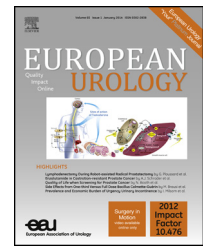


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International Urology Journal Club via Twitter: 12-Month Experience

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Abstract

Background: Online journal clubs have increasingly been utilised to overcome the limitations of the traditional journal club. However, to date, no reported online journal club is available for international participation.

Objective: To present a 12-mo experience from the International Urology Journal Club, the world's first international journal club using Twitter, an online micro-blogging platform, and to demonstrate the viability and sustainability of such a journal club.

Design, setting, and participants: #urojc is an asynchronous 48-h monthly journal club moderated by the Twitter account @iurojc. The open invitation discussions focussed on papers typically published within the previous 2–4 wk. Data were obtained via third-party Twitter analysis services.

Outcome measurements and statistical analysis: Outcomes analysed included number of total and new users, number of tweets, and qualitative analysis of the relevance of tweets. Analysis was undertaken using GraphPad software, Microsoft Excel, and thematic qualitative analysis.

Results and limitations: The first 12 mo saw a total of 189 unique users representing 19 countries and 6 continents. There was a mean of 39 monthly participants that included 14 first-time participants per month. The mean number of tweets per month was 195 of which 62% represented original tweets directly related to the topic of discussion and 22% represented retweets of original posts. A mean of 130 832 impressions, or *reach*, were created per month. The @iurojc moderator account has accumulated >1000 followers. The study is limited by potentially incomplete data extracted by third-party Twitter analysers.

Conclusions: Social media provides a potential for enormous international communication that has not been possible in the past. We believe the pioneering #urojc is both viable and sustainable. There is unlimited scope for journal clubs in other fields to follow the example of #urojc and utilise online portals to revitalise the traditional journal club while fostering international relationships.

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1. Introduction

A journal club is a ubiquitous forum in which members of a health care unit critique current research, improve understanding of study design and critical analysis skills, and keep abreast of new developments [1–3]. Prerequisites for an effective journal club include regularly scheduled meetings, appropriate meeting timing and incentives, a trained leader to choose papers and lead discussion, and ideally some form of continuing professional development recognition [4,5].

Traditionally, journal clubs have been confined to physical space and time; however, novel methods have surfaced to liberate journal clubs from these constraints. These include virtual environments such as Web sites, online discussion forums, and online conferences [6–8]. Online journal clubs and teaching conferences have arisen for local or regional medical and nursing units [8–10]. However, to our knowledge, no international medical or surgical journal club currently exists in these formats.

More recently, Twitter has proven to be a popular environment in which to conduct live discussions including health care topics. Twitter is an online social media service in which an account holder (@username) may send or receive short (≤ 140 characters), publicly accessible messages, or tweets. The technology allows for conversations between users that are publicly visible and for collation of otherwise unlinked tweets using prespecified terms following the “#” symbol (hashtag). Linkage of tweets via a hashtag creates a de facto discussion surrounding that topic or phrase (eg, #EAU14, #ProstateCa). A simple topic search with the “#” symbol returns all tweets that contain the hashtag, allowing a user to follow a particular discussion thread. This has extended to the journal club model, and a small number of regular journal clubs have been established [11]. These Twitter-based journal clubs have operated in the same scheduled and time-limited manner as physical journal clubs.

A urology journal club was established on Twitter with a more liberal duration to allow participation across global time zones. We sought to assess its growth and sustainability after 12 mo. We analysed the number of participants per month, the number of impressions, or reach, the discussion generated, the number of actual tweets and retweets per month, and the relevance of the tweets. Impressions, or reach, is the total number of users mentioning the #urojc hashtag plus the sum of all their followers. In other words, it measures not only the number of users who are directly involved with #urojc but also the number of followers exposed to #urojc tweets. Retweets are a measure of those tweets that have been reposted with minimal or no change. This usually signifies agreement with the tweet in question or that the user would like followers to also see the original tweet (if not already seen), and hence it is retweeted.

2. Material and methods

The International Urology Journal Club Twitter account (@iurojc) was created in November 2012 after three urologists decided to formalise

Table 1 – Characteristics of #urojc

Key Features of #urojc
Monthly discussion
Asynchronous for 48 h
Participation of authors
Incentive via prize
Recently published articles
Article freely available
Unrestricted participation

sharing of ideas through conversations that were already taking place via Twitter (Table 1). The hashtag #urojc was recommended for use in all tweets during the sessions. It was advertised mainly by word of mouth via the existing urology community on Twitter. Monthly discussions were asynchronous to accommodate participation from all global time zones. Discussion was scheduled for a period of 48 h to allow full participation from around the world.

The article chosen for discussion was typically very recently published [12–23]. On multiple occasions the respective journal made the article freely available for a short period of time. The first or corresponding author of the article was invited to participate in the discussion. If the author did not possess a Twitter account, one was created for the author with his or her permission. The journal club was open for all to participate, and a prize was awarded every month for the best tweet. Initially, the discussion was not formally moderated. After a few months, however, key questions were posed from the @iurojc account to provide a framework around which discussion could take place.

Using the #urojc hashtag, all tweets during the prescribed 48-h period were compiled for analysis. This included total tweet count, number and activity of individual users, and analytic measures to quantify the reach and interactivity of the discussion. Third-party services including Symplur (www.symplur.com), TweetReach (www.tweetreach.com), and Sprout Social (www.sproutsocial.com) were used to analyse conversation threads (those tweets linked to each other through direct replies to prior tweets), amplification of individual tweets by reposting (retweets or modified tweets), and the total number of impressions, which uses the individual users' follower count to calculate the number of times a tweet might possibly be read by others, whether participants or not. Unpaired Student *t* tests were applied using GraphPad software with a *p* value < 0.05 denoting statistical significance. Individual tweets were qualitatively analysed and categorised into those that were directly related to the discussion topic, those that were related to the journal club in general, those that were irrelevant to either, and those that were retweets of original tweets. User information such as nationality was extracted from public profiles where possible to do so.

3. Results

In the first 12 mo of #urojc, a total of 189 unique users participated, representing 19 countries and 6 continents (Table 2). The mean number of participants per month was 39, from a mean of 7 countries and 3 continents. Figure 1 is a schematic map in which every country represented in #urojc is denoted by a pin. There was significant international participation from Australia, the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom. There was a mean of 195 tweets per month. Excluding the first month, the mean number of new participants per month was 14. The mean number of impressions per month was 130 832. Ten of 12 papers were related to uro-oncology. Seven of these were related to prostate cancer, two to bladder cancer, and

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