

Why academics should make time for social media

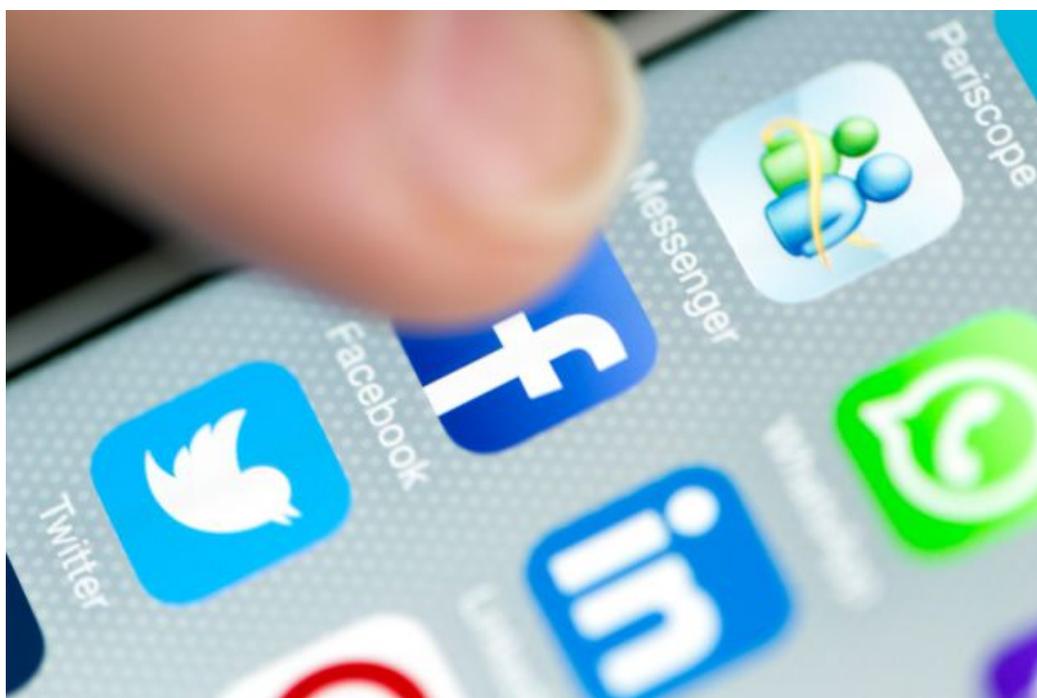
Andy Miah, chair in science communication and future media at the University of Salford, on why academics should maintain their online presence

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Source: iStock

Keeping up with social media has become a full-time job. Nearly every week, something new pops up promising to revolutionise how we connect with our students, develop our research profiles or achieve a bigger impact in the public domain.

So where should we focus our attention as higher educators, to ensure that we don't stretch ourselves too thin but don't miss out on the next big thing? What's out there already that's on the verge of being big news, and what's about to become a massive flop? And why should we care?

There are some clear "must-haves" for your social media portfolio – ways that will help you to connect with your peers. LinkedIn is a great place to start, and, with a minimum sign-up age of 13 years, it has become the go-to place for collegial contacts, the Rolodex of the Web 2.0 era.



[The A to Z of social media for academia](#) (/a-z-social-media)

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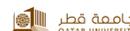
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It is quickly followed by Twitter, which is among the most well-used platforms for higher educators. Everything from event hashtags to

curated lists of experts allow us to be more aware of what each of our peers is doing, and can even build relationships within our institutions. A great example of this is the Health Care Hashtag project, which has been allowing scientists in healthcare to register event, disease or network hashtags in a way that helps the community to wade through the obscure acronyms that often are used around these events.

The range of uses of social media is vast and includes collaboration, presentation, networking, researching, tracking, portfolio presentation, audiovisual archiving, workflow efficiency, writing, event production, publishing, video creation, data visualisation and teaching. It is a lot to take in. If you can focus on one established and one emerging platform in these categories, that's already plenty.

But there are some other essentials. For instance, most grant applications now require you to have an ORCID identity when you submit, and one big challenge is figuring out the universal researcher identifier for all databases. I have accounts in ResearcherId, ORCID, Google Scholar, Academia.edu and ResearchGate, and each does something very different. For this reason, each is essential to have, and managing them is not so cumbersome once they are set up.

Alongside these must-haves, new and innovative platforms can be found in Haiku Deck, Prezi, event organising with eventbrite, and co-writing with Google Drive. There are new platforms such as JournalMap, which scrapes geographic data from article texts, mapping out the locations of fieldwork across the world and helping us see which parts of the world have yet to be explored. Then there are great audience polling tools such as Kahoot, which utilises audiences' mobile devices to allow them to respond to questions and show results in real time.

You can also keep in touch with students more effectively by keeping a close ear to the ground on platforms such as YikYak and SnapChat.

However, the bigger reasons to get on board with social media have to do with the changing world of information and education. Ignoring social media is like ignoring email in 1994. It is defining how a new generation connects with each other, for whom email – as we grew up with it – doesn't even exist.

The future of the university is also another big reason to invest in social media, as some of the most searched-for universities now are those that are online, rather than those of bricks and mortar. With the rise of massive open online courses and alternative education systems, universities must figure out their online strategy to ensure that they stay in touch with students. If your university isn't using SnapChat, then it's losing a big opportunity to relate to students.

One key thing to remember is that while platforms such as Pokémon Go may seem like they are just for kids, those kids will end up making choices about their future education – and the best way to engage with them will be to have a presence within these environments. Institutions and commercial companies are already populating Pokémon Go. To access this population, universities would be smart to follow.

Times Higher Education has teamed up with Andy Miah, chair in science communication and future media at the University of Salford (<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/university-salford>), to offer you the definitive guide to the social media tools available to academics, and how you can use them as you go about your scholarly work. Tap to view the full resource on the THE website (<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/a-z-social-media>).

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