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Social Media to Amplify Scientific Research?

CRISP, creative, targeted & instant – these are some of the hallmarks of social media communication. A huge population today is spending most of their time browsing for news, information, entertainment or simply striking and nurturing contacts. It is no wonder therefore that a large proportion of scientific information too can be accessed today on social networks like Research Gate, LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, etc.

Over the past few years, science communicators have rightly and increasingly been exploiting social media channels to popularize science, demystify complex ideas, and reach out to target groups & stakeholders. And in recent years, researchers too seem to have joined the social media bandwagon to highlight their scientific projects, findings, and achievements – not only increasing their global visibility but also substantially increasing the impact and citations of their research. In addition, scientists and researchers are also exploiting social media channels to build online communities where they can exchange ideas, pose questions, send enquiries and explore collaboration opportunities.

In fact, writing in *Nature Human Behaviour* (Vol. 5, page 812, 2021), Jens Foell, who changed careers from being a researcher for 20 years to switching to working full-time in Germany's biggest science communication YouTube channel, says, "Social media science communication is a nonstop academic conference for all. ...it seems odd that many scientists do not seem interested in, or even aware of, the large-scale academic conference that is taking place right under their noses... science communication on social media, which consists of statements and exchanges that fulfill all the functions of academic meetings." In fact, a major difference between academic conferences and meetings is that now the public too has an opportunity to listen in, comment and ask questions.

But scientists largely seem uncomfortable with the idea of embracing social media channels to highlight their scientific work. For such scientists, a recent paper published in the journal *PlosOne* ("Social media usage to share information in communication journals: An analysis of social media activity and article citations", February 9, 2022; <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0263725>), could be encouraging. Yasemin Ozkent evaluated articles published in the top 10 communication journals in 2018, recorded the traditional citation numbers (Google Scholar and Thompson-Reuters Web of Science) and social media exposure of the articles in January 2021 (nearly three years after the articles' publication date). The author found a positive correlation between exposure to social media and article citations.

Not surprisingly, journals round the world are increasingly marking their presence on social media channels. In fact, in a paper (Karmakar, M., Banshal, S.K. & Singh, V.K. Does the presence of social media plugins in a journal website result in higher social media attention of its research publications?, *Scientometrics* 124, 2103–2143 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11192-020-03574-7>), researchers from Cornell University showed that journals that have social media plugins integrated with their web pages get significantly higher social media mentions and shares for their articles as compared to journals that do not provide such plugins.

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