



Bruce Trail CONSERVANCY

Bruce Trail Conservancy Social Media Toolkit and Social Media Best Practices for Tourism

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Executive Summary

This social media toolkit aims to provide a resource to identify opportunities for the Bruce Trail Conservancy to engage with their users via social media while managing the challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic through this upcoming summer. Through the undertaking of an environmental scan, the understanding of the organizational context, and the development of a needs assessment, this report begins by presenting a better understanding of the Bruce Trail Conservancy in a broader context. From there, a literature review is presented, documenting the opportunities that the BTC social media platforms present in regard to managing capacity, managing risk, and contributing to the degrowth of tourism through promoting proximity and slow tourism. We also present the motivations for social media usage, the importance of communication and connection on social media platforms, and an outline of the most popular social media platforms and their associated trends.

Our key deliverables section begins with a documentation of the growth seen across all platforms between February 9, 2021, and April 9, 2021. Additionally, we present a general overview of the BTC social media platforms including the approximate # of posts in 2020, approximate number of average interactions on posts made in 2020, the top performing topics, and any additional findings. Another key deliverable is a 7-page tip sheet document that outlines the general best practices for each platform, some tips that can be applied to all platforms, and a list of accessibility tips and resources. Furthermore, we provide a Guide to Hashtag Development and Use, a list of current effective hashtags that are in use by the BTC, and a list of potential new hashtags to be used in the future. Next, we provide suggestions pertaining to how and why the BTC should increase the number of trail images on their social media platforms. We also provide suggestions pertaining to how and why a variety of demographics should be represented on social media. Finally, we recommend that social media tracking, analysis and interpretation occur on a monthly and yearly basis, and provide a list of the suggested metrics for each platform that should be tracked, analyzed and interpreted on a monthly and yearly basis.

Introduction

This social media toolkit aims to provide the Bruce Trail Conservancy with a valuable resource to aid them in disseminating information to their stakeholders and the communities they serve via various social media platforms. This report begins with a significant focus on COVID-19 and its associated impacts on the Bruce Trail Conservancy. Despite this, the majority of our findings and recommendations can be implemented during and following the COVID-19 pandemic. This report begins by situating the Bruce Trail Conservancy in a broader context, before moving on to review the literature, popular social media platforms and their associated trends. From there, a variety of key deliverables are presented for present and future use by the Bruce Trail Conservancy.

Understanding the Bruce Trail Conservancy's Broader Context

In order to determine what areas within a social media toolkit would be of most significant use to the Bruce Trail Conservancy, it was critical to understand the BTC's broader context by undertaking an environmental scan and understanding the organizational context. This section will outline our findings from the environmental scan, our examination of the BTC's organizational context, the needs assessment, as well as a list of key deliverables.

Environmental Scan

To understand the BTC context as positioned within the broader context of trail organizations, we met with industry leaders including Patrick Connor, Executive Director of the Ontario Trails Council, and Kelsey Johnson, Social Media Coordinator of the Voyageur Trail Association. This meeting was an opportunity to explore current industry trends among two organizations with similar operations and who serve similar stakeholders. From this initial meeting with leaders of similar organizations, the following items were noteworthy.

General Trends in Social Media Usage during the COVID-19 Pandemic

During the COVID-19 pandemic, both the OTC and VTA reported that they experienced an increase in public interest in trails, and thus an increase in their social media followers and interactions. This experience stems from the desire that individuals possess to know what is open and closed, and to understand the current COVID-19 protocols as they relate to specific trails. The growth findings presented in Figure 1 demonstrate that all of the BTC's social media platforms continue to see growth in their followings, which ultimately speaks to a need for current and updated information

Need for an Awareness Campaign for Responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic

Three items were identified within this main point. First, there is a need to inform visitors about some of the changing trends as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. These changing trends include the walkable passage exemption, managing the overuse of particular trails, and ensuring users only visit local trails. Next, there is a need to address risk management during the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, there needs to be clear information developed and delivered that can help trail users understand how to comply to the health guidelines, and information developed about the booking processes and what to do in the event that a trail reaches its capacity. In addition, there is a need to promote safe trail usage in general beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. In order to do so, social media campaigns can be developed to increase public awareness of trail safety (i.e. rural trails require special preparation, no "risky" photoshoots, etc.).

Political Context

When examining the political context, it was identified that there is a need to capture trail usage statistics. With these statistics, a better understanding of capacity demands will be developed and presented to policy makers to help inform future decisions (i.e. construction of new parking lots). Ultimately, with a better understanding of the usage statistics of each trail, the Bruce Trail Conservancy will be able to make informed decisions about where to place resources.

Understanding Trail Users

Moving forward, the following questions need to be considered in order to develop a thorough understand of trail users:

- Who are the trail users and what are their needs?
- How have behaviours changed during the COVID-19 pandemic in regard to outdoor recreation behaviours and intents? Will these behaviours remain the same when a sense of “normalcy” returns?
- What role does trail usage play in health and well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- How can we improve access? Are there limits to access, and can they be addressed?
- How can the needs of various groups (i.e. snowmobilers and hikers) be met?

Organizational Context

In examining the Organizational Context of the BTC we met with Adam Brylowski, the Manager of Conservation and Trail with the Bruce Trail Conservatory. From this meeting, the following items were noteworthy.

Quick Facts and History

The Bruce Trail Conservancy was originally established to protect the Niagara Escarpment. It was believed that the best way to protect the land was to provide public access to it. To date, 67% of the trail is secured. Most of this land is acquired through fundraising.

Bruce Trail Conservancy and the COVID-19 Pandemic

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic there have been huge influxes of people to the Bruce Trail, which has resulted in overcrowding issues and created issues in managing the number of users. As a result of this influx and overcrowding, there has been a significant amount of trespassing on private land and many parking lots are at capacity. With the parking lots at capacity, visitors in Hamilton and Burlington are being ticketed because they are parking illegal in order to visit parts of the Bruce Trail.

Issues with Social Media in Trail Management

Social media is one of the largest driving factors for overcrowding and trespassing. In regard to overcrowding, only a handful of areas are recognizable or easily found through a Google search. For instance, Beaver Valley Club and the Bruce Peninsula experience the most overcrowding because people are drawn to the features of these easily recognizable areas. Moreover, it is hard to control what trail users are posting on social media. For instance, if users decide to post an image of an area that is off-trail or out of bounds, others who view this image

may decide they want to go visit that area. This contributes to increases in trespassing, poses an incredibly safety risk for trail users and can be a liability for the Bruce Trail Conservancy.

Needs Assessment

Based on the information gathered from the environmental scan and organizational context, we were able to develop a needs assessment. This assessment identified the organization's current needs, and thus informed the creation of the deliverables within this toolkit.

Areas of Focus for Social Media Communications

The four areas of focus that were identified were risk management, capacity management, increasing the volume of images of trails, and expanding the demographic of trail users. First, in regard to risk management, there needs to be a stronger focus on (a) managing safety on the trails (i.e. education on appropriate attire, supplies, and expertise needed to handle the Bruce Trail terrain), and (b) education on hiking etiquette both generally and during COVID-19. Secondly, in regard to capacity management, there needs to be a stronger focus on dispersing the crowds in very popular areas. Specifically, it needs to be communicated to visitors that they need to have more than one destination in mind, and that they should refrain from visiting areas of the trail that are full. Next, the BTC needs to increase the number of images of trails that they share. This is important for two reasons: (1) these posts receive the most interaction on the BTC social media platforms, and (2) these can help with risk and capacity management by showcasing the types of terrain to expect and by promoting less visited areas. Finally, the BTC can use their social media platforms to help expand the demographic of trail users. Currently, the main demographic is older adults and by showcasing a variety of individuals on the trails (i.e. varying in age, race, gender, ability, etc.), the BTC is more likely to broaden their target demographic.

Key Deliverables

Based on the information gained from undertaking an environmental scan, understanding the organizational context and developing a needs assessment, we have determined a list of key deliverables that will allow for the continued success of the BTC's social media platforms in the present and future.

Literature Review

In undertaking an environmental scan, understanding the organizational context and conducting a needs assessment, we identified areas where social media could be a tool for managing capacity, managing risk and as a general means for promoting safe trail usage. While the COVID-19 pandemic presents challenges, it also presents unique opportunities for the Bruce Trail Conservancy to help develop sustainable tourism activities including proximity tourism and slow tourism.

Capacity Management

Our initial research of the BTC social media platforms and our conversations with Adam Brylowski indicated that they had seen a drastic increase in the number of individuals who had demonstrated interest in the trails since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, Adam stated that more interest was shown through social media and the sale of guidebooks had also increased, both indicating an increased demand for up-to-date trail information. The numbers we have tracked on the social media platforms also reflect this as a trend. Assuming

interest continues, we can predict that there will also be elevated participation levels through the upcoming summer than previously expected.

Challenges Presented

Assuming that COVID-19 does not necessitate a complete lockdown over the summer, trends indicate that the BTC will have higher participation than previous years. The COVID-19 pandemic has created a situation where international travel over the summer is not a possibility, and even travelling between provinces is discouraged at the moment. As a result, many individuals will be seeking recreational opportunities closer to home. Due to the lack of other activities that meet social distancing requirements, for many using the BTC trail networks might become a viable source for outdoor recreation through the summer months. However, last summer, the BTC found that the increasing numbers of trail users presented a significant challenge in capacity management. These issues are likely to continue to be an issue this summer.

Even during a typical summer, capacity management can be a challenge. Several BTC locations have been widely popularized through social media, such as the Beaver Valley Club and the Bruce Peninsula. In previous years it has already been noted that these areas tend to be more crowded, which is likely to be an even more significant issue this summer as the trails may see growth in the number of users.

How to Use Social Media to Overcome Challenges

To deal with increased capacity challenges, the BTC could aim to disperse crowds and use social media to attract users to less-visited areas. To do so, the BTC could share images of less visited areas with an exciting caption that highlights what makes those areas interesting or unique. Providing examples is valuable as a strategy as it allows for users to consider other options, which is not possible if trail users are not aware of their existence in the first place. Social media could highlight areas that might be at capacity and specifically redirect users to other locations and present different options that they could use instead. In our interview with Adam, we also discovered that guidebook sales have drastically increased over the past year, demonstrating the increasing demand for access to up-to-date trail information. Social media can be a valuable tool in managing this demand.

Risk Management

During COVID-19, capacity management presents a severe problem for risk management. Overcrowding poses a direct concern for health and safety, and social distancing cannot be maintained in parking lots or on sections of the trails.

Parking lots in specific areas such as Hamilton and Burlington are typically at total capacity, and people will often park in non-designated spaces. In years past, this has already been an issue. One issue is that not all the land that the BTC operates on is secure and is privately or publicly owned land. Private landowners have demonstrated frustration with trail users who park on their land to access the trails. Additionally, parking causes congestion, and as a result, many illegally parked vehicles have needed to be ticketed by the local municipalities. In this scenario, capacity management is directly linked to risk management. Some users endanger their safety by parking in non-designated areas and attempting to navigate to the trails on foot.

The BTC also expressed issues for safety where people have injured themselves taking dramatic or risky pictures for social media.

How to Use Social Media to Overcome Challenges

For the trails to continue to be used during this summer, the BTC needs users to follow COVID-19 protocols. Social media can be a valuable tool to quickly and effectively communicate with trail users and ensure that they have the information they require to use the trails safely. Information that could be shared with users includes ensuring that they are abiding with the safety procedures, which trails are opened and closed, and how to follow trail protocol. People will also need to be made aware if a location is at capacity, and if they will need to find an alternative. Social media can be used to communicate this message and suggest other locations that are less visited.

Social media could also help the BTC manage the non-COVID related risks of hiking. Users need to be aware of how to prepare for a hike. For example, dress to be ready for the day's activities and how to ensure they are proactively planning to hike safely. Social media could address trespassing issues by communicating that many sections of the trail operate on private land and the importance of only using designated trails. To manage risk and promote safe trail usage, infographics would highlight what is needed to navigate the trails safely. Moreover, the BTC should refrain from posting areas that visitors should not access. Another option is to include images that showcase the signage that tells users which areas are prohibited. The captions included with these posts should be a reminder not to access areas that have this signage posted and provide a reason as to why users are prohibited from accessing these areas (i.e., damaging natural areas, etc.)

COVID-19: An Opportunity to Rethink Tourism

It might be helpful to consider that the BTC is uniquely positioned to aid in degrowing tourism and allow more sustainable alternatives such as proximity tourism to become more viable and standard options for the general public. The COVID-19 pandemic presents a unique opportunity to create long-term change. Aiding with the shift to proximity tourism could be a defining step towards working towards responsibility and care in tourism.

Degrowing Tourism: Why Degrowth is Necessary

The pandemic has presented a unique opportunity to rethink tourism and work towards just and responsible practices. The current system of tourism was developed under the same neo-liberal principles that shaped the modern economy. Tourism has officially become an industry and utilizes economic growth measures as indicators of success and viability (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2006). Unfortunately, measuring growth objectives as success has resulted in consequences as environments and social goals have been subverted as priorities.

Efforts are being made to work towards responsible practices in the tourism industry. However, this is almost impossible to achieve because of deeply embedded systemic injustices. Degrowth seems to be about living within our means and addressing the systemic factors that impede sustainable operations. It is essential to recognize that the tourism industry has an enormous environmental impact because it consumes incredible amounts of resources to benefit a very select few of the members of the privileged population (Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019). While global development has begun to create greater equality in wealth and standards of living, this provides more individuals with the means to travel than ever before, meaning that "we are heading towards mega-mass tourism" (Wheeler, 1993). As tourism continues to increase,

sustainably managing demand has become an area of immediate concern. Unless a solution is found, the environmental impacts could be staggering.

Challenges for Moving Towards Degrowth

The challenges for achieving degrowth are ultimately embedded in the systemic challenge that tourism has evolved as an industry and is by definition driven by growth objectives.

Higgins- Desbiolles et al. (2019) speaks to the desire of tourism authorities to "justify their share of the governmental budget" and be recognized as "contributors to nations' economic development." As long as tourism continues to be motivated by growth above all else, degrowth is not possible. Jamal (2019) stated that progress would require altogether redefining the ontology of how tourism is practiced.

One of the barriers to creating genuinely sustainable practices is that many businesses are still relying on "business-oriented thinking," which is fundamentally driven by growth (Rantala, Salmela, Valtonen, & Höckert, 2020). This business-oriented thinking is one example of the systemic issues rooted in tourism through neoliberalism, where economic objectives are still considered the most critical priority. As a result, even "sustainable options" for travel do not have the impacts they promise (Rantala et al. 2020). Wheeler (1993) argues that much of the marketing for sustainable tourism is little more than false promise and does nothing to address the actual environmental problems created by mass tourism.

Proximity Tourism as a Strategy for Degrowth

COVID-19 has provided a pause in which tourism has the opportunity to reinvent itself and implement new systems that will bring responsible tourism from a concept into a standard practice in the industry moving forward. One of the biggest questions the tourism industry will need to ask in moving forward will be how tourism can drive social and economic development for its stakeholders while consuming within its means. Higgins-Desbiolles et al. (2019) cited the UNWTO to demonstrate how degrowth might be a means of aiming towards sustainable development goals (UNWTO, n.d.). One strategy for moving towards degrowth could be developing proximity tourism as a viable substitute for long-distance travel.

Opportunities for the BTC

Social media could be a tool for taking advantage of the increased interest that the pandemic has created to get people participating in local recreation and even "tourism-type experiences" even after the pandemic. This is a unique opportunity to take advantage of the interest and build new conceptualizations of the tourism experience. At the same time, individuals have an increased engagement level that might typically be expected under normal circumstances.

The BTC's Role in Degrowing Tourism

Higgins- Desbiolles et al. (2019) state that one of the most challenging aspects of degrowing tourism is getting people to "buy-in" to the concept. In this way, COVID-19 has presented a unique opportunity to grow interested in proximity tourism as it has created circumstances where individuals have no choice but to look closer to home. While proximity tourism cannot be expected to replace long-distance travel, it would be an accomplishment to get individuals to consider local options as an occasional substitute.

How the BTC could use social media to sustain interest in proximity tourism experiences after the pandemic. While the BTC might not be considered a location that would substitute long-distance travel, it does present a pathway for fostering more significant engagement with local experiences after the pandemic by taking this opportunity to build awareness about opportunities for recreation that exist closer to home.

COVID-19 as an opportunity to build a trail culture and expand user demographics

The COVID-19 pandemic could present an excellent opportunity to build a trail culture and connect with new demographics. The COVID-19 pandemic has created a broad range of interest across demographics, and this is a crucial time to engage while the interest is there so that it can be sustained after the pandemic.

This is also an opportunity for Canadians to get out and appreciate the beauty in their own country instead of going somewhere else to experience it. Many people visit Canada to view its natural beauty in the summer. Meanwhile, Canadians travel internationally for the same reason. This is an excellent chance to create awareness for the natural beauty that exists closer to home and for users to become more familiar with their local trail infrastructure.

How the BTC could use Social Media to build a trail culture. Social media campaigns should be diverse and appeal to many different user sectors and cater to each demographic's needs. Social media campaigns could also focus on promoting Canada's natural beauty.

Opportunities to Foster Slow Tourism

COVID-19 has presented a valuable opportunity to illustrate current tourism practices' fragility and has provided a rare pause under which tourism providers can re-evaluate. The delay given COVID-19 allows for opportunities to challenge the previous expectations of what is involved in the tourism experience and examine new narratives such as those presented through a proximity tourism experience.

As stated by Higgins- Desbiolles et al. (2019), "in a resource-constrained and stressed world, tourism will have to justify its existence by offering more benefits and value than it currently does." These narratives can provide insights into the components that make tourism meaningful to participants and help providers create more fulfilling experiences while also working towards more sustainable practices.

Furthermore, the modernization paradigm has led to a system where tourism is consumable, and often the environment is impacted in irreversible ways. When a location is commercialized and commodified, one of the problems is a lack of regard for the location's importance. Slow tourism encourages individuals to engage in an experience more deeply and fosters respect for the environment itself.

Social media often demonstrated the dichotomy between what we think a tourism experience is supposed to look like and what brings people lasting and meaningful experiences in tourism. An article by Rantala, et al. (2020) explores how human nature connections built by proximity tourism experiences can change what tourism is and can involve. These understandings are built from exploring geo-tourism from a feminist perspective that looks at the relationships between human, non-human, and earth holistically.

How the BTC could use social media to generate interest in slow tourism. The BTC could use social media to suggest ways that users could engage in some of the slow tourism

practices to create more profound and more manifold experiences for themselves as they enjoy the trails. Rantala et al. (2020) explicitly derive their findings from examining rhythm, vitality, and care and demonstrate how these concepts could be applied to a proximity tourism experience.

Rhythm is about slowing down and attuning oneself to observe the natural rhythms inherent in nature. Vitality is about natural surroundings as "lively" as opposed to the way that it is typically regarded in "stable, inert and passive matters" (Rantala et al., 2020). Care is about becoming responsible for caring for our actions and encounters with others just by entering the space. Social media could encourage users to slow down and observe the natural environment's subtleties and engage in more profound, more meaningful experiences with nature.

Motivations for Social Media Usage

The attention of social media has many motivations for users to engage in popular trends and platforms. It has become more popular throughout the years, creating many opportunities for businesses and individuals to grow their audiences. The four main reasons for social media motivations are entertainment, information seeking, personal utility and convenience (Al-Menayes, 2015). Of the four main reasons, entertainment and information seeking are the key that brings these social media platforms together for BTC to succeed in getting more trail users. When users are searching and looking for things to do, it creates curiosity based on someone else's experiences. Bloggers on social media tend to shape how readers understand social context posted, and users become influenced by decisions to engage in certain activities (Muldoon & Mair, 2016). This is the idea that social media engages users to get curious about their decision-making process when using social media for their entertainment and to find information that sparks their interests. Companies and users want to promote their goods by sharing and contacting users based on your profile's displayed preferences for marketing purposes. Companies may use social media to collect information from people by sharing personal data, which allows them to exchange, distribute, and receive content for improved marketing practices (Berg & Sterner, 2015). Companies that use different kinds of forums to reach audiences are motivated by a desire to raise credibility and status with their mission (Berg & Sterner, 2015). In a business context where there are opportunities and experiences to be developed, social media becomes a great source to fish out users for a motive that benefits them and satisfies them to raise more awareness through their experiences.

Meaning of Communication and Connection on Social Media Platforms

One of the most appealing characteristics on social media platforms is its ability to easily link users together. This basic networking function improves the user's experience by enhancing their feelings of connectedness with other users (Chan-Olmsted, Cho, & Lee, 2013). Users of social media have new ways to establish relationships and strengthen social bonds with others by exchanging content (Chan-Olmsted et al., 2013). Being able to freely communicate with others is one of the most important contact functions. Users can discover "purpose" through seeking love, showing personal issues, and meeting and engaging with like-minded individuals, which give opportunity for users to communicate with one another (Berg & Sterner, 2015). This type of contact is especially useful to people who are going through a life change and wanting to take on something new.

Furthermore, the user's experience is directly related to the degree of interaction through social media contact. Users with a strong sense of connectedness, for example, have an improved

perception of becoming closer to others, as well as a sense of belonging and shared identity with other users (Chan-Olmsted et al., 2013); this is accompanied by greater interaction with a variety of social classes (Chan-Olmsted et al., 2013). Users who have a strong sense of connectedness, on the other hand, are more likely to feel physically isolated from others (Chan-Olmsted et al., 2013). These people interact with others as if they are strangers, and they often have greater feelings of inadequacy in social settings (Chan-Olmsted et al., 2013). This suggests that social media contact and social connections may have an indirect relationship that shapes the user experience to open new gates that will allow users to experience and acknowledge new experiences they can encounter later.

Popular Social Media Platforms and Trends

Social media has the power to speak directly to individuals in a variety of ways. As social media becomes more than just listening to people talk it has created opportunities for us to hear, talk, and visualize; have conversations and experiences; and just connect with people online. The discovery in question, what is the most popular media platforms and trends right now as of 2020-2021, and how can we use to it to create best practices for the Bruce Trail Conservancy Social Media Toolkit.

Understanding Popular Social Media Platforms in Different Categories

Table 1 will review the popular social media platforms in a variety of categories, with the intention of providing the Bruce Trail Conservancy with the information needed to make informed decisions moving forward about the social media platforms they operate.

Table 1

Popular Social Media Platforms in a Variety of Categories

Category	Popular Social Media Platforms
Non-profits	Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn (Gauss, 2021)
Globally in 2021	Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram YouTube (Dalvi, 2020)
Mobile users in Canada	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter (Clement, 2020)
Worldwide as of 2021, ranked by users	Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, Tik Tok, Snapchat (Tankovska, 2021)
Creating content in fast and engaging ways	Snapchat, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn (Lang, 2021)
Tourism	Facebook, Snapchat, LinkedIn, Twitter (Wein, 2019)
Millennials	Facebook, Instagram, YouTube (PRNewswire, 2020)
Generation X	Facebook, YouTube, Instagram (PRNewswire, 2020)
Baby Boomers	Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram (PRNewswire, 2020)

Understanding Trends for Each Popular Platform

Table 2 will outline the popular trends on each of the current popular social media platforms including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Tik Tok, Snapchat, and LinkedIn.

Table 2

Popular Social Media Platforms in a Variety of Categories

Platform	Trends
Facebook	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Story sharing • Hashtag use • Shopping Experiences • Meme sharing • Group Chat Pages (Private, but interest driven communities)
Twitter (Sehl, 2020)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Memes • Hashtags use • Tweeting (interesting facts) spreading information
YouTube (Anthony, n.d.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenges • YouTube lives • How to tutorials (Use the space) • 360-degree videos • Vlogs • Nature sound videos
Instagram (West, 2019)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reels (short videos) • Photo content with #hashtags • Live Streaming/ IGTV • Instagram shopping • Carousel posts (information sharing) • Instagram challenges • Memes • Filters
LinkedIn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional Networking • Hashtags (tends to largen with experiences)
Tik Tok (Haasch, 2020; Fanbytes, 2020)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Video Content (dance, and experiences) • Meme Culture • Influencer Collaboration

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Viral Comedy Challenges • Self-Care & Mental Health Awareness
Snapchat (Curtis, n.d.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Video Content • Filters (BTC) • Snapchat live • Snap map • Ephemeral content • Subscription videos / Snapchat Discover

By understanding and implementing some or all of the trends listed above, the Bruce Trail Conservancy is more likely to produce content that will be enjoyable and interesting for their online community to engage with.

Overview of Platforms

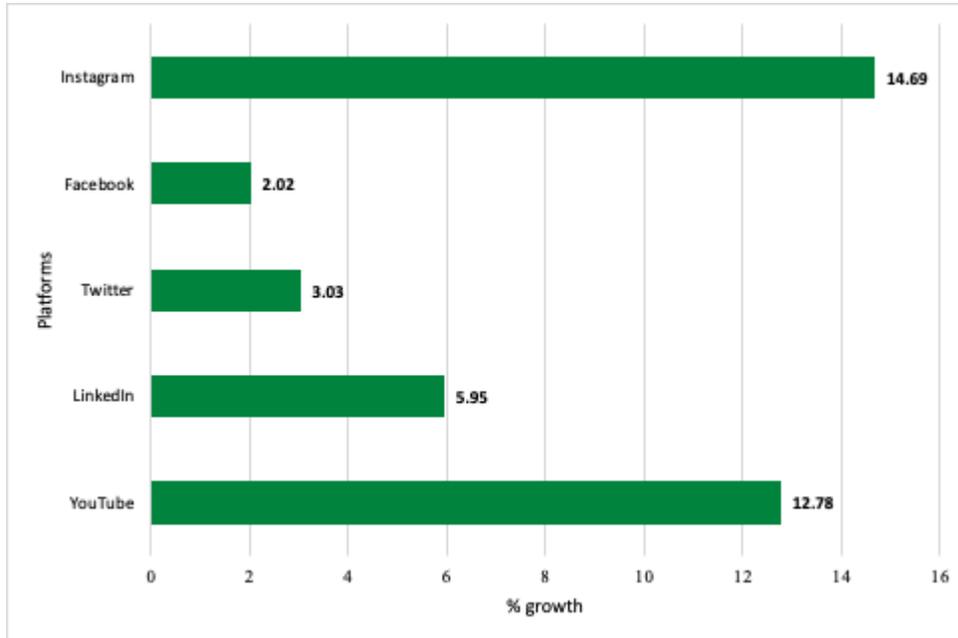
This section will (a) outline the growth witnessed on all five of the Bruce Trail Conservancy social media platforms between February 9, 2021 and April 9, 2021, (b) provide a brief overview of these five platforms, and (c) provide a selection of tip sheets that will guide the future use of these platforms so that continued growth and improvement can occur.

Growth

As Figure 1 depicts, there has been incredible growth in the followers on each of the five social media platforms that the Bruce Trail Conservancy operates. Specifically, a 14.69% increase was seen on Instagram; a 2.02% increase was seen on Facebook; a 3.03% increase was seen on Twitter; a 5.95% increase was seen on LinkedIn; and a 12.78% increase was seen on YouTube.

Figure 1

Follower Growth (February 9, 2021 – April 9, 2021)



General Overview of Platforms

Table 3 will present an overview of the BTC’s social media platforms during 2020 and will review the following metrics/topics for each platform: approximate # of posts in 2020, approximate number of average interactions on posts made in 2020, the top performing topics, and any additional findings that need to be addressed.

Table 3

General Overview of Each BTC Platform

Platform	Metrics/Topics		
	# of posts	# of average interactions	Top Performing Topics
Instagram	121	240 likes	COVID, hiking responsibly, recognizing celebrations and achievements
Facebook	181	47.96	COVID-19 restrictions, the best practices for hiking and hiking during a pandemic
Twitter	130	18.5	Trail openings/closures related to COVID-19 restrictions
LinkedIn	7	12.43	“Thank you to our Bruce Trail Conservancy Donors 2020”

YouTube	14	428.57 views	“Thank You to our Bruce Trail Conservancy Donors 2020” and “Webinar: Tips on Hiking the Bruce Trail End to End”
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Additional Findings

First, it was observed that not every tweet included a graphic. It is best practice to have a graphic with every tweet, and as such, it is recommended that the Bruce Trail Conservancy implement this best practice moving forward. Next, it was observed that posts are made on LinkedIn relatively sparsely (approximately once per month). To improve this platform's following and engagement, it is recommended that the Bruce Trail Conservancy make a conscious effort to have a more consistent presence on LinkedIn moving forward. Finally, it was observed that YouTube is mainly used to post webinars. It is recommended that the Bruce Trail Conservancy branch out to include other types of videos on this platform (i.e., videos of what to expect on the trails, how-to videos, etc.).

Tip Sheets

Located within Appendix A is a seven-page tip sheet document. This document intends to provide the Bruce Trail Conservancy with the general best practices for each platform, some tips that can be applied to all platforms, and a list of accessibility tips and resources. As such, this document contains an Instagram Tip Sheet, a Facebook Tip Sheet, a Twitter Tip Sheet, a LinkedIn Tip Sheet, a YouTube Tip Sheet, a General Tip Sheet, and an Accessibility Tip Sheet.

Hashtag Development Guidelines

In this section, the key deliverables will be (a) a brief guide on the best practices for hashtag development and use, (b) a list of current hashtags used by the Bruce Trail Conservancy that are effective and appropriate to continue using, and (c) a list of potential new hashtags that the BTC could implement in the future.

Guide to Hashtag Development and Use

This section will outline the following: hashtag basics, why the BTC should use hashtags, determine the best hashtags to use, how to use hashtags on each platform, and how many hashtags should generally be used on each platform. This guide was highly informed by a Hootsuite blog post by Karin Olafson, entitled [How to Use Hashtags: A Quick and Simple Guide for Every Network](#).

Hashtag Basics

Hootsuite defines a hashtag as “a combination of letters, numbers, and or/emoji preceded by the # symbol [...] that is used to categorize content and make it more discoverable” (Newberry, 2020, para. 5). On every platform, users can either click on or search for hashtags (Newberry, 2020). The following are items you should always keep in mind when using hashtags:

- They do not work with spaces, punctuation or symbols (not including the # symbol) (Olafson, 2020, para. 12)
- Your account must be public for the content to be seen by those who do not follow you (Olafson, 2020, para. 12)

- All hashtags should be “short and easy to remember” (Olafson, 2020, para. 12)
- Your hashtags should be relevant and specific. If they become too obscure, they are less likely to help with your reach or engagement (Olafson, 2020, para. 12)

Why You Should Use Hashtags

Hashtags are a potent tool that can expand an account’s audience while simultaneously categorizing content by topic, location, niche, industry, event or conversation (Olafson, 2020). There are five reasons why social media accounts should use hashtags. First, they allow for “increased engagement with your followers” (Olafson, 2020, para. 13). Essentially, this means that by using specific hashtags, you are visibly taking part in conversations that are important to your audience, leading to increased engagement (i.e., more likes, shares, comments, followers) (Olafson, 2020, para. 13-14). Next, hashtags provide “an opportunity to build your brand” by implementing branded hashtags (Olafson, 2020, para. 15). Some examples of branded hashtags for the Bruce Trail Conservancy are #BruceTrailConservancy or #KnowYourBlazes. Thirdly, they are “a way to show your support for social issues” (Olafson, 2020, para. 17). Many critical social issues or causes have at least one associated hashtag. By incorporating these hashtags into your content appropriately, you are demonstrating that you stand “behind [that] important cause or issue” (Olafson, 2020, para. 17). Next, hashtags can help add context to the content you share by connecting it to other related content within minimal characters (Olafson, 2020, para. 21-23). Finally, hashtags can help your target audience find you (Olafson, 2020, para. 26). On some platforms, “users can follow hashtags” (Olafson, 2020, para. 26). When you use a hashtag that a user is following, your content will show up on their main feed, therefore, increasing your reach and engagement (Olafson, 2020, para. 26).

Determining the Best Hashtags to Use

To determine the best hashtags for your brand, industry and audience, you will have to conduct preliminary and ongoing research (Olafson, 2020, para. 36). There are a few ways that you can go about conducting this research. First, monitor your competitors' social media accounts to note of the hashtags they are using most often (Olafson, 2020, para. 37). Second, use various tools to determine the best hashtags for your brand and the currently trending hashtags (Olafson, 2020). Some examples of tools are Hashtagify.me, RiteTag, or social media listening tools (Olafson, 2020). Next, consider using hashtags related to your most used hashtags (Olafson, 2020, para. 46). Finally, “analyze which hashtags were successful on past posts” (Olafson, 2020, para. 49). Examine your most popular posts and determine if there is a crossover between the hashtags used on each post (Olafson, 2020, para. 49). If your popular posts all contain some of the same hashtags, ensure that you continue to include those hashtags in the future (Olafson, 2020, para. 50).

Using Hashtags on Each Platform

Overall, the general use of hashtags remains the same across all platforms. However, each platform has a different number of optimal hashtags that should be used in each post, as well as different practices on where you will find hashtags within a post. Table 4 presents the recommended number and location of hashtags for posts on each of the BTC social media platforms.

Table 4

Recommended Number and Location of Hashtags for Posts on Each BTC Platform

Platform	Recommended Number and Location of Hashtags	
	Optimal # of Hashtags	Location of hashtags within posts
Instagram	Grid: 5-10 (max. 30) Story: max. 10 (do not use full amount)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be used in your grid posts, stories or bio • Put hashtags at the end of your grid post captions or in a pinned comment
Facebook	1-2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anywhere in the post caption or comments
Twitter	1-2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anywhere in the tweet
LinkedIn	1-2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anywhere in the update or article
YouTube	2-3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Video title or video description • Do not use more than 15, or you run the risk of being flagged as spam content

Current Hashtags

Thus far the Bruce Trail Conservancy has made effective use of hashtags on their social media platforms. After careful review, the following are a list of hashtags currently used by the Bruce Trail Conservancy that are effective and appropriate to continue using:

- #BruceTrailConservancy
- #BruceTrail
- #Hiking
- #Conservation
- #Nature
- #Ontario
- #StayHome
- #KnowYourBlazes
- #WildlifeWednesday
- #COVID19
- #RecreateResponsibly

Potential New Hashtags

Despite their effective use of hashtags, there are still a few topics that the Bruce Trail Conservancy has yet to cover through their use of hashtags. As such, the following are a list of potential new hashtags that the Bruce Trail Conservancy could implement in the future:

- #HikeResponsibly
- #HikeTheBruceTrail
- #ResponsibleHike
- #COVIDSafeHiker
- Starting with Nature

- #naturephotography
- #naturelovers

Guidelines for Photos Used on Social Media

This section will cover two of the four areas that we believe BTC social media communications should focus on in order to reach more trail users. The two areas are to increase the volume of trail images and expand the demographics of trail users through photography.

Increasing the Volume of Trail Images

The increase of trail images on social media platforms will allow more trail users to engage in the opportunities that BTC provides. Showcasing images of BTC trails can help expand trail users by boosting curiosity of common areas that can be accessed, which can refrain from showing the areas that are prohibited. Like travel bloggers, when they post their experiences and images, it captures the travelers' adventures and gives social media users a chance to learn about their encounters (Muldoon & Mair, 2016). This will acknowledge the images and increase curiosity of BTC trails. The online pictures of a tourist destinations like BTC trails can affect inspiration and tourists' attitudes toward a tourist destination, all of which contribute to the decision to visit (Lian & Yu, 2019). If images of BTC trails and experiences are addressed and captured on social media, it will allow the trails users demographic to expand. Additionally, by showcasing more images of the trails on their social media platforms, the BTC can assist in the mitigation of risk and capacity issues. For instance, by showcasing less popular areas, the social media platforms may reduce the capacity at popular areas like the Bruce Peninsula. Furthermore, the use of trail images can help users prepare for the terrain they will encounter prior to their visit. This will ensure that users come prepared for their hike, thus mitigating some of the risk factors identified earlier in this report.

There are two implementations that the BTC can consider to increase the volume of trail images. First, the BTC can make use of the images captured and shared by current trail users. For example, when users tag the BTC on Instagram, this image now lives in a section on the BTC public account. This allows for the trail user experiences and adventures to be represented, thus providing "a more authentic insight into people's experiences" (Muldoon & Mair, 2016, p. 466). By requesting approval and including trail users, potential users will emerge from the recognition of existing trails. It will encourage existing trail users to be acknowledged and will have more opportunities to spread the word about the trails at BTC. Another way to support BTC to increase their trail photos is to provide volunteer opportunities that can assist with the capturing of images of BTC trails. This will allow new photographers to expand their skills and experience but will also benefit the BTC as they will acquire a volume of images (Landwer-Johan, n.d.). For several unique photographs of the seasons shifting, this volunteer opportunity can be scheduled for various times of the day and different months to have a range of trail images for all seasons to incorporate on social media platforms. Implementing these recommendations would not only boost the number of trail images, but it will also provide an incentive to attract a wider audience interested in photography, allowing BTC to expand its tourism reach.

Expanding the Demographic of Trail Users through Photography

It is important that all trail users are represented so that a welcoming environment and culture is developed on the Bruce Trail. For BTC to recognize the diverse demographics of trail users, they can share images of trail users varying in age, race, ability, gender, and other

characteristics on social media regularly from the following suggestions. Instead of displaying the same demographic groups (for example, women in their 40s and 50s), it is recommended that the BTC incorporate different demographic groups to enhance more reach towards new users.

Some suggestions that we encourage you to focus on to expand trail users' demographics are to have a range of trail-based activities and incentives for new users. By creating events, it will encourage these individuals to use trails, thus expanding the demographic and increasing the trail community. It's important to remember that what an experienced walker or hiker considers a simple adventure can be a considerable challenge for a beginner (Hike Ontario, 2007). For someone who has never walked on a trail or has no idea how far they can easily walk, a five-kilometer walk in a non-urban environment on an uneven trail can be challenging (Hike Ontario, 2007). Understanding each established target audience's demographics, history, needs, and preferences is essential for planning fun and healthy trail experiences for the beginner (Hike Ontario, 2007). Another way the BTC can expand its demographics of trail users is by forming alliances with agencies and organizations that represent different demographics: church associations, adult recreation activities, boys and girls clubs, school institutions, scouts/guides, family service groups, and fitness and wellness centers and others (Hike Ontario, 2007). After developing these partnerships, the BTC would develop a media release form and get permission to take and share photos of these trail users. By developing and showcasing these partnerships, the BTC is likely to have more interest from a variety of people thus increasing the demographic of Bruce Trail users.

Social Media Metrics: Tracking, Analysis and Interpretation

The best practices surrounding this topic require social media metric tracking, analysis and interpretation to occur monthly, following specific social media campaigns, and at the end of the year. However, given the information we have regarding the individual's capacity in charge of the BTC social media platforms, we would only recommend that metric tracking, analysis, and interpretation take place on a monthly and yearly basis. To make this process simpler, we recommend that the Bruce Trail Conservancy consider using a scheduling program (i.e., Hootsuite or Socialbakers). A scheduling program would provide the BTC with the ability to schedule posts ahead of time and access analytic tools that would report back on the BTC accounts' performance. Table 5 provides the suggested metrics for each platform that should be tracked, analyzed and interpreted on a monthly and yearly basis.

Table 5
Recommended Monthly and Yearly Social Media Metrics for Each BTC Platform

Platform	Metrics	
	Monthly	Yearly
Instagram	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • # of followers (demonstrate the change from the previous month) • # of posts • Average interactions per post 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • # of followers as of December 31st of that year • # of posts in that year • Average posts per month • Average interactions per post • # of likes • # of comments

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which were the most engaging posts? • Which were the least engaging posts? • Story Specific Metrics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ # of stories ○ Average story reach ○ # of story replies ○ Completion rate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average engagement per month • Top 5 Performing Grid Posts • Worst 5 Performing Grid Posts • Story Specific Metrics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ # of stories in that year ○ Average stories per month ○ Average story reach per month <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Indicate best and worst month ○ Completion rate per month ○ # of story replies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Indicate best and worst month
Facebook	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • # of followers (demonstrate the change from the previous month) • # of posts • Average interactions per post • Which were the most engaging posts? • Which were the least engaging posts? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • # of followers as of December 31st of that year • # of posts in that year • Average posts per month • Average interactions per post • # of reactions • # of comments • # of shares • Total interactions • Post engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Best and worst month for post reactions ○ Time and date for best engagement • Most engaging post types <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ % of total interactions • Page reach per day • Post reach per day • Distribution of fans by location • Top 5 Performing Posts • Worst 5 Performing Posts
Twitter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • # of followers (demonstrate the change from the previous month) • # of posts • Average interactions per post • # of mentions • Which were the most engaging posts? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • # of followers as of December 31st of that year • # of organic/original tweets in that year • Average tweets per month • Average interactions per tweet • Total number of retweets • Engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ # of replies and likes

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Best and worst month for interactions ○ Time and date for best engagement ● Top 5 Performing Posts ● Worst 5 Performing Posts
LinkedIn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● # of followers (demonstrate the change from the previous month) ● # of posts ● Average interactions per post ● Which were the most engaging posts? ● Which were the least engaging posts? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● # of followers as of December 31st of that year ● # of posts in that year ● Average posts per month ● Average interactions per post ● # of reactions ● # of comments ● # of shares ● Total interactions ● Distribution of followers by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Location ○ Job Function ○ Seniority ○ Industry
YouTube (Baird & Sehl, 2020)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Channel Metrics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ # of subscribers (demonstrate the change from the previous month) ○ What were your top videos? ○ # of channel views ○ Amount of channel watch time ● Video Metrics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Amount of watch time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Channel Metrics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ # of subscribers as of December 31st of that year ○ What were your top videos? ○ # of channel views ○ Amount of channel watch time ● Video Metrics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Amount of watch time

Conclusion

All of the BTC's social media platforms have experienced significant growth through the COVID-19 pandemic. As interest grows, there is likely to be substantially more trail users in the years to come. As such, the BTC must have strategies for communicating with these trail users. This social media toolkit aims to provide a resource that will enable the BTC to communicate most effectively with trail users through the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. The collection of resources we have provided (a) identifies areas of capacity and risk management that can be addressed through social media and strategies for doing so, and (b) presents a variety of guides and tips that will aid with general social media use moving forward.

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Appendix A

Bruce Trails Conservancy Social Media Toolkit & Best Practices for Tourism

 YouTube saw a 12.78% growth between the period of Feb 9th, 2021 - April, 9th 2021. (266-300 subscribers)



 Instagram saw a 14.69% growth between the period of Feb 9th, 2021 - April, 9th 2021. (9504-10.9k followers)

Average growth across the 5 social media platforms was 7.86%. With platforms such as Instagram and YouTube seeing the greatest growth.

Areas of Strength

Continued growth was seen across all 5 platforms during the duration between February 9th - April 9th 2021.

Strong communication regarding Head Office closures, trail openings/closures and recruitment opportunities

Continue Going Forward

- Strong commitment to your branding in your use of colours and your tone
- Continuous use of bright and beautiful graphics
- Continuous use of relevant hashtags



Facebook saw a growth of 3% with just under 500 new followers



Twitter saw an increase of 70 followers bringing its total to 2482



LinkedIn saw a growth of 26 new followers with the third highest growth %



Areas of Improvement

- **Use graphics that represent all visitors**
 - This will help create a welcoming environment and culture on the trail
- **Try incorporating more images of the trails**
 - Viewers will be able to grasp a greater picture of what to expect
- **Post consistency (i.e. LinkedIn 1 post/month Instagram 1-2 posts/week etc.,)**

