Social media is becoming an increasingly popular channel for information sharing and has changed the way in which individuals interact, personally and professionally. This important technological trend has big implications for how researchers communicate and collaborate. Seeking to discover first-hand how researchers engage with social media, International Innovation asked a selection of contributors:

**PROFESSOR RAYMOND LEVITT**
(Stanford University, USA):

I use social media sparingly and selectively to interact with others in both my professional and personal lives. I am a firm believer that the active and thoughtful use of ‘publish and subscribe’ protocols in everything from email to social communities is a way to stay informed and also to inform others about interesting and meaningful content. Importantly, this enables one to do so without becoming overwhelmed or overwhelming others with unrestricted ‘many to many’ communications that may be of little or no interest to the receiver.

I use wikis and blogs in my classes as ways for students to communicate with the instructional team and each other, to access and build on each other’s knowledge and ideas. In addition, I participate in communities like LinkedIn to track down and follow people of interest and ResearchGate and Google Scholar to access and track my own research publications and related publications of interest by others.

In my personal relations, I use Google+ to share photos and comments only with restricted lists of family and friends. I do not post to Facebook or Twitter.

**PROFESSOR DAMIJAN MIKLAVČIČ**
(University of Ljubljana, Slovenia):

It seems to me that social media channels such as Facebook, Twitter and Google+ are not yet fully accepted by researchers. Maybe this is because the leading scientists grew up before the appearance of the internet and social media, or because certain social media channels that may be more appropriate to be used by scientists are yet to evolve – channels such as ResearchGate and LinkedIn are the right answers. In our group, we have been experimenting with using Twitter to announce to interested parties that a new research paper has been published, but the community is accepting it very slowly. After almost two years we only have 27 followers, although www.electroporation.net has had almost 6,000 unique visitors since being created in September 2012.

**DR JUAN FALCON-PEREZ**
(CIC bioGUNE, Spain):

Thanks to the internet and social media, in the past few years knowledge about, and interest in, different scientific topics has substantially increased within the non-scientific community. This has generated the need for specialised journals and magazines in which specialists tell a story and/or share results in terms that the layman can understand. Social media provides many possibilities to disseminate what is happening in laboratories, but it is important to be rigorous about what information is shared.
Social media provides me with a platform for personal expression within a professional context, enabling me to connect directly with others in real time. It’s a great way for sharing some of the positive and uplifting events I attend, such as award ceremonies at member organisations, as well as letting followers know what I find interesting from keynotes and speeches as they happen. Hashtags and trending let me know whether I am in or out of step with others! Because of my professional role, I am careful not to use Twitter for personal photos or comments as I feel this would blur the lines between my personal identity and professional role and responsibilities, but I am happy that my personality and values come through in my tweets.

The possibilities for social media to connect directly with professionals on Science Council registers means our current ‘big question’ debate on how to describe a professional scientist is a more engaging and free-flowing discussion, and we hear from individuals we might otherwise never have reached. In terms of the future, I believe social media has huge untapped potential for facilitating public engagement with science and scientists. We can explore together some of the key issues of transparency about researchers and their values, ethics and professional conduct, and whether (or how) science is contributing to public good.

**DIANA GARNHAM**  
(Science Council, UK):

**DAVID PHIPPS, KRISTA JENSEN AND MICHAEL JOHNNY**  
(York University, Canada):

Knowledge mobilisation is a suite of activities that connect research and researchers to partners who can use that research to inform innovative and improved products, policies, services and professional practices. These connections help to maximise the economic, social and environmental impacts of research beyond the academy.

We use certain social media tools to help mediate connections between research and its use. We published a book chapter on the role of social media in knowledge mobilisation (http://bit.ly/yorkspace_knowledge_mobilisation). Beyond the theory presented in that chapter, the key to successful social media use is a well-considered social media strategy that considers goals, audience, channels, the active conversation, resources and evaluation. There are a number of social media planning guides to assist with this. We collaborated with NeuroDevNet to make a social media Guide of Guides (http://bit.ly/socialmedia_guides), an annotated bibliography presenting a selection of social media guides we feel offer the best advice.

At York University and in ResearchImpact-Réseaul’ImpactRecherche (RIR), Canada’s knowledge mobilisation network, we use the following social media channels:

**Mobilize This! Blog** [160,000+ views from 149 countries] for thinking out loud, editorials, commentary and announcements

**Twitter @researchimpact** [6,300+ followers] for engaging, broadcasting, dissemination and community building

**Linkedin ResearchImpact Group** [401 members] for discussions, announcements and commentary in related LinkedIn Groups

**Slide Share** [25,995 views] and **You Tube** [7,747 views]: a repository of content including presentations and videos we have produced or are sharing

You will note we do not use Facebook in our own work. However, we help researchers consider their use of Facebook where that tool makes sense for them. Our knowledge mobilisation stakeholders are not using Facebook for their work, so neither do we. However, if your customers, clients, stakeholders and partners are active on Facebook then you should consider either being active on your own Facebook page or becoming active on theirs. But carefully consider whether you should be using a personal or professional Facebook persona when being active in the professional Facebook pages of others.

The number one question we get asked is ‘How do I drive traffic to my social media?’ That is the wrong question. When starting to implement your social media strategy your first action should be to see where there is existing traffic and become an active contributor to those conversations. Comment on blogs and videos. Retweet. Share content (yours and others’) in those conversations. That will raise awareness of your social media channels and others will, over time, become active contributors to your social media.