

Social Media: A Source of Research Data and a Scholarly Communication Tool: Insights from an in-depth Analysis of Tweets Related to Swine Flu and Ebola

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Abstract

This research project is the first evidence-based study to perform an in-depth analysis of Twitter data related to the Swine Flu and Ebola outbreaks (i.e., Web-data) employing a novel methodology. Over n=13,000 tweets were read and labelled in NVivo. This is an important area to study as previous research has found that the most common source of information during infectious disease outbreaks is the Internet (Jones & Salathé, 2009).

Our poster will report on some of the challenges that were faced such as:

- Methodological issues: Twitter data is not representative of the general offline population, and it was also found that due to bots and link baiting the quality of information may be low. Therefore, the insights gained can be limited.
- Ethical and Privacy issues: Although tweets are publically available for use by researchers, users may not be aware that their posts are being used for research purposes. Therefore, there are clear issues over informed consent.

Our project has generated good amounts of impact by engaging with relatively new methods of scholarly communication and has a blog post within the London School of Economic and Political Sciences (LSE) Impact Blog which is ranked within the top 1% of all posts read with over 23,000 page hits. The lead researcher (WA) also maintains a personal research blog which has amassed over 12 thousand unique visitors with over 20 thousand page hits during the course of the research project. By engaging with new methods of scholarly communication, we have had good success such as an increase in the number of:

- Page Hits
- Citations
- Comments

We have also had interest across sectors such as from academia, the general public, industry, media, and government. Our poster will, therefore, also highlight the critical success factors for engaging with new methods of scholarly communication.

References

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Session Classification: Posters and Minute Madness Sessions