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You Should Try This!

Engaging medical education scholars with a Twitter conference on professionalism and professional identity formation

Réunion de chercheurs en éducation médicale à une conférence sur Twitter autour du sujet du professionnalisme et la construction de l'identité professionnelle

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Implication Statement

The Education Innovation Institute (EII) of Medical College of Georgia, Augusta University, hosted a conference on Twitter about Professional Identity Formation (PIF), #MCGConf2021PIF, on February 25, 2021. The conference featured five presentations by 15 authors from Canada and the U.S. A Twitter conference is a versatile, affordable, and accessible digital option for medical education groups interested in diversifying conference offerings and reaching a broader audience. It was low-cost, organized in six months, and garnered over 9,000 Twitter impressions. Small networks and interest groups can organize Twitter conferences for their constituencies and larger conference organizations can host online mini-conferences to supplement in-person events.

Introduction

We have entered “The age of Twitter conferences.”¹ A Twitter conference is held exclusively using this popular social media platform. Conference presenters deliver presentations in the form of a succinct thread in which all activity is linked to a single designated hashtag. While Twitter conferences have grown in popularity over the past several years, it appears that the Education Innovation

Énoncé des implications de la recherche

Le 25 février 2021, l'Éducation Innovation Institute (EII) du Medical College of Georgia de l'Université Augusta a tenu une conférence sur la construction de l'identité professionnelle sur le réseau social Twitter (#MCGConf2021PIF). Cinq communications y ont été présentées par 15 chercheurs du Canada et des États-Unis. Elle a été organisée en six mois, à coût modeste, et elle a recueilli plus de 9 000 impressions sur Twitter. La conférence Twitter s'avère être une option numérique polyvalente, abordable et accessible pour les membres du milieu de l'éducation médicale désireux de diversifier leur offre de symposiums et de toucher un public plus large. Twitter offre aux petits réseaux et groupes d'intérêt la possibilité de convier leurs membres à des conférences restreintes et aux organisateurs de conférences plus importantes la possibilité de tenir des mini-conférences en ligne pour compléter leurs activités en personne.

Institute (EII)'s inaugural conference on February 25, 2021 was the first in medical education: “Peering into the Looking Glass”: Professionalism and Professional Identity Formation in Health Professions Education (HPE)” ([#MCGConf2021PIF](https://doi.org/10.36834/cmej.72639)).

There are many unique features of conferences hosted on Twitter, which, unlike video-supported conferences, are open to the public, have unlimited reach, and facilitate synchronous and asynchronous participation. Participants

and presenters do not have costs associated with travel or lodging and the venue allows for new ways of interacting with HPE scholarship. For example, the diversity and accessibility of the online space provided a lively venue for exploring and discussing PIF in HPE while also engaging in deep reflection. The responses from participants were both rapid and engaging within an intrinsically creative and interactive space. In the absence of audio, the experience was remarkably different than most conferences. The fast pace and quiet space may be appealing.

The first step to organizing #MCGConf2021PIF was to decide on a theme, title, and conference hashtag. After these details were in place, we developed a conference website including a registration page and a participation guide with technical and content information. A call for papers and the conference schedule was advertised through Twitter (of course), listservs, and other social media platforms. We set a nominal registration fee for presenters. Accepted abstracts were published in the Canadian Medical Education Journal.²

The conference featured five presentations and 15 authors from Canada and the United States, framed by introductory Tweets for defining PIF from a conference organizer (TW) and concluding Tweets by an invited commentator (HSW) for an overview of conference insights. Each prepared presentation thread (including slides and/or text) was presented by a designated author (15 minutes) followed by questions and comments (15 minutes). After the live event, participants and potential audience members were invited to continue their conversations on Twitter. We received positive feedback from presenters and conference attendees after the event. Presenter Maryam Yasinian (@yasinianmaryam) stated that “it was an amazing experience,”³ and presentation co-author Chris Gillette (@pharmacprof) remarked that he was “looking forward to many more” Twitter conferences in the future.⁴ Aileen Patterson (@aileenp25) of The School of Medicine, Trinity College Dublin (@TrinityMed1), who was not able to attend the live event, appreciated the fact that she could read through the presentations afterwards. “This conference looks amazing, research is so timely, going to spend some time looking through this #MCGConf2021PIF,” Patterson tweeted.⁵

The conference generated 9,225 organic impressions for EII’s Twitter account (i.e. the number of times a tweet was viewed on Twitter in its organic context⁶). Further, each conference presenter and participant’s personal Twitter account garnered additional impressions (examples in

Table 1). Reach was determined largely by each account’s follower count and connection to health professions educators and practitioners on Twitter; one challenge for EII was its low follower count. However, increase in overall analytics indicate that there are Twitter users in medical education who actively engaged online with our conference, and this event offered an opportunity for all involved to grow their digital network and reach new audiences. Another challenge faced by EII was low uptake at the abstract submission stage. This challenge was partly due to EII’s low impact factor on Twitter, as well as the newness of this conference medium within the field of medical education. Moving forward, conference organizers will develop a more robust publicity strategy to overcome these challenges. This strategy will include directly contacting potential presenters, particularly early career learners, via Twitter and email, as well as advertising on more health professions listservs, blogs, and websites.

Building off the momentum of #MCGConf2021PIF, EII will host a second Twitter conference in October 2021, “Change Processes to Transform Health Professions Education.”⁷ Other groups may wish to follow in EII’s footsteps given that Twitter conferences promise to offer an accessible digital option to supplement in-person conferencing.⁸

**The Institutional Research Board of Augusta University determined that the data collected did not constitute research, as they are all publicly available.*

Table 1. #MCGConf2021PIF Twitter impressions, February 25, 2021

Author	Twitter Handle	Conference Impressions
DeWitt, J	@JessicaMDeWitt	24,400
Wald, H	@hedy_wald	34,500
Wyatt, T	@DrTashaWyatt	13,600

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