ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Use of Twitter Polls to Determine Public Opinion Regarding Content Presented at a Major National Specialty Society Meeting

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Abstract

Purpose: The aim of this study was to evaluate the feasibility of using Twitter polls to assess public opinion regarding session content at a national specialty society meeting.

Methods: Twitter polls allow users to embed multiple-choice questions within tweets and automatically aggregate responses. Two radiologists attending the 2016 annual meeting of the ACR posted a Twitter poll containing the hashtag #ACR2016 during 10 meeting sessions addressing socioeconomics/advocacy, patient experience, and social media/informatics (20 polls total). Each poll contained a question asking for an opinion regarding the session's content. Polls were open for responses for 24 hours.

Results: The average number of responses per poll was significantly higher for the user with the larger number of Twitter followers (24.3 ± 14.4 versus 11.2 ± 9.8, $P = .015$). A total of 57% of respondents agreed that radiologists' payments should shift to value-based payments, and 86% agreed that radiologists should routinely survey their patients to monitor quality; however, 83% disagreed with basing physician payments on patient satisfaction scores. A total of 85% disagreed that the artificial intelligence supercomputer Watson will entirely replace radiologists. A total of 76% agreed that social media can drive business at less cost than standard marketing. A total of 56% agreed with the direction of the ACR's advocacy and regulatory efforts, whereas 74% considered the ACR's advocacy efforts to be moderately or very useful for their practice. A total of 50% planned to change their practice on the basis of keynote remarks by Dr Ezekiel Emanuel.

Conclusions: Twitter polls provide a free and easy infrastructure to potentially capture global public sentiment during the course of a medical society meeting. Their use may enrich and promote discussions of key session content.

Key Words: Social media, Twitter, medical conferences, public opinion, surveys

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INTRODUCTION

Social media has changed the experience of attending national specialty society meetings. Contemporary meeting attendees are frequently observed using their laptops, tablets, and smartphones both during and between sessions, engaging in a wide spectrum of web-based dialogs with other meeting participants as well as individuals following remotely via social media platforms. In particular, the microblogging network Twitter [1] provides rapid dissemination of short messages among large networks of users and is the primary social media platform for such medical meeting–based discourse. Twitter users may follow a predetermined meeting-related hashtag to identify and participate in the dialog related to a given meeting of interest. In recent years, increasing Twitter use has been reported for many medical conferences [2-6]. For example, Twitter exhibited substantially increased use over the course of consecutive annual meetings of the RSNA [2] and has been used annually at the meeting of the ACR since 2013 [7]. The use of Twitter during such meetings was considered to amplify the meeting's scientific content to

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a global audience and to promote discussions regarding the content not just among meeting participants but also among those not in attendance [2,3].

Twitter recently introduced a new polling feature that stands to enhance the platform's ability to enrich the conference experience [8]. Specifically, Twitter polls provide an easy and integrated infrastructure for any user to embed a multiple-choice question within a tweet; all other Twitter users may respond, with the final poll results being automatically tabulated in anonymous fashion. Twitter polls may provide a novel and powerful mechanism for evaluating public opinion of meeting content, both by actual attendees and by a broader global audience.

The aim of this study was to evaluate the feasibility of assessing public opinion regarding session content at a national specialty society meeting through the use of Twitter polls. In doing so, we simultaneously evaluated the usability of this new social media tool.

METHODS

Twitter polls can be created by any Twitter user. Polls consist of a question of up to 140 characters (the standard character limit for tweets) and two to four response choices. The poll's creator schedules the poll to be open for any amount of time between 5 min and 7 days. Any Twitter user may respond to the poll. During the polling window, Twitter does not allow users to see the distribution of prior responses until they have already recorded their own response. In addition, the poll can be retweeted by any Twitter user, allowing that user's followers to respond in an identical fashion. At the conclusion of each poll's response window, Twitter automatically computes the distribution of responses. In addition, users who participated in the poll and for whom push notifications are enabled are notified by Twitter of the poll's closing and final results. Thus, the final responses are visible to both the poll creator as well as participants. Twitter does not provide the poll's creator with information regarding Twitter users who responded to the poll, such as their Twitter usernames or demographics. It also is not possible to evaluate how responses varied temporally across the poll's duration.

For this project, Twitter polls were conducted during the annual meeting of the ACR held in Washington, District of Columbia, from May 15 through May 19, 2016. All polls were posted by one of two meeting participants (CMH and ABR), both active Twitter users with previous peer-reviewed publications relating to social media in radiology [2,9-11]. These two individuals had approximately 3,950 and 940 Twitter followers during the time of the meeting. All polls contained the meeting hashtag #ACR2016 so that the polls would be included within the Twitter feeds of any Twitter user following the meeting through its hashtag, as well as within the feeds of those following the two users creating the Twitter polls. For 10 of the meeting's sessions, each of the two individuals posted one poll during the session, for a total of 20 polls during the meeting. The 10 selected sessions dealt with socioeconomics/advocacy, patient-centered care, and social media/informatics [12]. The sessions were distributed across all days of the meeting, aside from the meeting's final day. Polls contained questions asking for respondents' opinions relating to the given session's content and had two to four response choices each. All polls were scheduled to remain open for responses for 24 hours.

Poll responses were recorded in a worksheet using Excel for Macintosh (Microsoft Corporation, Redmond, Washington) and summarized descriptively using percentages. The average number of responses per poll was compared among subgroups using a combination of paired and unpaired t tests. A P value $< .05$ was considered to indicate statistical significance.

RESULTS

Table 1 provides a detailed listing of all of the involved meeting sessions, poll questions, answer choices, and distribution of responses. Among the 20 polls, the average number of responses per poll was 17.8 $\pm$ 13.7 (median, 15; range, 2-41). The average number of responses was 16.1 $\pm$ 13.2 for polls on the meeting's first day, 21.6 $\pm$ 13.0 on the second day, and 13.3 $\pm$ 17.9 on the third day ($P = .372$-$.757$). The average number of responses was 20.0 $\pm$ 14.9 for polls posted in the morning and 17.0 $\pm$ 10.0 for polls posted in the afternoon ($P = .631$). In addition, the average number of responses was 12.5 $\pm$ 9.8 (median, 12.5) for polls relating to socioeconomics/advocacy, 19.3 $\pm$ 14.3 (median, 16) for polls relating to patient-centered care, and 28.5 $\pm$ 17.9 (median, 35.5) for polls relating to social media/informatics ($P = .048$ for socioeconomics/advocacy versus social media/informatics, $P = .272$-$.393$ for other comparisons). The number of responses was similar ($P = .801$) for sessions that were the only meeting events during their scheduled timeslots (the keynote address and Moreton

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