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Utilizing Social Media to Spread Knowledge: The Association of Pathology Chairs Experience at the 2018 Annual Meeting

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Abstract

Participants at academic conferences frequently use social media to disseminate educational content learned while at the meeting. Although most agree that this activity is harmless, some have expressed concern regarding the accuracy of the shared content and whether it truly reflects the intent and message of the speaker. As part of the goals of the APC 2018 social media committee to promote excellence through social media, a study was conducted to measure the perceived accuracy of tweets that represented an opinion or statement from a speaker and was shared during the annual meeting. Tweets shared on Twitter using the meeting hashtag (#APCPRODS2018) were collected and a survey unique to each speaker was created, to which 54% responded. The majority of speakers regarded the use of Twitter at the conference as beneficial in spreading their intended message in an accurate way. This study exemplifies the positive impact that social media use can have at academic meetings.

Keywords

social media, academic conference, Twitter, pathology, culture

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Introduction

Social media as a tool for primary communication and networking in society has rapidly taken root as a mainstay of global culture. There is no denying that the use of social media has played important roles in major societal structures—from shaping political landscapes,¹ to its use as an instrument in civil rights activism,² and uniting the global population on a scale never before seen.³ The world of academic medicine has also enthusiastically adopted the practice, and social media has become mainstream at many academic conferences.^{4,5} Pathology and laboratory medicine, as well as many other medical specialties, have been using social media as a tool for expanding conference participation beyond the confines of the presentation halls where the experts are sharing their knowledge with the audience.^{6,7} As a result, there have been many clear and significant benefits, the main one being the creation of an open access source of high-quality educational materials. The practice of “live-tweeting” whereby attendees “tweet” images of

presentation slides often accompanied by speaker commentary in real time is now commonplace in medical conferences.⁸ This practice has become a valuable tool for disseminating key learning points worldwide when in years past the information would be limited to the conference room. However, some presenters have voiced concerns about having their content

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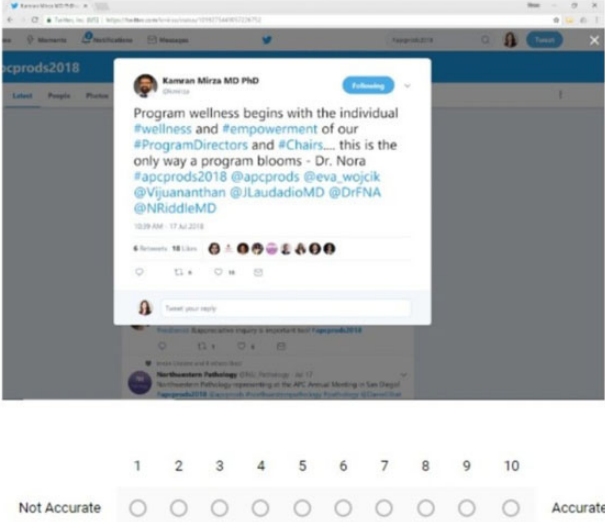
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Are the tweet(s) pictured below accurate in describing a point mentioned during your presentation? Please rate the accuracy using the likert scale that is below each tweet.

If it is not applicable, please leave it blank.

Q1:



1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not Accurate Accurate

Figure 1. Sample survey regarding Tweet Accuracy Question.

attributed to them in a public sphere without any process of vetting for accuracy.^{6,9} Indeed, a statement that is misquoted or taken out of context that is publicly attributed to an individual has the potential of damaging their reputation and possibly their career. In this study, we showed each speaker the tweets attributed to them at the 2018 Association of Pathology Chairs (APC) annual meeting, with the goal of assessing the perceived accuracy of the tweets and any positive or negative impact.

Materials and Methods

Using the Twitter search engine, we searched for all tweets bearing the APC 2018 meeting hashtag (#APCPRODS2018). We then compiled them into a Google spreadsheet and separated them by attributed speaker. A customized survey was created for each speaker that included all tweets that referenced only their content. For each tweet, the question was asked “Are the tweet(s) pictured below accurate in describing a point mentioned during your presentation? Please rate the accuracy using the Likert scale that is below each tweet.” A sample survey to measure perceived tweet content accuracy is shown in Figure 1. In addition, 4 questions were asked of all speakers, as displayed in Table 1.

Results

Of the 2798 tweets bearing the meeting hashtag, 2056 were retweets and 493 could not be attributed to a specific speaker.

Table 1. Survey Questions and Aggregated Results.

Question:	Answer Choices:	Response Summary
1. Twitter was beneficial in spreading my message.	[Agree] [Disagree] [Neutral]	41/49 (84%) agreed. 0 disagreed. 8/49 (16%) responded as neutral.
2. The advantages of having Twitter at an academic conferences are greater than the disadvantages.	[Agree] [Disagree]	48/49 (98%) agreed. 1/49 (2%) disagreed.
3. After seeing tweets that have been written about your presentation, do you think that you might adjust your future presentations to make them more amenable to Twitter?	[Yes] [No]	22/49 (45%) responded “Yes” 27/49 (55%) responded “No.”
4. Please explain some of your choices in the space below.	[Free text field]	17/49 responded.

The remaining 429 tweets were responding to or sharing content from a specific speaker. It was these tweets that were included in the surveys; 91 distinct speakers were identified and a unique survey was sent to each. Of the surveys sent, 54% responded (n = 49). Of those who responded, there were 167 responses regarding the accuracy of the individual tweets. Of a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 equal to “not accurate” and 10 equal to “accurate,” the respondents rated the tweets to be an average of 9.6.

The survey recipients were asked the following question “Twitter was beneficial in spreading my message” to which they had the option of replying “agree,” “disagree,” or “neutral.” Of the 49 people who responded, 41 (84%) agreed and 8 (16%) responded as neutral. No respondents disagreed with the statement. The same survey recipients were asked to mark whether they “agree” or “disagree” with the following statement: “The advantages of having twitter at an academic conference are greater than the disadvantages.” Of the 49 who responded, 48 (98%) agreed and 1 (2%) respondent chose “disagree.” The third question asked of all the survey recipients was “After seeing tweets that have been written about your presentation, do you think that you might adjust your future presentations to make them more amenable to Twitter?” Twenty-seven (55%) of 49 answered “no,” and 22 (45%) answered “yes.” All survey recipients were asked to “explain some of their answer choices” and were given the option to enter any free text; 17 of those surveyed responded. Selected responses are listed in Table 2.

Discussion

The use of social media in academic conferences is richly discussed in the published literature. Both the documentation of its frequent use at meetings and discussions about its potential helpfulness or harmfulness abound. However, the actual measurement of the speakers’ evaluations of the tweets that

Table 2. Select Answers to Survey Question 4.*

Free Text Field Answers

Twitter encourages brevity and one-line summaries; it is useful for bullet points and notifications (to lead a user to find more information) but **I do not believe content should be created with Twitter or any social media in mind.**

Tweeting is fine but I think that lectures need to be tailored for the audience and given the diversity of learners (tweeters and nontweeters) I think for a lecture to PDs that is changed for one could compromise the content or presentation style for others. This comment is coming from someone who doesn't tweet so it may reflect bias inherent of the inexperienced or an older generation. **I do think your subcommittee is doing the right thing by soliciting presenter feedback.** Thanks for your efforts to improve the educational value of your meetings.

It makes me want sign up for a Twitter account to spread or receive a topic of great interest.

I would have tailored power point slides that can be posted directly on Twitter—specifically slides with key figures/charts and takeaway points

I try and provide takeaway messages in my talks. I think the Twitter sphere captured many of the salient points. **I'd probably directly add some of my own hashtags into my future talks to drive some of these points home.** Thank you for organizing this effort.

I believe I have to give presentations in the best way possible, **not to accommodate social media.**

I am a Twitter novice as I don't have an account and have only practiced tweeting as part of an educational workshop where we all had a shared account we could access and use for this purpose. For the time being, **I plan to make my conference materials keeping the needs of the in-room audience in mind foremost.**

How impactful Twitter is depends upon the number of users. I don't think it was that high in this particular conference. **I see no disadvantages to it** so that if some people find it useful I think it is fine to use. As I am not a user myself, I don't have a very good understanding of how I might have to adjust my presentation to best fit Twitter, but my main factor that determines how I construct the presentation is what is best for the live audience.

Having been on the other side (audience member), I have realized **it is helpful to add Twitter handles and hashtags to slides** if I want to encourage specific terminology, etc.

As for social media, **it is sometimes distracting to the audience** when the person sitting next to you is incessantly on social media. If used selectively and in consideration of the people around you, it is fine spreads the word fast.

Agree! Not being a Twitter person, I had never considered that anyone would Tweet about my presentation, but **everything on Twitter about what I presented is completely accurate.** I can see how this is helpful in sharing what is presented at meetings to others. Very cool!

* Bold formatting added by the authors.

were shared by audience members in response to their presentations hasn't been well studied, and not at all in the field of pathology and laboratory medicine. One study¹⁰ that analyzed tweets at an emergency medicine conference demonstrated that most speakers were happy about the outcome of their content being shared on Twitter and judged the tweets to be mostly accurate. This study showed similar outcomes to our study,

which demonstrated that the majority of speakers at the conference found value in disseminating their presentation message on Twitter. The overwhelming majority also thought that the advantages of using Twitter at an academic conference were greater than the disadvantages. Just under half of the presenters would plan to tailor their content to make it more amenable to Twitter for future presentations, but most speakers did not feel the need to modify future presentation content.

As demonstrated by our data, most presenters feel that social media is a positive adjunct to academic conferences and helps to disseminate their message and content in an accurate way. Other positive effects of physician use of social media at conferences have been documented in the literature,^{6,7,11,12} such as encouraging dialogue and forming an extended academic community with fellow physicians who were not physically at the conference. Social media may also demonstrate to the lay public physicians' professionalism and dedication to the field through information they share from conferences on social media. An in-depth discussion by Gardner and Allen^{13,14} of the safety and legality of sharing educational content that includes properly de-identified patient materials has given the pathology community assurance and confidence to use social media as a public education forum.

Many things can be learned from our data set, including increased confidence in the accuracy of tweeted academic content from conferences and general speaker satisfaction with the quality and accuracy of shared material. Another item of consideration is that most speakers in our study did not feel the need to make their presentation content more amenable to sharing on Twitter after seeing the Twitter posts shared by attendees. This indicates that, generally speaking, presenters need not have anxiety regarding the format of their presentation content and how it will be shared on social media. If presenters are concerned about their content being shared on social media with the potential of misattribution a possibility, a helpful tip to avoid this error is to add their name and/or Twitter handle to a corner of each slide. This ensures correct speaker attribution and acts as a watermark of the slide's contents.

Conclusion

In summary, our study provides evidence that the integrity of information is maintained through translation from live presenter to social media message. This provides reassurance to faculty presenters and consumers of information across the globe and continued support for the use of social media at academic conferences.

Authors' Note

Dana Razzano and Yonah C. Ziembra contributed equally to this article.

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