

# The platform dilemma: Where next for academic social media?

# About

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# Contents

2	Executive Summary
4	Seven Research Insights
6/7	Scope What we asked
8	The Platform Dilemma: Where Next for Academic Social Media?
20	What Could Happen Next? Three Scenarios (and a Long Shot)
22	Conclusion



# Executive Summary

This report explores how academics are engaging with social media at a moment of rapid change and growing ambivalence. Based on survey responses from 1,790 researchers, authors, and students it reveals a nuanced picture: while social media remains a key channel for professional visibility, knowledge-sharing and community-building, trust in certain platforms is eroding.

X (formerly Twitter) and Facebook – once dominant hubs for academic conversation – are in marked decline. Their fall is driven by growing concerns over toxicity, platform ownership and the sense that these spaces no longer serve scholarly needs. In contrast, platforms like LinkedIn, Instagram and YouTube are holding steady or gaining traction. And a growing minority of scholars are experimenting with newer alternatives like Bluesky and Mastodon, which feel smaller, safer and more aligned with academic values.

The report also reveals an unexpected return to traditional communication channels. Email newsletters, peer-to-peer networks and in-person events are once again valued as effective, trusted ways to share research and connect with others – signalling a broader shift toward more intentional forms of academic interaction.

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The future of academic social media is not about whether scholars will be online, but where – and on whose terms.

Looking ahead, four possible scenarios are explored:

- a fragmented future where scholars spread across multiple platforms
- a return to more traditional modes of exchange
- the rise of purpose-built academic spaces
- and a long-shot possibility where platforms like Substack – built around newsletters rather than feeds – become the next digital home for academic connection

In short, the future of academic social media is not about whether scholars will be online, but where – and on whose terms. The platform dilemma is real, and the choices made now will shape what academic visibility, connection and community look like in the years ahead.

## Seven Research Insights

**1.** Social media remains essential – but not all platforms are equal. While nearly 70% of academics see social media as vital for professional visibility and networking, platforms like LinkedIn, YouTube, and Instagram are gaining traction, whereas X (formerly Twitter) and Facebook are in marked decline.

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**2.** Academics feel ‘trapped’ on declining platforms. Many researchers maintain X accounts for visibility but no longer actively post or engage. Top reasons for disengagement include Elon Musk’s influence, toxicity and hate speech, and a loss of academic value.

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**3.** Alternative platforms are small but promising. Platforms like Bluesky and Mastodon are still niche but show significantly higher levels of engagement, trust, and academic interaction – suggesting these could become meaningful spaces for scholarly communities.

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**4.** Younger researchers feel greater pressure to be visible online. Respondents – especially younger scholars – report increased pressure from peers and their institutions to maintain an active social media presence for career progression and research promotion.

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**5.** Email and newsletters are quietly reshaping academic communication. Despite the dominance of digital tools, 75% of respondents prefer to receive updates from publishers via email and newsletters. Rather than managing a social media persona, many scholars are choosing slower, more direct forms of communication. This growing preference could explain the rise of platforms like Substack, which are increasingly being used not just for distribution, but for networking, discussion and discovery.

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**6.** Engagement styles are shifting from passive to participatory. Bluesky users are nearly twice as likely as X users to post their own content and more likely to comment, share, and collaborate – indicating a move toward more intentional digital interactions.

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**7.** The future is fragmented. Rather than a single new dominant platform, academics are diversifying their digital presence across smaller, trusted spaces. From niche social platforms to community newsletters, the trend is toward more curated and personal engagement. The next wave of academic networking may not be loud or viral – it may look more like inboxes, subscriptions and slow-but-steady community-building.

# Scope

This study, conducted in November 2024, gathered insights from 1,790 respondents across the academic community, including researchers, authors, and students. The goal was to understand how scholars use social media, how their behaviours are shifting, and what role these platforms play in academic engagement.

The research explored the use of nine platforms: Bluesky, Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, Mastodon, Threads, TikTok, X/Twitter and YouTube.

While all these platforms have an academic presence, usage levels vary significantly. A handful dominate the landscape, with five platforms standing out as the most widely used. This study examines not just where academics are active, but how they engage, what they value, and whether emerging platforms are gaining traction in a rapidly changing social media environment.

# What We Asked

As part of this study, we explored how academics are using social media and how their behaviours are shifting, particularly in response to recent changes on platforms like X. We asked which platforms they currently use and how often and looked at how their engagement has evolved over time.

We also wanted to understand how academics use social media in general – not just professionally, but personally too – and how they balance those two modes of use. For work-related activity, we asked what they use each platform for: whether it's staying informed, promoting research, connecting with peers, or something else entirely. Given the role of publishers in the academic ecosystem, we explored which ones academics follow on social media and whether any stand out as particularly engaging.

We also asked what kinds of information they most value from publishers – such as updates on new books or calls for papers – and how they prefer to receive that information, whether via social media, email newsletters, or other channels.

Finally, we asked participants to reflect more broadly on social media's role in academia – how they feel about it now, and what they think the future might hold.

# The Platform Dilemma: Where Next for Academic Social Media?

## Social Media Is Here to Stay

Social media, in one form or another, remains a vital part of academic discourse. Nearly 70% of academics surveyed believe it will continue to be a key channel for engaging with colleagues and promoting their work. Across all age groups, researchers report using social media more than ever – to stay up to date with research, connect with peers, and advance their careers. However, while social media's role in academia is secure, the landscape is shifting. Our research reveals clear winners and losers: not all platforms are equally valued, and how, why, and where academics engage online is evolving.

## The Big Five

Our study identifies five dominant platforms among academics: You-

Tube, Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, and X. Among them, YouTube, LinkedIn, and Instagram are gaining traction, while Facebook and X are seeing declining engagement. Interestingly, LinkedIn stands out as the only platform used consistently across all age groups, whereas younger researchers are more likely to favour Instagram.

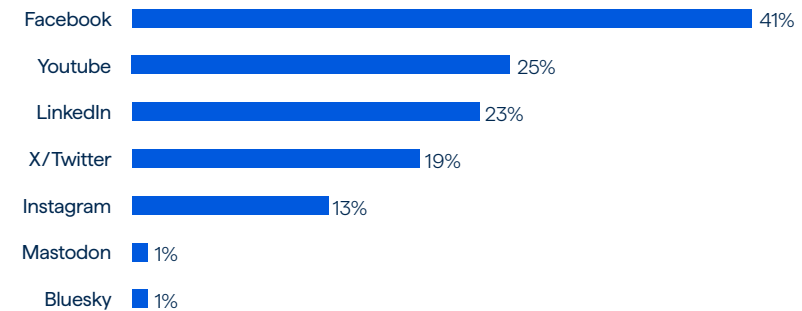
Looking at subject areas, X usage is relatively consistent, but two key trends emerge: social scientists are the most active users, yet they also have the highest attrition rates. Meanwhile, LinkedIn usage varies more – STEM researchers use it most frequently, followed by social scientists, while humanities researchers are the most likely to have stopped using it altogether.

While the research finds that some academics are leaving mainstream social media platforms, it certainly

isn't a mass exodus. Despite declining engagement, Facebook remains widely used (62% of respondents report they still use Facebook), but across disciplines, more academics report using it less rather than more. The same pattern is even more pronounced for X, particularly among social scientists, who are increasingly shifting toward LinkedIn, YouTube,

and Instagram instead. Meanwhile, Instagram continues to be the most addictive platform, particularly for younger researchers, with nearly a third (31%) of 26 - 35-year-olds using it multiple times a day.

Platforms academics say they are using less often (Amongst current users)



## Loss of Academic Value

- "X/Twitter has much less from academic organizations than it used to... no longer a good source for information on events and new books."
- "I used to find that 'academic Twitter' was a good place to find calls for papers... but ever since it became X, the quality has deteriorated."
- "Other academics have stopped using it so it's less of a good space for networking."
- "Too much spam, too little valuable interaction. Even serious colleagues are turned into trolls."
- "I feel that in my field of research and teaching, the benefit of using social media is not worth the investment in time."

## Why Academics Are Staying – and Why They’re Leaving

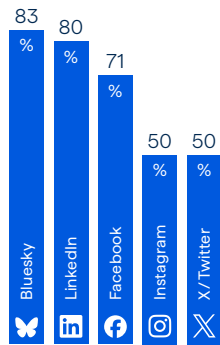
Despite ongoing debates about the future of social media, ownership upheavals, and mounting concerns about toxicity, these platforms remain embedded in academic life. A significant majority of respondents believe social media will continue to be a vital channel for networking, promoting research, and staying connected with peers. Notably, 61% report feeling increasing pressure to maintain an active online presence in order to remain visible and competitive in their field.

This pressure is especially acute for early-career researchers, many of whom feel that being active on social media is no longer a choice but a necessity. Platforms like X, Linked-

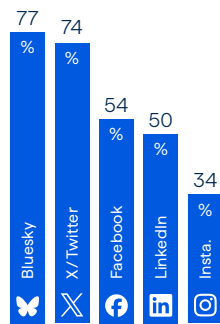
In, or newer alternatives are not just seen as useful tools – they’re perceived as essential for building a professional identity, sharing research, and staying plugged into academic conversations. For these researchers, maintaining a presence is tied to opportunities, recognition, and a sense of belonging in their field.

Even those who are sceptical or fatigued by social media often feel compelled to stay, worried about what they might miss if they step away – from potential collaborations and calls for papers to simply being visible to funders, colleagues, or employers. The result is a tension: a growing number of academics want to reduce their time online but feel they can’t afford to.

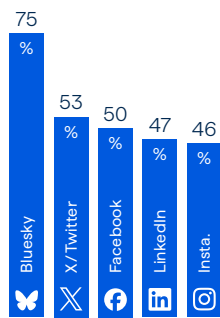
### Overview of how academics are using social media platforms



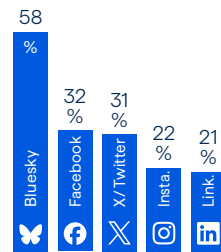
Connecting with peers, building collaborative relationships (Ø 70%)



Staying up-to-date on latest research findings (Ø 58%)



Promoting your own research to a wider audience (Ø 54%)



Discussions about trends and developments (Ø 33%)

### Professional Pressure vs Personal Fatigue

- “I’m using LinkedIn more often because I need more professional contacts.”
- “There’s increasing pressure to be visible online – but it’s exhausting.”
- “I feel like I’m more into social media than I used to be. Unwillingly but continuously.”

### Safety and Mental Wellbeing

- “It just makes me anxious and annoyed.”
- “I felt it was deleterious to my mental health... a space of conflict and discord.”
- “There seems to be no sense of boundaries of respect and cordiality... I find it a very abrasive space and it affects me badly.”

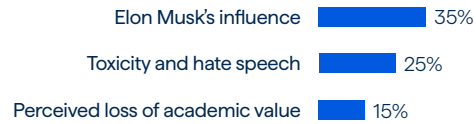


## Toxic Cultures

At the same time, a substantial portion of academics are choosing to disengage. Nearly half (49%) say that social media has become too toxic for meaningful academic engagement, discouraging them from participating in online discussions. A further 42% believe the future of academic networking will shift back toward in-person events, suggesting a desire to re-centre academic life in physical rather than digital spaces.

Disciplinary differences are emerging. Humanities scholars are the most likely to describe social media as too toxic to be useful, while researchers in STEM fields are more likely to predict a return to in-person networking. Social scientists, meanwhile, are the most inclined to see social media as a professional tool that is here to stay.

When asked why they have reduced or stopped using X specifically, three themes stood out:



These trends highlight a growing divide in how academics view the role of social media. While many see it as an unavoidable necessity, others are actively seeking alternatives that feel safer, more meaningful, or more aligned with scholarly values. The research suggests that the real shift isn't simply about who is leaving and how many, but how academics are using these spaces – and why.

## Platform Decline & Disillusionment

- "I have completely stopped using Twitter/X due to the change in climate and the disappearance of academic spaces there."
- "X/Twitter especially has become a toxic place; I used to post regularly. Now I seldom post."
- "I left Facebook more than 2 years ago. I avoid Instagram (Facebook in disguise!)."
- "Facebook keeps going downhill. Its news feed has become 90% junk."
- "X is no longer Twitter."





## Beyond the Big Five: Are New Platforms Gaining Ground?

Alongside the dominant platforms, our research explored academic engagement with four emerging or smaller social media spaces: Bluesky, Mastodon and Threads. While these platforms currently see lower overall usage, some – particularly Bluesky – are beginning to stand out for the quality and nature of interaction they foster.

Although adoption remains low, academics experimenting with Bluesky are doing more than just browsing – they’re actively participating. This may reflect the behaviour of early adopters, but it also hints at a desire for platforms that feel more purposeful, trusted, and less toxic.

By contrast, platforms such as YouTube and TikTok are more passive spaces – used primarily for content consumption rather than interaction or community-building.



### Early Adoption & Alternatives

- “I moved to Bluesky since Twitter became unusable. My main social profile is there now.”
- “I’ve been trying to transition from Twitter to Bluesky.”
- “I use Facebook because there are some very old friends on there but not really for work anymore. Bluesky is becoming very good for work purposes.”
- “Bluesky feels more academic-friendly – like the early days of Twitter, but better curated.” (Paraphrased – based on tone across several responses).”
- “I’ve found so many collegial linguists through Bluesky that it’s been amazing. We discuss current developments, and I have later emailed people to consult them on their expertise.”

## From Passive Browsing to Active Participation

The engagement patterns among Bluesky users are striking. 77% of users say they regularly post their own content, compared to just 45% on X. Similarly, 67% of Bluesky users report commenting on or sharing others' posts, versus 47% on X.

Crucially, the nature of activity is different too. 83% of Bluesky users report using the platform to collaborate and build relationships with peers – compared to 55% of X users – and 75% say they use it to promote their work (versus 50% on X).

Mastodon, while not as active as Bluesky, also sees greater posting activity than X, further suggesting a trend: academics who leave traditional platforms aren't necessarily

abandoning social media – they're simply looking for spaces that feel safer and more aligned with academic values.

Across all platforms, LinkedIn, Bluesky, Mastodon, and X have the highest percentage of users engaging for work-related purposes. But once again, intent matters. On X, the focus is primarily on staying informed; on Bluesky, it's about exchange, interaction and discourse.

These patterns suggest that while social media in academia may be evolving, it's far from disappearing. The future may not be less social – it may just be differently social.

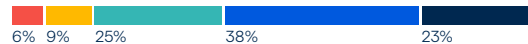
## Attitudes towards social media

■ Disagree strongly ■ Disagree slightly ■ Neutral ■ Agree slightly ■ Agree strongly

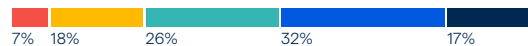
Social media is and will remain one of many channels through which one can network and promote research findings



There is increasing pressure on academics to maintain an active social media presence for career advancement and visibility



Social media has become too toxic for meaningful academic engagement and will increasingly discourage scholars from participating in online discussions



The future of academic networking will rely more on in-person conferences and events than on social media

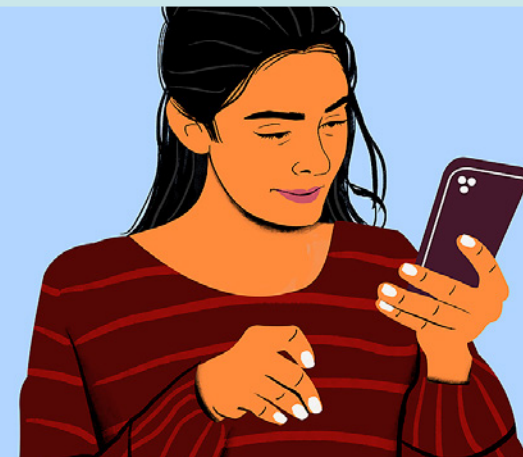


## What the Future Might Hold

→ “I was well connected on X with an academic account. I used to promote my own publications and learn about those of colleagues. Since Musk took over, the network is broken. A replacement has yet to be found.”

→ “Social media was able to be a space where those who could not attend in-person events were able to form meaningful connections. I have online events and digital networking to thank for my current position. My hope is that social media will be able to continue offering such opportunities.”

→ “It is still early into what I would think of as a post-Twitter social media landscape, so we will see how this develops, and whether academic communities can gather around some specific media spaces.”



## Research Insight

According to an April 2025 analysis by data analytics company Altmetric, Bluesky has overtaken X on most weekdays in terms of original posts linking to newly published research. As of March 2025, Bluesky users were generating a higher proportion of original posts compared to X, suggesting a shift toward more intentional, researcher-led engagement. Meanwhile, reposting on X continues to skew toward a handful of polarising topics, such as vaccine scepticism. Although X remains significant overall, Altmetric's data points to a growing migration of meaningful academic conversation to newer, more focused platforms.

## The Enduring Appeal of Traditional Channels

While social media remains a key tool for academic engagement, many researchers are turning – or returning – to more traditional forms of communication and connection. In fact, a significant portion of academics believe that in-person events will play a larger role in the future of scholarly networking. Nearly 40% of social scientists and humanities scholars, and 47% of STEM researchers, say they expect academic networking to shift back toward conferences and real-world events rather than relying on digital platforms alone.

This renewed trust in traditional formats is also reflected in how researchers prefer to receive information from academic publishers.

Email and newsletters top the list, with 75% of respondents naming them as their preferred communication channel – far ahead of social media, which was selected by only 41%. Publisher websites also ranked highly, suggesting that researchers still value direct, reliable, and non-algorithmic sources of information.

Taken together, these findings suggest that while digital engagement remains vital, many academics are looking for more stable, curated, and personal forms of communication – and that traditional channels may be central to the next phase of academic outreach.

## Returning to Traditional Channels

→ “I prefer email and in-person contact. Social media is too chaotic to be productive.”

→ “The best information still comes through mailing lists, conferences, and peer networks – not platforms.”

→ “I try to avoid social media altogether and focus on newsletters and journals.”

→ “For me, ‘traditional’ forms of communication like email and websites are more useful. I don’t have the time to sift through social media noise to find meaningful information.”



# What Could Happen Next?

## Three Scenarios (and a Long Shot)

1

### Fragmentation

We may see a continued exodus from platforms like X and Facebook – but without a clear successor. Rather than migrating en-masse to a new dominant platform, academics could spread out across a diverse ecosystem of smaller, more specialised channels like Bluesky and Mastodon. This would lead to a more fragmented landscape, where scholars engage in multiple spaces depending on their field, region, or purpose, making visibility and community-building more complex, but potentially more meaningful.

2

### Return to Tradition

Amid increasing fatigue with algorithm-driven platforms, we could see a resurgence in traditional modes of academic communication. Email newsletters, institutional mailing lists, peer-to-peer networks, and in-person events may reclaim their status as primary tools for sharing research and building professional relationships. This shift could reflect a desire for greater control, trust, and intentionality in how academics connect.

3

### Platform Innovation

Rather than moving laterally to newer versions of existing social media models, academics might gravitate toward platforms that reimagine scholarly interaction altogether. Purpose-built academic spaces – such as those linked to institutional networks, professional associations, or publishers – could see renewed interest. These alternatives offer more curated, focused, and professional environments: spaces that align more closely with academic values and are less prone to the noise, distraction, and volatility of mainstream platforms.

4

### The Long Shot: The newsletter replaces the feed

If the preference for email and newsletters continues to grow, the future of academic networking might lie not in social media at all, but in platforms like Substack. Originally built for one-way newsletter distribution, Substack is quietly evolving into a hub for community-building, discussion threads, and discovery – without the clutter of algorithmic feeds or public metrics. For academics fatigued by constant visibility pressure or wary of toxic dynamics, this shift could be appealing. Instead of managing a social media persona, scholars could build followings around ideas, delivered directly to readers' inboxes. In this version of the future, academic connection doesn't disappear – it just moves somewhere quieter.

# Conclusion

The academic social media landscape is in a state of transformation. On the surface, social media continues to be a vital tool for academics – used for networking, staying up to date with research, and promoting their work. Most scholars, particularly younger ones, still see it as essential to professional visibility and career advancement.

But dig a little deeper, and the picture becomes more complex. While platforms like LinkedIn, YouTube, and Instagram are seeing rising usage, others – particularly X and Facebook – are in decline. X, once considered the default platform for academic exchange, is now shedding users rapidly, driven by concerns over toxicity, ownership, and declining academic value. Notably, social scientists have both the highest usage and the highest attrition from X, revealing an acute tension between the platform's potential and its present shortcomings.

At the same time, smaller platforms like Bluesky are gaining ground – not in sheer numbers, but in the depth and quality of engagement they foster. Academics who use Bluesky are more active, more collaborative and more trusting of the space. These patterns point to the early stages of a platform migration – not a mass exodus, but a search for safer, more meaningful digital environments.

Crucially, researchers are also rediscovering the value of traditional, non-algorithmic communication. Email newsletters remain the preferred way to receive information from publishers, and there's a strong belief – particularly in STEM and the humanities – that in-person conferences and events will play a larger role in future academic networking.

In short: social media is not going away, but its role is being redefined. Scholars are no longer content to passively participate in chaotic or toxic platforms. Instead, they're seeking trusted, purpose-driven channels – whether that's a new platform like Bluesky, a publisher's newsletter or a return to face-to-face events. The future of academic engagement will likely be more fragmented, more intentional and maybe, more human.

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