

Michigan State University

**East Lansing Film Festival: Social Media Work
Final Report**

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Executive Summary

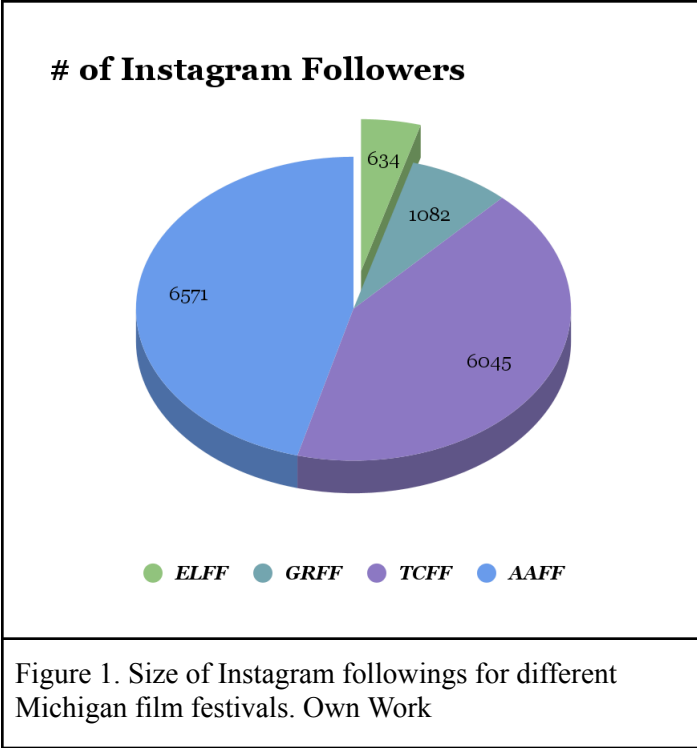
This report details the comprehensive social media marketing efforts undertaken by the team for the East Lansing Film Festival (ELFF), aiming to enhance its visibility and engagement.

Our group used Instagram as the primary social media platform, creating @elfilmfestival to content and engage a diverse audience. Initially adopting a picture and text strategy, we transitioned to short videos mid-semester to explore potential audience engagement. However, the return to the picture and text strategy proved more effective, aligning with Instagram's user preferences for quick, engaging content.

The future of ELFF's social media should continue to expand to multiple platforms, with an emphasis on Instagram and Facebook for their ability to cater to both younger and older demographics. Recommendations include incorporating short-form content, interactive elements like polls, and exploring giveaways to boost engagement. To attract a younger audience, ELFF should leverage TikTok and Instagram, focusing on visually appealing content and showcasing festival highlights beyond films. The report concludes that social media is a crucial tool for ELFF's outreach, offering both opportunities and challenges, and underscores the importance of adapting strategies to evolving audience preferences and platform dynamics.

1. Market Research

East Lansing Film Festival is relatively smaller than other Michigan film festivals, by comparison of its following on social media. On Instagram, East Lansing Film Festival is sitting at 634 and is rapidly growing as we saw an increase in roughly 400 followers over the last 4 months. Comparatively, other Michigan film festivals, like the Grand Rapids Film Festival, has 1082 Instagram followers, Traverse City Film Festival has 6045 Instagram followers, and Ann Arbor Film Festival has 6571 Instagram followers as seen in the figure below. This trend is followed on most of the other social media platforms, specifically Facebook, with the exception of Traverse City Film Festival and Ann Arbor Film Festival trading first place for number of followers. East Lansing Film Festival has about 3000 followers on Facebook with Grand Rapids Film Festival having slightly more, at about 3300 followers, Traverse City Film Festival triumphs at roughly 27000 followers while Ann Arbor Film Festival falls behind at roughly 12000 followers.



The types of messages that resonate the most with followers are transformational posts that introduce major updates to the festival, involve filmmakers and filmgoers, and posts that give behind the scenes clips of the studio or films being shown that season. This can be seen with the most recent post, currently at 361 likes, on Grand Rapids Film Festival’s Instagram account (@grfilmfestival) which gives their audience a behind the scenes view of the festival as well as a quick news introduction to the start of their 2023 festival season (Grand Rapids Film Festival, 2023). We can see this same behavior on Traverse City Film Festival’s Instagram account (@tcfilmfest) with their most liked post, at 798 likes, this season being a thank you clip to all of the filmmakers and filmgoers that season (Traverse City Film Festival, 2022).

Most posts that are mostly made up of text like film descriptions, ticket sale posts, or posts celebrating floating holidays typically do not get a lot of follower interaction. This is proven in multiple posts from Ann Arbor Film Festival’s Instagram account where each of these posts have no more than 50 likes whereas most of their other posts average well over 100 likes (Ann Arbor Film Festival, n.d.).

The other Michigan film festivals mentioned above seem to have strong approaches to marketing and social media as they are rapidly growing in follower numbers and follower engagements. The other Michigan Film Festivals appear to post more images of people and offer more opportunities for follower engagement, whether that be asking them how film has changed them, what their favorite film is and more. Something specific to Ann Arbor Film Festival’s social media strategy that was noticed was that in nearly every post, they mention ticket prices, dates of the festival, and a link to their website so they do not need to make posts specifically to share that information and can focus on creating other creative posts that will draw the attention of the followers more strongly.

2. Client analysis

The East Lansing Film Festival (ELFF) is a non-profit organization that was founded in 1997. It serves to provide the greater Lansing community as well as the City of East Lansing. Each November, the ELFF showcases indie films as well as feature films in a curated lineup. The organization displays a multitude of films that range from comedies to documentaries to dramas. What sets the East Lansing Film Festival apart is that it showcases small-time directors and producers who partner with the organization to help spread the word about their films. It is also the longest running non-experimental film festival in Michigan.

The Instagram account (@elfilmfestival) created for the ELFF raises awareness for the event, as well as highlights the different filmmakers and their respective films as they are shown. Utilizing Instagram as a social media platform helps to expand our audience as well as extend our reach virtually. By creating different types of content - whether it is reels, story posts, or main account posts, our team is able to gauge audience interaction and evaluate the overall impact of our content. The aim of using social media is also to engage with a diverse audience, and Instagram as a social media platform should reflect this diversity to appeal to that audience. Incorporating a different mix of content, such as film highlights, reels, and story posts can cater to different audience preferences and showcase the festival's diverse offerings.

In addition to this, the ELFF runs because of indie filmmakers and directors who are deeply connected to the community. Consequently, our social media platform strives to highlight their accomplishments and makes sure that we highlight the local businesses, artists, and sponsors. If our team were to continue being a part of this project and were to continue promoting the ELFF, we would try and collaborate with those directors, shoutout local artists and make cross-promotional posts to enhance our interaction with the community.

3. Social media strategy

We used the picture and text strategy on Instagram at the beginning of the semester. We did this because we thought it was the best way to attract a larger audience. To be specific, Instagram's platform is based on image and text, so it would be a natural way to grab users attention. The other variable that inspired our team to adopt this strategy was that we discovered picture and text was far more effective for garnering views than videos.

In the middle of the semester, the group decided to explore the potential for short videos, we changed our strategy from text and image to short videos. We did this because we wanted to know if short videos would attract a larger audience. In a notable attempt, we made a video to remind people about the dates of ELFF a couple weeks ahead of time. To our surprise, we only received 13 likes. This outcome displayed text and image was the strategy we should stick with for the remainder of semester.

Our general posting plan proceeded as follows. We made at least three posts a week before the East Lansing Film Festival, and during the festival, we posted everyday. We did have some goals, for instance, we wanted to use our target audience, younger people, in our instagram posts to increase engagement and attract as many people as possible to the festival. Secondly, we wanted to obtain more followers on our instagram account. Lastly, we wanted to figure out which kind of strategy attracted a larger audience. A big objective of ours was to increase our followers and overall all views per post by at least one hundred.

Our communication strategy was fairly straightforward, we planned to communicate through iMessage and class time, occasionally we'd meet through FaceTime. iMessage was where we communicated important issues or updates from the professor during class. It was great for asking and answering questions because someone usually responded within 15 minutes. Additionally, due to the widespread adoption of Apple devices, everyone was able to use iMessage, and compared to email, it was easier to pass along information and documents.

For our posts, we discovered that the text and image strategy had great engagement. We believe this will stay true for the Instagram platform because people's attention spans are shortening. Therefore, people are less likely to engage with long-form videos or posts with lengthy captions or text. Moreover, Instagram is a text and image social media platform. Thus, brings us to the conclusion that if people want to watch videos they'd go to TikTok or YouTube and if they want to read lengthy posts, they'd go to Facebook or X. This perfectly explains why the videos we made did not perform as well as if they were to be on other platforms.

4. Team Effort

During our time running the Instagram account for the ELFF, our group consistently shared ideas in our group chat, making sure everyone is on the same page throughout the entire process. As a group, we ensured that everyone was participating and understanding the tasks for each week. Before submitting our draft posts each week, we created a shared document and discussed our goals for our posts that week. By Wednesday each week, everyone created a post that followed the chosen theme for that week. Typically, the last person to add their draft post to the document was in charge of submitting the assignment. The purpose of having all eight of us come up with a draft post was to keep everyone engaged and have a selection of posts to pick from for that week. Additionally, for the scheduling and film description posts, a group member created templates for the rest of the group members to use to establish a sense of unity among these posts.

Each week, we strived to post every couple days, usually every two days. Depending on the content for that week, we posted more or less frequently, but we always made sure to reach the minimum goal of 3 posts per week. The two weeks the East Lansing Film Festival was in session, our group posted an average of 10 posts each week. These posts mostly consisted of film descriptions for each movie and the schedule for each day during ELFF. When it came to posting, our group took turns posting, giving everyone the opportunity to post content.

Overall, the process of brainstorming posts for each week was fairly easy, especially right before and during the East Lansing Film Festival because we mainly posted film descriptions and the schedule for each day. The first couple weeks of posting were a little more difficult because we sometimes struggled coming up with different ways to get people excited for the festival. However, after browsing through other film festival Instagram accounts, discussing ideas in our group chat, and searching for unique aspects of ELFF, we quickly resolved such issues. For instance, one of our posts focused on the various foods ELFF has to offer while another one informed people about bus routes to the festival. These were some of the differentiating elements of ELFF that made it stand out amongst other film festivals.

The main aspect that allowed us to successfully run the Instagram account was our group's endless motivation and collaboration. Texts in the group chat were always immediately answered and each group member illustrated their hard work and creativity in their draft posts every week.

5. Recommendations and Conclusion

In conclusion, we believe that using social media has been extremely helpful in getting the word out about the ELFF. We noticed significant differences in the amount of followers we had at the start of the semester compared to the end of the ELFF. People were interested in the content we were posting because not only were we getting the word out, but we wanted to make sure that we were using engaging and interactive content as well as fun and unifying colors that fit the brand that we were going for.

The next team of students should focus on developing a posting schedule where everyone knows when to post and how much to post. This worked very well for our team, and it created a good organized system. We also recommend the next team to post earlier in the day before the event so people know what is going on earlier in the day before any night showings. Our social media platform, Instagram, really helped with getting the word out about the festival. We noticed an increase of engagement (specifically in the number of likes and followers); however, our last suggestion would be to utilize reel posts more! Reels are a fairly new Instagram feature known for their high engagement and virality, and I think it would increase the audience and engagement for the next ELFF!

6. References - Everyone

Ann Arbor Film Festival [@aafilmfest]. (n.d.). *Posts* [Instagram profile]. Instagram. Retrieved December 12, 2023, from <https://www.instagram.com/aafilmfest/>

Grand Rapids Film Festival [@grfilmfestival]. (2023, October 8). *"It was an amazing weekend giving back to my community and sponsoring the 2023 @grfilmfestival! (Swipe) Our team at @blackpigeonstudios* [Video]. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/CyJTkcjRc2X/?img_index=1

Traverse City Film Festival [@tcfilmfest]. (2022, August 1). *"Thank you so much to all our sponsors, volunteers and filmmakers!!"* [Video]. Instagram. <https://www.instagram.com/p/Cgt9EIkF1w4/>

What is useful about their social media platform for the ELFF?

Angela Ansara: It is so useful because it is a fun way to get people excited about the festival as well as keep people up to date with the films and dates

Krysteen Nguyen: Being active on social media platforms is super important because it helps build a space where a community and audience can grow. It makes it easier for word of mouth about the festival to spread and for people to share it among their friends!

Xiaokun Chen: Social media platform can help ELFF to notice audiences about ELFF's schedule, movie screenings, and increase interaction with the audience.

Nadia Olejnik: Using social media platforms for the ELFF is beneficial because it allows the festival to reach a wider audience, including both older and younger generations. For example, while Facebook might be useful to gain an older audience's attention, TikTok and Instagram might reach more younger audiences.

Jackson Brinn: Social Media platforms are becoming integrated more and more into people’s everyday lives. For some, it’s a way of getting the scoop on upcoming local events. Therefore, this increases ELFF’s chances of garnering a larger audience to attend their events.

Caleb Logan: Social media allows for ELFF to reach a broader audience and introduce others to what they do and stand for. Instagram specifically allows ELFF to be a little more creative with posts and give a somewhat behind-the-scenes look with images of the venue before the event, while still being able to advertise. Different social media platforms allow ELFF to reach audiences of all ages and backgrounds and ultimately expand their event each year!

Mitchell Schudlinger: As the word of technology widens and new forms of information emerge, social media has been on the forefront of spreading these new ideas. Promoting the ELFF by using social media allows the information of the ELFF to reach new audiences and get more reach.

Rohun Savanur: Social media platforms help the ELFF expand their outreach and connect with different audiences. Instagram as a platform is a great way to help users discover new content and find new avenues of entertainment; in that sense, Instagram is the perfect platform for the ELFF to develop and enhance their message.

What is not as useful about their social media platform for the ELFF?

Angela Ansara: I think in general, their social media is beneficial, but it may not be as helpful or useful for people who do not use social media, because that was our main way of marketing the festival.

Krysteen Nguyen: Social media was not useful in some ways because it is harder for lesser known events to “go viral” and reach an audience, especially if the event is local. Although we gained a lot of followers of ELFF from using these social media platforms, none of our content necessarily “went viral” enough to spread to a larger audience outside of people who weren’t already interested in films.

Xiaokun Chen: I think it does not help us promote ELFF because we don't have a stake in the platform

Nadia Olejnik: Something not as useful about the social media platforms for the ELFF is that it might struggle to reach users that are not social media. For example, a typical grandparent most likely will not have a social media presence and therefore would not know about the festival. This might be where physical fliers and mail promotions might be more effective in reaching that specific audience.

Jackson Brinn: I think something that wasn’t useful about the social media platform is our limitation on content insights.

Caleb Logan: Without paying for ads or boosted posts, it is hard to reach an audience that is not already affiliated with you. Also, not everyone has social media and if ELFF wants to reach that audience then they would have to expand to other means of advertising that doesn't include social media platforms.

Mitchell Schudlinger: Social media may not be as useful to the older audiences or the population that is not on social media. So staying on the main stream social medias will limit the outreach of information.

Rohun Savanur: Because the audience for the ELFF is made up of older film enthusiasts, it is harder to market the festival to our target audience. Instagram is a relatively new social media platform, and so because of that a younger demographic comprises the majority of its users.

Include ideas about how to be successful in a team environment

Angela Ansara: I believe that communication is the biggest thing when working in a group. Being able to communicate thoughts and ideas in a healthy environment is key to having a successful team

Krysteen Nguyen: I think to be successful in a team environment, everyone needs to be held accountable. There should be a sense of responsibility to complete your tasks if your team members are relying on you, but also a sense of responsibility to remind your team members or help them out creating a positive environment where everyone is productive!

Xiaokun Chen: I believe that active participation in communicating with group members and actively completing assigned tasks is the key to success!

Nadia Olejnik: To be successful in a team environment, group members must be good at communicating with each other. Everyone might have great ideas, but if those are not shared with the rest of the group, the project might not feel like a unified idea, but more like multiple different ideas added into one project. Therefore, to make sure everyone is on the same page throughout the entire process, communication is a key factor in every group setting.

Jackson Brinn: A successful team environment requires positive attitudes and stellar communication skills. Without either of these, a team will quickly crumble. Furthermore, it's imperative that everything is organized and roles are delegated in a clear and concise manner.

Caleb Logan: Solid and timely communication with team members and taking responsibility for your actions help to account for a successful team environment.

Mitchell Schudlinger: I think that in order to be successful in a team environment, communication needs to be as strong as possible. If the communication in the group is lacking, even if its one person. It is very likely that parts of the team will start to fall.

Rohun Savanur: Being punctual and pulling one's weight are integral parts of being an productive team member. It is always important to make sure to meet deadlines that your team sets for themselves, as well as making sure that you are keeping yourself and your team members accountable. Communication is the glue that holds everyone together, and is the main component of making sure work gets done efficiently and effectively.

What are some of your thoughts regarding the future of social media promotion for the ELFF?

Angela Ansara: I think that for the future of the ELFF social media, students should continue to keep the posts light-hearted and fun. I noticed that we got a lot of exposure and good feedback when we did that. It keeps the marketing more entertaining.

Krysteen Nguyen: I think the most difficult aspect of promoting ELFF was being on the same page in terms of aesthetic and how the brand of ELFF should look and feel. I think in the future, students should take more time to chat to the client (ELFF) and discover what kind of vibe they want to achieve.

Xiaokun Chen: I don't think ELFF should be on just one platform because each platform has a different group of users. According to the different groups of users, we need to post different things that might attract them. Additionally, in order to attract more young audiences, we need to do a questionnaire to determine what kind of movies young audiences like.

Nadia Olejnik: I believe having the ELFF on multiple platforms is helpful in reaching a larger group of people. However, if I had to choose just two platforms for it to be on, I would pick Facebook and Instagram because while Facebook is successful in reaching an older audience, Instagram attracts attention from younger audiences. One aspect I found difficult while promoting the ELFF was to find a way to keep the posts entertaining while also being informative. In the future, I think ELFF should use its social media platforms to interact with its audience, such as through polls and even just simple questions in the caption of a post. Additionally, to bring in a younger audience, ELFF might have to include more films that might be more appealing to younger audiences. Regarding social media platforms, ELFF should strive to highlight the other elements of the festival that younger generations might find fun, such as fun drinks and foods, a photo booth, etc.

Jackson Brinn: To bring in a younger audience, we would have to focus on more short form content. Our younger generation doesn't really like to read and have short attention spans. ELFF's instagram page would have to adopt the idea of short reels that would be easy to digest, but not over the top.

Caleb Logan: People LOVE giveaways, not only would giveaways promote followers to be active with ELFF's social media platforms, but it could easily bring in other audiences who may have not heard of ELFF with the incentive of winning something. For ELFF to bring in younger audiences, they should focus on their Instagram and TikTok content as those seem to be the platforms that are most popular with younger generations. ELFF could also potentially host short film showings on campuses to introduce college students to the festival and the content they deliver!

Mitchell Schudlinger: I think that expanding to as many forms of relevant social media platforms as possible would be the best. As the ELFF is still relatively small, getting as much expansion and outreach as possible would be great.

Rohun Savanur: In the future, I think that using as many social media platforms as possible is the most effective way to reach as many students and film enthusiasts as possible. Although certain platforms are more effective than others and cater to different audiences, it is clear that using as many platforms as possible helps to expand the outreach of the festival as a whole; after all, the goal of using social media is to promote the festival to those who are not aware that it exists/those who do not know much about it. The

most difficult aspect of the ELFF to promote is the location and the actual venue, simply because it is difficult to coordinate actually going there and capturing content on-site. I believe to bring in a younger demographic, such as college students, it is imperative that we use platforms such as TikTok and Instagram to help promote the ELFF. These platforms are the most popular with a younger demographic, and so promoting it here is the most effective way to reach those age groups.