

The Role of the Social Network Instagram in Promoting Library Materials and Activities at the University Library “Svetozar Marković”

UDC 027.7(497.11):316.472.4

DOI 10.18485/infodhca.2025.25.1_2.5

ABSTRACT: Social media platforms have become an integral part of everyday life, permeating many areas and spheres. This paper analyzes the importance of social media in promoting library services and content, with a special focus on the Instagram profile of the University Library “Svetozar Marković” in Belgrade. The theoretical part of the study highlights the significance of promotion in modern library practice, while the practical part shows the correlation between types of posts and user engagement, including the number of views, likes, and profile visits. Challenges such as technical limitations and competition are identified, but the potential of modern formats that contribute to greater visibility and interaction is also recognized. It is concluded that successful promotion is achievable through a strategic approach, creativity, and adapting the content to the digital audience. Recommendations for further research in this field are also included at the end.

KEYWORDS: social media, library, digital promotion, University Library “Svetozar Marković,” Instagram, digital marketing, digital services, MILAGRO project

PAPER SUBMITTED: 30 December 2025

PAPER ACCEPTED: 31 December 2025

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1 Introduction

The creation of the digital world has greatly changed the way we access and share information. As centers whose key role is to promote and preserve

culture, libraries are increasingly turning to modern means of communication. In doing so, they find ways to connect with as many people as possible and stay in touch with their users. One of the ways that has proven most effective is social networks.

Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, or TikTok have become popular channels through which people can engage in events. Given that social media platforms, surpassing traditional library frameworks, are becoming the primary space for individual engagement, there is an opportunity for librarians to establish interaction with users and achieve additional benefits through its use (Kumar 2024). These benefits are reflected primarily in building the institution’s reputation as a modern and dynamic institution focused on its users.

Regarding the accessibility and information exchange, people increasingly access and share content through common online platforms, rather than through direct communication. Research shows that “...two people can spread the same information because they have the same sources of information, such as websites or television programs, which they regularly follow” (Bakshy et al. 2012, 1). This clearly indicates the need for libraries to become active participants in digital flows, so that their materials, activities, and knowledge they offer are present in everyday digital space.

This paper thoroughly explores the role of social media platforms in promoting library content and activities, with special emphasis on the context of academic libraries. Given the increasing demands for academic institutions to adapt their services to contemporary conditions and remain accessible to students and researchers, academic libraries must adjust their communication strategies to the expectations of a digitally literate generation of users.

Starting from the analysis of the theoretical framework of the given topic, the paper examines the types of content published on social media, the level of user engagement, and the challenges the library faces in maintaining an active online presence through the practical example of the University Library “Svetozar Marković” in Belgrade. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to explore and demonstrate how strategic use of social media can help libraries achieve educational goals, but also to point out the challenges that their use brings in library practice.

2 Library in the digital environment

In recent years, the University Library “Svetozar Marković” has adapted to the digital age through the development and use of numerous electronic services, and some of the most important ones will be listed below. Through a digital repository with digitized books, journals, and historical newspapers, valuable materials are preserved from oblivion and simultaneously made accessible to the wider public. Also, the library enables users to search the collection and manage loans through the COBISS system, as well as access other electronic databases. On the LibGuides¹ website, interactive guides that help users in research and more efficient use of available sources are available. Also, the digital repository Phaidra in the E-science system, at the University Library “Svetozar Marković” is primarily used for depositing doctoral dissertations defended at the University of Belgrade, but also for depositing scientific papers. In addition, it enables efficient management of bibliographic data and citations, which is of great help to students, researchers, and employees. As an additional resource, the library promotes and uses the portal Pretraziva.rs², which brings together digitized content from numerous libraries and cultural institutions in one place, and enables quick and simple full-text search. Digitization of doctoral dissertations, which are available on the website E-teze, further confirms the commitment to modernization and provides support for scientific research work.

These digital services represent the foundation for further improvement of communication with users. Bearing in mind that “...social media has the potential and fulfills the necessary prerequisites for the library to establish contact with end users and provide remote services...” (Margam and Soni 2024, 45), they are an ideal channel for successful promotion of the aforementioned digital services and other library services.

3 Theoretical framework

3.1 The Concept of Promotion in the Library Context

In the modern information society, promotion is no longer a secondary activity of libraries, but has become part of their strategy in exchanging information with users. In the context of library activities, promotion entails all activities that inform, encourage, and engage the public regarding

1. Водичи кроз научне области

2. Pretraživa digitalna biblioteka

available materials, services, programs, and events that the library offers. The goal of promotional activities is not exclusively to increase the number of users, but also to increase the library’s presence in the community and raise awareness about the importance of information literacy and access to knowledge.

Traditional promotional methods, such as posters, brochures, and printed notices in the library premises, still have their value, but are increasingly giving way to digital strategies, which often prove more effective. With the advent of the Internet and social media, libraries have gained new opportunities for faster communication. Furthermore, digital marketing enables libraries to present their educational and cultural role in a modern and accessible way.

3.2 The Role of Social Media Platforms in Promotion

Social networks present modern means of communication that enable people not only to access information, but also to actively participate in its creation, sharing, and commenting. Thanks to their interactive nature, they have become effective methods of promotion since they enable two-way communication, quick user reactions, and the spread of information in real time. Although social media platforms have already found wide application in the business environment, especially in companies that promote products and services, their value is increasingly emphasized in the context of institutions of higher education (Jevtić and Zelenović 2015)

Libraries can use social media to announce new publications, present interesting items from the collection, as well as to promote events, educational programs, and available electronic services. Such an approach to promotion does not require large financial resources, but it does require planning, continuity, and understanding of how modern users consume information. When used thoughtfully, digital marketing – especially through social media – can significantly contribute to strengthening the library’s role in digital society.

Among numerous social media platforms, Facebook occupies a special place when it comes to everyday communication and content sharing. As one of the oldest and most widespread networks, it gives preference to the concept of community. It enables users to form groups and pages according to common interests, where they can share various types of content.

On the other hand, Instagram is a visually oriented network, focused on sharing photos and short descriptions, and videos. It is more popular among younger generations and is often used for creative presentation of

content, brands, and events. Due to the simple and interesting appearance of the application, Instagram is an excellent tool for promoting activities, especially when the goal is to attract attention in an aesthetically appealing way.

4 Analysis of the Instagram profile in practice

For the purposes of the analysis, the official Instagram page of the University Library “Svetozar Marković” in Belgrade was selected, under the username unilibgd. The period covered by the analysis extends over three months (from the beginning of April to the end of June 2025). This time frame includes part of the spring and summer semester, when the library is most active in terms of cultural events and promotions.

Posts are categorized according to content (event announcements, informative posts, visual presentations of exhibitions, etc.) and compared according to the type of interaction they generated (number of likes, shares, and new followers). Accordingly, a qualitative approach was used in the form of content analysis, with illustrative examples of the most successful and notable posts.

The first category includes event announcements, such as conferences, workshops, and exhibitions. These include workshops such as “Past Migrations under the Blue Lights of Luminescence,” as part of the MILAGRO project, organized by the library itself. Also, this group includes announcements and promotions of exhibitions from other institutions and organizations with which the Library cooperates. This is, for example, the case with the “May Exhibition” of ULUPUDS and the “Um Naum” conferences.

The second category consists of informative posts intended for users, such as notices about working hours during holidays, while the third category represents promotional posts of Library services, such as discounts on Student Day.

Based on the collected data, a clear connection can be observed between the type of posts and the statistics of views, likes, and user interactions. In the analyzed period, the profile recorded a total of 5,156 views, and the interesting fact is that the larger part of the audience came from outside the circle of followers – as many as 50.1% of views were made by people who are not followers, while 49.9% of views were from existing followers. The total number of other types of interactions, such as likes, shares, comments, profile visits, and new followers was 177.

The highest individual number of views was for a post dedicated to the exhibition “Eight Creators of Serbian Academic Thought” with as many as 1,322 views, 23 likes, 12 shares, which resulted in 3 profile visits and 2 new followers (Figure 1). The second most successful was a post about the “Um Naum 3” conference, which collected 724 views, 12 likes, and 5 shares, with 12 profile visits and 1 new follower (Figure 2). All posts are accompanied by carefully selected pictures and professional graphics, which is shown in more detail in the images below.



Figure 1. Instagram post for the exhibition “Eight Creators of Serbian Academic Thought”

In order of average visibility, notices record the fewest views, conferences slightly more, while the greatest visibility is achieved through workshops and exhibitions, which combine visually attractive content with a specific event. It is interesting that notices, although the least viewed, recorded the highest average number of likes – about 12 per post, which may mean that followers react more to content that directly concerns their user experience. Overall, the data shows that cultural and educational content (exhibitions, workshops) achieve greater reach and engagement of the wider public, while informative posts trigger interaction with existing followers.



Figure 2. Instagram post for the conference “Um Naum”

As for the story format³, a shared “Reels”⁴ video intended to promote the Alumni Foundation of the University of Belgrade and the PhD Studies Support Center of the University Library, achieved 203 views, which represents the highest number of views on stories that the Library has posted so far. Given that this format was not regular practice, the achieved result indicates its significant potential. Accordingly, more frequent use of “Reels” videos is planned in order to improve content visibility and align with contemporary trends in communication on social media.

These indicators clearly show the positive effects of increased activity on social media. Compared to the period from January to April, when activity on the Library’s Instagram profile was minimal, significant growth in interaction and visibility was recorded. Profile visits increased by 84.5%, which indicates the effect of a more intensive presence on the network. At the same time, the number of followers increased by 42 users, or 5.9%, so it now stands at 541. In the period from May 22 to June 22, during which 4 posts and 8 stories were posted on the profile, additional growth was recorded – profile visits increased by 16.9%, which confirms that regular and diverse posting directly contributes to greater reach and user engagement. This digital shift

3. A short-term post (picture or video) that lasts 24 hours. It appears at the top of the app and is used to quickly share current events, polls, links, and more.

4. A tool for creating and sharing short and visually interesting videos.

also had its practical reflection through a larger number of exhibition visitors and more active participation in workshops.

4.1 Comparative analysis of Instagram and Facebook profiles using the MILAGRO project as an example

The MILAGRO⁵ project (Migrants and Local Communities Actively Growing Together for Inclusive Societies) represents a two-year program funded by the European Union within the CERV program, which began on June 1, 2024. The University Library “Svetozar Marković” participates as a project partner together with institutions from Italy and the Netherlands. Project activities include organizing meetings, workshops, summer camps, and local assemblies, with the aim of developing intercultural dialogue and democratic competencies.

Given the international character of the project and its importance for the Library’s visibility, the promotion of MILAGRO activities represents an ideal opportunity for a more detailed assessment of the effectiveness of different social media platforms. For the purposes of deeper analysis, the three most popular posts related to the project were selected, published on both profiles of the University Library “Svetozar Marković” – Instagram and Facebook accounts. The following indicators were monitored: number of views, reached accounts, and level of user interaction. The selected activities include: Summer Camp in Belgrade (July 16, 2025) (Figure 3), Internship of University College Utrecht Students (September 26, 2025) (Figure 4), and the Sixth Local Assembly of the MILAGRO Project (December 11, 2025) (Figure 5).

The analysis results clearly show the superiority of the Instagram platform in the domain of visibility and user engagement. When it comes to post views, Instagram records drastically higher numbers compared to Facebook. The Summer Camp post achieved 3,470 views on Instagram, which is 9.5 times more than 363 views on Facebook. Similarly, the post about the Students’ internship recorded 1,833 views on Instagram compared to 923 on Facebook (almost double the reach), while the Sixth Local Assembly post had 1,980 views on Instagram versus only 75 on Facebook, which represents 26 times greater visibility on the Instagram platform.

As for reached accounts, i.e., the number of individual users who saw the content, even greater disproportions between platforms are observed. The Summer Camp attracted the attention of 683 Instagram users, while on

5. MILAGRO



Figure 3. Summer Camp of the MILAGRO project in Belgrade



Figure 4. Internship of University College Utrecht Students



Figure 5. Sixth Local Assembly of the MILAGRO Project

Facebook it reached only 90 accounts (more than 7.5 times less). A similar situation was recorded for the Students' internship post, which reached 769 users on Instagram and 493 on Facebook. A particularly striking example is the post about the Sixth Local Assembly, which reached 551 accounts via Instagram, compared to only 23 users on Facebook – representing 24 times greater visibility on the Instagram platform.

The most significant differences are noticed in the level of user interaction. The Summer Camp post achieved 98 interactions on Instagram (likes, comments, shares) compared to only 9 on Facebook – which is almost 11 times more. The Students' internship post had a similar level of interactions on both platforms (36 on Instagram, 35 on Facebook), which represents the only category in which Facebook shows competitiveness. However, the post about the Sixth Local Assembly confirmed the general trend with 70 interactions on Instagram versus only 3 on Facebook. This data indicates an increase in engagement of as much as 23 times.

5 Challenges and opportunities for improvement

Despite visible progress in using social media to promote library activities, certain obstacles also arise that can greatly affect the quality and reach of content. Although each institution has its specificities, many challenges are universal. As authors Kari and Oyeniran point out, "in order to effectively promote library services with appropriate potential for increasing the

number of followers, library management needs to address serious problems related to staff training, lack of space, and poor funding” (Kari and Oyeniran 2019, 64).

One of the fundamental problems is limited technical equipment, since the Library currently does not have adequate software for content processing and other professional tools that would enable more visually dynamic content. Budget constraints represent an obstacle to the possibility of paying for post promotion or engaging graphic design specialists.

An additional challenge lies in the high competition and content saturation on social media, as users are exposed to different types of posts on a daily basis. Such content is mainly advertised by the media and celebrities who have far greater resources. In that environment, content that promotes education and culture, such as that offered by a library, is harder to stand out because it requires greater engagement to attract user interest. Therefore, it becomes more demanding to stand out and attract the attention of an audience accustomed to fast communication, while maintaining a professional tone aligned with institutional values. Because of all this, a thoughtful and strategic approach is needed, along with creative content processing and careful adaptation to the habits of target groups. Successful use of social media in library work is not only based on the digital skills of librarians, but also on the ability to design content that inspires trust and encourages long-term connection and user engagement (Magoi, Abrizah, and Yanti Idaya Aspura 2020).

However, the comparative analysis of Instagram and Facebook profiles using the MILAGRO project as an example showed that investing time and resources in the Instagram platform pays off. The results clearly indicate that the visual nature of this social network fully corresponds to the content that the Library promotes – professional photographs from events, graphically designed posters, and aesthetically attractive presentation of activities naturally fit into the Instagram format. Instagram’s algorithm favors visually high-quality and engaging content, which results in organic reach increase without excessive financial investments – this is especially important in the context of budget constraints that the Library faces.

In order to achieve better promotion, employees at the University Library “Svetozar Marković” strive to find appropriate and sustainable solutions for each challenge. The lack of professional equipment is compensated by using a quality camera on a mobile phone, while the IT department provides significant support in content processing. Also, employees rely on easily accessible design tools, such as Canva and Snapseed, which allow content to be

visually improved without additional costs. Budget constraints are overcome by involving more colleagues and volunteers in the work, with careful delegation of tasks. In this way, more ideas and different perspectives emerge, which contributes to the quality of content and makes the work process more dynamic. Taking into account that statistics have shown that the "Reels" format achieves a significant number of views, more intensive creation of short videos is planned, as well as the inclusion of more interactive formats, such as polls and quizzes. Creating a monthly post plan and organizing their advertisement have proven extremely useful, as they enable continuity and prevent longer breaks in posting. Through diverse content, from event announcements and material promotion to reports and interactive stories, gradual achievement of greater regularity and transparency of communication is achieved, which directly contributes to increasing page visibility and better connection with followers.

Given the upcoming celebration of the centenary of the University Library "Svetozar Marković" and planning future communication strategies, the results of the analysis clearly indicate the need to prioritize Instagram as the primary channel for promoting significant projects, international collaborations, and cultural events. This does not include completely abandoning the Facebook platform, but rather strategically directing resources and creative energy toward the platform that shows the greatest potential for engaging the target audience. Successful promotion of the MILAGRO project via the Instagram account has a multifaceted significance: in addition to increased visibility of the activities themselves, it contributes to strengthening the Library's international reputation, attracting new collaborators and participants in future projects, as well as fulfilling dissemination obligations to project funders. Such results lay a solid foundation for future digital campaigns, especially in the context of marking the Library's centenary, when maximum visibility and engagement of the widest possible audience will be necessary.

6 Conclusion

By integrating theoretical insights and illustrative examples, the paper has shown how modern communication tools can contribute to strengthening the Library's visibility and greater user engagement, but also pointed out the challenges that accompany their everyday application. One of the main conclusions is that presence on social media must be strategically planned, with a clear content structure and understanding of the target audience.

This research contributes to a better understanding of the potential that social media platforms offer to libraries, but also reminds us that successful implementation requires not only digital presence – but also creativity, regular monitoring of online trends, and mutual cooperation among colleagues.

In future research, it would be useful to compare similar examples of other academic or public libraries in Serbia and the region, as well as to further examine user attitudes about content that libraries place through social media. Such research in the form of interviews or questionnaires would provide a broader picture of the effects of digital promotion in librarianship and improve practices in the field itself. Also, future research could examine the correlation between social media presence and physical library visits, i.e. whether digital promotion directly affects the number of users, event attendance, and use of library services.

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