

GUIDELINE

ONLINE COMMUNICATION AND SOCIAL MEDIA FOR RESEARCHERS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF KASSEL

presented by the staff unit
Communications and Marketing

**U N I K A S S E L
V E R S I T Ä T**

Guideline Online Communication and Social Media for researchers at the University of Kassel

The University of Kassel welcomes independent science communication activities on the part of academics. When you engage in such communication you are making an important contribution to ensuring that academia has an impact on society and participates in the opinion-forming process. Social media channels offer the possibility of authentic, interactive and participatory communication – if you use them correctly. With this guide, we aim to support all researchers at the University of Kassel who use personal social media profiles in a professional context. In order to offer you well-founded information, we have bundled our experience from the Communications Office, the advice of the German Association of University Communication (Bundesverband Hochschulkommunikation), the recommendations of the National Institute for Science Communication (Nationales Institut für Wissenschaftskommunikation), as well as the explanations on the topic of science communication by the DFG, the #FactoryWissKomm of the BMBF, and Wissenschaft im Dialog (WiD). You are also welcome to get further information from these institutions. You will find a list of links below.

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“My personal opinion” ... but still public

Remarks such as “my personal opinion” or “posts reflect my own views” are commonly used in the private profiles of university members posting on social media. And you can certainly specify that these are exclusively your own opinions when making your views known. Nevertheless, you should be aware that you will still be perceived as a representative of the University of Kassel. When you do express personal opinions in a post, please additionally mark these as such. Ultimately, you are responsible for the content that you publish on social media. Be sure not to publish any internal university information on private channels.

5 tips to get started in communicating about your research and teaching

1. First of all, think about why it is that you want to communicate about your academic field. Answering this question will help you determine the topics, target audience, medium, style, and goals of your communication activities.
2. Develop a personal network in connection with your communication activities. Here you can exchange ideas, learn from each other, motivate each other and support each other in difficult situations. Ideas for network partners: university communications staff, other researchers, professional and academic associations, journalists ...
3. Do not take too broad an approach. Communicating to the “general public” usually means that no particular target group really feels adequately or appropriately addressed. Better to keep your specific target group in mind when choosing your topics and your wording.
4. Communication is dialogue. You need to listen to what other persons are saying, take others seriously and exchange ideas directly with your interlocutors. Respond to links to your profiles and comments to your posts if you are addressed directly and it seems appropriate to you.
5. Guidance for effective research communication is provided by the [guidelines for ensuring good scientific practice \(DFG\)](#). This is because good science communication, like good scientific practice, also features “content and methods of high integrity, is relevant, comprehensible, and transparent. It is research-based and accordingly also reflects its conditions for success for society and science.” ([#FactoryWisskomm, Action Perspectives for Science Communication, Berlin 2021, Introduction](#)). [Guidelines for good science PR](#) with a checklist for researchers are published by Wissenschaft im Dialog and the Bundesverband Hochschulkommunikation (linked below).

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What style of communication should I use when communicating in social media?

Posts in social media are not scholarly articles. Therefore, adapt your communication style to the medium, target group and topic. Social media are used to create a “we” feeling. Communication is similar to that used in an informal discussion. The communication is typically ad hoc, with unplanned topics and casual colloquial language. Address your target audience as equals. Academic communication on social media benefits particularly from a personal touch. You can certainly express your feelings in addition to communicating the fact-oriented content of your field. At the same time, please do not exaggerate and make it clear when you are expressing personal opinions. Also, be careful in using irony, satire or sarcasm. When read or heard exclusively online without your personal presence, this type of communication can easily be misunderstood.

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Which social media platform should I use for my communication?

Two central criteria are relevant for the choice of social media platforms for successful communication of your academic concerns:

1. **The target group.** Select a platform that your desired target group also uses. Otherwise, your communication activities could very well not find an audience.
2. **Your own usage behavior.** Choose a platform that you are personally comfortable with. For example, if you are a visual person, Instagram may well be suitable. Or if you prefer the fastest possible exchange of information or lively discussion, Twitter or possibly Mastodon might be more suitable.

Also consider your goal and the central messages of the communication you are undertaking in social media. From this you can determine suitable platforms, content and style of communication.

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3 tips for maintaining your social media accounts

1. **Post regularly**, e.g. at least once a week. Preparing a collection of topics and ideas or an editorial plan in advance can be helpful.
2. **Network with others**. Follow other accounts of your community, e.g. from your field (journals, associations, cooperation partners, related research institutions, etc.) and of course accounts of your own department. The University of Kassel is currently represented on [Twitter](#), [Mastodon](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#) and [YouTube](#).
3. When sharing content, please observe **applicable laws** such as copyright provisions and the right to one's own image (see below for more information).

You can find further information in the [Social Media Guidelines](#) of the University of Kassel.

What legal aspects should be considered?

Source: German Association of University Communications

Social media exchange does not take place in a legal vacuum. Especially in connection with photos, videos and comments, you should be familiar with the relevant legal regulations. Copyright infringements can be expensive, and comments with insulting, defamatory, anti-constitutional, racist, sexist, violence-glorifying or pornographic content can result in disciplinary, contractual and criminal consequences.

Relevant legal texts and areas of law are:

- The **Telemedia Act (TMG)** contains information on the obligation to provide an imprint, on the liability of the owner of the respective social media platform and on data protection.
- Free speech law regulates the admissibility of (public) statements. The **freedom of expression** under Article 5 of the German Basic Law (GG) extends very far. However, untrue statements of fact, insults and defamatory criticism are not permissible.
- The **Federal Data Protection Act (BDSG)** contains regulations on the collection, storage, and processing of personal data.
- The **German Art Copyright Act (KunstUrhG)** contains regulations on the right to one's own image. With a few specific exceptions (pictures of public gatherings, persons of contemporary history or pictures in which the persons are only accessories), the person's consent is required before publication of their image.

- The **Copyright Act (UrhG)** regulates the protection of texts, images, audio and video content (so-called works). In most cases, publication or distribution of such works is only permitted with the consent of the respective rights holder.
- The **German Trademark Act (MarkenG)** contains regulations on the protection of names and logos.
- Legal regulations also arise from the **employment relationship**. In particular, obligations to maintain confidentiality/official secrecy and professional loyalty should be mentioned here.

The **general terms and conditions, terms of use and guidelines of the providers** of the various social media platforms must always be observed.

The most common elements include:

- Provisions on limitations of liability of the portal and liability of the user.
- The providers take on the license to user-generated content. Thus, users may have no control over the use of the data provided and the profile data generated by their use of the platform.
- The terms of use of numerous platform providers contain specific provisions regarding competitions or the award of prizes on the respective portal. These should be observed to avoid problems with the provider.
- There is no obligation for the provider to maintain services permanently. The platform provider determines the choice of law and place of jurisdiction. These may be outside the German legal area.

Crisis communication, critical comments, hate speech, shitstorms: **What to do?**

You are welcome to contact the Social Media Team of the University of Kassel with questions about dealing with problematic posts or comments.

In addition, here are a few tips:

- You should immediately report content, comments or links on your account that are in violation of legal provisions, provide proof via screenshot and then delete them.
- You should clear up misunderstandings as quickly as possible.
- Acknowledge constructive criticism and thank people for their feedback.
- Do not give any attention to provocations, abusive language, accusations or insults.
- If such incidents accumulate, you can ...
 - make a single factual statement, but then discontinue the conversation.
 - report or block the author. Also in this case, it is best to document this with screenshots.
 - respond with “counterspeech”. You can ask your personal network to counter hate speech with arguments, other perspectives, or humor.

If you have the feeling that inappropriate criticism is getting out of hand or you are impacted by coordinated digital attacks, feel free to contact the Communications Office or the Social Media Team of the University of Kassel. Contacts can be found below.

Additional support outside of the university is also available, for example:

In English:

- [Internet complaints center](#) (Internetbeschwerdestelle)
- [Hate Aid](#): advice and legal support for digital violence.

Mostly in German:

- Reporting form of the [HessenGegenHetze](#) hotline.
- Use the [MayDay button](#) in the WissKon network to reach supporters within the scientific community.
- Coming soon: Hatespeech support service by Wissenschaft im Dialog (WiD)
- SciComm support: Information, resources and training offers as well as free personal advice. A joint initiative of Bundesverband Hochschulkommunikation and Wissenschaft im Dialog.
- [MeldeHelden](#): Here you can report digital violence quickly and easily via app. On your own accounts as well as other people's. Available for Android and iOS.

Where can I find other helpful tools for communication?

In the [Toolbox for Public Relations](#) of the University of Kassel you will find further helpful information and overviews that you can also use for your communication about your academic activities:

- [Social Media Guidelines](#): Recommendations for the use of social media platforms for organizational units within the University
- Service of the communications office: [Editorial Guidelines for Scientists](#)
- Useful information on [audio/video production](#)

What educational offerings are available in the field of academic communication?

Academic communication is part of the Graduate Programme at the University of Kassel. It is open to interested doctoral students from all departments. A training program in science communication for professors is offered by the Hessian Science Communication Network “Science Meets Media”, funded by the HMWK until 2025.

In addition, there are various external providers of advanced training in academic communication, for example the National Institute for Science Communication (NaWik), the Center for Science Management, and many other individual providers.

Further information

- [Guidelines for Good Science PR](#) with checklist for researchers publish Wissenschaft im Dialog and the Bundesverband Hochschulkommunik (German Association for University Communication)
- www.wissenschaftskommunikation.de: Platform for information and discussion for communicators, researchers, science journalists, and interested parties
- [#factoryWissKomm des BMBF](#): Handlungsperspektiven für die Wissenschaftskommunikation (German)
- [WissKon](#) – Network and conference for communicating scientists

Contact for questions

If you have any questions about social media conduct, this handout, or maintaining your social media channel, please contact the communications office:

- Vanessa Laspe, vanessa.laspe@uni-kassel.de
Hessian Science Communication Network
- Jaana Lieberknecht, jaana.lieberknecht@uni-kassel.de
Social Media Manager

The communications office is also your point of contact for communications and can be reached via: presse@uni-kassel.de, 0561 804-1961

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Toolbox for Public Relations
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