

# Leveraging Twitter to Maximize the Radiology Meeting Experience

Vivek Kalia, MD, MPH<sup>a</sup>, Daniel A. Ortiz, MD<sup>b</sup>, Amy K. Patel, MD<sup>c</sup>, Andrew K. Moriarity, MD<sup>d</sup>, Cheri L. Canon, MD<sup>e</sup>, Richard Duszak Jr, MD<sup>f</sup>

## Abstract

Over recent years, social media engagement has proliferated among physicians, health care systems, scientific journals, professional societies, and patients. In radiology, Twitter (Twitter Inc, San Francisco, California) has rapidly become the preferred social media engagement tool and is now an essential activity at many large radiology society meetings. Twitter offers a versatile, albeit simple, platform for anyone interested in engaging with others, regardless of title, stature, or geography. In radiology and other medical specialties, year-after-year increases in Twitter engagement before, during, and after professional society meetings continue with widespread positive feedback. This short-form messaging tool also allows users to connect and interact with high-impact individuals and organizations on an ongoing basis (rather than once a year during large meetings). Through live-polling, Twitter also has the power to gather global opinions on issues highly relevant to radiology's future, such as the Medicare Access and CHIP Reauthorization Act of 2015 (MACRA) or breast cancer screening. Also increasingly popular is "live-tweeting" of curated meeting content, which makes information from the meeting accessible to a global audience. Despite the promise of growing professional networks and enabling discussions that cross geographic boundaries, the risks of Twitter use during radiology meetings must be recognized and mitigated. These include posting of unpublished data without consent (eg, slide content captured on camera phones), propagation of misinformation, and copyright infringement. Despite these issues and with an eye towards professionalism, Twitter can nonetheless be used effectively to increase engagement among radiologists, radiology societies, and patients.

**Key Words:** Social media, Twitter, engagement, #SoMe, radiology meeting

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## INTRODUCTION

Social media engagement [1-4] during scientific meetings has increased steadily in recent years, for both radiology [5-6] and other specialty society meetings [7-16]. A number of "Tweet the meeting" publications illustrate a growing trend of capturing pearls and highlights of meetings in bite-size microblogs (tweets) through Twitter (Twitter Inc, San Francisco, California) [7-9,13,17]. During that time, peer-reviewed studies on the role of social media (and particularly Twitter) in a variety of meeting and nonmeeting medical education

and networking topics have proliferated. We review and synthesize this rapidly developing area of research herein.

There are a number of reasons Twitter has become the preferred social media engagement platform at meetings [18]: (1) it allows for short-form messaging conducive to high-paced interactive environments such as meetings; (2) it simplifies the sharing process to one click ("retweeting"); and perhaps most importantly, (3) it allows for easy organization and cataloging of messages into hashtags, preceded by a "#," which can later be searched and referenced by users across the world who can catch the highlights of a meeting

<sup>a</sup>Department of Radiology, Division of Musculoskeletal Radiology, University of Michigan Health System, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

<sup>b</sup>Department of Radiology, Eastern Virginia Medical School, Norfolk, Virginia.

<sup>c</sup>Department of Radiology, Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, Boston, Massachusetts.

<sup>d</sup>Advanced Radiology Services PC, Division of Radiology and Biomedical Imaging, Michigan State University College of Human Medicine, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

<sup>e</sup>Department of Radiology, University of Alabama at Birmingham, Birmingham, Alabama.

<sup>f</sup>Department of Radiology and Imaging Sciences, Emory University School of Medicine, Atlanta, Georgia.

Corresponding author and reprints: Vivek Kalia, MD, MPH, University of Michigan Hospital, 1500 E. Medical Center Drive, Taubman Center 2910D, Ann Arbor, MI 48109; e-mail: [vivekkalia@gmail.com](mailto:vivekkalia@gmail.com).

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without being physically present at the meeting [12]. It is currently customary for each scientific meeting to have its own hashtag (eg, #ACR2017), such that one can simply follow this hashtag to keep up with all tagged meeting content (rather than following individual posts or contributors).

As one's social media footprint grows, Twitter allows radiology meeting attendees to interact with other radiologists and health professionals from other specialties—as well as with patients, policymakers, and the media on issues affecting radiology and health care at large [19]. Perhaps best of all, those conversations often continue even after meetings adjourn. Radiology journals are also now utilizing this unique means of reaching the readership: a recent study showed that journals with Twitter profiles have higher impact factors and the number of followers of a journal's Twitter profile is positively correlated with impact factor [20].

Twitter may also serve to cite published studies presented at scientific meetings for maximal impact because it is by far the social media platform on which articles are most likely to be mentioned [21]. As Rosenkrantz and Hawkins demonstrated [6], Twitter also presents a powerful platform for live polling of both (1) meeting attendees and (2) other Twitter followers who are not in attendance but who may nevertheless have an opinion on a particular matter being discussed. Given the potential for exponential (“viral”) spread of tweets and retweets among very high-impact users (ie, those with thousands of followers), it is not an exaggeration to say that Twitter polls are capable of “potentially captur[ing] global public sentiment during the course of a medical society meeting” [6].

Equally important to active and effective Twitter use at meetings is encouraging others to join and use Twitter as a tool for engagement. Those not active on Twitter will never benefit from one's live-tweeting if it never comes across his or her glance. Therein lies one of the weaknesses of the social media strategy for increasing engagement—the population reached is inherently biased toward persons who engage in social media activities, which may not represent the population at large. However, there seems to be a growing trend of cross-generational adoption.

## BASICS OF TWITTER USE

The use of Twitter among radiologists, both in practice and in training, has grown exponentially over the last several years [5,19]. Similar trends are being reported in pathology [22], emergency medicine [23], plastic surgery [24], and other medical and surgical specialties. Social media has thus been called the “great equalizer”

for good reason; everyone from medical students to department chairs and from general radiologists to national thought leaders have the same opportunity to connect with others. Of course, being a known entity helps launch the visibility and number of “followers” of a new user.

As with every tool, there is a wide spectrum of user types. These range from the casual consumer to the avid content producer. Twitter interactions come in many flavors and include the following: replying to, liking, retweeting, and quoting tweets as well as direct messaging (which most of the time requires a mutual “following”) [25]. Each type of interaction has a different purpose, as detailed later.

Each individual, organization, journal, and so on can create a Twitter “username” or “handle,” which is always preceded with an “@” [25]. When creating a username, many radiologists choose to use their name and designate themselves as a physician, and then specify their role(s) as a radiologist in their short biography [25]. Following specific high-impact and relevant users allows users to curate their own live feed to keep up to date with the latest thoughts, news, and opportunities relevant to radiologists, including trainees. Following and unfollowing others on Twitter is a simple and fluid process, and unlike other social media platforms (eg, Facebook [Facebook, Inc, Menlo Park, California], LinkedIn [Sunnyvale, California]), it does not require reciprocal following. As one increases the number of people one follows, Twitter modifies that individual's feed and even suggests other similar users who may be of interest. New users unsure of who to follow are encouraged to take a look at who other users with similar interests are following.

One of the most important tools when starting to use Twitter is the explore and search function, which allows users to search for hashtags, users, and phrases. This is a great way to find new users to follow, keep up with trends, as well as learn about upcoming Tweet Chats and meetings. Physicians who have adopted Twitter find it a valuable medium through which to share new research, connect with both colleagues and patients, and keep abreast of happenings in their professional networks [26].

At first, determining one's “appropriate interaction” with an interesting tweet can seem daunting. The simplest interaction is a “like” [25]. A simple tap of the heart symbol shows one's interest in a particular tweet, which is then listed in that user's “likes” and thus becomes part of that user's Twitter profile. “Replying” [25] is the main method in Twitter to create a chain of tweets in the form of an organized conversation and

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