



Social media for professionals in Pain Medicine – an introduction and Twitter

Damien Smith *Consultant, Pain Medicine & Anaesthesia, Hillingdon NHS Foundation Trust, Middlesex; @thepaindoctoruk*

Stephen Humble *Consultant, Pain Medicine & Anaesthesia, Charing Cross Hospital, Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust, London; @kafkesque787*

Arun Bhaskar *Consultant, Pain Medicine & Anaesthesia; Chair, Communications Committee; Elected Council Member, British Pain Society; @DrArunBhaskar*

Social media, noun:

Websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking.

Social networking, noun:

The use of dedicated websites and applications to interact with other users, or to find people with similar interests to one's own. (Google definitions)

Introduction

When we see or hear phrases like social media or social networking, applications such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram might come to mind for most of us. But for millennia, we have found effective ways to interact with others who have similar interests to our own across vast distances. Therefore, social media in one form or another has been around for a very long time. Indeed, there are claims that the first postal service originated in Persia between 1700 BC and 500 BC. However, the first well-documented state-run service was the *Cursus Publicus*, which was set up by Emperor Augustus (64 BC–AD 14), which enabled communication across the Roman Empire. The need to form social networks is not a new phenomenon, but the tools used for this process have changed over time.

Telegraph	1792
First successful telephone transmission	1876
Marconi patented radio	1896
Email	1966
Wikipedia	2001
Facebook	2004
YouTube	2005
Twitter	2006 ¹

Reaching 50 million users

Telephone took 75 years to reach 50 million users compared to Internet which took only 4 years. Compare these to the reach of angry birds which took only 35 days to reach 50 million users.²

Radio, telephone and television required raw materials, construction and labour to have the infrastructure and then



distribution and sales to reach the 50 million mark. In contrast, once the infrastructure of the Internet was in place, interactive websites such as Google, Facebook and Twitter could harness the Cambrian Explosion of technology and applications that constitute a significant part of the global community. 'The strengths of social media are the interactivity, connectedness, participation, openness, conversation and sense of community that it fosters'.³



Over the coming issues of *Pain News*, we will introduce social media and some of its current applications and discuss how it can be utilised to further communication and knowledge relevant to Pain Medicine.

Twitter

What is it?

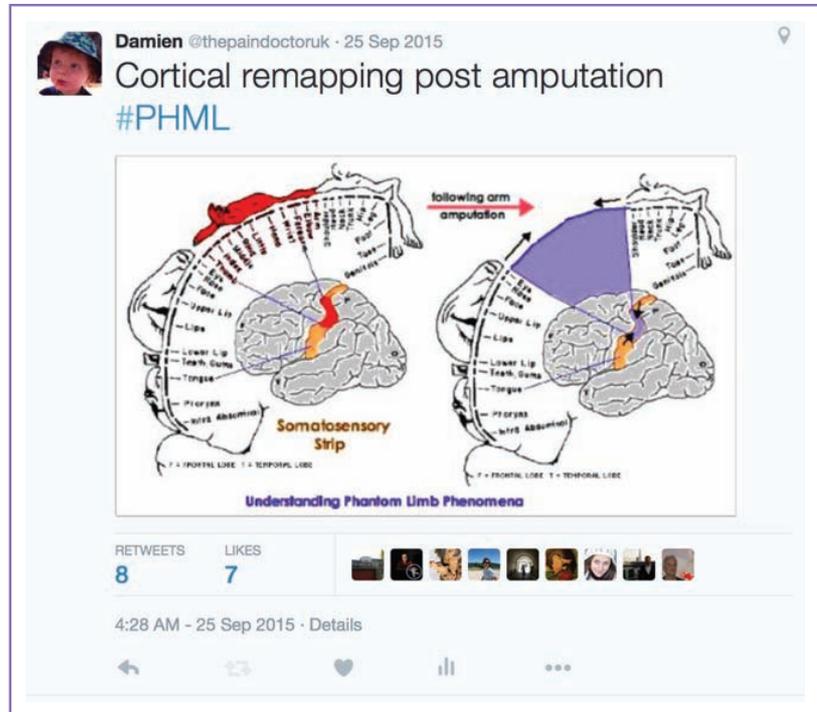
Twitter was founded in March 2006 and was launched in July 2006 by Evan Williams, Noah Glass, Jack Dorsey and Biz Stone. Many use it to share news, jokes or message whatever is on their mind. Users are limited to using a maximum of 140 characters to convey their message. Every second there are (on average) 6,000 tweets (messages) that correspond to 360,000 tweets per minute, 500 million tweets per day and a whopping 200 billion tweets per year!

Looking at those numbers, you would be right to think 'how can I be heard among all that Twitter noise?' The power of Twitter may be illustrated as follows: one of the authors (D.S.) attended the Peterhouse Medicolegal conference in Cambridge, United Kingdom, on September 2015. In one of the afternoon lectures, there was an excellent slide on cortical remapping post amputation (Figure 1). The slide was tweeted by one of the authors to 150 followers. It was retweeted by a follower in the United Kingdom who has 7,000 followers and then retweeted by them and so on. Within 45 minutes, it was read and retweeted by people in Athens, Amsterdam, Utrecht, Izmir and London. It was then seen and 'liked' by people in Buenos Aires and Melbourne. Within a very short period of time, within an hour, the tweet had gone around the world and was seen over 1,500 times.

The rapid mode of communication and dissemination of information is also the reason that Twitter has been involved in

controversy and censorship. It has been used as a mode of communication during political and civil unrests, used in protests and revolutions including the 'Arab Spring'. Currently, it is completely blocked and unusable in Iran, China and North Korea and has been previously banned in Turkey, Iraq and Egypt. Most people all over the world, young and old alike, are using smart phones and are familiar with smart-phone technology.

Due to its instant networking, it is now increasingly being used in emergencies and during major incidents. In March 2012, the UK Government produced a document giving tips on how to use social media in emergencies. During the recent flooding in the United Kingdom, the environment agency was sending regular updates with flood warnings and alerts, this was then mirrored by the Twitter traffic in the corresponding areas using hashtags (#) mentioning the word #flood (Figure 2).⁴



How do I use Twitter?

Once you sign up using an email address, you can create your own Twitter profile or persona. Search for someone who you know or anyone who you may find interesting. You then 'follow' these people or organisations. You can look at who your friends and colleagues follow to get some ideas. You will then receive a constantly updated 24-hour Twitter feed onto your homepage from everyone you follow and things they have tweeted, retweeted or liked. If you do not like what someone is saying or they Tweet too much, then you can politely mute them from your homepage (temporarily or permanently) without having to 'Unfollow' them. Twitter could be described as a very noisy party with many of people talking at the same time, but you can control whom you listen to or interact with.

Twitter definitions

Twitter	The brand name of a social media service and website where user can post messages which are 140 characters long
Tweet	A message sent on Twitter up to 140 characters
Retweet	The act of sharing another user's tweet to your following
Twitterati	Keen or frequent users of Twitter
Liked	Liking a tweet indicates that you appreciate it and also save it on your homepage so that you can access it quickly later on
Follower	Another Twitter user who has followed you to receive your tweets in their homeline
#	Denotes something that is happening and you can see what everyone is saying about it (e.g. #BritishPainASM2015, #Flood, #FOAM)
@	denotes a person or organisation that you can follow (e.g. @BritishPainSoc)
Trending	A topic or hashtag that is popular on twitter at that moment
Troll	Internet slang for an unpleasant person who starts arguments or upsets people with inflammatory or offensive comments

When can I use it?

Twitter is a great tool to use at conferences. It is possible to see what is happening in satellite sessions and to share pictures and links of papers being discussed and feel that sense of participation, conversation and community. Before the conference, the organisers can create a # related to the meeting, for example, #BritishpainASM2015 and #IASPCongress2016. Delegates can use this #name during the conference to share information from the lectures:

- Pictures from the lecture;
- Links to papers that have been quoted;
- Take notes;
- Share comments with others;
- Send questions to speakers;
- Information from the exhibition hall.

Delegates may tweet the contents of the lecture, workshop or poster, and this is a positive way of sharing and summarising the salient educational messages. In this way, Tweets can even be accepted during the appraisal and revalidation process as proof of attending the meeting and of reflective practice.

How can I get my voice heard?

Pain Medicine may not be the largest specialty in the United Kingdom, but with simple measures, it is possible to communicate its message effectively to patients and the general population. With approximately 200 pain clinics in the United Kingdom, we should make our voices heard. This can be illustrated by looking at some analytics from Twitter. The number of people that organisations follow and the number of tweets sent may be considered to reflect how large an audience or population can be reached and also the potential impact on that audience (Table 1).

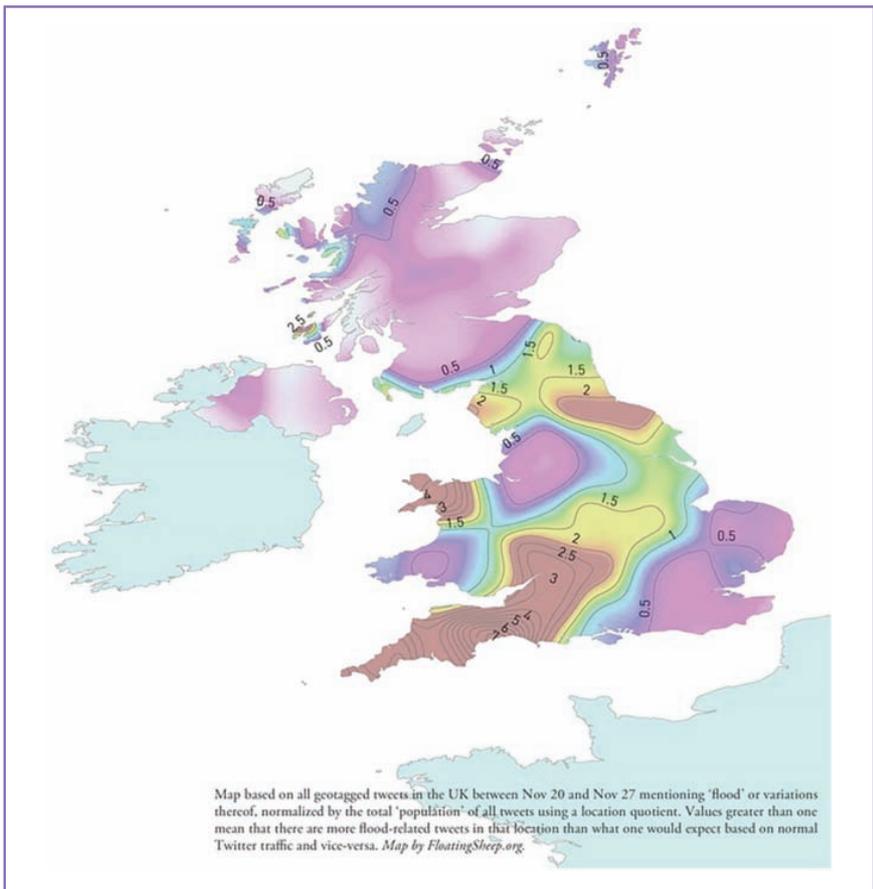


Table 1. Twitter analytics using Twitonomy Metrics for pain, anaesthetic and medical organisations (figures used from 9 January 2016)

	@ BritishPainSoc	@ EFIC_org	@ IASPPAIN	@ rcoanews	@ aagbi	@ TheBMA	@ FOAM_ Highlights	#FOAMed
Followers	1,227	451	3,301	7,737	6,726	64,972	14,903	
Following	168	329	75	26	4,039	2,200	105	
Tweets/day	0.17	0.7	0.1	0.5	3.7	13.8	2.8	~1,000
User Mentions	98 (0.5)	108 (0.3)	40 (0.1)	99 (0.1)	1,275 (0.4)	1,373 (0.4)	578 (0.1)	
Retweets	26%	38%	4%	11%	43%	29%	15%	

Table 2. Twitter analytics using Twitonomy Metrics for individuals (data from 9 January 2016)

	@EricTopol	@pascalmeier74	@traumagasdoc	@ButNHS
Followers	78.3K	45.6K	9,446	51.6K
Following	347	50K	1,650	4.5K
Tweets/day	6.1	16.8	14.7	25
User Mentions	4,216 (1.3)	2,576 (0.8)	3,456 (1.08)	376 (0.1)
Retweets	94.8%	33%	26.5%	13%

The International Association for the Study of Pain (IASP), European Federation of IASP Chapters (EFIC), British Pain Society and Royal College of Anaesthetists (RCOA) all send less than one tweet per day. This means that the number of people reached will be severely limited. The British Medical Association (BMA) and the Association of Anaesthetists of Great Britain and Ireland (AAGBI) send more than one tweet per day and follow over 2,000 people giving them a larger audience and therefore significant impact. Indeed, there are approximately 15 million people on Twitter in the United Kingdom alone,⁵ and it is very popular among journalists.

But you do not have to be a large organisation to be heard (see Table 2).

When we compare these figures with the ones mentioned previously, it is clear to see that pain organisations have

plenty of scope to improve their presence on Twitter and on Social Media in general, which will lead to an enhanced impact. Social media such as Twitter and Facebook may be used in a highly effective manner specifically for clinical education and continuing professional development. An excellent example of this is #FOAMed (Free Open Access Meducation). This will be explored further in the next article on Social Media to be published in the next edition of *Pain News*.

Conclusion

Social media may be considered as a natural evolution of our desire to interact with each other. News is disseminated as it happens often by people involved or around where it is happening using social media; there is no delay in getting the information out unlike conventional

printed press, radio or TV. There is an untapped opportunity for professionals working in pain clinics to become interconnected with each other and the outside world. This may lead to an advancement of knowledge through greater sharing which has the potential to enhance patient care. At the same time, there is also a chance to raise the profile for Pain as a specialty and ultimately improve public awareness, and perhaps even help to safeguard the specialty through the current (and future) climate of financial austerity.

References

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