

Five ways libraries are using Instagram to share collections and draw public interest.

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Alongside [universities](#), libraries and librarians are now using social media platforms to connect with users in a range of exciting and innovating ways. The latest platform that libraries are experimenting with is **Instagram**, which allows users to take photos on their smart phones, apply exciting filters and add hashtags, and then share these images online with their followers. **Amy Mollett** and **Anthony McDonnell** investigate how libraries are making the most of this visually-engaging platform.



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With photos of the latest books available to borrow, snaps of library visitors attending workshops, and shots of behind the scenes activities, Instagram is fast becoming an exciting platform through which libraries and librarians can share news, achievements, and images of everyday life among the bookshelves. But it's not only for its novel approach to photo-sharing that libraries are using Instagram: the social media platform is [growing faster than Twitter, Facebook, and Pinterest combined](#), and with the majority of users in key university student age brackets it certainly makes sense for libraries to consider Instagram's merits.

As part of a 'Higher Ed Instagram audit' we undertook to help LSE Review of Books get ready to launch [its own Instagram account](#), we focused on looking at some of the most common ways in which libraries around the world are using this photo-sharing platform.

1. Libraries are using Instagram to ask users about their favourite authors

Instagram allows libraries to introduce a little more fun into their online profiles and interact with users in new ways. Many have come up with imaginative ways to do something different using this platform, including the [New York Public Library's](#) favourite author competition. Starting on the 1st March under the hashtag #LibraryMarchMadness, the library puts up the names of two authors and asks followers to vote on which one they prefer (voting happens by users adding a comment to the image of the names). The author with the most votes goes through to the next round whilst the loser gets knocked out. At the time of writing, polls were still open in the final, where Dr Suess is pitted against Edgar Allan Poe. Other libraries can really up their online engagement and build a sense of community through similar methods.

2. Libraries are using Instagram to show off their surroundings and collections

It is common for Instagram users to take stylised photos of everyday events, and libraries are no exception. Many library Instagram accounts take advantage of the built-in photo filters, and use these on photos of individual books, full bookshelves, people reading, and the architecture of the building. Again, NYPL is great at this, but [Boston](#) and [Piscataway \(New Jersey\)](#) are worth a mention too. Library communication teams can use Instagram in this way to inspire users to come and visit. Followers might easily be able to imagine themselves curled up with a book working in a quiet sunny corner of the reading room.

3. Libraries are using Instagram to publicise events

Alongside promoting library events through newsletters, Facebook, and Twitter, it is now common to see libraries using Instagram for this cause, both before and after events. Before an event, libraries are sharing photos of event

posters, staff preparing for the event, and other related imagery. These photos can be used to both inform people and build excitement about the event. In addition, libraries are sharing photos of the event as it takes place – much like live tweeting on Twitter – and again once the event is over. This platform is a great place for capturing the excitement of author events or special anniversaries, and will hopefully increase interest in future activities the library runs.

4. Libraries are using Instagram to show what goes on behind the scenes

People are often curious about what goes on behind the scenes in a library. Instagram offers a great opportunity to showcase an intimate look at what the roles of different library staff entail: how book ordering is done, how new events are planned, helping students in a workshop, and even stacking the shelves at the end of the day. Other institutions such as theatres, universities, and museums could also take up this approach.

5. Libraries are using Instagram to show their history

Instagram is proving to be an innovative way of drawing out archived images and video for libraries and other institutions. [Boston Public Library](#) takes advantage of the fact that it is in one of America's oldest cities and publishes interesting historical images of the city and the library. [San Francisco Public Library](#) uses pictures of statues and the surrounding area in order to highlight the wonderful surroundings, to achieve a similar end.

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Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of the Impact of Social Science blog, nor of the London School of Economics. Please review our [Comments Policy](#) if you have any concerns on posting a comment below.

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