New study reveals how scientists use social media

October 12 2016

A new study published in the international journal *PLOS One* today reveals how scientists use Twitter to communicate.

The study is the first to survey scientists on their attitudes towards social media and show how they are using digital channels to communicate their research with both the public and one another.

Led by Kimberley Collins, Dr Jenny Rock of New Zealand's University of Otago and David Shiffman of the University of Miami, it surveyed 587 scientists from a range of academic disciplines.

The survey found that while scientists are yet to widely adopt social media, the ones that do see many possible advantages to using it in the workplace.

"Most scientists saw the benefit in using Twitter - they said it was a good way to access a large and diverse audience. They also appreciate the ease of communicating in snippets, how little time it takes, and how accessible it is." says Kimberley Collins, who undertook the research for her Master of Science Communication thesis at Otago.

The study also found that scientists mostly use Twitter to communicate with colleagues and share peer-reviewed literature within the scholarly community.

"Many scientists said they use Twitter to communicate specifically with
other scientists. Some used it as a forum to share their research directly with the public and media, but most saw it as a tool to share research within their field and to stay updated with science outreach and communication," says Ms Collins.

Despite the professional benefits associated with social media use, relatively few academic scientists currently use these tools. Misunderstandings of the disadvantages of social media use may contribute to their relatively limited use, which could be corrected by professional development training workshops or clearer departmental social media usage policies, she says.

Ms Collins says the results of this study add to our general understanding of the use of social media by academic scientists and act as a baseline on which to assess future trends in social media use within the science academy.


Provided by University of Otago