Social Media for Impact: our experience at the LSE

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The Role of Social Media and Digital Engagement in KE and Impact
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The Impact of the Social Sciences project

• Three-year HEFCE funded project, working with the University of Leeds and Imperial College London.

• Created the Impact of Social Sciences blog to encourage discussion.

Dynamic Knowledge Inventory…
a model of impact for the social sciences

- Knowledge currently in use
- Knowledge not in current use
- ‘Ordinary knowledge’
- Applied knowledge and research
- Theory-based, abstract knowledge and research
Thinking about academic communications

• Traditional outputs
  – Journal articles and books are read by some in your field, but don’t often break into other disciplines and are rarely picked up by the media.
  – Accessibility is a problem for those without subscription/library access.
  – Outputs are fairly long and jargon heavy.

• Digital outputs
  – Are more in keeping with how external users acquire and use information
  – Are lower cost for academics/universities to produce both in terms of time and resources.
  – Universities are increasingly becoming publishers and curators of digital content that is open and accessible.
Most universities are making corporate use of social media.
Although universities are using some social media channels more than others

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<tr>
<th>Percentage of universities using . . .</th>
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<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
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<td>Twitter</td>
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<td>YouTube</td>
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<td>Blogs</td>
<td>55</td>
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<td>Press releases</td>
<td>95</td>
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<td>Online repository</td>
<td>70</td>
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Our blog family

[Logos of various blog families]

- The Impact Blog
- LSE Review of Books
- EUROPP: European Politics and Policy
- USAPP
- British Politics and Policy
- democratic audit UK
The aims of our blogs are:

• To increase the public understanding of the social sciences
• To facilitate the sharing and exchange of knowledge between experts within and outside universities
• To open up academic research to increase its impact

We have no editorial ‘line’ except a commitment to communicating social science research and commentary in ways that enhance public debate and understanding.
Who are our authors?
Who are our readers?
Readership for individual blog posts far outstrips that of an average journal article

- The evidence shows that multiculturalism in the UK has succeeded in fostering a sense of belonging among minorities, but it has paid too little attention to how to sustain support among parts of the white population: Alan Manning (14/04/11) 23,956 pageviews
- If you pay peanuts, do you get monkeys? Paying teachers 10 per cent more results in 5-10 per cent higher pupil performance: Peter Dolton and Oscar Marcenaro-Gutierrez (28/12/11) 9,785 pageviews
- Every key ‘Westminster model’ country now has a hung Parliament, following Australia’s ‘dead heat’ election: Patrick Dunleavy (23/08/10) 9,482 pageviews
- The obsession with ‘hard work’ as a route to economic success is a dangerous distraction: David Spencer (7/10/13) 8,914 pageviews
- The ‘scrounger’ myth is causing real suffering to many in society: Kayleigh Garthwaite (20/12/12) 8,891 pageviews
- The lasting achievement of Thatcherism as a political project is that Britain now has three political parties of the right, instead of one: Patrick Dunleavy (17/04/13) 8,271 pageviews
- The government’s Work Capability Assessment for disabled people is one of the toughest in the world – it is not fit for purpose: Debbie Jolly (17/05/11) 7,116 pageviews
- Is Alternative Vote a better voting system? It depends: Rafael Hortala-Vallve (16/07/10) 6,423 pageviews
- The British class system is becoming more polarised between a prosperous elite and a poor ‘precariat’: Mike Savage (4/04/13) 6,346 pageviews
- Ten Commandments of good policy making: a retrospective by Sir Gus O’Donnell: Sir Gus O’Donnell (1/05/12) 5,812 pageviews
Also readership figures for across all our blogs are growing.

Visitor figures for LSE PPG’s five academic blogs (January 2013 to February 2014)
Social media can help research reach more people.
This effect can also be seen for dissemination by research centres and departments.
As well as for individual academics
Social media works to best effect alongside open access

If (social media interaction is often) then (Open access + social media = increased downloads).

Teras 2012
But can you both publish and try to be externally visible?
Social media also has the potential to change the practices of scholarship.
Perhaps though we are replicating offline habits of talking amongst ourselves.

The academic career path has been thoroughly destabilised by the precarious practices of the neoliberal university.

Mewburn and Thomson: small-scale study of 100 blogs

Rather than a site for translation, more evidence of conversations happening between academics – and much of it about academia itself.

Discourse, is similar in purpose, if not necessarily in form or content, to the academic discourse happening in journals.

- Mewburn and Thomson: small-scale study of 100 blogs
- Rather than a site for translation, more evidence of conversations happening between academics – and much of it about academia itself.
- Discourse, is similar in purpose, if not necessarily in form or content, to the academic discourse happening in journals.
And academics are also concerned about . . .

1. The focus on using social media (and impact) can feel like a new responsibility in addition to all the other things you do as an academic.

2. If you start a blog or create a twitter feed for a project, you need to keep these up which takes times and resources.

3. Being open with your research methods, stakeholders or findings could place restrictions on what you feel you can say.

4. Moderating the quality of discussion and debate via social media tools can be hard. This can’t replace peer review but some quality assurances can be built into how social media is used.

5. You can receive instant feedback on your work, and it is all public. Can be very nerve-wracking for individual academics and universities.
For more details:

The Impact of the Social Sciences (Sage, 2014)

Maximising the Impacts of your Research: A handbook for social scientists (2011)

Using Twitter in University Research, Teaching and Impact Activities: A guide for academics and Researchers (2011)

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