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EDITORIAL

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"Leveraging social media to advance your scientific career"

1 | WHY SHOULD SCIENTISTS CARE ABOUT SOCIAL MEDIA?

Disseminating scientific knowledge to the general public is an important skill for all researchers. It helps the public understand why your work is important, enables communication with people who may not typically have access or interest in reading formal journal articles, and brings pressing scientific issues to the forefront of public awareness. Given the ever-increasing prevalence of social media usage, reaching broader audiences through our phones has never been easier. To some scientists, however, social media can seem like an exhausting form of communication. Questions of whether it is worth the time and energy can deter many from engaging in it altogether.

If you are new to using social media professionally, various articles and blogs have detailed how to get started and build a professional brand (Azma, 2023; Pawlak et al., 2023; Rein, 2023; Yeo, 2015). These include information about finding your niche, building an audience, choosing a platform, and best practices for ensuring accessibility (Chiarella et al., 2020). Additionally, there is clear evidence of amazing science communicators who have effectively used social media to share research, get the public excited about science across various platforms, and access incredible opportunities for their own careers: Dr. Samantha Yammine (@science.sam), Dr. Raven Baxter (@raventhesciencemaven), and Dr. Andre Issacs (@drdre4000). But the question remains: why would a typical academic or researcher bother giving time and energy to this when there are countless other career aspects to prioritize?

2 | SOCIAL MEDIA TO ADVANCE YOUR SCIENTIFIC CAREER

Even if you do not aspire to be a science influencer, publicly communicating your professional goals and growing your network are critical for career advancement. Social media can be a highly effective method for achieving both. Because we (the authors) have been vocal about our work, our goals, and our passions, other people could refer to us when opportunities arose. While it is difficult to point to a singular post, comment or repost that nudged that door open for both of us, having public personas placed us in consideration for opportunities we might not have encountered otherwise. Exposure begets more exposure. For instance, someone might remember your tweet about recent research findings and invite you to give a seminar, where you meet someone who later nominates you for a conference presentation. During that conference, a member of a faculty search committee takes note of your compelling story and advocacy beyond your science. Now, there is someone who can speak to your abilities, and this could be what sets you apart from other candidates. While this might seem like a series of lucky scenarios, gradually building exposure played an important role in Dr. Ferguson's career advancement.

Alternatively, it could manifest as being publicly vocal about exactly what you want out of your next role. This could look like deliberately posting what your ideal position would entail and encouraging others to repost, so it reaches an even more expansive network beyond your own. Then someone in that extended network sees your post and advocates for your work, which results in the creation of a unique position that aligns with your passions and never would have existed otherwise. This is how Dr. Dukes created her faculty position. As unrealistic as these paths to our careers may seem, they became possible because we leveraged social media to connect with others.

Beyond being on the job market, networking through social media is an avenue to continually advance your scientific career. Especially early on, the more people you connect with, the greater the opportunities for professional growth. As a trainee, you can discover new mentors, learn about different career paths, and access free advice. Expanding your network increases your knowledge of grants, fellowships, and professional development programs that your immediate mentors may not be aware of. Further, connections through social media can enable conversations with people who have successfully obtained these opportunities and awards, giving you a chance to learn about their experiences and receive advice for your own applications. As a professional, social media can be used to promote your new lab and recruit excellent candidates to the team. At any stage, growing your network increases access to scientists at institutions across the country and around the world, enabling connections that might not be possible through in-person interactions alone. These online interactions can be helpful for fostering new collaborations, troubleshooting experimental concerns with other experts, or simply bolstering your support system. Connecting with people you might not normally encounter opens up endless opportunities.

To increase the likelihood of those connections, there are two key considerations. **(1) Connect with intention and aspiration.** Follow the scientists you admire as well as the peers you envision collaborating with. As the algorithms work their magic, you will connect with more people who inspire you. At the least, this approach can help filter out some of the noise and negativity on

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social media, but at its best, can lead to so much more. As you cultivate your network, **(2) be open about your passions beyond science**. If you aim for social media to be a conduit for opportunities where you can show up as your authentic self, what would that look like to you? Authenticity does not necessitate conforming to what is popular; instead, share content that resonates with you.

Investing time in nurturing your network and refining your voice increases your chances of making a lasting impression. Despite the brevity of our online posts, an observer can still gauge the essentials: whether you communicate well and if they want to learn more. Remember, convincing just one person of your potential can sometimes be all you need as a catalyst for your next step.

3 | BALANCING THE GOOD AND BAD PARTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA

We discussed the benefits of social media, but we would be remiss to not admit it can also be intimidating. Many are afraid to post their true thoughts for fear of being "canceled." Trainees and early-career faculty can face increased risk for speaking up out of concerns that it could adversely impact their future careers. All of the negativity, constant doom-scrolling, and trolls on the internet can make it feel daunting and overwhelming. However, the good aspects almost certainly outweigh the bad. So here are three tips to balancing it.

(1) Don't hide out of fear. Cancel culture is not as terrifying as it sounds. When being called out for saying something problematic, people tend to immediately go on the defensive and double down on what was said. However, this can really be an opportunity to grow. Learning why a certain term or statement is offensive and genuinely apologizing can lessen the animosity. You can learn how to do better in the future and engage with others in a respectful way. **(2) Aim to be an advocate.** While we acknowledge the power dynamics at play, speaking up is more important than staying silent. Using your voice to advocate on others' behalf is one of the most powerful things you can do. Some may not agree with what is said, but you do have the power to make a meaningful difference. Aligning yourself with others who have the same fight can also help reinforce your standing. **(3) Take breaks when needed**. All of us have stepped away for a bit, either when it becomes too much, or we just need to reset and recharge. Properly recuperating from the constant stimulation allows you to engage more effectively when you return. Additionally, remember you have autonomy in choosing with whom to engage. There is a huge difference between having an earnest debate and learning another perspective versus fighting with people who do not acknowledge your humanity. Taking care of yourself so you can be a better mentor, ally, and advocate is most important.

4 | TAKEAWAYS

Building your network and using your voice can yield real benefits, through both providing exposure that can culminate in a turning point in your own career and advocating on the behalf of others. Moreover, social media offers a platform to extend your reach beyond traditional academic circles and connect with diverse audiences who might not typically participate in scientific discussions. Although, someone will probably disagree with you no matter what you say, it is crucial not to allow dissent to silence you. Remember to maintain a balance, by engaging thoughtfully and taking breaks when needed, but keep at it. Your impact may reach further than you realize, and you never know who is watching.

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