Science Communication in the Digital Era

Personal Branding for Scientists: findability and discoverability

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Italiadomani

What will we cover:

- Should I be on social media as a researcher?
- Discoverability vs Findability
- What platforms should I be on and why?
- Best practices for social media
- What is personal branding?
- Understanding what is your personal brand
- Map the social conversation in your field (social listening)
- Learn to pitch yourself

Do I have any choice?

Why communicate science on social media?

Among researchers

- Networking
- Grant and funding agencies
- Make yourself reachable and findable
- Create communities
- Share your point of view beyond what's publishable

With the wider public

- Make yourself discoverable
- Reach stakeholders and policy-makers
- Build a your own 'brand'
- It can be fun sometimes when it's not a nightmare

Value of social media for research purposes

1. 44% | Connecting with peers in **research community**
2. 43% | **Promoting** research
3. 41% | Building **awareness** of topic adjacent to interest
4. 39% | Learning about **developments** in the research ecosystem
5. 37% | **Discovering** new research

- https://www.wiley.com/en-us/network/trending-stories/state-of-social-media-for-researchers-2024

Not that different after all

1. 49,5% | Keeping in touch with **friends and family**
2. 38,5% | Filling **spare time**
3. 34,2% | Reading **news** stories
4. 30,2% | Finding **content** (e.g. articles, videos)
5. 28,7% | Seeing what's **being talked about**

- Digital 2024: Global Overview Report — DataReportal – Global Digital Insights

Being visible on the internet

Discoverability

- Serendipitous, feed based visibility
- Strongly algorithmic
- Time-sensitive results

Findability

- Intent-based
- ‘brand searchability’
- Traditionally SEO/Web dependent, socials becoming more relevant over time
- Reputation proxy
- Builds over time

Why communicate science on social media?

Discoverability:

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Best practices for social media?

Every social media has its own rules, goals, styles and - above all – algorithms.

To get the best out of it, every social media needs its own strategy. You can't publish the same content on multiple platforms. This is becoming less true over time as platform copy features from each other and slowly homogenize to try to keep people on multiple platforms without requiring more effort, but it’s still often still important.

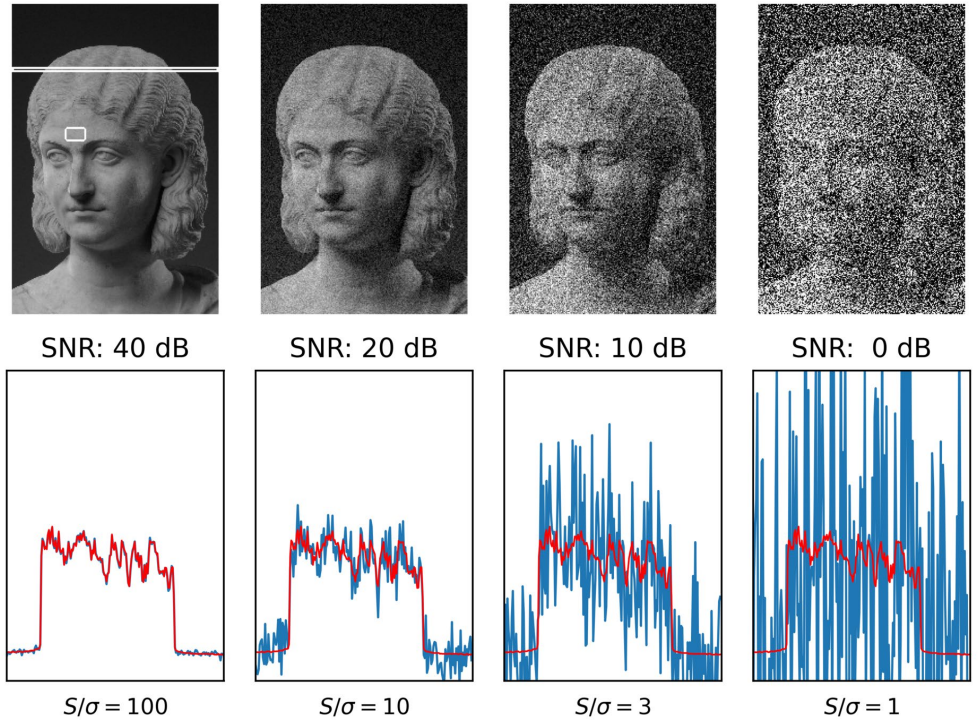
Most social media advice is trash: the signal and the noise

Social media “gurus” often overcomplicate and ritualize advice.

“What’s the best time to post content?”
When your audience is online. Yes, it’s that obvious.

“Do certain topics or words or things get me penalized?”
Sometimes. But algorithms change constantly, and platforms don’t publish blacklists. Unless you’re often talking about controversial topics, it probably doesn’t have a significant impact.

Creators often try to chase ‘visibility hacks’ but most of the times it’s just people mistaking noise for signals



Signal to noise ratio – Dtrx Wikimedia Commons

Most social media advice is trash, part 2: expiration date

Most social media tips often don't age well because they are:

- Very time-sensitive: platform behavior and user trends shift rapidly
- Based on opaque algos and datasets, sometimes even individualized
- Misaligned with your goals: they're usually from and for people doing marketing in much more of a strict and straightforward way

Product expiry – Pexels.com

Modus in rebus

Being on social media takes time, and has an opportunity cost.

Sometimes less is more. Being on multiple platforms is much less important than it was just a couple years ago.

For the past 10 years or so having a strong web/social presence has been a career advantage. But it might change.

Photo by JESHOOTS.com [Pexels]

Instagram

You can:

- Have a private, public personal profile or use the creator mode

As a user you can

- publish posts (images with captions), reels (videos) or stories.
- Follow and interact with people or pages you are interested in
- Go live

Photo by Pixabay [Pexels]

Instagram | What do we know about the algorithm

- Instagram rewards **recent** interactions (follow, comment, like, dm other people's content, send dm, reply to comments and dm).
- How recent is the interaction weights more than on other platforms; there is a strong bias towards novelty
- Is currently trying to not become irrelevant due to the rise of Tiktok so Meta for the last few years has been trying to algorithmically favour Reels (short vertical videos)

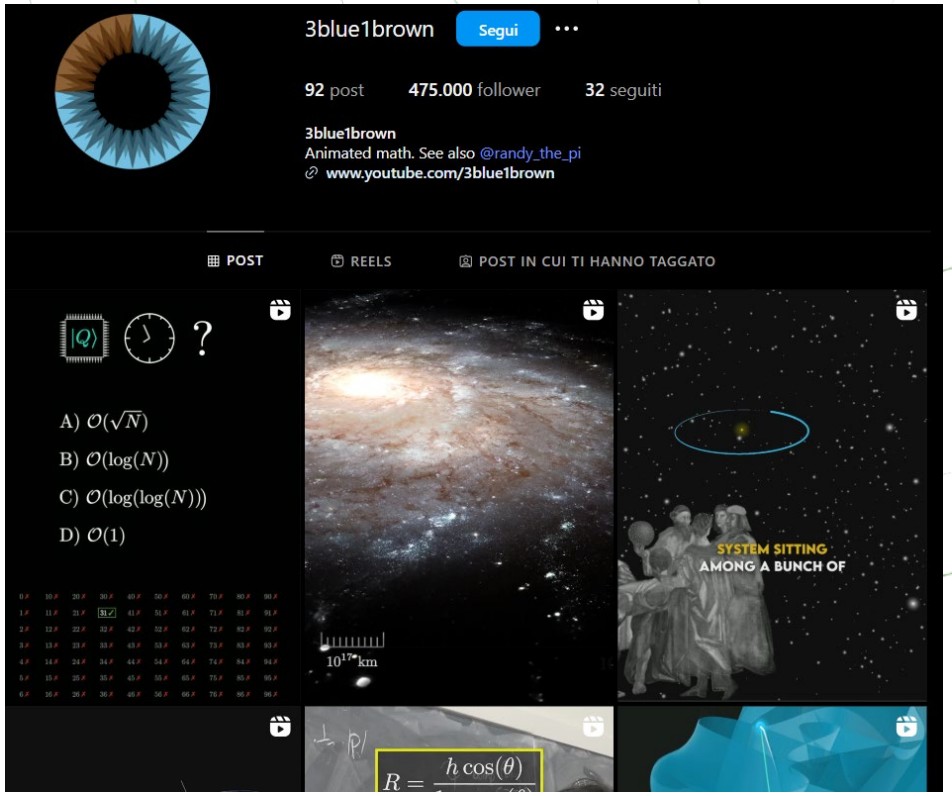
Instagram | Does it make sense for you?

Yes, if:

- You're in a field that can use strong visuals (graphs, animations, illustrations) or you care about sharing experiences or slice of life content especially in video format.

No, if:

- You care mostly about career development and professional networking, or you aim for deeper discussions and technical explanation.



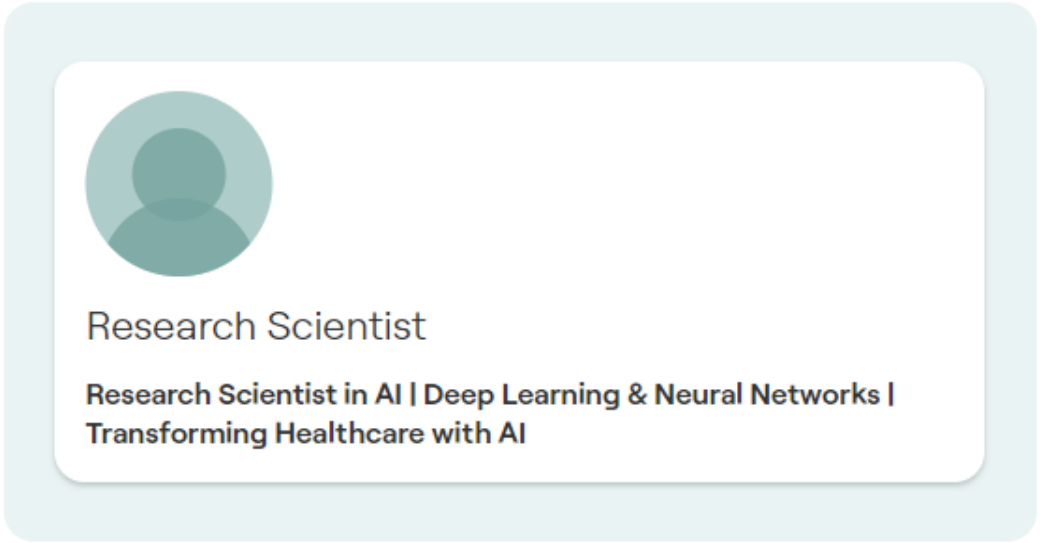
@3Blue1Brown on Instagram

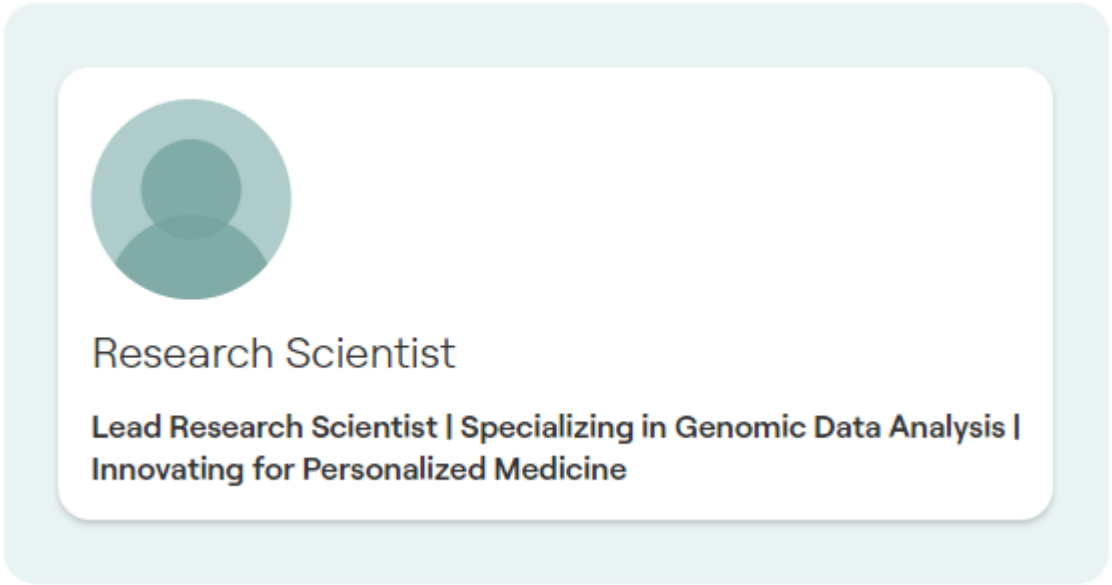
LinkedIn

- Personal **profile** and public **page**
- **Groups** (join, create, moderate)
- Professional networking platform
- Owned by Microsoft

LinkedIn | Set up your headline

- Experience and Projects
- Skills and Endorsements
- Recommendations and Accomplishments
- Education and Continuous Learning





What does Linkedin Like?

Tina Miller

Innovative Research Scientist in Renewable Energy Technologies

About

I am an ambitious Research Scientist with a passion for sustainable energy solutions and a Ph.D. in Materials Science. Over the past 7 years, my focus has been on developing advanced materials for solar energy conversion, striving to make renewable energy more accessible and efficient.

My approach combines a deep theoretical understanding of material properties with practical experimentation, leading to the creation of high-performance solar cells and energy storage systems. I pride myself on my ability to translate complex scientific concepts into real-world applications that can have a positive impact on the environment.

Leadership in research for me means not only guiding projects to success but also fostering a culture of innovation and resilience. I have successfully secured funding through grants and partnerships, and my findings have been featured in top-tier scientific journals. I am also an advocate for science communication, actively participating in outreach programs to educate the public on the importance of renewable energy technologies.

Tina Miller

Driven Research Scientist with a Specialization in Biomedical Sciences

About

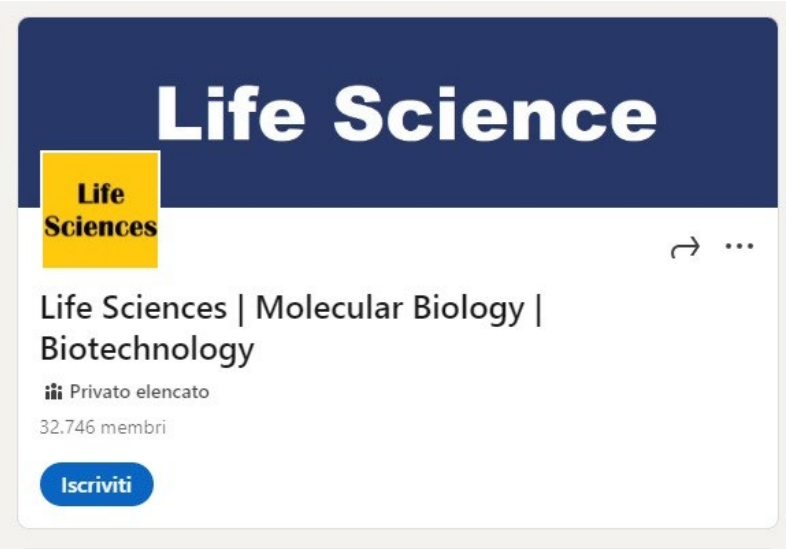
As a dedicated Research Scientist with over 12 years of experience in the biomedical field, my career is defined by a relentless pursuit of knowledge and the development of innovative healthcare solutions. With a strong foundation in molecular biology and genetics, I have contributed to groundbreaking research that has advanced our understanding of complex diseases.

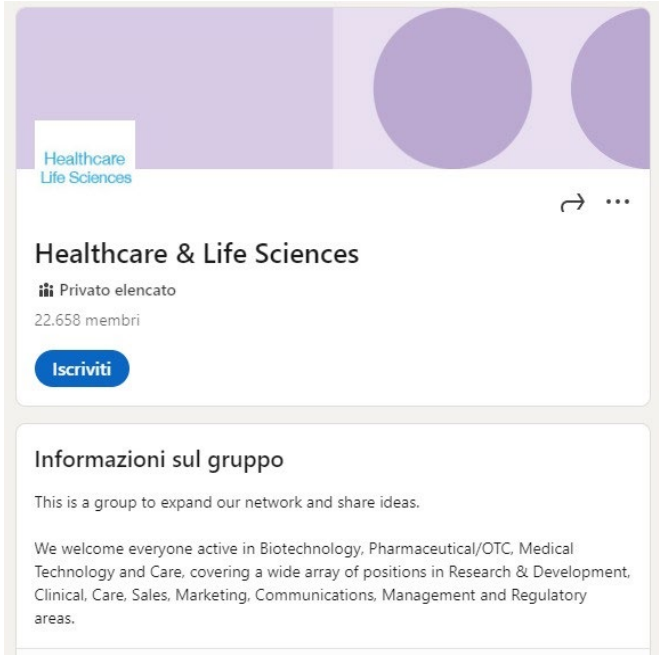
My expertise lies in designing and conducting experiments that lead to significant scientific discoveries. I am adept at using cutting-edge technologies and bioinformatics tools to analyze data and interpret results. My work has resulted in multiple peer-reviewed publications and has been instrumental in the development of new diagnostic tools and therapies.

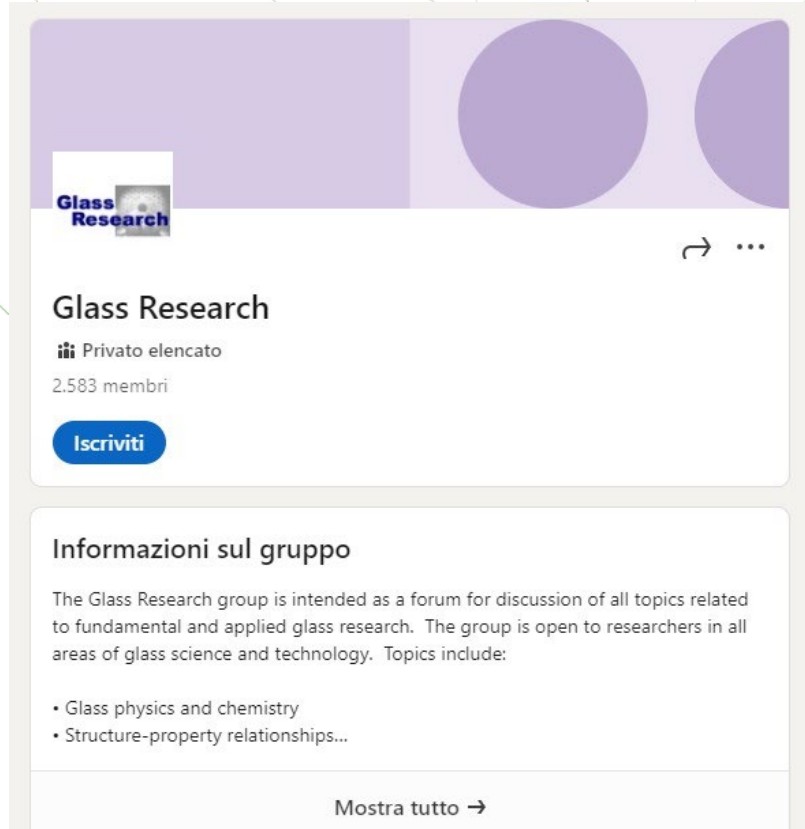
In my current role, I lead a dynamic team of researchers, fostering an environment of collaboration and intellectual curiosity. I am committed to mentoring the next generation of scientists and believe in the power of interdisciplinary research to solve health challenges. I actively engage with the scientific community through conferences and collaborative projects, staying at the forefront of biomedical innovation.

LinkedIn | Engage

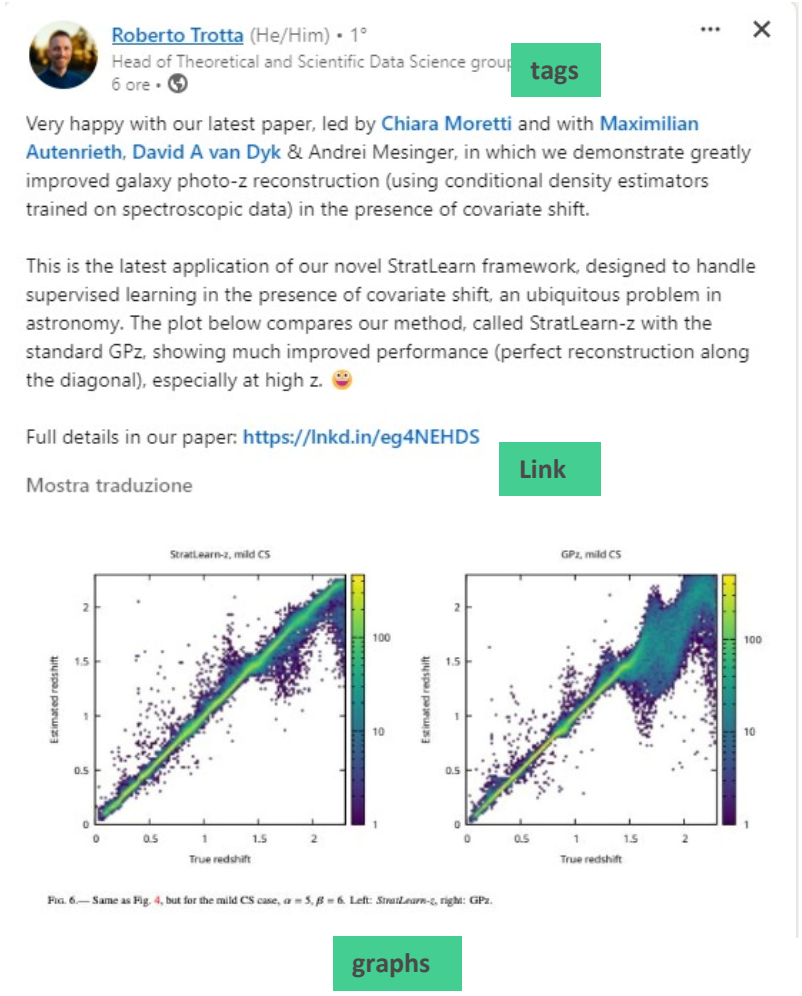
- Connections
- Comment, cite, groups

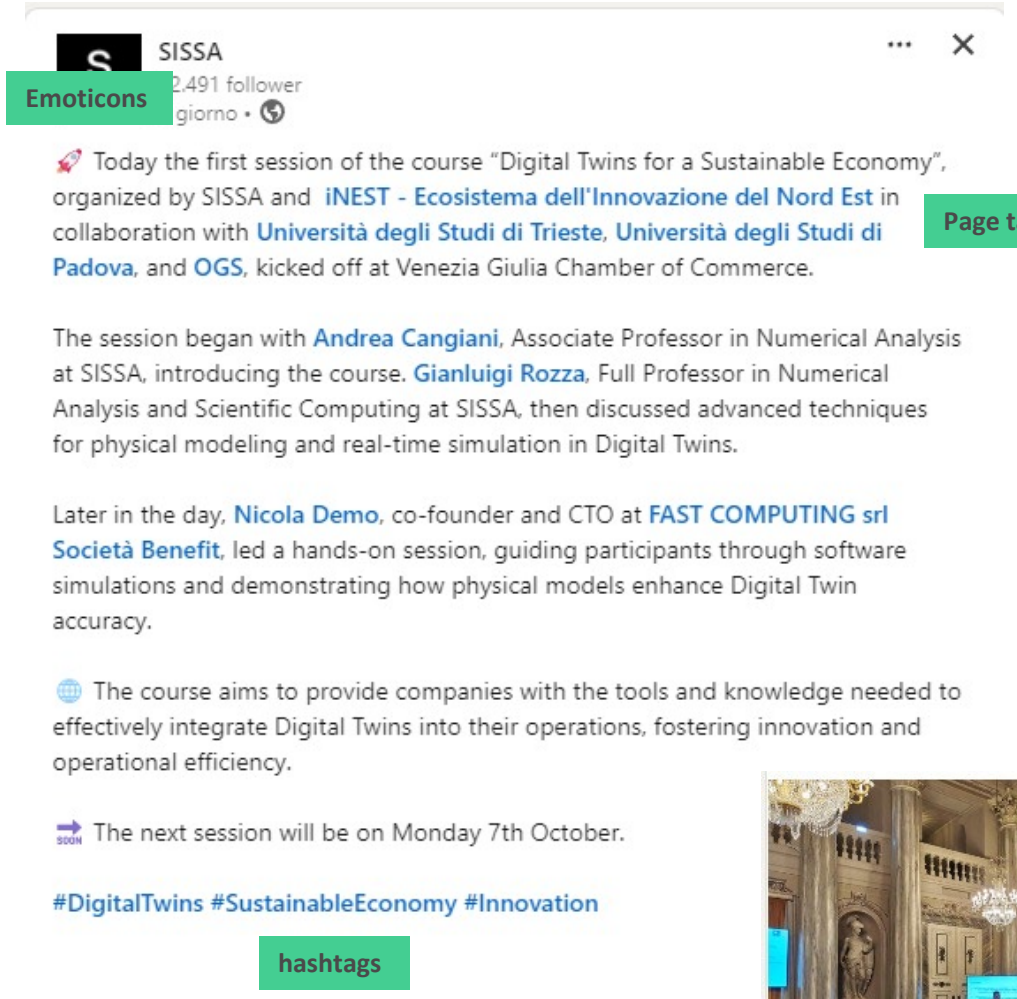


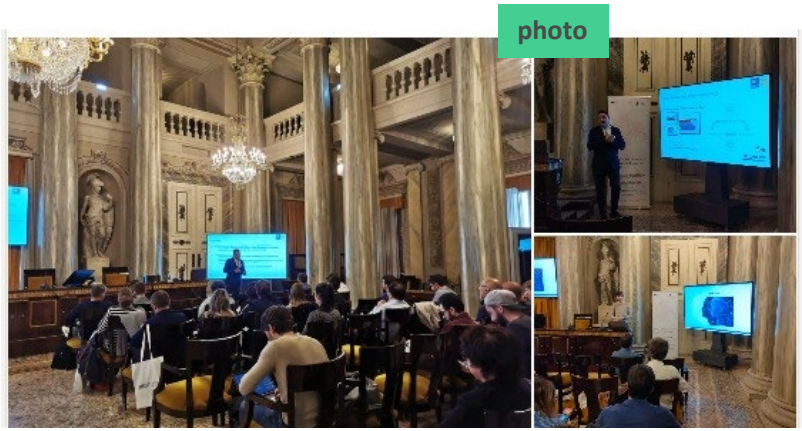




LinkedIn | Anatomy of a post







LinkedIn | Does it make sense for you?

Yes, if:

- You want to connect with researchers, academics, and industry professionals
- You share milestones, publications, or event participation
- You plan of getting out of academia

It’s basically mandatory if you don’t have a personal webpage. The value is in connection and presentation, not content.

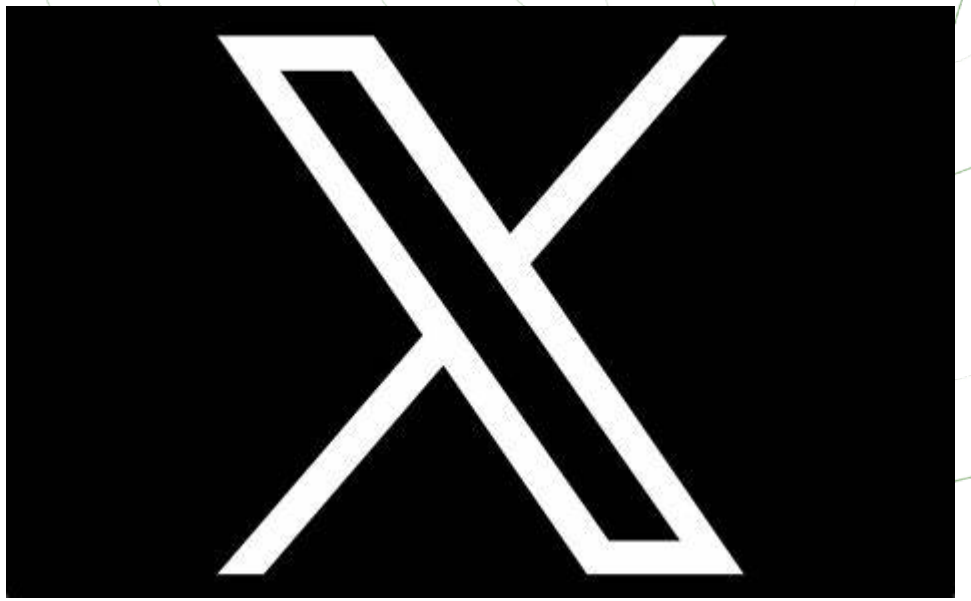
No, if:

- You’re not ready to shape a public-facing professional identity
- You want to do science popularization in a non tech-driven field

@Terence Tao has a basically empty LinkedIn Page last updated in like 2012. But you’re not Terence Tao.

Twitter/X

- 280 characters for non paying users (but you can thread)
- You can mention other people, comment their tweet, post photo, video or link
- Use hashtags to track topics (one or two, not too many)
- Recent strong push for video
- A terrible place for most things but sadly still kind of relevant for newsworthy stuff



Twitter/X | What kind of content

Frequent and fast:

- High volume, regular posts keep accounts visible
- Threads still work, but single strong posts perform better

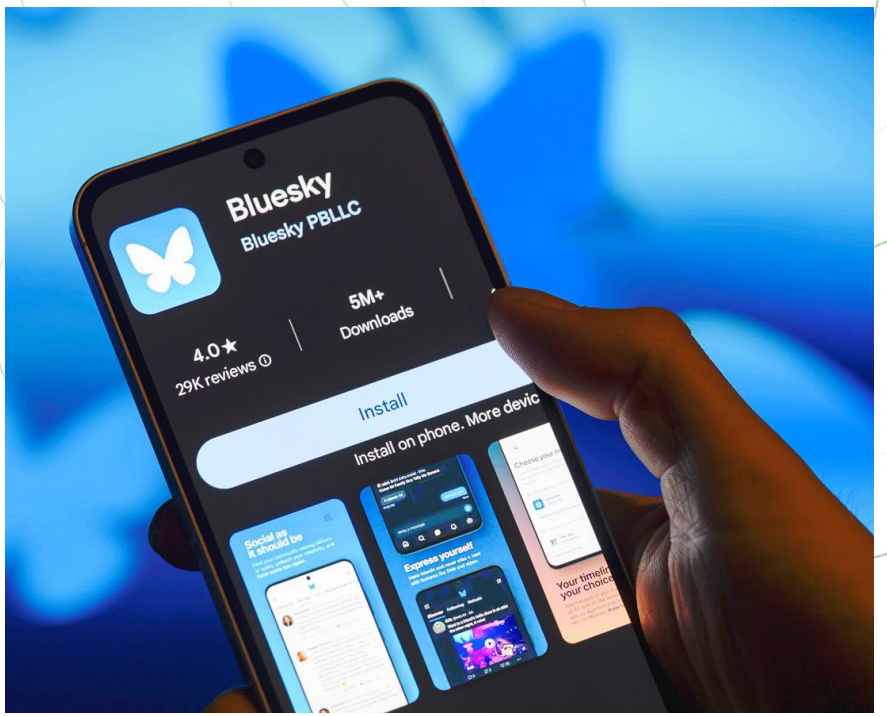
Personal and opinionated:

- Posts with voice or stance get more interaction
- Sharing thoughts on academia, teaching, or your research process builds a following

You can use Twitter/X for quick ideas, links to papers, preprints, event updates, light commentary and quick networking.

But what about Bluesky?

- No algorithm pushing trends, so you have to have genuine insight or actually be funny to get attention
- Still requires very frequent posting
- Replies, questions, and dialogue are the most viable way for self promotion, so it has genuine networking potential
- Lots of academics in the US moved to Bluesky, but there is still very little adoption in most communities. Depending on your specific research area, it could be a good place to think out loud and discuss papers.



Academia.edu

- Biggest Academical SM, but mostly humanities
- Share your papers and affiliation
- Connect with scholars and follow them
- Download papers

Over 265 million registered users [January 2024]

Founded in 2008

ResearchGate.net

- More STEM focused, but still not a lot of mathematicians
- Used to share preprints, ask/answer technical questions
- Some researchers use it as an informal paper archive but licensing is weird
- Still not a substitute for arXiv or actual archives
- Kinda spammy
- You might be on it even without having a profile

Over 25 million registered users [January 2024]

Founded in 2008, owned by Wiley

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Andriy Polishchuk's scientific contributions

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You probably need a personal website

Still the most professional, flexible tool to make yourself findable.

Why you need one:

- Central, stable place to link your papers, CV, talks, teaching, contact
- Helps people find and cite your work without platform friction (findability)
- Allows you to “control the narrative”
- Works across disciplines, institutions, and time
- It’s okay if you update it sporadically, most people do. A well maintained personal website signals academic credibility

But what should I have on my website?

What to include:

- **A short bio** (twitter-link who you are and what you work on), and a more expanded **about me (3-4) paragraphs**
- **Your CV** (PDF and/or clean HTML version)
- **Publications** (with links to preprints, DOIs, or PDFs)
- **Talks, teaching** materials, everything that makes you look like people think you say stuff worth listening to
- **Contact info** (email or contact form)
- A link to **your GitHub** if you write code
- A few photos (professional but simple)

Depending on how tech-savvy you are you can build anything from a single page no-code website with Notion to a WordPress blog to a simple tech stack with Github Pages. In most cases you won't need much more than a couple days of effort.

What is personal branding?

- Personal branding is the **intentional**, **strategic** practice of defining and expressing your **value**.

What does that even mean in practice.

- The definition sounds like something from a LinkedIn coach trying to sell a course, but in practice it's basically 3 things:

- Clarity and consistency about who you are (intentionality)
- Knowing what you care about and what you're looking for (strategy)
- Assessing what you have to offer and how to pitch yourself and your work to others (value)

No, but like, really, what does it mean in practice

For an early career researcher, it means to making it easier for others to know at a glance:

- What kind of research problem you work on
- What you care about (research interests but also relevant values & communities)
- What kind of opportunities you're open to (collaborations, teaching, applied work)
- What makes you stand out from the other people in your field. Not necessarily what makes you *better*, just different enough to be worth remembering.

Best practices for personal branding:

- Have a clean, coordinated online presence, with connections between all your “hubs”
- Don’t try to be everywhere with a bunch of abandoned pages, but choose a social media platform that makes sense to you to be active on in a professional sense
- Use the same name, photo, and short bio across platforms; even a color palette or a visual style if you wanna be extra fancy
- Create a two sentence “elevator pitch” for your research interests and use it consistently, to the point that even search engines start to pick them up
- Let your real voice and interests come through, be authentic, don’t sound like ChatGPT

Your Google CV: what shows up when someone looks for you online – and what should?

- Search your name (or name + your institution if you have a common name) on Google in incognito mode.
- What shows up? Pages, papers, social media profiles?
- Does it actually reflect what you care about?
- What doesn't show up that should and what do you wish showed up instead?

When you Google your username and there's more than one result:

Build your platform map: where should you show up?

Step 1: Find your focus

- Identify the objective for your online presence (es. increase visibility, connect with peers, influence policy, or engage the public.) Make it a single sentence.

- List your target audiences (Scientists in your field, journalists, educators, funders, or specific communities affected by your research.)

Build your platform map: where should you show up?

Step 2: Social Listening

Research hashtags and keywords: Search for 3–5 hashtags relevant to your field (e.g., #ClimateScience, #CRISPR, #RareDiseases). In most cases you will need an account on the platform to do that, so start where you already have an account.

Look for trending discussions: Explore recent posts or threads using those hashtags on platforms like X (Twitter), LinkedIn, Instagram.

Identify frequent topics, debates, and less obvious hashtags connected to your initial guesses. Take notes.

Build your platform map: where should you show up?

Step 3: Identify the loudest vs the most significant voices

- Look up top accounts posting in your field's hashtags — who gets the most engagement? Are they experts, institution, journalists, activists?

- Try to look up people who, based on your knowledge, have significant expertise: are they on the platform? If so, what do they post?

- What's the general tone of the most popular and/or most recent posts? Is a specific content format particularly common?

Build your platform map: where should you show up?

Step 4: Pick your opportunities

Synthesize the various bits of information you've gathered in a simple table: note the most significant hashtags, influential people or accounts, key topics being discussed, and the tone of conversations (e.g., supportive, skeptical, polarized).

Then, identify **opportunities** for yourself:
Where could you join ongoing discussions for networking purposes?
Where are there gaps you could fill with your expertise? How broad or specific?

THANKS!

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