Social Media for #SciComm

Storytelling and Ethics

Paige Jarreau

Scientists are increasingly using social media to talk about or read about science

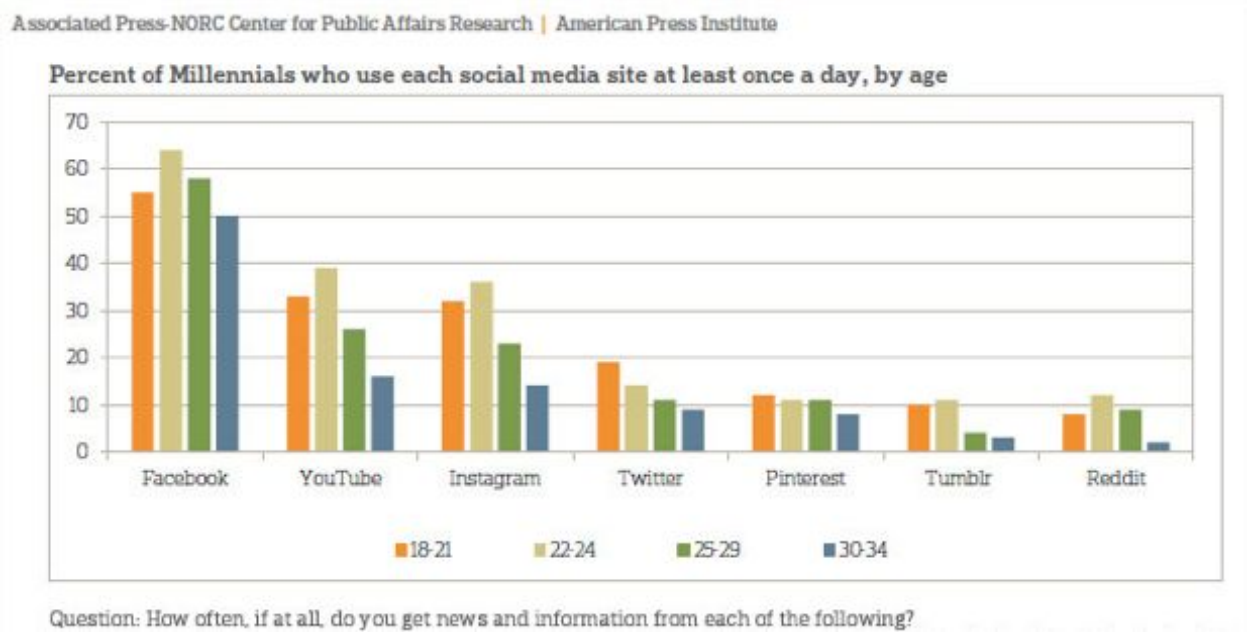
- 47% of AAAS members surveyed in 2015 have used social media to discuss or follow science
  - *51% have talked with reporters about research*
- 24% of AAAS members have blogged about research
- 16% of scientists blog at least once a month about topics related to their research; ~1 out of 5 tweet about their research (Brossard *et al.*, 2013).
- Younger scientists tend to strongly support direct communication with lay audiences (Corley *et al.*, 2011)

“Scientists themselves are now embracing roles that were conventionally taken upon by trained science communicators.”

- Dominique Brossard

19,808,428 views!

- The internet (and social media) has become a top source of science information for many Americans, especially those who follow specific areas of science and for younger Americans
- Social media use in general is on the rise



Ethical Issues in #Scicomm via Social Media

- Balancing responsibilities (to the story, to the science, to readers, to oneself)
  - Interpretations by non-target audiences
  - *True* two-way engagement
  - Commenting environments and trolls
- Scientists' behavior in social media
- Diversity
  - #WomenInSci #WomenTweetScienceToo
- Attribution

Balancing Responsibilities

- Those who communicate science in social media must balance various ethical responsibilities:
  - **Responsibility to the story**
    - Responsibility to the scientific facts
      - Duty to read the primary literature?
      - To cite/link to sources?
    - Responsibility to provide necessary *context*
    - Duties to be *honest* (in telling the story) and *fair* (to the subjects of the story)

Balancing Responsibilities

- Those who communicate science in social media must balance various ethical responsibilities:
  - **Responsibility to the reader**
    - Responsibility to be transparent in one's goals and intentions
    - Levels of certainty / strength of evidence (also consider readers' level of media literacy)
    - Exposing one's biases
    - How to properly edit / update social media content…
    - Clear commenting policies

“...try to become aware of your biases. Which voices [on social media] do you reflexively treat as authoritative? Which do you ignore, perhaps without noticing?”

- **Janet Stemwedel**, Science Blogging, the Essential Guide (2016)

Questions for Ethical Reflection

Before you publish:

- What am I hoping to accomplish with this post?
- Whom will this post help? Whom will it hurt? What is the balance of likely good and bad consequences of posting?
- To whom do I have duties that are relevant to whether I publish the post this way? Duties to publish it? To not publish it? To publish an edited version?
- Could publishing this undermine my ability to blog/tweet, etc. about science in the future?

- Janet Stemwedel

Commenting Policies and Trolls

- Below the line comments can influence readers' perceptions of the story

"Uncivil comments not only polarized readers, but they often changed a participant's interpretation of the news story itself." - DIETRAM SCHEUFELE

Original Article

The "Nasty Effect:" Online Incivility and Risk Perceptions of Emerging Technologies†

FREE

Ashley A. Anderson[1,*], Dominique Brossard[2], Dietram A. Scheufele[3], Michael A. Xenos[4] and Peter Ladwig[5]

Article first published online: 19 FEB 2013

DOI: 10.1111/jcc4.12009

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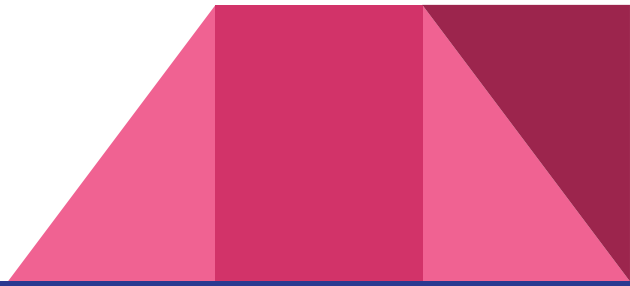
Commenting Policies and Trolls

- By moderating comments, you can promote *descriptive norms* ("it's what everyone is doing" (Cialdini) of respectful commenting on your blog
- Model good behavior
- *Don't remove comments just because you disagree*
- Ethical duties to foster open conversation?
  - BUT it's ok to not respond
- Trolls and harassment
  - Know when NOT to engage
  - Blocking (Twitter users)



Balancing Responsibilities

- Those who communicate science in social media must balance various ethical responsibilities:
  - **Responsibility to the larger community**
    - Actions of scientists in social media can feed positive or negative perceptions of science or science communicators
    - In recent court rulings, bloggers count as journalists → bloggers should abide by journalistic codes of ethics
      - Accuracy, Attribution, Verification, Embargoes, Giving subjects opportunity to respond

Balancing Responsibilities

- Those who communicate science in social media must balance various ethical responsibilities:
  - **Responsibility to oneself**
    - Making sustainable choices about frequency of posting to social media and time invested in researching topics for content
    - Caution in sharing personal information
    - Awareness of risks and legal action & writing on controversial topics
    - Staying true to one's values

Scientists' Behavior

"Yes, Folta was Blazek. He was using a pseudonym, he said, because it was fun … and so he could 'play in this space' without drawing attention to his role in the project. Yes, he had interviewed himself, but only because some of his listeners had caught on that Blazek might be him, and he wanted to throw them off his trail. And, well, no, he hadn't considered how all this might look to an outsider." - Brooke Borel

Seed Money

How Kevin Folta got entangled with Monsanto, created a shady podcast alter ego, and spurred a hot public debate over conflicts of interest in big ag.

Brooke Borel
BuzzFeed Contributor

posted on Oct. 19, 2015, at 9:33 p.m.

Social Media Training for Scientists?

- Transparency and disclosure
- Being upfront about potential conflicts of interest
- Verification of facts
- Awareness of “non-target audiences”
  - Openness to differing values, principles & practices encountered within global social networks.
- Trust and mutual engagement
- Two-way communication

"Seek the truth, verify, and be fair."

- **Joe Mathewson** (2014), in *Law and Ethics for Today's Journalist: A Concise Guide*

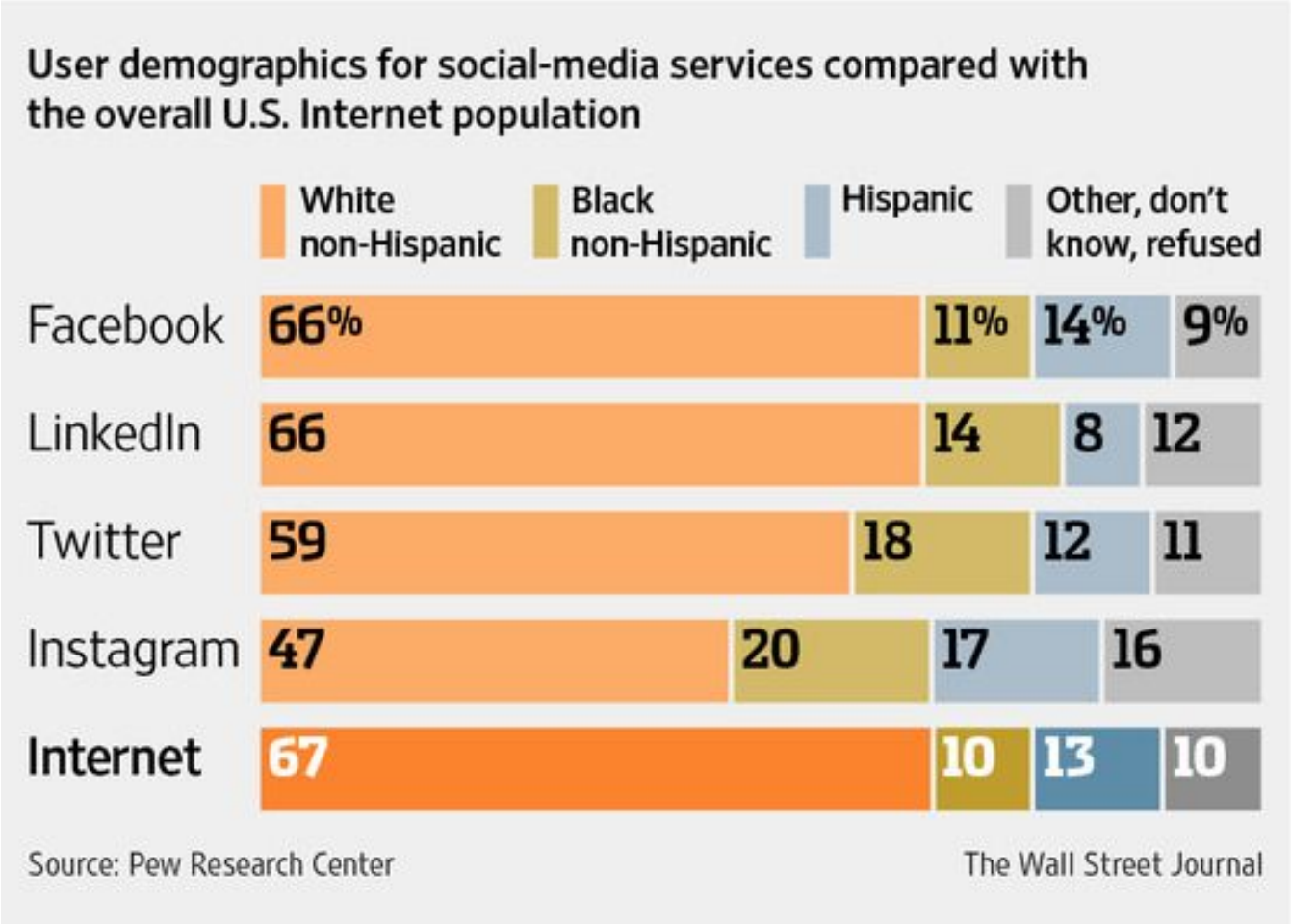
Diversity

Seeking out diverse sources on social media.

Awareness of power structures

Nature of the network itself

Giving voice to the voiceless.



Attribution

Society

I F**king Love Science and Facebook's problem with content theft

By Kevin Morris

"The people who actually made the content that drives Andrew's ascendant business- the professional scientific illustrators, the photographers, the cartoonists, the graphic designers- aren't given anything in return. They aren't paid. They aren't acknowledged. They aren't even asked."

- Proper attribution of sources and visuals in social media is key, and requires foresight
- Increasing awareness of creative commons image options