Association for Academic Surgery

Use of Twitter to document the 2013 Academic Surgical Congress

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ABSTRACT

Background: Social media is a cornerstone of modern society and its use in health care has rapidly expanded in recent years. "Live Tweeting" of professional meetings is a growing way for participants to communicate with peers. The goal of this study was to analyze the initial experience with implementation of a Twitter Team at the 2013 Academic Surgical Congress (ASC).

Materials and methods: Four ASC attendees were designated as the "Twitter Team" for the 2013 meeting. Organizational leadership prominently promoted the unique meeting hashtag (#2013ASC). Twdocs and TweetReach were used to aggregate data 1 wk after the meeting.

Results: A total of 58 independent users posted tweets with the #2013ASC hashtag during the week of the meeting. Total tweets numbered 434, with 288 original tweets. Of the 37 users who were identifiable individuals, 19 were in attendance at the ASC; 18 of the identifiable individuals were members of either the Association for Academic Surgery and/ or the Society of University Surgeons. The ASC Twitter Team was responsible for 76% of all #2013ASC tweets. The three most common content areas for tweets were promotional (147), content related from presidential sessions (96), and social (75).

Conclusions: Twitter provides a meaningful social media format for sharing information during academic surgical meetings. The use of Twitter sharply expands the available audience for meeting proceedings and broadens the discussion venue for scholarly activity. "Tweeting the meeting" represents an important future direction for information dissemination in academic surgery.

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1. Introduction

Social media in health care and education originated as a disruptive innovation, a "process by which a service takes root initially in simple applications and then relentlessly moves up market." [1] It has now become a communications cornerstone and its use in health care has become increasingly emphasized. The presence of Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Google Plus icons on web pages is now expected rather than being a novelty. Social media exists at a unique intersection between communication and technology and is typically used either to disseminate new information or to curate existing information. Communication *via* social media channels has become the norm for many surgical organizations and has moved from the strictly personal to the professional realm for many surgeons. Asynchronous communication in which messages are sent and received as time permits, rather than in real-time, has become a central tenet of modern communication, and in social media in particular.

"Blogs" or weblogs, which are essentially online journals, provided one of the earliest social media outlets, and the concept of blogs has now been further extended to the concepts of vlogs (video blogs) and microblogs. Twitter is the most widely used microblogging platform, with 218 million monthly active users and an average of 500 million "tweets" each day [2]. A "tweet" is a statement generated from a user's password-protected account that consists of 140 characters or less and ranges from the mundane ("Beignets for breakfast!") to the academic ("Scott and White using QR codes to more safely and accurately identify patients"). Even more powerful is the utilization of the site to share data not just as text, but also photos, videos, and weblinks. Twitter allows for asynchronous communication on a given topic between users. The first user may send out information in the form of a tweet that does not require the recipient (follower) to receive a message of interest at the same time or in the same location [3]. Further, if an individual has a public Twitter account, a tweet can be read not just by his or her followers, but by anyone who looks at their "Twitter feed." This ability to communicate based on interests rather than time and location has many advantages. A key advantage of asynchronous communication is that it allows the history of a group's interactions to be effectively captured in a meaningful way.

One of the innovative uses of Twitter has been its use for networking and information dissemination at professional meetings, with an explosion in this use in many medical disciplines over the last 3 y [4−8]. However, no prior peer-reviewed publication describes the use of Twitter at a major surgical meeting. We therefore sought to describe and evaluate our experience with implementation of a "Twitter Team" at the 2013 Academic Surgical Congress (ASC), the joint annual meeting of the Association for Academic Surgery and the Society of University Surgeons.

2. Methods

2.1. Twitter activity coordination

Four ASC attendees (A.C., J.S., N.G., and B.N.) were designated as the official "Twitter Team" for the February 2013 meeting. Organizational leadership prominently promoted the unique meeting hashtag (#2013ASC) during plenary sessions and on transition slides between sessions.

2.2. Data aggregation and analysis

Twdocs and TweetReach were used to aggregate data 1 wk after the meeting by identifying tweets that contained the #ASC2013 hashtag. Attendance status of tweeting individuals was established by registration review. We developed a unique categorization system for all aggregated tweets (Table 1). Two of the authors independently reviewed and categorized all aggregated tweets (A.C. and L.K.), with a third author's independent coding used to reconcile differences (B.N.). Stata 13.1 (StataCorp, College Station, TX) was used for data analysis.

Table 1 − Categorization scheme with examples.		
Tweet category	Definition	Example
Presidential session	Reflects content of session, or information/commentary directly related to subject	"@kibbemr highlights different motivations for# choosing surgery specialty among Baby Boomers vs Gen-X vs Gen-Y"
Plenary session/keynote speaker	Reflects content of session, or information/commentary directly related to subject	"Women's mentorship lunchawesome. Good 2c many other men attending. Diversity isn't just a women's issue, its an everyone issue"
Research session	Reflects content of session, or information/commentary directly related to subject	"Work from @bcmhouston showed alarming issues with handoffs, introduced their PACT method"
Promotional tweet	Promotes current or future meeting, sponsoring societies, meeting content/session, industry sponsors, individual speakers/leadership, society activities/ awards/educational or research opportunities	"Welcome to #2013ASC! Download your meeting program here http://t.co/LuT3WkuE"
Social tweet	Social comments of no particular educational or research value	"Damn surgeons… The hotel gym is literally packed. What is with all the leading by example?"
Other	Includes tweets related to other conference events but excludes promotional tweets	"@AcademicSurgery How about tweeting out a map of the hotel so we can find our way around?"