Description

In the past decade, the usage of the term “social media” seems to have increased greatly. Websites like Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn represent one way in which people can interact online to build various types of relationships. There is a set of academic researchers who are staunch advocates for using Twitter to help them engage with the general public and fellow scientists from around the world. But what is twitter and how does it work?

An Introduction to Twitter

Twitter is a microblogging website that allows users to send messages of 140 characters or less called tweets. Users can choose to follow other users on twitter. For instance, you may be interested in reading tweets from your university, or a colleague doing interesting work. In order to see their tweets, you would need to follow them. Tweets that include “RT” are called retweets. This means that a person has seen the tweet and agreed with it so much that they decided to share it with their followers. Twitter also allows users to categorize their tweets using hashtags. A hashtag is a word or phrase preceded by the symbol “#”. For instance, #scicom is a hashtag used with tweets about science communication. Twitter users can search for this hashtag if they want to find out what people have been saying about science communication. When you wish to tweet a particular person or institution, you would use the “@” symbol in front of their username. This is a handy way to start or continue a conversation with a twitter user.

Tweeting Your Research

While it is true that tweets can range from people talking about their lunch to celebrity photos, twitter can also be a source of more serious information. Researchers who use twitter often use it to share their most recent publications. You may wish to follow researchers that you know or people whose papers you are interested in. Reading your colleagues’ tweets will eventually allow you to find out what the popular hashtags in your field are. You can search for these hashtags to read more about developments in your field. You can also create your own hashtags.

Twitter is about building relationships. This means that you can use it to share your own publications. This can take place in the form of sharing information or journal articles that you found helpful but that you did not write. Your followers may also appreciate you tweeting about a conference that you are at which they were unable to attend. In this way, you are providing value to those who choose to follow you.

Twitter can also be a useful platform for asking questions to your followers whether or not you are inthe same field. Your followers may be able to give you an insight into a difficult experimental situationor introduce you to someone you may need to speak to. Twitter can also be used to organize an offline response to an issue that matters to your particular niche community. It can also be a tool to help raise funds for your research. As you build credibility online, science journalists may use twitter to connect with you. After all, you, are an expert in the field and they are interested in research questions and stories.

Impact of Twitter

As a researcher, you probably submit articles to academic journals. The pursuit and generation of knowledge is a core part of your job function. When you publish an article it is one of about two million that will be published within a year. Ideally, you would want your paper to stand out enough that those who would benefit from your findings would read, and possibly cite, your work. Can a microblogging site help with that?

A paper on agricultural sustainability became the most read journal article in the *International Journal of Agricultural Sustainability* with more than 8,000 article views in two weeks. After a press release to promote the journal article, the publisher's e-marketing team also posted about the paper on their social media platforms. The result? The paper was tweeted by 496 users and tweets about the paper had a reach of over one million users and the article was finally picked up by the Huffington Post, and SciDevNet.

Similarly, Melissa Terra who works in the Digital Humanities had conducted an experiment where she blogged and tweeted about some of her papers and observed how this affected how often these articles were downloaded. She found that papers that she blogged and tweeted about had eleven times the number of downloads as papers that had not been tweeted about. She also found that her papers were being downloaded at a much higher rate than those published by her colleagues who were not using social media to promote their work. In her opinion, the investment in social media is well worth it.

Getting Started

Setting up a Twitter account is relatively easy. It is important that you give some thought on how you should craft your profile page. This will help people decide whether or not to follow you. It would be helpful to remember a few things while using social media.

- Use a conversational tone and minimize the use of jargon.
- Pay very careful attention to your spelling and grammar as tweets cannot be edited
- Avoid tweeting when upset and strive to keep your tone respectful
- Avoid using more than three hashtags per tweet
- Ask questions as a way to start discussions with your followers

Twitter is one way to speak directly to a wider audience than you would typically have access to. Far

from being a waste of time, Twitter can be a useful way to find and share information, conduct informal polls, get involved in chats, and find new ideas. In this new year, you could use a new approach to raise your research profile, 140 characters at a time.

Category

1. Promoting Research
2. Using Online Media

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