LETTERS

TWEETING AND RULE BREAKING AT CONFERENCES

We should investigate social media's value properly

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Social media have transformed traditional concepts of knowledge translation,^{1 2} and the rapid rise in conference “hashtags” creates its own knowledge gap. For some, this has resulted in a distorted perception of how Twitter works and how its use can be of benefit (or a hindrance).³

“Banning” Twitter is incongruous: you’re not banning Twitter—you’re banning its use to distribute what is perceived to be sensitive information. Conference organisers and presenters need to be clear about what information they are and aren’t happy to share.⁴ This was the case before Twitter, so the issue relates to outdated copyright claims rather than the social medium itself.

We also need a sense check of the power of social media, Twitter in particular. Some conferences now have huge numbers of tweets and millions of potential impressions. Those new to Twitter may believe that anything and everything will be seen and “re-tweeted” by thousands. This is actually highly improbable given the large volume of competing information. For information to go “viral” it must be clear, picked up by key influencers, and relevant to a large number of healthcare professionals.

It’s time for major publishers, conference organisers, and academic institutions to stop paying lip service to social media as an add-on and truly investigate its potential value and/or perils. Speakers and delegates will benefit and won’t be confused by outdated policies and rules.

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Full response at: www.bmj.com/content/353/bmj.i3556/rr-0.

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