

# Social Media for Engagement Transcript

Fitting everything you want to say into 280 characters, choosing the right hashtags or getting to grips with the latest trends. Using social media can be a daunting task, and one that you might think is not for you.

Is your first thought when someone says “Have you tried using social media for engagement” “Why? Why should I go through the pain of putting in the time and effort to create content and put it out into the world.

It’s a reasonable point, social media can be time consuming and does take effort. But it’s worth it, I promise.

My name is Sam Langford and I’m a science communicator and public engagement consultant who spends far too much time on social media. In this video we’ll explore the benefits of social media, what makes good content and how you can get started!

We’ll also take a dive into four of the most popular platforms and how you can use them. It’s also worth noting, there’s a lot of crossover between social media and other types of engagement, and I won’t go into some of the more general advice.

So with all that said, let’s go!

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I get it, social media can seem like a chore, taking you away from the other important things that you need to be doing. So how can putting in the effort be of use to you?

I've come up with two main points that I feel are the most important benefits that are applicable to pretty much all researchers.

The online world allows you to reach audiences who may never otherwise engage with your project, which could be due to their geographic location or perhaps their ability to access face-to-face events. All you need is an internet connection, allowing you to reach a worldwide audience at any time!

You can use social media to increase your own profile as a researcher, or the profile of your research itself, through socializing with other researchers or perhaps even an interested public audience.

The second main benefit is the ability to build a community.

Across all social media platforms, it is possible to foster a community who are invested in the work that you do.

Imagine you're in a pub or a café with a friend, you strike up a conversation about your work, and soon you'll be getting ideas about how they view the work you do.

The same happens with social media, the audiences you engage with can provide you with new perspectives on your work, either by providing an outside point of view, or showing you where the strengths and weaknesses are in your communication about your work

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By taking the time to consult and listen to others who engage with your work online, this can lead to a number of positive outcomes for your research.

You can also use this community for data collection. Perhaps they could be the people who contribute to your project through surveys, interviews or providing feedback.

Or maybe they could be the people who go out and collect data for you! The Parenting Science Gang are a fantastic example of using social media to recruit researchers through building a dedicated social media community.

Now, these are just two points, but there are so many other reasons why social media is useful.

But how do I know what to do, I hear you cry!

Well, there are some key points to always remember no matter which social platform you are using, in order to create the best content that you can.

Number 1, Be human. Try where possible to show that there's a human behind the posts and not a faceless AI churning out tweets for the masses. The best social media accounts are those who act like real people.

Finding the tone you want to use is important, and being consistent with this too in order to let your audience get to know you and what to expect from your content.

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Using images and video content is a good driver of engagement, the visual element captures your audience's attention. GIFs, infographics, videos, they're all great.

However make sure that you have the permission to use any images you include and that you credit the creators, if you didn't create it.

Number 3, Be active

It might sound silly, but you need to be using the platform in order for people to respond. Join in conversations, ask questions, make your presence known and probably most important, lift up other people. Don't throw out content and disengage with the responses people give.

If you see something you like, hit the like button, but more importantly hit the retweet button. By helping provide a platform for others, it increases the likelihood that they will return the favour and boost your content.

Number 4, Hashtags

Join in with or track an ongoing conversation by using hashtags relevant to your content. Make sure to be consistent in your usage, and use hashtags that are already in use. Always make sure that you capitalize each individual word, to maintain accessibility for users who use screen readers.

Number 5, Don't forget to make your content accessible

This includes adding captions to videos, including alternative text on images, using inclusive language and avoiding the use of flashing lights on GIFs and other visual content.

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So you know the basic rules, but how do you choose which platform to use? Let's focus on the four most popular platforms!

Have you ever thought, "I'm too old for TikTok, it's a platform for kids!" And whilst a lot of young people do use it (50% of users are under 34), this actually makes it a platform with huge potential for high quality interactions with your audience, and the features it includes allow for some really creative ways to engage.

TikTok has seen an astronomical rise in users over the past year! At its core a video sharing platform, that allows you to create videos between 15 seconds, 1 minute and 3 minutes in length. These are short, snappy videos, with incredibly diverse content like comedy shorts, musical performances, life advice and educational content.

But it's also very fast moving, so being able to react to the latest trends and work with the algorithm is important. The platform puts the content on users "For You Page", which has decided what content they most want to see based on their past likes, shares and the content that they spend time watching. So it is highly beneficial to mould your content to fit with current trends.

## Section

There are several unique functions on TikTok which sets it apart from the other platforms.

Stitch allows you to cut your video and another user's video together. This is a really great way for a user to, for example, respond to a question that you pose by taking your video and adding their own layer.

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Duet, allows someone to create a new video where they and the original video are side by side. This can be used in very creative ways to sync two videos together, some of the best examples of this have been the ways that people create musical numbers together.

You can also respond to people's written comments by creating a video directly from this interaction. This is a very personal way to interact with your audience and provide them with a high quality response that makes them feel valued.

TikTok is a platform with huge potential, and I expect to see more and more researchers using it in the future.

Until recently, Instagram was the most popular of all of the social media platforms, especially for audiences under 25 years old. They've made some changes to try to challenge TikTok, in my opinion its a mistake.

Instagram content is at its most successful when it tells a great story using high quality visuals. They continually add new features which allows users to add content in new ways.

From basic posts on your grid, limited time Stories presented in a slide show format, the TikTok competitor Reels to the longer form videos that you can post via IGTV, Instagram has a multitude of ways that you can post.

The grid is the first place that people will see your content, if they discover you using hashtags attached to posts. So this is the place to focus on community and network building on Instagram.

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Once you have them on board, some users will predominantly watch content posted to Stories, which give them regular updates from the accounts that they follow.

The Stories function is probably the most useful function for regular engagement with your users, as it allows you to build two way engagement.

You can create quizzes, collect feedback, run ask me anything events and much more! This content is available for 24 hours, before being added to your own private archive.

Twitter is a fantastic platform for engaging with other academics, policy makers, journalists and public interest groups. And more and more, it is becoming a place that you can engage with schools, community organisations and other audiences.

It's the go to social media platform for academics, with many people now being recommended to "just be on there."

The unique selling point of Twitter is the ability to have real, two way conversations with a huge number of users in real time. As an incredibly open platform, the immediacy of the interactions you can have allows you to create dynamic conversations that can result in real in depth discussion.

It also forces you to be concise, the 280 character limit on an individual tweet means you need to carefully consider the words you use, to get the right message across and appropriately engage with your audience. A downside is that there is no edit function, meaning you can't make changes if you make a mistake in a tweet, unlike on Facebook and Instagram!

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Of the big four, Twitter is the best networking app, and so works best for connecting with researchers with common interests, any where in the world. From book collaborations based off a conversation about farting animals, published papers, academic conferences running in the app itself to science festivals, Twitter has led to some really high quality collaborations through public engagement.

Facebook is the social networking site that is best for engaging with families and older age groups who are more likely to be on here than they are other platforms.

It's a really great place for dissemination and promotion, with a bit less focus on the two-way engagement that some of the other platforms can provide.

In order to facilitate engagement, you need to spend a considerable amount of time constructing your network. This could be building a network through people already on your friends list, or by spending time engaging with "Groups" and "pages", where people already spend their time.

For example, if you want to engage audiences with a BioBlitz event, encouraging them to get outside, look at nature and feed into the research, then you might choose to engage with groups focused on wildlife and the outdoors by posting project information in the group

Some real benefits to Facebook are the opportunities for promoting events (both on and offline), the unlimited word count for posts and the chance to build and maintain in depth networks.



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It's worth bearing in mind that conversations on Facebook can be slow and don't usually happen in real time the way you might expect on Twitter or Instagram, and conversations are more restricted due to needing a connection with your audience to be established through a network of friends.

We're also seeing a bigger push towards commercialisation on Facebook, as the company moves towards paid advertising to drive your content visibility, so long term Facebook isn't the best outlet for public engagement.

Using social media does come with its own risks, but rather than put you off using it, it's good to know what to do in the event of an issue arising. Some of the more common risks include:

If you're not careful, social media can take up far more of your time than you originally intended. So it's really important to factor in your time commitment when your planning, and stick to it!

Make sure that you're clear on how you will access social media. Will you use a professional/institutional account rather than a personal account?

You may want to do this on Facebook and Instagram, allowing you to separate your work and personal lives. On Twitter, some people use separate accounts, but not always. It depends on what you feel most comfortable and safe to do

Dont feed the trolls

People who like to cause trouble for their own entertainment, generating negative responses through offensive, controversial and bad faith comments. The best advice is to ignore a troll and make use of your best friend, the block button!

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If you are representing a project or organisation, ensure you understand their values and protocols. Beware of how you respond and think before you tweet! Engaging with your institutional communication/social media teams for support and advice is a valuable starting point.

This has been a whistlestop tour of using social media, and hopefully it has given you some food for thought on how you could use different platforms for engaging public audiences with your work!

It's far from the full story, so if you ever want to delve a little deeper and find out more about social media, email me at [sam@scicommwithsam.com](mailto:sam@scicommwithsam.com)

For now though, take care.