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Live Tweeting and Social Media Broadcasting in Conferences.

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1. LIVE TWEETS AND LIVE BROADCASTS

In the past decade, social media has taken an ever-larger role on internet and in the media, offering great opportunities for events such as academic conferences. Even small conferences and events on obscure topics can now connect with an audience all over the world. However "live-tweeting" in conference sessions can also be disruptive and damaging in ways that participants don't always anticipate. As a response, many conferences have tried to develop new policies or guidelines around social-media use during meetings. It is not unusual for speakers to present unpublished work. While they may be willing to share unfinished work or sets of ideas to a group of peers, academic speakers may not wish to have such material broadcasted to the whole world.

"Live-blogging" or "live-tweeting", just like live streaming[1]– is a form of reporting and a form of publishing. Importantly it is a form of broadcasting content. Guidelines are essential for those working with social media to report academic events as they take place.

As social media usage has become a common feature at conferences, anxieties about authority, control, attribution, originality and privacy present difficult issues to the practice of academic social media use. It is no different to any other content. If it is the work of someone else, they must be properly referenced and attributed. It is essential to practice openness and transparency with the use of live social media to be compatible with academic requirements.

Live social media broadcasting can be an effective and useful tool and aid academic research and conferences. Increasing the reach of any event. However it must be controlled and civilised to minimise the potential risks it may also present.

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[1] See live streaming guide [link to..]

2. QUOTED OUT OF CONTEXT

Delegates presenting at academic conferences may show concern about complicated data or findings being reproduced on social media without sufficient background information. There can be a number of reasons for conference presenters to be wary of having their sessions live-tweeted. They may want to present early findings that they are legally prohibited from widely distributing, or are doing politically sensitive work. Presenters might also have a paper prepared for publication and be concerned that one of their reviewers might a read a related "tweet", undermining the blind peer-review process.

As part of the process of setting up a conference, it may be wise to adopt an opt-out policy[2] on conference tweeting and to ask attendees not to take digital photographs of slides, and to avoid posting raw data from someone else's presentation online. Those working in sensitive areas might worry that rivals may get early data off the web, or that such publishing via social media may affect patent applications.

3. INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY AND LIVE "TWEETING"

The sharing of scientific results beyond the confines of conferences held in lecture halls through blogging and social networking blurs the line between journalists and researchers. Academics in competitive fields may be more reluctant to discuss new findings if they fear it will be posted on the internet within seconds. Talking to the press is generally discouraged before any research work is published. Live blogging or "tweeting" can create many issues for researchers. Academics may be cautious about revealing unpublished results at conferences for fear that rivals in the audience might note them down. With such note-taking now taking place live and on the web, the speed and distance that information can spread must be considered very seriously.

Instant exposure on the internet may create problems for many researchers. Here in the UK any public disclosure may prevent you from applying for and getting a valid patent. Talking even to friends and family, may constitute a public disclosure. Once your idea is released on the internet it will be in the public domain and you will no longer be able to apply for a patent. Your intellectual property will be indexed to search engines for all the world to access. This has led to many conference organisers banning digital photography.

There is no greater public disclosure than the disclosure of information online.

4. WHY ALLOW LIVE "TWEETING" AT ALL?

Social media also has great benefits for Academic discourse. The practice of "live-tweeting" provides a record of events but can also be participatory, generating collaboration, discussion, as well as ideas or references that might be useful for a presenter. However, as a precaution it may be worth considering prolific social media users the same as you would members of the press or media and subject them to certain reporting restrictions.

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[2] https://www.nature.com/news/conference-tweeting-rule-frustrates-ecologists-1.18207

5. BEST PRACTISE

It is important to remember that universities benefit from public comment, and that speakers at such events should, in general, be accessible and accountable to their audiences. "Live-tweeting" may often be approached as a way to disseminate information and bring others into the discussion. Conference planners should also keep in mind the dangers and downsides of "live-tweeting". They should alert attendees to potentially dangerous "hashtags" and encourage "live-tweeters" to use only official conference "hashtags". Presenters should have the right to ask people not to "live-tweet" during their talk, and shouldn't have to explain their reasons.

6. ESSENTIAL RULES TO LIVE SOCIAL MEDIA BROADCASTING:

i. Before an event decided on an official policy for "tweeting", will it be permitted or not. Will the conference be suitable for a *"live-tweeting" encouraged* approach, or will there be sensitive information involved. Have you consulted your speakers? Possibly including these rules in the T&Cs for the conference.

ii. It is virtually impossible to prevent all attendees posting on social media during an event. However it is your responsibility to set an official, acceptable guidelines and standards. If you allow live "tweeting" the hashtag should be advertised in advance, making sure it's relevant, easy to type and does not have alternative meanings or uses on Twitter. To help ensure that the key points you want disseminated from the conference are effectively published online, appoint some experienced social media users to be your 'official' "live-tweeters".

iii. If taking photos, whether you intend to post them online or not, ensure there is sufficient signage and that attendees are informed in advance. Attendees and presenters should be given the options to not be photographed and there should be areas designated as no photography area for them to sit. Ensure all speakers attending have signed and returned the necessary release and consent forms[3] before the event.

iv. The person appointed to be in charge of "live-tweeting" the whole event or individual sessions must reliable and dependable. They will be representing the University and the conference to world, it is a great responsibility and must be taken seriously.

v. Attribution is key: Advise those attending and ensure that you yourself are clear in your "tweets" about who is saying what. If you don't attribute and/or use quotation marks when reporting what has been said, people can (and rightly will) assume it's you saying it. If the speaker is on Twitter, find out what they are called on Twitter in advance, as their 'handle' may often be different than their full name.

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[3] https://www.bath.ac.uk/publications/photography-and-filming-consent-and-location-forms/

vi.   When quoting directly, use quotation marks. Think direct and indirect reported speech. Never assume anything you read online is from the public domain. Attribute other people's ideas or anything else you quote. It's not just good manners, it is professional ethics.

vii.   Even if you completely disagree with what is being said, always be polite and respectful. Don't "tweet" anything you wouldn't say to a person or group face-to-face.

viii. If you are "live-tweeting" an event, assume that people outside the conference will be interested and/or will read your "tweets". This includes people who don't follow you directly.

Remember: You are using a worldwide public facing publishing platform!

7. SUMMARY

In short, default permission for live-tweeting should be expected at any meeting or conference. Those using the Twitter publishing platform should be aware of the dangers, and presenters should be able to opt out easily if they wish.

Social media isn't negative or positive in itself; it's just a tool. As with any tool, you want to know how it works, when to use it, and where the potential issues are. If organizers, "tweeters", and presenters are careful and knowledgeable, Twitter can amplify and deepen the conference experience. If such considerations are not acknowledged Twitter may have the potential to sometimes take the conference over.

Remember: Twitter and the like are public facing publishing platforms. Those that report live from conferences and events using social media publishing platforms should face the same scrutiny and restriction as those from the traditional press and media.