



Eighteenth Thing: Engaging with Social Media

Thinking about using social media to share your research, but not sure where to start? This Thing written by Lucy Naphali and Andy Hurt outlines how to build a social media profile, pick the right platform, and manage any risks. Plus, read an interview with TikTok sensation Mary McGillivray, aka @theiconoclass, about how she uses social media to share her research on the late Middle Ages in northern Italy.

Why should researchers use social media?

Using social media is beneficial, not only for you as a researcher, but for other academics and wider general audiences. Some benefits include:

- **Reach:** you're able to communicate your research to a broader audience than traditional publishing channels.
- **Networking:** you can establish your online identity while connecting with others, providing opportunities for collaboration regardless of location.
- **Speed:** it allows for instant communication of your ideas.

Getting started

Purpose

Firstly, understand your goals. This will help you decide which platform(s) to use and when, how, and what you post. Ask yourself:

- What medium do you prefer: text, photos or video?
- How much time can you commit? Be realistic. What time do you have available to build and maintain a consistent presence?
- Who will you engage with? Other researchers, the general public, or institutions?

Profile

Regardless of platform, you'll need to build a profile. Here are some of our tips:

- Use your own name as your username (handle) wherever possible. This builds trust and makes it easier to connect your research to you.
- Your profile picture should be a clear photo of yourself, ensuring you're recognisable and making your profile more personal.
- Link to your publications so your followers can find your work.

Personal liability

You need to be mindful of your personal liability and ensure you are behaving ethically online. Make sure you are not:

- In breach of copyright.
- Publishing data without authorisation.
- Breaching confidentiality.

Keep in mind reputational risk: for both yourself and any institutions you represent. Social media posts can feel ephemeral but are difficult to erase. Many recruiters search social media accounts, so be thoughtful about what you post.

Platforms

Twitter (also known as X)

Twitter posts are restricted to 280 characters and allow images and videos. It's great for generating conversations and keeping up-to-date with what's happening in your discipline or interest area. You'll find many institutions using Twitter as a key promotional tool for their work. Twitter offers personal and professional accounts, with the [professional account](#) designed for businesses, brands, or creators. The professional account includes more features, including promotional tools and profile information options.

Get started

- Follow people and organisations in your field and look at who they're following.
- Twitter uses [hashtags](#) to help users find relevant tweets and can increase the visibility of your own tweets. Explore at least three hashtags other people in your field are using.
- Use [Twitter Analytics](#) to help you see the impact and reach your tweets are having, as well as information about your followers.

What others have tried

Individuals	Institutions, groups and fun
Dr. Kwang Cham	Pride in STEM
Dr. Jess Danaher	Dr Meming
Amba-Rose Atkinson	The Struggling Scientists
Dr. Amina Yonis	Academic Encouragement
Dr. Melinda Adams	Academic Chatter

Instagram

Instagram is a powerful visual storytelling and communication tool, allowing others to see your research through your eyes. Use it as a photographic or video diary, by blending the personal and professional elements of your life. Or use it to highlight your research or share your knowledge on a subject area.

Instagram's capacity for video sharing has been influenced by the popularity of TikTok. There are now four ways to share video content – [Stories](#), [Reels](#), [Live](#) and [Instagram Video](#).

- **Stories** are 15-second videos that disappear after 24 hours. Expired Stories can be saved as Highlights in your Instagram profile, located just above the grid.
- **Reels** are 15-30 second clips which, like TikTok, enable effects such as timed text, filters, green screen mode, timer and speed controls, and songs from their audio library.
- **Live** videos enable you to stream directly to your audience, appearing at the front of the Stories bar with a 'Live' icon. They can be shared for 30 days before they are deleted.
- **Instagram Video** is in-feed video posts. These are added in the same way images are posted and can be up to 60 minutes long.

Instagram now has [three types of profiles](#) – Personal, Business and Creator. The latter two profiles offer analytics, insights and additional contact options. More than a discovery aid, hashtags can now be followed, allowing users to stay connected with areas of interest. Use them wisely!

What others have tried

Individuals	Institutions, groups and fun
Dr Kita Ashman	Difficult Birds Research Group
Mary McGillivray	Science Gallery Melbourne
Dr Sara Webb	Walter and Eliza Hall Institute (WEHI)
Krystal De Napoli	VCA Animation
Nick Carter	Burnley Campus Postgrad Group
Taylah Gray	Women in Wildlife
Naomi Koh Belic	PhD Comics
Karen Parada	The Tree Projects
Simona Castricum	Heron Island Research Station

TikTok

TikTok is a video sharing app that allows you to create shortform videos ranging from 5 to 120 seconds long. Users can find videos through hashtags, but the main way users find content is through TikTok's powerful algorithms which analyse user behaviour to curate tailor-made feeds. TikTok also uses 'sounds' – prerecorded music or sound bites that you can put over your videos. These sounds often function like hashtags, with certain sounds and accompanying video trends going viral. The brief and visual nature of TikTok makes it ideal for communicating ideas quickly and succinctly.

Get started

- Find users posting about your field using hashtags.
- Follow and interact with 10 users to start building your algorithm.
- Post a 60 second video using a sound from the [TikTok sound library](#).

What others have tried

Individuals	Institutions, groups and fun
Chaotically Science	Rainbow History Class
Historical Han	ATLAS Experiment
Dr Jess Venner	Scieneers
Esmé Louise James	
Dr. Kirsten Banks	
Mary McGillivray	

Tips

- **URL shortener:** Try [bit.ly](#), [TinyURL](#), or the University of Melbourne's very own [go.unimelb](#).
- **Altmetrics** (alternative metrics): View [the University's guide](#) to measure your impact based on your social media.
- **Share across different platforms:** e.g. between Instagram and TikTok to minimise the content you need to create.
- **Link in bio:** To maximise bio space, use a free 'link in bio' tool, such as [Linktree](#) to link to your researcher profile (e.g. [ORCID](#), [Google Scholar](#)) publications, conference presentations or institution.

About the authors

Lucy Naphthali

Lucy is a Liaison Support Librarian with the Arts Faculty, based in the Baillieu Library. With a background in public libraries in remote communities and a past life as a filmmaker, she is passionate about community outreach, building digital literacy and all kinds of visual media. Lucy spends a lot of time vlogging on TikTok and scrolling through Twitter to find interesting threads from people from all walks of life. She is also a part of the Twitter team at @unilibrary.

Andy Hurt

Andy has worked in libraries for over 30 years in student facing roles. She is also a Master of Communication student. By day she uses critical thinking, research and writing skills in her job. By night she is inspired by music, art, film, and theatre to think deeply about society and politics, particularly social justice. A fan of blogging and social media, she sees communication and connection as central to relationship building. She is also the social media coordinator for the @unilibrary accounts and a lover of Instagram.

Interview with Mary McGillivray

1. What is your research about?

I'm an [art history PhD student](#), and I research fictive marble from the late Middle Ages in northern Italy (old walls pretending to be stone!)

2. How have you used/interacted with social media in your research?

I have been a social media video creator for more than three years, making educational content for a general audience on TikTok, Instagram and YouTube. Since 2020 I have been integrating my media work into my academic practice, and for my PhD research I am completing half my project as a “creative work” component in social media video. It's exciting to be a pioneer “creator academic” in Australia, and I am grateful to the University of Melbourne for supporting a non-traditional project.

3. How has your understanding of social media helped you work ‘smarter, not harder’ when managing your research?

The number one thing I've learned since starting my career as a content creator alongside my academic pursuits is that communicating to a general, non-academic audience makes your academic writing better. It's easy to get caught up in the specialist language of your field, but writing scripts and presenting them on camera for an international audience of millions has helped me hone the difficult skill of writing in a succinct, clear, and engaging manner.

4. What is your number one tip on social media?

My number one tip for making social media video is to know your platform inside out. Whether it's TikTok, YouTube videos, Facebook posts or Tweets, spend time on the platform watching and reading what others share, getting to know the styles, genres, memes, jokes and language of the platform – because nothing performs worse than social media posts that don't feel native to the platform!

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