

Social media could impact on quality of conference presentations

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A new pilot study into the impact of Twitter on conferences suggests that social media may impact on quality of presentations as speakers receive real-time feedback.

The study resulted from collaboration between a group of doctors with a strong interest in Social Media and was brought together by Dr Damian Roland, a honorary senior lecturer at the University of Leicester and Consultant in Paediatric Emergency Care at Leicester's Hospitals, and published in the journal *Emergency Medicine*.

Dr Roland said: "In a small sample of [tweets](#) captured at an Emergency Medicine Conference and shown to presenters, the majority were deemed to be reflective of the message the presenter was trying to get across. A small number were found not to represent the presenter's views.

"Tweets are public and therefore any presenter must think about what they do (and don't) want distributed. I have heard presenters say please don't take pictures in the past - could this soon be followed by please don't tweet?"

"The quality of presentations should hopefully improve as presenters are forced to concentrate on their key messages more and respond to the real time feedback they are now receiving."

Dr Roland, from the Sapphire Group in the Department of Health Sciences at the University and the Paediatric Emergency Medicine Leicester Academic Group at Leicester Royal Infirmary, worked with Natalie May, Richard Body and Simon Carley from Central Manchester University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust and Mark Lyttle from Bristol Royal Hospital for Children and the University of the West of England, Bristol.

The study of tweets from a medical conference found that the majority of tweets were accurate- but some were not and misrepresented what the speaker had said. Indeed, in isolation, they could be seen to harm the speaker's reputation.

Dr Roland said: "Dissonance between the intended message and its translation via a tweet likely exists due to a number of factors related to the presenter, the tweeter or the technology.

"One potential cause is the quality of the presentation and the clarity

with which messages are presented. It was not possible in this study to ascertain whether the whole audience was similarly mistaken or whether this was one individual's misinterpretation. Tweeters themselves may consciously or subconsciously phrase the message to achieve greater impact for their followers, an approach which could be viewed as sensationalism in some circumstances.

"These areas require further assessment in a future larger scale study, wherein comparison of tweets from the same talk may determine the extent of these effects. Finally, there remains the challenge of constructing a 140-character tweet which accurately communicates the content and context of the intended message."

More information: 'Are you a SCEPTIC? SoCial mEdia Precision & uTility In Conferences' by Roland D, May N, Body R, et al. *Emerg Med J* DOI: [10.1136/emered-2014-204216](https://doi.org/10.1136/emered-2014-204216)

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