

ECSA social media policy

Introduction

This document provides an overview of ECSA's social media activity and guidelines on how to use social media effectively. While largely for ECSA staff, we are making it publicly available as a guide to our members who may want us to share their news and activities via our social media channels.

The main objective for all social media activity should closely mirror that of the organization:

“To encourage the growth of the citizen science movement in Europe in order to enhance the participation of the general public in scientific processes, mainly by initiating and supporting citizen science projects as well as performing research on citizen science.”

In short, our social media activity should focus on promoting citizen science activities: sharing opportunities, news and ideas related to citizen science, from our members and elsewhere. Beyond this, our aims are to:

- make ECSA more visible
- get people involved with ECSA and build our follower base
- promote ECSA's activities and achievements.

Approach

There are a number of issues to consider when using ECSA's social media channels.

Who can post material on social media?

As ECSA has a relatively small team (currently six part-time staff), we do not have a full-time person responsible for managing our social media output. Therefore, the best approach is for all ECSA staff to have access to our social media channels. This has certain advantages:

- It means that a wider range of views and interests are represented, and therefore should be featured, for example, different branches of science (biology, astronomy etc.).
- It means our social media presence reflects the diversity in the team (e.g. gender, age group, location, background).
- It shares the workload across the team, meaning it is not one person's responsibility to find the time among their other tasks.
- It represents the knowledge or experience of the person attending a specific event that is being tweeted about or sharing a specific document (e.g. relevant publications or project milestones).

There are risks with this approach, though:

- People do not add content if it is not their main role, seeing it as ‘someone else’s job’ and leading to static and underused social media accounts.
- There is inconsistency in the messages and ‘voice’ we use in our social media posts.

To minimize these risks, we will adopt the following processes:

- The communications and community officer should take overall responsibility for all social media channels, checking at least once a week what has been posted (if anything) - and encourage posts by other team members if nothing has been posted (at times, asking specific colleagues to post something).
- If the ECSA team should grow much larger (i.e. 10 or more people) we should review how many people have access to our social media channels.
- All passwords will be changed when a team member leaves, for security reasons.
- Every team member needs to be familiar with the social media ‘voice’ guidelines for ECSA, and use these when posting. Generally, this should be:
 - friendly in tone, but not overly matey or informal
 - enthusiastic - we are the champions of citizen science, after all!
 - polite, but not too formal (i.e. no swearing, but no need for Sir and Madam etc).
 - professionally written, i.e. no lolz, #bantz, excessive PUNCTUATION!!!
- Emoticons are fine to use, and help to convey emotion, but they should not be overused - and as a complement, not a replacement, for actual words!

What should we post?

Before posting anything to social media, you should ask:

- Is this relevant to citizen science?
- Do our followers need and/or want to know this?
- Is it appropriate content for ECSA to share?

By asking these questions, we will avoid filling our social media feeds with material that is off-topic, offensive or irrelevant to our audiences. For example, while certain issues may be of interest and importance to us as individuals - such as human trafficking, gender equality, charitable causes, etc. - we should not post them on our ECSA account as they are not directly relevant to citizen science.

Examples of what we can post include:

- ECSA events and activities
- news from ECSA members (although we should not feel obliged to share all news)
- media articles about citizen science
- opportunities to take part in citizen science activities

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- publications or other sources relevant to citizen science
- ECSA project updates/milestones.

How often should we post something?

The simple answer is: when there is something worth sharing! While some organizations or businesses aim to have a constant 'presence' on social media, this is not a suitable approach for ECSA because:

- we do not have a full-time person dedicated to this task
- the nature of citizen science means there is not always 'news'.

We should avoid setting targets for how often we post, as this can lead to posting material for the sake of it (i.e. material that doesn't get a 'yes' to the three questions above) and will add to the 'noise' on platforms such as Twitter. The overall effect is that our followers will value our posts less highly as they become less relevant or become repetitive. The overall message is, therefore, quality over quantity.

Which language should we post in?

It is likely that most of our posts on social media channels will be in English. However, it is important to remember and reflect the fact that we are a European association. We should, therefore, be open to posting in other languages and take advantage of the range of languages spoken by staff (currently English, French, Italian, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Swedish). The important issue is to ensure that we are confident in what we are sharing. Staff should therefore only post in languages in which they are fluent.

Is there anything we shouldn't post on social media?

As long as it fulfils the criteria above, it is fine to post almost all content. However, it is worth remembering that social media platforms are not 'free', despite their regular claims to be so: each makes money from its users by harvesting their data and selling it on to third parties, often with little consideration as to how those parties might use it. There have been numerous scandals involving the [sale of data by social media platforms](#), and the ways in which these platforms have been used for [malicious purposes](#). While these should not (at present) prevent us from using these platforms, it is always worth considering that all information uploaded - about us and our members - will be harvested for other purposes.

I am still not sure what to do...

If you are unclear about how, when or where to post social media content, then you should:

- ask ECSA's community and communications officer for help
- raise the issue at the weekly team meeting.

Social media accounts

ECSA currently has the following social media accounts. For the reasons outlined above (i.e. no full-time staff member dedicated to social media), we should not aim to establish a presence across all social media platforms, but rather focus our resources on maintaining an active presence on selected channels.

Channel	Link
Facebook	www.facebook.com/ECSAcommunity
Linkedin	www.linkedin.com/company/eucitsci
Twitter	https://twitter.com/EuCitSci
Flickr	<i>No account</i>
Instagram	<i>No account</i>
Pinterest	<i>No account</i>
Reddit	<i>No account</i>
ResearchGate	<i>No account, although we are considering this for the future</i>
Snapchat!	<i>No account</i>
TikTok	<i>No account</i>
Tumblr	<i>No account</i>
YouTube	<i>No account, although we are considering establishing one in partnership with EU-Citizen.Science</i>

Twitter

Twitter is a site for news, entertainment, sports, politics and more. It has a strong emphasis on real-time information: things that are happening right now. It only allows 280 characters in a post (tweet), unlike most social media sites.¹

Twitter should be our main social media channel. It is quick and simple to use, and where we have the most followers (~3,200 in May 2020); it is also where many of our members are also most active. In general, we should use Twitter to **engage** with our followers, and:

- build our network and community
- post real-time information on ECSA activities, such as updates from conferences
- share news and information about developments in the field of citizen science.

¹ Background on different social media channels adapted from: <https://buffer.com/library/social-media-sites>

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Version: V1
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To have an impact on Twitter, it is helpful to:

- include an image where possible (and relevant)
- use hashtags, such as #citizenscience or #biodiversity or #EarthDay, so that people who don't follow us can still find posts (and may then follow us)
- tag relevant people - but make sure they are relevant to each post, not just citizen science in general.

Who to follow

There are different organizational approaches to Twitter follows. Some follow only other organizations, not individuals; others limit the people they follow so that the balance of followers to people followed is high (which is sometimes seen as a sign of importance). Some choose to limit the people they follow as a Twitter follow can be seen as an endorsement and it is not possible to track everything that people are posting.

However, there is a shift in thinking among some that it is better to build a community and follow back all those who follow an organization, so they feel part of our social media community. As a network-based organization, it makes sense for ECSA to adopt this approach, i.e. we follow back those who follow us, as long as their profiles are not incompatible with our values (e.g. racist or homophobic posts in their timeline). We should also not follow back any spam accounts, of course.

An alternative approach is to only follow institutions, and individuals who are ECSA members. We should not follow a system where only some individuals are followed and not others, as this could be seen as endorsing, or valuing, the views of some and not others - which is not an inclusive approach.

ECSA will make a decision on which approach to adopt when this policy is revised.

Facebook

Facebook is the biggest social media site in the world, with more than two billion people using it every month. Almost all content formats work well on Facebook — text, images, videos. The Facebook algorithm prioritizes content that sparks conversations and meaningful interactions between people, especially those from family and friends.

Facebook is our secondary social media platform, where we make announcements about the association and its members. In general, we should use Facebook to **inform** our followers about:

- upcoming events and activities
- major developments within ECSA or the field of citizen science.

Type: Public
Owner: ECSA
Version: V1
Updated: 6 May 2020

Given the limited resources for responding to social media posts, we should consider Facebook a one-way channel, through which we disseminate information out, but do not regularly engage in discussions or debates, which in our field are more commonly held on Twitter.

Linkedin

LinkedIn has evolved from a resume and job search site into a professional social media site where industry experts share content, network with one another, and build their personal brand. It has also become a place for businesses to establish their thought leadership and authority in their industry and attract talent to their company.

LinkedIn is our third priority for posting material. However, the format is similar to Facebook and most updates added to Facebook can also be posted to our LinkedIn page.

Double posting

For many organizations, posts are shared (albeit sometimes adapted) via all their social media channels. This is a quick and (virtually) cost-free way to reach audiences on all these platforms - and while some of our followers might follow us on one or all of our channels, it is likely that some only follow us on one.

All content created by ECSA, such as announcements about events or new blog posts, should be shared on all channels. It is not necessary to do this for content we are resharing (i.e. retweets do not need to be added to Facebook), although this can be done if they are considered very relevant to us as an organization, or citizen science as a field.

Other platforms

As an organization, ECSA lacks the visual content to populate sites such as Flickr, SnapChat and Instagram, or videos for YouTube. Further, the EU-Citizen.Science platform, which ECSA will inherit, is developing some channels on these platforms (e.g. Instagram). Given our limited resources for social media, and the fact that these channels would involve more time to seek out content (i.e. from our members), we should not seek to establish a presence on any other social media just now.

However, it is important to recognize that different sectors of the population use different social media channels. For example, SnapChat! is very popular with younger people, while WhatsApp is used in some countries as a social media channel for sharing content, a use that is less familiar in Europe.

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We should stay abreast of developments in the wider use of social media to ensure that our presence is inclusive of all sectors of the population and reflects changes in patterns of use. Future versions of this policy may see ECSA expand the social media platforms it uses, or shift its focus to newer or more relevant platforms.