Capstone Project

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Executive Summary

This paper investigated how the City of Richmond could improve its social media engagement to increase community awareness of its recreation-based youth resources. The central research question explored specific strategies for improving the City's social media presence through secondary and primary research analysis.

The secondary research revealed that social media had been shown to effectively reach youth. The three most prominent social media trends found in the literature were the use of influencers, short-form videos (reels), and authenticity. These trends were found to effectively engage youth and increase participation in recreation-based programs. However, controversies are associated with these trends, such as influencer messaging being challenging for youth to differentiate from traditional marketing messaging, offering an uncensored and authentic voice while also balancing public perception, and social media itself demonstrating predatory characteristics on youth development.

The primary research revealed that the City of Richmond has a priority to investigate innovative practices that can better reach youth. However, its current social media practices lack consistency, and key documents do not reflect the importance of social media. The primary research also found that the use of trends mentioned in the literature (influencers, short-form videos, and authenticity), proved to be effective in observations of a social media post and two Twitch livestreams. This paper emphasizes that there are many opportunities for further research, such as more interviews, clarification of photo release/waiver, and the long-term effects of consistent posting of reels.

This paper concludes with tailored recommendations for the City of Richmond. These recommendations are to create standardized social media practices, review and clarify photo release/waiver, review job qualifications for the Youth Development Coordinator position, implement reels and influencers into consistent practice, and present authenticity in social media content.

Introduction

Social media continues to grow and evolve with each passing day and has never been more accessible, with most young people owning mobile devices that can host these digital platforms and the minimum age requirement to join being just 13 (Ceci, 2022; Forrest, 2024). This growth in popularity is reiterated by the fact that in 2022, 99% of youth (aged 15-24) in Canada used the Internet, and 91% used social media (Statistics Canada, 2024). Although affected by the dramatic stress of the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, these statistics underline the critical role that social media plays in the role of youth. It further underlines a need for research on how social media can be leveraged to reach the youth in our communities. Given this, my proposed research question for this project is: *How can the City of Richmond improve its social media engagement to increase community awareness of recreation-based youth resources?*

Operationalized Terms:

Social Media Engagement - Social media engagement is the way users interact with a social media organization's account's "posts, comments, likes, and views." (Tarifa-Rodriguez, 2024). Social media engagement focuses on the active involvement of social media users rather than passive.

Community Awareness - Community awareness is the public's understanding of local issues, trends, norms, and available resources. It reflects the effectiveness of how information is shared and how aware people are of important community matters. (Mahat et al., 2023).

Recreation-Based Youth Resources - Recreation-based youth resources are any programs, workshops, events, or activities created with the intent to contribute to the health and well-being of youth. Youth will be the term used to describe young people aged 13 to 24 (City of Richmond, N.D.).

Background and Context

The City of Richmond is located within the Metro Vancouver area in the province of British Columbia. The city is home to a population of roughly 209,935, with 32,950 (11.1%) between the ages of 15 and 24 (Statistics Canada, 2022). In the city, eight recreation facilities currently offer recreation-based youth programming, such as Friday night hangouts, open gyms, queer safe spaces, and youth leadership committees. In addition to recreation facilities, the Richmond Art Centre hosts the Richmond Youth Media Program, a program that allows youth to engage in a wide range of mixed media, including sewing, screen printing, photography, graphic design, and music production.

Many of the recreation and cultural facilities in the City of Richmond have two Instagram accounts: one for the general population and one for youth. During the pandemic, these youth Instagram accounts were implemented as a way to reach youth from their homes. Currently, they're being used to promote youth-related events, programs, and resources. Therefore, the scope of this paper is directed at how the City of Richmond can improve the engagement of these youth Instagram accounts.

The City of Richmond's *Youth Strategy 2022-2032* highlights the importance of effective communication to further the community's awareness of youth resources. One of the priorities showcased is to "explore and implement safe, equitable and effective communication tools to increase knowledge of local youth resources for youth and their families" (City of Richmond, N.D.). This aligns with the scope of the research question, which is to increase awareness of recreation-based youth resources.

The document also notes that youth feel unaware of available opportunities and often struggle to locate information. In addition, youth have made it clear there's a need for a more centralized hub of information and resources while emphasizing the usefulness of multi-platform promotion, mainly through social media and other digital media. These research findings demonstrate a need for further research into how social media can be used as a tool to deliver information to youth.

Literature Review

The importance of social media in a youth's life cannot be understated. Today, social media acts as a place for youth to learn new information, connect with others, and strengthen relationships (Jo and Jang, 2023). In addition, social media can trigger feelings of belonging in youth, a key involvement in wellness (Lüders, 2025). Luders (2025) illustrates that for youth, social media content is not merely entertainment: it's a means for youth to participate in culture and further recognize values.

The Canadian recreation field has used social media as a tool to create youth-led solutions for local challenges and a city-wide network capable of connecting youth with each other and their communities (Burd, 2010). In recent years, the USA has put in a great deal of effort towards furthering research in this area. For example, in California, researchers found that even just a brief social media message positively influenced the likelihood of youth participation in natural forest areas (Schwab et al., 2020). This connects to the fact that many of today's youth were born with social media in their lives, making them more reliant on social media for learning. The National Recreation and Parks Association (2024) reiterates this idea in a recent survey they conducted across the USA, where it was reported that social media is the most prominent source for finding out about local events for Gen Zer's. It is these findings that highlight the crucialness of social media in reaching youth and promoting recreation opportunities.

In New Jersey, recreation professionals teaching a youth mental health course found that by posting the positive experiences of youth participants on social media, they were able to create awareness and foster consistent participation (Faulcon, 2024). In other words, when posting the testimonies of the youth participants, the friends of these youth see it and feel inspired to register. It's this notion of using the stories of participants to attract new participation that highlights the importance of influencers - valuable collaborators who have the power and ability to reach diverse audiences. It's also this notion that underscores the indistinctive image influencers can pose on social media. Stressing the fact that, theoretically, any user can become a social media influencer (van der Bend et al., 2024).

In Missouri, parks and recreation professionals explored the use of local micro-influencers and found that their influence helped shape community perception of various events, leading to an increase in awareness and attendance (Reynolds, 2024). This positive change in awareness and participation can be alluded to by the fact that using influencers can be less aggressive and a more natural marketing strategy than using paid ads (Expert Panel, 2023). However, the advantages of micro-influencers can also be controversial because their marketing messages might be more difficult to distinguish than paid advertisements.

In a Dutch study (2019), researchers found that youth have difficulty differentiating marketing when posts contain subtle brand/ product placements (van der Bend et al., 2024). Moreover, it was noted that smaller influencers like friends of youth were deemed trustworthy because of their limited following and influence. These smaller influencers have the ability to engage in highly integrated brand/ product advertisements, which only heightens the confusion youth face in recognizing marketing content. Although controversial, this literature suggests that smaller influencers have the power to increase awareness, participation, and trustworthiness of social media content.

In addition to influencers, it was noted that youth prefer videos for advertisements because they offer more opportunities for information and entertainment compared to a static image (van der Bend et al., 2024). Furthermore, a preference for shorter videos that are not too long. This exemplifies why many social media platforms popular with the youth demographic, such as YouTube and Instagram, have all implemented their take on the short video model (shorts and reels).

Social media trends such as partnering with influencers and short videos are part of a list of practices that many successful social media accounts use. Another practice mentioned throughout the literature is the use of authenticity. The expert panel at Forbes emphasizes that authenticity is crucial when attempting to reach younger audiences (2023). This focus on authentic messaging is also cited as an essential contributor to reaching urban youth and convincing them to spend more time in nature (Schwab et al., 2020). The idea of authentic messaging revolves around making content that youth can connect and resonate with.

However, creating content that is authentic is no easy feat. In a social media campaign showcasing youth music, Plus and Cox (2017) found that the most significant challenge came from trying to promote an authentic, uncensored voice (2019). They noted that promoting the authentic and uncensored voice of one youth was difficult due to their usage of profanity in their music. This resulted in the campaign needing to add a warning of explicit language before the post. The difficulty of delivering an authentic and uncensored voice while acknowledging the public perception is one of many challenges associated with showcasing youth on social media.

The usage of social media as a tool to reach youth is controversial in itself, with many youths exhibiting poor reflective and critical consumption habits on the platforms (Aran-Ramspott, 2024). This notion illustrates an important idea: although the most beneficial way to reach youth, the use of social media can also be seen as predatory, with many youth having little to no control over their ability to consume social media in moderation. Moreover, in a study exploring youth recreational forest use, researchers in Switzerland (2017) found that "perceived boredom" caused by social media usage is a strong deterrent (Oppliger et al., 2019). They highlight how the constant availability of electronic entertainment, like social media, is leading to a decline in the ability to self-entertain. Therefore, making important self-entertaining recreation activities like spending time in the forest less likely. This idea illustrates a key point: as technology and social media evolve, so will the risks and negative consequences associated with usage.

On the same premise of outdoor recreation use, social media content has been linked to risky behavior. In a study based in New South Wales, Australia, researchers (2023) found that social media increased visitation to national parks, economic growth, and strain on the ecosystem (Cornell et al., 2025). Researchers found that a large portion of the increased visitation to the park was sparked by photographers coming to the park to try to take photos they saw on social media. This led to 36% of these social media photographers engaging in risky behavior for photos, like bypassing barriers, dangling their legs off cliff edges, and being in hazardous areas. This study emphasizes the

importance of balancing safety precautions with social media engagement to ensure that both youth and recreation amenities are not being compromised.

There are many gaps in the literature on how social media engagement can be used as a tool to increase community awareness of recreation-based resources. One of these gaps is that social media is still a new concept in the field of research. Thus, because this concept is new, there are no longitudinal studies that have taken place on this topic (Tam et al., 2024). Another gap is that there is no standardized evaluation process for measuring the impact of social media campaigns. This means that whatever results this paper finds will be primarily based on evaluations made by the author.

Despite the controversies and gaps in research, social media remains a powerful tool for increasing community awareness of recreation-based youth resources. While controversies surrounding influencers, authenticity, and outdoor engagement need to be acknowledged, it's also important to note that social media can foster meaningful connections and promote positive recreational experiences. Future research should focus on developing standardized evaluation methods and long-term studies to better understand social media's evolving role in youth engagement. By acting on trends such as influencer partnerships, short-form video content, and authenticity, the City of Richmond has the potential to reach more youth and increase community awareness of recreation-based youth resources.

Methodology

Social media is currently one of the most accessible ways to reach the youth demographic. Given this, the primary research in this paper will be devoted to exploring the current use of social media for youth engagement within the City of Richmond. Moreover, it investigates the practical use of trends such as influencers, short-form videos, and authenticity. This is done through interviews with Youth Development Coordinators (YDCs), content analysis of social media accounts and relevant documents, and observations of an Instagram post and two Twitch livestreams.

The interviews were scheduled with five YDCs under the City of Richmond. These interviews were conducted over Zoom between February 28, 2025, and March 5, 2025. They were conducted to gain insight into the current internal processes for posting social media content in the City of Richmond, regarding their youth Instagram accounts. To explore this, questions were asked identifying whether YDCs had ever used "short-form content," "trends," "influencers," or "youth" in their social media content (appendix 1).

The content analysis looked at the social media accounts managed by the YDCs who were interviewed for this project. Specifically, investigating their accounts (appendix 8-12) to see if there are any identifiable patterns in the content posted that garners more engagement. The social media accounts were assessed by monitoring the likes, comments, and views of successful Instagram posts/reels (appendix 7). The documents will be evaluated by analyzing any mentions or lack thereof of social media (appendix 14, 16, and 18). In addition, the content analysis covers the City of Richmond Youth Strategy 2022-2032 (appendix 13), the South Arm Community Association YDC Job Posting (appendix 15), and the City of Richmond Photo and Release/Waiver (appendix 17). These documents give insight into how the City of Richmond currently sees social media in pertinence to how they frame it in important/legal documents.

The observations looked at one social media post and two Twitch livestreams. The first (appendix 19) was on March 9, 2025, at 1:30 pm, and it was an observation of a piece of content made by Omar Rajan, a Youth Outreach Worker in charge of the City of Richmond youth Instagram account. This observation was used to explore the effectiveness of trends such as influencers, and short-form videos in a City of Richmond youth Instagram account post. The effectiveness of the post was measured by comparing its engagement metrics to the average engagement metrics per post. The second (appendix 20) and third (appendix 21) observations were on March 11 and 14, 2025, and they were observations of popular League of Legends streamer Marc Lamont (Caedrel), and popular chess streamer Alexandra Botez (BotezLive). These two observations aimed to understand how successful Twitch content creators use social

media trends such as authenticity in their livestreams. Authenticity was measured through the streamers' ability to connect and resonate with their audiences.

Research Findings and Analysis

Interviews

The interviews conducted were with Omar Rajan on February 28, 2025, at 3:00 pm (Appendix 2), Kasie Kwook on March 4, 2025, 9:00 am (Appendix 3), Payton McNeill on March 5, 2025, at 9:30 am (Appendix 4), Leonid Oldfield on March 5, 2025, at 12:00 pm (Appendix 5), and Em Lee on March 5, 2020, at 2:00 pm (Appendix 6): five YDCs working under the City of Richmond. Specifically, the Richmond Cultural Centre Annex, the City Centre Community Centre, the South Arm Community Centre, the West Richmond Community Centre, and the Cambie Community Centre. These interviews were conducted to better understand current social media practices in the City of Richmond. Examples of questions asked:

- What social media platforms do you currently use?
- Is there a set schedule for posting?
- What types of messages do you promote?
- Have you ever made short-form videos or used influencers?

The key finding from the interviews was that there are currently no concrete guidelines for posting other than minor formatting requirements. This was made evident when the YDCs were asked if there are "any guidelines or procedures that must be followed for posting," and three of the six explicitly mentioned there not being a lot of guidelines other than certain branding (association and city logos) and description requirements. Moreover, other than the formatting requirements, there were only two other guidelines mentioned by two of the six YDCs: disclaimers before posting controversial topics and not showcasing youth on Instagram.

This ladder point is especially interesting since it exemplifies the confusion surrounding social media guidelines. Mainly because it directly contradicts the regular practices of one of the six Instagram accounts, which continuously posts youth. This account is the City Centre Community Centre (CC) in Richmond. They have, like many other community centers, a Youth Leadership program that enables youth to create and implement events and projects within the community. City Centre CC is the only facility that has leveraged its youth Leadership program, making youth-generated content into a consistent practice. This exception alludes to the fact that all these social media accounts are still new (only being implemented over the pandemic) and that, because of this, there's substantial confusion over which practices are supported.

Other reasons why many YDCs are not implementing youth-generated content is because of the photo consent waivers and managerial concerns. It was noted that there were significant barriers to getting parents to sign these photo releases/waivers. Moreover, the timely process of signing them has led to missed marketing deadlines, making the posts obsolete despite the effort by the youth to create the content. Another reason some of the YDCs avoid using youth in their content is ethics, with some, including managers, believing that it's not in the best image of the City of Richmond to showcase youth in their social media.

Content Analysis

Content Analysis of the Instagram accounts headed by the five interviewees was conducted to explore whether posts garnering more engagement had any identifiable trends. In addition, content analysis was performed on documents such as the City of Richmond Youth Strategy 2022-2032, the South Arm Community Association YDC Job Posting, and the City of Richmond Photo and Release/Waiver. This was to identify how the City of Richmond references social media in strategic plans and legal documents. This is important because it gives reference as to how social media is currently being framed.

Firstly, the five City of Richmond Youth Instagram accounts analyzed were the @cityofrichmondyouth, @citycentreccyouth, @southarmccyouth, @westrichmondyouth and @cambieyouth. These accounts were analyzed to investigate which types of City of Richmond youth Instagram accounts garner the most attention and which posts are most successful. This was measured by collecting data on which account posts had the highest engagement: the top liked posts, top commented posts, and top liked reel.

Secondly, three City of Richmond public documents (Youth Strategy, Job Posting, and Photo Release/Wavier) were analyzed. The content analyzed in these documents was any mention of topics relevant to the scope of this research. In this case, it was highlighting any use or lack thereof of the words social media or marketing. This content was analyzed to give insight into the City of Richmond's current use and perception of social media regarding youth.

The key finding from the content analysis is that the City of Richmond's goals of implementing new practices to better reach youth do not align with the terminology of key documents. To put it differently, in the City of Richmond's Youth Strategy 2022-2032 document, the fifth strategic priority illustrates a need to use "innovative practices to understand and respond to the changing needs of youth..." (City of Richmond, N.D.). These innovative practices are evident through the City's use of youth Instagram accounts. Furthermore, it's apparent by the use of social media trends that can be found in the more successful posts of the youth's Instagram accounts. These trends are influencers, short-form videos (reels), and authenticity.

The most liked and commented post was a reel (10.1k views, 218 likes, 7 comments) made by the City Centre CC's Youth Leadership Team, which showcased youth promoting an upcoming youth volleyball event (City Centre, 2024). The post demonstrated the key use of influencers through the use of youth to promote the event, reels, and authenticity, highlighted by the youth's passionate delivery and clever editing. It's important to note that these trends were also present in other highly engaged posts (garnering over 1k views, 50 likes, 1 comment) made by the City Centre CC and the Richmond Cultural Centre's youth Instagram accounts.

Despite social media being an effective way to reach youth and improve participation in youth programs, the job requirements of YDCs don't have any expectations of social media literacy. In a job posting for YDC made by the South Arm Community Association, there was no mention of social media or marketing experience as a required qualification. However, marketing was mentioned in the desirable qualifications section. This is important because it alludes to a misalignment between the City of Richmond's goals and the expectations of staff leading those initiatives.

In addition, the terminology in the Photo Release/Waiver does not reference any social media practices or initiatives. In other words, the photo consent waiver does not mention social media. It does, however, reference "website or other media (City of Richmond, 2021)," when explaining what the promotional video footage/photos taken might be used for. Another crucial barrier embedded in the waiver is the legal terminology. This legalese makes it hard to decipher whether one photo consent form is needed per social media post showcasing youth or whether one can suffice for multiple posts. This repeats the theme that innovative practices, such as social media, are still new to the City of Richmond, and therefore, their usage has not been reviewed or standardized.

Observations

For this paper, three observations of public online content took place. This included observations of an Instagram post and two Twitch livestreams. The first observation was of an Instagram post made by the account 'cityofrichmondyouth' on March 9, 2025, at 1:30 pm, six days after the post's release date on March 7, 2025. The observation focused on a short-form video (reel) that was posted to promote a youth open-mic event. The purpose of this observation was to observe a piece of content created with the intent of using an influencer trend.

The second and third observations were of livestreams on the Twitch channel 'Caedrel' (March 11, 2025, at 1:00 am) and 'BotezLive' (March 14, 2025, at 1:30 pm). The first stream was a co-stream of a professional League of Legends tournament (video game),

and the second showcased a professional chess player attempting a chess puzzle challenge. The aim of these observations was to watch professional content creators, or in other words, people who make a living around creating content on social media. More importantly, observe how these people display authenticity to their viewers. Specifically, through analyzing the themes, specific actions, and language of the livestreamers.

The key finding was that leveraging influencer trends such as imitating other influencers, short-form videos, and authenticity was shown to be effective throughout the observations. This was evident through the 'cityofrichmondyouth' youth stand-up promotional reel, which successfully imitated simple effects made famous by another influencer, Jordan Howlett. This reel was made by YDC Omar Rajan, who showcased himself inviting youth in the community to a stand-up night at the Richmond Cultural Centre. This video imitated Jordan Howlett's style of social media because the frame spotlighted Omar in the mirror and zoomed in further on him as Omar told the viewer to come closer, two characteristic traits of a Jordan Howlett reel. However, it's the ladder trait of zooming in on the influencer as they tell you to come closer that really exemplifies Jordan Howletts' social media content. It's this simple yet intimate technical use of the zoom-in feature that enables the video to feel more personal, almost as if the influencer is talking directly to the viewer. This technique enables viewers to feel more connected to the influencer, thus alluding to elements of authentic messaging. This post successfully increased engagement by receiving 97.18% more likes and 677.78% more comments than the account's average likes and comments (Inflact, N.D.). This suggests that creating short-form videos that incorporate famous influencer techniques can increase the authenticity and engagement of social media posts.

In the two livestreams observed, both content creators exemplified abilities to connect with their viewers on a deeper level. To put it differently, while observing these streamers, it was noted that both had different ways of acknowledging and interacting with their viewers. For example, in Caedrel's Livestream, he commentated on a professional League of Legends (LOL) match in an international tournament. This means that the content of his stream focused solely on spectating, analyzing, and commentating on the contents of the game that unfolded before him. While many

viewers (31k) of his stream are there for his analytical breakdown of the gameplay, many are also there for his interaction with the chat -the section of the livestream where live viewers can write comments that can be seen by all viewers with Caedrel included. The chat is a pivotal part of Twitch's livestreaming service and enables content creators to interact directly with viewers. Throughout Caedrel's live stream, there were many times he referenced his chat, monitored his chat, made jokes with his chat, and asked questions to his chat about aspects of the game, all contributing to feelings that the viewers are just as integral to the experience as Caedrel himself. This highlights an important aspect of authenticity: it's a collaborative experience. What's more, throughout the livestream, Caedrel demonstrated an ability to use a conversational commentary style, blending both professional analyses with informal language and profanity. It was this focus on informal language that made his voice feel uncensored and natural, thus further contributing to the authenticity of the livestream.

In Alex Botez's livestream, her content focused on her attempting to solve 30 chess puzzles in under three minutes. During the challenge, her mind and focus were solely on the puzzles. However, in between the attempts, she actively worked to maintain viewer interest through interaction with her chat. This was done by taking song requests from the chat, answering questions from the chat, and explaining what she was doing to the chat (challenge rules). At one point in the stream, she even acknowledges that her content of attempting a puzzle challenge for as long as she had might not be the most engaging for viewers. It's this acknowledgment that her content was less exciting that demonstrates vulnerability and honesty with the viewers. These aspects are something that many viewers can resonate with and connect to, thus contributing to the authenticity of the livestream. This notion supports the idea that authenticity can be portrayed through acknowledging drawbacks with the viewers, not solely on the core content itself.

Opportunities for Further Research

Based on the primary research conducted, there are many opportunities for further research to understand the best ways the City of Richmond can leverage social media

to increase awareness of recreation-based resources. Firstly, interviews with other YDCs or people in charge of youth social media accounts at other municipalities would be beneficial. Specifically, learning what other youth Instagram accounts outside of the City of Richmond. Secondly, further clarification on photo release/waiver is crucial. This topic opens up the potential for a review of the document and further research into how the language can be more clear towards social media processes. Lastly, further research is needed on the long-term effects of consistently posting reels highlighting influencers (youth or youth workers). This would add definitive findings to the social media suggestions found in the primary research and would better inform the City of Richmond's best practices.

Recommendations

This paper explored how the City of Richmond could improve its social media engagement to increase community awareness of recreation-based youth resources. Here are five findings based on the primary and secondary research conducted.

1. Create Standardized Social Media Practices

There is a lack of consistent guidelines and understanding surrounding social media use among Youth Development Coordinators (YDCs) within the City of Richmond. Many of the recreation YDCs interviewed mentioned different/contradicting practices. For instance, the City Centre Community Centre creates youth-generated content on its youth Instagram account, even though the use of youth in social media content has been unachievable for many of the other accounts. This inconsistency highlights the fact that all these accounts are still new and thus would benefit from creating standardized social media practices that can be implemented across all youth Instagram accounts.

2. Review and Clarify Photo Release/Waiver

A significant barrier identified throughout the interviews is the process of obtaining photo consent for youth to be featured in social media content. The lengthy and complex process leads to missed marketing deadlines and, in some cases, discourages YDCs from using youth in their posts. Moreover, the current waiver does not explicitly mention social media, referring only to "website or other media," which causes further ambiguity. These findings suggest that a review of the photo release/waiver would be beneficial for social media practice concerns.

3. Review Job Qualifications for Youth Development Coordinator Position

The City of Richmond's job postings for YDCs currently do not reflect the need for social media or marketing experience as a required qualification. While marketing is listed as desirable, this paper suggests that explicit reference to social media experience should be added to desirable as well. This is because social media has evolved into one of the most innovative practices for reaching youth, and thus, experience in this area should be valued and sought after.

4. Implement Reels and Influencers into Consistent Practice

The literature indicates that influencers, although controversial, are effective ways to improve social media awareness, participation, and trustworthiness. It was also noted in the literature that short-form videos (reels) are more appealing than static image posts. This is also reflected in the content analysis, where the posts that gained the most engagement (likes, comments, views) were reels showcasing influencers promoting future community events. Furthermore, observations of a recently posted Instagram reel by '@cityofrichmondyouth' that incorporated an influencer showed a significant boost in likes and comments compared to the account's average. These findings suggest that the current practices of creating reels and showcasing influencers are a successful way to increase engagement of youth Instagram accounts.

5. Present Authenticity in Social Media Content

The literature highlighted that authentic messaging, creating content that youth can connect and resonate with, has the ability to not just engage youth but increase the likelihood of them participating in recreation-based activities. In addition, the literature highlighted challenges with authenticity concerning delivering youth an uncensored voice while also balancing public perception. The theme of delivering an uncensored voice was reiterated in the observations of two popular livestreamers on Twitch. Moreover, it was observed that the efforts made by the content creators to interact with their viewers/audience were a substantial contributor to their authentic image. These findings suggest that implementing authenticity is crucial for improving social media engagement and increasing awareness of recreation-based youth resources.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the purpose of this paper was to investigate how the City of Richmond could improve its social media engagement to increase community awareness of its recreation-based youth resources. Given the prominent presence of social media in the lives of Canadian youth, understanding how to effectively utilize social media as a tool is crucial for reaching and informing the youth in our communities.

The literature review noted that adopting successful social media trends like short-form videos (reels) and collaborations with influencers, have been shown to significantly grow engagement. In addition, the implementation of authenticity in social media content proved to not only increase awareness but also participation of recreation-based activity. It's important to note that all these social media trends come with controversies and challenges due to the ethical complications of promoting to youth on social media and delivering an uncensored voice.

The findings of the primary research reveal several key insights into the current social media practices within the City of Richmond and potential areas for improvement. The interviews with Youth Development Coordinators (YDCs) highlighted a lack of

standardized guidelines for social media posting and a confusion regarding the use of youth in content. Furthermore, barriers to obtaining photo consent and managerial concerns were identified as barriers to featuring youth in content. Content analysis of the City's youth Instagram accounts, and relevant documents indicated a misalignment between the City's strategic goals of using innovative practices to reach youth and the explicit requirements in job postings for YDCs and the terminology used in the photo release waiver.

Despite these challenges, the research also illuminated promising avenues for enhancing social media engagement. The analysis of successful Instagram posts demonstrated that short-form videos (reels) and content featuring influencers garnered the highest levels of engagement, aligning with trends identified in the literature. Moreover, observations of both a City of Richmond youth Instagram reel and popular Twitch livestreams underscored the effectiveness of incorporating authenticity in content to connect with and resonate with audiences. This suggests that by embracing these trends, the City of Richmond can more effectively capture the attention of its youth population on social media, thus increasing awareness of recreation-based resources.

Ultimately, this paper provides a foundation for the City of Richmond to strategically refine its social media practices to better connect with youth on social media. By creating standardized social media guidelines, reviewing and clarifying the photo release/waiver, considering social media experience in YDC job qualifications, consistently implementing reels and influencer collaborations, and prioritizing authentic content, the City of Richmond can significantly improve its social media engagement to increase community awareness of recreation-based youth resources.

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Appendices

1) Question Guide

   1. What is your youth centre like? When is it open? How's participation? Have a lot of regulars?

   2. What social media platforms do you currently use to promote your youth centre?

   3. Is there one person in charge of posting or a group of people?

   4. Is there a set schedule for posting content? How far in advance?

   5. What type of messages do you post on social media?

   6. Do you have any guidelines or procedures that must be followed for posting? Municipal guidelines?

   7. Have you ever tried making short-form content?

   8. Have you ever used online trends or influencers in your social media?

   9. Have you ever used youth in your social media content? Would you need permission before posting?

2) Transcript from Zoom interview with Omar Rajan on Feb 28, 2025, at 3:00 pm

   1. In charge of the Richmond Youth Media Program (cityofrichmondyouth) is the Instagram handle, a free program for ages 13-24. The program takes place at varying times between Tuesday and Saturday, with Tue-Thur 3-6 pm, Friday 5-8 pm, and Sat 12-4 pm. Moreover, each day has different focuses, with Tue/Thur/Sat being dedicated to regular drop-ins, Wednesday physical media (i.e., sewing, print media), and Friday live performances (i.e., music concerts, DJs, stand-up, open-mic). In January, 245 youth attended the program over 22 sessions. This program is a referral-based program that offers amenities

such as free photography, videography, piano, drums, music recording, coding, sewing, four mirrorless cameras, etc. The program takes referrals from the school district, foundry, and other mental health providers; however, the youth can also refer themselves. Currently, staff will let non-referred youth come to participate in the program for the first three sessions as a trial run before asking them to go through the intake process. This program is a non-profit and is partnered with Richmond Addiction Services.

2. The Richmond Youth Media Program uses Instagram and YouTube. However, the YouTube account is still a work in progress, with only one posted video. They plan to release another video showcasing one of their latest events: Battle of the Bands.

3. There's a team in charge of the Instagram account. The two outreach workers lead the social media account.

4. The posting schedule is every Tuesday, plus additional posting with events. In addition, the schedule is organized through the Youth Development Coordinator calendar to ensure double posting does not occur. This calendar also enables the Youth Development Coordinator to create collaborative posts on Instagram with each other and community partners. Lastly, the accounts tend to post day-to-day stories.

5. In the past, the Instagram account mainly posted callouts to artists, event promotion, and program promotion.

6. There are no formal guidelines for posting. This is mainly due to the whole process being new - prior to the pandemic, they did have accounts. However, in the past, when attempting to post a youth showcase on Instagram, I was told not to by the Managers. Also, the managers have communicated to YDCs not to use Cap Cut or TikTok.

7. Yes, there have been many reels posted on the account. The first one ever was on April 20, 2020. It was a video of each youth worker doing a little intro and then throwing toilet paper to the next through clever editing. The team

aims to do one every so often. The last Christmas video posted has a thousand views.

8. Yes, the account has used trends in the past. One example was a Harlem Shake-esq video. Another was a Christmas ornament video that followed a trend popular in 2022.

9. Yes, the latest reel on the Instagram account is a video showcasing a youth's project to make a race-worthy go-kart. This video was approved and demonstrates the ethical grey area, which is spotlighting youth on the Instagram account.

3) Transcript from Zoom interview with Kasie Kwook on March 4, 2025, 9:00 am

1. In charge of all youth programming at City Centre Community Centre (citycentreccyouth). This includes registered programs such as science, dance, arts, and the Youth Leadership Teams. This volunteer program has 130 high school participants split off into six different teams, with each team planning different themed events (carnival, health & wellness, culture, etc.).

2. Marketing is done through Instagram and through the YDC team. Moreover, the youth network table which includes Richmond Addiction Services and Foundry. In regards to the Youth Leadership Teams, one of which is dedicated to Marketing, which means they're responsible for Canva posters. These posters need to include the City Centre CC logos.

3. The Director of Marketing is in charge of the social media accounts.

4. The Youth Leadership Team uses Google Drive to schedule posts under the folder All Friends Unite. The youth must then add their post with a postdate to the group drive. This must be done 72 hours – 1 week in advance.

5. Mainly promotional, however, also use the account to showcase mental health events such as Bell Let's Talk Day. Also, use the account to thank Youth participants and volunteers of programs.

6. Some guidelines are that if the post covers a controversial topic such as body positivity, burnout prevention, or eating disorders, a caption disclaimer is added. However, most of the time, I prefer to just say it in the welcome talk of events and programs. Mainly because getting enough participants for these programs is a struggle, and adding disclaimers can be a determent factor.

7. Last year staff made a lot of reels. One reel was for a clothing shop and did well - it got 9k views. The youth who make the reels reach the youth that they know. Most reels get 4k+ views.

8. Most of the reels that the Youth Leadership Teams post are from TikTok trends. Trends such as the phone light dance and the gingerbread building event.

9. Before the Youth Leadership Team can post content or even join the team, all 130 of them need to sign the informed consent form and a photo consent form.

4) Transcript from Zoom interview with Payton McNeill on March 5, 2025, at 9:30 am

1. In charge of 10 programs. The programs run every day of the week and cover a little bit of everything. The drop-in is open from 3-4 pm Monday and Fridays. Friday is 8:00-11:30 pm Basketball. There's a Pre-teen hangout on Thursday. Youth come in every lunch hour from the high school. They also come in immediately after school.

2. Marketing is done through Instagram (Southarmccyouth).

3. The person in charge of posting is just me (Payton).

4. Try to post around 3:00 pm when youth would be opening phones after school. Sometimes I use the pre-schedule tool. Never post during school hours because you don't want to encourage phone use during class. The approval process takes 2-5 days.

5. Messages and content consist mainly of events, monthly calendars, trips coming up, classes with low registration, volunteer opportunities, memes on stories, and posters from the city, such as the latest photography exhibition.

6. The guidelines revolve around a posting template depicting certain branding in places and a specific layout where the logo, date, pre-typed info, registration info, and age are meant to be kept.

7. Yes, in the time that I've had the YDC job, I've posted two reels, with another one coming soon. However, the reels will not be included in the reels due to the barrier of photo release forms.

8. Not actively using trends except for a few memes, but it's necessary that they're relevant.

9. Posted some youth on the story in the past, with consent forms signed. One story was about them putting up a poster. However, this is not a consistent practice because the photo consent form process takes too long, and they would need to have them signed for every single activity.

5) Transcript from Zoom interview with Leonid Oldfield on March 5, 2025, at 12:00 pm

1. I am the YDC at West Richmond Community Centre (westrichmondyouth), which is one of the smaller facilities. Responsibilities include the youth (13-24) and pre-teen (9-12) programs. These programs include the Youth-in-Action committee, which has 30 total participants that meet on Mondays from 4:00 – 5:00 pm. A recent event was Pink Shirt Day, where we hosted a rock painting session where youth drew on rocks what kindness looked like to them. There's also a pre-teen committee called Leadership Take-Action, which is smaller in scale and is mainly dedicated to helping in other programs and making posters. We also have many one-off workshops, one of which is a financial literacy workshop where accountants come in to teach youth about

investing. Also, we recently organized the city-wide photography challenge, where youth participated in a contest to see who could take the best picture in the community. Lastly, we do open gyms, late-night hangouts on Fridays, DnD club, BBQs, Pizza nights, and camps.

2. Platforms currently being used are Instagram where most content is made with Canva.

3. I'm (Leonid) in charge and oversee the Instagram account. Try to use content and promotion made by the Youth-in-Action committee. Have recently made a collaborative post for the photography challenge.

4. The schedule revolves around posting when it comes up and fits in. If it's a specific program, I'll post it a couple of weeks before the season starts. In other words, post it when the program is visible on the website before the registration.

5. Tend to post promotional content to the Instagram account highlighting programs that need a boost, big events, scholarships, programs that are being canceled, and things that have been done. Last year's Youth-in-Action committee made a Lunar New Year and Earth Day post. Will try and include promotions highlighting upcoming holidays in the calendar given by the school boards

6. There are not really many guidelines other than certain messaging and posting templates.

7. I have never done it personally and have never made a reel. However, the Youth-in-Action committee has attempted to. It never made it to the account because of missed deadlines.

8. The staff don't use trends, but the youth do. They'll incorporate the trends into the promotion of a youth event. I believe that Steveston and City Centre have had more success time in doing this.

9. Not yet. This issue is that it's not a streamlined process. The permission process takes too much time, effort, and thought. The Youth-in-Action committee is usually just trying to get marketing and word out by creating a poster that can be included in an Instagram post. In the past, they had a youth competition to create a West Richmond Youth-in-Action committee logo, which currently is the Instagram account profile picture.

6) Transcript from Zoom interview with Em Lee on March 5, 2020, at 2:00 pm

1. The YDC for Cambie Community Centre (cambieyouth). The youth programs are open from Monday to Friday. There's a youth (13-18) open gym for Basketball and Volleyball. On Fridays, it runs from 6:00 – 8:30 pm and 9:00 – 11:30 pm. Other programs include multisport, hip hop, LGBTQ2S + program, and Youth-Taking Charge committee. In addition, there's also a special monthly Friday night hangout where there's more of an incentive, like hot chocolate and clay charm making.

2. The primary platform currently being used is Instagram.

3. I'm (Em) in charge of and oversee the Instagram account.

4. There's not a strict schedule for posting content. However, the goal is to post one week before relevancy. For example, if there's an event next Friday, post the promotional content this Monday.

5. Mainly use the Instagram account as a tool to highlight programs, events, youth resources, and youth showcases. Also, try to post different types of mental health promotion -adding comments such as friends are family to the Family Day post and more description on why Pink Shirt Day is important to the Pink Shirt Day post.

6. There are not a lot of guidelines; the ERCA (Cambie Association) gives more leniency towards the Cambie youth Instagram. This enables less rigid and more tactful reel content.

7. Have lots of experience making reels on Instagram.

8. Try to get some of the staff who are younger and recently attended the Friday night hangout to be included in the reels because they're more effective in identifying and using youth-relevant trends. One limitation to using trends is the business suite account. This account does not enable trending audio (Chappell Roan) to be used in the background of videos. One past event called Models and Marketing gave youth who filled out consent forms, volunteer hours for posing in promotional content.

9. Yes, however, the photo consent forms are a significant barrier to doing this on a consistent basis.

7) Content Analysis of the City of Richmond Youth Social Media Accounts

	cityofrichmondyouth	citycentreccyouth	southarmccyouth	westrichmondyouth	cambieyouth
link to Instagram	www.instagram.com/cityofrichmo	w.instagram.com/citycentreccy	www.instagram.com/southarmc	www.instagram.com/westrichmo	://www.instagram.com/cambiey
most liked post	www.instagram.com/p/DFOm7p	www.instagram.com/p/DG6G8S	www.instagram.com/p/DGjuB1	www.instagram.com/p/DFOm7p	www.instagram.com/p/DFOm7p
	80 likes and 2 comments	56 likes and 1 comment	28 likes and 1 comment	80 likes and 2 comments	80 likes and 2 comments
most commented pos	/www.instagram.com/p/DGypMf	www.instagram.com/p/DG4lWZ	/www.instagram.com/p/DGjuB1	www.instagram.com/p/DFOm7p	www.instagram.com/p/DFOm7p
	56 likes and 7 comments	29 likes and 3 comments	28 likes and 1 comment	80 likes and 2 comments	80 likes and 2 comments
most liked reel	tagram.com/jasperhu8590/reel/	agram.com/citycentreccyouth/re	agram.com/southarmccyouth/re	gram.com/westrichmondyouth/r	tagram.com/cambieyouth/reel/D
	2.02k views, 74 likes, 1 comm...	10.1k views, 218 likes, 7 comm...	624 views, 10 likes, 0 commen...	2.39k views, 24 likes, 0 comm...	525 views, 5 likes, 0 commen...
important notes	Most liked is a (collaborative) post announcing winners of photography challenge. Most commented post is advertising youth open mic night, and was made for observations. Most viewed reel showcases a youth's process making a go-kart.	Most liked (collaborative) post is promoting a youth skate hosted by run for women committee. Most commented is a post announcing the new run for women committee team. Most viewed reel included youth promoting a volleyball tournament with smooth transitions and nintendo music. The video demonstrate effective use of authenticty and trends.	Most liked and commented is a collaborative post highlighting southarms efforts to participate in pink shirt day. Most viewed reel is promotion for a special basketball drop-in on January 3rd. The post uses a google search template that's been trendy because of Wired's *The Web's Most Searched Questions* youtube videos.	Most liked and most commented is same as CityofRichmond's. Most viewed reel is a spotlight of Whistler's Blackcomb Mountain. The post uses trendy music and presents a beautiful hike on the mountain.	Most liked and most commented is the same as CityofRichmond's. Most viewed reel holiday themed and uses trendy music. The video presents the different amenities at Cambie's youth centre in an artistically aesthetic way.

8) @cityofrichmondyouth

9) @citycentreccyouth

10) @southarmccyouth

11) @westrichmondyouth

12) @cambieyouth

13) City of Richmond Youth Strategy 2022-2032

14) Content Analysis of City of Richmond Youth Strategy 2022-2032

- Document highlights key research on youth and social media

- Social media was used as a means to promote the survey that informed the strategy

- The survey was done during the COVID-19 pandemic

- Youth prefer social media as the place to learn about youth resources and opportunities in the community

- McCreary Centre Society reported that 74% of Richmond Youth engaged in online activities, including social media and watching videos instead of sleeping

- In regard to unstructured time, it was reported that social media had the highest daily use citations, followed by spending time alone, and then spending time with family.

15) JOB POSTING South Arm Community Association Youth Development Coordinator

16) Content Analysis of South Arm Community Association YDC Job Posting

- Promote the positive contributions of youth to the community

- Perform duties consistent with the guiding principles of the city strategies

- Create, prepare, and distribute promotional materials using mixed mediums; including web-based promotions

- Keep current with best practices to serve all youth

- No reference to social media marketing experience in the *Required Qualification* section

- Marketing and event planning skills are noted in the *Desirable Qualifications* section

17) [City of Richmond Photo and Video Release/Waiver](#)

18) Content Analysis of City of Richmond Photo Release/Waiver

- No mention of social media in the document

- Social media is referred to as "other media"

- Language makes it unclear whether the waiver only accounts for one social media posting or multiple

19) Observation of cityofrichmondyouth Instagram post on March 9, 2025, at 1:30 pm

- The post was released on March 4, 2025

- The post is a promotional video (reel) for a Youth open-mic event that took place on March 7, 2025

- The post is inspired by Jordan Howlett, aka jordan_the_stallion8, a social media content creator and influencer

- The post showcases Omar Rajan, a Youth Development Coordinator, speaking in a calm and concise way to the viewer

- The post starts with Omar giving the viewer a brief overview of the event: time, date, locations, name

- The next part of the video has Omar tell the viewer to come closer, where he then zooms in on himself, further enlarging himself in the frame of the video

- This is a technique coined by Jordan Howlett

- Omar then goes on to further describe the event, noting that this event will be a supportive space for youth to try performing in front of an audience and that it's also a space for any youth that wants to come and spectate live music performed by local Richmond youth

- He then concludes his video by telling the viewer to *come through* and lastly reiterates the time and date of the event

- The post currently has 56 likes and seven comments

- The post garnered six comments on March 4 and one on March 5

- Five of the six comments posted on March 4 are positive, with viewers noting their excitement with kind messages and emojis

- One of the six comments posted on March 4 is a user trying to promote their BMX biking lessons

- The post on March 5 is positive as well

20) Observation of Caedrel Twitch Stream on March 11, 2025, at 1:00 am

- Co-stream of First Stand International League of Legends (LOL) Tournament

- Game 1 of Karmine Corp (KC), the European representative, and CTBC Flying Oyster (CFO), the Taiwanese representative

- Has currently 31,783 viewers

- The game begins with the champion select phase

- Caedrel gives thoughts on different picks per team

- Used the word *merchant* (trendy language) to describe a player who has picked a champion more than three times

- Analysis of champion selection is very thorough

- Has a clear, calm, and knowledgeable tone

- Speaks almost as if talking to a friend

- Does not overuse or force trendy language

- Mainly uses LOL terminology

- Runs ads as the champion select phase ends and right before the game begins

- The subscribed (paying) viewers are not forced to watch the ads, while the rest of the viewers are

- Gives opinions and critiques on the gameplay

- Uses profanity (in moderation)

- Asks Questions to the chat

- Chat responds to his commentating and reactions

- Makes jokes

- Caedrel reacts to commentators in the game

- Uses the word *lawyer* to describe a viewer who keeps defending a team

- Uses imagery and metaphors

- Constantly monitoring chat

- Uses the word *cooked* to describe the doomed-like state of the game for one of the teams

- Is visibly passionate about the game, yelling and screaming while watching towards the end

- Clearly biased towards the European representatives, which adds to the humor

- Uses the term *don't be weird*.

- Ended observation at 1:50 am while he had 55,850 viewers

- View rate grew throughout the Stream observed

21) Observation of Botezlive Twitch Stream on March 14, 2025, at 1:30 pm

- Alex Botez, professional chess player and chess content creator

- She's doing chess puzzles on chess.com

- Has currently 1,768 viewers

- Her goal is to complete 30 puzzles in puzzle rush before she runs out of her three lives (gets three puzzles wrong) or runs out of her three-minute time limit.

- Has music playing in the background

- Uses profanity when she makes a mistake or messes up the challenge

- Usually stays quiet while attempting to complete the puzzle challenge

- Uses the term *locked-in* to describe her mental state towards completing the challenge

- Explaining to viewers what she's trying to do

- Runs ads at random points in the stream for non-subscribed viewers

- Very determined to complete the challenge

- Makes comment that she's aware this type of puzzle content might not be the most engaging for viewers

- Makes joke that she'd been doing puzzles for three hours and that her brain was starting to feel *fried*

- Makes great efforts to respond to chat and switch the music between attempts

- Ended observation of Stream at 2:30 pm while she had 1,735 viewers

- Viewers stayed consistent throughout the Stream observed