

Social Media and Scholarly Publication: What Is the Connection?

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Younger generations are technology natives, and social media is an integral part of everything they do.

A recent post on The Scholarly Kitchen website (Davis, 2019) got me thinking about the role of social media in my professional life. I have young adult children who keep me in the loop about social trends to some extent. They instructed me to join Facebook many years ago and, since then, I have remembered friends' and relatives' birthdays with much greater success. I joined Twitter and, for a time, had a personal as well as professional account. It was difficult to keep those separate, and I eventually stopped tweeting on the personal account. I only use my professional one now and with greater circumspect (no politics and fewer complaints about hotels and airlines). I have an Instagram account where I follow many chefs, winemakers, and artists, and I enjoy the beautiful images that they post.

According to the post on The Scholarly Kitchen, research looking for a connection between social media posts and downloads of journal articles has shown little association; social media posts about articles did not drive readers to articles. One randomized controlled study (Hawkins, Hunter, Kolenic, & Carlos, 2017) did show that when editors tweeted about upcoming articles, compared to the tweets from a generic journal account, more readers went to the journal website. However, monthly page views did

not differ between the two arms of the study. There is also the matter of bots and automatic tweets about new articles that affect the ability to measure the true impact of marketing and promotion of a single article or publication.

Uptake of social media and scholarly collaboration networks (SCNs), such as ResearchGate, by scientists has grown, as was shown in a study conducted by Springer Nature in 2017 (Staniland, 2017). Use of ResearchGate was high, with 95% of respondents using this SCN—88% for professional purposes. Just 25% of respondents said that they accessed Facebook and Twitter for professional reasons. Almost 40% of participants used social media for self-promotion, such as sharing content and supporting research activity, and about 50% used social media to find and read content. The use of SCNs was higher for professional purposes, particularly for supporting research activity and finding or reading content. But interaction on these platforms was low, with just 40% of participants using either social media or SCNs for discussion.

What is the connection? Does posting on social media drive readers to the journal, or are staff wasting their time? I personally have found tweets and posts about topics I am interested in professionally to be very useful. Although I subscribe to many table-of-content alerts for a wide range of journals, every week I find something interesting to read based on a tweet or Facebook post. I use social media as a brief mental break from writing, reading, and other scholarly activity while I wait for the kettle to boil to make my tea. And, yes, there are times when reading a tweet can lead me down the rabbit hole in a search for an article, but

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eventually I do go back to what I was doing, and I have often learned something along the way. I also believe that younger generations are technology natives, and social media is an integral part of everything they do. We will have to use social media to connect with them in even more ways than we do now, or they will find other, perhaps less-reliable sources for information.

Smartphones are now ubiquitous in the pockets and hands of many of us in clinical practice, where we use them to help provide evidence-based care to our patients. I accept that some of us are sneaking a peek at our feeds on social media as we move between office and examination room, but perhaps that is the mental break we need to clear our heads and change gears. Those of us who teach students have long ago accepted that pen-and-paper notes have fallen away, and we are faced with a sea of laptops in every classroom. This is how the world works, and progress will continue whether we approve or not.

Social media matters in the 21st century, and we can use it to our advantage. I would like to see nursing, as a profession, reaching out more to the general public on matters of health and wellness, showing the public not only that we are the most trusted professional, but also that we possess a vast body of knowledge that can help them to live their best and healthiest lives. We need to use these platforms to inform and educate and not just as reminders of

birthdays, as I do. And, in the interest of full disclosure, I checked Twitter 12 times while writing this editorial. Follow me @drannekatz.



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