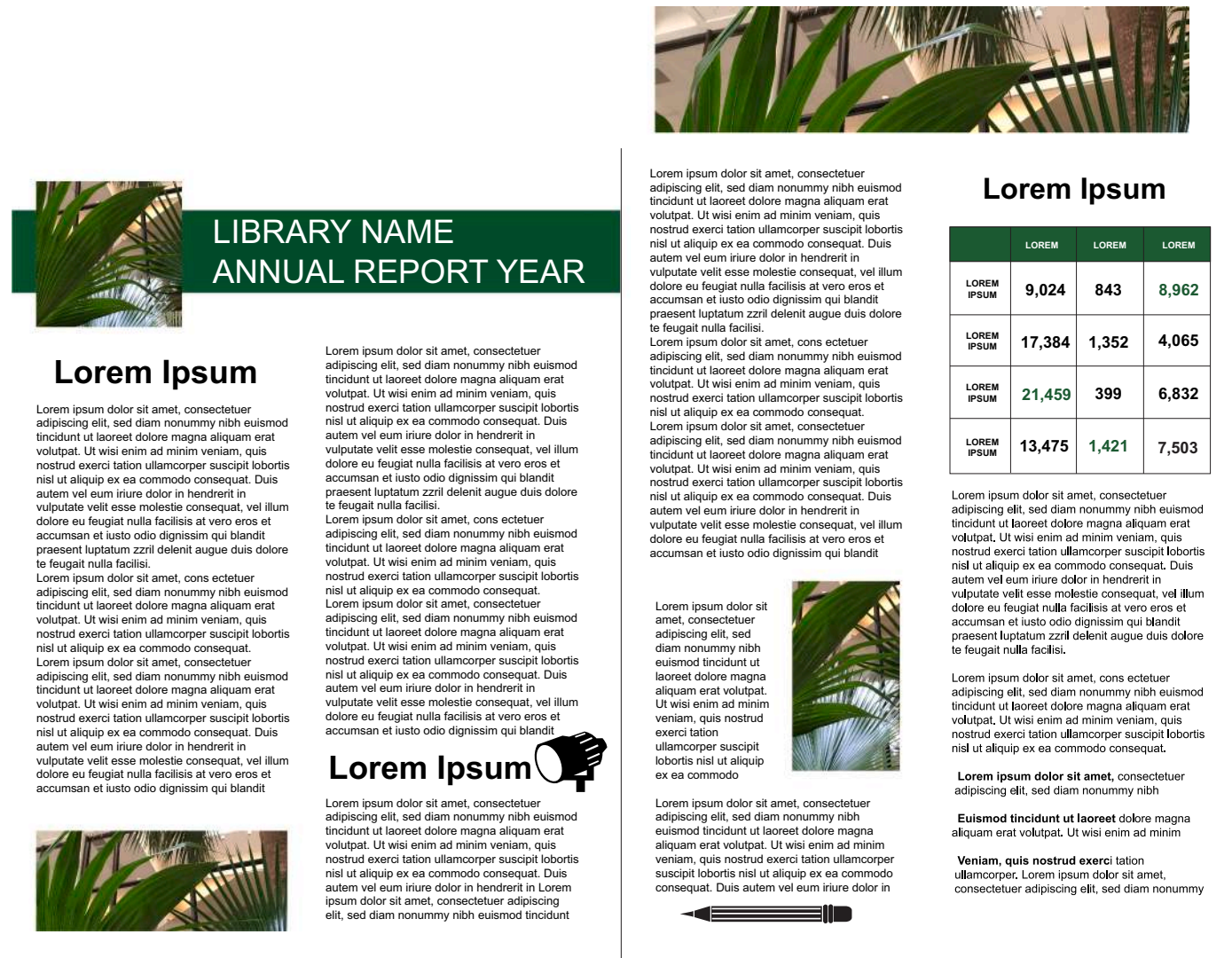• Molestie consequat, vel illum dolore eu feugiat nulla facilisis at vero
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Fig. 1. Representation of prototypical report style annual report.

sheet style and another 9 % (n = 2) were infographic style.

Phase 3

Given the amount of time invested in preparing an annual report, repurposing the content for wider dissemination, through the diversification of communication channels, can increase the return on investment by reaching a wider audience. The concept of resharing information across diverse channels and directing the reader back to a central document, such as an annual report, is a tenet of the hub and spoke model. The researchers decided to focus on Instagram because it is widely adopted among academic libraries and one of their target audiences in stakeholder communication.

Instagram is a social media platform that is popular with the 18–29 demographic which encompasses the age of the traditional undergraduate student. Of the 26 libraries in the state university system, 20 libraries had an Instagram account. This is an adoption rate of 77 % (n = 20) compared to the presence of annual reports (42 %, n = 11). This result further supports the prevalence of social media being used to share information in academic libraries (Clunie & Parrish, 2018). Comparatively, 91 % (n = 10) of academic libraries that had public annual reports also had Instagram accounts. Of the 20 academic libraries that had Instagram accounts, 70 % (n = 14) had their accounts linked from the library's homepage. The remaining accounts were located by searching Instagram, the library's website, the school's website, and referring to the Libraries on Instagram directory.

An assessment culture and annual reports

Of the 20 academic libraries that had Instagram accounts, 90 % (n = 18) demonstrated evidence of an assessment culture, sharing information that could be found in an annual report.

Instagram posts that included information from the following categories were evidence of an assessment culture:

• Events and event attendance
• Feedback/surveys for library experience
• Faculty and staff accomplishments, awards or recognition, and publications
• Personnel changes (new hires, retirements)
• Fundraising posts soliciting donations
• Updates to library policies, facility, services, equipment, and hours
• References to strategic plan
• Statistics about library services and library use

What needs to be determined is whether the discrepancy between academic library annual reports and Instagram reflects academic libraries not completing annual reports or not making their annual reports available to the public. If it is the former, then most of these institutions could transform the content that they are producing already for social media into an annual report. If it is the latter, the willingness to share annual report information via social media with its enhanced communication opportunities, but not through a publicly accessible website, is an interesting dichotomy. However, it is worth noting that only 25 % (n = 5) of academic libraries incorporated statistics about their library services or usage in their Instagram posts or captions. This was

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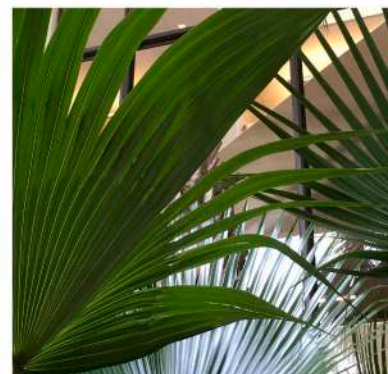
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LOREM IPSUM	17,384	1,352	4,065
LOREM IPSUM	21,459	399	6,832
LOREM IPSUM	13,475	1,421	7,503

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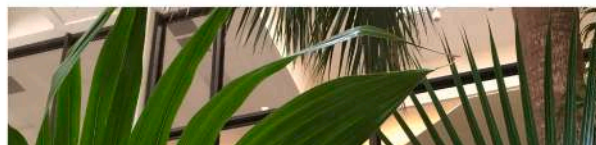
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Fig. 2. Representation of prototypical newsletter style annual report.

surprising because every annual report included statistics. In addition, infographic posts would seem like a good fit for the platform and would allow student stakeholders to get an idea of library impact. Perhaps like the corporations that are hesitant to share their corporate social responsibility data through social media, this annual report-like data would be too transparent (Lock & Araujo, 2020; Medina Aguerrebere et al., 2022). Interestingly, the one library that had the most social media posts with annual-report-like data did not have a public annual report available. However, their usage of Instagram post implies that they are incorporating the hub and spoke model into their workflow and that this data and content are coming from one source that is shared across many different channels.

Stakeholder communication

The other thing to consider about social media is the potential to reach stakeholders. Currently, there is limited research to help libraries estimate or benchmark their social media performance and effectiveness in reaching stakeholders. We propose that one potential way to calculate stakeholder reach is by looking at the common components of a library's Instagram account following – students, faculty, staff, and other campus departments. Stakeholder reach could be estimated by dividing each library's follower count by the sum of their 2022 IPEDS (https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds) Enrollment and Human Resources data, which results in an average of 6.6 % stakeholders following their library's Instagram.

However, only 47 % of adults use Instagram (Pew Research Center, 2024). Dividing each library's follower count by 47 % of the sum of the 2022 IPEDS Enrollment and Human Resources data increases the average to 14.1 % of stakeholders following the library's Instagram. To summarize, based on these calculations, it is estimated that academic libraries are reaching on average 14.1 % of their potential stakeholders (faculty, staff, students) through their Instagram accounts. The follower count used in these calculations could also include alumni, who could be considered potential stakeholders if donations are of interest, but would also include other external entities like other library accounts, local businesses, etc.

Depending on the target audience or intended stakeholders, the capability of an academic library's Instagram to reach those populations could be even lower than the estimated 14.1 %. This introduces some questions about the value of the platform in the library workflow. For example, has the academic library usage of Instagram reached the point where sharing annual report data is worthwhile? However, if a library is already completing an annual report, Instagram does provide an additional communication channel to share that information with an external audience.

Trends that inform "best practices"

An analysis of the annual reports from academic libraries in the state

Fig. 3. Representation of prototypical magazine style annual report.

university system distilled the following commonalities that could be interpreted as best practices:

Table of contents

Incorporating a Table of Contents creates a structured document that is easy for stakeholders to navigate. With an average annual report length of 24 pages, this is a quick way to improve the utilization of your document.

Strategic plans

Including strategic information demonstrates how the library supports the institutional mission, goals, vision, and strategic objectives. The annual report is an opportunity to share the value of your library with provosts and administrators. Viewing the annual report as a rote task and a dumping ground of database statistics misses an opportunity to create a positive narrative. Well-designed annual reports have the potential to build years' worth of evidence that shows how the academic library supports student success, retention, and more. The annual report gives academic libraries a platform to build administrative support by clearly linking library activities to institutional priorities.

Statistics and clarity

Including context, clear language, and explanations enhances the statistical content included in annual reports. Every report included in this analysis contained statistics. Incorporating statistics into a report is a convenient way to gauge performance for stakeholders like provosts who value information provided in that format (Murray & Ireland, 2018). The real "best practice" should be providing context to what these numbers represent. Libraries are not immune from siloing; library metrics and jargon can be as confusing for internal audiences as it is for external audiences. Providing descriptive explanations makes it easier for readers to understand the significance of the statistical data. Completing an annual report provides a training opportunity on how to communicate data clearly and effectively and what it means for the library's overall health, strategic plan, and the university's mission. This practice becomes invaluable when communicating to external audiences about the budget, library services, and more.

Return on investment

Viewing the annual report as a worthy investment of time with the potential for an increased return on investment can help mitigate some of the frustrations of yet another task in a sea of work responsibilities. A benefit of investing more time and resources into the production of an annual report is increasing the number of by-products that can be used for additional marketing and outreach initiatives. For instance, arranging for the institutional marketing or communications department to take professional photographs of the library building, events, or exhibits results in products that can be incorporated into the annual report and also reused for brochures, flyers, websites, or university press releases. Additionally, narratives crafted in an annual report can be shared via social media, in meetings with faculty and other departments on campus, and more.

Audience & purpose

Identifying the audience and purpose of the annual report early in the planning stages will help determine what content to include and the optimal format. Incorporating key elements that convey the library's value and its role in supporting institutional initiatives to the target audience will guide the document's overall structure. The types of data included in the report and how they are presented can also be
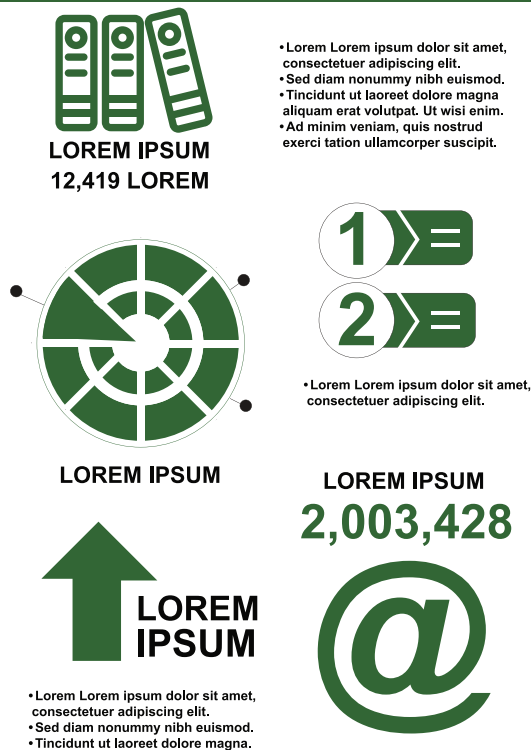
Fig. 4. Representation of prototypical infographic style annual report.

Library Name Annual Report Year

	LOREM	LOREM	LOREM
LOREM IPSUM	9,024	843	3,962
LOREM IPSUM	17,384	1,352	4,065
LOREM IPSUM	21,459	399	6,832
LOREM IPSUM	13,475	1,421	7,503
LOREM IPSUM	18,227	991	5,893
LOREM IPSUM	11,763	1,934	4,894

Fig. 5. Representation of prototypical factsheet style annual report.

determined by the audience. If the academic library is interested in reaching an external audience with a goal of fundraising or outreach, the magazine style report with its engaging stories and visually attractive images is an effective choice to promote the library. External audiences might be more interested in engaging qualitative data that shares the impact of the library. The benefit of this approach is that it can serve as an effective marketing tool and will yield additional content that can be easily reused and shared to promote the library. If the document is envisioned to serve an internal audience and function as a historical record that can be used for administrative purposes, the report style, with its detailed narrative structure, would be a good fit. Internal audiences and administrators might be more interested in quantitative data like statistics and library usage to assist in goal tracking and benchmarking. There are a variety of design elements and content choices to choose from when crafting an annual report. Knowing the target audience and purpose of the report will help you make choices that support your library's goals.

Conclusions

In this exploration, the intersection of transparency, accountability, social media, and communicating with stakeholders is evident. Communication is key to transparency and accountability, with many approaches to communicating with stakeholders. Annual reports are an effective way to present information about the library to stakeholders but allow for little to no feedback from stakeholders. Annual reports vary greatly in their length, style, and the amount and type of information included. Despite this variability, several trends were identified among the annual reports, including nomenclature, statistics, and location on library website. The researchers proposed four categories of format styles to help describe characteristics that were often found together in annual reports: report style, magazine style, newsletter style, and infographic/fact sheet style. Hopefully, the description of these

styles can serve as inspiration for librarians looking to create a new or updated annual report. The researchers determined a mixed styles approach integrating elements from report and magazine-style annual reports creates the most versatile document while still facilitating repurposing content on social media platforms and in other outreach materials. Libraries that do not make their annual report available online are missing an opportunity to communicate with stakeholders and build support for their library. However, posting the annual report online is a form of passive sharing and libraries should consider how they can facilitate communication and engagement with their stakeholders.

Instagram and other social media platforms support two-way communication between the library and its followers. Many academic libraries communicate assessment or annual-report-like data on Instagram which illustrates some degree of assessment culture. However, only 55 % (n = 10) of the libraries sharing annual-report-like information on Instagram also shared that information in a publicly available annual report. That number rises to 72 % (n = 13) if we factor in the presence of any assessment data on their library website. Libraries should consider innovative ways to engage their stakeholders, from students to faculty to administration, by sharing assessment and accomplishments information on social media.

Limitations

This study was limited to libraries in one state university system. The goal was to identify themes and trends across annual reports and stakeholder communication through Instagram. These findings are informative but not generalizable to other library systems as each system is unique.

This study relied on annual reports that were publicly accessible on the library's website or institutional repository. More recent annual reports may exist that are not posted online due to changes in personnel responsibilities or website design. Another consideration could be variations in terminology preventing discovery of applicable documents. Some libraries provide similar information in other strategic documents, such as strategic plans, as part of their assessment documentation, or in an impact report or data webpage.

Recommendations for future research

There are several opportunities for additional research into annual reports, transparency, accountability, and communication with stakeholders. Further research is needed on what information is collected by academic libraries, how that information is used, and what information is being shared and with whom. Academic libraries collect a lot of statistical information, and other potential information sources include feedback from patrons, survey results, staff information, etc. Understanding the possibilities in the data collection and utilization lifecycle of academic libraries can help librarians make informed choices as they plan their own assessment. Another opportunity for future research is examining how academic libraries in other states are sharing annual reports, assessment reports, and similar information. Sharing reports on the library website or repository is one level of visibility. Sharing on social media platforms that allow the audience to interact and comment on the material arguably enhances the visibility of these reports. Finally, the prevalence of information sharing across social media sites and their effectiveness as a communication tool with stakeholders is another avenue to explore.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Laura Wright: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Investigation, Conceptualization. **Samantha Paul:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Methodology, Investigation.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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