

Becoming a Networked Researcher – using social media for research and researcher development

by Blog Admin

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Unable to conduct PhD fieldwork overseas, [Dr Sarah-Louise Quinnell](#) found herself searching for new ways to communicate with actors dispersed across the globe. Now, [her website](#), a virtual research environment, has become the hub of her research and she utilises forums, blogs and twitter to interact with more actors and increase her impact through different audiences.



I was the first person in my department to actively engage with social media and digital research methods to conduct my PhD research. I was unable to undertake fieldwork in the traditional sense; spending a period overseas conducting interviews and collecting data, as part of my Geography PhD at KCL. While I had made several trips to a number of institutions, I had to look at different ways to contact and communicate with a large number of globally dispersed actors.

During my background research I had already seen that a number of international organisations were employing web based forums and message boards as mechanisms for encouraging international debate. The applications enabled participants from all globe to participate in discussions asynchronously, from their home location. I then began to consider how these techniques could be used for a postgraduate researcher.

Over the following two years I worked with a web developer to trial and apply a number of different of open source and bespoke applications to create my own virtual research environment (VRE) which comprised of a web site which included a blog, message board / forum and instant messaging facilities. I also used VoIP technology to conduct interviews. As such my web site became my field site, the hub of my research. Using social media applications enabled me to interact and engage with more actors interested in my research than I would have been able to using normal methods. It also enabled me to increase the impact of my research through the different audiences I could reach through blogging and as I progressed tweeting. Not only did it enable me to collect data and promote my research having an active online presence has also helped my professional development.

Post-PhD I have been engaging with a number of online resources. I am the supervisory correspondent for the [thesiswhisperer](#), the managing editor of [PhD2Published](#) and I actively engage with #phdchat community on twitter. I also write the post-PhD diaries for the [Guardian Higher Education Network](#). I have also presented on issues relating to social media application in academia. 5 years on from the start of my journey into digital research methods and how social media can be used for academic research and researcher development, I am encouraged to see more people engaging with technology, however I am still very aware that their uses are for promoting research and creating communities of researchers.

These are both important uses of social media but these applications also offer new and innovative ways to find, create and disseminate information, thus having applications throughout the research process. This is why I set up [networked researcher](#). The purpose of this site is to promote and support the use of social media in academic research and researcher development.

The site has just launched and the project ties in with new courses on using social media in research that I will be delivering as part of the [King's College London Researcher Development Programme](#). At the moment the blog side of things is up and running and I am looking for people to share their experiences in using social media within research / researcher development and higher education more generally to illustrate how you can apply these technologies in all aspects of research. As it grows I hope to expand beyond the blog

to construct a virtual research environment (VRE) communication platform as I used within my research. The purpose of this platform will be to enable researchers to communicate whilst providing 'how-to' guides on different aspects of social media and eventually become a template that can be used by other researchers to employ their own VREs within their work. Social media isn't the future of research, it is the present and we need to embrace it.

Dr. Sarah-Louise Quinnell gained her PhD from the Geography Department at King's College London in 2010. She has research interests in digital research methods and communication as well as international environmental politics. Sarah is the founder of the site [networked researcher](#). You can visit her personal blog [here](#) and she tweets [@sarahthesheepu](#)

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