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
attributed to them in a public sphere without any process of vetting for accuracy. 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.

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
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 study, 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, 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 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. Ziemba contributed equally to this article.

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