

*BOOK REVIEW*

**Social Media: How to Engage, Share, and Connect  
(4th Ed.)**

Reviewed by  
Adrienne A. Wallace, Ph.D., Grand Valley State University (Michigan)

**Social Media: How to Engage, Share, and Connect (4th Ed.)**

Author: Regina (Gina) Luttrell, Ph.D.

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For those seeking a career in public relations and social media, *Social Media: How to Engage, Share, and Connect*, by Regina Luttrell, makes the transition from classroom to boardroom, for students and instructors mentoring them, complete and somehow painless. The fourth edition is updated to reflect innovations, challenges, tools, and issues specific to today's digital landscape for public relations practitioners.

**Structure and Organization**

*Social Media: How to Engage, Share, and Connect* is organized into three parts: 1) The Advancement of an Industry, 2) Strategic Planning: Public Relations and Social Media, and 3) Strategic Management: Public Relations and Social Media. These parts work to engage readers in 14 chapters ranging from theory to practice, ethics, and the future in a

comprehensive manner to unearth the “why” behind social media strategy and not just all the “fun” things you can tactically imagine. The “why” or use of strategy is one of the key differentiators of this text in a crowded market of social media textbooks. As an educator and professional, I want students to understand why they are doing something in an effort to remain strategic, comfortable, platform agnostic and skillfully dangerous, in an ever-changing environment where social media platforms come and go—good-bye Facebook, hello Meta.

As a core text, this book is suitable for subjects or classes related to language arts, communication studies, advertising, public relations, business communications, marketing, social sciences, media studies, digital studies, political science (digital activism), and more. The work would also be an excellent partner to a main text if you would like to inject more social media into an introduction to public relations, digital media, social media, public relations or advertising campaigns class, or even a communication, marketing, advertising, or public relations capstone or internship course.

### **Changes to Fourth Edition**

This seminal text on social media is a public relations educator staple. This book is one of the few social media textbooks updated regularly, which eliminates the normal weakness of a social media text which is that as soon as it is published, it is outdated. Author Luttrell and publishers, Rowman & Littlefield, solved that issue for instructors with their proactive updates

Features of the fourth edition include improved chapter objectives and learning outcomes, which easily align with a semester schedule; social media expert profiles and practice areas to help satisfy the “what do you

do in a day” question popular among applied major program students; theory- into-practice boxes with exercises that connect back to the chapter material or updated case studies using the “diversity-first” approach—a staple in Luttrell’s books; a living Twitter community and boxes throughout the text that address “learn social media and public relations” with #LRNSMPR where students can connect with others even countries apart; a more comprehensive glossary of terminology for students and faculty to examine together; a discussion of additional social media channels (Clubhouse and TikTok); and finally, a new appendix with ideas for social media strategy guidelines and templates that allow practice in the classroom (p. 219-239).

I particularly like the digital assets in this edition which allow me to make practice handouts for quick and dirty in-class social media audits. The author uses resources from several case studies and infographics, including downloadable models on her website at [www.ginaluttrellphd.com](http://www.ginaluttrellphd.com). Additional materials can be requested through Rowman & Littlefield publishing with an educator login.

### **Contributions to Public Relations Education**

As in previous editions, this edition illustrates the author’s concern for both the history and future of social media as it applies to public relations and the business case for sound strategy supported by creative tactics. The textbook bridges social media theory and practice, which by nature includes both understanding of the medium and how to “do” social media. Strategic council occurs thoughtfully and deliberately through her signature “practitioner speaks” approach included in all of her textbooks. Additionally, the book is accessible for students, professionals, and educators who might need help keeping up on the barrage of new tools, strategies, and techniques within the social sphere. Keeping up with social

media trends and policy can be arduous; however, this book mitigates that work for fellow educators.

Of particular note are the modifications to Chapter 4, The Road Map to Success: Developing a Social Media Plan, which carries throughout the text. Luttrell introduces readers to the Diversity & Inclusion Wheel for PR Practitioners and explains how the “diversity-first” approach is central to social media and public relations planning (Luttrell, 2020). This addition, partnered with the chapter on social media ethics (Chapter 11), unifies the deliberate thought around inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility principles in practice throughout the public relations curriculum, something often missing from other popular social media texts. The addition is a core differentiator of this textbook for use in the public relations classroom.

### **Strengths and Weaknesses**

#### ***Strength: Cost***

Rowman & Littlefield get it: book price shouldn't be a barrier to education for students or for instructors. For some, the price point of this book won't prove to be a barrier to adoption, given the \$35 cost for paperback.

#### ***Strength: Language***

Luttrell is skilled at using plain language in most of her textbooks. The author understands the needs of students and strives for a favorable student experience through easy information which is neither oversimplified nor stilted. She writes in a way that is easy to read and understand, making classroom participation less of a barrier. I frequently heard students comment that they often read ahead because their interest was genuinely piqued. The text takes a complicated series of topics and makes them immediately executable to a generation that thinks they may already

“know” social media. A “digital native” doesn’t equal digital expert, so this textbook improves perspectives among young professionals and makes barriers to entry in a technical field less panic-inducing.

***Strength: Application***

If you have ever purchased a textbook written by Luttrell, you’ll know much of her strength lies in demonstrating practical application of theory. In this she creates a landing place for students to examine the fuzzy bits and really extrapolate perspective in order to activate or repair strategy. In this particular edition, her theory-into-practice boxes and the social media expert profiles elevate that form.

***Neutral: Influencers***

The topic of influencers is more a neutral point than a weakness for this text. That said, as influencers faced a reckoning in the last year in a COVID-19 environment with trust and ethics routinely violated, I’d like to see the fifth edition improve coverage in the area of influencer relations. Sourcing Amanda Russell’s book, *The Influencer Code: How to Unlock the Power of Influencer Marketing* (2021), which has quickly established itself as the “influencer Bible” within the last year, along with Northwestern University Kellogg School’s (2021) adoption of the “Influencer U” curriculum for its Executive Management program would help. Doing so would be a perfect partnership, collaboration, or extension of the textbook.

***Weakness: Text Presentation***

At no fault to the author—this is more a deficiency of the publisher – I feel compelled to address text presentation as a weakness. We NEED color in our textbooks. You can’t expect a student who is glued to a LED or OLED smartphone to engage fully with a text on social media when the photo

examples of charts, graphs, and examples of social media (i.e., Instagram feed, tweets, Facebook [Meta] posts, etc.) are printed in the text in black and white.

### **Summary**

Dr. Luttrell is a prolific, trusted, and well-respected author in the area of social media and offers an unparalleled framework for understanding and practical use of social media in a public relations context. I've adopted every edition of *Social Media: How to Engage, Share, and Connect* as both a partner text in introduction public relations courses, and in an introduction to advertising and public relations course at my institution. I have no qualms in encouraging others to do the same.

### **References**

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