

# Web analytics 101: How to use statistics to drive online engagement to your institutional page or research project.

[blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2016/05/27/web-analytics-101-how-to-use-statistics-to-drive-online-engagement/](https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2016/05/27/web-analytics-101-how-to-use-statistics-to-drive-online-engagement/)

If you are looking to drive traffic to your institutional or project websites or blogs then it is important to consider how visitors are arriving and any potential trends that this behaviour may reveal. **Robin Coleman** shares tips from his experiences on maximising visits to the Institute of Development Studies website. He recommends a more sustained look at how your website looks and performs on mobile devices and offers tips on how to improve your website exposure, ranking and ultimately its impact.



Monitoring the success of online engagement and policy influence is more than just page views to your research website. Without deeper analysis we could be missing opportunities and threats from reaching vital audiences. I'll introduce you to deeper analysis of your website statistics (with Google Analytics) and provide a basic understanding of how visitors arrive at your site. I'll follow this up with some ideas to help regain your online audience after some recent major changes affecting Google search and Facebook.



## Check your website stats for your Source/Medium traffic

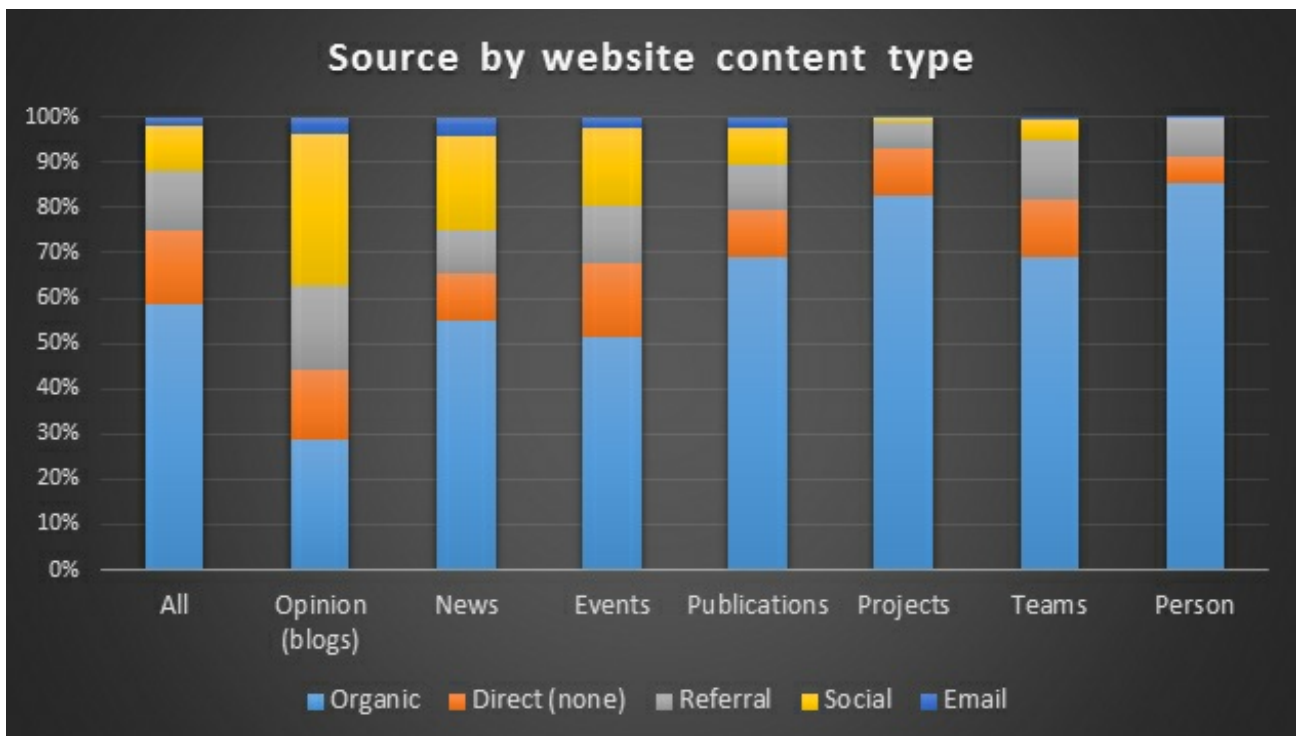
If your objective is to drive traffic to your institutional or project websites or blogs then checking how visitors arrived there will reveal any potential trends. For the majority of website managers, we can use Google Analytics and split this web traffic (Acquisition > All Traffic > Channels) into the following categories:

- **Organic:** visitors using search engines to discover website content (Google usually dominates a high share so don't be surprised to see 90 -95% of Organic). You may find that the keywords used mean that a fair share of the audience are already aware of your key products or specific content.
- **Direct:** visitors who know the website address are either entering it manually or using saved bookmarks.
- **Referral:** This traffic is generated by other websites linking to your site. We love these!
- **Social:** you may be surprised (well I was) that Google expands their definition of Social to include blog platforms (Blogger and WordPress), multimedia (YouTube, Soundcloud, Flickr etc.) by default as well as the well-known social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter etc. You may find that some WordPress-based websites (without any blog function) are being treated as Social traffic where they should be Referral.
- **Email:** any traffic generated from email newsletters either from your own lists or others.

Every website's Source or Channel ratio will be different but for comparison, at the Institute of Development Studies we receive the majority of traffic from Organic search (around 60%). The rest is made up of Direct traffic at around 15-20%; Social, which has seen the biggest growth from 5% to around 12% over the past 3 years; Referral traffic at under 10%; and Email providing around 2% share. If your website or blog has been online for more than a year you'll be able to compare time periods and discover trends i.e. which of the above channels are expanding or declining.

## Deeper analysis by content type

Deeper analysis shows that visitors enter the website differently to the overall channel breakdown therefore varying the channel ratio too. The IDS website hosts a number of web pages with specific types of content including blog posts, news articles, publications, events, and people profiles. It is no great surprise then to see that Blog posts and News articles receive more than a third of its traffic from social media (as shown below). Compare this to less topical content like staff profiles and research projects as they are visited via search engines using keywords and phrases.



## Device check: how visitors differ when using mobile

As well as the Source channels to consider, statistics can also reveal what Devices are being used to consume our web content. Mobilephones have seen a huge growth in popularity and usage. The [Institute of Development Studies](#) has an international audience and this increase is especially evident in developing countries where 3G networks and lower phone costs allow faster uptake.

By segmenting the web traffic numbers in the different device (in Google Analytics use Audience > Mobile) i.e. Desktop, Tablet and Mobile you can analyse for the following:

- **Bounce Rate:** the visit consists of just one web page then bounces away. High percentages will confirm this issue.
- **Average Session Duration:** find out how much time a web page is being viewed on average. For blog posts, you want this in minutes not seconds.
- **Pages per Session by Device:** provides the number of web pages each visit consists of.

A final suggestion for segmenting your website statistics is to combine Visits by Device with their most popular Source channel. This should reveal trends on how your visitors prefer to visit. For instance, the share of IDS website 'Direct' visitors using their mobile device has more than doubled in the last three years. And there's a similar story with visitors using Twitter with their mobiles. All this shouldn't come as a surprise if comparing your own online habits but it's good to see the evidence in graph form. All the above will provide you with a better website dashboard for monitoring and evaluation. If you have experienced any surprising trends in your traffic channels then maybe the recent Google and Facebook algorithm changes will be the cause.

## **Whilst Facebook and Google blocks us, mobile users ignore us**

Over the last decade blogging and social media has helped non-profit and academic communications remain cost effective and has done so with great results. However, the digital communication landscape has changed recently meaning your research could be ignored or not even found.

### **Mobile and responsive: a survival tactic**

So what if mobile device visitor traffic is in the minority? Perhaps you think your website works ok on a small screen with the expanding gestures we're now used to. Unfortunately, Google has a vision and it is mobile (did you forget they own Android?). Last April Google introduced a new element to their search algorithm to rank websites that are 'responsive' in design meaning that content can adapt and reconfigure to display clearly on mobile devices. Since then industry pundits have dubbed this event as '[Mobilegeddon](#)' where non-responsive websites have dropped in ranking. Those companies and organisations who didn't have mobile-friendly websites had to advertise via Google, to recapture their main audience.

The other threat is the mobile users themselves. Again, checking your stats for Bounce Rate, Average Session Duration and Pages per Session by Device and we see a declining trend suggesting our visitors have less time to read our content or have shorter attention spans. They face distractions and issues such as social media, videos of cats, smaller screen sizes and they expect 'snack-sized' content.

### **Facebook fans high but exposure low**

Just as Google has been changing the 'rules', Facebook has also been tinkering with their platform's algorithms. You may not have noticed but your personal feeds have contained more friend related content than 'Page' content. Despite the growth of Social traffic Facebook has actually been declining in the last year. Unless you know how to set up your personal feed on a page by page basis or perhaps have liked and commented on recent posts from a company/organisation then like a magician, Facebook will make your posts disappear.

## How to combat traffic loss

Here are my tips to improving your website exposure, ranking and ultimately impact by source channel as described above:

### Organic

- Invest in a mobile responsive website – for some this might mean the painful process of changing your Content Management System. Improving your server performance as well as the web page load speeds will really help too in terms of search engine ranking and ultimately, the visitor experience.
- Improve your web writing skills – try the [COPE approach \(Create Once, Publish Everywhere\)](#), front load with keywords and use shorter titles.
- Advertise – in the short-term you may need to pay for advertising if the content demands it.

### Social

Don't give it up. [Publishing to Twitter will actually affect your Organic Search improving your site's ranking](#) or at least the individual web page being promoted (be it a blog, publication or campaign landing page). For Facebook, consider their advertising but also consider investing in other channels first before giving in to their demands.

Otherwise, try repackaging the content to encourage sharing. There's still the power of viral when content is interesting enough it will be shared. For those short attention spans, think about accompanying images, infographics, short videos and essentially well-written headlines or titles. Whilst you're reviewing your website and Content Management System, make sure your images are [Facebook OG and Twitter card scraping friendly](#). Consult your web programmer if you find images are not appearing correctly when shared on social media.

### Referral

If you work with partners then get friendly with your counter-parts. Introduce yourself and work together to link relevant webpages better. Instead of just the web address, use keywords to link. Multiple links are even better within reason. Improving this area will also help your Organic traffic.

### Email

With social starting to wane why not take control and become the master of your own communication. There's a real opportunity here to grow this channel with some modest investment and gain influential fans of your research. Those visitors tend to use this medium in more relaxed way and will have more time to read and use 'call to action' links. Good copywriting will guarantee these visits – use the [COPE method](#).

### Direct

If all goes well then your website will be remembered, favourited and bookmarked. This is the ultimate goal where your visitors use your website as the 'go-to'.

*This post is a combination of two original blogs featured on the IDS website: [It's all about M+E: Understanding how visitors arrive at your website](#); and [Whilst Facebook and Google blocks us, mobile users ignore us](#).*

*Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of the LSE Impact blog, nor of the London School of Economics. Please review our [Comments Policy](#) if you have any concerns on posting a comment below.*

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