

FACES OF PARKDALE: BUILDING COMMUNITY THROUGH INSTAGRAM

INSPIRATION REPORT

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OBJECTIVE

The objective is to create an Instagram account for the Parkdale branch of the Toronto Public Library (TPL) as a participatory technology. Through this social media platform, stories from Parkdale branch patrons will be shared to spread awareness, community connections, and encourage empathy. This idea aligns with the Tech & Trends area.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides the idea of creating an Instagram account for the Parkdale branch of TPL to help build stronger community connections through social media. While many libraries use Instagram to promote books, collections, programs, and events, this idea would focus on sharing the stories of Parkdale patrons as a series. By posting the experiences of Parkdale people from different backgrounds, the library can encourage understanding, empathy, and a sense of belonging. This idea reflects Parkdale's diverse community and supports the library's role as a welcoming community space. The report explains why Instagram is a good platform for this project, outlines how it could be implemented, and discusses important considerations such as privacy, informed consent, accessibility, and staffing. The Instagram account will feature a weekly patron story alongside regular library posts. This approach can strengthen relationships with the community, increase awareness of the library's impact for board members and library funders, and support the goals of a hyperlinked library.

INTRODUCTION

Instagram remains one of the most popular social media platforms among young adults, particularly those aged 18–24. It is the second most widely used platform for library marketing (Hursh, 2025). Many libraries already use Instagram to interact with patrons by asking about their favourite books and authors, displaying library collections and events, showing the daily work of library staff, and sharing local community history (Mollett & McDonnell, 2014). Building on these existing practices, I propose that the Parkdale branch create its own Instagram account to feature the stories of its patrons.

I chose the Parkdale branch because it currently maintains Facebook and X accounts but does not have an Instagram account. While its parent organization, TPL, operates a central Instagram account, its content represents all 100 branches rather than the unique experiences of the Parkdale community. Parkdale is home to a diverse population that includes newcomers, people experiencing homelessness, young adults, and residents from a wide range of educational and socioeconomic backgrounds. The neighbourhood also has a relatively young population, with many residents between the ages of 20 and 44. At the same time, Parkdale is experiencing gentrification through the construction of new condominium and apartment developments while continuing to provide numerous support services for low-income households (City of Toronto, 2024; Statistics Canada, 2023).

People often make assumptions about others without understanding their lived experiences. By interviewing patrons and sharing their stories through Instagram posts, the Parkdale branch could create awareness, understanding, and empathy within the community. This ongoing patron story series would complement the branch's regular social media content while highlighting the diversity of the community it serves.

Creating opportunities for meaningful community connection is essential to the future of public libraries as community centered institutions. As a library professional, I believe that using technology to amplify human stories reflects the core principles of the hyperlinked library, where technology strengthens relationships, encourages participation, and builds more connected communities.

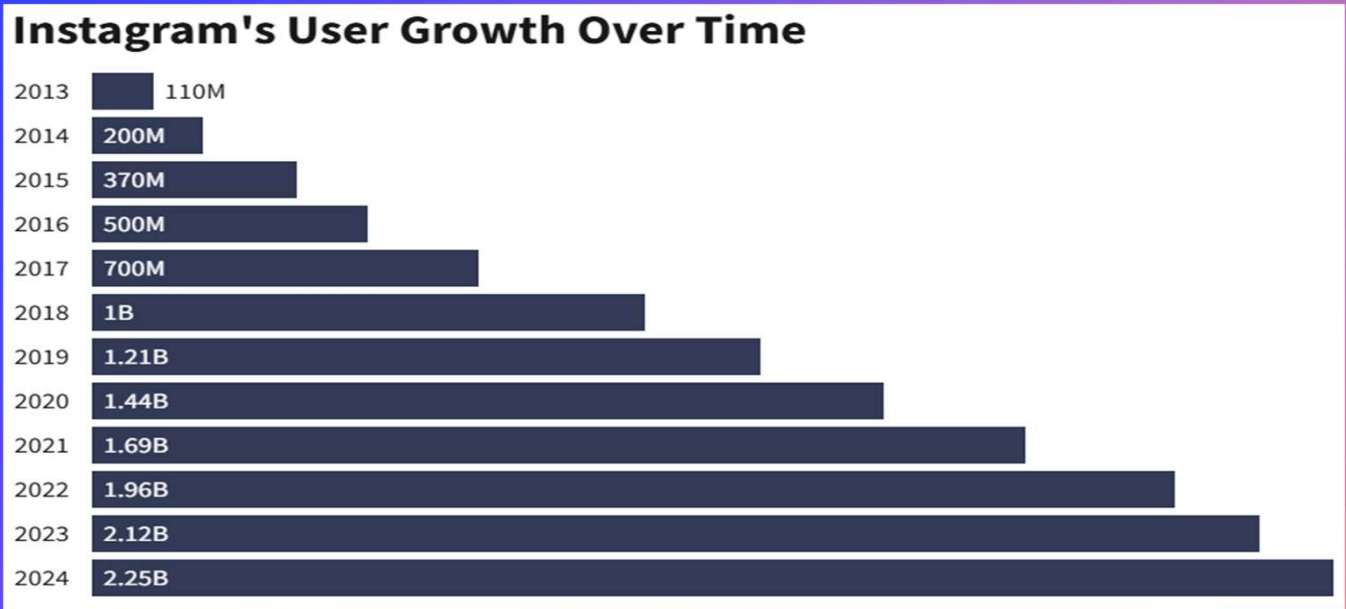


Figure 1

ALL ABOUT INSTA!

Instagram is a free social media application that uses a visual-first approach to online communication, making it particularly well known for social photography (Budge, 2020). The platform was launched in 2010 under the name *Burbn* before being acquired by Facebook in 2012 (Blystone, 2022). Today, Instagram has more than 1.2 billion users worldwide and is one of the most widely used social media platforms, ranking behind Facebook and YouTube in popularity (Rodriguez, 2024).

Originally designed for personal photo sharing, Instagram has evolved into a multifaceted platform that supports stories, reels, live video streaming, and business marketing (Rodriguez, 2024). The application is available for download through mobile app stores and allows users to create either personal or professional business accounts (Greenwood, 2025). Creating content is simple and easy: users select the "+" icon on their profile, choose the type of content they wish to post, edit it using filters, effects, music, text, and captions, and then post it to their account. In addition to content creation, Instagram offers interactive features such as polls, direct messaging, translation, and tools for testing content performance. The app has also introduced artificial intelligence (AI) features that allow users to generate video transformations from text prompts, including changing clothing and backgrounds (Blystone, 2022).

A Timeline of Changes to Instagram

2010 to 2013:	Beginnings
2010	Instagram launches on iOS as a photo-sharing app, gaining 25,000 users on day one
2012	Facebook acquires Instagram for \$1 billion
2013 to 2016:	Expansion
2013	Introduction of Direct Messages, marking entry into private communication
2016	Launch of Stories
	Instagram Shopping debuts, transforming the platform into an e-commerce destination
2018 to 2020:	Video Evolution
2018	IGTV launches for long-form video content
2020	Reels debuts as Instagram's answer to TikTok
	Improved e-commerce features with expanded Instagram Shopping
2023 to 2025:	Monetization and Safety
2023	Introduction of Meta Verified paid subscriptions
	Launch of Creator Marketplace for brand collaborations
2024	Enhanced teen safety features and parental controls
	Expansion of Creator Marketplace globally
	Users can now edit their messages up to 15 minutes after sending

Figure 2

Instagram Terminology	Description
POST	Photos and videos shared on Instagram account
STORY	A post that will be removed after 24 hours from account
LIKE	Heart icon used to show acceptance of a post
FOLLOW	Subscription for other accounts
DIRECT MESSAGE	Private messages between accounts
TAG	Mentioning or including another person's account in the post
HASHTAG	Categorizes posts
EXPLORE PAGE	Posts and stories displayed according to your account's activities and algorithm
IGTV	Allows uploads of longer videos
REELS	Short videos
HIGHLIGHT	Stores selected old stories onto profile account



Figure 3

TIPS FOR INSTAGRAM POSTS INSPIRED FROM HURSH, A. (2025A, 2025B):

- Use simple natural language for hashtags and posts
- Include captions, Alt text for accessibility needs
- Use minimal hashtags
- Tag the locations to posts
- Keep video reels short
- Add trending audio
- Find the peak engagement time for followers/audiences
- Add posts and reels to stories
- Use polls and quizzes
- Consistency in posting schedule
- Save inspiring content from other Instagram users for ideas

INSPIRATION AND SIGNIFICANCE

The idea for the use of Instagram for telling patrons' stories was inspired by Budge's (2020) study, which researched the impact of social photography in Australian public libraries using Instagram. The study explored how practices such as taking selfies contribute to people's desire to be remembered, using a library project that showcased the faces of residents across New South Wales. The resulting posts expressed themes of identity, belonging, and place, demonstrating how patrons developed a stronger connection to the library as a community space. Budge (2020) argues that libraries, as cultural institutions, must understand both the information needs of their communities and patrons' satisfaction with library services to remain relevant to the public, governing boards, and government funding agencies.

Drawing on this example, the Parkdale branch should develop a similar initiative by creating a unique Instagram hashtag to feature stories and photographs of patrons from diverse backgrounds, representing different ages, genders, and cultures. Such a series would foster a sense of belonging while documenting the community during this time in its history. In doing so, the library would strengthen its role not only as a provider of information but also as an institution that collects, preserves, and represents community history for future generations (Budge, 2020).



Figure 4

IMPACT AND APPLICATION:

The primary audience for this series includes patrons of the Parkdale branch, Toronto residents who use Instagram, and library enthusiasts beyond the city. The project's goal is to highlight the stories of Parkdale community members, including newcomers, people experiencing homelessness, families, seniors, young adults, and youth. We want the patrons featured on the library's Instagram account to feel seen, valued, and recognized as part of Parkdale's living history. In addition, sharing these stories could encourage community members to connect featured patrons with relevant resources or support services, particularly for those experiencing homelessness or financial hardship. The project would also demonstrate to municipal governments and library board members the continuing importance of public libraries as community hubs that strengthen social connections and bridge divides among residents.

Implementing this initiative would present several challenges. Instagram is owned by Meta, raising potential privacy concerns related to user data. Other limitations include the platform's reliance on paid advertising, staff shortages, budget constraints, and the inability to include clickable links directly within post captions (Hursh, 2025). The project would also need to distinguish itself from similar initiatives, such as *Humans of New York*, to avoid copyright or intellectual property concerns. Additionally, Instagram's algorithm rewards consistent posting and high levels of user engagement. To maximize the reach of the account, library staff would need to maintain a regular posting schedule and encourage interactions through likes, comments, shares, and the strategic use of location tags.

Protecting patron privacy must remain a central priority. Participants should provide informed consent before their photographs, interviews, or personal stories are shared online. Library staff must also assess any potential safety risks and ensure that participation is entirely voluntary. Stories should be presented respectfully and inclusively, avoiding exploitation of participants' personal experiences.

Finally, the project will acknowledge the digital divide within the Parkdale community. Some patrons featured in the initiative may not have access to smartphones, reliable internet service, or Instagram itself. Library staff will ensure that participation does not depend on digital access and should explore additional ways to share these stories within the library to reach community members who are not active on social media.

EVIDENCE-BASED EXAMPLES

Many libraries have adopted Instagram as a platform for sharing images of their buildings, announcements, contests, banned books, collections, and library events. For example, Rice Library at the University of Southern Indiana and Roesch Library at the University of Dayton were highlighted in research examining Instagram usage among academic libraries (Tekulve & Kelly, 2013). Powell Library has also used Instagram to feature student-created content, showcasing the experiences and perspectives of its users.

Roesch Library further engaged students through a photo contest called Library Snapshot Day Week, which encouraged participants to share images demonstrating how the library has influenced their academic and personal experiences. This initiative highlighted the meaningful role libraries play in students' lives while promoting community engagement through Instagram (Tekulve & Kelly, 2013).

An example from Budge's (2020) research features an Instagram post by Yasmin, whose photograph was shared as part of both the library project and the *New Humans of Australia* account. Yasmin, a newcomer to Australia from Syria, used her photograph, caption, and hashtags to express her sense of belonging in her new country. Her story demonstrates how Instagram can be used by libraries as a tool for preserving personal narratives and recognizing individuals as part of a community's history.

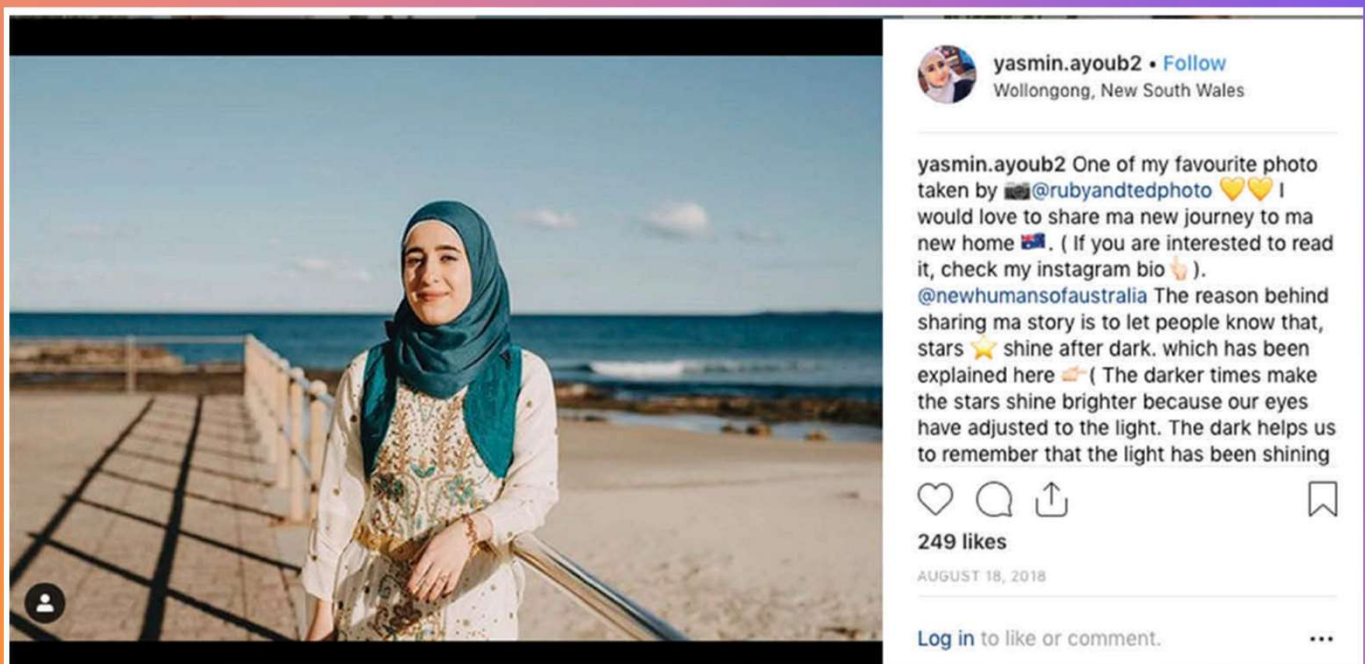


Figure 5

ACTION PLAN

Before implementation, library policies regarding photography, social media use, privacy, and patron consent should be reviewed. The project would then feature one community member each week through an Instagram post or story. These narratives would be collected using a narrative inquiry approach (Stephens, 2020), allowing patrons to share their personal experiences and connections with the Parkdale branch in their own words. The content format would focus on patrons discussing their backgrounds, their relationship with the library, and the reasons they use the Parkdale branch.

This project would include patrons from diverse demographics, including seniors, adults, teenagers, and children. For participants under the age of 18, parental or guardian consent would be required. Privacy and safety considerations would guide the entire process, including the development of a consent form that outlines permission for photography, interviews, and online publication. All Instagram content would follow accessibility practices, including the use of alt text, captions, and audio features.

The project and Instagram account management would be assigned to a team of three library staff members. These staff members could include one librarian working alongside public service assistants, library assistants, or pages. Team members would dedicate work time away from the circulation and reference desks and other programs to plan, create, and manage Instagram content. The storytelling format would not be limited to photographs; videos, reels, and other multimedia formats will be used to capture patrons' experiences. With the participant's input, posts will include emojis that help represent their thoughts and personalities.

Parkdale branch staff will provide guidance for patrons who need assistance downloading and using Instagram. Like the strategies described by Tekulve and Kelly (2013), the branch will promote its Instagram account through existing social media platforms (Facebook & X) and display physical signage. Posts will also be shared through Instagram Stories to increase visibility and reach a wider audience (Potter, 2022).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this Instagram account for the Parkdale branch would be a meaningful way to strengthen community connections while embracing a growing technology trend in public libraries. By sharing the stories of patrons from diverse backgrounds, the library can promote empathy, belonging, and understanding while also highlighting its important role as a community hub. This series will go beyond promoting library services by giving the patrons a chance to be seen, heard, and remembered.

This idea will reflect the future of libraries as participatory, people centered spaces that use technology to build relationships rather than simply provide information. It aligns with the principles of the hyperlinked library by building conversation, inclusion, and community engagement through social media. As a future library professional, I believe libraries should continue finding creative ways to connect people, preserve local stories, and respond to the changing needs of their communities.

At the same time, this initiative raises important questions. Libraries must balance the benefits of social media with the challenges regarding privacy, informed consent, accessibility, the digital divide, and the influence of platform algorithms. Future evaluation should check whether posting patron stories increases community engagement and helps patrons feel more connected to the library. By acknowledging these challenges, libraries can use technologies such as Instagram in thoughtful and ethical ways that strengthen their role as welcoming and inclusive community spaces.

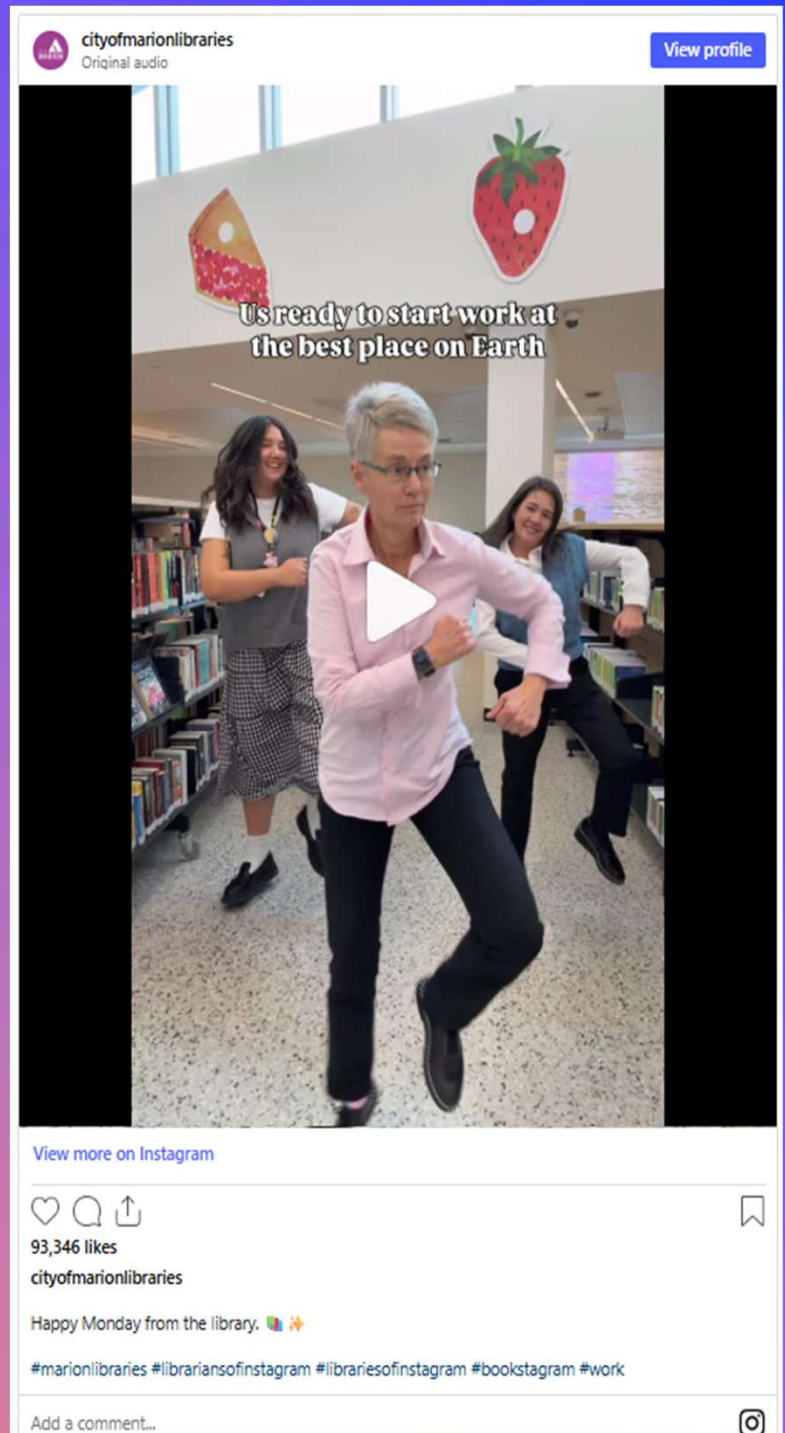


Figure 6

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