



Social Media 101 for academics:

*The seven questions to quick-start  
your social media strategy*

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Social Media 101 for Academics:

# NET NATIVES

## *The seven questions to quick-start your social media strategy*

For many academics, the idea of establishing some sort of presence on social media is shifting from an optional extra to something resembling a requirement. And, while these digital technologies offer many exciting opportunities for broadening your reach, having great conversations and making useful connections across the globe, they can also be a daunting prospect - where should you start?

What strategy should you take?

The seven questions we'll go through in this whitepaper will help you form the basis of your own social media strategy. By working through them, you'll be left with a much clearer understanding of your audiences, the type of content you could post and the type of social media user you are.

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# QUESTION ONE

## Why do you want to use social media?

This may be an obvious question, but it's also arguably the most important one to ask yourself if you plan to start using social media for professional purposes. If you don't have an idea of what you want to get out of it, you can easily find yourself going off track of your main goal and losing interest.

**It's important to give this some serious thought before you get stuck in and really establish the reason you want to start using social media...**

- Do you want to contribute to discussion about your area of expertise and establish yourself as a thought leader in your field?
- Or do you want to use social media to source and share links to great content that your peers and students will find useful?
- Perhaps you want to be involved in recruiting students to your university and use your presence to showcase the student experience and advocate for your institution?
- Or do you just want to use social media to source things to read and observe, without actually saying anything about yourself?
- Or perhaps you want to do something completely different.

**No matter your reason (or reasons) for wanting to go in on social media, make sure you know where you're heading - it will make things so much easier in the long run.**



# QUESTION TWO

## Who do you want to reach?

Knowing your audience on social media makes it much easier to decide whether or not to write a particular post or share a particular type of content and can really help you focus your efforts to get the most from it. It can also help you decide who you might want to follow and connect with, which in turn will give you a more useful timeline to scroll through.

**There are a number of audiences you might want to reach using social media:**

- **Your academic peers** - social media is a great way to stay in touch with your contacts from across the globe and building new ones.
- **Students/researchers** - you could either use social media to enhance your relationships with your current students or to get your work in front of a wider student and researcher population who might want to cite you in their own work.
- **The press** - the press are always looking for academics who can add to the discussion around a particular issue or subject. A strong social media presence can help you appear on the media's radar and increase your chances of being asked to get involved, from blogs through to TV interviews.

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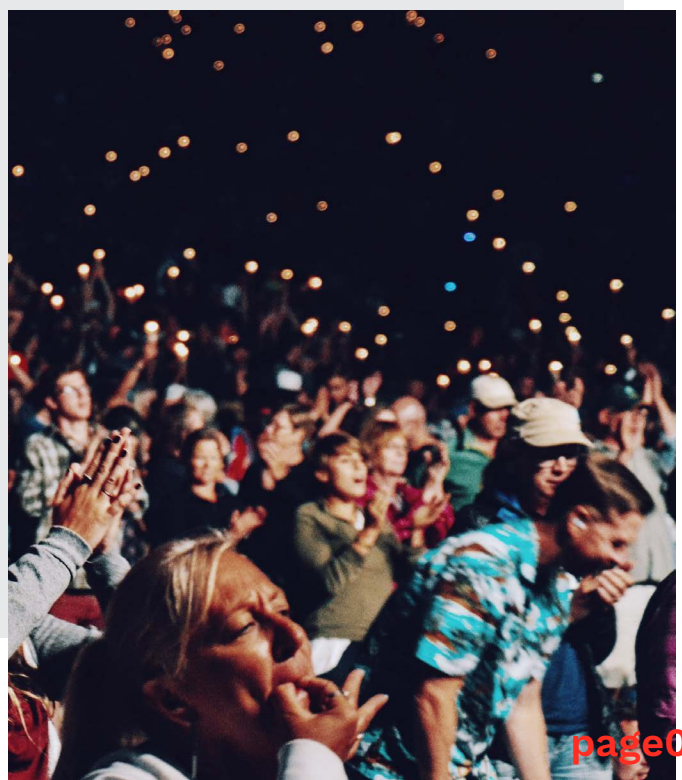
# QUESTION TWO

## Who do you want to reach?

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- **Conference organisers** - as with the press, a strong social media presence will also appeal to conference organisers and offers them a quick and easy way to get in touch with you.
- **The general public** - the general public are interested in the work of academics and universities and there is the potential to make a real impact by engaging with the public. You might get more people involved in your research, you might attract new students to come and be taught by you or you might even connect with a potential donor.

It should be said that you needn't limit yourself to trying to reach a single audience - indeed, some of your content may naturally crossover. For example, a really well-crafted blog post about your latest work could be equally appealing and useful to a student, a journalist and a member of the public. However, having an understanding of your ideal audience is always useful in guiding how you approach social media and what content you post on it.



# QUESTION THREE

## What sort of content do you have?

Once you know why you want to use social media and who you want to reach, it's time to start thinking about what content you can share online:

### Links

Sharing links to great content on the web is a brilliant way to build authority on social media. If you find something you think your audience will get value from, share it.

### Images

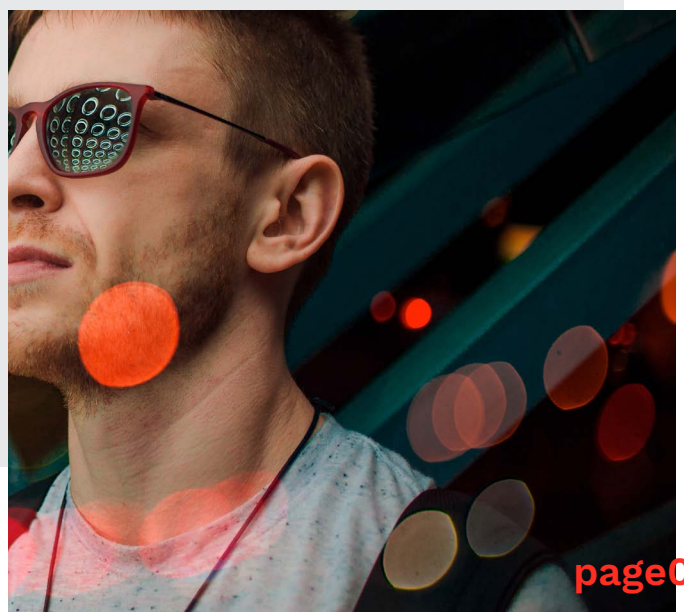
Social media posts with images get far more interactions than simple text updates, so it's worth your while adding an image if you can - maybe a photo if you're at an event or on a visit, or even an infographic to help explain some

data or research. Free tools like canva.com are a great resource for creating your own graphics and images.

### Re-tweets and shares

Sharing other people's content on social media is a huge part of how these technologies work and in many ways is the ultimate seal of approval - that you value someone's content so much that you want to pass it onto your audience too. Most social networks have an option to share, which will make sure the original poster is credited, and many of them also offer space for you to add your own comment to a share, in case it isn't obvious why you are doing so.

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# QUESTION THREE

## What sort of content do you have?



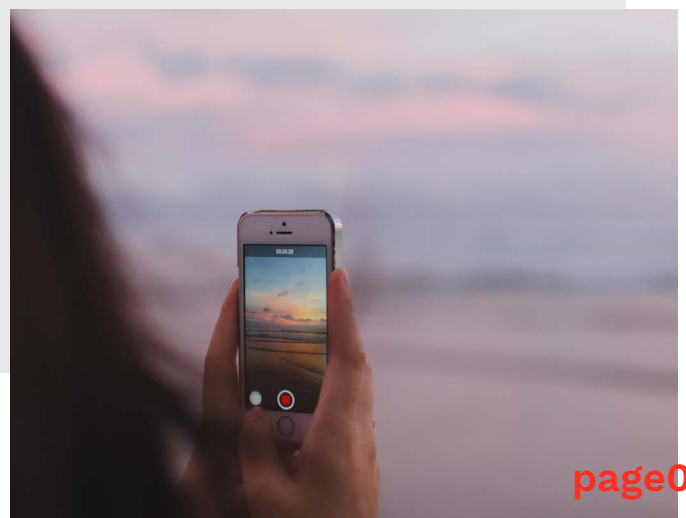
### Blogs

Having your own, regularly updated blog is a fantastic source of content for your social media channels; you can write a blog post and then use social media to promote it. You might blog about your research, about something topical or newsworthy or even use a blog post to write up events or conferences you attend. You could use something like Wordpress to set up your own blog, or investigate whether your institution has its own blogging platform you could use and make the most of the excellent search equity afforded to .ac.uk web addresses. Or, you can write blog posts on social media channels directly; on LinkedIn for example, you can use the 'publish' platform to write blogs. These posts get excellent reach, you can embed videos and social media posts within them and they attach themselves to your profile, so can be a really effective way of building up a written portfolio to sit alongside a public profile.



### Podcasts and vlogs

You might find talking things through easier than turning them into a written blog, so you could consider creating a podcast or a vlog? Podcasting is an especially good option if you don't want to feel restricted by time; according to the latest research on podcasts, 85% of people who listen to podcasts listen for the whole show, whereas the vast majority of video viewers don't. They give you room to discuss and explore. One great example of academics using podcasts effectively is the Talking Politics podcast from Cambridge University - it's topical, interesting, academic and yet still has wider public appeal. Podcasting is a fairly low-cost option compared to video - you could create something using your phone for example - and is an area that is still experiencing massive growth.



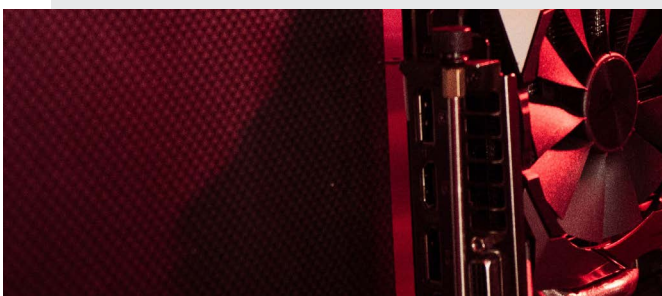
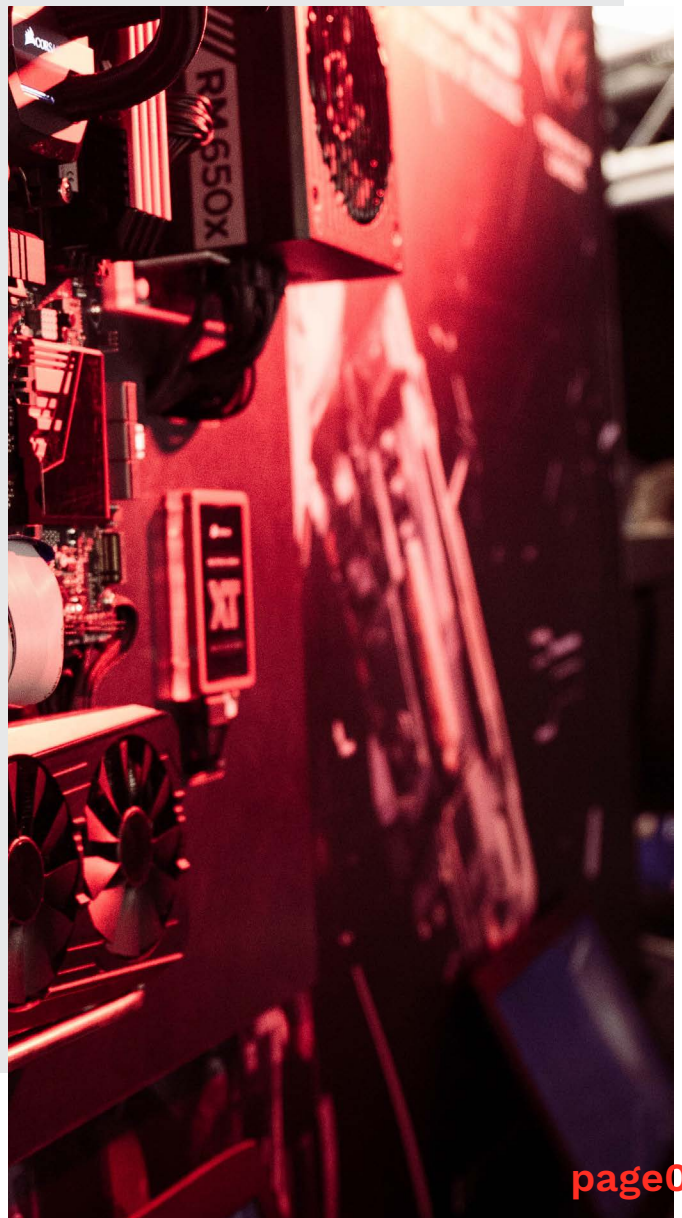


# QUESTION FOUR

## How comfortable with the technology are you?

When it comes to social media, there's plenty of choice. But, that doesn't mean you have to be everywhere; it's far better to do one or a few networks really well than do lots of them badly. It comes down to which network or networks will best help you achieve what you want to achieve and reach the people you want to reach.

Whichever platform you choose, it's worth evaluating how competent you are using them and taking the time to understand how they work and how you can get the most from them. When you first join a network, take some time to sit back and be a sponge - learn how they work, where the main features are and get a feel for them before you jump in.



# QUESTION FIVE

## What sort of social media user are you?

Just as your reasons for using social media will be different from person to person, how you actually go about using social media will vary too.

**We've identified four common types of social media user - which one are you?**



### The Lurker

This type of person actually accounts for upwards of 80% of Internet users. You're not interested in posting yourself, instead, you're using social media to read, watch, learn and consume. You're on the hunt for content rather looking to create it. You'll like things without actually 'liking' them, if you catch our drift. Despite the creepy name, there's nothing weird about being this type of user, although from a REF point of view, taking this approach will make it difficult to prove what impact you're having.

**The Lurker accounts for upwards of 80% of Internet users.**



### The Sharer

Lurking is all well and good, but you're far too generous to keep all that great content to yourself - you're a sharer. You want to be the person your followers look to for links to excellent articles, videos, podcasts and more, the person who, just by adding your seal of approval in the form of a share will be enough for people to check it out themselves. But, you're not really interested in creation - for you, it's all about curation.



### The Networker

You're really interested in the 'social' part of social media, so networking is the name of the game for you. Just like networking offline, you want to meet interesting and useful people, and add them to your contacts book. This might mean connecting with colleagues from your institution, or finding other scholars in your field from around the world - including potential partners for future collaborations. And, of course, being a networker isn't just about building your contacts - you're there to have great conversations too, and it's the same on social media. You'll leave comments, reply to questions and find interesting and interested people to talk to.

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# QUESTION FIVE

## What sort of social media user are you?

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### The Creator

Not quite as God-like as the name suggests, but still pretty impressive - creators account for the smallest proportion of social media users but they usually end up with the biggest influence. While you probably also do plenty of networking and sharing, you're also adding plenty of your own quality content into the mix. That might mean writing blog posts, making podcasts and videos, sharing images and infographics... essentially, you're putting yourself out there with lots of original content.

While we're talking types of social media user, there are some others that you should really try and avoid. So, don't be a...

- **Peacock** - these people are obsessed with likes, followers and generally showing off how popular they think they are.
- **Ghost** - these users do what they can to remain anonymous and usually use fake names and have sparse profiles. This is fine for your personal social media use, but isn't something I would recommend if you want to use social media for professional purposes - being a ghost stops you building a digital footprint and will drastically lessen your impact.
- **Troll** - nasty, offensive, horrible bullies - the less said the better.



# QUESTION SIX

## How much time do you have?

There's no point in denying it; social media can easily become a drain on your time. But, that's not to say you should be put off getting stuck into social media. If you take the time to come up with a rough strategy, you'll already be applying some discipline to your social media efforts.

And, when it comes down to it, the amount of time you need to set aside to your social media activity can and should be determined by you. Put in as much time as you can afford to - even once a day can give you plenty of opportunities to do something excellent.

Almost as important as thinking about how much time you can spare for social media is thinking about when in the day you want to use these technologies - for instance, could you use your commute to stay on top of Twitter, or limit your Facebooking to your lunch break?

**The amount of time you need to set aside to your social media activity can and should be determined by you.**

**Here are some tips to stay on top of things and make social media more manageable:**

- **Notifications** - get them set up so you are emailed or pushed to your phone when things need your attention, rather than having to be online all day.
- **Make use of travel time** - your commute can be great for listening to podcasts or catching up on Twitter.
- **Scheduling tools** - programmes such as Buffer, Hootsuite and Tweetdeck allow you to set a day's worth of tweets to go out across a few hours automatically, so you don't have to be online all day. If you have your notifications set up correctly, you won't miss any incoming messages.
- **Follow good people** - the beauty with social media is that you create and curate the list of people follow, so you can fill your timeline with people who add value. You might want to follow thought leaders in your field, colleagues and peers that you respect, or even accounts that offer light relief.

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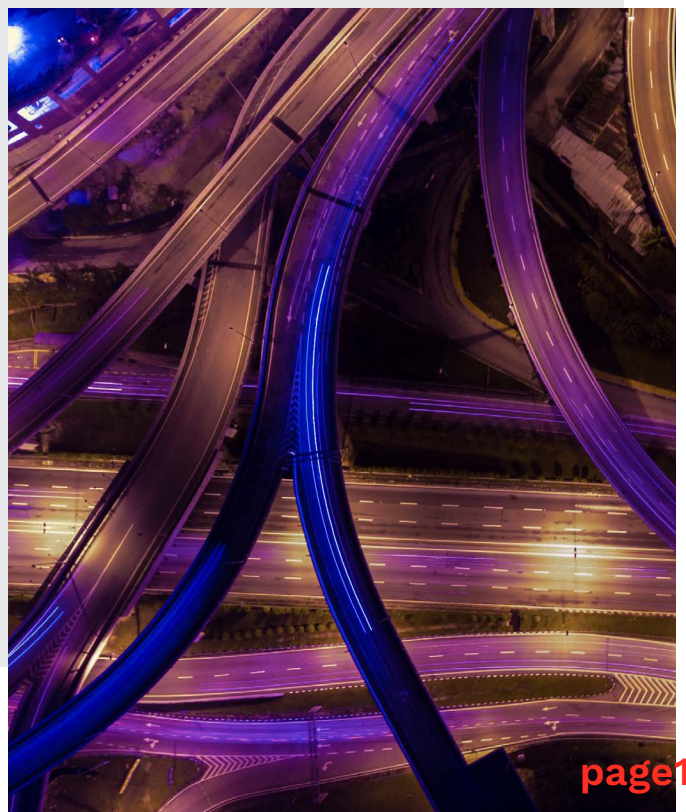
# QUESTION SIX

## How much time do you have?

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- **Train your algorithms**  
- most social networks are now controlled by algorithms, the idea being that they serve you the best content that is most relevant to you, rather than simply giving you everything. The reason for this is to ensure you get value from your social networks and to save you time; the average Facebook user has 1,500 posts that could potentially be served to them each time they log in. The thing to remember with these algorithms is that they will serve content based on your behaviour on that network, so you need to train them; if you like something you see, click 'like'. Reply to people, share stuff from other users, as it all helps the algorithms learn - as does clicking on links, searching for hashtags or keywords and visiting people's profiles. On Instagram, the algorithm even notices

if you linger on a person's post as you scroll through your feed. You can also let the algorithm know when they get things wrong - there will usually be a drop down menu where you can request to see less of a type of content, or less content from a particular person or page. The more you put into the algorithms, the better they will understand you.



# QUESTION SEVEN

## What about evaluation?

With so much emphasis on impact in the REF scoring, understanding how to evaluate your social media efforts is really important. The good news is that most social networks offer you insights at no cost and, after a couple of plays, they're fairly easy to understand.

On top of that, if you master evaluating your own efforts you can get into the habit of doing it on a regular basis - which could save you a panicked call to your communications/marketing teams in the run up to the next REF submission.

The problem with social media insights is that there are a lot to pick from. You will be best served concentrating on the metrics that have the most relevance to your social media goals - the 'why' from our first question. These goals might look a little like this...

**You can calculate your social engagement by dividing the total number of likes, comments, and shares with how many people your content reached or how many impressions it generated.**

### Awareness

If you're after awareness then you need to look at metrics like the amount of followers you have and the impressions/reach for your posts. These metrics are arguably the least useful, as all they really do is give you an idea of what your potential audience might be rather than what they are interested in, as well as the fact that awareness is generally pretty tough to measure. However, they are still figures that are worth being aware of and can help provide some context when measured alongside other metrics. From a REF point of view, don't purely rely on awareness metrics.

### Social Engagement

If you want your content to generate engagement then the metrics for you to focus on are likes, comments, shares and your engagement rate - which is usually calculated by dividing the total number of likes, comments and shares with how many people your content reached or how many impressions it generated. These metrics can help you understand what sort of content your audience really reacts to and give you an idea of whether or not

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# QUESTION SEVEN

## What about evaluation?



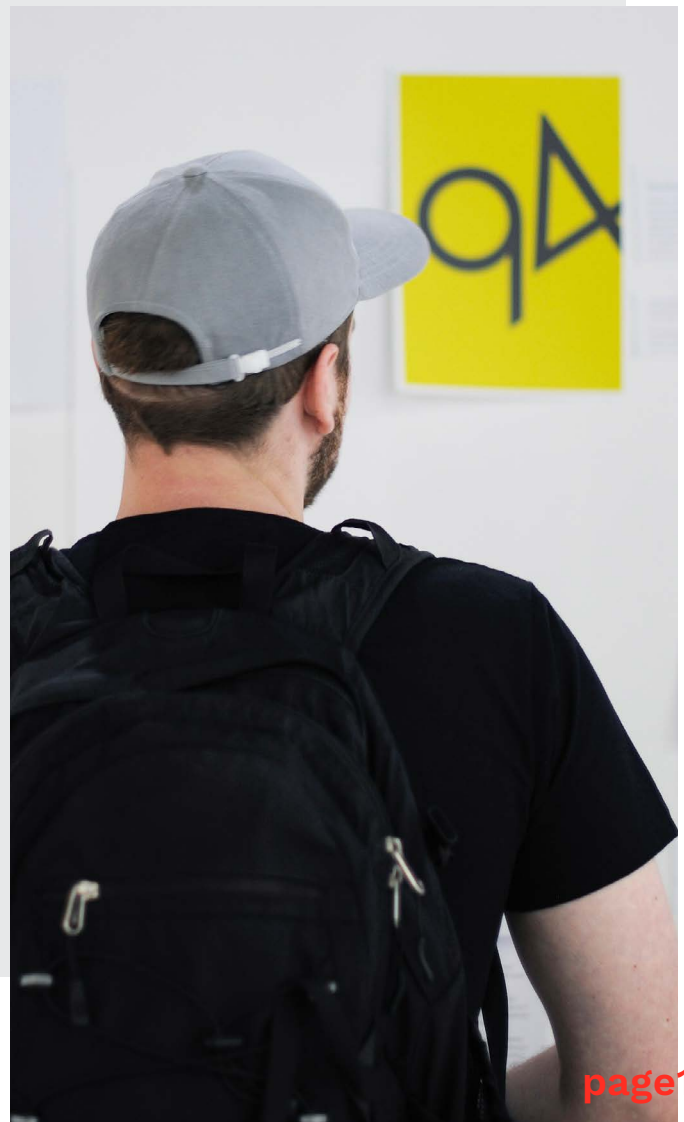
your audience is actually taking notice of what you post. You can often get far better results from a smaller audience that has a high engagement rate than by simply having thousands of followers. For REF, these metrics are really useful as they give you a clear idea of the sort of impact you're making online.



### Taking Action

Getting a few likes on social media is all well and good, but chances are you probably want people to go further than that. If that's the case, you'll be interested in metrics such as downloads, link clicks and newsletter/event sign ups. You could also reasonably include shares in this mix because they imply something deeper than just a like - they show that you've posted something that someone else has deemed worthy of sharing with their own network. These metrics are the ones really worth paying attention to, as they reflect actions that are going to give your content the most impact. And, from a REF point

of view, these also have the most impact because they are actually showing actions that directly result from your work.



# SOME USEFUL RESOURCES

## Blogs:

- [Buffer blog](#)
- [Hootsuite](#)
- [Sprout social](#)
- [LSE Impact blog](#)

## Podcasts:

- [Social media social hour](#)
- [The Digital Marketing Podcast](#)
- [Reply all](#)

## Books:

- [Social Media for Academics, by Mark Carrigan \(SAGE\)](#)
- [Communicating Your Research with Social Media, by Amy Mollett, Cheryl Brumley, Chris Gilson and Sierra Williams \(SAGE\)](#)

## Fun Twitter accounts:

- [@AcademicsSay](#)
- [@LegoAcademics](#)
- [@AcademicPain](#)





# ABOUT NATIVES GROUP

## Who are we?

We are a collection of specialist brands who can either solve individual problems or work collectively as partners to our clients.



NATIVES GLOBAL  
CONSULTING

NATIVES PP



edurank

CEREBRO™

THE  
NATIVE



your objectives. Then we add knowledge, expertise and superlative execution. And we make something amazing.

We deliver a range of creative solutions that will make your college stand out from the crowd, including; digital and print advertising, email template and microsite design, video production, photography, experiential and animation. We pioneer the use of the latest innovative creative formats for the education sector.

What is the secret to a successful advertising campaign? Combining your data with inspiring creative and copy. We believe in the importance of collecting and using your audience data to inform our targeting and messaging.

## Who are Net Natives?

We are **creatives, thinkers, makers, planners and doers** - tenacious, talented and together, more than the sum of our parts. We know great campaigns all start with one thing: understanding. So that's where we begin - with you, your audience, your ambitions and

## Contact Us

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/netnatives

# SERVICES:

Here are just some of the services our team of experts can work with your institution on:

## Advertising

- Direct media planning and buying
- Biddable media (search, social & programmatic)
- Attribution tracking
- End to end reporting

## Creative

- Video and photography
- Creative concepts
- Graphic design
- HTML5 displays ads
- Copywriting

## Analytics and Insight

- Desk and field-based market research
- Analytics
- Business intelligence
- SEO Training
- Conversion strategies
- Strategic content development
- Lead generation and nurturing
- Competitive analysis
- Performance analysis

## Student Engagement

- Student audience panel
- Brand advertising
- Lead generation campaigns
- Community management

## International Expertise

- Chinese social platform management
- China digital advertising
- Local website and microsite development

## Social Media

- Social media and social content strategy
- Social media training

## Strategic Marketing

- Reputation and SEO management
- Consulting and project management

## Marketing Software

- Marketing performance software
- Data visualisation software
- Social media content performance software