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## **Accessibility Matters: Supporting Inclusive Social Media in Academic Libraries**

*Tyne Stanley*  
*The Open University, UK*

The Open University (OU)'s mission is to be open to people, places, methods, and ideas, and this means that a commitment to equality is embedded in all that we do, including our social media activity. People of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities study with us. In fact, we are the largest provider of higher education for people with disabilities: 30,791 students declaring a disability studied with us in 2019/20. Accessibility and inclusivity are at the forefront of the OU's mission to be open to all, and so we've worked hard to make sure the content we put out on the OU Library's social media channels can be enjoyed by as many people as possible.

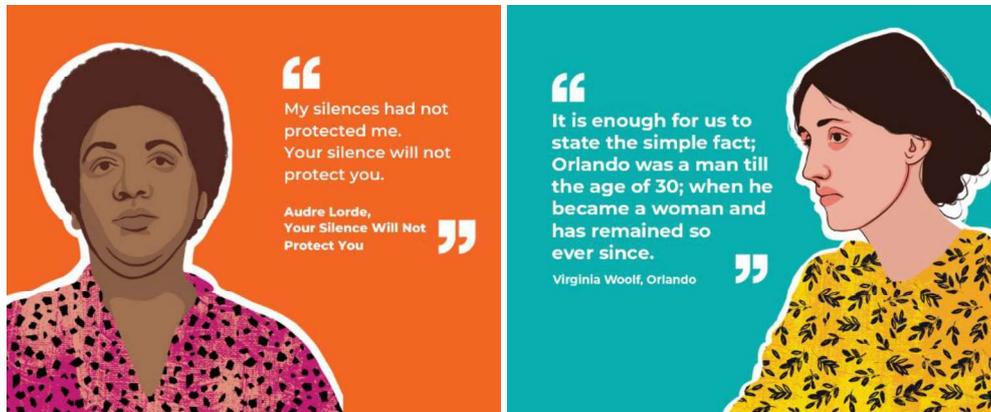
Back in October 2020, my team received an email from a colleague directing us to a blog post about an upcoming social media 'tweetposium'. Now, my background is in social media marketing, but even I had never heard of a tweetposium before. So, feeling intrigued, we perused the blog post and found the criteria of showcasing how you've used social media to build community, care and compassion as very fitting for the OU Library.

Our submission for the tweetposium consisted of four short videos showcasing various tweets we had sent out over the past couple of years that we felt best represented our content's ability to foster community, care and compassion amongst our followers. These included:

- **Accessibility & Support for Students with Disabilities:** our promotion of awareness days, such as International Day of Sign languages and Dyslexia Awareness Week, by sharing informational videos and links to online support, as well as creating videos with OU Library staff to showcase the support they provide.



- **Equality, Diversity & Inclusion:** our celebration of diversity and the strengths that it brings. For instance, we celebrated Black History Month by showcasing poetry written by BAME poets and observed Pride Month with posts highlighting LGBTQIA educators and activists. For both campaigns, we created original artwork to accompany the posts and linked through to free resources so our followers could learn more.



- **Mental Health & Wellbeing:** sharing mental health support information and resources from the OU and beyond to help promote the wellbeing of our community. Campaigns are run during mental health awareness days and throughout the year providing students with tips to help them look after their mental wellbeing.



- **OU Digital Archive:** how we love to share our university's unique history, by showcasing the Digital Archive through throwback tweets that showcase old study materials and other items relating to the history of the university.



The tweets that featured these videos got a great response and we were delighted with the feedback we got from them. Some examples included:

*“Brilliant first session to kick off what will be an amazing day.”*

*“Brilliant outline of the great work that @OU\_Library do to support our students and the wellbeing of our diverse community at #SocMedHE20.”*

*“Thank you @OU\_Library for sharing resources related to sign language and dyslexia.”*

*“More brilliant resources shared by the @OU\_Library on helping students to manage their mental health during a very challenging year!”*

*“Wow! I had no idea the OU had been active for so long!! That’s amazing.”*

*“It is interesting to see how some institutions are very active in social media to share their #equality and #diversity practices #SocMedHE20”*

The videos are now featured in a playlist on [the OU Library YouTube channel](#) so that they can be viewed by anyone at any time. It was wonderful (and extremely useful) to also have the opportunity to see how other higher education institutions are using their social media channels to communicate with their community.

Our involvement in the tweetposium got us thinking – what else can we do to make sure that our social media continually promotes equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI)? And how can we help others to do the same? When you go to Google and type ‘inclusive accessible social media’, it returns with ‘about 364,000,000 results’... where on earth do you start?! It took me several days of reading multiple web pages to really get to grips with best practices for using social media in an inclusive and accessible way. Within the OU Library, we have several colleagues that volunteer to create content for our social media account outside of their usual roles. We thought it would be useful to collect and condense the results of my research to create a central document that contains best practice information for creating inclusive and accessible social media, but with academic accounts in mind. The document could then be shared amongst our colleagues, other academic libraries, and beyond, to help others who also want to allow their content to be enjoyed by as many people as possible.

I began by collating the key information that I’d found during my research into a document and organised the information into easy to digest sections: Promoting Diversity and Inclusion; Making Text Accessible; Making Images Accessible; Making Videos Accessible; Contrast and Colour. I also included a section for references and links to further reading (the document would have to be hundreds of pages long to include everything in depth – and no one would have time to read that!) I am by no means an expert in digital accessibility, so I wanted to get the document reviewed by people with an expertise in making online content accessible. The OU has an Accessibility and Usability Evaluation team, as well as an EDI team, who very kindly agreed to review the document and comment with their suggestions. I also sought feedback from our central social media team and an external Library Marketing Trainer. The final step was to get a ‘seal of approval’ per se from an external accessibility consultant. Several of our team members, including myself, have taken part in some fantastic digital accessibility webinars provided by UK charity [AbilityNet](#), who house a team of digital accessibility consultants, so they seemed the ideal people to go to. Their input to the guide has been invaluable.

The latest version of the [Inclusive and Accessible Social Media Guide](#) can be accessed via Open Research Online (ORO) – the Open Access repository of research outputs from The Open University's research community. The service is publicly accessible and can be browsed and searched freely. We are however currently in the process of finding a more permanent home for the guide where we can feature the different versions as it gets updated to reflect changing practices. We'll keep everyone posted about this via the [news section of the OU Library website](#).

We hope that the document will prove to be a valuable resource for others to use in promoting online accessibility and inclusivity. No one is going to be perfect when it comes to being inclusive online but making an effort to make social content more accessible ensures that everyone can enjoy it. The more people that create inclusive content, the more likely it will be for accessibility best practices to become the norm.

## **Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.