

UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK
DEPARTMENT OF CHEMISTRY

BUBBLING UP: SOCIAL MEDIA

Termly collection of wellbeing stories
shared by staff and students, because we
care

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ABOUT US

ISSUE 4 TEAM

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We are looking for 2 student editors, so if you are interested in joining the team please express your interest by e-mailing chem.experience@warwick.ac.uk.

If you'd like to supply feedback, or submit a piece for the upcoming issue, please get in touch via a form at warwick.ac.uk/bubblingup or by emailing Dr Bo Kelestyn at bo.kelestyn@warwick.ac.uk



STEFAN ROESNER

SENIOR RESEARCH FELLOW

@chemistrycloseup on Instagram
Synthetic organic chemistry through a spy glass

About three months ago I joined Instagram and started the project chemistrycloseup. At the time I was surprised that no one else had come up with the same idea. Chemistrycloseup was created to facilitate chemistry outreach in times of social distancing and to communicate organic chemistry through pictures to a lay audience that might not have any chemistry background. The medium Instagram was chosen as social media platform as it reaches, in particular, a young audience. In addition, I am able to combine my interest in art and photography with my occupation in the Chemistry Department.

For the last ten years since I started my postgraduate studies, I have spent a significant amount of time in research laboratories in front of fume hoods. However, if I am telling my non-scientist wife that I had to purify a compound by Kugelrohr distillation, she has no idea what I am talking about. Even worse, our undergraduate students at Warwick often do not know what academic research at Warwick looks like before starting their MChem project. With chemistrycloseup I am trying to fill this gap and show through pictures what happens behind the closed double doors of the C block.

STEFAN ROESNER

SENIOR RESEARCH FELLOW

Every day I encounter interesting observations in the laboratory. Buried away at the back of a drawer I found some impressive pieces of long unused glassware, some of which have a now unknown function as many practical skills have been lost over the years. I was lucky to grow some beautiful crystals, like the ones shown below, which is so far my most liked picture on Instagram – the crystal porcupine. One of my co-workers works on the synthesis of fluorescence tags for protein labelling, which gives me a never-ending source of pictures of lime green solutions.



In summary, after three months of running chemistrycloseup, it has become harder to come up with original picture ideas. Thus, I added short videos to my repertoire. Although it initially started as an outreach project, so far, I have not been able to reach my target audience on social media as most of my followers are chemists, too. However, if you are interested in organic synthesis or just the research that happens at the Chemistry Department, start following chemistrycloseup on Instagram. You might be surprised about our discoveries!

BO KELESTYN

DIRECTOR OF STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Social media is something I have a long and complex relationship with.

I got my first account on VKontakte (or VK - 'Facebook' for post Soviet countries) in 2008 to stay in touch with friends from international language school. Russia was invading Georgia at the time, which was my first experience of how political social media can be.

I studied Business as an Undergraduate and Web 2.0 was one of the topics I was excited by! Social media was starting to grow and businesses that were using it to build and engage with their communities were examples of innovation and the future of business.

The power of digital was what inspired me to pursue MSc and PhD in digital innovation. Ironically, I found it so distracting that I had to delete Instagram for a week ahead of my thesis submission.

It helped me stay in touch with my family and friends in Ukraine, follow and support Revolution of Dignity in 2014, but it also meant that expressions of support were subjects to trolling with fake news and general misinformation creating a very dangerous information war. I followed brands and fitness accounts that helped me learn new exercises but also made me feel bad about my body at the same time.



BO KELESTYN

DIRECTOR OF STUDENT EXPERIENCE

I use social media to share my work and network but I often find myself mindlessly scrolling through my feed when I am anxious or angry.

Since the start of the pandemic, my boundaries between work and social have blurred really fast. I now have a 1-hour limit on my use of Instagram and regularly monitor how I use my devices each week. I unfollowed and muted any accounts that did not inspire, educate or entertain, including my own family and friends. That might seem harsh, but my health depended on my mental diet (hygiene). Even if you choose to have no presence, you are still bound to hear people talk about it or share updates with you. Exposure to social media might be inevitable but the choice of what content you and I consume is always with us.

I am constantly reminded of the power of these spaces to nourish as well as hurt you. I hope that with this issue we can be reminded of this power and support each other in channeling it to learn and grow, connect with each other, express ourselves, fundraise, and make it a source of positive change for #WarwickChemFam

LOUIS AMMON

MSC BY RESEARCH STUDENT

We live in a world where social media penetrates even the darkest parts of our society. Social media connects people across hundreds, if not thousands, of miles bringing connection, happiness, and joy to many, however not everyone uses social media for good, some use it to put others down, and some for more illegal activities.

I joined the world of social media at 11, everyone in my year at secondary school had it, and even then, the FOMO was real, so I just had to get Facebook, back then it was very much a place of connection and sharing, adding humorous things like "married to Justin Bieber" to your profile, and adding hundreds of awful photos of your latest escapades with your school mates.

Its far more recently that I have experienced the darker sides of social media, and it really ranges from the sublime to the ridiculous, the roller-coaster of emotions that scrolling through your twitter feed puts you on is crazy, one minute you are congratulating someone on an achievement, the next you are watching a video of someone being brutally murdered. And this is nothing, the amount of trolling that many experience for just being their best selves is extreme.

My feeds had me being thrown from the joys of happiness to the depths of despair in a matter of seconds, it was really messing with my head, so I sat down and carefully curated my feeds - something well worth doing. I muted words like Cummings and Rowling, blocked accounts that pump out hatred and vitriol, and I still take the time to do this on a regular basis.

LOUIS AMMON

MSC BY RESEARCH STUDENT

I also have digital wellbeing controls on my phone; I can only use Reddit, Twitter, Instagram and TikTok for 30 minutes each day (I deleted the Facebook app, I still have an account but I only really use it for ChemSoc purposes) I've found this stops me getting too lost in the murky waters, and losing hours of my day working out my scrolling finger. I deleted Snapchat a while back and I've also logged out of my personal Instagram accounts.

Having a generally positive social media experience is far more than just a personal responsibility, there is so much that we need to hold the companies accountable for, better review policies, more fact-checking on ads and posts from those in power, more responsibility in how they use data.

The world doesn't always have to be a dark and scary place and neither do social media platforms, sometimes you've just got to take the time to put the right measures in place to ensure you don't get wrapped up in The good, The bad, and The ugly that is the internet.

There are some great TED talks on social media and The Social Dilemma is well worth a watch (Warning: You'll want to crush your phone into a million pieces after watching it), as is Brexit: The Uncivil War.

<https://www.ted.com/topics/social+media>
https://www.ted.com/playlists/397/the_power_of_social_media

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wAIP6fIONAI>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v9EKV2nSU8w>



MARIANNA DIAMANTAKIS

MCHEM STUDENT

My idea to do my CH222 presentation about social media came about after I watched the popular new Netflix show known as 'The Social Dilemma'. At the time, I remember how all my friends were either telling me to watch it because they found it so interesting, or not to watch it because it scared them so much. In the show, they detail how social media is essentially 'hijacking our brains and dividing society' through means of psychological manipulation and surveillance capitalism. Surveillance capitalism is the way that companies analyse every online move we make to produce data that can be used for commercial purposes. This sounded familiar to me... Am I the only one who thinks about something, and then the next day they see an advert for it online? According to the show, this all comes about because data on every like, share and even how long you spend looking at something online is collected and used to make you spend even more time on the platform. For companies like Instagram, Facebook and Twitter, their business model is to keep people engaged on the screen. One way in which this is done is through the refresh action on apps; every time you refresh you get something new which creates an unconscious habit to keep refreshing. This is the same way that a gambling addiction works. It is the unpredictability of that process which makes it so addictive, and site creators know this and use this to their advantage. Sean Parker, Facebook's former president, describes this as "exploiting a vulnerability in human psychology".

MARIANNA DIAMANTAKIS

MCHEM STUDENT

I have no doubt that a large portion of our generation are almost addicted to social media, myself included. When I deleted Instagram from my phone in the summer, I remember that for the first few days I found myself going to the place the app used to be, only to find it was not there anymore. Nowadays, whenever me or my housemates need to sit down to do our university work, we go to the extent of giving each other our phones to ensure we aren't distracted by them. This addiction was even more evident in the March lockdown; at the start I would find myself spending all day every day on my phone, just mindlessly scrolling. The fact that Instagram now has tools that can limit your daily usage of the app just goes to show the creators are fully aware of the problem they have created.

It is hard to deny how much social media has impacted our society and social culture, but many have served for our benefit. My Mexican-born mother never fails to remind me how lucky I am to have social media and the internet. When she first moved to the UK, the only means of communication she had with her family was on her landline. Not only was it extremely expensive to call because she lived so far away, but the 6-hour time difference made it very difficult to keep in contact. When I think about her being alone in her tiny flat in Shepherd's Bush, I am definitely grateful to have social media to make me feel connected to my friends and family when I am away at university.

Overall, I think that social media has many benefits, especially in today's lockdown situation where we are unable to physically spend time with each other. But I also think that it is important to be mindful about what a powerful tool it can be, and how much time we are spending on it. It's crazy to see how much more time in the day there is once you disconnect from your phone for a while.

ADAM ALCOCK

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND EXPERIENCE COORDINATOR

I'm really pleased that we're covering social media as a topic. But instead of heading to the negatives (because let's be honest, the words social and media do not have positive connotations, and rightly so on occasion), I want to advocate social media for social good through taking responsibility of our own output. As a user I have a choice every time I log on: whether to post that photo, leave that comment or retweet that meme... I choose to take responsibility for the content that leaves my virtual footprint out there, for everyone to see. My background is in comms and I regularly use social media platforms for work, so maybe my mindfulness around content is always alert, but I answer some simple questions in my head when posting: is what I'm saying kind? Is it truthful? Can it be misconstrued? Would I be okay with my employer and/or my Mum seeing this? (Because these are really useful benchmarks!) and if the answer to all of these is YES, then I'm usually good to go.

So what do I use social media for? I use it to network and connect, to share and promote, to celebrate and gather feedback. It's a really powerful tool (professionally and personally), so each of us can choose to use it in a positive way. It's not all negativity and trolls, there are some good out there - and we can each add to that good when we make positive choices every time to log on and post.

I found these resources useful:
<https://youtu.be/4uHu2aajMN8>

<https://www.studentmindsblog.co.uk/2020/10/how-i-crafted-positive-social-media.html?m=1>

NEXT ISSUE: FUTURE OF THE STEM COMMUNITY

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COMING IN TERM 2 2020/21

If you have been affected by this issue, please
find out more about the support available on
warwick.ac.uk/bubbling-up or by speaking to your
Personal or Senior Tutor in the department.

