Book Review: Social Media for Academics by Mark Carrigan

While social media is an increasingly important part of academic life that can help to promote research, build networks and demonstrate impact, many remain wary about the potential risks of navigating digital terrain. In **Social Media for Academics**, **Mark Carrigan** *provides clear, practical advice on the benefits and challenges of using social media for academic purposes.* **Andy Tattersall** *welcomes this as a balanced and thoughtful guide for academics that outlines the wheres and whys of how to start and how to avoid getting it wrong in the first place.*

Social Media for Academics . Mark Carrigan. SAGE. 2016.

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Academics engaging in social media as a means to communicate their research and interests have a variety of experiences. There are those who have taken to it like a duck to water and then there are those who are like a newborn giraffe taking their first steps in the world – awkward and open to prey. In the meantime, the majority of academics have had little or no interaction with what social media has to offer, for a variety of reasons. Therefore a book that sets out its stall as *Social Media for Academics* has a lot of ground to cover and a huge potential audience.

Attempts to engage academics with anything above a mild interest in social media, whether at institutions, workshops or via the web, have at times felt like applying a big hammer to a very small nervous nut. What Mark Carrigan has set out to do is bring a more relaxed, engaging and easier approach to how academics can engage with social media. Anyone who has seen the author give a talk will no doubt be aware of his keen interest in the data that underpins social media use, and his book sets out by highlighting those ever-changing stats as a sign that change is afoot.

From the start, Carrigan gives the reader an insight into his own world; yet, despite being a social media champion, he is clearly not here to deliver a sermon. This is what makes the book different from many other guides you may come across: less dry but with plenty of academic rigour. Very often social media guides are aimed at the intermediate user; whilst this title will appeal to the most novice, it also adds weight to arguments by experts in the academic community.

The book is structured around two clear themes, those being social media activities and social media challenges. It starts with asking what existing activities could be enhanced by social media? However, the challenges of social media are many, and Carrigan is keen not to shy away from them as he offers an honest appraisal of the technologies and their pitfalls.
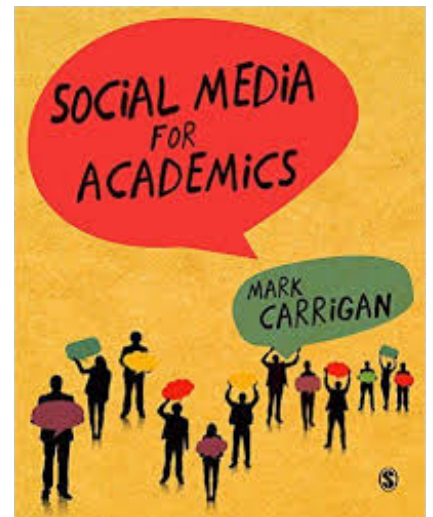
Image Credit: Social Media Class (mkhmarketing CC 2.0)

Social Media for Academics is very much a book of two halves, the first part being the foundations to practical social media use in academia. Readers are given four practical areas where they can apply social media within their research. Under the chapter heading pretext of 'Using Social Media', the reader can explore how to publicise their work, build their network, ensure public engagement and manage information. Each chapter is broken down into the evidence around each theme, opportunities and, where applicable, the pitfalls. Whilst this is not the step-by-step guide with diagrams that some academics would desire, it explores many of the possibilities in a way that is less fearful for the first-time social media user.

Carrigan explores the opportunities that can be found in creating social networks with a strong focus on Twitter. From conference Tweeting to Twitter Chats, we find out how these can lead to real-life networks. Public engagement is something that is increasingly appearing on academic wavelengths, and Carrigan also covers this theme to include students, the media and policymakers in his definition of the term. Whilst the risks are explained, Carrigan focuses on the idea of proper engagement rather than purely broadcasting messages. Many academics have latched on to the benefits of discourse around their research with the public rather than one-direction communication. Carrigan does point out that some of this can be achieved outside of social media.

The second part of the book is focused more towards the personal and professional challenges that can come with social media. Considering that some readers may be a little dubious or worried about picking up such a title, the author focuses on the positives over the problems, but never shies away from the issues over the course of the book. Being exposed to more information on the web seems almost inevitable for the majority of academics, so the book aims to offer ways to curate that content and turn that information into useful knowledge.

These careful considerations in the second part of the book show the detail of knowledge and expertise underpinning the title as a whole. One area that is often not given enough coverage when talking about academia and social media is the issue of the relationship between the personal and professional identity. All too often little thought is given to how we may appear to different audiences and how this may have negative effects in some of those camps. Nevertheless, it is an essential discussion to have, as most academics will either have had their own internal chat or one with colleagues about the issue of personal boundaries at some point in their career. Carrigan explores the various dilemmas we have using social media professionally, from our relations with friends and family

to those with our students and colleagues. Each one is turned into a case study with practical advice on crafting a good social media profile.

In the final chapter the author explores what lies ahead – again, with more possibilities come more problems. With any book like this it will always have its limitations; technology is moving faster than ever, so is our relationship with it and each other. Future iterations will no doubt be very different, but for today, this book is timely and relevant. Carrigan has set out a clear and concise book on practical things that the reader can do to engage with this ever-changing online landscape. Carrigan's experience as a hybrid academic who carries out academic work but with a strong professional element positions him in an ideal place to understand the practicalities and problems that social media brings to academia. This is no doubt in part due to his extensive experience as a blogger and podcaster. In that sense, the book is very much the author putting their money where their mouth is.

Social media stirs up an awful lot of anxiety in the academic community and, to a large extent, rightly so. Yet it does offer a world of possibilities that are not without challenges, but Carrigan addresses many of these in a way that has a good balance. His pragmatic approach will hopefully chime with readers who have begun exploring social media as part of their work. For those yet to dip their toe into social media, Carrigan offers plenty of evidence-based advice as to the wheres and whys of how to start, but more importantly, how to avoid getting it wrong in the first place. Social media platforms can be a bit like going to a new restaurant for the first time – if you have a bad experience, you might not go back again. *Social Media for Academics* is a balanced and thoughtful academic TripAdvisor that shows you the best dishes and the dirty kitchens in one guide.

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Note: This review gives the views of the author, and not the position of the LSE Review of Books blog, or of the London School of Economics.