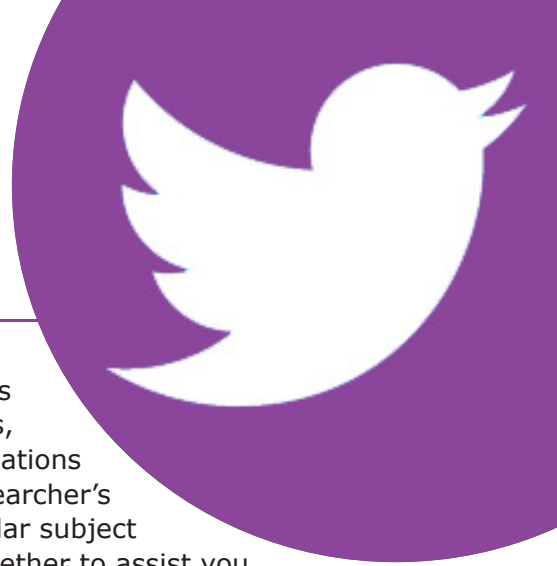


Twitter: A Whistle-Stop Guide

By Betty Paton*, April 2014

Using social media to disseminate and access development research is fast becoming the standard in mainstream organisations. Researchers, policy actors, and other potential users of research are utilising applications such as Twitter to both promote their own research, access other researcher's work and hold conversations, debates and discussions around particular subject areas. The following **practical tips and guidance** have been put together to assist you in making the most of this social media tool.



Setting up an Account:

What is Twitter?

Twitter is an **online social networking and microblogging service** that enables users to send and read "tweets", which are text messages limited to **140 characters**. You do not have to create a Twitter account to read Tweets, but you do need one to send them. Users can access Twitter through the **website, SMS, or a tablet or mobile device app**.

To create a Twitter account, go to: www.twitter.com/signup

Some important things to consider when setting up your account:

- 1. Will the account be used by multiple members of your organisational communications team?** If so, and even if not, use a generic organisation email address, rather than a personal one, so that everyone will be able to access it if needs be.
- 2. What will your "Twitter handle" be?** Your handle is the username you select and the accompanying URL (i.e. <http://twitter.com/username>) which will become your twitter profile. Choose something short, if possible, to give you more character space within your tweets, but also make it memorable and clearly linked to your organisation.
- 3. Clarity of organisational branding across all of your social media platforms, website and published materials is very important.** Twitter allows you to upload an image to your profile and it is worth taking a little time to customise your logo to fit into the specifications. You can also customise the colour and background on your profile to make them fit with your organisational brand.
- 4. Brainstorm your bio.** Your Twitter profile includes a short biography so other users can find out a little bit more about you. Space is limited, so try to come up with something short, snappy and concise. Many users add in a shortened version of their website url or links to other social media accounts here too.
- 5. Multiple accounts?** Some large organisations have multiple Twitter accounts for different departments, regions or languages. If this is something you are considering, it is even more important to make the branding across all of them coherent in style.



Commonly used Terms and Knowing the Lingo:

This [great guide on using Twitter in academic settings**](#) from the [London School of Economics and Political Science](#) Impact blog outlines all of the Twitter terminology you will need on page three. It also has detailed information on different Tweeting styles, some of which I will expand on below.

Twitter at an Organisational Level:

- Policies and Procedures

When setting up organisational social media accounts, it is important to have some policies and procedural guidelines in place for staff to follow so that everyone is on the same page when it comes to content, boundaries and etiquette.

Below are some basic rules and regulations for organisational Twitter accounts. These can be tailored to suit your own organisational needs.

- You should not disclose any confidential or proprietary information about **[the organisation]** through any social networking account. If you are unsure about whether a blog, tweet, post, comment or photo is acceptable, always consult your manager. Inform your line manager of any blogs (personal or professional) to which you regularly contribute.
- When posting as **[the organisation]**, maintain a professional tone-of-voice and manner at all times.
- **[The organisation]** encourages you to write knowledgeably, accurately, and using appropriate professionalism. Despite disclaimers, your Web interaction can result in members of the public forming opinions about your company and its employees, partners and products.
- Plagiarism applies online as well as in print. Organisational logos may not be used without written consent.
- Respect copyright laws, and always reference or cite sources appropriately.
- If you create an account on a social media site that mentions **[the organisation]** and/or our current and potential clients, employees, partners, competitors, YOU MUST identify that you are an employee of the company and that views expressed on the blog or network are your alone and do not represent the views of the company.
- You are responsible for what you write and must exercise good judgment and common sense. You should refrain from comments that can be interpreted as slurs and are demeaning, inflammatory, etc.
- You must not publish any views that are racist, or otherwise discriminatory or offensive.
- Your online presence reflects **[the organisation]**. Be aware that your actions captured via images, posts or comments can reflect that of **[the organisation]**.

Tweeting for your organisation:

Social media channels are a great way to give your organisation a front-facing voice and personality. In doing so, it is important to ensure that you maintain a consistent and appropriate tone-of-voice and style.

The [LSE Twitter Guide](#) categorises Tweeting styles into three distinct types:

- 1) **Substantive updates:** written in complete sentences, intelligible on their own, formal or corporate, primarily with url links to blogs or documents and use hashtags to link content to particular subject areas.
- 2) **Conversational Style:** More fragmented and relaxed. This style is often used far more by individuals than organisations and covers both professional and personal interests.
- 3) **A middle ground/Compromise style:** Using a blend of substantive and conversational styles - conveys personality without being too informal. Great for small Think Tanks or departments.

The LSE Twitter Guide explores the pros and cons of using all these styles at an organisational level: [Read more here**](#).

If **multiple team members** are Tweeting from one organisational account, it is vital to manage consistency across tone and style. In order to do this, write out an **organisational Tweeting style guide** outlining the style you want everyone to use (first or third person, plural or single/ I or we, etc).

Building Twitter Relationships:

Whichever style you decide suits your organisation best, it is integral to nurture some great Twitter relationships in order to maximise your impact on this platform. Start by following any institutions that have a similar background, interests and outputs to yours. Right is a list of all of the Think Tank Institutions currently on the TTI-PEC project:

To find and follow each of these institutions, simply type in their Twitter handle to the search function on Twitter and click on the green 'Follow' button on their profile.

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Public and Private Lists:

One great way to categorise Twitter profiles you are interested in is to create a list. You can do this through your profile on Twitter. Lists can be either public or private and are a great way to bring a similar group of individuals or institutions together in one stream.

The five steps to creating a list:

1. Click on 'Me' at the top left of your profile.
2. Click on 'Lists' at the bottom of the box in the top left.
3. You will then see the option to 'Create a list' under your Twitter logo on your profile.
4. Create a list (either public or private) with a title describing the category it will form.
5. To add Twitter profiles to a list, click on their profile and find the drop down menu to the right (shaped like a little cog). Here, you will find the option to add or remove it from your list.

 **AfriHeritage** @Afri_heritage
Our MISSION is to provide intellectual leadership in helping Nigeria and Africa think through the emerging economic renaissance.


 **CSEA Africa** @csea_afric
Non-profit think tank that conducts independent, high quality research on economic and development issues in Nigeria and Africa to facilitate policy making.

 **ISSER-UG** @ISSERUG
ISSER is a research wing under the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ghana and engages in a number of policy relevant research.

 **TTI-ITT** @TTI_ITT
The Think Tank Initiative is a multi-donor program dedicated to strengthening the capacity of independent policy research organizations in the developing world.

 **ESRF** @ESRFTZ
The Economic and Social Research Foundation was established in 1994 as an independent, not-for-profit institution for research and policy analysis.

 **IEAGhana** @IEAGhana
Ghana's First Public Policy Institute

 **KIPPRA** @KIPPRAKENYA
The Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis (KIPPRA) conducts objective research and analysis on public policy issues

 **Think Tank Fund** @ThinkTankFund

 **IEA Kenya** @IEAKenya
Institute of Economic Affairs is a Public Policy think tank that seeks to promote pluralism of ideas through open, active and informed public debates

 **Enrique Mendizabal** @onthinktanks
Independent research, advice and ideas on think tanks around the world. Check out new ideas: <http://onthinktanks.org/on-think-tanks-lab>

Social media management tools:

A great way of making the day-to-day maintenance of Twitter at an organisational level more efficient and easy to keep on top of is to set up a social media management tool like [HootSuite](#).

This tool allows you to:

- Stream in and manage multiple social media accounts from one central account simultaneously
- Sync Twitter, Facebook and other social media accounts together
- Schedule posts to go out at specific times across the day
- Create streams around specific tags and follow them in one central place
- Track analytics of your social media outputs through an in-built system
- Sync the social media stats with Google Analytics to generate more detailed results for particular campaigns

This can be an invaluable tool for ensuring that results for a social media campaign are tracked for stakeholder analysis and can save a lot of time and staff capacity.

Hootsuite is also an invaluable tool if you are running multiple organisational accounts, as you can manage them all in one central place.

Strategy and goals:

Try to form a basic organisational Twitter and social media strategy from the start. It doesn't have to be set in stone, and can be edited and amended as you work out what works for your team. Think about:

- How many Tweets you want to send a day (perhaps five spaced every couple of hours from 9am to 5pm)?
- How many RTs are you aiming to send each day?
- What ratio of organisational content vs external content do you want to promote (it is good to try to have at least two of those five Tweets sending traffic back to your website)?
- How many followers do you hope to gain per week?
- How many new follows will you make per week?

For information on tracking and monitoring your Twitter activities, see the previous Research to Action guide:

[Practical tips and guidance on monitoring your Twitter activity***](#), available on R2A.

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**<http://bit.ly/1hEfjrw>

***<http://bit.ly/1j4mEjR>

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