

Enhancing professional networking and engagement using social media

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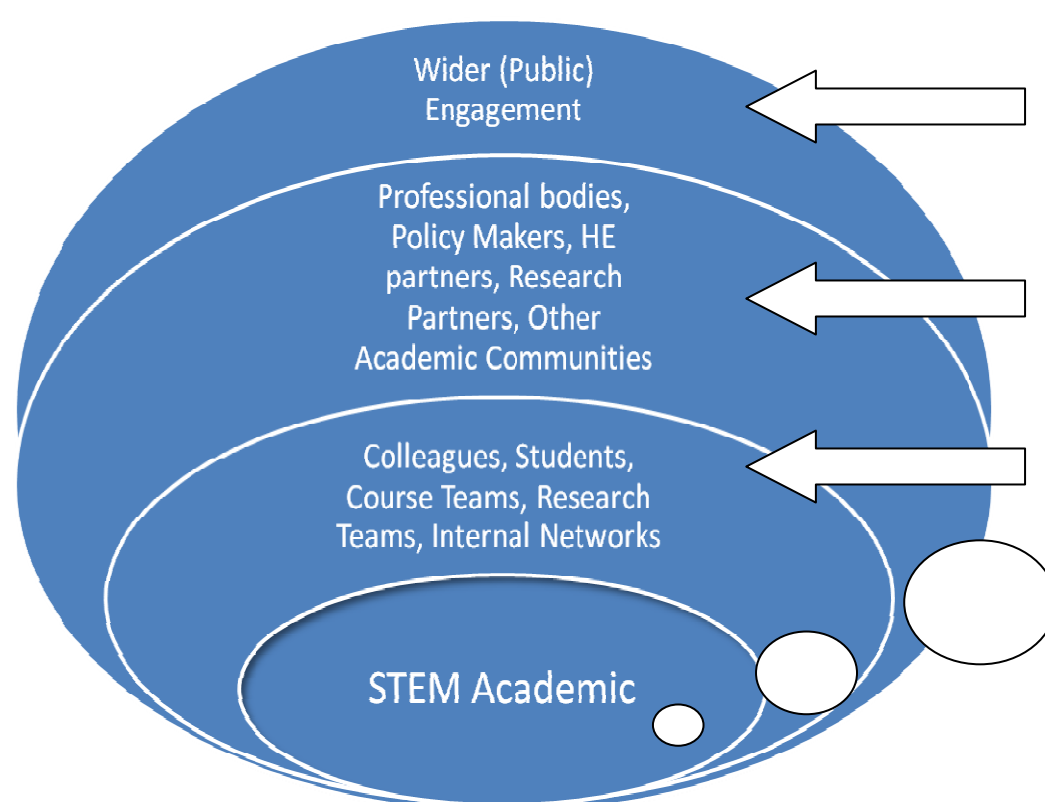
An investigation into how STEM academics are using social media to engage with their existing professional networks and extended communities, and explore ways to support those who want to use these tools more effectively.

Project aims

- To investigate how social media is currently used by STEM academics to engage with existing formal and informal networks;
- To investigate how social media is currently used by STEM academics to extend the boundaries of these networks to engage with broader communities;
- To understand the drivers for, and barriers against, social networking and maintaining professional identities online;
- To support STEM academics in the development of online professional identities and the use of social media to engage with different user communities.

In addition:

- Are there gendered differences in styles and levels of engagement?
- Are there differences across STEM disciplines in styles and levels of engagement?
- What is the impact of these differences?



Phase I: Exploration

- Literature review: STEM engagement, digital scholarship, applications of social media and professional identity management.
- Initial discussions with OU staff active in these areas.
- Clarify the key issues and refine the project aims.

Phase II: Data collection and analysis

- Interviews with STEM academics at UK institutions to explore the current position of social media in their networking activities:
 - Are these tools enabling them to create an online professional identity?
 - Are these tools enabling them to reach extended groups of people, outside of their usual networks?
 - What are people doing and what works?
 - What are people's fears and inhibitions about social media and wider engagement?
- Study interviewees' online professional identities:
 - online connections,
 - public conversations,
 - posts, 'tweets' etc.

Phase III: Dissemination

- Conference papers, journal papers and eSTEeM reports.
- Workshop to support staff in raising and developing their impact/engagement levels through the use of social media.

