

Work the Network

February 27, 2015

Attention Undergrads and Grad Students: Authors Needed

The Undergraduate Update is an online forum for undergraduates providing helpful tips on a variety of topics, including designing posters for conferences, taking the GREs, etc. If you think you could offer helpful advice to your fellow students on any topics related to research, graduate school, psychology-related careers, etc., please email the APS Student Caucus (APSSC) Undergraduate Advocate, [Staci Weiss](#), at or [visit the Update online](#).

Mentorship Program

The APSSC Mentorship Program is designed to connect undergraduate student affiliates with graduate mentors who are willing to share their experiences and expertise on all issues related to research and graduate school. We are currently accepting applications for both graduate student mentors and undergraduate student mentees. For more information on how to get involved, undergraduate and graduate student affiliates are encouraged to contact [Staci Weiss](#) or read more on the [Mentorship page](#).

Despite the wariness and skepticism with which the scientific community has viewed social media over the past decade, recent developments and changing perceptions have led to a surge in its use for academic purposes. Indeed, over the past few years, social networking in the scientific community has grown well beyond expectations, as researchers are increasingly using social media platforms to stay informed, connect with colleagues, and share findings (Van Noorden, 2014). Though research articles in peer-reviewed journals are still the mainstay format for reporting findings, social-media start-ups are beginning to transform the landscape of scientific communication. One reason for this shift is that social media offers researchers efficient and creative ways of consuming, creating, and sharing information. As psychology graduate students, our careers are developing in the midst of the social-media upswing, and we must choose how much or how little to involve social media in our own professional lives. This article discusses five ways that graduate students in psychological science can use social media to enhance their research and future careers.

1. Create an Online Presence

Psychological scientists are increasingly turning to social media to share their own articles, to chime in on important topics in their field, and to generate greater visibility for themselves and their research. In fact, 13 of the top 50 most followed scientists on Twitter are psychologists or neuroscientists (You, 2014), including Dan Ariely (@danariely) and APS Fellows Steven Pinker (@sapinker), Daniel Gilbert (@DanTGilbert), Daniel Levitin (@danlevitin), Paul Bloom (@paulbloomatnyale), and Matt Lieberman (@social_brains). Creating your own professional online presence while in graduate school can be a great way to help disseminate research you care about to a public audience. If starting a Twitter feed is

too time-consuming or distracting, designing a professional website or blog may be a better choice. Platforms such as WordPress and about.me make the process of launching and editing a website straightforward enough for even the most inexperienced of users. An up-to-date, professional-looking website can provide valuable information to future employers in both academic and industry settings. Another low-investment way to share your voice online is to write a guest post for a psychological science blog. For example, an organization at my university called Psychology in Action started a fully student-run blog that gives graduate students a forum to write about interesting topics related to their research.

2. Stay Up-to-Date

There are a number of ways to use social media to stay informed about findings in your field. For example, Google Scholar is ubiquitously used among researchers as a publication search tool, but it can also be used to set alerts for articles that contain certain keywords. If you are interested in the work of a particular researcher on Google Scholar, you can click the link on their citations page to “Follow new articles” or set up a specific alert with their name. Live updates on social media from scientific conventions are also becoming more common, thus allowing students to follow news from conferences they may not be able to attend. For example, APS uses its own Twitter feed (@PsychScience) to update attendees and other followers on conference happenings.

3. Build a Network

While large professional networking sites such as LinkedIn have achieved incredible popularity over the past few years, research-specific networking sites also have recently begun to gain momentum. ResearchGate and Academia.edu are two of the best known. With minimal effort, researchers can create a profile, upload articles they have written, and connect with others who are interested in their work. Beyond using the traditional citation number to gauge the impact of your work, you can monitor how many people read or download your articles, and you can request articles from other authors. These sites also provide question-and-answer forums for researchers to get feedback on a range of topics. For graduate students, networking in this way can open up doors of communication that might otherwise not be available.

4. Create and Share Content Online

Presenting data, whether for a conference, a class, a research proposal, or an article, is at the foundation of much of what we do as psychology graduate students. As the bar for presenting interesting presentations and easily interpretable data creeps steadily higher, students can keep up with this trend by using programs that are freely available online. For example, Prezi allows users to create publicly visible presentations for free and offers a number of helpful data visualization options. Another social-media presentation site, emaze.com, has similar features with less of a learning curve, while sites such as infogr.am offer free options for creating eye-catching and interactive graphics and publishing them online.

5. Manage Your References

With the vast number of articles published each week, the task of organizing references can sometimes feel daunting. Fortunately, managing, sorting, and sharing a library of references has become increasingly easier and streamlined thanks to a number of online reference managers designed specifically for researchers. Mendeley, Zotero, and CiteULike are three of the most common free reference managers that allow you to save online articles with a click of a button, cite these articles as you write, and automatically create a formatted bibliography from your citations. In addition to these practical and time-saving features, a number of reference managers also provide tools to seamlessly share your research sources with others, thus allowing you to exchange relevant references and articles with collaborators and colleagues. A word of caution: Be sure to double-check references downloaded through these programs, as they sometimes contain errors.

Whether you choose to dabble or dive in fully, social media is beginning to alter the way we communicate in our field. Big changes may also be on the horizon. Some research-specific social-networking sites are encouraging scientists to upload raw data or unpublished findings, and ResearchGate has launched a new feature called Open Review, which lets researchers publish their own reviews of papers they have read. It is too soon to tell whether these changes will lead to an increase in collaborative, high-quality research or simply information overload. However, the expanding role of social media in our field cannot be ignored. As graduate students, we have the opportunity to help shape the way psychological science is represented in this world of social media. æ

Steven Pinker will participate in an “Inside the Psychologist’s Studio” interview at the 2015 APS Annual Convention in New York City, May 21–24.

References and Further Reading

Miah, A. (2012, December 30). The A to Z of social media for academia. Retrieved January 15, 2015, from <http://www.andymiah.net/2012/12/30/the-a-to-z-of-social-media-for-academics/>

Van Noorden, R. (2014, August 13). Online collaboration: Scientists and the social network. Retrieved January 15, 2015, from <http://www.nature.com/news/online-collaboration-scientists-and-the-social-network-1.15711>

You, J. (2014, September 17). The top 50 science stars of Twitter. Retrieved January 15, 2015, from <http://news.sciencemag.org/scientific-community/2014/09/top-50-science-stars-twitter>