Social media for increasing the networking and engagement opportunities of academics

*The future is connected*

- Public engagement
- Maintaining networks
- Wider connections
- Academic development

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Key messages

• The main social media tools currently being used by UK STEM academics.

• How these are being used to engage with existing professional networks and extend the boundaries to reach broader communities.

• The drivers for, and barriers against, using social media within a professional context.

• Recommendations to support academics in the use of social media
The project

• Enhancing professional networking and engagement using social media

• Literature
  – *Computer science, social behaviour and psychology, business and marketing etc.*

• Method
  – *Interviews with a small number of academics*
  – *A larger scale online survey*

• Results
  – *Activities, motivations & outcomes*
Activities
• **Introvert user**
  • Infrequent use of one or two social media tools
  • *Reads rather than posts, follows more than is followed*
  • *Views other profiles rather than updating own*

• **Versatile user**
  • More regular use, or intense sporadic use, of one or more social media tools
  • If blogging - usually has specific motivators
  • If using Twitter - tends to read more than post, although may post around specific events
  • Updates profile, reads discussions, messages existing contacts or searches for people they know

**Expert communicator**

• Frequent/daily use of a minimum of 2 tools
• If blogging - long term commitment - although frequency of posts can be variable
• Usually using Twitter – posts frequently, large number of followers - typically more than they follow
• Actively searches for different social media tools for different purposes
• Shares ideas/reflections online, makes content publicly available
### Motivations

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<th>Self-development</th>
<th>Maintaining networks</th>
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Outcomes

- Learnt something new  \((Tw\ 70\%)\)
- Received useful feedback  \((Bl\ 45\%)\)
- Contributed to career progression  \((Bl\ 30\%)\)
- Strengthened existing networks  \((Tw\ 60\%)\)
- Maintained existing networks  \((SNS\ 71\%)\)
- Developed new networks  \((Tw\ 67\%)\)
- Extended the audience of my work  \((Bl\ 76\%)\)
Career progression

I have managed Twitter accounts for the department where I work, and special interest groups [...]. These are skills that people have expressed an interested in.

Senior people know who I am because of Twitter. That has to help.

The ability to use twitter is a skill which many employers are looking for now.

Prizes for public outreach, higher public profile, journalist contacts, name recognition.
Barriers

I fail to see the benefits of such superficial [...] communication.

I don't think my friends want to have notifications or be "spammed" by anything non-socially related.

Not convinced that it is worth spending time on

I'm never sure on what to say. I don't know what others would be interested in reading.

There's already way too much information out there. I worry I'd just be contributing to the noise rather than the signal.
Engagement
The snakes and ladders of social media
Conclusions and recommendations

• What is needed to encourage and support academic staff in their use of social media?
• Main positives: increased profile
• Main negatives: uncertain rewards
• Recommendations:
  – Training/workshops
  – Sharing good practice
  – Measured outcomes and rewards
  – Writing for different social media environments