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Mobilizing Global Knowledge: Refugee Research in an Age of Displacement

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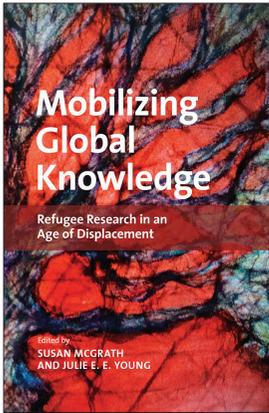
MOBILIZING GLOBAL KNOWLEDGE: REFUGEE RESEARCH IN AN AGE OF DISPLACEMENT

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Disseminating Knowledge in the Digital Age: The Case of the Refugee Research Network

William J. Payne and Michele Millard

Introduction

Too often, moments that propel the world towards positive social change are marked by horror. One such moment was the death of Alan Kurdi, a toddler born in Syria amidst a brutal war who, together with his mother and brother, drowned on 2 September 2015 as they attempted to cross a four-kilometre stretch of the Aegean Sea between Turkey and the Greek island of Kos. A photograph taken that day by Turkish press photographer Nilüfer Demir challenged the global polity to pay attention to this loss of life. The dissemination of that image through social media ensured that millions were reminded of the cost of war. In the photograph, Alan appears strangely peaceful, and only the various associated captions and commentaries inform us that the little boy had not survived the crossing. The photojournalist later commented, "I hope that my picture can contribute to changing the way we look at immigration" (Küpeli 2015). Certainly, what we do with such moments determines the dimensions of our collective humanity (see chapter 4).

Scholars note that—at least in the months following its dissemination—this photo shifted the language describing those seeking asylum from "migrant" to "refugee" (Aiken et al. 2017). Aiken et al. (2017, 3, 5) determined that the effectiveness of Demir's image—why it went viral—resulted from its "ideal representation of the innocent, irreproachable body worthy of grief," and because "the positioning of [Alan Kurdi's] body masks a violence done, but now unseen." These authors conclude that Twitter allowed for the global reach that this image achieved because it was picked up early on by specific users with large followings. However, they also argue that this global reach failed to translate into real improvement for refugees because the resultant media attention focused as much on the phenomenon of the circulating image as on the geopolitical events that led to the child's death.

Given this dismal analysis of the impact of social media in a time of crisis, are there ways we can employ these tools to effect real change? This chapter provides a detailed analysis of the Refugee Research Network's (RRN) experience with social media to mobilize research and information concerning refugee and forced migration issues. Our goal is to show how that communication and online networking strategy is working.

The RRN, Knowledge Mobilization, and Social Media

From its beginning, the RRN has used social media as a tool to disseminate knowledge about refugee and forced migration issues (also see chapters 6, 7, and 10). This work has responded to the RRN's guiding principles, that knowledge should be accessible, open source and open access, and not caught behind academic firewalls (see the introduction). The RRN sees knowledge dissemination through the conceptual framework of Knowledge Mobilization (KMb), defined as "the process of connecting academic . . . research . . . to non-academic decision-makers so that . . . research informs decisions about public policy and professional practice" (Phipps et al. 2012, 180; see also chapter 7). The concept of KMb, popularized by Canada's Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), provides an emerging frame for the multi-dimensional interactions between society and university-based researchers that can foster the social innovations we need to address problems such as climate change, poverty, forced migration, and so on (Cooper 2014; Phipps et al. 2012). Phipps et

al. (2012) emphasize the need to create a "culture of research" rooted in these networked interactions that connects decision-makers to existing and emerging knowledge and leads to solutions to the difficult challenges of our time (see also chapters 3, 6, 10, and 13).

Bennet and Bennet (2007) emphasize that this process is more than just the transfer of knowledge and that KMb creates value through bringing together knowledge, people, and action such that both the creation and the use of knowledge are embedded in communities and organizations (see also chapter 10). Phipps et al. (2012) emphasize that KMb can be thought of as a program comprising several specific processes, that collaboration and learning are key to this program in what is increasingly an uncertain world, and that KMb helps decision-makers in society approach "wicked problems" using an evidence-based approach.

The concept of KMb has emerged in a context in which funders consider universities through the lens of "social relevance" and in which researchers face an increased expectation that they produce knowledge that is seen as "useful" to society (Naidorf 2014). In this register, KMb is "a complex and emergent process that focuses on making what is known ready for value-producing action" (Naidorf 2014, 15). At the same time, scholars and practitioners have amplified their call for evidence-based policy and practice. In this context, "knowledge brokers" and "research brokering organizations" are poised to provide a crucial role in the reinforcement of the relationship between university-based researchers and those contexts where research can have concrete impact (Cooper 2015; Naidorf 2014). At a time when "the field of KMb . . . is still in its infancy" (Cooper 2015, 15), the RRN seeks to play this brokering role as well as to facilitate relationships and communication among researchers from different parts of the world.

In a preliminary study of the functioning of the RRN conducted in 2009, participants in the network identified KMb as a key long-term benefit of their involvement, noting that the "potential impact included influencing policy, increasing the public's awareness of refugees and forced migration issues, and developing long-term relationships with NGOs and INGOs" (Hynie et al. 2014, 10). However, RRN participants also said that communication problems, because of the "tyranny of distance" and other challenges had limited the impact of the network and that "the benefits [of their involvement] needed to be more tangible and relevant to their own

agendas" (Hynie et al. 2014, 11). A redoubled focus on KMb through social media is one way that the RRN has sought to address the issues raised in the evaluation. Over the last ten years, the RRN has gained insight into the opportunities and limitations of social media as a forum for engagement within and between multiple sectors.

Studying Social Media

Social media has fundamentally changed how we create, manage, and share information and knowledge and is itself rapidly evolving. According to Cooper (2015, 8), "KMb efforts . . . are increasingly mediated through online platforms such as websites and online communities as well as through social media outlets such as Twitter and Facebook." A key element of the RRN has been its use of online tools, including a website and a suite of social media platforms (Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and listservs), to connect with different audiences, including academics, practitioners, policy actors, and refugees themselves (see also chapter 10).

"Social media" has been succinctly defined as "Internet services where the online content is generated by the users of the service" and include tools for communication, collaboration, and sharing of multimedia that have proven useful in every step of the research process including identification, creation, quality assurance, and dissemination of knowledge (Cann et al. 2011, 7). These tools stimulate opinion-sharing and information exchange and include Internet-based applications that allow for the production and circulation of user-generated content (Go and You 2016).

Scholars note that social media also provide people with limited technical knowledge the opportunity of being involved as consumers or even producers of content and as such it has great potential for social and cultural transformation (Panagiotopoulos 2012). While the academic literature on the use of social media is particularly focused on its use in the marketplace, there is a burgeoning interest in the use of social media by non-profits to communicate and build relationships with their publics (Campbell et al. 2014; Lim and Lee-Won 2017), and for activism (Dekker and Engbersen 2012; Panagiotopoulos 2012).

In research concerning social media as part of social justice campaigning, Paek et al. (2013) found that frequency of social media use is related to the civic/political participation of the users and leads to a sense of civic

mindedness and inspiration to taking concrete action. However, they also found that the connection between social media use and the desired behavioural outcomes is weak, and conclude that "social media may be a long tail strategy" that is more likely to be successful across larger geographical areas and over longer time periods (Paek et al. 2013, 1578). In a recent meta-analytic study that reviewed the findings of more than a hundred empirical studies about social media, the authors found a positive relationship between social media use and various forms of citizen engagement including constructive impact on levels of social capital, civic engagement, and political participation. Skoric et al. (2016, 1833) conclude that "the Internet could offer new opportunities for citizen networking and open up new venues for political expression, potentially activating those previously disengaged citizens." The rapid growth in social media use coupled with evidence of a linkage between social media and social change underline the importance of these tools in our day (see also chapter 6).

Different social media platforms play distinct roles and Facebook and Twitter are particularly associated with helping behaviour (Paek et al. 2013). Nah and Saxton (2013, 308) found that Facebook and Twitter are "in some ways different tools that can be used for different purposes, and may as a result require different configurations of organizational resources, governance characteristics, and contextual and environmental factors in order to implement and maintain." Researchers have also shown that social media tools vary based on the degree of self-disclosure they require, the level of social presentation they allow, and the extent to which they facilitate two-way symmetrical communications (Go and You 2016).

Social Media, Scholars, and KMb

According to Phipps et al. (2012, 183), "social media has the potential to support knowledge mobilization and research-based relationships." There is also compelling, if preliminary, evidence that social media promotion of publications, especially when combined with open access to that research, can substantially impact its dissemination. For example, while on maternity leave, Melissa Terras (2012) uploaded open access versions of her own peer-reviewed articles to her home institution's repository, tweeted about each item, and then analyzed the resultant downloading patterns. She saw a significant increase in interest in her research as a result of this Twitter

dissemination, as much as an elevenfold increase based on the results of her limited experiment.

However, in a recent investigation of the actual use of social media for KMb, Cooper (2014) found that less than a third of research brokering organizations (RBOs) in Canada used social media. Furthermore, those who did use Facebook and Twitter had only small networks. And while the scale of social media usage and speed of uptake of these tools across the globe suggests the possibility of great potential for their application to KMb, this author also found that much of the social media activity of RBOs to date is not actually focused on mobilizing research knowledge. Consequently, Cooper (2014, 17) insists that "social media must be embedded in larger processes in order to promote higher levels of activity and substantial interaction."

The concept of "research impact" has emerged as a key consideration in the formulation of research projects, though the term itself has come under some scrutiny. For example, Chubb and Watermeyer (2016b) wrote that "academics applying for research funding have expressed their concern at feeling the need to exaggerate and embellish the possible future impact of their work." As the governing rationality of neoliberalism seeks to transform us into self-investing entrepreneurs seeking to increase the value of our "human capital," other measures of quality in universities and research institutions are replaced with, "metrics oriented entirely to return on investment" (Brown 2015, 23). Recent investigation shows that researchers see their scholarly integrity at risk when they are compelled to "sell . . . their research ideas, or . . . the nonacademic impact of these, to research funders" (Chubb and Watermeyer 2016a, 1). Yet those of us engaged with research—and perhaps with a particular urgency when that research relates to human suffering—do nevertheless want our work to make a difference, to matter, in some small way to make the world a better place. The RRN's experience is that social media can be part of this "making a difference."

Findings, Analysis, and Discussion

The authors of this paper have had direct involvement with the social media presence of the RRN for between two and eleven years. This critical reflection of our experiences builds on the earlier evaluation of the RRN
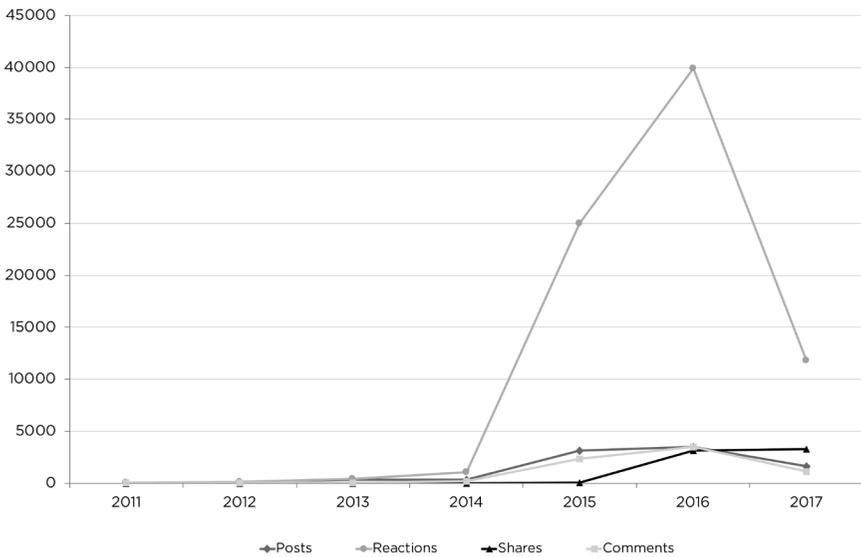
FIGURE 9.1

RRN Facebook Group Activity from 6 January 2011 to 29 June 2017. Source: https://sociograph.io.

and draws on our analysis of our own experience with the RRN social media tools. In addition to our own scrutiny of the use of these social media tools, we also rely on the free analytics generated by Sociograph.io that provides a graphic and numerical account of the RRN Facebook group's activity over time.[1]

In this section, we provide a concise description of the RRN's application of a range of social media tools (including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and webinars) including how they have been put to use. We stress: the need to develop an engaged audience prior to significant "trigger" moments when accelerated social change may be possible, the feedback relationship between an engaged audience and quality postings, and finally the key roles of moderator and of an associated quality website to ensure the effectiveness of social media tools. We also provide some preliminary thoughts on the impact of social media in terms of the mobilization of knowledge in the field of refugees and forced migration. Finally, we

comment on what can be known from the RRN's experience regarding the opportunities and limitations of social media as a forum for engagement within and between various constituencies and in particular for academics who seek to make their research accessible and available to all who might benefit from it.

Reach of the RRN Facebook Group

As of 26 October 2018, the RRN's FB group had 38,813 members. It is an "open" group, which means that anyone can see the group, its members, and their posts, though a staff person of the RRN also moderates it (the RRN's Methodology & Production of Knowledge in Forced Migration Contexts cluster also has its own FB group; see chapter 13). Though the original purpose of the FB group was to mobilize and sustain a Canadian and international network of researchers and research centres committed to the study of refugee and forced migration issues and to finding solutions to the plight of refugees, it has evolved into a loosely connected, much broader network of people interested in these issues through the sharing of information and has also been used as a forum for information exchanges such as refugees looking for directions and advice about safe routes to travel and students looking for educational and practice experiences. In addition to the postings by members of the group, as part of the RRN's communications strategy two staff members also regularly scan sources of relevant information and post resources on the FB group.

There was slow but steady growth from its 2009 FB beginning, but then something started to happen in the last third of 2014 that resulted in significantly higher activity over subsequent months. We suspect that the spike in interest was in response to the increased focus on refugee issues in the news, particularly stories about refugees in boats crossing the Mediterranean (including the tragedy of Alan Kurdi and his family). It may also be that the internal network started working, in the sense that an individual would sign up to be a group member and then their friends would see something of interest and subsequently joined. The RRN connected with other refugee-focused FB groups and was involved in establishing FB groups for the International Association for the Study of Forced Migration (IASFM) and the Canadian Association for Refugee and Forced Migration Studies (CARFMS), so there was some intermingling of the various FB groups, contributing to the greater global reach of the RRN Group (see

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also chapter 10). The result of this momentum was exponential growth in the membership of the group between 2015 and 2017 such that for a time it was attracting about a thousand new members per month. It has since levelled off to more modest yet steady growth.

Users of the RRN Facebook Group

In the beginning, the membership of the RRN FB group was primarily North American, though the rapid increase in members mentioned above coincided with a significant globalization of the membership as well, especially from the Middle East. While nearly half of the members use English as their primary language on their own FB pages (43 per cent), about the same number use a different primary language (44 per cent), most notably Arabic, Amharic, Swahili, and Bengali (note that 11 per cent had no posts at all).[2] And while most posts to the RRN FB group are still in English, some people post in other languages, including German, Swedish, Arabic, and Rohingya among others.

To gain additional insight into the range of people joining the RRN Facebook group, we did an analysis of a sample of the group's members by looking at the FB profiles of one hundred people who joined on 16–17 March 2016 and another hundred people who joined on 4–9 July 2017. The results of this analysis indicate that the increased global reach of this FB group continues: the two hundred new members surveyed in two different timeframes live in thirty-six different countries including, in addition to North America and Australia, twelve European countries, ten sub-Saharan African countries, seven countries from the Middle East, and four countries from South Asia. The data also suggest a trend towards a transnational membership (i.e., people who have lived in more than one country), with particular interest in the group by those with university-level education and a preponderance of members who are involved either through employment or volunteer activities in work focused on refugees and migrants.

The RRN FB group moderator, also one of the authors of this chapter, has identified a "90/10 rule" in that most people receive and read content but do not actually post. Over time though, we have also seen a greater use of the "like" button and some more substantive comments being made regarding posts. And while the growth of the RRN FB group may be part of a feedback loop such that people who have something they want to

disseminate may be more likely to post on the RRN FB group because of its large audience, a key issue that likely impacts the decision to post here is the quality of the posts that members receive.

There is a normative, even political, function to the RRN FB group. The RRN is about research and intellectual exploration but it is key to remember that the particular grounding and framing of the project is focused on improving the lives of those in forced migration or refugee situations. The group provides a credible venue where research and information can be disseminated, where new scholars can talk to each other and ask for information and advice, and where refugees themselves can gain insight about what is happening at the global level, what policies are in place, and where the movements of people are happening. A few members are clearly communication officers for their respective institutions so there are many postings regarding employment opportunities and educational programs related to forced migration. Other members regularly post information to shine light on under-examined issues or issues that have dropped off the mainstream media radar. With the groundswell of volunteerism in Europe, people are posting key practical information including guides regarding how to navigate the asylum system, tools for asylum seekers who are travelling, and free online language courses among other items. There is also an emerging group of people using the FB group to announce new relevant journal articles, books, and other publications.

While individual members may be focused on particular issues, the collective effort results in an FB group that helps people identify the global phenomenon behind the myriad particulars and to think about the deep-rooted causes and systemic issues that need to be addressed. For example, many posters have added to the conversation regarding how forced migration from Syria and Iraq is tied to climate change, that severe drought during the first decade of this century led to many farmers moving to the cities, thus aggravating social tensions (Kelley et al. 2015). Members respond to particular posts in a variety of ways, including like/dislike buttons, comments, and sharing posts with their own networks. These tools provide people with a way to respond emotionally to terrible stories such as a shocking account of organ harvesting among Somali forced migrants.

Infographics and memes tend to generate high levels of response because these formats communicate a great deal of substance in a simple

image or short video. For example, one meme that said "I'm more afraid of the people who are afraid of refugees than I am of refugees" received a great deal of response. Two hundred and seventy-five people "liked" it and many people also added comments. Stories about the poor behaviour of governments in relation to asylum access and refugee resettlement also generate a great deal of interest and activity. As such, the RRN FB page is contributing to the public discourse. We have seen some indication that academics are starting to recognize the potential for using the RRN FB group as a venue for dissemination of relevant research by sending a link to an open-access version of a journal article or other published research (for example on Academia.edu). Furthermore, people occasionally use the FB group to request specific articles they do not have direct access to because of paywalls, something that is especially relevant in the global south.

Sometimes, refugees themselves post short messages showing fear and anxiety. "I am stuck here . . . We live in this refugee camp and we are desperate, so please help us." Often, there is nothing the RRN can do beyond providing the platform for others to respond, though in a few cases we have managed to connect people in crisis with a local NGO. Occasionally, people ask how to get to a particular country and other members of the group are able to suggest where they might find useful information sources or an NGO that might be able to offer assistance.

While the spikes in activity on the RRN FB group (see Figure 9.1 above) seem to be associated temporally with real-life events, it is notable that the actual number of posts only shows a modest increase—what really changed is the amount of engagement with posted material by people who "like" or comment on a post. For example, during a 24-hour period in July 2017, several items attracted the attention of a segment of the FB group including video about a UNHCR program for economic development for refugees that elicited several shares, a posting for a new IOM program in a refugee camp in Iraq (six "wows"), an announcement about funding for a scholarship for someone to study activism in response to the European refugee crisis (22 "likes") and a link to a new online service called "emergencybnb" designed to connect refugees with potential hosts (22 "shares"). These spikes of activity have likely led to notable increases in people joining the group, which perhaps also reflects the increased global use of social media.

Role of Moderator of Facebook Group

While geopolitical shifts likely contributed to the increased participation in the RRN FB group over time, institutional support and the particular commitment of specific people has been key to the success of the group. Though the group is open, the RRN does provide oversight to membership and participation in the group. As part of the writing of this paper, the moderator (one of the authors) systematized the guidelines used to moderate the group, both in terms of accepting posts and in excluding individuals from membership as follows:

Dos

1. Members are free to post content about new research, papers, publications, conferences, workshops, NGO reports, best practices, videos, university programs in forced migration studies, scholarship, internship and job opportunities, and anything else you can think of that is a form of knowledge in refugee and forced migration studies.

2. Everyone is free to ask questions and carry on discussions around refugee/forced migration issues, programs, practices.

3. Content must be broadly relevant to refugee and forced migration issues, and overall supportive of refugees. Policies, attitudes, and practices can be critiqued, but not the existence of refugees (i.e., identifying them as bogus) and their right to seek asylum, as well as to enjoy human, civil, social, economic, and political rights.

4. If posting about non-refugee specific topics (i.e., climate change, gender, employment, migration, human rights), the content should overlap with refugee and forced migration issues. For example, a posting about human rights issues is not sufficient—there should be a connection to refugees and forced migration.

5. Certain campaigns and activities that are strictly advocacy around programs and services are allowed, but on very limited terms—it's not really relevant to the knowledge sharing focus of the group.

Don'ts

1. Advertising commercial services, self-promotion, or posting otherwise inappropriate content (porn, hate, xenophobia) will not be approved.

2. Posting exploitative "death porn"—e.g., raw footage or photos of victims of violence is often put forth without attribution or context and can violate the privacy of the victims and their families. Please refrain.

3. Posting videos or other types of content without some sort of explanation or context is not informative. If you link to a story or video, please make sure there is some sort of explanation or context in the description if the link doesn't have one or if there's no preview.

4. Posting personal funding campaigns (e.g., someone who wants to volunteer in a camp and is raising funding for their travel, or campaigns for individual refugees) is not permitted.

The role of the moderator has been key to the success of this FB group. The moderation of the FB group is a loose form of curation in which the moderator uses the "3-second rule": if it is not quickly clear to the moderator that the post has something to do with human rights, forced displacement, migration and refugee issues, or the human rights of people in danger of displacement, it is not approved. Overall, the moderation seeks to ensure that the content of the FB group reflects the complexity of the relevant issues.

In addition to the vetting role described above, the moderator also posts relevant material, provides commentary on posted material, and responds to the posts and comments of others. The institutional capacity and engagement provided by the moderator, a staff person at the Centre

for Refugee Studies, has been key, and the success of the RRN FB group is closely tied to the fact that the moderator makes time to be on the group as part of their daily routine. For the duration of the project, the RRN Co-ordinator has held this role as part of their assigned duties, a time frame that corresponds with the increased level of activity in the group, likely because members are encouraged through this steady institutional engagement. It is essential that an FB group like this be moderated. If a time comes when resources are no longer available to include this role as part of the responsibilities of a staff member, the RRN would need to develop a volunteer moderation role, perhaps shared by several people, though we are skeptical that the quality of the FB group would be maintained without institutional support.

RRN's Experience with Twitter

Paek et al. (2013) comment that different social media platforms play distinct roles, even in relation to the same campaign or project. Perhaps significant, those who participate in an FB group are called "members" while those who subscribe to a particular Twitter feed are called "followers." Early on, the RRN identified that organizations and individuals involved with forced migration and refugee issues in their professional lives are especially oriented towards using Twitter as a source of relevant information. As the most common platform for microblogging, the RRN uses Twitter to provide short and concise pieces of information, usually with links to items directly related to academic research in the area of forced migration. As of 26 October 2018, the RRN Twitter feed has 3,312 followers, much smaller than the FB group but still significant (for other uses of Twitter in the RRN, see chapters 6 and 10). While the FB group experienced exponential growth during certain periods, subscription to the RRN Twitter account has also grown at a steady pace over the past two years since a graduate student was assigned the duty of regularly posting items to the Twitter feed.

On two occasions (10 May 2016 and 11 July 2017), we conducted an analysis of the profiles of the most recent followers of the RRN Twitter feed. The results showed that nearly two-thirds of the users are individuals and almost another third are organizations or businesses (9 per cent of profiles did not provide the relevant information). Of those profiles for individuals that provided information regarding employment or profession

(about half of this subset of profiles), many indicated a connection to academia and/or to work in the area of refugees and forced migration. The geographical spread of the RRN's Twitter followers is concentrated in the UK and Europe (more than a third of followers) and in North America (nearly a fifth of followers), though it seems to be expanding to other parts of the world over time, particularly to Africa.

In their research of the use of Twitter by non-profits, Nah and Saxton (2013) analyzed the tweets posted by one hundred large U.S. organizations over a one-month period based on the primary purpose of the tweets. They identified that these organizations use Twitter for three primary purposes: informational, organizational promotion, and dialogic (i.e., relationship building). Early on, the RRN made the decision to use Twitter only for informational purposes, specifically for the sharing of academic/research related information in the area of forced migration. Our analysis of the followers of the RRN Twitter feed supports our sense that this information is primarily of interest to academics, professionals, and organizations connected to refugee and forced migration issues.

As with Facebook, regular attention to Twitter is crucial to its success. Unlike the Facebook group, only those few people (staff and key graduate students) identified as administrators are able to post items, and it is especially crucial that those who take on this role have the skills to identify relevant material that will be of interest to the RRN Twitter followers and that the organization has sufficient capacity to ensure that this task is completed on a regular basis. Twitter is especially effective in conjunction with a high-quality organizational website that functions as the permanent repository for items that are promoted using the Twitter feed, something we discuss further below.

YouTube, Listservs, and Webinars

As part of a KMb strategy using social media, the RRN has also made use of YouTube, listservs, and online discussions. For example, the RRN YouTube channel contains several hundred videos. With adequate resources and infrastructure, video is an effective way to mobilize research. The RRN is connected to several listservs including the news list of the Centre for Refugee Studies (CRS) as well as the listservs of CARFMS, IASFM, and the Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR). Each listserv was established with specific criteria regarding its purpose and the sort of material

that members should distribute. We estimate the combined reach of these listservs as approximately 10,000 users—a significant number for the mobilization of research, especially in conjunction with the FB group and the Twitter feed. While not always considered a form of social media, listservs do fit the definition of Cann et al. (2011) as an Internet service in which the users generate content.

RRN Website and Associated Networks

Most social media tools are by nature ephemeral. Tools such as Facebook and Twitter provide feeds for information, communication, and discussion in real time, though neither is especially well designed to function as repositories of materials for later use. Therefore, an organizational website with a searchable database is essential for the storage and organization of materials that are mobilized through social media. Furthermore, well developed Facebook groups and Twitter feeds are themselves excellent sources of materials that can either be uploaded or linked to the website. The RRN originally envisioned its website as a standalone hub, and it has only been through the experience of the past few years that we have recognized how important it is to see the website in a dynamic relationship with the communication tools of social media. And while the RRN did commit significant resources to the development of a website from the beginning, the site was impacted by major technical challenges that have taken time and resources to surmount.[3] We argue that the process of KMb using social media requires the thorough integration of a highly functional website. Given that the funding that has supported the RRN has ended, we are working with institutional partners to ensure that the now functioning RRN website will continue to be supported as an online research clearinghouse. As well, the Emerging Scholars and Practitioners on Migration Issues (ESPMI) Network set up through the RRN has developed its own effective website and social media presence that complement the work discussed in this paper, as do the activities of the various institutes and centres that have been part of the RRN (see chapter 10).

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed key learnings of the RRN in relation to "doing" KMb by way of social media: it takes time and effort to build credibility and develop a social media audience; you need to be prepared with effective tools when particular trigger events take place; there is a feedback relationship between the development of a social media audience and the mobilization of quality material; and, the use of social media tools should be integrated with a solid website. As such, we have identified key opportunities and limitations of social media as a tool for the mobilization of knowledge related to forced migration and as a form of engagement within and between the multiple sectors that are involved, including academics, practitioners, policy actors, and refugees themselves.

While social media is often rather shallow and broad, it is nevertheless a useful tool for engagement and can be harnessed to bring people together in other venues for sustained, thoughtful discussion and discourse. Social media is important because it creates a community of likeminded individuals who actually do get to know each other. It also gives opportunities for experts to engage with members of the public or refugees themselves, even if it is at a superficial level. Furthermore, it demonstrates that refugees themselves can be heard. Therefore, it is imperative that academics incorporate social media as part of their dissemination program and activities if they want their work to have impact beyond specialized audiences.

Notes

1   See sociograph.io.

2   The language of the member's most recent post on their own FB page was used as a proxy for their primary posting language.

3   Hindsight taught us that the open source, open access website platform we initially chose was not designed for the complex databases we wanted to include. Also, the university that hosts the RRN did not have the capacity to support the website platform's technical needs.

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