

DILIP S. MUTUM

**SOCIAL MEDIA
FOR
RESEARCHERS
&
ONLINE PERSONAL
BRANDING**

SECOND EDITION

About the author



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Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/dilipmutum>

About the eBook

This ebook is a compilation of a few articles/ tutorials which I wrote for the [Wolfson Research Exchange website](#), University of Warwick Library, targeted specifically at academics and researchers. The first edition of the ebook was quite well received and this second edition makes a few changes and updates based on comments and suggestions I received.

Please visit the Wolfson Research Exchange website (<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/>) for more interesting and useful articles/ tutorials.

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Please email me directly (dsmutum@gmail.com) for any comments or suggestions for further improvement.

Dilip S. Mutum, PhD
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Image on Cover:

Partial map of the Internet based on the January 15, 2005 data found on opte.org. Each line is drawn between two nodes, representing two IP addresses. It has been licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 2.5 Generic license.

Table of Contents

ABOUT THE AUTHOR	I
ABOUT THE EBOOK	II
TABLE OF CONTENTS	III
1: PERSONAL BRANDING FOR RESEARCHERS	1
IN THIS CHAPTER.....	1
PERSONAL BRANDING: WHY YOU SHOULD DO IT	1
ACADEMIC REPUTATION IS IMPORTANT	2
DEVELOPING AN ONLINE PROFILE PAGE	2
PROMOTE YOUR BOOK ONLINE	3
WORKING PAPERS	4
BLOGS	4
SOCIAL NETWORKS.....	4
GOOGLE YOURSELF	5
DON'T BE AFRAID OF THE INTERNET	6
RELATED RESEARCHER ARTICLES ON THE WOLFSON RESEARCH EXCHANGE SITE	6
YOU MAY ALSO BE INTERESTED IN.....	6
2: MAKING YOUR BLOG MORE INTERACTIVE	7
IN THIS CHAPTER.....	7

BLOGGING FOR RESEARCHERS7

SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMISATION8

OPTIMUM LENGTH OF POSTS9

CONNECTING TO OTHER BLOGS.....9

LINKS TO SOCIAL MEDIA9

INCLUSIVE BLOGS10

CONTENT IS KEY.....10

RELATED RESEARCHER ARTICLES ON THE WOLFSON RESEARCH EXCHANGE SITE11

YOU MAY ALSO BE INTERESTED IN.....11

3: USING LINKEDIN TO PROMOTE YOURSELF AS A RESEARCHER12

IN THIS CHAPTER.....12

LINKEDIN: HELPING YOU GET CONNECTED12

GETTING YOUR PROFILE RIGHT.....13

BUILDING CONTACTS13

JOINING GROUPS14

GETTING RECOMMENDED.....14

SHOWCASING YOUR EXPERTISE15

CROSS LINKAGES.....15

RELATED RESEARCHER ARTICLES ON THE WOLFSON RESEARCH EXCHANGE SITE15

YOU MAY ALSO BE INTERESTED IN.....16

4: FACEBOOK FOR RESEARCHERS17

IN THIS CHAPTER.....17

CREATE A FACEBOOK RESEARCH PAGE.....17

POLLING18

EVENTS.....	19
GROUPS	19
USING FACEBOOK GROUPS: AVOIDING COMMON PITFALLS	20
ADVERTISING.....	20
PRIVACY AND OTHER ISSUES.....	21
RELATED RESEARCHER ARTICLES ON THE WOLFSON RESEARCH EXCHANGE SITE	21
YOU MAY ALSO BE INTERESTED IN.....	21
5: USING TWITTER TO BOOST YOUR RESEARCH PROFILE.....	23
IN THIS CHAPTER.....	23
TWITTER: AN OVERVIEW	23
ASKING QUESTIONS.....	24
TRACKING CONVERSATIONS	24
HOW DIFFERENT RESEARCHERS USE TWITTER	25
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS WITH USING TWITTER.....	26
RELATED RESEARCHER ARTICLES ON THE WOLFSON RESEARCH EXCHANGE SITE	27
YOU MAY ALSO BE INTERESTED IN.....	27
6: RSS FEEDS: HOW THEY WORK	28
IN THIS CHAPTER.....	28
RSS FEEDS: THE BASICS.....	28
FEED READERS: HOW THEY WORK	29
SUBSCRIBING TO AN RSS FEED	30
ADVANTAGES OF RSS FEEDS	30
USING RSS FEEDS FOR RESEARCH.....	31
OTHER RSS-TYPE TOOLS	31

USING TWITTER WITH AN AGGREGATOR	32
RSS: A POWERFUL NEW TOOL	33
RELATED RESEARCHER ARTICLES ON THE WOLFSON RESEARCH EXCHANGE SITE	33
YOU MAY ALSO BE INTERESTED IN.....	33
7: CREATING JOURNAL ALERTS.....	35
IN THIS CHAPTER.....	35
ALERTS: THE DIFFERENT TYPES	35
ADVANTAGES OF USING ALERTS	36
SETTING UP JOURNAL ALERTS	36
TABLE OF CONTENTS ALERTS	37
TICTOCS.....	37
ZETOC	38
MANAGING JOURNAL ALERTS	38
SEARCH ALERTS	39
JOURNAL ALERTS: SOME DISADVANTAGES	39
RELATED RESEARCHER ARTICLES ON THE WOLFSON RESEARCH EXCHANGE SITE	40
EXTRA REFERENCES	41



1: Personal branding for researchers

In this chapter

- Personal branding: why you should do it
- Academic reputation is important
- Developing an online profile page
- Promote your book online
- Working papers
- Blogs
- Social networks
- Google yourself
- Don't be afraid of the internet

Personal branding: why you should do it

Personal branding is not just for celebrities or those in the corporate sector. As a researcher, adopting the techniques and practices developed in business schools to create your own personal brand can be a powerful tool for marketing yourself.

Many researchers are uncomfortable with the idea of promoting themselves or their work. The general opinion seems to be “let your work do the talking”. However, no one will know about your work unless you tell them about it. As an early career researcher, it is absolutely essential to promote yourself.

After your PhD you may take time and effort to write a book, but how will it be doing a couple of years after publication? There are steps you can take to avoid it becoming one of those books left in some lonely corner of the library.

Academic reputation is important

Recognition by your peers is likely to be taken into account in the Research Excellence Framework as well as university appointments and promotions. Universities are increasingly looking at the contribution of academics in terms of their public profile and the impact of their research beyond academia.

Traditional methods of marketing your work include attending conferences and publishing in journals and books. These are still very important, but personal branding increasingly takes place on the internet. Here are some useful online tools for personal branding.

Developing an online profile page

Today it is essential for all early career researchers to have an online profile. It is common for employers to Google applicants' names before they even create a shortlist.

Most universities will provide you with a profile page where you can list your contact details, research interests and publications. This can be very useful in ensuring that your

work will appear high in Google results because university domains are favoured by Google ranking algorithms.

Make the most of online repositories like Warwick Research Archive Portal ([WRAP](#))¹ which will promote your work beyond your time at the institution.

When it comes to maintaining lists of your publications on such sites, it is wise to keep these in an easily exportable format.

You might want to invest in a personalised domain name (preferably yourname.com) and hosted website as a place to build your profile online. Take a look at my own website (<http://www.dilipmutum.com>). You might change universities or move into the corporate or public sectors during the course of your career; having a personal website will ensure that you have an online profile which is not tied down to a single organisation.

Promote your book online

Even if you are not keen on building a site to promote yourself personally, consider creating a website to support your book or to share your research with a wider audience.

The promotional pages provided by publishers and organisations may not promote your work in a way that is tailored optimally to your audience. You know your own work best – and creating a promotional page can show your work to its best advantage.

Working papers

Credit often goes to the person who publishes first so it's a good idea to put a working paper online. This way of registering your contribution to the field is often used in the social sciences. Because they are easy to access, it is not surprising that some online working papers are cited more than journal articles.

Blogs

Blogs are also becoming more and more popular among researchers. These websites are interactive and dynamic compared to traditional static sites, which merely publish information online. Running a blog makes it possible to share your thoughts and research with a much wider audience, as well as receive comments and feedback.

Social networks

Social networking sites are not just places to keep in touch with old friends or play games. Usually the first result you see when you Google a person's name are either their [Facebook](#) or [LinkedIn](#) page.

LinkedIn is often considered the more professional of the two, but Facebook can also be used in a professional manner, for personal branding. A younger generation of researchers are increasingly using Facebook to develop contacts and have academic exchanges.

The problem with Facebook is that there is a risk that unguarded personal conversations (and sometimes inappropriate photographs posted by friends) might bring your professionalism and integrity into question: the key is to manage your Facebook presence with a degree of caution and to use all its features to help you present your best image.

Another social networking site which is becoming popular with researchers is academia.edu. This social network is targeted specifically at academics but so far lacks the popularity and flexibility offered by the other networks.

Google yourself

Developing and managing an online presence should be an important part of your personal branding strategy. If you want to see what others will find out about you then you should Google your own name from time to time.

You can also try searching for keywords relevant to your research on important sites like Google and academic databases. Can you improve the ranking of your own work to these searches by putting those keywords into the titles of your work?

Don't be afraid of the internet

Some people, perhaps especially researchers, are uncomfortable with the idea of posting work or other information online. They might be afraid someone will steal their work or ideas, for example. But this is an increasingly outdated concept in this digital age. There is an ever-growing movement towards open access and the democratisation of knowledge. Promoting yourself on the internet is now essential for your long-term career success.

Related researcher articles on the Wolfson Research Exchange site

- [Using LinkedIn to promote yourself](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0036/)
<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0036/>
- [Enhancing your e-Portfolio](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0037/)
<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0037/>
- [Blogging about your research: first steps](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0007/)
<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0007/>
- [Facebook for researchers](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0040/)
<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0040/>

You may also be interested in...

- Armstrong, C. [Should Academics Use Social Networking Sites in Their Professional Lives?](http://www.jobs.ac.uk/career-tools-and-advice/jobseeking-tips/1341/should-academics-use-social-networking-sites-in-their-professional-lives/)
<http://www.jobs.ac.uk/career-tools-and-advice/jobseeking-tips/1341/should-academics-use-social-networking-sites-in-their-professional-lives/>
- Peters, Tom (1997), [“The Brand Called You.”](#) Fast Company, 10 (August), 83.
- Willmeth, R. (2011). [Promoting yourself and your work.](#) In Anatomy of writing for publication for nurses by Cynthia Saver. Sigma Theta Tau International: Indianapolis. p.161.



2: Making your blog more interactive

In this chapter

- Blogging for researchers
- Search engine optimisation
- Optimum length of posts
- Connecting to other blogs
- Links to social media
- Inclusive blogs
- Content is key

Blogging for researchers

The interactive nature of blogs sets them apart from ordinary static websites. On blogs, people are not only sharing information but they are interacting with each other, having conversations. Not only are the bloggers talking with visitors to their blogs, the visitors are talking among themselves as well.

This has great potential for researchers, and an increasing number of academics are now blogging. How can you increase the interactivity of your blog to maximise its power as a tool for researchers?

Search engine optimisation

Most people assume that once they have a blog, visitors will come streaming in. You might have even invested in a domain name. However, you could end up being disappointed when the traffic does not increase even after a couple of months and no one is leaving a comment on your blog.

What is going wrong?

The first question you have to ask yourself is whether you are doing enough publicity for your blog. If people are not aware of your blog, they won't visit it.

You can add the url of your blog to your e-mail signatures, post it on your Facebook and Twitter profiles and even print it on your business card.

You can submit your blog url to various search engines, meaning they will come up in those search engines' results when people search for relevant terms.

You could also read up on some basic search engine optimisation techniques, which can help your blog to get a higher ranking on search results. It is strongly recommended that you go through Google's [webmaster guidelines](#)². The guidelines cover several basic do's and don'ts.

Also take a look at the [search engine optimisation page](#)³ on the Central Office of Information (COI) website.

Optimum length of posts

Most blog readers do not stay long on a blog and Darren Rowse aka [ProBlogger](#) suggests that the length of a blog post should be kept short. He notes the general opinion that a blog post should be at least 250 words and below 1000 words.

Connecting to other blogs

Ask questions on your posts as this will encourage visitors to leave comments. Having polls and competitions are also good ways of increasing the interactivity on your blog.

Do not wait for visitors to come to your blog. You should also go out and search for other bloggers with similar research interests. You can leave comments on their blogs along with your blog address (if possible). You could even create a post on your own blog as a response to a post on another blog. This can help initiate dialogues and can eventually lead to collaborations.

If you like someone else's blog, add their link to your blog roll – a list of blogs you like. Do inform them that you are linking to them and often they will link back as well. However, do not ask for link exchanges; a lot of bloggers find this annoying.

Links to social media

It is possible to link your blog to other social media such as [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#) so that whenever you make a blog post, a short message with a link back to your blog post is

automatically posted on Twitter and Facebook as well. This will enable you to pull visitors to your blog from your followers and friends on these social networks.

Inclusive blogs

Of course blogs are personal and tastes vary. However, many bloggers make the mistake of choosing template designs and colours that are simply bad. For example, using a black background with red text – this is difficult to read for many people.

It is absolutely essential to make your blog inclusive so that it is usable by people of all abilities. The [Web Accessibility Initiative \(WAI\)](#)⁴ guidelines issued by W3C is widely regarded as the international standard for Web accessibility and everybody who has a website should refer to these guidelines.

Most professional blogs have a simple, uncluttered white background with attractive images accompanying the posts. This helps the visitors to focus on the content.

Content is key

Content is what makes visitors come back. You need to have posts which are interesting to your visitors.

Blogs are great because they are personal. Making the tone of the blogs too formal may result in blogs appearing bland and boring. Research by [Johnson & Kaye \(2004\)](#)⁵ has

shown that blog users may even view the biased tone of bloggers positively and see them as more credible.

You might also want to consider adding videos and podcasts. This will make the blogs even more attractive to a wider range of visitors.

Related researcher articles on the Wolfson Research Exchange site

- [Using Twitter to boost your research profile](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0038/)
http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0038/
- [Facebook for researchers](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0040/)
http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0040/
- [Social bookmarking: organising and sharing sources](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0008/)
http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0008/
- [Blogging about your research: first steps](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0007/)
http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0007/
- [Blog readership: build and maintain an audience](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0009/)
http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0009/
- [Podcasting your research](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0050/)
http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0050/

You may also be interested in...

- [Useful tips on blogging for impact](http://ictkm.cgiar.org/2009/04/23/blogging-for-impact/)
http://ictkm.cgiar.org/2009/04/23/blogging-for-impact/



3: Using LinkedIn to promote yourself as a researcher

In this chapter

- LinkedIn: helping you get connected
- Getting your profile right
- Building contacts
- Joining groups
- Getting recommended
- Showcasing your expertise
- Cross linkages

LinkedIn: helping you get connected

[LinkedIn](http://www.linkedin.com) (<http://www.linkedin.com>) is the social network of choice for millions of professionals worldwide. It allows you to connect to both academic peers who use it as well as professionals, so it can be a useful tool for spreading the word about your work and finding potential collaborators. It is also used for recruiting potential job candidates.

Though it lacks some of the services present in [Facebook](#), there are several ways you can use LinkedIn to market yourself and your research. Here are some tips for getting the most out of your [LinkedIn](#) account.

Getting your profile right

You should spend some time thinking about what to put on your [LinkedIn profile](#), and in what order it should appear on your profile. Choose a professional title and update your employment history. Make sure that you have a **professional-looking photograph**.

If you're responsible for the **branding and marketing of an organisation**, research group or company, add it to the company directory and build that profile as well. It's an important way for prospective employees or customers to review your business and past employers when making a decision.

Building contacts

[LinkedIn](#) helps you build up your contacts by suggesting "**People You May Know**" in a box on the right hand corner of the home page once you have signed in. These are usually people who work in the same organisation or who studied in the same institutions.

You can also add contacts **by searching your email contacts** (which LinkedIn does automatically). Look up people you meet at conferences and other events to see whether they have a LinkedIn profile and send them a request to get connected.

Joining groups

Joining groups on [LinkedIn](#) is a great way of keeping in touch with others and keeping yourself updated about your field. Groups can be a great way to carry out market research and surveys as well. You can join groups by selecting “**Groups you may like**” from the “Groups” drop-down menu. You can also do a keyword search for groups in your research area.

When you **join a group**, it’s a good idea to go through **past discussions** and get a feel for the kinds of things people talk about. You may be able to do this before you decide to join, depending on the group’s privacy settings.) Once you have a feel for the group, you can raise your profile by introducing yourself and stating your reasons for joining.

You can also create your own group and invite your contacts to join in. Once you have set it up, keep the group alive by making regular and relevant posts and asking questions. Invite new people to join as well.

Getting recommended

Though you can ask friends and colleagues to give you a favourable recommendation, it is a good idea to select someone in your network whom you admire. You can post a recommendation for them by viewing their profile and following links, and often you will get a recommendation in return. You can also ask for a recommendation directly.

Showcasing your expertise

[LinkedIn's Answers](#) feature is a great way to connect with new people. This function allows you to showcase your expertise by answering other people's questions. If the person who asks the question likes your answer, he / she might rate yours as the "Best Answer". Every week the "best experts" are listed on the answers page.

Cross linkages

Now that you have a [LinkedIn profile](#), you should go ahead and promote it. Place the link for your LinkedIn profile in your **email signature lines**. Add links to your LinkedIn profile from your website, blog or Facebook page.

You can also incorporate your blog posts into your LinkedIn profile via an application such as [BlogLink](#)⁶.

Watch out for new features on the LinkedIn site and other websites and tools which might interface with LinkedIn, as these are developing all the time and may give you a great advantage in promoting your research.

Related researcher articles on the Wolfson Research Exchange site

- [Personal branding for researchers](#)
<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0037/>
- [Enhancing your e-Portfolio](#)
<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0037/>
- [Facebook for researchers](#)

<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0040/>

- [Blogging about your research: first steps](#)

<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0007/>

You may also be interested in...

- [Great tips on getting the most out of LinkedIn](#) by Gareth Edwards

http://www.nb2bc.co.uk/marketing_online/articles/?id=168

- SHRM Research Spotlight: [Social Networking Websites and Staffing](#) (2011)

[http://www.shrm.org/Research/SurveyFindings/Documents/Social Networking Flyer_Staffing Conference_FINAL1.pdf](http://www.shrm.org/Research/SurveyFindings/Documents/Social_Networking_Flyer_Staffing_Conference_FINAL1.pdf)



4: Facebook for researchers

In this chapter

- Create a Facebook research page
- Polling
- Events
- Groups
- Using Facebook groups: avoiding common pitfalls
- Advertising
- Privacy and other issues

Most people see Facebook as a place to socialise – to connect with friends, share pictures and play online games. However, an increasing number of academics and students are using this popular social network for academic and research purposes.

Create a Facebook research page

It's a good idea to create a Facebook page for your research group or organisation. The [Wolfson Research Exchange Facebook page](#)⁷ is an example of this, and it is a great

way to keep a professional presence on Facebook that is separate from your personal one.



Fig: The Wolfson Research Exchange Facebook page

Polling

For simple research, just click the “Questions” tab and then write the question you want to ask your friends. You can leave the answer open or add options they can select from. For more options you can use the [Facebook Poll app](#)⁸.

Events

One really useful feature in Facebook is the Events feature. People are increasingly using this tool to organise and publicise informal events and even conferences on Facebook.

When you create the event on Facebook, you have three choices:

- Open – Events can be seen by anyone, and anyone can send invitations to the event.
- Closed – The event listing is visible to anyone but only those invited can see the details.
- Secret – These events can be seen only by those who are invited.

There are other options as well. If you want to make the event more interactive, you can enable the ‘Event wall’ and allow other people to post pictures, videos and links. This is useful to get feedback and to keep in touch even after the event has ended.

Go through the [Events Help Centre](#)⁹ for more information on Facebook events.

Groups

To communicate with people who are not already your Facebook friends, you can join one of Facebook’s many [groups](http://www.facebook.com/groups) (<http://www.facebook.com/groups>). These allow you to talk to members in real time or via email. Updates will come to your email like a regular mailing list.

If you are conducting research via an online survey site, you can recruit respondents via Facebook groups. Just post an invitation to the group along with a link to your survey site.

Using Facebook groups: Avoiding common pitfalls

Some people might not be comfortable with being used as research subjects, so reassure them that your research is for academic purposes only and that responses will be anonymous.

Credibility is an issue: if you have a fake name with a cartoon as your profile picture, it might be difficult to get responses.

Don't make the mistake of joining a group and starting to recruit respondents to your survey straightaway. You should take some time to get to know the members first, joining in the discussions and then later on introducing them to your research.

You can also create your own private groups accessible only to you and your collaborators and use the space to discuss ideas.

Advertising

If you have money to invest, you may consider using [Facebook ads](#)¹⁰. Facebook ads are a great way to target a specific segment of Facebook users based on location, age and interests.

Privacy and other issues

If you plan to use Facebook for professional or academic uses, you have to decide who sees your profile. Having a public profile which is accessible to anyone is not always a good idea.

On Facebook, your friends can tag photos with your name and create content which appears on your profile.

You do not need to accept every friend request and you should avoid posting inappropriate messages or pictures as they may come back to bite you in the future.

Related researcher articles on the Wolfson Research Exchange site

- [Using Twitter to boost your research profile](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0038/)
<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0038/>
- [Making your blog more interactive](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0039/)
<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0039/>
- [Blogging about your research: first steps](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0007/)
<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0007/>
- [Blog readership: build and maintain an audience](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0009/)
<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0009/>
- [Social bookmarking: organising and sharing sources](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0008/)
<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0008/>

You may also be interested in...

- Lauren's blog entry about using [Twitter for research](http://blogs.warwick.ac.uk/researchexchange/entry/untitled_entry/)
http://blogs.warwick.ac.uk/researchexchange/entry/untitled_entry/
- BBC news item [Facebook dominates UK mobile use](#)

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/8500368.stm>

- Infographic: [Facebook's Indonesia users overtake the UK](#)

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/pda/2011/apr/06/facebook-statistics>



5: Using Twitter to boost your research profile

In this chapter

- Twitter: an overview
- Asking questions
- Tracking conversations
- How different researchers use Twitter
- Potential problems with using Twitter

It may be hard to explain your research using just 140 characters. However, an increasing number of researchers are doing just that: using Twitter as a means of sharing their work.

Twitter: an overview



Twitter is the fastest-growing social network in the world, so it's well worth it to tap into this as a resource for disseminating your work. Twitter is a microblogging site and it is called microblogging because it only allows you to post a message comprising of a maximum of 140 characters called a *tweet*.

You can subscribe to other users' tweets by following them. Users who like your tweet can then retweet it, sending it out to their own group of followers.

When you post a tweet, other users can reply with their own tweet and your user name is automatically appended so that you can track the reply. On the Twitter page, you can see the replies by clicking @Mentions on the menu.

Asking questions

By [asking questions on Twitter](#)¹¹ you can get almost instant feedback on certain topics (depending on your followers).

If you have a research question, post it up on Twitter and use [hashtags](#)¹² (for example, #warwick) for the specific keywords which you think are important. Hashtags mean your tweet will be seen, and retweeted, by more users.

It's important to acknowledge others' responses to your questions, as this can help you build relationships with other users.

Tracking conversations

If you tweet a lot and have conversations back and forth, you can sometimes lose track of the conversations between you and another user, especially if you have loads of followers. This can be a problem if you want to look up old conversations you had several months ago.

You can use [Bettween](http://bettween.com/) (<http://bettween.com/>) to track conversations between you and another user (or between any two users) by just putting in the two Twitter user names.

When you have thousands of followers, it is almost impossible to follow all the conversations going on and an application like [Tweetdeck](http://www.tweetdeck.com/) (<http://www.tweetdeck.com/>) can help you manage the flood of information. This application allows you to organise and manage the people you follow and the topics more effectively without even opening your browser.

How different researchers use Twitter

Different people use Twitter differently. Some people use it as a way to disseminate news about their research findings, while others use it to keep up to date with what people in their field of research are doing. Twitter can also be great way to build a network of people who can help you with your research.

Here are some examples of academics who use Twitter in different ways to further their research:

- Roberta, a Teaching fellow at the School of Management, Royal Holloway, mainly uses it to share news she finds interesting with her followers. She also finds it interesting to read updates from political activists.

- Finola, a Senior Lecturer in marketing at Kings College, London, also uses Twitter to keep up with news, recent work and conferences on specific topics that interest her, like copyright and social media. She also follows academics and critics concerned with film, her main research area, and publicises events and calls for papers.
- Professor Mustafa at the Brunel Business School uses Twitter to note some of his findings. His Twitter account is linked to his Facebook account and the most interesting discussions, for him, take place in Facebook.

Potential problems with using Twitter

If you are a new user and do not have that many followers, the use of Twitter as a research tool can be somewhat limited. Linking it with other social networks such as [Facebook](#) (via the Twitter application) and [LinkedIn](#), where you might have more friends, will help you build up a Twitter presence.

Also, sometimes 140 characters are just not enough to get the message across; for discussion of complicated issues you may need to contact users directly via email or by phone, if they are willing.

Related researcher articles on the Wolfson Research Exchange site

- [Selling your research online: e-profiles for Arts PhDs](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0032/)
http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0032/
- [Blogging about your research: first steps](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0007/)
http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0007/
- [Enhancing your e-Portfolio](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0037/)
http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0037/
- [Using LinkedIn to promote yourself](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0036/)
http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0036/
- [Making your blog more interactive](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0039/)
http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0039/
- [Podcasting your research](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0050/)
http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0050/

You may also be interested in...

- Hendry Lee's excellent post on using [Twitter for research](http://www.twitip.com/twitter-for-research-why-and-how-to-do-it-including-case-studies/)
<http://www.twitip.com/twitter-for-research-why-and-how-to-do-it-including-case-studies/>
- [How to Ask Effective Questions on Twitter](http://www.twitip.com/how-to-ask-effective-questions-on-twitter/) by Darren Rowse
http://www.twitip.com/how-to-ask-effective-questions-on-twitter/
- [The Ultimate Guide to Twitter Hashtags](http://www.searchenginejournal.com/twitter-hashtags/9419/)
http://www.searchenginejournal.com/twitter-hashtags/9419/



6: RSS Feeds: how they work

In this chapter

- RSS feeds: the basics
- Feed Readers: how they work
- Subscribing to an RSS feed
- Advantages of RSS feeds
- Using RSS feeds for research
- Other RSS-type tools
- Using Twitter with an aggregator
- RSS: a powerful new tool

RSS feeds: the basics

A web feed provides subscribers to the feed with frequently updated content. They are also called syndicated feed because content distributors syndicate a web feed, thereby allowing users to subscribe to it. The most common format of web feeds are the RSS (which originally stood for RDF Site Summary but which most authors now refer to as

Really Simple Syndication) feeds. However, another alternative to RSS is the Atom Syndication Format.

Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feeds have revolutionised the way we use information, and the number of sites offering RSS feeds is increasing every day. All you have to do is subscribe to an RSS feed with a feed reader or aggregator and new content is automatically sent to you.

RSS feeds can include full or summarised text as well as other information such as publishing dates and authorship. They are available from a variety of online sources including websites, blogs, databases, electronic journals and e-books.

Feed Readers: how they work

Researchers can now pull RSS feeds from various sources (for example, new journal article citations, search results in electronic databases and news alerts) into a feed reader or aggregator. These aggregators regularly check your favourite sites and then list all the feeds in one convenient place.

There are several aggregators around, some of which are accessed via a browser, and some of which are downloadable applications. [Wikipedia](#) has a comparison of the most popular feed aggregators. A popular reader is [Google Reader](#) which is free and can be personalised to your liking.

Subscribing to an RSS feed



Once you have selected a feed reader, you then check on the web for content which you want to receive regular updates on. You can easily identify RSS feeds by the orange icon which was first used by the Firefox browser and is now widely accepted.

You can subscribe to the feed in various ways by clicking on the button. You will usually get the address of the RSS feed which you can then cut and paste into your reader. However, other sites will give a choice of various readers on clicking the button. All you have to do is select your favourite reader and the feeds will start appearing automatically.

Advantages of RSS feeds

RSS can be a way to de-clutter your e-mail inbox and save a lot of time and effort surfing sites to see whether there have been any updates. Another advantage of RSS feeds is that they offer a high degree of privacy as compared to e-mail subscriptions. As your email address is not used, it eliminates the possibility of spam emails.

Also, to unsubscribe from a feed is much easier on RSS feed than email, where you sometimes have to explain the reasons for unsubscribing. To unsubscribe from a feed, all you have to do is delete the RSS feed from your reader. The [Academic Productivity](#)¹² site has a very good discussion of the advantages of RSS feeds.

Using RSS feeds for research

You can use RSS to be notified whenever your favourite database, such as [EBSCOhost](#)¹⁴ or [ZETOC](#)¹⁵, has new results related to a given search or journal alert. For example, you can be alerted whenever an author you're following, publishes a new paper or when a chosen article is cited. This means you are immediately aware of any new research or updates to previous findings.

If you regularly visit a large number of research blogs, you can subscribe to the feeds of the blogs and just skim through the titles of the latest posts to read the ones you find most interesting rather than go to each blog.

It's possible to use RSS to watch a website or blog even if the website does not offer an RSS feed of its own. You can create an RSS feed for any website using a service such as [Watchthatpage](http://www.watchthatpage.com/) (<http://www.watchthatpage.com/>).

Other RSS-type tools

A number of researchers use online services like Digg and Delicious to bookmark their favourite research links.

If you like a particular user's list of favourite websites, you can follow the same list by copying the web address of their feed and adding the subscription to your own reader. (Delicious does not have a feed button, but you can start subscribing to a user's list by entering the URL of the user's profile page into your reader.)

As mobile technology gets better, more people will start using their phones to access their feeds on the move. Google has already created a mobile-friendly interface for their popular Google Reader.

Using Twitter with an aggregator

[Twitter](#) is increasingly being used by a number of researchers to bookmark their favourite links. Not many people are aware that Twitter has permalinks as well as RSS Feeds which you can then subscribe to in your favourite reader.

[Tweetdeck](#) is a desktop aggregator programme specifically for organising your experience of social media applications like [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [Foursquare](#) and [LinkedIn](#). It was first made for Twitter and works best with this, allowing you to group the Twitterers you follow into columns.

When you are following thousands of people, this tool can help deal with the endless flow of conversations. But you can use Tweetdeck to follow and create updates on many other social media platforms as well.

As an added bonus, Tweetdeck allows you to save searches and get automatic updates on them.

RSS: a powerful new tool

RSS is revolutionising the way we obtain information. Although people are using it more and more, it is still a relatively new technology. This means that not every site supports it and a lot of people still prefer to receive e-mail alerts.

Related researcher articles on the Wolfson Research Exchange site

- [Creating journal alerts](#)
<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0017/>
- [Getting the most out of conferences](#)
<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0019/>
- [Social bookmarking: organising and sharing resources](#)
<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0008/>
- [Using Twitter to boost your research profile](#)
<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0038/>
- [Blogging about your research: first steps](#)
<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0007/>

You may also be interested in...

- [Warwick Library RSS Feeds](#)
<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/main/research/researchers/literaturereview/keepuptodate/rss/>
- [Things 5 and 6 : RSS feeds](#)
<http://23thingswarwick.blogspot.com/2011/01/things-5-and-6-rss-feeds.html>
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<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/main/research/researchers/literaturereview/keepuptodate/webalerts/>
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7: Creating journal alerts

In this chapter

- Alerts: the different types
- Advantages of using alerts
- Setting up journal alerts
- Table of contents alerts
- Managing journal alerts
- Search alerts
- Journal alerts: some disadvantages

Alerts: the different types

As a researcher, it can be tough keeping up to date with the new developments in your discipline: research papers are being published every day all over the world, in both old and new media. Journal alerts can be a useful tool to ensure that content is delivered straight to you, rather than having to search for it.

Journal alerts are notifications of new journal issues, new articles or tables of contents (TOCs), delivered via e-mail, RSS feed or aggregator at regular intervals. Similarly, search

alerts like [Google Alerts](http://www.google.com/alerts) (<http://www.google.com/alerts>) can notify you of the latest new search results on a given topic. You can use both journal and search alerts to receive regular updates on the work happening in your field.

Advantages of using alerts

- Save time and energy by taking the effort out of browsing.
- Stay up-to-the-minute on your field: alerts notify you as soon as new work comes out.
- Manage the flood of information with features like filter rules and folders.
- Added bonus: online editions often come out earlier than print versions.

Setting up journal alerts

Databases and online journals allow you to set up journal alerts either by e-mail or Really Simple Syndication (RSS). It is a matter of preference whether you prefer to have e-mail alerts or to receive RSS feeds using a feed reader.

There are minor differences in the way you set up journal alerts for the popular journal databases like [EBSCOhost](#)¹⁶, [Web of Science](#)¹⁷ and [Proquest](#)¹⁸. With each, though, you can choose how frequently and how long the alert should for, and whether to receive brief or detailed records.

Almost all databases should have a guide to setting up alerts. If you are unsure on how to set up an alert, refer to a database's help pages or technical support. For example, Proquest has detailed pages on how to set up an [alert for a publication](#)¹⁸ and on [managing alerts](#)¹⁹.

The [University of Wisconsin library](#)²⁰ also has a really useful page that lists databases and instructions for creating alerts.

Table of contents alerts

Another kind of alert will send you the table of contents of any journal you choose. Two good examples this kind of service are [Zetoc](http://zetoc.mimas.ac.uk/index.html) (<http://zetoc.mimas.ac.uk/index.html>) and [ticTOCs](http://www.tictocs.ac.uk/) (<http://www.tictocs.ac.uk/>). One advantage of these is that you only need one account to monitor many journals. Here are some features of Zetoc and ticTOCs:

ticTOCs

- Freely available to everyone
- 14,271 journal titles available
- Provides table of contents (TOC) RSS feeds by title, subject of publisher
- Embedded links to full-text articles

Zetoc

- Free to members of UK higher education institutions and research councils
- 27,000 journal titles available
- Supports search alerts as well as journal alerts
- Disadvantage: no embedded links to full-text articles. This means you have to search the internet yourself for any article you decide to read.

Managing journal alerts

If you subscribe to journal alerts via e-mail you can create rules to filter your e-mail into different folders rather than clogging your inbox. It may be an advantage to monitor journals from a single source like Zetoc or ticTOCs so that you create one rule for that single source rather than many rules for each publisher's alerts.

If staying up-to-the-minute is important to you, you might want to use ticTOCs or set up direct alerts from the journal publishers. ticTOCs are faster because they use the data supplied by publishers while Zetoc and many other sources re-key the data into their databases.

Search alerts

You can subscribe to alerts relevant to given search terms on databases which index journals (including those mentioned earlier: [EBSCOhost](#), [Web of Science](#) and [Proquest](#)) as well as on Google and Google Scholar.

To subscribe to alerts on Google: sign in to your Google account (or create an account if you don't have one). Go to [Google alerts](#) and then set up your relevant search alert. On [Google Scholar](#) (<http://scholar.google.co.uk/>), you can create an alert by first signing in and then performing a search. You then click the 'Create email alert' link to create an alert for your specific search results.

Search alerts are especially useful if it's important to you to keep things simple: you can choose just one database or search engine to alert you to all relevant new content. Just make sure first that the database you're using carries the important journals for your field.

Journal alerts: some disadvantages

Although alerts can make our lives much easier, we can end up subscribing to too many e-mail journal and search alerts, leading to information overload. You will need to manage alerts actively, making the most of software available to organise and delete them, and to unsubscribe from redundant alerts.

You should also be aware that not all journals or databases support alerts. For example, take a look at the list of EBSCOhost databases which support the creation of [Journal Alerts](#)²¹.

Related researcher articles on the Wolfson Research Exchange site

- [RSS Feeds: how they work](#)
<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0018/>
- [Searching for journal articles](#)
<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0014/>
- [Finding books for your research](#)
<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0016/>
- [Social bookmarking: organising and sharing resources](#)
<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0008/>

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3. Central Office of Information (COI) search engine optimisation page:
<http://coi.gov.uk/guidance.php?page=332>
4. Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) guidelines:
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Chapter 4

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9. Events Help Centre:
<http://www.facebook.com/help/?page=413>
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