

How effective is the
use of social media by
the top ten
Scottish Universities?



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Introduction

Florizel Media looked at the range of social media activities of the top ten Scottish Universities (as ranked by the Guardian) over the period of a week at the start of August 2015. With school exam results being published we would have expected quite a flurry of activity and engagement between universities and current/potential students. We were also interested to find out whether ranking as one of the top universities was reflected back in other aspects such as social media activity.

We found that performing well as a university was not a measure of effective engagement on social media. The University of Glasgow came out top across most of our metrics which gave them first place by a good margin. The University of St Andrews, who rank as top university in Scotland and third in the UK, came ninth out of the ten we assessed.

The organisations that are successful are the ones who not only have a presence on social media but who also post consistently and engage with their audience. It is gratifying to see some great examples of using social media without needing to use it for pressure selling.

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Methodology

Our data was collected during the week 2-8 August 2015.

We looked at a range of metrics (see Appendix for details) for the top ten Scottish Universities (as [ranked by the Guardian](#) in May 2015). These included the channels they had presence on, the size of their audience, their activity, engagement and the posts which brought them the best of this. We also analysed their reach on Twitter – this channel can be particularly effective at reaching a larger audience especially if you know and engage with your key influencers.

Each metric was scored with a maximum available score of five points. We looked at eight different metrics which gave a maximum score of 40 points. The best performing university scored 37 out of 40 points whilst the least well performing institution scored 11 out of 40.

Universities Evaluated

The table from the Guardian gave us the following universities in order of ranking:

1. University of St Andrews
2. Heriot-Watt University
3. University of Edinburgh
4. University of Glasgow
5. University of Strathclyde
6. University of Dundee
7. University of Aberdeen
8. Robert Gordon University
9. Edinburgh Napier University
10. University of Stirling

We were keen to see if the universities that performed best according to the Guardian's measures equated in any way with their performance on social media.

Results

The overwhelming winner on our scores was the University of Glasgow. They were only beaten on two metrics - both times by Strathclyde, who came second overall in the rankings.

In the Guardian's table St Andrews ranked first (third for the whole of the UK, behind Oxford and Cambridge) and Heriot-Watt second. In our results they came 9th and 10th respectively.

	Soc Presence	Audience	Engagement	Activity	Top 50 posts	Mentions	Mentioners	Reach	Total	Potential
Glasgow	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	3	37	40
Strathclyde	4	2	4	2	3	5	5	5	30	40
Dundee	5	2	2	4	1	3	4	2	23	40
Edinburgh	4	5	3	1	1	3	3	1	21	40
Stirling	5	1	4	4	3	1	1	1	20	40
Robert Gordon	5	3	3	3	2	1	1	1	18	40
Aberdeen	5	2	3	2	2	1	2	1	18	40
Napier	5	3	2	2	1	1	1	1	16	40
St Andrews	5	2	1	1	1	1	2	1	14	40
Heriot-Watt	4	2	1	1	0	1	1	1	11	40

Being there

The only way to get off the starting blocks was to have social media accounts. On this measure most of the field had a presence on all of the key social media channels. They were all using Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. There were only two absences on Instagram (an increasingly important channel) – Edinburgh and Heriot-Watt. And a single absence on Google+ at Strathclyde.

	Twitter	Facebook	YouTube	Instagram	Google+	Total
Aberdeen	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5
Dundee	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5
Edinburgh	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	4
Glasgow	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5
Heriot-Watt	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	4
Napier	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5
Robert Gordon	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5
St Andrews	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5
Stirling	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5
Strathclyde	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	4

Mostly present and correct at this point.

How big is your audience?

Whilst size isn't everything it does help to have a reasonably sized audience. Even in the best cases engagement only happens with a small proportion of an audience so having a bigger audience can help spread your message further.

The smallest audience (total over all channels) was Stirling at 38k. At the other end of the spectrum was Glasgow with 188k. If an account has an engagement rate of 1% then in Stirling's case this would give a potential actual audience of 380 compared with nearly 2000 for Glasgow.

	Total Audience	Score
Glasgow	188k	5
Edinburgh	174k	5
Napier	85k	3
Robert Gordon	76k	2
Aberdeen	71k	2
Strathclyde	67k	2
Dundee	62k	2
Heriot-Watt	59k	2
St Andrews	46k	2
Stirling	38k	1

If you engage well with your audience and they share your content then your reach will be exponentially greater.

So, size does matter.

Are you actually doing anything?

Having an account and an audience is a great start but if you aren't posting anything then the chance of getting any benefit is extremely low.

We looked at total number of posts across all channels.

	Activity	Score
Glasgow	58	5
Dundee	37	4
Stirling	31	4
Robert Gordon	20	3
Strathclyde	18	2
Napier	15	2
Aberdeen	14	2
Edinburgh	9	1
Heriot-Watt	5	1
St Andrews	2	1

Glasgow came well ahead of the field with 58 posts over the course of the week we analysed. Although as we'll see in the next section, quantity isn't a guarantee of engagement, not posting at all is a sure way to make sure that there is little or no engagement or reach. St Andrews' two posts is almost enough to guarantee its place near the bottom of the table.

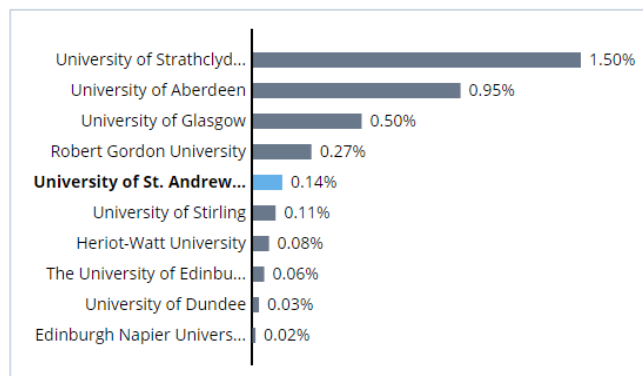
How engaging are you?

For this metric we looked at the total engagement across all channels. These are all the measurable interactions such as likes, shares, retweets, favourites etc. For this set of scores Glasgow was so far ahead of the others as

	Engagement	Score
Glasgow	16000	5
Stirling	906	4
Strathclyde	847	4
Aberdeen	611	3
Edinburgh	519	3
Robert Gordon	504	3
Dundee	408	2
Napier	392	2
St Andrews	114	1
Heriot-Watt	61	1

to be in a different universe. For the period that we looked at, Glasgow had over 8,000 likes on their Facebook posts alone. Heriot-Watt came last with a total of 61 engagements across all channels.

Engagement total tells us part of the story, however, by looking at the average engagement rate per post we can compare the accounts with both large and small audiences. This metric takes the average number of interactions per post, per follower and weights it by audience size.

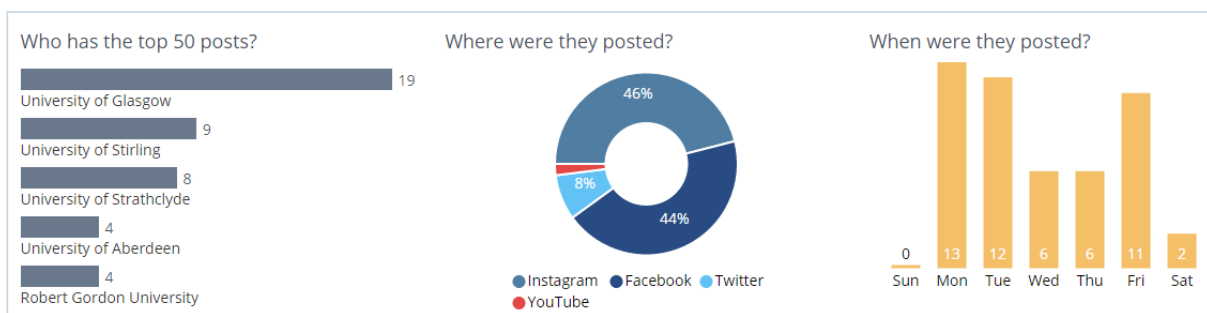


By this measure, Strathclyde move to the top with an engagement rate of 1.50% and Napier languish at the bottom with a lowly 0.02%.

Top Posts

By engagement rate

To understand engagement it's important to look at the content which garnered it.

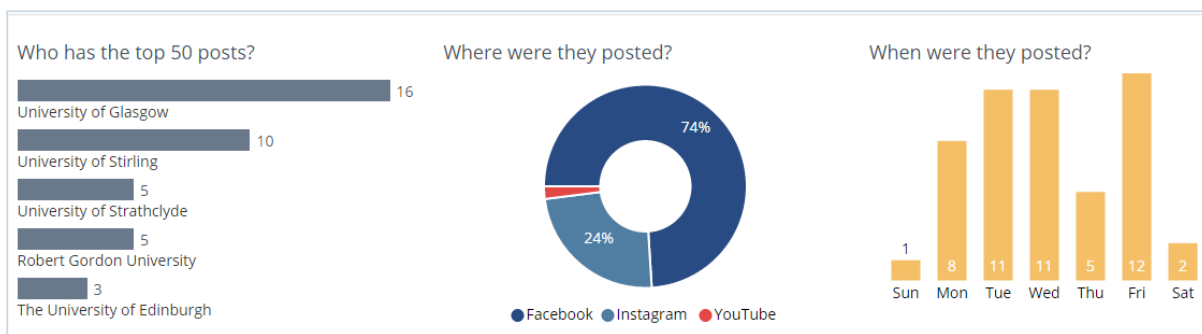


If we look at engagement rates we can see that Instagram comes out ahead. The top post from Strathclyde had an engagement rate of 12.82% with 67 likes and 3 comments.

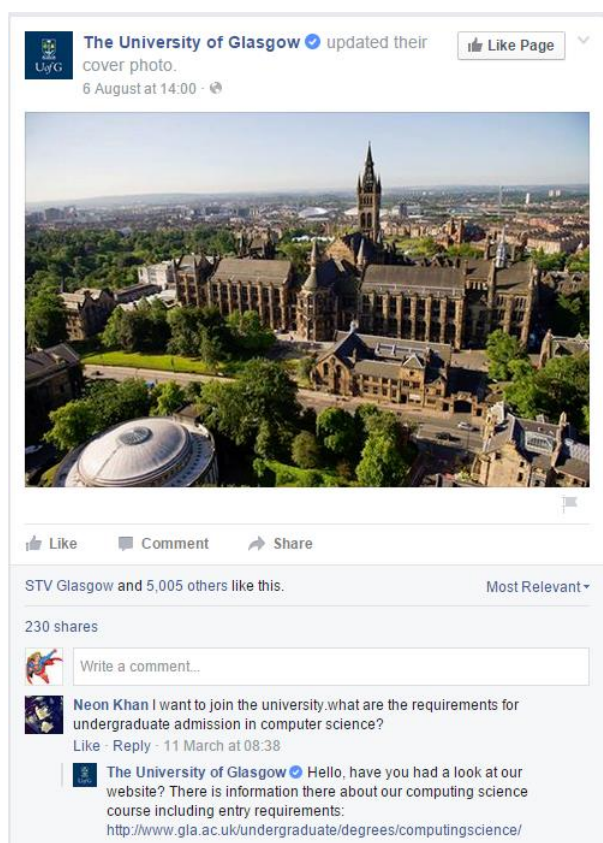


By conversation

If, however we look at engagement ordered by the amount of conversation then Facebook wins this race.



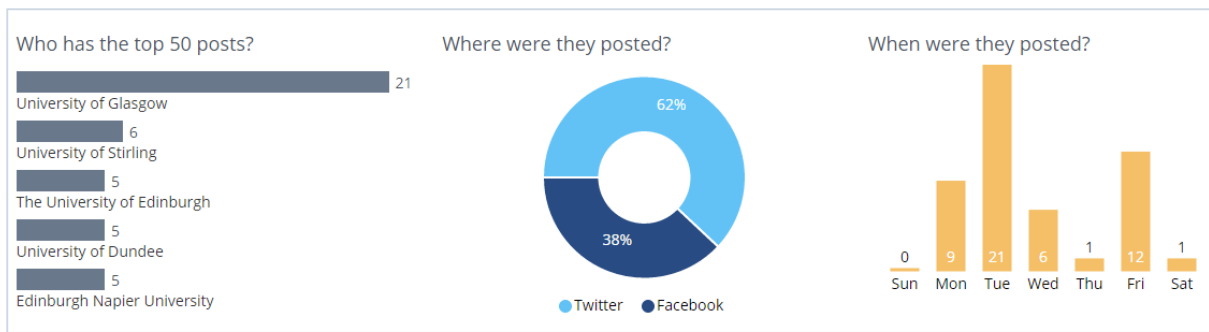
Facebook is good for getting conversation around a subject and its effectiveness can be seen by the responses from the account holder. The top post from Glasgow demonstrates this well.



This post had over 5000 likes, 230 shares and 80 comments. And the social media team at Glasgow were obviously monitoring the responses as can be seen by their prompt reply (at 9:21) to a comment enquiring about undergraduate requirements (posted at 8:38).

By reach

This time Twitter is the winner for reasons that we will explore in the next section.

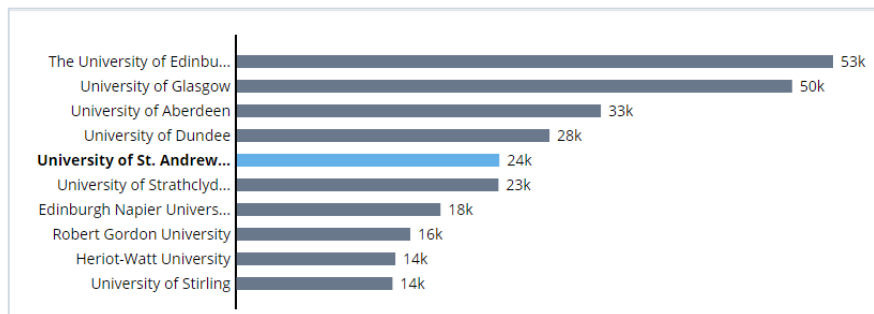


Reaching a wider audience

Twitter is a particularly good channel for reaching a wider audience than just your own. Unlike Facebook where users can restrict what is seen publicly, most Twitter accounts are set to be visible by anyone.

Edinburgh has the highest number of Twitter followers with 53k closely followed by Glasgow with 50k. But where Twitter gets

interesting is that it isn't just about how many followers you have but it's also



about how influential they are. For example, you may have a follower with 100 followers. If they retweet your content then they offer you a possible additional audience of 100. Nice but not earth shattering. But suppose one of your followers has a following of 10k and they retweet you. Then the additional audience you could reach is considerably higher. Get a few high following influencers in your audience and your reach can increase way above the number of followers that you have. Build a relationship with these

accounts so they are more likely to retweet your content and you can quickly see that this is a great channel to help spread your message.

	Twitter mentions	Score
Strathclyde	71	5
Glasgow	65	4
Dundee	44	3
Edinburgh	35	3
Aberdeen	15	1
St Andrews	13	1
Napier	12	1
Stirling	12	1
Heriot-Watt	10	1
Robert Gordon	3	1

When we looked at the number of mentions that the accounts in this landscape received we found that Strathclyde came top with 71. This time Robert Gordon was at the bottom of the list with only 3 mentions. The next thing that we looked at was the influence of the accounts

that mentioned them. Strathclyde, with a following of 23k had the highest potential reach of 216k. Glasgow’s reach was just over half that number even though they have over twice the number of followers.

Strathclyde’s two biggest influencers were @STVEdinburgh with 44k followers (Edinburgh and Heriot-Watt – you should be making friends with them!) and @thestudentroom with 43k followers. This indicates that your audience size is important but so is the audience of your followers.

Conclusions

The social media audience for organisations like universities will be heavily biased towards a younger generation. People who have grown up with the internet and who should be the easiest to engage with. Our report shows that on the surface all of the organisations are 'doing' social media however some are doing much better than others.

To see only two posts in a week from the University of St Andrews suggests that they aren't taking this as seriously as they should. Our figures show that the universities that are in the forefront of this area are the ones that have a consistent presence across the channels, who are posting regularly and who are engaging with their audience. When they share content they can be pretty sure that it will reach a wide audience.

The University of Glasgow are taking engagement seriously by replying promptly to their followers' comments and posts. Take a look at the Twitter account for [@GlasgowUni](#) and see the responses to tweets. Same thing on their Facebook page – they don't just post, they respond. That's the way to do it.

Appendix

University selection

We selected the top ten universities in Scotland as ranked by the [Guardian University Guide 2016](#). Their criteria can be found [here](#).

A guide to our metrics

- Channels – we assessed the activity of the universities on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and Google+.
- Social presence – the university has an account on a particular social media channel such as Facebook, Twitter etc.
- Total audience – the total number of followers, fans etc across the full range of channels we assessed.
- Total engagement – the total number of social interactions on posts across all the channels tracked. These include likes, shares, comments, retweets etc.
- Total activity – the total number of posts made across the social channels we have tracked.
- Top posts – here we looked at the most engaging posts (attracted the most social interactions). We looked at these from a number of different perspectives – engagement (likes, comments etc), conversation and reach.
- Reach – how far content travels. This can be affected by the number of shares, retweets that a piece of content attracts.

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