

SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDANCE FOR ACADEMICS

Introduction

Social media can be an excellent platform to promote your work and expertise among fellow academics, journalists and the public, and to follow peers and relevant organisations. However, there is always a risk of a hostile reaction, especially if people or particular communities disagree with your research. The aim of this document is to provide academics with guidance on

engaging with the public on social media, and common approaches used to manage issues on social media.

Please be aware: This document is an advisory note. It is up to you whether you decide to use social media or interact with the public on the platforms. The University does not expect you to do so.

Choosing a social media channel that is right for you

If you decide to use social media, we recommend reflecting on your aims and objectives for your online presence. The more defined your aims and objectives, the more effective your efforts will be.

If you're looking to just broadcast your news/research to the wider public, **Twitter and Facebook** could be the right platforms.

If you're looking to broadcast your news/research to certain communities or interest groups, **Twitter and LinkedIn** could be effective platforms.

If you have a consistent number of visual elements (such as photos and videos) and you're looking to target a younger audience, consider using **Instagram**.

If you're looking to share work with an audience who have an interest in academic research, consider using **Researcher, ResearchGate or Academia**.

Blogging can be an effective platform to generate discussions about your research and promote thought-leadership and policy pieces. With no character limit, you can clearly explain your thoughts while minimising the risk of being taken out of context.

Please note: If you would rather not run your own social media or blog, you can ask your department, division or college channels to share your message, or write a piece for Medium or The Conversation. These accounts often already have a following established with the kind of audience you are trying to reach.

Points to consider as you start off on social media

1. **Define your audience** – have a think about the type of people you want to reach with your posts. If you have some time, consider making a follower 'wish list'.
2. **Reflect on your tone** – will you be using your account for purely professional reasons, or will you be using it for personal posts as well?
3. **Take your time and review posts before sending** – posts written while feeling tired, emotional, sarcastic or flippant may not come across as intended.
4. **Cultivate a following** – social media success doesn't happen overnight. Consider taking 5 – 10 minutes every day just to scroll and interact with people on your social media channel.
5. **Spread the word** within your faculty/department to help grow your audience.
6. **Acknowledge and tag** relevant funders, partners and collaborators.

Dealing with comments on social media

You may find a number of people will want to interact with you because of your research or expertise. Some comments could be from people who support and agree with your work, while some may have genuine questions about it.

- Reply as you would like to be replied to – kindness can be an effective tool on social media.
- Avoid going into too much detail – if there is a website or other place for more information, it is best to link to the source.
- Can the conversation be taken to a private space? Sometimes taking the conversation away from the public can be beneficial and stop the momentum of the conversation. You could ask the user (if the conversation is happening on Twitter) to direct message (DM) you.

How to spot someone who is looking for an argument on social media

Aside from people who don't understand or disagree with your research, there could be individuals or groups who 'troll' you by posting deliberately offensive or provocative comments, which may be about your research or yourself. Social media can quickly become a relentless environment.

Warning signs include:

- They will use an aggressive tone or offensive language
- They will try to provoke a heated and emotional response from you and others
- They will continually post the same type of message (spam)
- They will make their criticisms personal
- They will make clearly misleading comments or statements
- They will frequently Quote Tweet replies in order to broadcast them to a wider audience
- They may tag or get their followers to spam message you
- Review their social media feed and bio – are they pushing a certain agenda?

Advice on how to deal with 'trolls' on social media

- Remember, you don't have to respond to them.
- Report trolling accounts and messages to the social media platform.
- If you feel threatened or believe a criminal act has taken place – always report to the police.
- Discuss with your communications lead. They may be able to provide you with further support and guidance.
- Mute trolling accounts – this Twitter feature is useful as it hides the troll from your feed without them being aware they have been 'muted'.
- Hide their comments on Twitter and Facebook. Please note on Twitter the platform has a section on each post which shows hidden tweets.
- Block trolling accounts as a last resort. This stops them seeing your posts, and vice versa. However, the blocked account will know they have been blocked, and may take offence.
- Turn off your notifications.
- Temporarily switch your account to private so only existing followers can interact with you.
- Take a break from social media.

How PAD can support you with social media criticism/trolling

If you feel you are being targeted on social media, please get in touch with the [PAD social media team](#).

We can help in the following ways:

- Provide support on how to manage social media during challenging times.
- Show you how best to report social media posts and accounts.
- Explain some of the features you can use to minimise the visibility of trolls on your feed.
- Provide solutions on how to minimise the potential of abuse on social media.

Although the social team can provide some support, there are certain elements which are beyond the team's control.

- The University cannot publicly back or reply to individuals/organisations on your behalf.
- PAD cannot force social media platforms to remove certain posts – we can only report and explain why we feel the post needs to be removed.
- The University cannot force social media platforms to ban certain individuals or groups.
- We can't report individuals/organisations to the police.

Please note: the University cannot get involved in commenting on the issues themselves – academic findings and opinions will always be a matter for public debate.

Social media and your well-being

The University can offer support if social media abuse is harming your well-being. Your HR lead will be able to offer more advice in the first instance.

However, if you feel that a criminal act has taken place or feel threatened, please report the account and content to the police.

Social media security

Be mindful of what you share across different social platforms. Trolls may search your name on several platforms and find information that you may not want the wider public to be aware of. For example, if you blog about your garden or check into a venue on Facebook, a troll could use this information to find out where you are, or where you live.

If your social media security is compromised this could potentially put you at risk and also lead to reputational issues, for example, if your account is hacked.

Please consider the following:

- Turn off the option of sharing your location of where you have tweeted/posted from (including 'non-work' platforms such as fitness or dating apps).
- If you want to include a location in your social media bio, we suggest putting 'Oxford' so it's not a definitive location. We strongly recommend against sharing the address of your department.
- If you share pictures of your home or office be mindful of what can be identified. Can people identify a door number, the road you live or work on or the car you drive?
- Avoid sharing pictures of your family and loved ones.

Social media account security

- Set a unique password for each social media account
- Consider using a random password generator
- Implement two-factor authentication (2FA) on your account
- Ensure your account is linked to an email address you have easy access to

PAD social media contact details

The PAD social media team is always on hand to provide social media support and advice where possible. To contact us, please email the team: social.media@admin.ox.ac.uk.

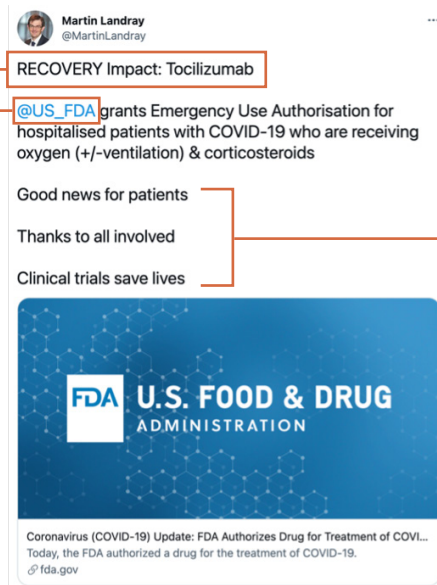
More information

[Find out more about managing one's time on social media here.](#)

Appendix: Peer examples of good social media practice

Posts with a heading catch the eye as the reader instantly understands the subject of the tweet.

When possible, tagging relevant accounts to your posts will help boost the reach of your post.



The tweet structure is clear and easily readable. Spacing out your message is an effective way of making your content more consumable.

Being brief and concise on social media helps to create content that can be understood by a wide range of people.

A strong and clear opening will grab your reader's attention.

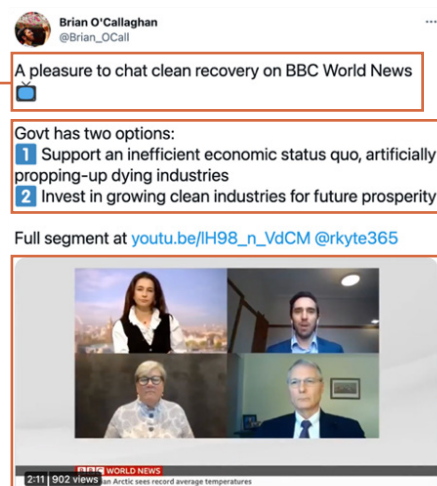
Using hashtags can help you join conversations already taking place on social media and help people understand you are supporting a campaign, or place your post in the context of an awareness day.



A clear call to action.

Use photos or video to help tell your story.

Promoting when you appear on the media can be an effective way of boosting your reach.



Using bullet points or numbers can help make your points as clear as possible.

If you have permission to use the footage, videos of yourself can help enhance your social media presence.