Online Impact of Canadian Conference of Medical Education through Tweets

Alireza Jalali[1], Timothy J. Wood[2]

[1]Division of Clinical and Functional Anatomy, Faculty of Medicine, University of Ottawa, Canada
[2]Academy of Innovation in Medical Education, Faculty of Medicine, University of Ottawa, Canada

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR: Professor Dr Alireza Jalali, Faculté de médecine, uOttawa**,** 451 Smyth Road, 2164 Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K1H 8M5. Tel: 1-(613) 562-5800, ext. 8142. Fax: 1-(613) 562-5687
Email: ajalali@uottawa.ca

The use of social networking tools is becoming increasingly common in medical education with a variety of possible uses that people have not been able to do before.[1] For example, how is twitter used by attendees and non-attendees to a conference and how frequent are the tweets? Do people tweet about talks, set up meetings, note important sessions, or use it to coordinate social activities? The purpose of this study, therefore is to analyze one of these aspects, and find out the impact of twitter in disseminating information concerning the 2012 Canadian Conference on Medical Education (CCME).

To measure the impact of CCME tweets, we used TweetReach Pro (TweetReach.com). TweetReach provides analyses of data about tweets and focuses specifically on how many people are "reached by" each tweet. One of the analyses provided is a "Snapshot report" (SR). SRs provide historical analyses of tweets for 7 days, which are perfect for quick glimpses into twitter activity related to a hashtag (#). A hashtag is used to mark keywords in a tweet. As such, the tweeter influence of a conference can be measured by analyzing the impact of the conference hashtag.

Two components are reported in an SR:
- Reach: the total number of unique twitter users that tweet using the hashtag
- Exposure: the total number of times tweets about using the hashtag were delivered.

We obtained the SR of two twitter hashtags used during the conference: #CCME and

#CCME2012, between April 12 and 19, 2012. A total of 762 tweets, originating from 106 contributors, were exchanged containing either or both hashtags. From the 762 tweets, 456 were original, 197 were retweets and 109 were replies. The Reach of these 762 tweets was 62,293 and the Exposure was 1,318,662. Next we calculated the Reach to Exposure Ratio (R/E). According to TweetReach, the R/E represents the depth of penetration of tweets about a topic. This shows the online impact of a hashtag. A lower R/E suggests that people are seeing tweets about a topic repeatedly, while a high R/E suggests broad but shallow penetration of that topic. To help interpret the R/E, TweetReach provides the following ranges:

- Low R/E = 0.0-0.19 (i.e. Local news events & conferences)
- Average R/E = 0.20-0.59 (i.e. Larger media events)
- High R/E = 0.60-0.99 (i.e. Significant national or international events)

CCME 2012 had a R/E Ratio of 0.05 (62,293/1,318,662).

The analysis of the tweets showed that a number of people were following CCME 2012 using twitter but the low R/E Ratio suggests a large percentage of contributors were tweeting multiple times about the meeting and thus information was not spreading far beyond their followers.

Given that conferences are likely relevant to a smaller or localized audience, this result is perhaps not surprising. However, given the increasingly large and diverse online audience, meetings like CCME should start thinking of ways to use this technology in order to reach out to a wider audience and in the process help disseminate relevant and useful information.

Reference

1. Forgie SE, Duff JP, et al. Twelve tips for using Twitter as a learning tool in medical education. Med Teach. 2013;35(1):8-14. doi: 10.3109/0142159X.2012.746448. Epub 2012 Dec 21.