



Who Should Read

Chief Research Officers (CROs) and their communications staff

Departmental and central communications staff

Research faculty

Social Media for Research Communications

A Guide for Leveraging Social Media to Increase Public Engagement

Three Ways to Use This Tool

- Convince institutional partners of the importance and value of social media for research communications
- Educate institutional partners on the uses and capabilities of different social media platforms
- Identify strategies for using social media to grow public engagement with university research

Social Media for Research Communications

Social media provides a direct channel to the general public to communicate the value of research. While the University Research Forum's 2017 Research Communications Pulse Check Survey showed that most CROs and their research communications staff are using social media on a weekly basis, simply having a presence on these platforms does not guarantee true engagement with stakeholders. Often, universities are not fully leveraging social media platforms to grow their base, as measured in number of followers, retweets, shares, etc.

How to Use This Tool

This tool provides CROs, communications staff, and faculty with an overview of why social media is important for research communications, the different social media platforms most commonly utilized for research communications, and strategies for better utilizing those platforms to maximize the impact of a social media presence.

Part One: Overview of the Value of Social Media

Social media usage has grown rapidly over the last decade. While people often assume social media is dominated by younger users, an increasing number of older adults are joining social media platforms. As a result, social media provides research communicators and faculty with access to a growing subset of the general public. Since the majority of the adult public now uses at least one social media site, it is a critical channel to leverage for research communications.

Part Two: Guide to Social Media Platforms

Research communicators have numerous potential platforms to choose from. According to our Pulse Check Survey, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are the most commonly used platforms for research communications. But each platform has advantages and disadvantages. Some are better for communicating certain types of content than others, and some are better for communicating with certain audiences than others. Platforms also differ in the types of metrics that users can access and utilize to evaluate effectiveness. Communicators should take advantage of the data social media platforms provide regarding audience (e.g., location, demographics, interests), engagement (e.g., followers, mentions, comments), and popular content (e.g., likes, shares, retweets).

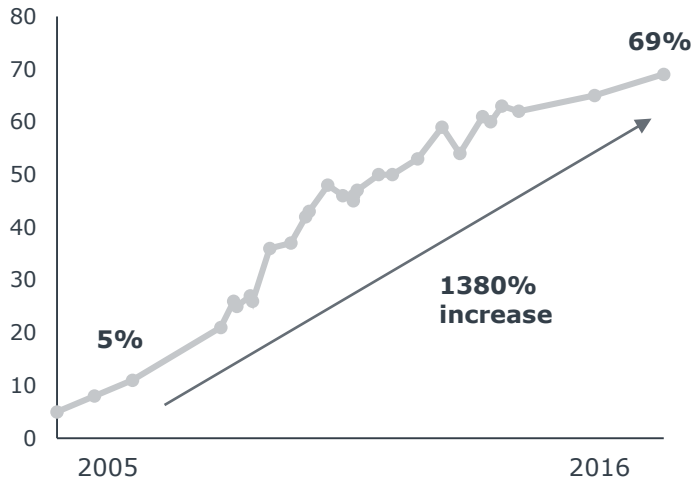
Part Three: Tips for Optimizing Social Media Usage

For each social media platform, there are a number of strategies that communicators can use to enhance their presence and improve their posts. Ultimately, optimizing social media usage requires communicators to strategically select their content, medium, audience, message, platform(s), and metrics. They should then assess the value of the communications and adjust their approach based on these results.

Part One: The Value of Social Media

Social Media Use over Time

Percentage of US adults who use at least one social media site



69%

Percentage of adults over 18 who use at least one social media site

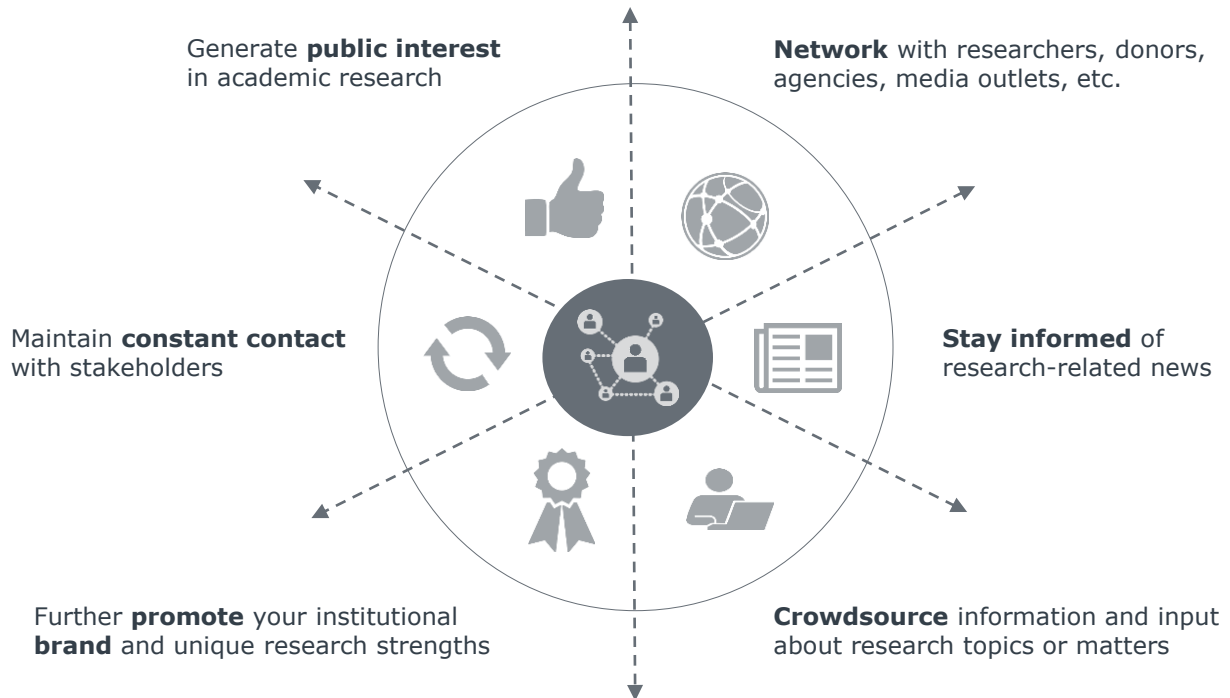
80%

Percentage of adults 30-49 who use at least one social media site

64%

Percentage of adults 50-64 who use at least one social media site

Potential Benefits of Social Media

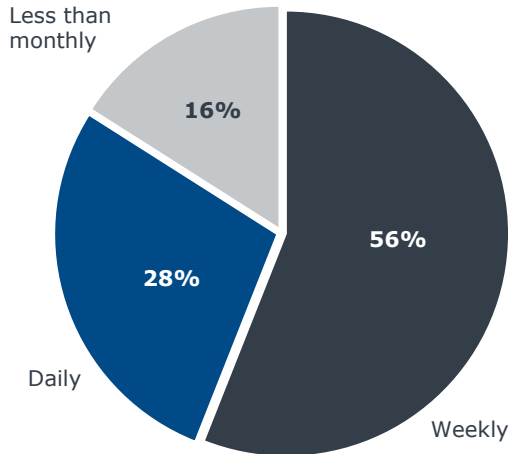


Sources: EAB interviews and analysis; Pew Research Center, available at <http://www.pewinternet.org/fact-sheet/social-media>.

Part One: The Value of Social Media (Cont.)

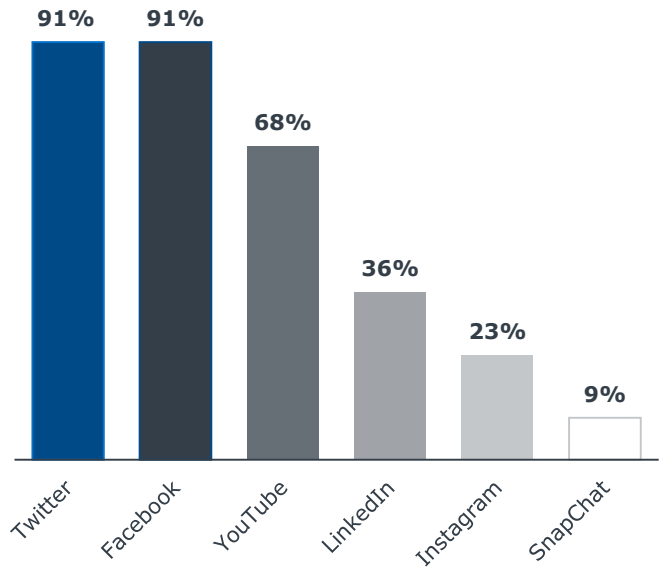
Social Media Usage for Research Communications

Frequency of use of social media to communicate about research



Top Social Media Platforms for Research Communications

Percentage of respondents using each platform



But simply having a presence doesn't guarantee engagement...

Key Goals for Communicating Research via Social Media



Engage the unengaged



Grow followers



Increase retweets, likes, comments, shares



Articulate the value of research in concise and compelling way



Attract additional support (from the public, donors, legislators)

Source: University Research Forum 2017 Research Communications Pulse Check Survey.

Part Two: Social Media Platforms

	Facebook	Twitter	YouTube
Users	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2B monthly active users • 79% of Internet users utilize • Still popular among young adults, but older adults are joining • Currently the most popular social media platform 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 328M monthly active users • 24% of Internet users utilize • More popular among the highly educated and younger audience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 176.1M users in United States • 20% of Internet users in United States access multiple times a day
Potential Uses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create connections • Establish forum for discussion with a community • Use to drive traffic to events and activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide real-time updates • Promote events or projects • Prominent platform for science communications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capture events and activities in video form • Utilize for interviews • Video contests
Posting Basics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can choose from text, photos, videos, and infographics • Not limited in length 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 140 characters • Can include image and link • Can include a hashtag (#) • Can use @ to start a conversation and loop in other accounts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can upload videos that show processes, provide evidence, or explain concepts • Not limited in length, but limited by medium
Metrics/ Data	<p>Available via Facebook Insights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Likes • Shares • Comments • Total organic reach (e.g., total number of unique people who were shown your post through unpaid distribution) • Engaged users (e.g., number of unique viewers who clicked on post) • Click-through metrics 	<p>Available via Twitter Analytics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Top tweets, mentions, and followers • Retweets • Likes • Engagement rate • Detailed information on followers (e.g., location, demographics, interests) 	<p>Available via YouTube Analytics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Views • Subscribers • Shares • Audience retention (e.g., average watch time)

Sources: EAB interviews and analysis; Duke University, Initiative for Science & Society, "Sharing Science-Socially"; UC San Diego, available at <http://ucpa.ucsd.edu/resources/social/social-101>, http://ucpa.ucsd.edu/images/uploads/Social_Media_Cheat_Sheet_4_10_15.pdf; AAAS, available at <https://www.aaas.org/pes/strategies-social-networking-sites>; Statista, available at <https://www.statista.com/statistics/264810/number-of-monthly-active-facebook-users-worldwide>, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/282087/number-of-monthly-active-twitter-users>.

Part Three: Optimizing Social Media Usage

Communicating Research Through Facebook

The image shows a screenshot of the Cornell Research Facebook page. On the left, there are five blue callout boxes with white text and arrows pointing to specific elements on the page:

- Establishes rules and norms for usage:** Points to the 'Home' link in the left-hand navigation menu.
- Provides contact info for questions about Cornell social media:** Points to the 'About' link in the left-hand navigation menu.
- Linked to research Twitter account:** Points to the 'Twitter' link in the left-hand navigation menu.
- Posts include brief text and graphics:** Points to a post by Pamela Chang from the Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine.
- Linked to the institutional research website:** Points to the 'Learn More' button on the right side of the page.

The Facebook page itself features the Cornell Research logo, a cover photo with a blue and red abstract design, and a post from Pamela Chang dated September 1 at 10:25am. The post text reads: "Pamela Chang from the Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine is working to locally target and inhibit disease associated inflammation. #CornellResearch". The post includes a graphic with yellow and purple abstract patterns. The right side of the page shows a 'College & University in Ithaca, New York' section with a 5.0 star rating and 1,277 likes.

Three Key Recommendations



Keep text-based posts to a minimum (even though there isn't a character limit)



Create and invite users to research events—this Events feature distinguishes Facebook from other platforms



Use Facebook as a hub for all social media activity

- Link to your Twitter account
- Upload videos from YouTube
- Post photos from Instagram
- Direct traffic to your research website

Sources: EAB interviews and analysis; Facebook, available at https://www.facebook.com/CornellResearch/?ref=page_internal.

Part Three: Optimizing Social Media Usage (Cont.)

Communicating Research Through **Twitter**

Four Key Strategies

Strategy 1: Research and institutional accounts should play nicely together. Use @ to loop each other into the conversation and establish a reciprocity of retweets.

Strategy 2: Create a unique research hashtag as OSU did with #OSUResearchMatters. This enhances your brand and creates a library of research-related tweets for your institution.

Strategy 3: Use topical hashtags to describe research. This contributes to the larger dialogue about the subject and increases “searchability.”

Strategy 4: Build social media relationships with colleges and schools by using @ to give them credit in research posts. Also, save time and energy by retweeting their research-related content.



Sources: EAB interviews and analysis; Twitter, available at <https://twitter.com/search?q=%23OSUResearchMatters>, https://twitter.com/UNCResearch?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor.

Part Three: Optimizing Social Media Usage (Cont.)

Communicating Research Through **YouTube**



Four Key Recommendations



Make videos entertaining

- Use videos to tell stories about research and its impact
- Leverage anecdotes and surprising findings



Make videos understandable

- Keep videos short, simple, and jargon-free
- Make sure faculty researchers do not speak to an academic audience



Make videos relatable

- Lead with a strong opening statement that relates the research topic to the average person



Make videos personal

- Put a face to a name by involving faculty researchers
- Have faculty researchers talk about how and why they started studying specific topics

Case in Brief: University of Iowa



- Public Institution in Iowa City, Iowa
- Doctoral Universities: Highest Research Activity
- \$440M+ in research expenditures (2015)
- As part of its "Communicating Ideas" workshop, the Office of Research and Economic Development produces a video series, "Research Minute"
- After receiving training and coaching, faculty record one-minute videos explaining their research in an accessible way
- Videos are posted on the office's website and its YouTube channel
- College of Liberal Arts and Sciences shares the videos on their Twitter account using #ResearchMinuteMonday
- Central communications office also uses the videos when pitching stories to the media

Part Three: Optimizing Social Media Usage (Cont.)

Increasing Engagement Through Social Media



231% ↑ Percentage increase in website page views

135K ↑ Number of Twitter impressions (increase from 9,885 in previous month)

3 Number of local news stations that picked up the stories

1 Number of articles rewritten (and infographic picked up) by R&D magazine

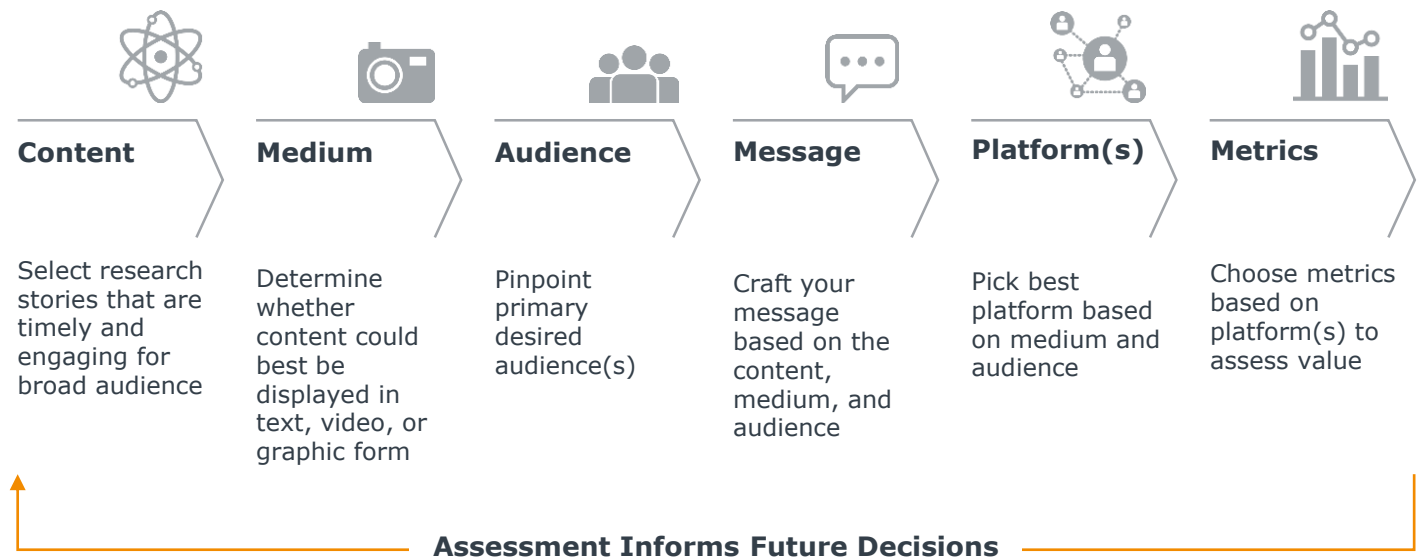


Case in Brief: University of Arizona

- Public Institution in Tucson, Arizona
- Doctoral Universities: Highest Research Activity
- \$600M+ in research expenditures (2015)
- Sought to utilize digital communications to maximize impact, better engage with stakeholder groups, and elevate overall attention to their research
- “Star Wars Science” featured four stories in which Arizona researchers applied real-world science to the highly popular sci-fi *Star Wars* movie series
- Timed to precede a new film release, utilized #StarWarsScience, and promoted the series through Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and LinkedIn Slide Share

Part Three: Optimizing Social Media Usage (Cont.)

Using Social Media Strategically



Social Media Tips

- Accounts on different platforms use the same name
- Focus on engagement, not quantity of posts
- Repost or retweet when running low on new content
- Connect posts to popular media at key times
- Collaborate with other institutional accounts (especially central communications)
- Track altmetrics (e.g., likes, shares, retweets)