



ISER Young Investigator Blog



Social media for scientists: tips on getting started and building a following on Twitter

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Social media has gained increasing popularity amongst scientists with many taking to Twitter to promote their latest research, share their career accomplishments and crowdsource ideas for optimizing experiments. There are many social media platforms including Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, Tik Tok, Clubhouse, YouTube, LinkedIn and Quora that are steadily building online communities of scientists and the list of social media platforms keeps expanding. There are even science-specific social media platforms such as ResearchGate and Academia.edu where scientists can create a professional scientific profile, connect with other researchers, share their latest publications and ask questions to the general scientific community.

Of these social media platforms, Twitter is the most popular amongst scientists with many journals, societies (including our very own ISER, follow us @ISERworld), scientists (follow me @EyeDaisyShu) and universities/research institutes creating Twitter accounts and posting regularly. Many foundations and charities that support vision and eye-related research are also on Twitter and regularly post updates on their latest grant opportunities including Fight for Sight (@FightForSightNY) and the BrightFocus Foundation (@_BrightFocus). There are so many amazing eye researchers on social media including Dr. Bryan William Jones (@BWJones) who is head of the ISER Communications Committee as well as many ISER Young Investigators including Dr. Sandra Hammer (@shammer04), Dr. Nilisha Fernando (@NilishaF), Dr. Tirthankar Sinha (@Sinha_BME) and Erik Butcher (@ErikRButcher).

Tweets are short and succinct, with a maximum character count of 280. Once you've created your account and locked in your account name a.k.a. "handle", it's time to start Tweeting, hone in on your science communication skills and build your following.

Here are some tips to get started:

1. Make it visually engaging

Adding an image, video or gif can enhance your Tweet's level of engagement. If you're posting about your new publication, add an image of yourself holding your paper or even a screenshot of the abstract. Adding emojis to your Tweets can also enhance engagement.

2. Be liberal with your hashtags

When you have character count space leftover in your Tweet, don't be shy about adding hashtags. Hashtags are essentially a type of filter system that allows users to easily access all Tweets that have also used this hashtag. So if you post about #Mitochondria, you'll find that this hashtag appears as blue-colored text instead of black and is "clickable", directing you to a myriad of mitochondria-related Tweets.

3. Be liberal with your tags

Don't be shy about tagging your colleagues, institutes, journals and friends in your Tweets where appropriate. This instantly notifies them of your Tweet and if they retweet this, your Tweet can now be shared with their following, thus enhancing your reach and engagement.

4. Make use of scicomm bots

There are a handful of Twitter bot accounts that are automatically set up to retweet Tweets that are tagged with a particular hashtag or tag. For example, @SciCommBot will automatically share Tweets that have "#SciComm" in it so if your Tweet is anything to do with science, use this hashtag to boost your Tweet's engagement.

5. Add dimensionality to your account

Personalize your Twitter account with Tweets about your daily research life in the laboratory from snapshots of your experiments in progress to fun social events that you share with your friends or co-workers. It's all about promoting work-life balance through your account.

6. Participate in Follow Friday Tweets

Start a thread where you ask your followers to tag 3-5 people in STEM to follow on Twitter. This is a great way of expanding your network, making new friends and engaging in the conversation online. I'm a co-host on the podcast, Behind Our Science (Twitter @behindourscience) and we do a weekly Friday poll where we ask our followers to vote on a science-related question and tag their friends in the comments to vote.

7. Post frequently and engage with the Twitter community

It's all about being pro-active on Twitter, getting your message out there and above all, having fun! The more you post and follow others, the more likely your following will grow.

See you all in the Twittersphere!