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FOLLOW THE FOSSILS

Developing Metrics for Instagram as a Natural Science Communication Tool

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Follow the Fossils

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Abstract: The ability for people to connect, learn, and communicate about science has been enhanced through the Internet, specifically through social media platforms. Facebook and Twitter are well studied, while Instagram is understudied. This Element provides insight into using Instagram as a science education platform by pioneering a set of calculated metrics, using a paleontology-focused account as a case study. Framed by the theory of affinity spaces, the authors conducted year-long analyses of 455 posts and 139 stories that were created as part of an informal science learning project. They found that team activity updates and posts outside their other categories perform better than their defined categories. For Instagram stories, the data show that fewer slides per story hold viewers' attention longer, and stories using the poll tool garnered the most interaction. This Element provides a baseline to assess the success of Instagram content for science communicators and natural science institutions.

Keywords: social media, affinity spaces, case study, qualitative analysis, online learning

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