

The role of a social media editor: What to expect and tips for success

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Introduction

Social media has become entwined in the private and professional lives of many in modern society. In academia, social media enables users to communicate instantly and transparently with other professionals, the general public and policymakers across the world, and forge virtual communities.¹ There has been growing popularity at the level of individuals and institutions to establish professional accounts to communicate ideas, disseminate shared learning, foster collaborations and drive patient and public involvement. These benefits wholly appeal to academic journals, many of which now regard social media as important drivers of success. Shares and retweets of published articles increase their read counts and favourably affect metrics which benchmark research attention, for example Altmetrics and PlumX. It is now established that social media activity, especially on Twitter,² correlates with citation counts^{3–5} and therefore directly influences the journal's impact factor – the de facto measure of success. Accordingly, journals are increasingly enrolling individuals to manage and coordinate academic social media account(s), known formally as the social media editor (SME). These positions are influential and are held in high regard by the editorial board. They are usually run by trainees or specialists who are well versed in the journal's specialty.⁶ As the role is relatively modern, with many being the first to serve the role,⁶ the editor may not have received specific remits for their role or a code of conduct by which to abide. We therefore aim to share our collective experience and to provide tips on becoming a successful SME (Figure 1).

The role of the SME

The specifics of the SME role will vary depending on the journal and its editor-in-chief, but will primarily consist of maintaining the social media account(s) to disseminate the journal's content and enhance its online reach and reputation. Duties performed by the SME include:⁶

1. Reviewing upcoming publications to select articles to highlight;

2. Posting summaries of published articles on social media;
3. Responding to social media notifications and queries;
4. Generating content to promote journal articles, for example visual abstracts, infographics and podcasts;
5. Maintaining the account profile, for example updating the profile bio, photo(s) and impact factor;
6. Hosting social media events organised by the journal, for example author chats/journal clubs;
7. Posting live at conferences (if affiliated with a society/organisation);
8. Promoting the journal, for example call for submissions, announcing new issues and so on;
9. Working closely with the editorial board and office to discuss strategy and provide updates; and
10. Peer reviewing submitted papers (from both an editor and social media perspective).

Expected qualities of the SME

The desirable qualities for a successful SME include being:

1. Responsive (to requests from the editorial board, editorial office and audience);
2. Organised (can fit the role around their day job);
3. Efficient (able to work and deliver under time pressures);
4. Knowledgeable (good grasp of English; understands the content and significance of papers; up to date with the latest literature and gaps in knowledge);
5. Professional (abide by social media rules of etiquette,⁷ avoid personal content, avoid spelling/grammar errors, adhere to copyright laws and declare conflicts of interest as appropriate);
6. Proactive (check journal content regularly);
7. Computer literate (familiar with information technology);
8. Social media savvy (should already be maintaining their own social media account);
9. Adventurous (offers new ideas); and
10. Aware of limitations (not taking on too much).

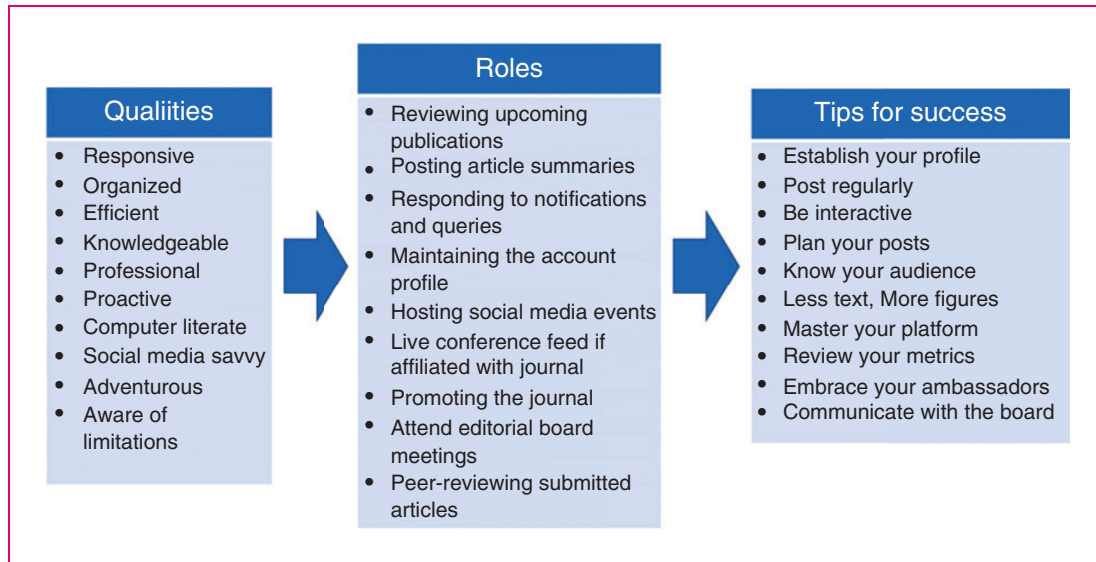


Figure 1. Desirable qualities, expected roles and tips for becoming a successful social media editor.

Tips

Establish your account(s)

Most journals will have an established social media platform in preparation for the role. However, if required, a dedicated professional account can be set up using a platform that suits the needs of the editor and editorial board, whilst considering pros and cons (Table 1). Twitter is the platform of choice for professional accounts because of its simplicity, interactivity and rapid sharing through retweets. Facebook serves the largest public audience and is an alternative, although shares on private accounts do not feed into Altmetrics/PlumX metrics. YouTube, Instagram and TikTok are also used to host media-specific content. The SME must be aware of the differences between the various platforms in order to enhance the impact fully.

All accounts require a username, bio and photo. Within the bio, it is advisable to include a brief description of the journal, its scope, impact factor (which is updated yearly) and a link to the official website. Consider tagging the affiliating organisation (e.g. @my_ueg for *UEG Journal*) or relevant professional accounts (of the editor-in-chief or SME).

Post regularly

Maintaining relevance is vital for any social media account. It is important to strike the right balance of posts to maintain impact and momentum. Accounts which post infrequently risk a loss of interest from followers and may be deprioritised from subscriber feeds, whereas those that post too often could be

regarded as a nuisance and lead to unsubscribing. Social media posts should be interesting, that is, eye-catching or thought-provoking. They should carry novelty – excessive repetition of posts on the same paper should be avoided. Visit and bookmark the ‘Online First’ or ‘In Press’ sections of the journal which provide the latest releases and are likely to garner attention. These should be regularly reviewed and shared in a timely manner for maximum effect. When posting journal articles, always include the link to the paper. This not only allows convenient access to the full text, but also contributes to social media metrics. Having a good grasp of the latest developments and hot topics being discussed in the field can also allow the SME to post relevant work from their respective journals and heighten visibility. All posts should be professional (see above) and reflect the voice of the journal, with a focus on scientific content.

Be interactive

Social media accounts should encourage interaction. Tag users (e.g. authors, institutions and societal accounts) who may share the article and bring visibility and followers. Ensure gender representation and diversity in your tags. Be proactive and keep lists of influential users and consider following them. If appropriate, like, retweet or respond. Some journals will ask authors to provide Twitter handles and a short summary to facilitate dissemination (and discussion) if their paper is accepted. Hashtags enable topics to be indexed under a common heading to improve searchability and are encouraged.⁸

Table 1. Overview of the mainstream social media platforms for hosting an academic Twitter account.¹¹

	Instagram	Twitter	Facebook	YouTube	TikTok
Monthly users	>1 billion	0.3 billion	2.5 billion	>2 billion	0.8 billion
Users	Teens and young adults, usually <40 years old	Middle-age professionals, 35–65 years old	More popular in the older age group, 30–40+ years old	All ages, usually 15- to 34-year-old adults	Teenagers and young adults, 16–24 years old
Content	Visual work including pictures/animations	Breaking news, bite-sized content	Pictures, videos, blogs, discussion	Videos, tutorials	Entertaining, interesting, comedic and sometimes nonsensical short-form video content
Strengths	Emphasis on visual content; can be useful for learning anatomy, sharing algorithms	Most popular for professionals; allows short, open dialogue for debate and crowdsourcing; content easily shareable through retweets	Most popular social media platform; no limits on wording, number of images or videos	Exclusive focus on videos can reach a wide audience, particularly younger users	Fun and short video format popular amongst younger audience; posts can quickly amass large numbers of views
Limitations	Not ideal for discussions; not popular for medical education	Character limit can be challenging; format not immediately intuitive and requires a longer learning curve	Losing popularity among younger audience; not a popular platform for medical education	Not ideal for discussions; no regulation of content and overcrowding can make navigation difficult	Not ideal for discussions; not popular for medical education; risk of misinformation

Plan your posts

Consider using a scheduler to plan posts in advance. Social media management software (e.g. Buffer, Hootsuite and TweetDeck) enable posts to be scheduled and distributed across multiple platforms simultaneously. These can be synchronised with personal calendars to coincide with important dates (e.g. issue releases and conferences) and seminal publications, some of which may be flagged up for press release. These tools allow for better time management.

Know your audience

Keep abreast of your followers. Develop an intuition for the days and times that followers are most likely to interact, and the topics of particular interest. This can help to schedule posts for optimal visibility and impact. It is not uncommon for journals to have accounts across platforms and to use the most appropriate one with regard to the content at hand, for example short clips of author interviews and videos of endoscopic procedures will likely be better served with video-sharing platforms such as YouTube. There is also a

science behind the optimal timing to tweet or post social media content which may differ amongst different platforms. Although English is the lingua franca of scientific research, some journals will post translated content to appeal to a wider audience.

Less text, more figures

Brevity lies at the core of Twitter, where posts have a 280-character limit and ‘a picture is worth a thousand words’. The art of the role is to summarise full papers into this character count by extracting headline messages, minimising text, applying symbols/emojis and emphasising images. Condense hyperlinks using a professional URL shortener. However, avoid using abbreviations which can confuse international readers.

Social media users tend to scroll and move on. Grab their attention using eye-catching media (e.g. self-explanatory figures or visual abstracts). Visual abstracts provide an at-a-glance summary of papers with minimal text. These increase the impressions, retweets and article visits compared to text alone.⁹ The screenshot function can be used to capture high-resolution on-screen images, especially within PDF

files. On Twitter, attaching images enables up to 10 users to be tagged without eroding the character count. Up to four images may be attached. Consider resizing images to ideal aspect ratios which fit within the preview window. The ideal aspect ratio is 16:9 (widescreen) for a single image post, 7:8 (displayed side-by-side) for two images and 2:1 (in a 2×2 layout) for four images. Beyond Twitter, different social media platforms have various formats to adhere to which requires the SME to have a more nuanced approach towards creating content. For example, Facebook posts allow up to 63,206 characters, although shorter posts may lead to higher engagement.

Master your platform

While SMEs are likely to be well versed with basic functionality, learn the more advanced functions. On Twitter, the functions of ‘Pinned Tweet’, ‘Draft’, ‘Search’, ‘Lists’, bookmarks and poll can be helpful. ‘Moments’ enable tweets to be compiled. Serial tweets on the same paper can be released in a ‘thread’ or in a ‘Tweetorial’ format. Social media analytics (see below) can be interrogated to assess the impact of posts. Online hashtag analysers can determine the most influential ones to select for future use. Be flexible with accessing the social media account. Although computer access provides greatest functionality, smartphone access enables optimal responsiveness whilst on the go.

Review your social media metrics

As a SME, it is imperative to become familiar with Twitter analytics/Altmetrics to monitor your journal’s social media presence. The Altmetrics score is calculated from various online sources where a paper is cited, including: full publications, social media (Twitter and Facebook), Wikipedia, saved articles on bookmarking services, blogs and news outlets.¹⁰ Twitter analytics (available at <https://analytics.twitter.com/>) is the easiest way to keep track of Twitter activity and progress over time. This provides data such as tweet impressions (the number of times the tweet has been viewed), profile visits, follower counts and so on. The goal is to see steady progress over time. Third-party software may also yield helpful information, for example TweepMap enables users to view where followers are located.

Publishers are recognising and embracing the movement of social media dissemination and are including options to share publications using a link or DOI associated with each article. Various platforms are being used to facilitate and track these articles. Examples include platforms such as ImpactStory, Kudos, Publons and PlumX.¹⁰ Be aware that in the short

term, any interventions by the SME is unlikely to influence the journal’s impact factor, which is typically calculated over the preceding two or more years.

Embrace your ambassadors

Some journals recruit individuals who are enthusiastic and active on social media platforms as ambassadors to help promote and disseminate posts. This can have a big impact on the reach of posts. Ambassadors hailing from different countries can also enable the journal to reach a broader audience internationally. Their main role would be to help promote and share articles by the journal, and to join in the discussions where appropriate. Using a unified hashtag identifier for such posts (e.g. #UEGambassador, #JGHambassador) also allows for easier searchability and fosters a sense of solidarity. If there is an affiliated society, ambassadors present at conferences may also take up the role of live tweeting. Well-run social media campaigns will help to raise the visibility of the journal.

Communicate with the board

As the SME role is essentially to communicate the views of the journal, it is important to have a good relationship and open communication with the editorial team (especially the editor-in-chief). Before starting, be clear of the duties and expectations, terms of reference (if applicable) and the types of posts which are permitted. Ensure that there is a clear pathway for troubleshooting, for example for controversial posts and complex queries. Join board meetings to be up to date with the journal’s strategy which may involve social media. Update the board with progress, for example followers, popular posts and analytics. Encourage them to tweet! Share your own vision and social media strategies which may benefit the journal. Review structural process to enhance social media integration, for example inviting authors to include usernames, a tweet or a visual abstract during the submission phase. This can make life easier and enhance the impact and profile of authors. Last but not least, reach out and discuss how the journal can better support the SME role, for example funding for online subscriptions or professional assistance with graphics/visual abstracts.

Discussion

The role of SME may seem daunting at first. For us, this involved learning on the job. By describing the nature of the work and the qualities and tips to succeed as a SME, we hope to provide some guidance on this unique role which may benefit interested applicants and those occupying current roles. With the emergence of

social media in academia, SMEs will likely become ubiquitous and hold an influential position amongst the editorial boards of academic journals.

Notes

Dr Keith Siau (@drkeithsiau) manages the Twitter account for United European Gastroenterology Journal (@UEGJournal).

Dr Rashid Lui (@RashidLui) manages the Twitter account for Journal of Gastroenterology and Hepatology (@JGH_latest).

Dr Sultan Mahmood (@SultanMahmoodMD) manages the Twitter account for Clinical Gastroenterology and Hepatology (@AGA_CGH).

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Keith Siau^{1,2}, Rashid Lui³ and Sultan Mahmood⁴

¹Medical and Dental Sciences, University of Birmingham, Birmingham, UK

²Gastroenterology Unit, Dudley Group Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, Dudley, UK

³Division of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, PR China

⁴Division of Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition, University at Buffalo, Buffalo, USA

Corresponding author:

Keith Siau, Gastroenterology Unit, Dudley Group Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, Dudley, DY1 2HQ, UK.

Email: keithsiau@nhs.net