

# THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE REPUBLIC OF GEORGIA AND A DISCUSSION ABOUT AMERICAN ACADEMIC FREEDOM WITH ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS

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## ABSTRACT

The Republic of Georgia has begun a transition from old world economics to integrating social media and the Internet to provide a global presence for the country. Research shows that the Georgian people have significantly embraced social media as a means for conducting business and connecting with many countries on a global basis. A survey of 5,450 Internet users seeking information from companies produced these results: 31% searched using Facebook; 52% searched using the Internet; and 17% went to call centers for information. In the United States of America, Social Media is new to academia. Very few laws have been developed by universities to protect academic freedom and intellectual properties produced by faculty members. Many discussions are taking place across the country to develop a system that protects the works of the faculty while protecting the universities from electronic intrusions such as hacking and other forms of electronic surveillance. Research details positive support of academic freedom by universities, but there is evidence of weak enforcement of laws at the state and federal levels. Another area of concern is the level of honesty given by the participant in an online setting. It is difficult to ascertain if the other person is being honest or not.

**Keywords:** Internet, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Georgian History, Academic Freedom, Intellectual Properties

## INTRODUCTION

The history of Georgia is very colorful and has its beginnings as one of the earliest civilizations in man's history. After much turmoil and conflicts, Georgia gained its independence from Russia in 1991. The country has had to rebuild its entire infrastructure and its economy was in ruin. The resilience of the Georgian people has helped the country to begin to rebuild and modernize its economy and secure its presence as a global nation. As Georgia rebuilds its infrastructure and economy, it is also committed to providing academic freedom to its citizens and transparency to its government. In Tbilisi, capital of Georgia, a building was erected using glass for its walls. The purpose of this project was to show governmental transparency to its citizens and the world.

In the early 90's, Georgia began to invest in technology to bring better communications from the global society to its citizens. The Internet infrastructure was constructed to provide communication and an understanding of the workings of global economies. As communications improved, social media was introduced and has become very popular and a necessity for most

Georgians. Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn are heavily used and relied upon by businesses and citizens.

As Georgia continues to integrate itself into the global market, it continues to upgrade its social media and networking capabilities to bring instant access and communication to the country on a global basis. Evidence of the importance of global social media is the collaboration with this article by the three authors. Ten years ago, the authors would not have been able to communicate quickly and effectively to produce this work.

In the United States of America there are several discussions being conducted by university faculty members and their administrations on the topic of social media and its effects on intellectual property and academic freedom. Because Social Media is so new, there are very few laws protecting academic freedom and intellectual property in American universities. One important question is how the university can protect academic freedom and intellectual property from being compromised by hackers and still allow academic freedom to flourish.

## THE HISTORY OF GEORGIA

Evidence for the earliest occupation of the territory of present day Georgia goes back to c. 1.8 million years ago. Evidence of human activity has been found in the excavations of Dmanisi in the south-eastern part of the country Avalov and Zurab (1906). This is the oldest evidence of humans anywhere in the world outside Africa. Later prehistoric remains (Acheulian, Mousterian and the Upper Paleolithic) were found in numerous caves and open-air sites in Georgia (Allen, 1932).

The ancient Greeks knew of a region called Colchis which was a Georgian tribal union in the 13th century BC on the Black Sea coast under the Kingdom of Colchis in western Georgia, and it was featured in the Greek legend of Jason and the Argonauts, who travelled there in search of the Golden Fleece Braund (1994).

The nation of Georgia (Georgian: საქართველო sak'art'velo) was first unified as a kingdom under the Bagrationi dynasty by the King Bagrat III of Georgia in the 9th and 10th century, unifying from a number of predecessor states of ancient kingdoms of Colchis and Iberia Anchabadze (2005). The kingdom of Georgia flourished from the 10th to the 12th centuries under King David IV the Builder and Queen Tamar the Great Gvosdev (2000). Georgia fell to the Mongol invasion in 1243, and had a brief reunion under George V the Brilliant with the Timurid Empire Assatiana and Bendianachvili (1997). By 1490, Georgia was fragmented into a number of small kingdoms and principalities Lang (1962). During the Early Modern period, these small entities struggled to maintain their autonomy against Safavid and Ottoman domination. All these entities were finally annexed by the Russian Empire in 1801 Lang (1955). After a brief bid for independence as the Democratic Republic of Georgia during 1918–1921 Bremmer & Taras (1997), Georgia became part of the Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic from 1922 to 1936 Gvosdev (2000). In 1936, the country became the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic until the dissolution of the Soviet Union (Georgian National Communication Commission, n.d.).

The current Republic of Georgia gained its independence in 1991 Suny (1994). Opposition pressure on the communist government was manifested by popular demonstrations and strikes, which ultimately resulted in an open, multiparty and democratic parliamentary election held in October 1990. The Round Table/Free Georgia bloc captured 54 percent of the proportional vote to gain 155 parliamentary seats out of the 250 up for election. The communists gained 64 seats or 30 percent of the proportional vote Suny (1994). The leading dissident Zviad Gamsakhurdia became the head of the Supreme Council of the Republic of Georgia. On March 31, 1991, Gamsakhurdia wasted no time in organizing a referendum on independence, which was approved by 98.9% of the votes (Georgian National Communication Commission, n.d.). Formal indepen-

dence from the Soviet Union was declared on April 9, 1991. It took some time before Georgian independence was recognized by other countries such as the United States and European countries. Gamsakhurdia's government strongly opposed any vestiges of Russian dominance, such as the remaining Soviet military bases in the republic. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union his government declined to join the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). A tense situation was worsened by the large amount of ex-Soviet weaponry which was available to the quarreling

Georgian parties. Also, paramilitary groups were gaining power. The situation came to a head on December 22, 1991, when armed opposition groups launched a violent military coup d'état (Steel, 2002) besieging Gamsakhurdia and his supporters in government buildings in central Tbilisi. Gamsakhurdia managed to evade his enemies and fled to the breakaway Russian republic of Chechnya in January 1992 Steele (2002).

The new Georgian government invited Eduard Shevardnadze to become the head of a State Council—in effect, president—in March 1992. This move put a moderate face on the somewhat unsavory regime that had been established following Gamsakhurdia's ouster. In August 1992, a separatist dispute in the Georgian autonomous republic of Abkhazia escalated when government forces and paramilitaries were sent into the area to quell separatist activities Steele (2002). The Abkhazia people fought back with help from paramilitaries from Russia's North Caucasus regions and alleged covert support from the Russian military stationed in a base in Gudauta, Abkhazia. In September 1993, the Georgian government forces suffered a catastrophic defeat. The Georgian government forces were driven out and the entire Georgian population of the region was expelled. Around 14,000 people died and another 300,000 were forced to flee.

A powerful coalition of reformists headed by Mikheil Saakashvili and Zurab Zhvania became united to oppose Shevardnadze's government in the November 2003 parliamentary elections. The elections were considered to be blatantly rigged, even believed by OSCE observers. In response, the Saakashvili coalition organized massive demonstrations in the streets of Tbilisi. After two tense weeks, Shevardnadze resigned on November 23, 2003, and was replaced as president on an interim basis by Nino Burjanadze.

The results of the rigged election were annulled by the Georgia Supreme Court. The Rose Revolution on November 25, 2003, led to the resignation of Shevardnadze.

On January 4, 2004, Mikheil Saakashvili won the Georgian presidential election with an overwhelming majority of 96% of the votes cast. Constitutional amendments were rushed through Parliament in February strengthening the powers of the president and

to dismiss the current members of Parliament. The post of Prime Minister was created and Zurab Zhvania was appointed Prime Minister. Nino Burjanadze, the interim President, became Speaker of Parliament.

The Rose Revolution raised many expectations, both domestically and abroad. The new government was expected to bring democracy, end a period of widespread corruption, and government inefficiency. Also, the government was expected to complete state-building by re-asserting sovereignty over the entire Georgian territory. Both aims were very ambitious; the new ruling elite initiated a process of concentration of power to be put in the hands of the president, in order to use the revolutionary mandate to change the country. In fact, the Saakashvili government initially achieved impressive results in strengthening the capacity of the state and toppling corruption; but such achievements could only result from the use of unilateral executive powers. He failed to receive consent from Parliament. He created a trade-off between democracy-building and state-building.

In August 2008, Russia and Georgia engaged in the South Ossetia war. The war was called the Five-Day war. Relations between the countries remain very tense.

In the October 2012 parliamentary election, the ruling party United National Movement led by Saakashvili lost power to the Georgian Dream coalition led by Bidzina Ivanishvili, who became the new Prime Minister. In October 2012, Saakashvili admitted defeat for his party in the parliamentary elections. In his speech he said that, "the opposition has the lead and it should form the government - and I as president should help them with this." This represented the first democratic transition of power in Georgia's post-Soviet history Batiashvili (2013).

Presidential elections will be held in Georgia in October 2013. They will be the sixth presidential elections in Georgia since the country's restoration of independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. The last elections in January 2008 resulted in the re-election of Mikheil Saakashvili for his second and final presidential term. According to the constitution, Saakashvili is unable to run for a third consecutive term.

Upon the inauguration of a new president in 2013, a series of constitutional amendments passed in the Parliament of Georgia from 2010 to 2013 will become laws. The amendments constitute a significant reduction of the president's powers in favor of the Prime Minister Batiashvili (2013).

### **PROBLEM DEFINITION**

The problem Georgia faces is the high start-up costs with limited resources for developing an integrated Internet network. In addition to building an integrated Internet network, the introduction of Social Media is so new that it has been used mainly for personal purposes and discussions. Commercial use of Social Media is in

its infancy and needs further development Batiashvili (2013).

### **THE HISTORY OF INTERNET DEVELOPMENT IN GEORGIA WITH AN ANALYSIS OF THE RELEVANT LITERATURE**

The history of internet development in Georgia has three major steps. The first step was taken in the early 90-s. At that time, all Internet providers had ties with Russia, and the only site in Georgia was in the Science Academy of Georgia Batiashvili (2013).

The second step was when the two first Georgian internet providing companies were established. They were Kheta (WWW.KHETA.GE) and Goodwill.com. The fee of the first Internet rental was \$300 (laris) per month, or \$3 (laris) per hour. The appearance of the new Internet providers in the market, Sanet (WWW.SANET.GE) and Kavkasus (WWW.CAUCASUS.NET), caused lowered the prices to \$20 per month, and to \$2 per hour. The providers used Satellite and Cable for delivery. The transmission speed in the direct channel was 64Kbit/sc. (Please note that \$1 lari = approximately \$0.50 dollars).

The third step was the introduction of a Fiber-Optic cable highway network. It was connected with Trans Asia-Europe, Georgian railway line fiber-Optic cables, SDH web and other networks in the Tbilisi radio-relay line. It was also linked with the Turkey Republic and other countries. This network system gave Georgia the opportunity to connect with Europe. At the same time, other Internet networks were built in other Georgian cities like Batumi, Kutaisi, and Rustavi. Since August 2003, ADSL technologies have been engaged in the process. Today more than 10 Internet providers offer these technologies to consumers (www.online.ge, www.telenet.ge, www.sanet.ge, www.caucasus.net, www.geonet.ge, www.service.net.ge, www.egrisi.ge and etc.) The price of the Internet was reduced, while the speed of it became faster. Today 80% of the providers still use Satellite channels. In 2007 the net income of the operating companies in the Internet market was more than 30 million laris (approximately \$15 million U.S. dollars) compared to 3.15 million in 2000. In 2006 the volume of the net income (26.15 million laris) increased by 32% compared to the income of the previous year. The Georgian electronic communication service market and its Internet consumption is the second fastest growing segment after the mobile communication segment (Cell Phones). At the end of 2006 the total number of ADSL technology Internet consumers increased by 80% and for 2008 it was more than 30,000 consumers. Today the situation is different.

**Table 1.** Internet Retail Subscribers  
Batiashvili (2013)

	1st Quarter 2010	1st Quarter 2011	1st Quarter 2012	1st Quarter 2013
DSL technology	137,036	174,542	206,379	213,045
Fiber-Optic technology	66,120	93,638	136,955	197,524
EVDO&CDMA technology	33,334	55,812	61,674	51,567
Wi-Fi technology	405	1,867	9,108	21,018
WiMax technology	3,517	5,791	7,926	8,942
Other technology	1,043	809	496	1,389
	241,455	332,459	422,538	493,485

Note: The table lists the statistical data for the Internet usage in Georgia for the last three years (Batiashvili, 2013).

**Facebook Society in Georgia**

*Present material is based on data from a study, during which 5,450 active users of social networks were surveyed; 10 qualitative analyses were conducted and network study software was used* Batiashvili (2013).

Social networking in the Georgian society does not have a very long history. As millions of social network users joined the network, it moved into different stages. The first networks were purely communication types: ‘Skype’, ‘ICQ’ etc. In the next stage, it became more advanced and became more functional and richer in content. The first Georgian network had minimal content. But it gained popularity quickly. It was called ‘Odnoklasniki’. It enabled certain Internet searching, entertainment, and other useful services apart from direct communication. However, when Facebook became available, a majority of Georgian Internet users joined Facebook. It was spread like a virus among the internet users. Today it sounds illogical to say “I do not have a Facebook page”.

Based on current data there are almost a million members in the Georgian Facebook community, which is a large number for Georgia. The million members represent 21% of the population of Georgia. If one considers the fact that computer availability is very limited, but quickly progressing, the number is truly impressive. If one compares the number of Facebook

users to the number of Internet users, then one will notice an even more impressive figure – eighty three percent of Georgian Internet users are Facebook members Batiashvili (2013).

Georgia is number 83 on the global list of Internet users in its use of the Internet. This ranking is caused by the high percentages of Facebook users in relation to the limited Internet coverage in the country.

Statistical data of the Caucasian countries is very interesting. Azerbaijan has the highest number of Facebook users, but Georgia has a higher percentage of Facebook users among Internet users.

**Table 2.** Facebook Society Caucasus  
(February, 2013)

	Azerbaijan	Georgia	Armenia
Facebook" users	1,013,080	969, 840	395,340
Position in list of Countries	82	85	112
Population	12.20%	20.95%	13.32%
"Online" users	23.97%	82.84%	29.06%

Note: This table shows the subscribers to Facebook by country, ranking in global Internet users, population percentages, and online users as a percentage of population.

Trends in the Facebook community growth in Georgia are significant. According to the survey given in February 2013, the number of Facebook users increased by 174,360 in the previous six months; which is 17% of total users. However, the number of Internet users has almost reached the maximum capacity of the Internet network. Therefore, the number of Facebook members can only increase if there is growth in the speed of the Internet and there is more computer access for the population. Facebook is the most popular social media with the majority of the population and there is little probability of any substantial threats from other social media networks.

The popularity and importance of other social networks have been studied. Facebook is the most used network. Twitter is second and LinkedIn is third. LinkedIn is very popular with business professionals. There is a discrepancy in the number of Facebook users and other social media users because the numbers differ and are considered unreliable. Further research is needed to validate current statistics.

Analyzing Facebook users from the perspective of age presents some interesting data. The largest age group is 18-24, with 320,000 users. 83% of users are

from the age of 16 to 44.

**Table 3.** Facebook Users Age Categories (February 2013)

#	age	percentage
1	13-15	7
2	16-17	9
3	18-24	33
4	25-34	27
5	35-44	14
6	45-54	6
7	55-64	2
8	65-100	2

Note: Percentage of Georgian citizens subscribed to Facebook by age group.

Fifty five percent of Facebook users are women and 45% are men. In Azerbaijan the opposite is true with only 36% of women and 64% of men being Facebook users. While in Armenia and Georgia this percentage is almost equal. In Georgia most Facebook users visit the social network in the evening and at night. The least activity is during the morning during the afternoon. The evening and night usage comprises almost 80% of the total Facebook activity.

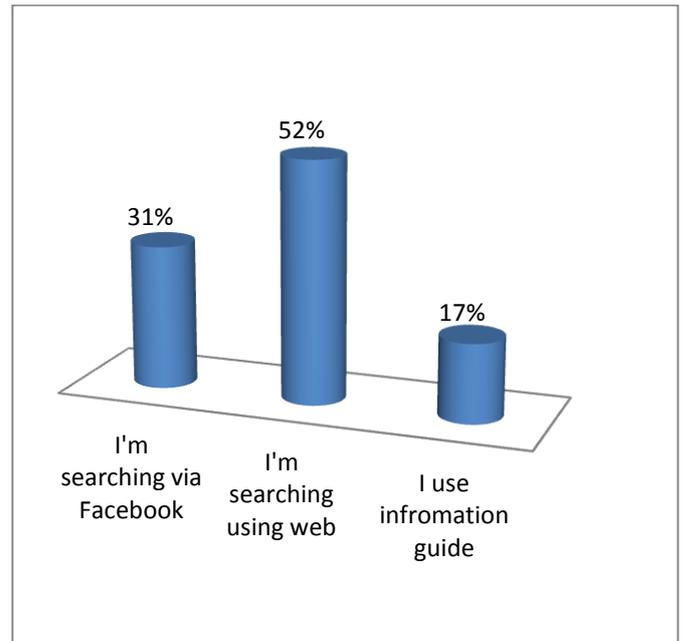
Seventy percent of Facebook users spend over two hours in social networks which is considerably longer than global statistics. An average Facebook user in other countries spends about 12 minutes in social networks and 10.5 billion minutes are spent globally per day. If one calculates this data into working hours, it would mean that approximately 22 million people spend eight hours daily on social networks.

The number of users who are constantly connected to social networks via mobile phone and actively check updates is also increasing. Today 30% of active users of social networks use mobile phones as their means of communication and checking for updates in social networks. It is predicted that along with the increase of technical knowledge and the advancement of technological tools these figures will increase every year. Internet consumption has increased from 180 terabytes to 370 terabytes from 2010 to 2012. This may not be a very large number compared to Internet volumes, but the quick jump in numbers is significant. One can conclude that increased Internet coverage will result in the increase of social networks users, an increase in the duration of their use on social networks, and being constantly connected to it.

The methods used by customers to search for

information regarding certain companies present interesting data. 52% of active Internet users search for company information on the Internet, 31% search for the same company information on the company Facebook page, and only 17% use the company call centers for information. The most important fact is that more than one third of users search for a company in social networks Batiashvili (2013).

**Table 4.** How Customers Search on the Internet



Note: percentages of Georgians using different modalities to search the Internet.

**What Customers Expect**

*Why do users click 'like' and why they read information about brands?*

Studies have shown specific trends, which provide companies with unique opportunities to track social network preferences:

1. When a Facebook member clicks 'Like' on a company page, he/she expects to obtain more information about the company.
2. He/she already has a positive experience regarding the brand and they want to gain more information.

When a company provides information it must be simple, easily understood, and visually aesthetic.

Five main aspects that users expect from the companies present in social networks have been identified in the following table:

**Table 5.** User Expectations from Companies

Sales
Sharing Experience
Expressing Loyalty
Answers to Questions
Desire to Have Fun

Note: These categories depict Georgian Internet Users expectations when contacting Georgian companies through Social Media networks.

Most of the users who click ‘Like’ on the company page expect certain benefits. Their expectations are not just about getting discounts on a daily bases, but they expect to get some interesting offers periodically. When users have a positive experience connected with to a certain brand they try to share this experience with their friends in the form of a comment. They expect their friends to share their positive experience as well.

Customers who are satisfied with a brand beyond the Internet, usually join the Facebook page of the brand. They expect to find updates from the company and they are loyal to the brand.

When customers have questions about the company’s brand, very few of them have the desire to call the hot line, wait for an operator, and then wait for the answer to his/her questions. Social networks provide good opportunities to post questions. Less time spent waiting for an answer and better results are achieved.

Due to the popularity of Facebook, it is imperative that a person updates his/her Facebook page regularly. If updates are not done frequently, the person will lose Fans. Users are expected to be entertained, find useful information about the person, and be engaged.

**Ideal Social Network Page**

The Ideal Facebook page for a company is one where users can read news, make comments, share information with the others, participate in opinion polls and vote, upload their photos and videos etc.

Georgian companies are very interested in providing an interesting social network page for their customers. The results for the March 2013 survey are given below:

**Table 6.** Georgian Brand Social Network

#	Page	Local Fans	Fans
1.	საქართველოს ბანკი (Bank of Georgia)	370 229	409 005
2.	TBC Smart Club	325 489	360 639
3.	TBC BANK - თიბისი ბანკი	238 084	253 049
4.	ALTA	211 008	225 529
5.	ბანკი კონსტანტა Bank Constanta	198 452	211 998
6.	Geocell	182 295	194 141
7.	MagtiFun	153 359	171 859
8.	მე მიყვარს ჩემი პატარა	140 308	157 897
9.	ალდაგი   Aldagi	109 590	114 915
10.	Georgian Avia Service Agency	99 460	108 747
11.	GO! Electronics	91 953	99 490
12.	HotSpot	81 302	86 533
13.	lavnana	75 135	86 235
14.	VTB BANK (GEORGIA)	73 575	79 363
15.	Georgia, საქართველო	55 616	74 355
16.	ბელაინი • Beeline	59 155	62 863
17.	Georgian Lottery Company LLC	54 841	58 103
18.	Pepsi Georgia	46 771	49 288
19.	Nokia Georgia	33 947	37 977
20.	Radisson Blu Iveria Hotel	23 964	27 471

Note: This chart depicts the number of Georgians and others who contact companies through Facebook.

**AMERICAN ACADEMIC FREEDON AND ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS DISCUSSION**

Social Media has impacted American universities and their options for preserving academic freedom and intellectual properties. In 2004, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) addressed the use of electronic communication in reference to academic freedom. The association agreed that academic freedom must be preserved no matter what method of communication was used. The emphasis is 2004 was on the use of email, but now with all the new social media networks, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Reddit, and Tumblr, the AAUP wants to re-visit the topic of

academic freedom and intellectual properties to ensure that the author of any publication is able to retain the rights and ownership of the publication. AAUP (2013) notes that students come to class with 2 1/2 media devices and faculty come with two media devices.

The concern for AAUP is two-fold: 1) the author retains ownership of his/her works, and 2) the university administration does not install restrictive laws that override the academic freedoms of the faculty members when it installs security measures to protect its digital systems. There is a fine balance between protection of the university's digital information and the faculty's need for academic freedom. (AAUP, 2013, p. 6) states, "In particular, colleges and universities should refrain from employment of so-called "filtering" software that limits access for purportedly "harmful" or even "controversial" materials". The AAUP makes this assumption: "social media sites blur the distinction between private and public communications in new ways", p. 14. The concern is that people might think that they are using a private network to communicate with; but in reality, they might be showing their private information to anyone.

Natriello (2009) states that while universities support academic freedom during the use of Social Media, there is weak support for laws at both the state and federal levels. More information is needed to ensure academic freedom is written into laws governing the boundaries of Social Media. In a study where ten students in a graduate level class held face-to-face and online discussions, the majority of the students preferred face-to-face discussions over online discussions Katrina (2006).

In conclusion, faculty members need to become more informed on how they disseminate their original ideas. They also should become involved in the decision making process with their university administration concerning the development of strategies to restrict malicious electronic communications. The newness of Social Media and the Internet play important roles in the feelings of people. Honesty, discomfort, and other feelings are not expressed when there is not a face-to-face meeting.

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The Republic of Georgia has had a long and storied history. It is one of the earliest civilizations known to man. It gained its independence from Russia in 1991 and it began to rebuild its economy and become a member of the global society.

The first technology infrastructure was the installation of the Internet network. It was primitive and very costly. As time progressed and competition increased, the quality of the Internet was increased and the prices came down. As a result, over the years the amount of users employing the Internet has grown dramatically.

Currently, there are almost 500,000 Internet subscribers which represent about 10% of the population.

Facebook is the most popular type of social media currently being used. Twitter and LinkedIn are gaining popularity as both businesses and citizens become familiar with the new technology. Georgia is sustaining a high growth of Internet subscriptions. The number of subscriptions has more than doubled in three years.

Further research should be conducted that investigates how businesses use social media to interact in the global market. Currently, the social media is being used for personal purposes. The future should bring economic opportunity to the region by connecting international businesses to local markets and local development opportunities. Developing global business partners should become a priority for the country as it moves to grow its economy and prosper. Connecting through social media networks should reduce time and costs in developing networks and opportunities for investment into the country's economic growth and future.

Social Media is also new for academia in the United States of America. The AAUP has found that very few universities are being pro-active in dealing with harassment from electronic communications. Universities should immediately begin to design policies that combat the threat from illegal electronic communications while preserving the integrity of academic freedoms and intellectual properties produced by faculty members.

Further research should be conducted in the topic of academic freedom through the use of Social Media. Currently, a review of the literature does not indicate any definitive research concerning the effects of Social Media on academic freedom. A longitudinal study should be devised that follows trends concerning laws being developed to impact how Social Media is regulated and how these laws impact academic freedom.

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