Social media and personal websites in science

Before Class

Listen to Season 1, Episode 4 of The Animal Behavior Podcast, in which Amy speaks with Ted Stankowich who is a passionate science communicator as well as an animal behavior researcher. Ted highlights how useful social media can be for promoting your own research, finding the research of others, and networking within relevant groups.

Find one or two examples of a scientist or lab group using media that you particularly like. This can be on any platform but if you are unsure where to start, scientists can often be found on Twitter (although we may be in the process of this changing so also consider Instagram, LinkedIn, Mastodon and Threads) and some also have links to their social media accounts on their websites. Some of these are accessible without creating an account yourself but if you would prefer not to use any of these platforms you can just look at the personal websites of scientists. Think about why you particularly like someone's posts, page or website. What stands out? Content? Design? Easy to find?
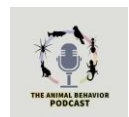
During Class

Chose a platform using the table on the next page and create your own scientific post/page/website. If you already have one of these, pick a different one to get started with or expand it using some of the suggestions below. Consider what you are aiming to achieve, where you feel comfortable and what time commitment you can make. Remember, this exercise is about your interests as a scientist so, although people often have overlaps between their personal and professional platforms, make sure what you create is distinct from your usual social media use.

If you choose to set up a website think about what pages you want to include by looking at some examples you found before class. You can even make a professional website a little personal (where appropriate). Maybe you like wildlife photography or illustration or blog writing or interpretive dance – the world is your oyster if you can make it relevant!

If you are setting up a social media account, set up a posting plan (you can even pre-schedule posts) to get yourself started. Your first post can be a great way to get some attention if you give it some time and thought! You could also think about who you want to follow. Scientists that work on topics you are interested in and your classmates are a good place to start.

If you are not so interested in pursuing a career in science or academia, LinkedIn is a great place to start. When filling out the different sections consider how skills you gained during your degree can be more widely applicable and think about the language you use. For example, data analysis and being able to use software like R is a very valuable skill even outside of science. If you have had the chance to run your own experiment yet that shows project management skills. You have almost definitely worked in a team at some point!

What?	Where?	Pros?	Cons?
A website	There are loads of great free platforms you can use to make a basic website! You also don't need to be a coding genius to do so. Have a look at WordPress, Squarespace, Weebly, google sites or GitHub and see what suits you best.	- Easy to maintain once you've made it. - Accessible – nobody needs an account to look at your site. - Very flexible – you can put whatever you want on it!	- Big commitment early on whilst designing. - Might not be easy for other people to find (unless you promote it). - You might have to pay for certain features (but you don't need to the free versions are more than enough).
Classic social media	Loads of options (I might have missed some): Twitter, Instagram, Mastodon, Threads, TikTok, YouTube.	- So many options so you can find what works for you. - Small time commitment. - Can be set up fully in an hour or two.	- Although small time commitment, you need to post (ish) regularly to keep it going. - People aren't always friendly*. - Can be exhausting – take breaks when you need them.
Professional platforms	LinkedIn, ResearchGate, Google scholar.	- Platforms like LinkedIn can be very useful if you are planning on leaving academia. - A good way for people to find your research and for you to find theirs.	- LinkedIn may not be used as much in academia (varies geographically). - ResearchGate and Google scholar only really become relevant when you start publishing research.

* Like with anything on the internet, people can be mean and there is plenty of misinformation floating around. Feeling comfortable and safe with what you put out into the world and the responses you get is the most important thing. If that means blocking people, shutting down your account, taking breaks from using social media, making your account private or reporting another account do it! That being said, most people out there are nice and friendly.