

# Life as a Tweeter:

## Information Dissemination in the World of Twitter

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### Abstract

*Current awareness bulletins, reading lists, and bibliographies are all methods of information dissemination, and considered as the preserve of librarians and information specialists. However, with the advent of the internet and social media, sharing of information has become much easier and can be done by anyone. For example, some medical journals require researchers to submit articles with an abstract to also provide a tweetable version, and in some journals it is a requirement for academics seeking to be published.*

*All of us can tweet and share our views on a range of matters but what is the role of Twitter as a means of disseminating information on professional topics? What are the potential benefits? What are the pitfalls? This paper, from the perspective of a professional tweeter for the Society for Study of Addiction, explores these and other issues.*

### Keywords

Substance abuse, Social Media, Twitter

### The Society for Study of Addiction (SSA)

The Society was founded as the Society for the Study and Cure of Inebriety in 1884, and is the oldest organisation of its type in the United Kingdom. As a learned society its key objective is to support the communication of scientific knowledge about dependence on alcohol, nicotine and other drugs. The mission of the Society is to broaden and promote the scientific understanding of addiction, and aims to help

clinicians and policy makers get research evidence into practice.

In its early days the mission of the Society was met through meetings at which papers on inebriety were read, discussed and then published as proceedings. In July 1884 the Society's first proceedings were published, and a journal was born. Today the journal is the longest established scientific journal in its field and is now in its 132<sup>nd</sup> year of being published (Edwards, 2006).

The SSA communicates through a variety of ways including its journal *Addiction*, emails, newsletters, its website and for the past year or so has been using Twitter as an

information dissemination tool to keep its members, those working in addictions, and interested general public informed about new resources, research, conferences, training and other events, and SSA news.

## What is Social Media?

Social media has emerged over the past 10 years in various forms to play a fundamental role in our lives. But do we actually understand these networks? And are we using them in the right ways?

The online Oxford Dictionaries defines social media as “Websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking” (Social media, 1989). Wikipedia describes social media as computer-mediated tools that allow people or companies to create, share, or exchange information, career interests, ideas, and pictures/videos in virtual communities and networks (Social media, n.d.).

### Twitter

Twitter started 10 years ago in March 2006, and is an online social networking service that enables users to send and read short 140-character messages called “tweets.” It is said that on average, around 6,000 tweets are tweeted on Twitter per second which corresponds to over 350,000 tweets sent per minute, 500 million tweets per day and around 200 billion tweets per year.

<http://www.internetlivestats.com/twitter-statistics/>

### Getting started

Twitter has considerable potential as an information dissemination tool and can be used in a myriad of ways within libraries and the research community. For ideas on its potential, a useful blog is [http://philbradley.typepad.com/phil\\_bradeys\\_weblog/2009/01/using-twitter-in-libraries.html](http://philbradley.typepad.com/phil_bradeys_weblog/2009/01/using-twitter-in-libraries.html) and a report from Taylor & Francis (2014) Use of social media by the library – current practices and future opportunities.

<http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/access/wHITE-paper-social-media.pdf> explores fully

the uses that social media have for libraries and the benefits it can bring.

Prior to setting up Twitter accounts or any other social media services, it is important to establish why you, your library, or organisation wants one, and what it hopes to achieve. Carscaddon and Chapman (2013) provide very useful advice on spending time planning your library’s approach.

Questions to consider include

- Who is it aimed at?
- Set goals – what does the library wish to achieve through use of social media – is it promoting services, professional exchange library to library, current awareness from users, feedback.
  - Select your channel/platform – Twitter Facebooks. RSS email or newsletter
  - Style and types of message – use of language – grammar, written style
  - Use of language – written style
  - Selection policy/assessment of content – sourcing your content
    - What resources do you have – staff time; skills required etc. training needs?
    - How will you monitor it? Statistics
    - Indexing/hashtags?
    - Develop clear guidelines/policy – make this public

Having been through the above, the SSA set up two accounts with specific aims. The SSA main account is used to disseminate information about addiction matters including new resources, research, conferences, training, and other events. This account is not used for discussion or comments. This avoids causing any difficulties for a professional body that has a reputation to maintain.

The second, ad-hoc, account, is the SSA’s Symposium account which is dedicated to sharing targeted information about Symposium themes, presentations, and for attendees to use and share comments about presentations. This feed is for use during the Symposium and protocols on use of social media are given to attendees. Groves (2016) explores the issues regarding tweeting and rule breaking at conferences.

The SSA Social media policy sets out how we use social media; what you (as a follower) can expect from us and how we will communicate if required with our followers.

<https://www.addiction-ssa.org/social-media>

The next stage is to set up an account and undertake training in using Twitter and then find time to explore or 'play' with Twitter prior to going live, and become familiar with key twitter vocabulary.

**Tweet:** message of up to 140 characters posted on Twitter (can include pictures)

**Twitter stream:** series of tweets from a Twitter account

**Retweet (RT):** a tweet forwarded by someone to their followers

**Followers:** individuals or organisations who choose to follow your Twitter account and receive your tweets

**Following:** individuals or organisations that you have chosen to follow on your Twitter account; you will receive their tweets

**Mention:** using @username to talk to or mention a specific Twitter account in a Tweet.

**Hashtags:** words or phrases with starting with a #; used like keywords or indexing terms so clicking on a hashtag will search for all public instances of its use.

The Twitter Help website provides much advice on using it <https://support.twitter.com/> and another useful site and guide to twitter is <http://mashable.com/guidebook/twitter/>.

Selecting content - for an information dissemination feed subscribing to specialist- or subject-based sources is an excellent way of identifying content. These include blogs and news feeds that are addiction focused. Agencies working in the sector and key government sites that issue health information and useful statistics are also a good source for content. As with book selection it is important to be selective of the lists subscribed too. For example you may need to consider not subscribing to those that appear to have a political bias, or are campaigning for a cause such as "legalisation of drugs" - this will hopefully avoid undermining your organisation's professional standing and reputation. A useful source is tweets from those that follow you and from those you follow.

A question that has arisen on many occasions has been "How much time are you

spending on tweeting?" Clearly, this is dependent on how you are using it. In my role as a disseminator of information, I spend 30 minutes to an hour per day on twitter and that includes both finding and assessing content. There is useful guidance about tweeting and the optimum number of posts from <http://michaelhyatt.com/12-ways-to-get-more-twitter-followers.html>

There are some useful tools to help with managing Twitter and these are listed below and in appendix.

- Buffer - tool for helping you to schedule tweets in advance. It has a free and paid version.
- Tweriod - analysis of your tweets and your followers' tweets to show best times for tweeting.
- Twitter Analytics -detailed report on followers and individual tweets, including impressions, clicks, and engagement.
- The Tweeted Times - content curation from your twitter account showing key stories, links.
- Tweepmap - map showing locations of followers

## Twitter in research communities; libraries (special/academic)

Within the academic/ research sectors there is considerable data and information. Paulli (2012) stated in a blog post that there are "1.5m academic publications every year and two new articles are uploaded to UK PubMed Central every minute of the day." Keeping up with this mass of information is challenging and whilst there are issues of intellectual property and ownership, by using twitter for current awareness and ensuring that sources are cited properly, libraries can provide a valuable service to the research community. However, in recent years the role of libraries has been challenged by the advent of the Internet and development of social media, and many specialist libraries, particularly in the addictions sector, have disappeared. Academics and others working in the field use the new platforms of blogs, email groups, twitter, and sites such as Researchgate to share their work as well as communicate it

to a broad audience of other researchers, decision makers, journalists and the general public.

Tim Hitchcock (2014) in a recent blog about twitter's value to the academic community cites "Dan Cohen – the director of the Digital Public Library of America – always says about Twitter that the important thing is that at the end of the week, it makes you aware of all the publications and developments, calls for papers, and conferences, you need to know about in order to keep up with your corner of the academy. It is not about what you had for breakfast. It is about being on top of your field."

This view applies equally to libraries and Hawn (2009) suggests that the power of social media lies in its ability to disseminate and collect information rapidly among many users. This is where librarians and libraries have an advantage in being skilled in information literacy, which is the ability to recognise when information is needed, ability to locate it, evaluate it, and disseminate it. Twitter provides an opportunity to communicate with your users, share information, and present it in an easily accessible way.

Depending on how you or your library decides to use Twitter you can tweet about other library services and activities such as

- Events and promotional activities
- New books/journals/ E-resources
- Seek feedback on your services and reply to comments people make about your library

It is important to monitor your account and Twitter analytics provides data on tweets such as what is popular or not so popular, tracking number of retweets, and looking at what time of day tweets are recirculated. You can also request a log /archive of all your tweets. These data can be used to plan your staff time on twitter, and assist with planning your content.

### **Pitfalls**

Twitter is a powerful tool but there are some pitfalls to avoid. Be cautious when using it for two-way communication, and

avoid getting into long and heated discussions as this can impact negatively upon your organisations reputation. Keep your written style professional and on topic, too many tweets about how wonderful your library is maybe seen as spamming, and is a breach of Twitter's unwritten rules.

### **Conclusion**

Social media is clearly an effective tool that can be harnessed by libraries for many uses including current awareness and selective dissemination of information; internal communications; professional communication (e.g., library to library); and externally as a marketing and promotional tool to raise one's profile.

### **Top tips**

- Know why you want to use social media.
- Develop a policy on content and process.
- Take a strategic approach – for example start small and gain experience in using Twitter.
- Consider having separate accounts for different services such as feedback; reference enquires; current awareness.
- Be professional – reflect your library/organisation through your tweets – use a brand voice so avoid 1<sup>st</sup> person singular.
- Regular, effective use is the key to be successful as tweeter.
- Follow credible sources – such as Medscape, Mental Elf, EMCDDA, NIDA, and SAMSHA,
- Retweeting can help keep the time under control.
- Manage and monitor the service, analyse usage – use twitter analytics
- Use services such as Buffer –a tool that helps you schedule tweets in advance.
- Check who is following you.
- Share useful/validated information resources
- Have a strong password, one that is not easily guessed
- Provide regular reports for organisation on twitter

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## Appendix: Useful tools

Buffer: <https://buffer.com/>  
 Tweriod: <https://www.tweriod.com/>  
 Twitter Analytics:  
<https://analytics.twitter.com/about>  
 The Tweeted Times:  
<https://tweetedtimes.com/>  
 TweepMap: <https://tweepmap.com/>

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