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The ERA-NET promoting European research on biodiversity

Annex 1

Practical method note 10

Social media

PRACTICAL METHOD NOTE 10

SOCIAL MEDIA

WHAT ARE SOCIAL MEDIA?

As we increasingly aim to improve the impact of our research and move towards co-creation of research, there is a growing impetus for using social media. Broadly defined, social media are a group of Internet-based applications that enable users to interact with one another, affect and change content on the Internet.

Within this general definition, there are various types of social media, many of which will be familiar to a wide section of society, such as Wikipedia, YouTube, Twitter and Facebook:

- Wikipedia enables the collaborative creation and editing of documents to form a 'living' encyclopaedia that is constantly being added to, edited and updated. A researcher may wish to add details of their new research or their projects to Wikipedia to make them more widely visible and accessible online.
- YouTube enables users to upload and edit their own videos and to comment on and share the videos of others (see practical method note 7 on commissioning video).
- Twitter enables small pieces of information (a maximum of 140 characters per 'Tweet') to be shared between users, often with links to larger documents, websites or films. Twitter enables users to comment on information, ask specific questions or directly interact with the bodies which may have most use for research findings.
- Facebook is the world's largest social network. A Facebook fan page can be a great way to promote research findings, and create a forum for conversation and discussion.

There are many other social media platforms to choose from (notably Google+, LinkedIn, Instagram and Research Gate), but we focus on these four (and in particular the last three in the list above) because they are most widely used by and adapted to the purposes of researchers.

WHY USE SOCIAL MEDIA TO ENGAGE WITH STAKEHOLDERS?

Social media has the potential to inform public debate and decisions in policy and practice. For example, a 2004 study by Sutherland et al.[1] showed that up to 77% of conservation management is based on anecdotal evidence and discussion with friends and colleagues, rather than directly being based on research. A similar study by the *Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development* in 2007 [2] showed that 75% of Internet users used social media as a key source of information. Social media enables the rapid spread of concepts through peer-to-peer learning. People pay attention to what their trusted information sources and friends have to say. In social media, information moves rapidly between and across social networking sites, through both technology features and also through key individuals active on multiple platforms. Products, messages and behaviours spread like viruses and, similar to medical epidemics, a handful of people play an important role in starting 'idea epidemics'. Social media can enable researchers to position themselves in these discussions, spark new discussions and make their findings easily accessible to the rapidly growing population of social media users.

Social media is about facilitating greater engagement of stakeholders and others interested in research. Commonly, universities, institutions and businesses do not approach social media optimally and treat them simply as platforms for interactive marketing (providing information and enabling comment). However, to

enable true participation and learning, social media must be used in a way that enables information to spread effectively from person to person. For example, researchers on a project may publish its biodiversity research as a paper, putting the link onto a social media platform. This is only interactive marketing. In order to turn this into participatory social media, the research team would need to add space for people to comment on the paper or upload their ideas for how to implement the research. The difference is in enabling a conversation and creating ownership beyond the research team and into the wider online community.

APPROACHES TO ENGAGING WITH SOCIAL MEDIA

To effectively use any kind of social media it can be particularly useful to be aware that those who are most effective in their use of social media tend to fall under one or more of three specific categories: Mavens, Connectors and Salespeople. A research team may find it helpful to identify individuals that are particularly suited to these roles and involve them when utilising social media:

- **Mavens** are idea specialists, human databanks, who are likely to be obsessive about details and about sharing them with others; many academics fall within this area. In social media, the Maven shares facts with others but may not necessarily interact with other users. Those new to social media may find that the Maven role is the most comfortable.
- **Connectors** are networkers. They tend to know a lot of people from different cultures and niches and are skilful at making contacts. The connector acts as social 'glue' by spreading ideas around. For example, a connector may access the information provided by a Maven and share this with others as they have a large and wide range of contacts. Connectors may be active over numerous social media platforms and are key players in affecting change as a result of the information they share.
- **Salespeople** have skills of persuasion. These are highly influential individuals, with high-level positions in their organisations, and are recognised by many for their knowledge. Endorsement by salespeople can be key to information becoming trusted and having ideas and concepts spread.

BEST PRACTICE IN USING SOCIAL MEDIA[3]

Before adopting social media as a promotional tool make certain that activities are planned appropriately, set goals and objectives, and identify actions necessary for achieving your desired result.

Even if the social media presence is for your research, a personal approach to interacting with your target audience may lead to more successful and productive communications. These interactions may include thanking users for liking Facebook pages or retweeting, or offering expert views or expertise to followers.

Always ensure that the content that is posted on social media does not contain inaccuracies or mislead your audience, as this can lead to reputational damage to the Project Team or institution. One of the biggest reputational risks can come from being vulgar or confrontational on social media sites. It is vital that all content remains professional and any grievances are not aired publicly. It is important to set expectations about what should and should not be included in online content.

Promoting research is the likely reason why the Project Team are using social media and whilst sharing experiences, expertise and knowledge can promote the value of the research it is important to balance self-promotion by promoting and helping others. This can make your followers more receptive to promotional posts and make them more likely to circulate your promotions amongst their own networks. It is also important to ensure you do not share too much. Remember, if you wouldn't say it in front of people who are valuable to your team or project then it should be kept off social media sites.

Following these best practices can assist the Project Team in creating an engaged online community and ensure that the Projects online presence is productive and positive.

SOCIAL MEDIA PLANNING

It is worth thinking systematically about potential use of social media to get the most out of it:

1. Check the social media policies of the organisations involved in the research.
2. Create a social media plan. The best social media plans involve elements that give people a reason to do something, share something, or gain something. The best plans integrate more than one of these elements.
3. When working with social media it is useful to think about separate campaigns, for example particular topical issues, points of engagement in the research, or key findings.
4. Decide what outcomes are sought from using social media (e.g. attendance at a workshop, reads of a paper, awareness of an issue), and then consider what action would support this. For example, there may be creative activities that could be used. An example may be trying to get increased community understanding of resilience under climate change. In order to do this, a project may empower the community to tell others about what it means to be resilient. To further raise awareness, community members could create short films illustrating their vision of a more resilient future alongside an amount of money that would be needed to achieve this vision. This information, along with the films, can be uploaded to a dedicated webpage. Once done, each group would work independently to raise awareness of their video and campaign to get others to donate. Such a campaign should include 'do', 'share' and 'gain' aspects.
5. Successful social media campaigns are often 'PUVV': they should be **Personal** (cultivating the feeling of personal relevance to other users), **Unexpected** (people like consuming then sharing new information through social media; attract their curiosity and present familiar concepts in new ways), **Visual** (where possible, show, don't tell; use photos and videos and synthesize thoughts with quick visuals), and **Visceral** (a successful campaign often triggers the senses: using sight, sound, etc., to tap into emotions).
6. Different social media platforms have different audiences and it can help to tailor the message to that audience or to choose one platform over another in order to be most effective in targeting a message.

GETTING STARTED

YOUTUBE

YouTube is the largest video sharing site on the internet and lets anyone upload short videos for private or public viewing. It enables users to share and comment on its content. As such, it is a popular way to reach large audiences with videos. In order to reach a larger audience a single YouTube channel for a whole faculty, department or research group may be the best approach rather than having separate channels for different research projects, which are likely to have relatively few videos in each channel. This approach has a benefit of accessing a much larger audience than on an individual channel and ensures that content is automatically branded.

Step 1: Getting the right account: A Google account is needed in order to upload videos to YouTube. An existing Google account can be accessed at www.youtube.com where a channel can be customised. To create a separate account for a research project, select a new username and password for the project. Choose a username that reflects the name of the project, as this will become the ending of the URL for the channel.

Step 2: Starting and customising a channel: After logging in to YouTube, there will be a 'Channel Setup Checklist' at the top of the right-hand pane, where channel art (e.g. project logo) and a channel description can be added.

TWITTER

With its 140-character updates ('Tweets'), Twitter is a great way to get timely information out to audiences and to engage with those with similar interests.

To create a Twitter account:

- Go to http://www.twitter.com and click on "Sign up now".
- For "Name", give the department, program, or project name.
- Next, choose a Username – this will become part of a Twitter address and a personal identifier when tweeting and responding to tweets. Choose a username that clearly identifies the department or program.
- Ideally for email, use a group mailbox that several members of a department or program can check if possible, rather than a personal email address.
- Next, click "Settings" and fill in that information. Under the 'one-line bio', include brief descriptive text about the department or program, and a link to the web site.
- For a picture, use a professional icon that links to the institution. Universities may already have, or be able to create, an appropriate image.
- Before tweeting, build a list of departments and individuals to follow. Seek out other accounts from the institute and for people and programs in the same field, as well as those tweeting keywords relevant to the interests of the programme. Read, retweet and respond to these tweets to begin building a network.

Twitter is generally best viewed as a conversation, not a megaphone. As such, it is important to share interesting news and information and to share news from other sources, to respond to and ask questions and to build a conversational relationship with others.

FACEBOOK

A Facebook fan page can be a great way to promote department or program activities, showcase accomplishments and events, engage with stakeholders, students, faculty, staff, alumni and the wider community, as well as create a forum for conversation and discussion.

1. Timeline

Requirements:

A profile picture that links the programme to its institution. Universities may already have, or be able to create, an appropriate image.

A timeline cover image. This is a large image that will take up the width of the Facebook page. It should be at least 399 pixels wide and very high quality. It shouldn't have buttons or call-to-action wording on it.

Images for the tabs. This is where the call-to-action items can be and these should be attention grabbing and lead visitors to more content.

2. Facebook Fan Page vs. Facebook Group

It is usually better to create a fan page rather than a group for a department or program.

Feature	Fan Page	Group
Allows distinct URLs	Yes	No
Indexed by search engines like Google	Yes	No
Admin can access visitor statistics	Yes	No
Discussion features and forums	Yes	Yes
Can be cross-promoted on other fan pages	Yes	Yes
Ability to create events and invitations	Yes	Yes
Twitter or blog feeds	Yes	No
Visible to unregistered people	Yes	No
Fans can leave comments and "likes"	Yes	No
Can send out bulk emails to your members' in boxes	No	Yes
Information posted on your wall will appear on your fans' wall	Yes	No
The administrator's personnal information isn't listed	Yes	No

How to create a Facebook fan page

- To set up a Facebook fan page, first secure the approval of the department chair or program manager. Unlike a personal Facebook page, this page directly links back to the university and must be professional. Include a statement on the page to ensure it is clear that inappropriate content will be removed.
- To create a fan page, there must be a pre-existing Facebook account. This account can be set up with a personal email account (fan pages keep personal account information private). See www.facebook.com and fill in the form on the homepage to set up a new account.
- Using the personal Facebook account, go to www.facebook.com and log in with user name and password.
- Then go to www.facebook.com/pages/create.php
- A preferred category may be "Local > Education" or "Brand, Product or Organization > Nonprofit."
- For "Name of Page", choose something that will clearly identify the organisation.
- Then click on the "Create Page" button.
- Now start adding items to the fan page.

Here are some ideas to help build a Fan Page:

- Avoid sending too many updates to fans.
- Mention when the project Web site is updated, whether it is new photos, an upcoming event, etc.
- Add links to drive traffic to the department or organization's Web site.
- Mark as 'Favourite' other Facebook pages that have topics that are similar.
- Monitor comments daily and respond to those that warrant it.
- Encourage two-way communication. Delete comments that include personal attacks, vulgarity or slurs. However, do not delete comments simply because they are critical – rather, respond on the wall or directly to the individual with additional information.
- Ask staff and co-workers to "Share" or "Post" to the Facebook page. Ensure all comments also follow guidelines for professional university/programme communications.
- Include all social media information in promotional materials and in email signatures.

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