Social Media: copyright best practice for teaching staff, students, and post graduate researchers

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# Introduction

Social media has enabled communication and the sharing of content through a variety of ubiquitous devices, like mobile phones, tablets etc. With this ease of sharing content, comes a heightened copyright risk due to the global audience these platforms have. There are also the questions of what are your rights on these platforms; along with how your materials can be used by them (Twitter, LinkedIn etc.)?

This document sets out to address the above issues and questions, by providing non-legal guidance for teaching staff, students, and researchers to consider when using social media platforms.

To make the content more digestible this document is divided into three distinct sections for the applicable audience. Despite the distinct separation of content, there is some overlap between the areas in terms of non-legal guidance.

# 1. social media for teaching staff

Social media platforms, enable posts to be made frequently and easily via different devices, i.e., a laptop, mobile phone, or tablet. With this comes potential infringement, as the casual nature of the platforms can be misleading, and lead to the assumption that copyright law does not apply (it still does). Coupled with heightened copyright infringement, is the public nature of the platforms which means you aren’t just communicating with one or two people, but a global audience. You should be mindful not post anything you don’t own via the internet (including social media platforms) unless you have written permission. This is especially relevant, as you will be held accountable, not the social media platform, if you upload something that infringes copyright or is unlawful. When sharing other people’s lawful content online, best practice is to link to it, as opposed to uploading it yourself.

When using social media, you should read the terms and conditions associated with a particular platform before you sign up, as this will give insight into what rights you have. Most platforms let you maintain the copyright to your own work. However, you should be mindful of almost all these sites have a clause stating you grant them a global, non-exclusive, royalty free licence to adapt, copy, distribute, process (and even sub licence), your uploaded material. This means you still own your content, but Twitter, LinkedIn (or any of the others), can use your material in any way they see fit, without having to compensate you or ask for your permission.

When it comes to protecting your intellectual property when using social media, the simplest solution is not to upload it to any platform. There are other private, online alternatives that will let you share your work via private file sharing services, or cloud-based platforms. If you do decide to share your work via a social media platform, you should consider putting a clear copyright statement on it. Although, this may not stop your work from being unlawfully infringed, it does mean the person(s) cannot say they were unaware that is was protected. This would also result in, it being easier for you to get your work removed, when (and if) you request it get taken down.

**N.B. for non-legal guidance around how best to advise students when using blogs and wikis, please refer to** [**this document**](https://edshare.gla.ac.uk/id/document/7128) **(page 5).**

# 2. social media for students

Social Media can be viewed as being “casual” or informal, however this doesn’t mean copyright laws & intellectual property don’t apply to these platforms. You should be aware of the following points covered below, when you consider using platforms, like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and TikTok.

* You should not upload anything you don’t own, unless you have written permission from the rights holder (copyright owner)
* Examine the terms and conditions associated with the social media platform you sign up to & check for copyright information (if you don’t find, do not assume that copyright doesn’t exist)
* When posting links on social media, only link to genuine, lawful content or reuse content that has a Creative Commons licence associated with it
* Do not share copyright protected content you have downloaded from an online course found within your university’s Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), i.e., Moodle, Blackboard, and repost on a Social Media platform, website or via email
* Don’t email or share copyright protected material you have legally downloaded to anyone else, especially via social media or VLE
* If you encounter your own content posted on someone else’s site, then you’re well within your rights to contact the infringing owner, requesting your material is removed
* Remember, no social media platform will be held accountable if you upload content which is unlawful, and or violates copyright law

# 3. social media for researchers

The use of social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn is becoming increasingly popular amongst researchers to publicise and promote their own work and develop a professional network to exchange knowledge and good practice. Therefore, it’s important to understand how to make use of social media from copyright and research-based perspectives.

If you make use of a social media platform, it is advisable to read the terms and conditions associated with them, and examine how (and to what capacity), they reuse your personal information and content (such as images/photographs), you upload to their site.

Before sharing content (i.e., images) on social media platform, it’s worthwhile considering how sensitive and valuable is it in relation to your research? As other users could potentially use your content without asking for your permission. If another individual or body has used your content without asking for your permission, you’re well within your rights to contact the infringing owner, requesting your material is removed.

Below are some other key factors you should be aware of when

* Do not share copyright protected content taken from an online course within your institutions Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), i.e., Moodle, Blackboard, and repost on a Social Media platform, website or via email
* Don’t email or share copyright protected material you have legally downloaded to anyone else, especially via social media or your university’s VLE
* You should not upload anything you don’t own, unless you have written permission from the rights holder (copyright owner)

From a research perspective, social media can be a valuable source for data, i.e., ‘mining’ hashtags, or examining trends in public behaviour or opinion. To help enable ethical best practice when conducting research through social media, [the Association for Internet Researchers ethics guide](https://aoir.org/ethics/), would be a useful reference. As these guides highlight the importance of considering privacy and ethical issues before gathering data.