

**KAREN FOLEY:** Welcome back to the *Student Hub Live*. This session deals with whether or not academics can make scholarly use of social media. So I have some serious academics for you, and I can welcome Azuma and Alison sent back to the studio today.

We have some widgets that we'd like you to vote on, so three words to describe your identity, what's your work setting, and some multi-choice questions, right. Yes or no, can serious academics make scholarly use of Facebook and Twitter? Which social media platforms do you currently use, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp or other? And how many hours a day do you spend on social media? And there are a range of choices there.

Now, to vote on those, you just press the one that you'd like to select, choose the item that applies to you, and return the results. And then you can see what other people at home are saying also. For the word count, you need to put three things in, and we keep clearing those down because there are different people in various sessions. So do put three words in there. If you can't think of three, just to add one or two, but you need to put a full stop so that there's something in each box so that your results can submit.

Now, we've spoken today, Alison and Azuma, at various points about the importance of community in peer-to-peer learning and how important this is at postgraduate level. Because whilst community is really important in all areas of study, at postgraduate level there's something a little bit different about needing our peers around us. And Jane was talking a little bit more about this wiki that they were doing on one of the modules and about how important it is to sort of mimic real scholarly communities. So how does social media come into it then?

**ALISON:** Well, there is this sense of community that, as you say, we were talking about earlier that's sort of within a course. And so that we've got things built into the course that will allow people to communicate within the course. But we're also trying to explore-- and as you say, for professional uses-- guide people to other options.

So we've got a Facebook site, where, perhaps Azuma will talk about later, we've got a Twitter stream, and we've got a tweet chat we want to promote for this evening and to engage with people beyond the course, as well, to get people interested in the discussions we're having. And then we also are going to be guiding people to some of the professional associations sites and some of the blogs and Twitter activity out there, too, as well as having a tight community,

also to sort of extend networks that will be a useful way beyond the programme, hopefully.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Now, we asked our audience whether serious academics can make use of scholarly use of Facebook and Twitter. 100% of them said yes, I think, realising that this wasn't a rhetorical question, and we were going to explain some aspects to them. I sit it in some of these conferences, and everyone's on their iPads on Twitter. Everyone's commenting on certain things.

So the question is, fair enough, if we can use social media. But will people have time for them? And how important is that, then, when you're, all of a sudden, starting to cram and study with life and all these various other things going on and going off to the library and finding all these articles, et cetera? So should people be giving up their social media or adding to it? Where's the balance?

**AZUMA:** It's a good question. [INAUDIBLE] we wouldn't want to encourage anybody to do something which we feel is going to distract from their formal study. So it is informal, and it is social. But the point is it allows you, I think, to talk and think and discuss with a community beyond the other students on your course. So there's a much wider scholarly academic community, other students doing MAs or people who are writing and researching around your particular area of interest, whatever it is.

Whether it's leadership, whether it's childhood studies, whether it's alternative education, there are other professional academics who are also likely to be certainly on Twitter or to have blogs, who, if you're engaged in those networks, it gives you a chance to be having those conversations with them as well. So it gives you access to a wider community.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Now, it all sounds quite serious. And king of procrastination, HJ, has just turned up on the chat. So I'm sure he's got some advice to share with us in terms of that. Is it serious, though? Or is some of this space fun in terms of using social media to support your academic study?

**ALISON:** Well, you can use it for both, can't you? And that's what we're exploring on the Facebook site at the moment. And Azuma's brilliant at this. She brings in this, sort of, really informal feel to it. And I'm sort-- everybody's playing. It is a new space for us all to play. And one of the things is to think about your digital identity. And one of the things is to consider whether you want to put your professional and your scholarly activity into the space where your personal social activity was, so whether to set up another page, sorry, another account. And that's what some of us have done, so to separate things out.

But even in those spaces, we've decided that the Facebook page is a very playful place. But it's hopefully very supportive. So that the emotional side of study is something that can be very supportive. We were talking about this morning people saying, oh, you know, my top tip is-- and you go, really, oh, that sounds great. I wouldn't have thought that was a relevant thing to be talking about.

We were talking about the poem about dusting, didn't you? Saying, no, forget your dusting whilst you're studying. But that's also useful. And then there's the other side. There's the academic side, which Azuma was just referring to, where you can really, in real time, engage with real people, real debates and hot topics that haven't been published yet.

So they're not in the library and the digital literature yet, but they're the academics that you've come across in the course. And they're out there. They're doing research now. And so we can talk to them and engage with the ideas in real time.

**KAREN FOLEY:** And indeed, while students may create different identities on Facebook, for example, many academics do also. So you might be friends with them on one level, but they might also have a professional side and, again, include things like blogs and vlogs and various articles or thoughts, et cetera. So it's a nice way to be able to engage.

If we start to separate these out, bearing in mind we asked our audience at home what social media platforms they currently use, the majority, unsurprisingly, are on Facebook with 43%, 23% on Twitter, less so with Instagram. And WhatsApp, I think, has quite a good following, as well. So Facebook has one sort of context. And let's take a look at that.

You've mentioned Azuma as being playful in practicing identities, I guess, we could say on the Facebook page. So what context might students find Facebook supportive for? And should they be looking at following things that will help support their areas of interest?

**AZUMA:** I think that there's a really strong presence of The Open University, especially, I think, informal Open University accounts. I know from just the past few weeks of looking around on Facebook, there are several modules, for example, who have a Facebook group for students following a particular module. And if you can't find one, I think it's fairly easy to set one up. And that sort of sits slightly outside the more formal website, which means, I think, you have slightly different conversations.

It's much easier, I think, to post images, for example. I know in the lead up to the start of term, was it "Student Hub Life" that had the unboxing, with students just taking pictures of their OU materials?

**KAREN FOLEY:** And study buddies are very popular. But we've got some on the board behind Zach and Lee at the moment from our Freshers Week, various things people have sent us in.

**AZUMA:** So those things, I think, is just another way of talking about what it is you're doing, of just getting tips from other people to share in your experiences, and, in a sense, just, I think, strengthen that sense of identity of yourself as being an OU student. And so I think those things are-- they're fun.

They're not desperately serious. They're fun. But hopefully they need two other conversations-- oh, I've got that book. How are you finding it? There are times when people, for example, have read a really interesting paragraph about a particular subject. And they've just taken a photograph of the page and just given their thoughts about it.

So it's not too serious. It's not leading to an essay. It's not working towards the TMA. But it's talking around that subject in a way that is informal, but nonetheless, I think, reflects back on the work that you will eventually do for the module.

**ALISON:** A sort of professional relevance.

**AZUMA:** It's a professional relevance, I think.

**ALISON:** And we've been feeding in things that we found from all over the Open University and other sites. But there's a lot of resources that we can feed in, in real time. If somebody asked a question, well, how about this or the latest thing on the library site. They've always got activities. So just to keep those things in people's minds that might be at a timely time for them to use.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Now, you've to a Twitter chat tonight, don't you? So tell us about Twitter. I mean, the 140 characters, very sharp and snappy, often with a hashtag, very popular at conferences as a way of feeding in the chat and questions as people are having a dialogue, at the same time as maybe a speaker is talking, or even making connections outside of that particular context with other people in the area.

How would you recommend students might start engaging with Twitter? Should they be

following people? Should they be looking at hashtags? Should they be tweeting at certain people?

**AZUMA:** I think they should be doing all of those things.

[LAUGHTER]

But yes--

**KAREN FOLEY:** In moderation, when they've got time.

**AZUMA:** Well, yes, I think that there's a really strong academic presence on Twitter. So it may well be that there are particular contemporary writers, who you're noticing their names are coming up quite frequently in your literature. It could well be that that person is on Twitter, so it might well be worth looking for them.

There's certainly going to be a group of people who are within your academic community, whatever it is. It's easy for me to talk about educational leadership or to talk about post-16 education, post 16 (FE) education. And I know, for example, with FE education, there are a group of people who work in colleges, in universities, and teacher education, who every Thursday, they sit and they have a Twitter chat. And they have their hashtag, and they table a group of questions, and they all sit and have a chat about it on Twitter on a weekly basis.

On a monthly basis, BELMAS, which I know Alison is going to talk more about, but British Educational--

**ALISON:** --Leadership and Management and Administration Society, yes.

**AZUMA:** OK.

**KAREN FOLEY:** I see why you call it BELMAS. That's fine. We'll put the link for that in the chat for BELMAS.

**ALISON:** Just the other plug for that is that it's free membership for the first year. So it's really good for students starting up to see whether it is of use to them. Because not only are these Twitter chats, but there's a journal that you get, a professional journal. Yeah, sorry, I'm distracting.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Just for a minute, park the idea of the content side of things and just go back to this point you were making, I think, about access, because it's incredibly rare that you get access to some of these huge names. And you can have that through Twitter.

**AZUMA:** You can have that through Twitter.

**KAREN FOLEY:** They don't listen to you. [LAUGHS]

**AZUMA:** No. [LAUGHS] Yes, you can have that discussion with them not all the time, clearly. But they certainly will be posting. For example, they've just written something. They've just published something themselves, or they've read something that they find interesting. And I think it's you know that you're getting information which is very recent, which is very current, and it's from a credible source that you can rely on. And so I think, for example, the education is somebody like Dylan William, which, again, if people are doing education, would mean something. But if you're not, I'm sorry, it won't.

But there are really interesting people who, I think-- it gives you an opportunity to be in conversation with them. Whereas you might not otherwise have that opportunity. So I think it's worth seeking out. And there are also some very interesting blogs, but maybe you're going to talk about the blogs later on.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Well, I wanted to ask, because somebody's made a very good point about using their OU blog to demonstrate some struggles and progresses, et cetera, because people have an OU blog. So I wonder, Lee and Zach, if you could fill us in.

**LEE:** Yeah, OU blogs, I mean, every student can have one of these. You can access them through Student Home. And lots of students make use of these. They blog their thoughts, their feelings, what they hope to achieve, how their studies are going. And it's not all necessarily overly brimming with positive.

It's actually about the real-life challenges of studying, as well. So people blog about their problems. People blog about the challenges and about how they overcome those, as well. So it's a really good way of sharing that information and helping other students, as well.

**KAREN FOLEY:** They're also a way to access things, because I think the student are saying that it's very important because she doesn't think she is going to be able to work outside the home. And so being able to document their struggles is, in a sense, I guess, sharing some of those advice with other students, as well as perhaps just doing something to honour your own space and your own progress, to maybe reflect on, as well.

**LEE:** Absolutely it's a great reflection, too. I mean, not many of us keep a handwritten diary

anymore, so a blog is a fantastic way of doing that and sort of interacting with other students, as well.

**KAREN FOLEY:** So people can find their blogs, which, again, all OU students can have. You don't have to have one, though. Don't feel under any pressure to sort of engage with anymore than you need to. But if you'd like to, then you can check out your Student Home Page and find your blog and start posting, as and when you will.

They're a great way to disseminate information and also a great way to back on things. I often read blogs. I must admit I comment on them slightly less. But I often read the comments that people have put on them and think, gosh, again, just being able to sort of further that dialogue. And a nice bit-sized chunk is a really useful thing to be able to do when you're short of time.

**ALISON:** And a lot of the modules have a professional development planning process within them, of which this could act as a sort of learning journal. So you can be reflecting back on it. I know some of our EMA tasks, part of the task is to reflect on your learning journey.

So these blogs are a really good learning journal space. I know there are other spaces where you can think back on it, and you've recorded it at that time, when it was fresh and it was real. So you can see how much progress you've made and what a difference it's making to you and your professional role, as well. It's a good place to reflect on that.

**KAREN FOLEY:** I know you wanted to talk about the [INAUDIBLE], makes sense to sort of bring it in now. But I wonder, Azuma, if you could sort of share your thoughts on the relationship between writing a blog for other people and writing a blog to actually learn something about yourself and your experience, that whole sort of iterative process of writing things and discovering things about yourself as you're beginning to communicate them.

**AZUMA:** OK, yes, I guess there's something to say about the process of writing itself. I think that's when we're students, when we're involved in university life and so on, that we think of writing as just something that we do so that we can show what we know about the world. And I think what we would both say is that writing is an important way of helping you to think about things and helping you to work out how to phrase things and helping you to work out how you want to make connections with things.

So in that sense, it helps you to produce knowledge and to generate knowledge, as well as just to show it. So it's not just something that we do in order to be assessed on it. So from that

point of view, I think it is really important for post-graduate students. And I would say, certainly if you're doing an EdD or a PhD, I think I would almost say that a blog is almost essential. If you're are doing an MA, its a good thing to be doing, and it's a helpful thing to be doing.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Would you like to add anything, Alison, about what people might use a blog for, in particular, as Azuma says, if you're doing one of these EdDs or PhDs, it might be essential. What sort of things do you think people might put in their blogs and what for?

**ALISON:** Well, and I think perhaps having a thought process. What we've been talking about might not feel comfortable for everybody. So it is a place for you explore your digital identity, so what you're prepared to show beyond-- and that's why you can have different stages of access for these blogs.

You can write it for yourself and keep it for yourself. And then as you feel confident, you can open it up, perhaps just to a closed group. You can send the link just to people that you know. So it's a safe opening up of it. And as people give you reactions, you might start to respond either to whether you've written about the emotional side-- that might be the hardest thing to show-- or whether it's the learning, the academic side, as Azuma was saying, trying to explore how you might sort of articulate these ideas in ways that is this scholarly enough? Is this OK? And get some feedback and increase your confidence with your writing.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Because if you have those comments on the blog, then you can encourage your peers to maybe sort of share their thoughts on what you're articulating.

**ALISON:** Absolutely.

**KAREN FOLEY:** And then that can facilitate different discussions.

**ALISON:** Absolutely.

**AZUMA:** You can, for example, keep a blog as a reading diary, right? This is what I've read. This is what I've thought about it. This is how it connects to the particular work that I'm interested in doing. And if you like, if that causes you-- for example, if you're doing our modules or leadership modules and you read something about leadership which causes you to reflect on your own leadership style, you've got that meeting there of your own experience and your academic content. And hopefully other people will read that and be able to comment on and exchange, I've also read this, and I've interpreted it in a completely different way. And that's ideally what can happen through blogging.



**KAREN FOLEY:** So it's a very fluid format. It can be something that can be used as a very reflective piece just for yourself, can be shared with a small group of people, or can be more broad. And again, people writing those blogs may use for those purposes, but also they might like to check out other people's blogs.

Any recommendations? I know we've got quite a few links that are on our Resources page of the website. *Surviving the OU* is one of the blogs I think, that you've recommended for students. What sort of things would be key? And why are they useful?

**ALISON:** Well, I think one of the links that I provided I thought was useful. It was a summary of the best blogs to go and look for. Because, as you were saying, there's so many different styles of blog, that if you were thinking of blogging, you'd be able to say, well, oh, I could imagine writing something like that. But that sounds a bit too sort of-- but, yeah, some people are very, very generous with their innermost articles about study. And there's so many, particularly vlogs out there, and particularly OU students, who've really, really put their heart on the line.

They've really thought through on their own journey and said, oh, I wish I had known this, or wish I'd done not, or really recommend this, some very module specific or subject specific. But some of them have got real general appeal. And they obviously feel very motivated that they wish that people had told them these things and shared these things, so they're very generously putting themselves out in creating these resources.

**KAREN FOLEY:** And often when you share them, you're reflecting on how well you've come on, in a sense, and so it can be a really nice positive thing for you, as well as an altruistic thing to give to other people.

**ALISON:** And then there's the academic blogs. As you were saying earlier about watching the Twitter activity and debates, you can see how academics use critique and how they develop debates. Well, it's the same with the blogs.

If you look at some of the academics' blogs, or we talked about BELMA. There's also the British Educational Research Association. They have a blog site where it's not an individual, but they sort of collect in blog posts from all of the membership, philtre it a bit. It's [? not got ?] a style, though, but it's very, very short, 750-words-maximum pieces, which you've got evidence base that will take you places which will make you think. And you can see different styles, and you can engage with different debates very, very time efficiently and see how

academics use them.

**KAREN FOLEY:** So we covered blogs. We covered Facebook, Twitter. What about these forum spaces? You've mentioned some of the welcome forums, and these are asynchronous. So they're less action packed at the time, unless, of course, someone happens to comment on them when you're there. But they're a sort of a space where people can post questions, and there's welcome forums often that people have been recommending students check out on. So tell us for the new students who may not have come across a forum, what it is and what they might use them for.

**ALISON:** Well, we've got them built in to all of the modules. So they are guided. They're structured. So they'll be built in to the module. Obviously, there'll be one, the welcoming one, that the tutors usually host.

So you'll be invited with a question to respond, and you just need to put a small post. It will often be reflecting on your own practise, so it won't be anything that you've had to study before you can respond. You can just reflect on the question were from your own experience. And this is what we were talking about earlier.

That puts the expertise that the students-- you-- are bringing to the course on the table so that somebody else can go, oh, yes I've worked in that context. Or I've had that experience. Oh, mine was something that the fact that it was important was different for me. So all of the activities are built in to structure around a question, to stimulate thinking. And some of them are in the whole module.

Some of them are in small tutor groups, which are sort of safer smaller places. And I guess, in terms of people engaging with each other asynchronously, I don't know whether we were going to have time to come on to. But places like Research Gate and academia.edu are places where academics are putting up work, either that's just been published or is in process. And you can follow academics there.

You can have discussions with them asynchronously there. You can ask them for copies of their work. And there's this basis for debates, as well, and access to information.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Well I'm glad you got in there, because we're nearly out of time. So thank you for filling us in. When is your Twitter chat tonight?

**AZUMA:** It's at 7:30 this evening. We're on the #OUPGInduction17.

**ALISON:** Right, for an hour. We'll be there for an hour.

**KAREN FOLEY:** For one hour. And is there any point in people watching that after the event has taken place? They can still get the feed.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

**AZUMA:** In fact, if you do a search on that hashtag, you'll find the discussion that we've been having for the past few weeks. But I guess tonight is probably the last thing that we'll do.

**KAREN FOLEY:** So it's going to be more live. So if people want the--

**AZUMA:** More live, yes.

**KAREN FOLEY:** --immediate engagement, then they can come [INAUDIBLE]. But of course, this the great thing about Twitter is that you can just pick it up and put it down as you will so--

**ALISON:** And perhaps we should just say to just say we're going to lose the "induction" bit after today, and then it'll just be #OUPG17 and we'll be able to carry on the conversations, but not so focused around the induction experience.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Wonderful. Well, we've put the link for the hashtag in the chat room, so you can make sure that you follow that. Well, Azuma and Alison, thank you very much for coming on today. And that's all we've got time for in this session, so I'm just going to say bye-bye to Lee and Zach.

**LEE:** Bye.

**ZACH:** Thank you Thank you very much for having us.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Well, that was short. I was expecting a little bit more, to be honest. Have you had a nice time eating biscuits with everyone at home today, Lee and Zach?

**LEE:** Oh, we've had a fantastic time. And I can see why HJ took so many power naps last night. It's been great to see HJ on the chat room, as well.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Brilliant. Thank you very much. Well, thank you for feeding all those comments back in. And that's the end of the show today. So if you've missed any of the sessions, it's all available on the Catch Up. You can check that out, which is [livestream.com/ouconnections](http://livestream.com/ouconnections).

We will be cutting its up and putting it on our YouTube channel very soon, though, so you can also do a search there. There's lots of other content available. So if you are new to the Open University and you want to find out about things like how the student support team works, about additional requirements, there are many, many, many sessions that you can look up of the *Student Hub Live* YouTube account.

So check that out, and hopefully we will answer your questions. But if we don't, drop us an email, [studenthub@open.ac.uk](mailto:studenthub@open.ac.uk), and we'll make sure it gets the right department and back to you. You can also subscribe to us and give us your email address, and we'll let you know about future events. And there's a small feedback form. So if you'd like to tell us what you thought of the show, you can either email us or fill that little form in, and it'd be great to hear from you.

We've covered an awful lot today. So I'll just remind you, we've been talking about the post-graduate programme more generally, what it means to be a post-graduate students, and things that you might do in your first four weeks of study. We've then looked at leadership and management, inclusive practise, applied linguistics, and childhood and youth. And finally, ended up with today's session, looking at Facebook and other forms of social media and how academics might use them to enhance their practise.

So thank you very much for watching. I hope you've enjoyed the programme. It's all from us at the *Student Hub Live* today. Bye for now, and do come to our events in future.