

USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA TO ENHANCE THE IMPACT OF PUBLISHED PAPERS

A major goal of research and scientific writings is to promote the frontier of knowledge. This in turn benefits the researcher with associated increase in reputation and attendant career progression. Increasingly, researchers are being evaluated based upon their publications as well as the number of citations these publications received. One of the key ways to increase citations is to expose the research output to a wider audience because people can only cite articles that they are aware of. As opined by Marashi *et al*, citations to an article may strongly hinge on the visibility instead of merit¹. Furthermore, Ebrahim argues that in the future, writing a high quality article in journals will only give it a fifty percent chance of getting cited, while the promotion and broad dissemination of the publications will be needed to complete the other fifty percent.^{2,3}

Though most journals make attempt at increasing the visibility of the articles they published, the researchers who wrote the articles are in the best position to promote their papers more effectively.³ The visibility of a research project/paper can be increased during several stages of the research lifecycle. At the pre-research stage, by participating in team-authored articles especially with international authors. At the pre-publication stage, by publishing in journals with high impact factor, as well as choosing open access journals. And finally at the post-publication stage by actively promoting the article to a wide range of audience.^{3,4}

The social media can play a key role at the various stages stated above, and this piece is aimed at informing/reminding researchers that the social media can be a veritable tool in achieving the aforementioned. While the social media offers a wide range of tools that can assist the researcher in finding, using and disseminating information, this write-up will focus on its ability to increase visibility, citation and ultimately the impact of published works.

Social media use has greatly increased in the last decade, with Pew Research Center reporting an increased usage among American adults from 7% in 2005 to 65% in 2015.⁵ The upsurge in social media use has affected several aspects like politics, healthcare, education, and is currently having an increasingly growing effect on research.⁶ Social media provides an informal and quick means of informing people about one's research by simply posting it or creating a link to the paper online.

The social media can be broadly defined as "web-based communication tools that enable people to interact with each other by both sharing and consuming information".⁷ It has also been described as a phenomenon in which the online content is generated by the users of the service.⁸ The social media is comprised of plethora of social tools which can be categorized based on what they are commonly used

for: Communication - Blogging, Microblogging, Social networking; Collaboration - Social bibliography, social news; and Multimedia sharing - Video, Presentation.⁸ Common examples of the specific social communication tools that are available to researchers for promoting their works include:

Social networking: These platforms allow users to create a profile, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and opinion and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system⁹ for example, Facebook and LinkedIn. More research-oriented examples are ResearchGate, Nature Network and Graduate Junction.

Blogging: This involves creating and maintaining a website that feature publication of personal thoughts and Web links. The blogs can serve several purposes such as a means of making research data and article available on the web.⁸ For example, Blogger and Word Press.

Microblogging: Unlike blogs where large volume of write-ups can be posted, microblogs only offer a way to make small pieces of writing available online. They often have features that allow users to grow a network of followers.⁸ For example, Twitter.

Social bibliography: These are primarily reference management tools that also offer the ability to connect and share information with others.⁸ E.g. Mendeley, Zotero, CiteULike

Multimedia/Video sharing: These are social tools that are primarily used to share videos, pictures e.g. YouTube, Instagram.

Presentation sharing: They are often used to share lecture slides, documents. For example, Slide Share, Google doc.

In order to use social media for promoting research, the researcher needs create an account with the preferred social platform(s). Since they all have different strengths and weaknesses, it is important that the researcher identifies the ones that would be best suited for promoting the research. Furthermore, the researcher can also link some of the accounts together. For example, the Facebook account can be linked with Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram, such that whatever the researcher posts in one account can automatically appear on other accounts, thus, spreading the reach of the research work.¹⁰

Useful tips have been proposed to aid effective use of the social media in promoting research and increasing visibility of the one's work. These include: being selective, picking two or three social tool/account and committing to them^{10,11}; having a clear

goal to be achieved; linking with key partners online; avoid devoting too much time compared to the accrued benefit; posting relevant pictures/images/infographics to quickly convey a key message and also attract more people; actively expanding one's network, so as to reach new audience with minimal effort, and finally, measuring the rate of increase in visibility through number of views, comments, and citations.¹¹

If used appropriately, promoting research via social media enables quick feedbacks, allows researchers with similar interests to connect, reveals research that people may not have been able to find otherwise (like in journals that only have print copies), provide another way of demonstrating the impact of research through "altmetrics" (alternative rating metrics that considers social media engagement).^{8,10}

Criticisms about the use of social media for promoting research works exist. These include: believe that it weakens the quality of discussion, exposes researchers' professional life unduly, notion that social media are trivial in nature and suitable only for entertainment rather than professional discourse, promoting peer-reviewed articles in the same social media space with numerous unverified personal opinions may make it more difficult to identify which contributions are valuable or authoritative. Furthermore, engaging in social media promotion on numerous networks may become counterproductive due to over-complexity which is the enemy of efficient communication.⁸

While some of the criticism may be genuine, the researcher only needs to be focused, define his/her intent of engaging the social networking tools and adhere to the tips given earlier to avoid the possible negatives. In addition, the researcher should operate within the guidelines for authors of the journals that have published their works, respect copyrights and avoid plagiarism.

Overall, research impact is crucial to the progress of a researcher, and increasing the visibility as well as citations of their research works play a vital role in these regard. Social media tools are veritable resources that can be harnessed to achieve these objectives, thus, we encourage researchers to use them to their advantage.

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