

Instagram as a Valuable Scholarly Publishing Social Media Tool: This Platform Is Not Just for Influencers Anymore

Jennifer Regala

One of the highlights of my career was working with Mary Williams, Features Editor of *The Plant Cell*, and Katie Rogers, formerly Community Engagement Administrator, at the American Society of Plant Biologists (ASPB). I consider them to be true leaders and innovators in a meaningful social media community. I will never forget when they presented at an all-staff lunch-n-learn about ASPB's social media strategy, which included their 3 peer-reviewed journals, the overall organizational presence, and the unique digital ecosystem and membership experience, Plantae.org. They shared their secret sauce for successful virtual involvement, which was simple yet brilliant: plan your content thoughtfully and well in advance and then focus on fluid and organic engagement. Look for opportunities to connect with your audience sincerely in the places they want to be found. Instagram, a social media network that relies on images and videos to enthrall its users, is the perfect place to perfect this approach.

Angela Cochran recently wrote a post for The Scholarly Kitchen considering the question of whether X (formerly Twitter) is worth the time.¹ This thoughtful article, and many conversations I've participated in within our community, all focus on the question of what happens to our publications, our organizations, and our own personal and/or professional presences on the social media platforms available to us.

I propose that we all gather on Instagram. It's a well-curated, mostly polite, aesthetically pleasing haven. Need to showcase your beautiful journal covers? Have a great intro video of an impactful article? Want to share a behind-the-scenes glimpse of your Ed Office? Want to share key takeaways of a recent meeting? Then Instagram is your platform. If you're trying to reach your audiences in a more intimate way, you might be surprised at what's possible.

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Another important point is that our work is serious business. We are mired in deadlines and editorial policies and Open Access mandates and platform woes. Our editorial boards are burdened with handling submissions and simultaneously hoping for more yet dreading the thought of more. Our authors have so many choices of where to publish before they perish. Dare I say that Instagram can offer everyone a brief respite from the grind and allow for accessibility to content and community in an entirely different way?

Below, I share some tips as a 12-year devoted Instagram user. I first created my Instagram account as a personal spot to share amusing pics of my kids, crock pot meals, my rehab efforts after my hip replacement, and lots and lots of hot pink shenanigans. After my Threads debacle I chronicled in this space this past summer, my personal account has since blurred into a hybrid of IRL friends, scholarly publishing colleagues, and authors/editors/reviewers I've worked with both in the past and currently.² Now I have many of my editors and authors following my @mommyjennyblog adventures on Instagram—they'll just have to love me through it.

The American Urological Association (AUA) has 3 journal-related Instagram accounts for our peer-reviewed journals, *The Journal of Urology*®, *Urology Practice*®, and *JU Open Plus*. We've found great engagement on these handles from places and people we were not expecting, which has made it fun for our team to create content in new and unique ways.

On Being Organic and Fluid... and Using Instagram to Do It

Anyone can schedule articles to post on Facebook, Instagram, and X, and I encourage you to come up with a robust editorial calendar to do so. But the great fun of Instagram is how much opportunity there is—add still photos, dress your photos up with a filter or some background music, post a video, show some personality! When you're thinking about using Instagram in a professional setting, though, I do caution you to consider tone and voice when you think about what to post.³

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How to Have the Prettiest Squares in Town

Instagram launched in 2010 as a spot to share your photos in aesthetically pleasing rows of squares, arranged 3 in a row, with captions meant to highlight the meaning of each image.⁴ Selfies quickly ruled the platform, as did shelfies (swoon-worthy bookshelves), food pics, nature shots, and pets—lots and lots of pets. As the app evolved, more features were introduced, but even today, thoughtfully curated squares rule.

How do beautifully arranged images help your publication, though? Look no further than *Science Editor's* own account (@csescienceeditor), where you can see the captivating covers of recent issues. What a great way to lure your audience into your important work (Figure 1, online only):

Video Content

Video content is another way to grab your audience's attention. And as Instagram has evolved, they've figured out more ways to share videos.

Stories, Highlights, and Reels

An Instagram story is a fleeting 24-hour video glimpse into anything you choose to share. For our AUA journal Instagram handles (@journalofurology, @juopenplus, and @urologypractice), we post quick links to articles, short video snippets, and sneak peeks of interesting events and people. A story disappears after 24 hours, but not to fear. It can be captured in a highlight. Collections of highlights can be curated on your profile page and viewed for as long as you keep it in that collection. You can sort highlights in any way you choose—ideas included by issue, by topic, or by contributor.

A reel is a TikTok-style video, often including music, that remains as a permanent video presence in your collection of Instagram squares.

How Do You Get Video Content?

My best advice to get interesting video content is ask for it. Here are things we've done at the AUA that work like a charm:

- Ask your Editor-in-Chief to film a short video each issue highlighting the most important items published in the journal's pages.
- Reach out to a reviewer of a newly accepted paper to ask for their take on why that paper is impactful from their point of view.
- Invite an author to explain the importance of the work.
- Get on the video yourself and explain your editorial processes or some other behind-the-scenes information. Your community likely doesn't know as much about peer review or production as you think they do!

Instagram Takeovers

An Instagram takeover is a next-level approach to providing a transparent experience for your devoted Instagram followers. Here's how to do it: Invite a tech-savvy editor to video 24 hours (or more!) of their life; what their professional life looks like, what their editorial workload looks like, the whole enchilada. Have them share their honest insights and the challenges they're facing. They can record the videos and send them to you to post. You'll get relatable content that hooks your followers and inspires others to want to take over the account in the future. You can then share these takeovers as a highlight in your profile. Hearing directly from editorial leadership and other key contributors is rare, but if you can make these takeovers happen regularly, you will be offering a unique accessibility to your processes and content that will be appreciated by your community.

Promote Yourself, Your Organization, and Your Events

Look no further than one of the AUA's favorite doc stars, most prolific authors, social media sensation, and wonderful human, Dr Giovanni Cacciamani (@gecacciamanimd), for how to do Instagram RIGHT to promote yourself on social media (Figure 2). He is sure to post his published work on Instagram along with expertly used emojis and brilliant layperson summaries of his important work. And it's all visual and easy to digest! And notice how he uses his caption to acknowledge the contributions of others—perfect chef's kiss.

Silverchair also does a phenomenal job of promoting a community vibe on Instagram. Look no further than their Thanksgiving post to see their heartfelt message to their followers.

Don't Forget to Repurpose Your Content!

As you create your Instagram content, don't forget to sprinkle it far and wide. Post your photos and videos to other platforms as suitable. And you can post your TikToks, X posts, and other social media posts back to Instagram. And of course Instagram is linked to Threads, which makes it super easy to cross-post.

Pay Attention to Who You're Following

Find your people and follow them. And quickly, you'll find that they follow you. You'll get to know your community more quickly than you ever believed to be possible.

Why Should You Care About Doing Any of This Crazy Stuff?

It's easy. Do you want to stand out? How will you be different in this maddening time of X imploding, decreased staff resources, and no time and no energy to get the

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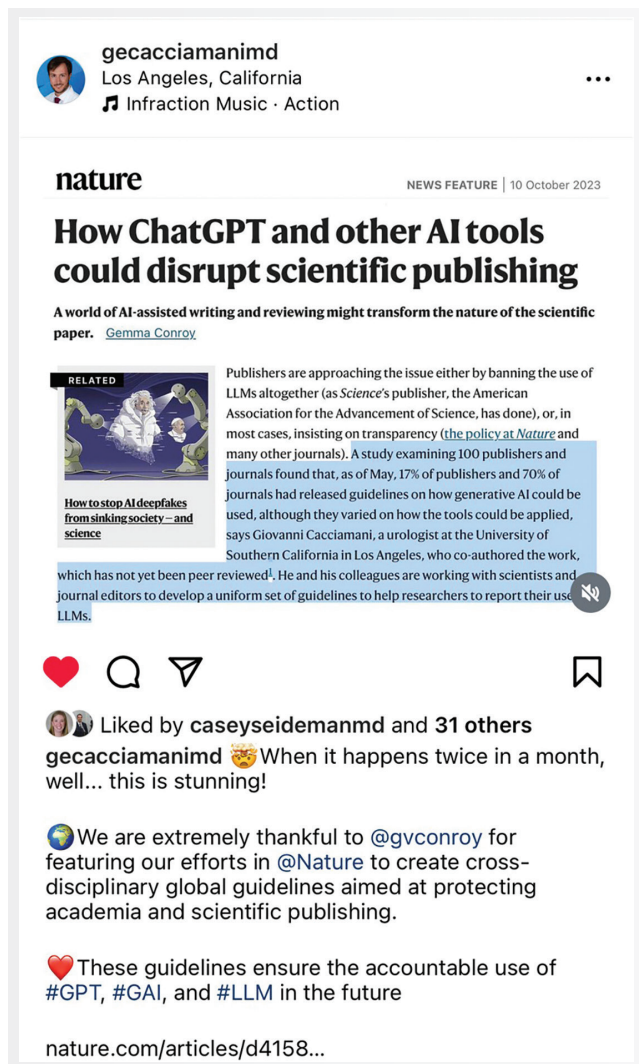


Figure 2. Dr Giovanni Cacciamani on Instagram.

job done? Instagram is your answer. And trust me when I say your community is looking for an escape, too. Give them something pretty and interesting and fascinating to consume, and you'll have them hooked.

Bonus Story: Buyer Beware

It wouldn't be a Jennifer Regala-penned article without a little personal insight on the platform. I happen to love Instagram on a molecular level. It's entertaining, people are generally really nice, and you're catching people at their very best. You got a new car? Show it to me. You remodeled your kitchen? I'm going to need to see multiple photos of that with video footage of your organized spices. New puppy? Say less, I'm glued to your feed.

Instagram is also masterful at serving up the very best targeted ads. At the time of this writing, I am getting ready to take a day off from the AUA to head to my annual neighborhood ladies' holiday lunch. This year it's Barbie-themed... ZOMG. Amazing. Instagram barrages me regularly with pink clothing ads, but somehow my phone heard me talking about this party, so the fancy hot pink party dresses started coming. I found the perfect hot pink, one-sleeved, faux feather-trimmed dress. I ordered it from that Instagram ad on the spot and waited patiently for it to arrive. It showed up and was high-quality material trimmed with the most beautiful feathers. As I went to try it on, I noticed something off about it. It wasn't until I slipped it over my head that I discovered there was no hole for my right arm. Yes, my right arm will be trapped beneath that luscious dress, allowing only my left hand to eat and take my Insta pics and TikTok videos that day. Please allow this cautionary Instagram ad tale to guide your future purchasing decisions.

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