



CHAPTER 18

THE DIGITAL IDENTITY OF GRADUATE STUDENTS

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Graduate students need a digital identity in order to be found by an academic colleague or a future employer. However, the lack of technical skills and familiarity with the necessary digital tools is a handicap even when graduate students use their personal social network accounts. The construction of their own professional brand starts with the choice of the right strategy and tools.

Not all graduate students have the same goals, needs, requirements, and skills. Those who are doing a PhD do not need the same digital identity as those who are getting a master's degree. In fact, their online visibility and their personal and professional goals are different. So the structure of their digital identity and the tools necessary for this identity must also be somewhat different.

Furthermore, the use of the right online tools is not always easy to manage. The proper use of a tool and the right content for publication on social media are of prime importance. The use of different platforms such as scholarly social networks or professional social networks must be clearly distinguished.

It is true that gaining online visibility helps the graduate student, and not only in his or her personal or professional lives. In the long term, online visibility also helps the institution where the graduate student is enrolled. Therefore, online reputation must be treated carefully.

The Digital Identity of Graduate Students

It is commonly known that using social networking sites (SNSs) makes it possible to gain online visibility. The construction of a digital identity should be one of the goals of a graduate student. However, online visibility can be established in several different ways. These ways will depend on the selection of the right strategies by the graduate student. In this chapter, an MA degree student and a PhD student are going to be differentiated since their roles on social media are completely different. As the final goal is the labor market, the way for each group to obtain visibility will vary. At this point, libraries can help with training in the construction of a digital identity, as is explained here.¹

According to *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary*, a master's degree is "a degree given after one or two years of study following a bachelor degree."² A student acquires skills in a specific subject area of study or in professional practice. On the other hand, a PhD degree is focused on research as a primary goal.

In the labor market, a student with a master's degree usually looks for a professional job in a very specific field. This is the reason for taking a master's or postgraduate course. In the case of a PhD degree, the holder has two main options. These options are to look for a professional position in academia at their own university (not possible in all countries) or to find a professional position in the research industry.

Both types of student need to build up a digital identity on the internet in order to network and be found by a future employer or by a peer for professional collaboration. This can be accomplished through social media. The creation of a personal digital identity will provide online visibility and promotional possibilities among other professional benefits. However, the lack of presence limits visibility, and this can lead to undesirable results.³

Graduate students need to use digital tools to establish an online digital identity. The learning curve for these tools or digital platforms is sometimes complex and can require training. Therefore, social networking sites are necessary to gain online visibility. There are the generalized SNSs used by the major part of the population. There are also the scholarly social networks used by a specific group of people, for example, academics. In addition, some SNSs are

used as a support for certain aspects of education at many levels.⁴

The term *online visibility* has no concrete definition. However, a short colloquial definition of online visibility can be to be easily found on the internet. It means to be digitally active, to publish content, and to interact with other people. Nevertheless, it does not necessarily mean to have thousands of followers on a personal profile account. One of the reasons for not using a personal profile account is because some SNS content is not retrievable from Google or other similar search engines.

According to some authors, online visibility means to have a webpage and to be present on the internet.⁵ However, this is not necessarily the only way. Online presence or online visibility can be achieved on SNSs without needing to develop an independent website.⁶ It is possible to find cases where academics or professionals outside of academia use only a social network such as Twitter or YouTube. However, visibility on these sites is limited to a concrete social network. Moreover, trends in the traditional digital model recommend having a website first and a social networks profile later.⁷

A written blog should be the central element (common core) of the website. Subsequently, SNSs can be used to support the blog. This allows for the distribution of the blog content among other social networks. In the case of PhD students, it is important to be clear that altmetrics can be used to measure the impact of their work.⁸

The following sections introduce the tools frequently used by a large number of professionals across a wide range of specialties.

The Written Blog as a Starting Point

The first question to be considered by a graduate student is the possibility of having a written blog. A blog is a good idea because a written blog enables the creation of a personal brand. It establishes the writer as an authority in his or her field. It builds an online reputation because its contents are quickly indexed by search engines. This situation allows it to be found by searchers and to attract traffic and people interested in the blog's contents. A blog also allows one to have virtual real estate on the internet, a place to be contacted through a contact form, or a place where others can read the published contents. It establishes the voice and the image of the graduate student.

What will give online visibility to a PhD student will be writing about his or her PhD thesis and about the research, ideas, or reports of new developments in the field. It is important to emphasize that confidential questions about the research should not be divulged. A master's student will gain online visibility by writing about the field and showing professional expertise.

A written blog is not expensive to produce; in fact, some blogs are free. However, a written blog needs to be consistent in its timing. This means writing frequently, at least once per week or every two weeks. The writing frequency is important because the algorithms of search engines like Google or Bing need to be fed frequently to index the blog's contents.

There are many ways to create a free blog. The following is a short list:

- Blogger (<https://www.blogger.com>)
- WordPress (<https://wordpress.com>)
- Tumblr (<https://www.tumblr.com>)

Having a blog means having the technical skill needed to write a blog, a different skill from academic writing. Once the blog has been started and becomes part of the blogger's daily life, it is time to start a profile on an SNS.

The contents of blogs are very wide-ranging: a written post, a podcast, video, images, infographics, or a combination of all of them are excellent material for a blog. However, all this material must be prepared and planned in advance. Otherwise, it is enormously time-consuming.

Generalized Social Network Sites

It is very well known that SNSs are useful for spreading and sharing information in the form of videos, voice clips, pictures, or text. However, in most cases, these pieces of information can be placed in a written blog and, as stated before, later distributed in a generalized SNS.

Here is a list of generalized social networks:

- Facebook (<https://facebook.com>)
- Instagram (<https://instagram.com>)
- LinkedIn (<https://linkedin.com>)
- Twitter (<https://twitter.com>)
- YouTube (<https://youtube.com>)
- Pinterest (<https://pinterest.com>)

The best strategy with social networks is to choose an SNS whose published content is indexed by search engines such as Google or Bing. This is especially important because what gives online visibility to the graduate student is not only the personal profile but also the content generated on these social networks.

From the above mentioned list, Facebook and Instagram are possibly of no use when looking for online visibility because the content placed in these social networks is not indexed by any search engine. Certainly, a personal profile

can appear in Google or Bing search results, but the published content does not. These two networks are mainly based on internal promotion through contacts and paid advertising. Unless a graduate student is involved in a specific field such as marketing, social media, or photography, these two social networks should be avoided, at least at the first stages.

LinkedIn is another social network that must be taken seriously. LinkedIn is an SNS designed to be a professional contact network where the resumé and expertise play an important role. However, it is important to use the proper keywords in the resumé form on this network to be easily found.

LinkedIn's most interesting feature is the possibility of posting not only text but also pictures, native videos, and original content, which gives a strong advantage to the professional candidate. On LinkedIn it is also interesting to note that individual profiles can be included in topic-specific groups such as marketing or social media groups. This facilitates professional connectivity to an industry.

Twitter, even though it might seem old-fashioned and probably more focused on journalism in recent times, is still a very useful SNS. It is possible to create streaming videos and to place pictures on Twitter. It is also possible to write text to the limit of 280 characters, and the content is indexed by Google and Bing. Twitter is also effective when following events such as a conference or for engaging in virtual chat, provided you have an adequate hashtag. However, TweetDeck, a free Twitter tool, is better for following events.

It is especially important to consider the learning curve of these social networks and the time it may take to master them for professional purposes. As an example, a social network like YouTube has a huge learning curve, and not just in understanding the platform as a social network. The process of producing and editing videos, especially if they are intended to have online visibility and a presence in a specific professional field, is also challenging.

These social networks are useful for both types of graduate students, those who have a done an MA degree and those who have taken a PhD degree. These SNSs are also important for the graduate student since companies use these sites to supplement their selection process by observing the candidate's behavior, attitude, and language appropriateness in virtual environments.⁹

Scholarly Social Networks

There are specialized social networks that cannot be overlooked, especially by PhD students. These social networks are specially recommended to the scholarly community. A PhD student needs to at least have a social profile on one of these social networks.

Here there is a short list of some of the scholarly social networks:

- Google Scholar (<https://scholar.google.com>)
- ResearchGate (<https://www.researchgate.net>)
- Microsoft Academic (<http://academic.research.microsoft.com>)
- Academia.edu (<https://www.academia.edu>)
- SSRN (<https://www.ssrn.com/en>)
- PlazaScience (<http://www.plazascience.org>)
- Loop (<http://loop.frontiersin.org>)
- LabRoots (<http://www.labroots.com>)
- MyScienceWork (<https://www.mysciencework.com>)

The reason for having a profile on one of these social networks is that a PhD student needs to track the work of, or to have direct contact with, his or her peers. Essays, books, book chapters, proceedings, and research articles are part of this work, as well as any other material created for the academic area. This means that to have some relevance in the field, works must be cited. The more public the profile, the greater the possibility of being cited. To be cited affects university rankings of the school where the student is enrolled.

The best-known site on the list is Google Scholar. The big advantage of Google Scholar is that the profile is public. Google Scholar has an index known as the h-index that measures the citations used by researchers.

Research Gate has 14 million members. On this social network, it is possible to create and to be involved in groups, to connect with other researchers, to upload documents, and to share them at any time. It is also possible to measure the research activity of universities.¹⁰

The First Steps of Creating a Digital Identity

After examining some possible options for starting an online presence, the next step for the student is to choose the right strategy.

Though possible, it would be unnecessary to have and maintain a profile on all social network sites. In addition, the first steps of maintaining an online presence are never easy. Questions such as what content to publish and where must be accurately and strategically planned. Other planning issues, like a publication calendar or deciding which type of content is going to be published, should not be avoided. This is a highly important point because these social networks are massive consumers of content. Table 18.1 indicates where to start in the social media.

Table 18.1

Starting Points on Social Media for Graduate Students

PhD Student	MA Student
Written blog	Written blog
Twitter	Twitter
LinkedIn profile	LinkedIn profile
Google Scholar	YouTube
ResearchGate	
Microsoft Academics	

The first option is a written blog, which is the fastest way to have online visibility regardless of the graduate student's learning curve.

Technical Skills and Training to Use Social Media Networks

Here is a useful list of technical skills that a graduate student should acquire:

- content curation
- data visualization
- image composition
- networking
- public speaking
- search engine optimization
- video editing
- writing for social media

Writing text for social media may be easy for a graduate student. However, technical skills are necessary to go a step further. These technical skills are necessary to post other kinds of information on social media. Skills that fall into this category are image composition, video editing, data visualization, networking, and content curation.¹¹ There are other technical skills, but as a starting point, a general overview of those skills listed is usually required depending on the media and the context.

Where text composition is concerned, writing a text for a social network is not the same as writing an academic or a scholarly paper. One of the issues to understand is that in a scholarly paper, texts are normally reviewed. So they must be written carefully and should contain new ideas or new research. On the other

hand, texts that are going to be on social media must be interesting and must attract the attention of the reader.

The Graduate Library's Role

University libraries have a number of strengths that are valuable for graduate students. Librarians also have professional skills that are very useful. These capacities can be exploited by libraries to help graduates create their digital identity and utilize social networks.¹²

Strengths to be emphasized are libraries' expertise in using social networks, creating communities, generating segmented content, and helping in research and preparing submissions to scientific publications. In addition, librarians are specialists in analyzing metrics and using and editing metadata.

Social networks are used by university libraries to disseminate library activities or academic research results. At the same time, many students have profiles on social networks before or after graduation. Harnessing the experience of the library in the distribution of content can be of great value for training graduate students. One of the aspects of digital identity is the generation of content in any format; library workshops on social media content creation must be considered, and on the use of technological tools for deferred publishing like Buffer or Hootsuite.¹³ The focus should be on helping students refine the content creation for their social media profiles so that they can take full advantage of this necessary tool, both within academia and beyond it.

Creating segmented communities on social networks around the content they publish is also an area of expertise of libraries. This strength can also be leveraged to create a network base among graduate students of different specialties. Questions about how to do networking and how to make full use of it would be possible elements of training. This way graduates can be helped to create a base of professional contacts.

As well as creating communities, libraries generate content for targeted users through social networks. That is, libraries employ social network websites with a strategy and a clear objective. In fact, the strategic use of social networks is one of the strongest elements of libraries.¹⁴ Taking advantage of this situation, it can be applied to online workshops to help graduate students make strategic decisions about their social network profiles. Research libraries can generate training material through workshops by using academic social networks. Such training would not only be interesting for academic networking but also useful for academic visibility.

Moreover, libraries can also assist with protocol designs for connecting with potential employers through social networking or collaborating with

colleagues on research projects. In addition, they can create workshops about applying for financial assistance, seeking professional advice on the creation of start-ups, and applying for research grants.

University research libraries usually offer support for graduate students, especially with research or accessing scientific publications (i.e., locating material on a specific topic or using online resources). An example would be assistance in using databases or choosing a journal for a scientific publication. In some cases, they can also offer help in finding work.¹⁵ However, one crucial aspect to cover is the training of graduate students in the academic use of social networks (e.g., for promoting scientific articles). In some cases, libraries have started serving students in this way, but a majority of them have not as yet.¹⁶

Another vital aspect of the library is the analysis of metrics. This is in fact a part of the professional profile of the librarian; a key competency is the ability to create and analyze a profile on a social network. This enables libraries to help graduate students gain visibility by optimizing their own metrics to gain and to manage their resumé and professional publications.

In addition, editing metadata is an important skill for librarians. Metadata editing can also be useful for graduates to position the contents of their social networks and gain more visibility. Again, the creation of specialized workshops on generating metadata for SNSs would be very valuable for online visibility.

In summary, the main idea is to use the resources of the library to organize workshops and online training on the use of different aspects of social networks. Libraries can even provide assistance through social networks using mobile technology. Finally, there are options to teach graduates, especially doctoral students, about the importance of disseminating the results of their research through social networks, and about the importance of using metrics to gain visibility.

Libraries have a number of strengths that are valuable for graduate students. Librarians also have professional skills that are very useful. These strengths can be exploited to help graduate students create their digital identity and their use of social networks.

Some positive aspects of libraries are the use of social networks, creating communities, generating segmented content, and assistance in research and in scientific publications. In addition, librarians are specialists in analyzing metrics, and in the use and editing of metadata.

One of the main issues is that a graduate student needs to make a big effort to be sure of gaining online visibility. However, it is better to take little steps rather than to do nothing.

Steps for Any Social Network Site

1. Choose the right SNS and understand the real benefits of having a profile on any particular social network.

This point is highly important because creating a personal brand on Twitter is not the same as being cited in academia. These benefits also have a long-term effect on the university where the graduate student is enrolled because, in most cases, students post information about their activity at their university. This means they are indirectly promoting their university as a brand.

2. Complete your profile on the social network.

Sometimes this is easy due to Google or Facebook plug-in connectors, and at other times it is less easy. Usually, all personal data must be entered manually.

3. Understand how to follow other people or to be followed.

It seems easy, but it is not always clear what it really means to follow a person or an institution or to be followed by an institution or another person. This affects the kind of communication that is possible and the nature of the personal data that is shared, among other things.

4. Publish or share contents.

As it is not always possible to publish one's own content, there is also the possibility of digital content curation and the sharing or publishing of content from others, while respecting copyright issues.

5. Participate in specialized groups.

Most social networks have the possibility of creating a group, a project where it is possible to participate with other colleagues around the globe. Online groups provide the easiest way to connect with other people and to collaborate professionally.

6. Be aware of what is published.

While it is easy to post content, it is important to understand the possibility of a negative impact on the reputation of a university. Offensive material or other unethical matters should be avoided.¹⁷

Some Thoughts on Online Reputation

Online reputation is the term used when someone needs to maintain his or her good name over the internet. This means that you should not place inappropriate content, even in private forums, that can be found by someone who is investigating your past. There is also the importance of the messages we send out and the perception that others have of us. This is especially relevant for graduate students who, upon examination of their digital footprint, could have their candidacy revoked for a professional or academic opportunity.¹⁸

At the same time, online reputation also refers to the use of your name in the social media profiles. Care must be taken when somebody is using your name. As part of taking care of your digital identity, probably one of the best things to do is to monitor for uses of our name regularly, for example, through alert services like Google Alerts or Talkwalker Alerts.

If an internet activity is started on social media, it is especially relevant to have your name associated with the most used social networks, even if these profiles are not going to be used. Protecting your name is an important part of your online reputation.

Conclusion

The best way to obtain online visibility is by using social media. The decision to use any social network will further define the strategy and online visibility. Online visibility is slow and is not an immediate matter. It takes time to be found on search engines.

Before diving in and wasting time, it is better to undergo initial training. In most university libraries, it is possible to find help by asking the librarian. At the same time, it is possible to find university courses based on social media.

Notes

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