

Four Sports Radio Hosts Answer Five Questions About Facebook

Derek Futterman | October 11, 2021 | Barrett Sports Media

Over the last week, Facebook has been dominating news headlines — for all the wrong reasons. A whistleblower, revealed in a *60 Minutes* interview to be Frances Haugen, said the company’s products “harm children, stoke division and weaken our democracy.” One of the world’s most valuable companies with a market cap of nearly \$1 trillion, Facebook is the world’s most heavily used social media platform, hosting 2.85 billion users who share photos, reconnect with old friends, shop for products and consume written and visual content. The company also owns Instagram, another popular social medium which has nearly 1.4 billion users of its own, and WhatsApp, the world’s most heavily used instant messaging service.

Haugen, a former company employee who resigned this past April, copied internal research documents and provided her insight to several media outlets, including *The Wall Street Journal*, who published the information last week in a public impugnation of the ethical and moral standards of the company. As the former lead product manager in Facebook’s civic misinformation department, Haugen testified in front of the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation about the company’s products that she considers to “deepen divides, destabilize democracies and make young girls and women feel bad about their bodies.” Haugen’s mission is to help reform social media, rendering them as net positives in mediated communication rather than allowing companies like Facebook to profit off of deception and dread.

A significant part of sports radio’s evolution involves broadcasting and disseminating its content to multiple platforms, one of which includes social media such as Facebook and Instagram. With the recent negative headlines disquieting users and amplifying the conversation as it pertains to the regulation of social media, our own Demetri Ravanos suggested last week that it was time for sports media to leave Facebook. I put that theory to the test, asking several hosts across sports media how they utilize these channels of communication in the 21st-century, and how they see them continuing to be implemented in radio.

--

How much access do you let listeners have to you on Facebook as opposed to other social media platforms?

Marc Hochman (Host, 560 WQAM/790 The Ticket Miami): “Zero. Facebook is reserved for friends and family. I have a queue of thousands of people over the last ten to fifteen years that have tried to be a Facebook friend. Twitter and Instagram are my two go-to platforms for my interaction with listeners. I try to be super active on both..”

Damon Amendolara (Host, CBS Sports Radio): “I certainly try to give them access in multiple ways. I do think there’s a limit to access; I won’t post everything that’s personal

to me. There needs to be some line where public figures have private lives. I try to be accessible as much as possible on as many different platforms as [I can so] my listeners get to know me. Ten years ago, we did a lot [on] Facebook. We found that the interaction there hasn't been what it once was. Twitter really took over as a go-to [platform,] and so did Instagram. We still use Facebook, but we use it less. Its usage has dropped [quite] precipitously over the last five years."

Maggie Gray (Host, WFAN): "It's really evolved for me. At the beginning, I was very closed off. When I first got hired at WFAN, the transition was so crazy, and I thought it would probably be best if I was not checking my mentions all the time. As I got more comfortable at WFAN, I started to ease it back a little bit, and started to really enjoy it. I've interacted with people a lot more."

Christian Arcand (Host, 98.5 The Sports Hub): "I'm not really on Facebook anymore, but I have an open Twitter and Instagram account. I used to be a lot more open with things before I was on the air. I think a lot of people come across that as they move up in the business — [I] never felt [it] to the point where I felt I had to delete a bunch of tweets."

In general, have hosts been helped or hurt more by having a social media presence?

Marc Hochman: "My personal experience is that it's helped because you get a deeper view into who the host is and what he or she is like outside of the show. I'm very careful about it. It hurts some [hosts] because people are very apt to be wildly unfiltered on Twitter and sometimes will go for a joke or a hot take. Besides [it] beyond falling flat, [it] can impact someone's career negatively if it's written poorly or not thought out. For me, social media has been great, but I'm sure there's a myriad of stories of social media even killing careers."

Damon Amendolara: "I think it can always help more than it hurts. Obviously, you have to hesitate on engaging in mean-spirited conversation, or when someone just wants to fight and argue. You have to put out there what is smart to put out there. We have seen so many people get in trouble with other stuff. Think through what you're saying and posting. You have to remember that your negative interactions are [usually] outweighed by positive or neutral ones, so I think, overall, giving listeners access, being able to publish your stuff and have more people consume it, and having people be able to see you in multiple lights is really important. I think a lot of people don't even listen to the show who are fans of my content; there's a percentage of my consumers that consume me only through social media."

Maggie Gray: "I think it really comes down to the individual host. For all the flaws that social media has, I can't imagine doing this job without it, simply because it's where news is breaking [and] where you are trying to find a new audience. On the flip side, you're in a public space giving opinions, so with that you are naturally going to be drawing criticism just by virtue of what the job description is. It's about making sure you

are weeding out and not paying too much attention to people who are either trolling you or arguing for arguments' sake."

Christian Arcand: "I think in some cases hosts have built their entire careers on social media — younger ones certainly — and some guys my age or older have used it to niche their brand and boost their message or content. I think there's also been some people who've had their careers ruined by it because I think we have all been in a bad mood one day and argued with people. You see that happen everyday on Twitter, and you hope that it's not you doing it. I think it's a double-edged sword in that way."

How does social media play a role in talent evaluation? Namely, does what people say or like in the past have an impact on their candidacy in a job search?

Marc Hochman: "If I were still hiring for the radio station, I absolutely would use social media as an indicator — not the be-all end-all in the decision — as to who I'm dealing with. When you are listening to someone's audition or reel, or having an interview with them, you're getting a brief and polished glimpse at a person. Social media gives you a more full-depth view of a person's proclivities and who a person is."

Damon Amendolara: "I certainly think so. I've certainly seen people get hired for certain jobs based only on their social media presence — networks, television stations, radio stations, etc. have simply looked at how many followers a person has and [sought to] leverage that into eyeballs for them. I'm sure it depends on every given scenario, but that's absolutely a factor in hires and some decision-making made across the industry. I don't think you can resent it; you simply have to accept it as part of the industry right now. You either get on that train or move aside. If you don't like that other people are benefiting [from] it, you have to be better [at it]."

Maggie Gray: "As someone who is in the public space and who is on social media a lot, I'm constantly thinking about it. I want to make sure that I'm coming across in a genuine, authentic way. I try to be as clear as I can, especially if I am tweeting jokes or trying to be funny. You have to make sure things are coming across in the way you mean it so it does not get misconstrued. As far as hiring practices, a program director or a manager would be better suited to answer that question. I noticed when I got hired at WFAN, people [online] had gone back through my social media and searched my entire feed. Nothing was bad or offensive — I would never do anything like that. The social media world went ahead and did the work to try to find something. I was surprised at first, but that's to be expected."

Christian Arcand: "I'm certainly nowhere near any hiring jobs right now, but I would imagine when someone's looking to hire a personality, they look to see if they have a social media following. I don't think anyone wants to hire anyone who puts stuff on social media that would embarrass them or the company. It's so common these days with everybody on some platform or another — you wouldn't be doing your job if you didn't go back and check it out."

How have the recent negative headlines about Facebook made you rethink your use of that platform and social media as a whole?

Marc Hochman: “I really use Facebook, again, just personally, and I use it for posting pictures of my family and, for me, it’s like a video scrapbook. You have to remind yourself that Twitter and Instagram are not representative of real-life human-to-human interactions. I don’t really give [either platform] too much credence because [they] become an echo-chamber, and oftentimes Twitter becomes mob mentality; very rarely does that kind of stuff rule in real life. I love it more for the interaction between listeners and hosts. The way that I use Twitter and Instagram is not just to promote the show on a daily basis; I use it to start conversations that are interesting to me. I like when conversations are heated about silly things. When social media isn’t fun, [I ask] ‘Why am I doing this?’”

Damon Amendolara: “For me, they’re all individual. I took a long and hard look at Instagram before I got on there. I cultivated what I thought was a game plan to approach it, and, of course, that evolved as I went on; you see what works and what doesn’t work. I did the same thing when I was originally on Snapchat; ultimately, I bailed on Snapchat because I did not think it was a benefit. Facebook, in 2006-2007, there’s a value there. In 2008-2009, you kind of had to be there. Now I don’t think you don’t need to be there anymore; that’s not where conversations are taking place. The headlines on Facebook did not change my view of it. You have to view and watch it on a regular basis. It’s a tool. If you feel it’s valuable, you use it. If you don’t feel it’s valuable, you don’t use it. I don’t think it should be some sort of grand change based on news. You should kind of be locked in on those realities every day you use these things.”

Maggie Gray: “I don’t do anything on Facebook. I have a personal Facebook, and I don’t really use that at all. I use Twitter, a little bit of Instagram, but [Facebook] hasn’t really played into [my] life.”

Christian Arcand: “It honestly has made me think about it a lot. I don’t really go on Facebook that much anymore because it’s not that interesting to me. I was in college when Facebook came out, and it was really great. You could reconnect with all your old friends; you just type in a name and you find somebody from your past. I’m so far removed from the novelty of it that I don’t really care — I could lose my Facebook tomorrow. Instagram I guess is an offshoot of Facebook, and *The Wall Street Journal* had that series about how it affects teens. I’m glad I didn’t have that as a teenager; I think it’s tough for kids today on social media. The people in charge of running these platforms are preying on them in many ways, and I think that’s really messed up. I use my Instagram to post pictures of my wedding stuff; I’m an old Instagram guy. I think, all and all, there should be some changes. I do think they ought to. It’s been tough on the younger generation, for sure.”

What do you see as the future of the implementation of social media into radio?

Marc Hochman: “It just brings you closer to the air personalities and the radio station. I don’t think there’s much more to evolve; I think people get side-tracked all the time. ‘I have to be more active on Twitter; I have to have a Twitch channel.’ All of this stuff, to me, takes people’s eyes off the prize, which is the radio show. I love to use it as a complimentary piece because I find it to be fun and a good way to grow the audience. If I was listening, things that are important for a radio show, I don’t think social media would crack the top five.”

Damon Amendolara: “Ultimately, sports media is communication. We are expressing ideas. We are communicating through a microphone — ideas, opinions, etc. Social media [are] simply that. These are modes of communication. It’s never going to go away. They are intertwined forever. Broadcasting and opinion-making is social media. I think that people will ultimately get more sophisticated and more savvy and more smart in how they use it. In some ways, it is a relatively new thing people are dealing with. We have a lot of people in our industry who are older than the general users of social media, so they don’t always know how to use it as well. In my estimation, you understand it, you learn about it, you utilize it and if you don’t, you get out of the way. It’s an extension of what we do in living — which is to express ideas on a platform.”

Maggie Gray: “I think that people are using social media to get their work out there and to have it shared. It is much different than when I was first getting out of college and into broadcasting and there were so few ways to get in front of people. Social media has totally obliterated that barrier. I think it’s excellent for finding new talent and new voices; the cliché about the democratization of information. I think it’s excellent for people to get their voices and opinions out there, and try to cultivate a following. I think that’s only going to increase as we get going. Maybe it shows that we need even [fewer] traditional mediums because you can get your stuff out through Twitter and Instagram, and amass a big following without going the traditional route in media.”

Christian Arcand: “I think at some point it’s going to be completely intertwined, and if we are talking [about] social media, that includes streaming platforms. There’s so much money on Twitch right now. I saw this ‘Dungeon and Dragons’ series made \$9 million on Twitch; it’s unbelievable. Our show is broadcast on Twitch... [and] we share clips on social media all the time. Again, I haven’t checked The Sports Hub Facebook account because I’m not on Facebook much. It’s very intertwined and I don’t see that separating anytime soon. Radio is a platform, and you are always looking to add to it. Eventually, TV, radio and social media [are] all just going to be one big thing. I don’t know when it’s going to happen, but it will.”