

SMC | Social Media Snapshot

Science and social media make comfortable bedfellows according to the inaugural SMC Social Media Snapshot, which examines how New Zealand research institutions use social media.

Most research institutions have some form of social media presence and several have amassed tens of thousands of followers, helping them to stay engaged with a broad audience who “share”, “like” and “favourite” their content.



Which institutions are using social media in the New Zealand science sector, what are the most popular social media platforms, and who is making best use of them?

We tackled these questions by undertaking an informal stocktake of social media usage, aiming to get a clearer picture of social media use by organisations involved in scientific research.

Key findings:

- Around 90 per cent of the country's 45 major research organisations engaged in scientific research have an official social media presence (at least one official social media account).
- Twitter is the most popular social media platform among research institutions, followed by Facebook and YouTube.
- Institutions most commonly have a presence on two or three social media platforms.
- The University of Auckland, GeoNet and Te Papa have the most followers for Facebook, Twitter and YouTube respectively.
- Smaller research groups within institutions have been slower to adopt social media, but Facebook is their preferred platform.

The SMC Social Media Snapshot follows the 2014 Nielsen survey [New Zealanders' attitudes to science and technology](#)¹, which highlighted the rise of ‘new media’ as sources of scientific information for the public.

Specifically, the Nielsen survey found:

- 44% of New Zealand adults have viewed a video on a scientific topic online
- 20% read or responded to a blog on a scientific topic
- 20% discussed a scientific matter on a social media website

¹ Nielsen report, December 2014 [New Zealanders' attitudes to science and technology](#)

Social media use

We examined the social media activities of the top research institutions in New Zealand - including universities, Crown Research Institutes(CRI), Centres of Research Excellence, large museums and independent research organisations².

Of the 45 major research organisations and groups we looked at, almost all were using some form of social media to engage with the wider community.

Amongst those organisations using social media, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube were the three most popular platforms.

There was limited use of Vimeo (video sharing) and Instagram (photo sharing) accounts, indicating these platforms were not yet considered mainstream by the majority of organisations using social media.

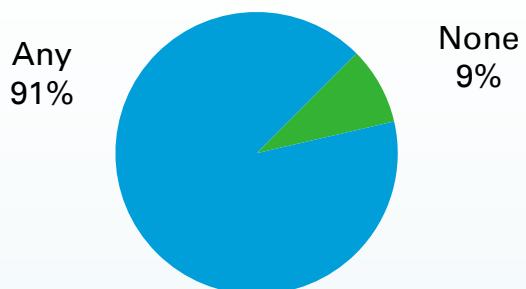
Using multiple platforms was the norm, with universities, CRIs and museums pushing content out across a range of platforms (average 3.5).

NIWA, the University of Waikato and the University of Auckland stood out as the top social media 'multi-users', each engaging with the public via no less than seven platforms.

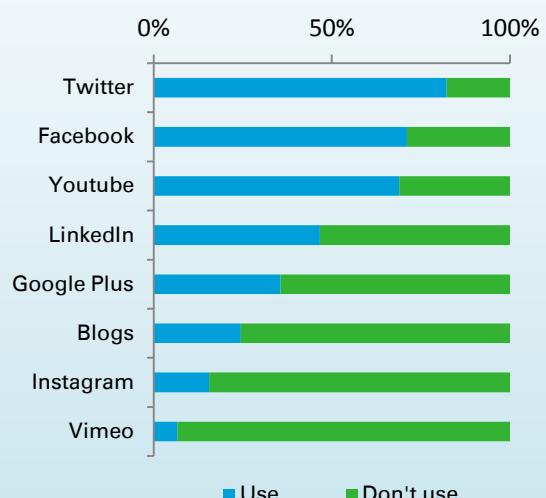
Popular platforms

Here, we take a closer look at the three major platforms used by research organisations. Nothing stands still in the social media space, so these numbers may have changes since the time we collected data for our Social Media Snapshot.

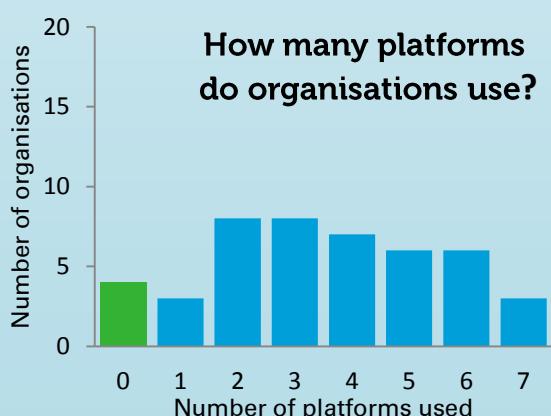
Total social media use



What platforms do organisations use?



How many platforms do organisations use?



² Our approach in searching for organisations and social media accounts is detailed in *Notes on Methodology* at the end of this document.

Twitter

The global ‘microblogging’ service Twitter is the most popular platform for research organisations. We identified 37 Twitter accounts linked to New Zealand research institutions.

It’s hard to compare accounts given the range of different types of organisations included in the snapshot. But a peek at the top tweeters gives some insight into which New Zealand institutions are dominating the twittersphere.

Geonet comes in first with more than 35,000 followers, which is not surprising, given their near instantaneous earthquake updates.

This represents a solid lead over runners up Auckland Museum and Te Papa, sitting around the 25,000 and 20,000 marks respectively, with the rest of the universities following behind.

In terms of actual tweets, AUT University has been the most prolific, firing out more than 13,000 tweets in the last two years. Massey University and Geonet are not too far behind with just under 10,000 tweets each.

When it comes to being networked, the University of Auckland comes out on top, following a whopping 5,500 other Twitter accounts.

Top Twitter accounts

Twitter handle	Followers	Tweets
@geonet	35776	9858
@aucklandmuseum	25047	4608
@Te_Papa	19876	7242
@AucklandUni	16276	4410
@MasseyUni	8450	10584
@otago	7685	2002
@AUTuni	7599	13593
@VicUniWgtn	6656	2307
@waikato	5236	6408
@LincolnUniNZ	4658	2099

Foreign language social media: Massey University

While most institutions focused on the classic mainstream English-language platforms, Massey University is noteworthy for its use of Chinese social media platforms [Youku](#) and [Weibo](#). In the increasingly competitive market for international students, Massey is leveraging social media to gain an edge.



Facebook

Facebook, the world's biggest social media platform, lived up to its reputation. It is close behind Twitter in terms of popularity, with 32 Facebook pages identified amongst the organisations covered in this snapshot.

We examined Facebook statistics using the universal currency of approval – the “like”.

The University of Auckland is a clear winner on the Facebook front, with over 108,000 likes - almost double that of AUT University, which comes in second with just over 56,000 likes.

Te Papa and Geonet are close behind with around 50,000 likes each.

Although Twitter is the most commonly used social media platform, Facebook appears to offer engagement with a larger audience. We found that substantially more people liked Facebook pages than followed Twitter accounts.

Top Facebook pages

Facebook page	Likes
The University of Auckland	108,852
AUT University	56,369
Te Papa Tongarewa	52,323
Geonet	48,817
Victoria University of Wellington	44,227
University of Otago	36,255
Massey University	35,399
University of Waikato	35,027
University of Canterbury	34,630
Auckland Museum	32,611

Promoting social media channels: University of Waikato

When it comes to promoting an organisation's social media presence through their website, the University of Waikato deserves special mention. The front page of the university's site includes Facebook and Twitter plugins displaying “likes” and “recent tweets” respectively, and a link to a comprehensive [social media directory](#) for all the platforms and accounts used by various sections of the university.

Stay Connected



Visit our [social directory](#) for more channels.

YouTube

We managed to find 31 YouTube accounts linked to New Zealand research institutions.

In terms of drawing eyeballs, Te Papa museum is a clear winner.

With over five million total views, the museum's channel is well in the lead. Runners-up are GNS Science, the University of Otago and the University of Auckland - all sitting just north of the one million views mark.

Te Papa is also No. 1 in terms of subscribers – a measure of more sustained interest in a YouTube account. The museum had around 5,100 subscribers, with the University of Auckland (almost 2,900) and GNS Science (about 1,500) in second and third place respectively.

Top YouTube channels

YouTube channel	Total Views	Subscribers
Te Papa Tongarewa	5,151,822	5,137
GNS Science	1,189,099	1,446
University of Otago	1,055,482	924
The University of Auckland	1,059,299	2,884
AUT University	829,030	1,095
Auckland Museum	623,547	881
University of Canterbury	423,624	1,230
UniversityWaikato	303,196	690
LincolnUniversityNZ	246,200	190
Victoria University of Wellington	244,148	653

Mobile apps in the mix

Although not social media *per se*, we noted that mobile phone apps are also used by some institutions. Geonet's popular Quake app is used to share updates on earthquakes, while Auckland, Massey and Canterbury universities are using mobile apps to engage and share information such as maps and news updates with their audiences. These university apps are largely targeted at staff and students but are also useful to the general public.

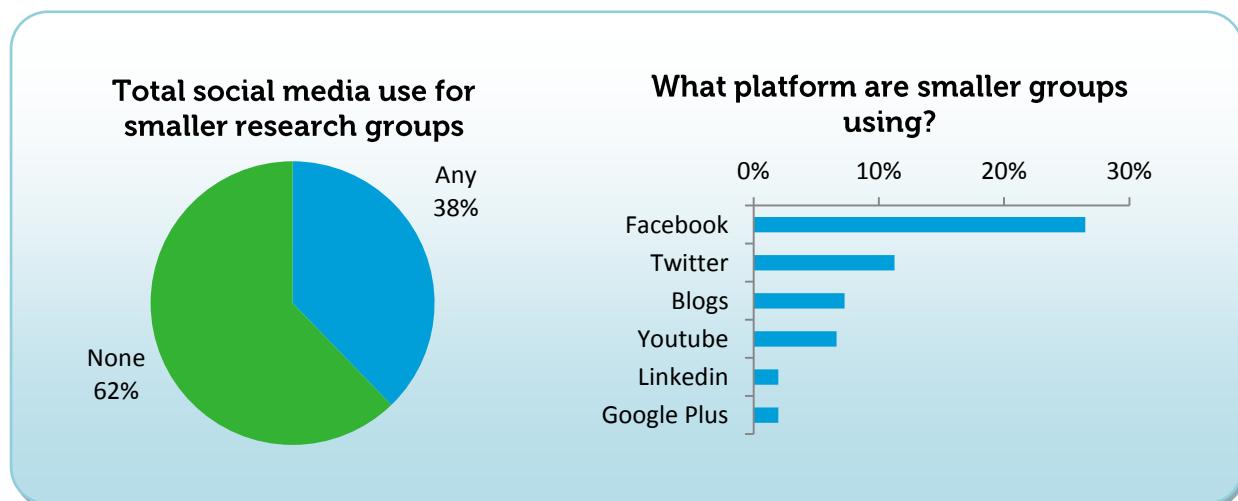


Smaller organisations

While our focus was on major institutions' use of social media, we did also take a more granular look at using social media amongst smaller sections of the research community - including university faculties, departments and research labs and collaborations. We did this by trawling institutional webpages for references to social media, as well as cross checking for a presence on major social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.

Although ensuring comprehensive coverage and drawing a clear picture from this disparate range of groups was more difficult, we managed to cover 151 groups at varying levels.

We estimate that over a third of these groups use at least one social media platform. Among those using social media, Facebook is the most popular – being used by about a quarter of groups covered – followed by Twitter, YouTube and blogging platforms.



The Science Media Centre has collated all the Twitter accounts covered by this snapshot into a handy Twitter list, available here: tinyurl.com/smcnz.

It is a work in progress, so if there are any you think we've missed please let us know by tweeting at [@smcnz](https://twitter.com/smcnz).

Keeping up to date

While it is positive to see smaller research groups engaging and sharing information on social media, many accounts appeared abandoned or neglected due to a lack of recent updates.

The University of Auckland's Department of Statistics initially stood out as a leader in social media engagement by managing Facebook, Twitter, Google Plus and LinkedIn accounts, as well as a standalone blog, and promoting these accounts on their website. However closer inspection of the Twitter, Google+ and LinkedIn pages revealed that they had not been updated in over two years, highlighting the difficulty of continual curation of online content across multiple platforms.

However this was balanced by the fact that the department's standalone blog, *Statschat*, was supported by its own up-to-date Facebook and Twitter accounts.

Where organisations choose to engage with an audience via a platform they need to plan for sustained resourcing to keep updating it with fresh content, or at least ensure the details available to the public are current.

Notes on methodology

To keep the project manageable, we limited our search to research organisations, looking at: universities, including science faculties, departments and individual research groups; Crown Research Institutes; Centres of Research Excellence; Museums with research staff; and a number of independent research organisations. As a general guide, we included only organisations that would be expected to be publishing in the peer-reviewed literature.

In our search we focussed on the most popular platforms (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, Google Plus, Instagram, Vimeo) and also included online blogs as another form of engagement.

Social media accounts were identified by searching organisations' webpages for links to accounts, as well as through keyword searches on major social media platforms. As such, accounts included could be considered as those 'easily available to the public'.

Unless explicitly institution-related, personal accounts were excluded. Accounts were only recorded if they were clearly curated by the organisation, since some LinkedIn and Google Plus records can be generated by other users.

We know that there will be some organisations we have missed so do let us know if there are some gaps in the lists. Figures are current as of June 2015.

Researchers: John Kerr, Sayani Ghosh and Amy Guest