

Invited Fellows Class of 2024 Presents:
How can Coaches Survive and Thrive in the World of Social Media

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Fellows Research Methodology

First, we defined the field, with assistance from former USA Swimming Interim CEO Shana Ferguson. Then, we worked to identify typical challenges coaches face when we approach social media. We wanted to learn:

- 1) What platforms are out there?
- 2) Which platforms do our community, parents and swimmers use the most?
- 3) Which platforms are the most accessible and safest?
- 4) Which platforms are the most applicable to the swimming community?

In Phase I we conducted a **SURVEY** to understand how coaches were using the various platforms in their day-to-day.

The 2024 Invited ASCA Fellows platforms were chosen based on the ease of accessibility, safety of the platform and what seemed to be the most applicable to the swimming community, based on our initial survey results. Those platforms were Facebook and Instagram.

Next, as a follow-up, in Phase II we developed several **focus questions and created Focus Groups** aimed at identifying key factors that influence how coaches and clubs can best utilize social media. This helped us crystallize our position.

Finally, we offer some industry Best Practices through coach interviews, presentations, and advice from our colleagues.

The hope is to provide an overview of this overwhelming world of Social Media, and show coaches how some clubs survive...and even thrive!

Respectfully Submitted,

Your 2024 Invited Fellows Class

What is Social Media: How are we defining social media and how does it impact swimming coaches?

Social media refers to platforms and apps that allow users to create, share content, and engage in real-time networking. It plays a major role in our daily lives, including those of our swimmers, their families, and our broader club community. For coaches, it offers a powerful tool for communication, visibility, and growth.

By tapping into coaching groups, online resources, and shared content, we can stay informed, connect with others, and strengthen our club's presence. Embracing social media allows us to build community, celebrate achievements, and extend our impact beyond the pool. But it's not always so easy, or clear.

Our project started as "How Coaches can Survive and Thrive in the World of Social Media?"

But as we narrowed our focus, we thought it would be more beneficial to focus on illustrating **how coaches use different platforms to engage, attract and retain membership.**

Before we dive into the specifics of social media and the swimming community, let's dive into a small review of the history of social media. The timeline below illustrates the evolution of social media platforms and uses.

Pre-Social Media (1960s–1990s): Early Online Communication

- **1969:** ARPANET, the predecessor to the internet, enabled academic networking.
- **1978:** Bulletin Board Systems (BBS) allowed users to exchange messages and files.
- **1985:** GENie, Prodigy, and AOL offered early forms of forums and chat rooms.
- **1997:** SixDegrees.com launched, often considered the first true social network. Users could create profiles and friend each other.

Early 2000s: Rise of Social Networks

- **2002:** Friendster launched, popular in Asia; focused on connecting friends.
- **2003:** LinkedIn began for professional networking; MySpace emerged as a major platform, especially for music sharing.
- **2004:** Facebook started at Harvard and rapidly expanded.
- **2005:** YouTube launched, revolutionizing video sharing.

Late 2000s: Mainstream Adoption

- **2006:** Twitter launched with its 140-character "tweets."
- **2009–2010:** Facebook and Twitter became global phenomena.
- **2010:** Instagram launched, focusing on mobile photo sharing.

2010s: Diversification and Mobile Explosion

- **2011–2013:** Snapchat, Vine, and Google+ entered the scene (Google+ shut down in 2019).
- **2016:** TikTok (originally Musical.ly) began attracting younger audiences.
- **Social media:** Became a key player in marketing, politics, and news.

2020s: Meta, AI, and Metaverse

- **2021:** Facebook rebranded as Meta, reflecting its shift toward the metaverse.
- **Short-form video:** TikTok, Instagram Reels, YouTube Shorts dominate.
- **Viewing:** AI and algorithms heavily influence what users see.
- **Share Information:** Platforms face scrutiny over privacy, mental health, & misinformation

Based on this wide range of social media, Our goal is to remain focused on how swim coaches can use social media to assist in building a brand as well as retaining and attracting new members.

Phase I - Social Media Use Survey

At the outset, we understood that gathering information quickly and comprehensively was key to understanding how coaches could effectively use social media. The initial survey was intentionally broad, targeting factors likely to influence social media use, including:

- Geographic location (LSC)
- Club size
- Coaching roles and responsibilities
- Platforms used
- Style and frequency of posting
- Coach comfort with social media

Once survey responses were collected, several trends were identified:

- Coaches are already using social media and are comfortable with it.
- There is a strong consensus that Head Coaches should have final approval on posts.
- These insights shifted the research focus toward developing best practices for social media use by coaches.

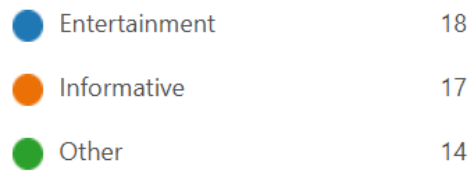
The following **survey results** helped shape this report into best practice development.

i. What is your club's goal with social media use?

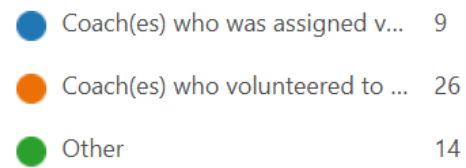
● Communication channel with ...	35
● Brand awareness to community	38
● Recruiting tool for swim team	25
● Recruiting tool for lesson prog...	15
● Other	9



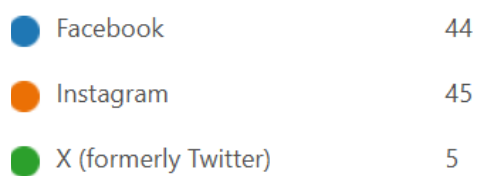
. What posts get the most views?



. Our social media channels are run by:



What social media platforms does your club use?



Rank which social media platforms has the highest engagement for your club?



SURVEY FINDINGS:

We learned that the two most frequently used platforms for Coaches are Facebook and Instagram.

Below highlights the purpose, function, and audiences based on survey responses and coach feedback. It also provides context on how clubs are currently leveraging social media in their communication strategies:

- Instagram dominates usage and engagement, especially among swimmers and younger audiences (teens, college-aged, and younger parents). IG Stories with videos and music are particularly engaging.
- Facebook is primarily used by parents and is effective for community outreach, advertising, and information sharing in local groups.
- Informative content (geared toward parents) currently outweighs entertainment. However, kids prefer engaging, fun, video-driven posts.
- Swimmers are more active and interactive on Instagram, while parents comment more on Facebook, though with lower overall engagement.
- Challenges include inconsistent posting and a lack of regular content creation.
- Instagram is seen as the most used and versatile platform among swimmers, parents, and staff.

DEEP-DIVE INTO THE 2 MOST-USED PLATFORMS BY COACHES:

Facebook is a social media platform founded in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg and his college roommates at Harvard. This was originally created for college students and has grown into one of the largest social networking platforms in the world, now operated by Meta Platforms, Inc. It also serves as a major hub for businesses, advertisers, and media outlets to reach several audiences. This has shaped our social media experience in the US. Here's a quick timeline of its history and a breakdown of how it works:

Early Years

- **2004:** Launched as "*The Facebook*", initially limited to Harvard students.
- **2004 (later):** Expanded to other Ivy League schools, then most U.S. universities.
- **2006:** Opened to anyone 13+ with a valid email address.

- **2007–2009:** Introduced features like News Feed, Facebook Ads, and the Facebook Platform for developers.
- **2010:** Reached 500 million users and was featured in the film *The Social Network*.

Going Public and Beyond

- **2012:** Facebook went public (IPO) and acquired Instagram.
- **2014:** Bought WhatsApp and Oculus VR.
- **2016:** Played a major role in global political discourse, facing criticism over misinformation and data privacy.

Rebranding and Meta

- **2021:** Facebook Inc. rebranded as Meta Platforms, Inc., signaling a shift toward building the “metaverse,” a vision of a shared virtual environment.
 - Facebook remains one of the largest social media platforms globally, with billions of users and a central role in online communication and digital advertising.

Instagram is a social media platform primarily focused on photo and video sharing. It was launched later, in October 2010 and later acquired by Facebook (now Meta Platforms, Inc.) in 2012. Instagram is widely used by individuals, influencers, brands, and creators to build communities, promote content and engage visually.

Instagram was initially created to offer a simple, visually appealing, way for people to share photos and videos from their mobile devices - intended to meet the growing demand for mobile-friendly, easy-to-use, visually driven social media. It blends photo sharing, social networking and mobile technology; ultimately filling a gap that platforms like Facebook and Twitter hadn't focused on yet. With the increase in widespread use of smartphones, especially the iPhone, Instagram was designed for mobile use first. Here are some key features of IG:

Simplifying Photo Sharing

- Easy to take, edit and share photos instantly.
- Provide better mobile experience for photo sharing than existing platforms.

Leveraging the Rise of Smartphones

- High-quality mobile cameras.
- The growing trend of mobile internet usage.
- Social networking features are integrated into mobile apps.

Creating a Social Photo Network

- Follow others, Like and comment on photos, Discover new content via hashtags and Explore.

Key Features

- **Photo & Video Posts:** Share images or videos with captions, filters and hashtags.
- **Stories:** Temporary posts (photos/videos) that disappear after 24 hours, like Snapchat.
- **Reels:** Short-form videos (up to 90 seconds), popular for trends, music and entertainment, and Instagram's answer to TikTok.
- **Explore Page:** Personalized discovery feed based on your activity.
- **Direct Messaging:** Private chat feature for individuals or groups.
- **IGTV** (now integrated into regular video features): Previously long-form video content.
- **Shopping:** Businesses can tag products in posts or set up in-app shops.

PHASE II - Focus Groups & Experts

As a follow-up to our primary survey, we developed several focused questions aimed at identifying key factors that influence how coaches and clubs can best utilize social media. Below is a summary of each question and the insights gathered from the responses.

Question 1: Our survey showed that social media is viewed as the Head Coach responsibility. Why do you view social media as the Head Coaches responsibility?

Summary of responses: Social media is often seen as the Head Coach's responsibility because they are viewed as the team's leader and key communicator. With limited volunteer support, the role naturally falls to them. This approach has historically helped maintain content quality. However, some believe social media should be managed by a dedicated person, with input or approval from the Head Coach. Currently, there's a gap in staffing, but efforts are underway to strengthen the team's online presence.

Question 2: Is there the ability to delegate this responsibility to another coach? Why or why not?

Summary of responses: There's agreement that someone with marketing or social media expertise should manage team accounts, rather than placing it solely on the Head Coach. Delegation is key, especially with clear guidelines and a defined storytelling approach. While some coaches handle basic posts (like photos), they acknowledge their limitations and welcome support from more experienced parents or assistants. The importance of allowing others to help and understanding content expectations is emphasized.

Question 3: Do you have a schedule for a posting rate and what is that schedule? Examples: one per day, once per week, once per month

Summary of responses: Most teams post several times a week, with many aiming for 2–3 posts weekly. While some strive for daily content, they often fall short due to time or relevance. Posting typically happens when there's valuable content to share, rather than strictly by schedule. A few teams use a content calendar with themed days, while others operate without a set plan.

Question 4: Within your schedule do you choose or alternate the style of posts? Examples: shout outs, training, information etc.)

Summary of responses: Some teams follow a varied or themed content approach, alternating between training updates, motivational quotes, testimonials, achievements, and fun activities. Others focus on informative posts, such as articles or meet updates, often with prior approval. While a few have a structured posting plan, others do not use a consistent schedule.

Question 5: What made you want to get more comfortable, if not already, with social media?

Summary of responses: Social media is seen as an essential, unavoidable tool for marketing, communication and team visibility. It's considered the "new normal" and a powerful way to attract swimmers, share positive messages and stay competitive. While some acknowledge the need to practice and adapt, others also caution about potential mental health impacts. Overall, there's strong agreement that embracing social media is necessary for success.

Question 6: Is there a specific type of post you personally utilize most or prefer the most? Why?

Summary of responses: Coaches try different types of content—like motivational quotes, team highlights, and meet fun—to engage their audience. Videos of swimmer achievements, team photos, and key updates receive the most attention. Posting frequency varies, with some active on both Facebook and Instagram, while others post less often.

Question 7: Our survey showed that the average time spent is 2 hours and less on Social Media? Is this the right amount? Should it be less or more?

Summary of responses: Posting frequency and time spent on social media vary by club schedule, with some aiming for fewer posts and others averaging around 2–3 hours per week. Several respondents are unsure about the ideal amount or the question's specifics but generally feel the current time spent is acceptable or could be less.

Question 8: "Many of you selected "other" as a type of post that gets the most views. What do you mean? (examples: training tips, team info like weather delays etc.?)

Summary of Responses: Videos showcasing swimmers breaking records and fun moments get the most views, followed by team photos and important updates like cancellations. Highlight reels are especially popular, while practice changes are communicated through the website and emails. Overall, content featuring kids having fun tends to attract the best engagement.

Question 9: Why do you lean towards a certain platform?

Summary of Responses: Platform choice is often based on ease of use and audience reach. Facebook is favored for engaging parents and older groups like Masters swimmers, while Instagram is preferred for its simplicity and ability to reach a wider, younger audience.

Question 10: Does leaning towards a certain platform impact how many posts get viewed or shared?

Summary of responses: Opinions vary on whether platform choice affects post views and shares. Some see Instagram as attracting more youth engagement, while others notice no significant difference or are unsure. Many post across multiple platforms based on capability rather than strategy.

Question 11: What advice do you have for other coaches for using social media?

Summary of responses: Key advice for coaches includes getting help, focusing on promoting the team rather than themselves, and setting a consistent posting schedule. Starting small and having a clear plan or direction is important. It's also crucial to keep content fun, positive, and avoid posting solely for clicks.

Chats with former Fellows A valuable interview with Jason Pullano (Fellows '22) was based on the incredible social media presence he has built. His presence can be seen daily through shared content and interactions. We learned that his core philosophy is "what is put out is what is perceived" as all posts reflect not only the team's image but also coaches' personal resumes. Content shared on the team's social media page should have purpose with consistent effort as there is no secret sauce. Jason's purpose in using social media was to accurately represent the team, highlight accomplishments while engaging the community with intentional and well-balanced content. As the public content defined how his team is viewed - both internally and externally.

Wisdom from a Social Media Success Story Coach Mike Murray is the Assistant Athletic Director and Head Swim and Dive Coach at Albany Academy. He gave a great presentation titled "Social Media: Building your Brand." The full presentation can be viewed at www.swimmingcoach.org. In summary of "Social Media; Building your Brand" we learned the following: **Catchphrase + Consistency = Strong Brand Reach.**

Branding and Catch Phrase

- **Keep It Simple** - Simple branding makes it easier to connect and grow. #workworks
- **Build a Brand Platform** - Create a logo and catchphrase everyone can use ultimately, making content creation and sharing easier.
- **Start Before Social Media** - Explain the brand: what it means, why it matters and must be usable across any group or team.
- **Maximize Member Involvement** - Get athletes using the catchphrase to increase reach and engagement.

Tools for Success

- **Google Analytics Account** - Google Analytics is important as it tracks data and shows information about visitors and their interactions that take place on your website. This is amazing information to help coaches and clubs create and share content that visitors are interested in.
- **Eye-catching content** - Use outside programs to create content. Two examples are Canva and Gipper.
- **Collaborate** - Bounce ideas off staff for variety and creativity.
- **Set Policy** - Create and review a social media policy yearly.

Platform -Specific Tips

- **Facebook**- Closed group for club info. Example use would be to repost weekly emails.
- **Instagram**- Best for visual, inspiring content.

Best Practices! What we Learned

Platform Usage:

Platform	Purpose	Posting Frequency
Instagram	Primary platform for all updates	Daily to several times/week
Facebook	Major Updates, announcements, major highlights	1-2x per week or as needed

Content Categories & Examples:

Category	Example Posts
Recognition and Highlights	Swimmer of the meet, Test Set Winners, Parent Volunteer of the Month.
Coach Engagement	Screenshot/snippet of coach planning, Short video of workout set up.
Collaboration	Joint test sets with other teams, shared posts when others use your pool, community engagement.
Community involvement	Volunteer spotlights, highlight fundraisers & donations. An example would be new training equipment.
Engagement & Interaction	Polls and votes (examples: favorite set, gear, colors).
Human Touch/Visual Appeal	Candid shots of swimmers (parents really enjoy these), swimmers birthdays.

HOW TO BALANCE YOUR CONTENT Tips

- **Balance Content** - Mix educational, celebratory and visual content. Content should appeal to different audiences (parents, swimmers and peers).
- **Show and Tell** - Use visuals and stories.
- **Content Tone** - Positive, professional and community-focused.
- **Purpose** - All posts must be clear.

More Tricks

- **Call to action** - When appropriate or needed. A great example would be to “Vote in our poll!”
- **Posts** - ensure every post aligns with the team's values and goals.
- **Branding** - use consistent colors, logos and hashtags.
- **Membership Engagement** - encourage team, parents and swimmers to like, comment and/or share posts.

BEST PRACTICE - WEEKLY CONTENT SHARING SCHEDULE

Day	Example Content
Sunday	Recap, poll or next-week teaser
Monday	Motivation or test set preview
Wednesday	Swimmer/Parent Highlight
Friday	Behind-the-scenes coach post or recap

Day	Theme	Examples
Monday	Motivation Monday	Instagram & Facebook share a quote, athlete spotlight or goal for the week. “Hard work beats talent when talent doesn’t work hard. #itsallifestyle”
Tuesday	Technique Tip Tuesday	Instagram reel/story from practice with a tip from a coach. Streamline video with caption: “Elbows locked = faster breakout”
Wednesday	What’s Up Wednesday	Post updates, reminders on Facebook. Create a poll or question on Instagram such as the hardest race.
Thursday	Throwback Thursday	Instagram & Facebook: old team photos, past meet moments or swimmer progress. Really encourage comments and tagging.

Friday	Feature Friday	Instagram post highlighting a swimmer, coach or team value with a quote or fun fact. Cross-post on or even expand with more information on Facebook.
Saturday	Speed Saturday	Post a recap of a swim meet or a test set. Posts could also include recognition for new championship time standards, best times, etc.
Sunday	Shoutout Sunday	Instagram: Celebrate weekly accomplishments - Best times, effort, team spirit. Make sure to use team's catch phrase. Thanking volunteers /coaches is a great idea.

CONCLUSION

Social media has become an essential tool in modern coaching, transforming how swimming clubs communicate, promote and grow. From its early beginnings to today's dynamic, mobile-first platforms, social media has evolved into a space where visibility, engagement, and storytelling are critical. Coaches now have the power—and responsibility—to use these tools to attract and retain membership, celebrate achievements, and shape public perception.

Our project began with a question: *How can coaches survive and thrive in the world of social media?* Through surveys, interviews, and focused research, we discovered that success lies in intentionality, delegation, and consistency. **Coaches should not shoulder this responsibility alone. Instead, with the help of dedicated staff, tools like Canva and Google Analytics, and a clear brand message, clubs can create impactful content that reflects their mission and values.**

By embracing best practices—such as establishing a content schedule, balancing post types, and encouraging community interaction—clubs can foster a positive online presence that inspires swimmers, engages families, and builds lasting connections with their community.

As social media continues to evolve, so must we as coaches. With clarity of purpose, creativity, and collaboration, we can leverage these platforms not only to inform, but to inspire.