英語で伝える科学

第3回
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Sharing Science –

Using SNS to Enhance Your Research

PROFILE

Caitlin Devor is a science communicator originally from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA. She writes to excite non-expert audiences about new scientific discoveries and empowers researchers to find their own voices as communicators.

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In this science communication (scicom) series, members of the Division for Strategic Public Relations will share our recommendations for how UTokyo researchers can share their expertise beyond their professional circle. Today, let's think about social media, or SNS. SNS is a great scicom tool because it is free, flexible, and allows you to talk directly with your audience.

First, the golden rule: If you wouldn't say something in real life, don't say it on the Internet. Don't be racist (人種差別主義者), xenophobic (外国人嫌い), sexist, homophobic (同性愛嫌い), ableist (身障者を差別する人), or any other variety of rude. This way, you can be proud to use your real name and face on anything you post. However, not everyone online follows this rule and you may encounter Internet cruelty, especially against women and non-binary people (性自認が男女二元論に当てはまらない人). Plan how you might deal with trolls (荒らし) and know your legal rights for responding to threats.

Where and How to Begin

Some experts prefer to have separate SNS accounts for private, personal use and public, professional use. After deciding how to manage your accounts, you should choose one platform to start using. When you choose an SNS platform, you also choose an audience. LINE, WeChat, Twitter, Instagram, Facebook — each platform is most popular with different types of people and favors different styles of content. Specialize your content (stickers [スタンプ] , emoji, photos, videos, amount of text, vocabulary, humor) to the platform and audience. Stay accessible by adding speech captions to videos for viewers who are hard of hearing and adding alt text to videos and images for viewers who have low vision. (You can normally add alt text to any image you upload online. Alt text is used by screen reader technology to describe an image to someone who cannot see it. For example, the alt text for the image in this article could say, "Photo of a person holding a smartphone, which is surrounded by bubbles of blue thumbs up and pink heart social media reaction symbols.") If you currently use no SNS, Twitter is easy to start — the text is short and many researchers already use Twitter to talk with the public, journalists, and other experts.

After deciding what account and platform you are most comfortable using, define your goals. Knowing what you want to achieve can help you decide how much time and energy you want to spend on SNS for scicom.

Do you want to connect with specific people? You can make fewer original posts of your own. Instead, spend most of your time reading posts or links shared by those people and having conversations with them in the comments area of their posts.

Do you want to have many followers? Create high-quality content so that people will want to "share" it. Their shares can attract more new followers for you. Post new content frequently and on a regular schedule (every day or every week) so that your audience stays interested in your SNS account.

Do you want to have high-quality engagement on your posts? Share new content on a regular schedule and then follow up by asking your audience questions to prompt them to stay interested or engaged in your content and not just scroll down to see what else is on their SNS feed. You should be quick to thank anyone for positive comments, respond to constructive negative comments (it is OK to ignore or block rude comments), and do your best to answer any questions from your audience.

If you don't know where to begin, follow researchers or journalists whose work you admire to see how they use SNS. Comment on or re-share their posts. Follow #SciComm, #SciArt, #sciED (science education), or other hashtags relevant to your specialty. Rotating curator accounts are permanent SNS accounts that are used,

or "hosted," by a new person every week. Rotating curator accounts are good places to find inspiration from different people. On Twitter, check @RealScientist, @BioTweeps, @AstroTweeps, or @IAmSciComm. When you are comfortable, volunteer to contribute to a rotated curator account so new people can find you too.

Science on SNS

SNS content is always brief. You cannot share the same volume of detail on SNS as you include in your published research. Instead, share small portions of larger scientific stories. Post daily updates of your experiments (photos of equipment used or a small piece of data collected), share links to papers you're currently reading, or comment on current events relevant to your expertise. Posts with "teaser questions" (What does this photo look like? Can AI solve this puzzle?) and high facilitation (acknowledging when others share your posts, answering questions, asking follow-up questions) attract larger audiences and enhance audiences' excitement for science.

Remember that SNS platforms use computer algorithms to curate what content is shown in users' feeds. Despite your best efforts, the algorithm may decide to hide some of your posts. Focus on your long-term goals for your professional SNS scicom efforts while making quality content you enjoy, rather than obsessing over the performance of each post.

Professional "Social" Networks

Separately, professional social networks, including LinkedIn, ResearchGate, and Academia.edu, can be important for researchers. These are digital CVs, not scicom tools. Employers, collaborators, or students might Google search your name after reading your publications or SNS posts — you want them to find you easily. On professional platforms, always use the same name that you use on academic publications and include a link to your lab website. The PEOPLE portion of the UTokyo website lists all current faculty members — faculty members can edit their pages anytime.

My office uses Twitter @UTokyo_ News_En and Facebook @UTokyo. News.En. Follow #UTokyoResearch and let us know if you'd like to collaborate!