Taking astronomy beyond the doorstep of social media

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Community and Outreach Support
Education and Public Outreach Department
European Southern Observatory
You: @ESO_astronomy What questions does this talk try 2 answer? #AstroComm
What are social media?
What are social media?

- They are media for social interaction, using (...) web-based technologies to transform and broadcast media monologues into social media dialogues.

- They support the democratization of knowledge and information and transform people from content consumers to content producers*

* Wikipedia
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The power of one – Target groups become targeted individuals

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Why should we care about social media?
Why should we care about social media?

- Because our target cares about, uses and likes social media.
Why should we care about social media?

- 6 out of the top 10 countries in the world using social media are ESO Member States and 2 are potential Member States.

- Of the 5 most active blog countries in the world, 3 are ESO Member States.

- 24 out of the 25 largest newspapers are experiencing record declines in circulation because we no longer search for the news. The news finds us.

- 25% of search results for the world top-20 largest brands are links to user-generated content, which proves that
  - embracing the social media channels is a search engine optimisation tool that can generate traffic on our websites
  - partnerships with the communities is becoming increasingly important.

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Why should we care about social media?

- They are free platforms open to everyone and easily accessible 24/7 via mobile.

- They are extremely popular networks in terms of users and generated content, among the most visited websites in terms of time spent and no. of hits.

- They have the potential of reaching more people than any other traditional media.

- They allow individuals to become opinion leaders as user-generated content becomes news, recommendations, complaints.

- They are spreading. The time to reach 50 million users that media channels needed were: radio – 38 years, TV – 13 years, Internet – 4 years, Facebook – 9 months!

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Social media are happening. With or without us – We might as well have a word to say

Key Point 2

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How can we use social media to communicate astronomy?
Steps in defining the social media strategy for ESO

1. Like with every communication strategy, it all started with defining the objectives
   - Interact with people and make them discover and love our brand thanks to our activity
   - Bring astronomy to people in a friendly and easy digestible manner
   - Redirect people to our website in order to find out more

2. Once that was defined, we had to find our social media channels.

THE BAD NEWS IS…

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THERE ARE SO MANY!

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How can we use social media?

ESO social media plan

THE GOOD NEWS IS…

3. We only had to choose a few.
   - The mix we chose to focus on: Twitter, Facebook, Flickr, YouTube

4. Before anything else: we are listening and

5. Joining in others’ conversations

6. We will then start our own conversations, meant to build relationships with our community

7. We will have a consistent presence, by sharing news, images and videos engaging in conversations, organise tweetups and contests, developing a network of Tweetbassadors (people who become ESO ambassadors on Twitter) and thanking all those who support us in bringing astronomy to people

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Facebook wall with our friends comments

Social media bar on our website

Twitter account with RT of other messages

ESO_Observatory

Facebook Astronomy

ESO is the foremost Intergovernmental astronomy organisation in Europe and the world’s most productive astronomical observatory. It operates three sites in Chile, on behalf of its fourteen member states.
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YouTube channel with ESOcasts

Share button for people to easily spread the news with their friends
Social Media *are not* rocket science, but easy and natural interactions – You can (must) act like you do with friends in real life

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Some case studies
What happened before when there were Solar Eclipses and you were not there?
- You waited for after event movies and pictures, maybe some live transmission on TV, if they found it interesting enough

What happens today?
- Let’s look at what was happening while I was preparing this presentation (July 12, starting 20:00 local time)
A tweet alerts me that the eclipse has started

you can clearly see now...#solareclipse (@clavius live at http://ustream/jd84)

I follow the link and arrive at the web stream...

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Live video of Solar Eclipse with explanations

Chat room where I can connect simply with my Twitter account. I can now talk and share impressions

My message is seen by all participants (2000 at this point), but also by all my friends who are encouraged to join the stream channel…

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Messages I post in the web stream chat are automatically appearing on my Facebook.

My friends comment and like my post, joining in the chat and spread the news to their friends as well.

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In the time it took us to arrive at this slide, there were already 6000 participants.

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As part of IYA2009, the Newbury Astronomical Society (@VirtualAstro) had the fantastic idea of gathering people over Twitter to watch… the Moon at #MoonWatch

Members of Newbury AS organised telescopes and CCD cameras to allow them to live-tweet images of the Moon and Saturn (…) along with a list of astro-twitters who were ready to answer questions and direct people to interesting objects in the sky.*

Later on, they repeated the story with meteor showers, which anyone could report at #MeteorWatch

*www.astronomy2009.co.uk

#Facts: @VirtualAstro has 6.728 followers and it sent 16,385 tweets
More than 10 000 people participated in #Meteorwatch, making this one of the biggest mass-participation events of IYA2009. On both nights of the meteor shower this was by far the most-discussed thing on the Twitter network anywhere in the world!

P.S. Solar Eclipse web stream has now 8000 viewers
ESA did a similar live web cast from the media event in ESA/ESOC covering Rosetta's flyby of asteroid 21 Lutetia.

Journalists and individuals alike all around the world could attend the live event, which meant that people had access to news instantly.

Tweets with images and opinions started flooding the tweeuniverse, spreading the news.

#Facts: @esa has 7.169 followers and it sent 1.317 tweets
ESA web cast of Lutetia flyby

Connection via Facebook, Twitter etc.

Live chat

Highlighted videos

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Twitter search for “Lutetia” turned back countless tweets from individuals, journalists, other institutions etc.

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And this is what actually talking to people means…

**LUTETIA IN THE LIGHT**
A really nice way to end our Lutetia fly-by coverage! Stuart Atkinson, one of our regular blog visitors, runs his own excellent science & astronomy outreach efforts in the UK (visit his site: Cumbrian Skies). Stuart’s sent in a poem this morning in celebration of Rosetta’s fabulous results of yesterday. Thanks Stuart! -- Daniel

For all these years you were merely
A smear of light through our telescopes
On the clearest, coldest night; a hint
Of a glint, just a few pixels wide
On even your most perfectly-framed portraits.
But now, now we see you!
Swimming out of the dark - a great
Stone snark, your star-tanned skin pitted
And pecked, scarred after aeons of drifting
Silently through the endless ocean of space.
Here on Earth our faces lit up as we saw
You clearly for the first time; eyes wide
With wonder we traced the strangely familiar
Grooves raked across your sides,
Wondering if Rosetta had doubled back to Mars
And raced past Photos by mistake –

Then you were gone, fading back into the black,
Not to be seen by human eyes again for a thousand
Blue Moons or more. But we know you now,
We know you; you’ll never be just a speck of light again.

**mars_stu** Thanks @esa for using my #Lutetia astropoem

http://webservices.esa.int/blog/post/5/1248

17 minutes ago via web

**mars_stu** Cumbrian Sky looks back at the #Lutetia encounter: http://cumbriansky.wordpress.com/2010/07/11/behind-lutetia

about 11 hours ago via web

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NASA has developed an entire page dedicated to connecting via social media, called the NASA Buzz Room.

From all the activities NASA does in this direction, one that is very engaging is represented by Tweet-ups.

A Tweetup is an informal meeting of people who use the social messaging medium Twitter. NASA Tweetups provide @NASA followers with the opportunity to go behind-the-scenes at NASA facilities and events and speak with scientists, engineers, astronauts and managers. NASA Tweetups range from two hours to two days in length and include a “meet and greet” session to allow participants to mingle with fellow Tweeps and the people behind NASA's Twitter feeds.

#Facts: @NASA has 466.171 followers and it sent 9.046 tweets

*NASA web page
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Astronauts on Twitter do not send only space news but connect with people naturally. Here’s Astro_Jose talking in Spanish about a cartoon.

While the eclipse was starting, Astro_Soichi (ISS) was tweeting a satellite image from Spain, which is getting ready for the World Cup.

Earlier, even NASA official account RT (ReTweets) the message to its friends.

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Social Media *can talk about* rocket science, easily and naturally – You just have to go beyond their doorstep and make friends.
D @You So, 2 answer ur question, this talk tried 2 give...

- a definition of social media, stressing that target groups become targeted individuals

- a reason why social media should be considered, considering the fact that online conversation is happening whether we like it or not, so we might as well have a word to say

- some directions on how social media can be used, stating that handling them *is not* rocket science, but as easy and natural as every day interactions with friends

- a few case studies of successful uses of social media, pointing out that social media *can talk about* rocket science easily and naturally

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Thank you

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Moving from talk to conversation…

Here are a few opinions of Twitter users: ESA, Astroengine and Ksastro.

For joining the conversation, please visit: http://astrocomm.tweetwally.com/

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Why tweet?

@esa organisation seen as open, approachable and modern, and increases perception as one-stop shop for space

@esa can provide fast, efficient, low-cost coverage of an event - launch or conf - quick updates, prog changes, in few words, direct to right people

@ksastro Twitter allows large organizations to connect with the individual (with not much work). and update the world on their latest news.

@ksastro It creates a platform for everyone to connect and feel as though they are a part of the work/organization

@ksastro Twitter brings the organization into ones house, and makes it personal.

@ksastro according to a late report by the NASA PIO's they have gained over 700,000+ views to their site (per month) thanks to twitter!

@astroengine Community. Twitter is an instant, real-time way for people in the same research field to connect with you and your contacts. As time goes on, you find that you will make connections through friends with research centers you wouldn't have otherwise met in the "real world."

@astroengine Promotion. Although you don't want to spam everyone with your institution's latest and greatest research all the time, Twitter is a great way to update your community about the next big thing. Also, you will probably have science journalists following you, so you never know what connections you've made until you get contacted by one of the big news outlets. Never underestimate your followers!

@astroengine Service. Tweeting about other research in other institutions is another way to provide a service to your followers and connect with other institutions. Cross-PIO promotion/interaction is a great way to earn respect with other research groups.
How to tweet?

@esa friendly, informal voice, share the excitement, invite participation, surprise and amaze, always edit the tweet to twitter style

@esa wow factor, what’s new, interesting, weird, funny, original - esp great images and videos

@esa be generous - share and participate, answer questions, don’t just broadcast, pass on others’ great news

@esa Use RTs as your guide - no RTs = zero interest

@kastro People follow those who put time into their tweets, rather than the robotic updates (via RSS feeds, codecs, etc.)

@kastro People like to see the latest images, and "behind the scenes" of the organizations they follow.

@kastro Thousands of people view theses photos just because it shows them the work perspective of the agency and makes them feel more a part of it.

@astroengine Accuracy. Every tweet should be accurate. To become a trusted resource, this is an obvious attribute.

@astroengine Personality. Twitter followers love to follow science Twitter accounts that express a personality. This doesn't mean you have to tweet everything you do, but express opinions and views on your expert topic. But be careful about becoming unprofessional -- tweet as if you’re writing a professional blog.

@astroengine Be concise. This comes with practice, but 140 characters is more than enough space to get your point across. Link to relevant sources when possible.
How NOT to tweet?

@esa broadcasting corporate, bureaucratic messages (no RTs)

@esa overuse of automatic feeds, esp timeset ones that release 5 or 6 at once and bombard the audience

@esa trying to control or dominate the audience or taking a defensive attitude

@ksastro As for what can go wrong, there really isn't anything! Twitter is an open platform

@astroengine Public debates. Sometimes people get nasty on Twitter or they say something they don't mean. Don't get into a public argument or heated debate -- send the offending Twitter user a direct message and argue away from the public eye.

@astroengine Not responding to followers. If you're asked a question, try to reply (if you have time). Doing this enriches your community and gives your institution a better public face. Twitter accounts that just tweet without interacting soon become boring.

@astroengine Be aware of what's going on. Twitter is a fabulous resource for getting the scoop on brand new research. Follow valuable Twitter users and spend some time following what they are saying. Make Twitter useful to you! Often, many science accounts get so wrapped up in their own stuff, they miss valuable (and sometimes obvious) tips about what's going on in the rest of the world.