Description

The Power of a Tweet

When the online social networking service called Twitter was launched in March 2006, there was some skepticism about the value of a 140-character message called a *tweet*.

Less than 10 years later, Twitter has 288 million monthly users and is valued at over $30 billion, which presumably answers skeptics about the value of those tweets.

However, is there a role for Twitter to play in the promotion of academic research, or is it best reserved to post YouTube links, movie previews, and news stories? In other words, should you use Twitter to promote your research?

A Natural Extension

The publication of your research has always been looked upon favorably by research institutions and universities as raising awareness of their research scientists through a broader public profile. “Getting your name out there,” enables media interest, collaboration with peers, and some positive Public Relations (PR) that could come in useful for grant funding applications.

The arrival of blogging platforms such as *Blogger* and *WordPress*, allowed researchers to engage with their respective audiences in a more direct manner while, to some degree, removing the dependence on academic journals to generate a “profile.” Even the most esoteric research subjects could find a zealous audience, as long as the researcher’s website could be found on the Internet.

Researchers who enjoyed the opportunity for commentary and opinion pieces on their field, embraced blogs as soon as they were available, and many have now embraced Twitter as a vehicle to maintain that level of communication without the need to maintain a website, by *microblogging* within the 140-character limit of a tweet.

An Interactive Medium

For those who have started and maintained a blog, adding a Twitter account can be a daunting task at first. Blog posts are typically written to inform, with the author, especially in academia, writing as the Subject Matter Expert (SME). Opening the posts to commentary is an option, but not all scientists want a high level of engagement with their readers, and many find the process of developing a comfortable “voice” to be a challenge. On Twitter, the rules are different. Before you decide to use Twitter to promote your research, know that Tweets are public! Unless you send a DM (Direct Message), you are open to responses from anyone in the “Twitterverse.” This can be a useful tool if you are looking for feedback or conducting an informal survey, but proceed with caution because deliberately inflammatory statements that are explicitly designed to promote a debate can generate some highly critical and usually unhelpful input from “trolls.”

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More Than Just Traffic

If you use Twitter to promote your research, it can surely provide a significant boost to your website visitor traffic, which is the best metric for measuring your reach to the audience for which you are writing. However, with the inherent expectation of engagement, you must be prepared for responses to those tweets. Those responses may come from account holders who are not familiar with the terminology of your field and they may therefore ask for clarification on your tweet. In addition, it is considered poor conduct to only promote on Twitter, even if you're not actually selling anything. Balance your activity with informative tweets, re-tweets from others, and participation in dialogs in which you have a genuine interest and can add value.

Category

1. Promoting Research
2. Using Online Media

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