

1 **Title: International Gynaecological Cancer Society (IGCS) 2020 Annual Global**
2 **meeting Twitter activity analysis: A beginning**

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Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate

This study is an analysis of Twitter conversations, available in public domain, and not performed under any specific institute/organization, thus no formal ethical approval was sought. Permission from top ten users (Twitter accounts mentioned in manuscript) was obtained, for using their Twitter handles

Consent for publication

Not applicable

Availability of data and materials

Data will be provided, if requested

Competing interests

GB, HH, NN, SJ, FN, WA declare no competing interests
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Authors' contributions

Study planning, conduct, concept and design: GB
Data acquisition: WA
Statistical Analysis: WA
Manuscript preparation: GB, HH, NN, SJ, FN, AGE, WA
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86

87 Abstract**88 Introduction**

89 Scientific conference organizers encourage attendees to disseminate information
90 and communicate through social media. Twitter is the most frequently used social
91 media platform by healthcare practitioners, at medical conferences. Official hashtags
92 are announced before scientific conferences take place, and participants are asked
93 to use these hashtags in their tweets. If users begin to use a hashtag, it makes it
94 visible to their followers, and therefore it helps to increase visibility for the
95 conference. Analysis of Twitter conversations during a gynecology oncology
96 conference has not yet been attempted. This study aimed to analyze Twitter
97 conversations during the virtual International Gynecological Cancer Society 2020
98 conference, to understand the interactions between Twitter users related to the
99 conference.

100 Methods

101 Tweets using the hashtag "#IGCS2020" were searched using the Twitter Search
102 Application Programming Interface (API) during the period 10th to 13th Sept 2020.
103 We used NodeXL Pro to retrieve data. The Clauset-Newman-Moore cluster algorithm
104 was used to cluster users into different groups or 'clusters' based on how users
105 interacted.

106 Results

107 The total number of users within the network was 168, and there were 880 edges
108 connecting users. Five types of edges were identified, these were as follows: 'replies

109 to' (n=18), 'mentions' (n=221), 'mentions in retweets' (n=375), retweets (n=198), and
110 tweets (n=68). The most influential account was that of the IGCS account itself
111 (@IGCSociety). The overall network shape resembled a community where distinct
112 groups formed within the network.

113 **Conclusion**

114 Twitter users during IGCS 2020 were clustered within several groups, and the overall
115 network represented a community.

116 **Keywords**

117 Social media, Conference, Education, Information Dissemination, Twitter,
118 Gynecological cancer

119 **Highlights**

- 120 1. Twitter engagement during scientific conferences can potentially be enhanced
121 by regular analysis.
- 122 2. Twitter users during IGCS 2020 were clustered within several groups, and the
123 overall network represented a community.
- 124 3. This study could provide a framework for increased social media engagement
125 during future IGCS meetings.

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133 Introduction

134 With the advent of social media, medical communication during conferences has
135 evolved. Twitter, a social media platform, has now become a major form of
136 interaction. Wikipedia defines Twitter as an “American microblogging and social
137 networking service on which users post and interact with messages known as
138 ‘tweets.’” Twitter, Inc. is based in San Francisco, California, United States, and was
139 established in 2006. [1] In January 2021, <https://www.statista.com/> ranked Twitter as
140 the sixteenth most used social network with 353 million monthly visitors. [2] A 2016
141 research poll found that Twitter is used by 22% of all online American adults. [3] The
142 countries with most Twitter users are in the United States, Japan and India, with 69.3
143 million, 50.9 million, and 17.5 million users respectively reported in January 2021, [4]
144 Since its inception, Twitter has grown and is increasingly adopted as a
145 communication and learning tool in educational and research activities in the
146 oncology field. [5] Hashtag (#), a form of metadata, can share content, organize
147 health information, and create virtual communities. Metadata in the Twitter context
148 serves to help users identify a topic/conversation. By adding the hashtag (#) symbol
149 to words or strings of characters, social media users can create information channels
150 to bring focused information, narrowcasting around a specific issue, or create new
151 communities with a common interest. [6, 7] Several other standard Twitter terms are
152 described in Table 1.

153 The International Gynecological Cancer Society (IGCS) was established in 1987 with
154 its mission to enhance the care of women with gynecologic cancer worldwide

155 through education and training and public awareness. [8] Members include
156 gynecologic oncologists, radiation oncologists, medical oncologists, and
157 pathologists. In 2020 the society had 2930 members, representing 113 countries. [8]
158 In 2020, the 19th annual IGCS meeting was completely virtual due to the COVID-19
159 pandemic, limiting international travel and in-person gatherings. While some studies
160 have looked at Twitter engagement during scientific conferences [9-12], gynecologic
161 oncology conference tweeting is yet to be analyzed. With a completely virtual
162 conference, we anticipated increased levels of social media use. In this study, we
163 aimed to describe the content shared on Twitter and analyse Twitter conversations
164 during the first virtual IGCS 2020 annual meeting, held in September 2020.

165 **Methods**

166 We specifically evaluated: Who was the most influential Twitter user during the
167 virtual IGCS 2020 conference? What were the most frequently occurring 'co-words'
168 and topics that were being discussed? And what was the shape of the network?

169 *Data Retrieval*

170 Tweets using the hashtag "#IGCS2020" were searched and collected prospectively
171 by WA, using Twitter Search Application Programming Interface (API) [13] during the
172 period 10th to 13th Sept 2020 (virtual IGCS meet period). No tweets were excluded
173 since the data collection period was focussed to four days of the conference only.
174 The Search API is a means to connect to Twitter to retrieve data. Different APIs
175 provide different access levels, and academic researchers most commonly use the
176 Search API. We used NodeXL Pro [14] to retrieve data. #IGCS2020 was promoted
177 prior to and during the conference by conference organisers themselves
178 (@IGCSociety and @MaryCEiken).

179 *Data Analysis*

180 Social network analysis (performed in NodeXL) was used to analyze the data
181 drawing on algorithms and layout options built-in NodeXL. The Clauset-Newman-
182 Moore cluster algorithm was used to cluster users into different groups or ‘clusters’
183 based on how users were interacting within the group. The graph was laid out using
184 the Harel-Koren Fast Multiscale layout algorithm. Each small dot on the network
185 chart represents a connection to another user. The six types of the Twitter network
186 were used to interpret the network graph. *Polarized Crowd*: Polarized discussions
187 feature two large and dense groups that have little connection between them. *Tight*
188 *Crowd*: These discussions are characterized by highly interconnected people with
189 few isolated participants. *Brand Clusters* These are formed by accounts that discuss
190 a well-known service, product, or person. Brand-mentioning participants focus on a
191 topic but tend not to connect. *Community Clusters*: Some popular topics may
192 develop multiple smaller groups, which often form around a few hubs, each with its
193 audience, influencers, and sources of information. *Broadcast Network*: Twitter
194 commentary around breaking news stories and the output of well-known media
195 outlets and pundits has a distinctive hub and spoke structure. Many people repeat
196 what prominent news and media organizations tweet. *Support Network*: Customer
197 complaints about a significant business are often handled by a Twitter service
198 account that attempts to resolve and manage customer issues around their products
199 and services. This produced a hub and spoke structure that is different from the
200 Broadcast Network pattern. In the Support Network structure, the hub account
201 replies to many otherwise disconnected users, creating outward spokes. [15]

202 ‘Influence’ in Twitter term may be described in several forms. “Indegree”
203 “retweets” or “mentions”. Indegree is the number of people who follow a user;

204 retweets mean the number of times others “forward” a user’s tweet; and mentions
205 mean the number of times others mention a user’s name. [16] Influential users were
206 detected by using the 'betweenness centrality' algorithm. This algorithm is one of the
207 advanced network metrics to find those Twitter users who are on the most paths
208 between others in the network. 'Co-words,' also known as 'word-pairs,' are
209 essentially two words used together in tweets most frequently. The co-word analysis
210 was conducted in NodeXL which analysed the Twitter data to identify words that
211 occur most frequently together. They provide insight into the conversations that are
212 taking place. The shape of the network is determined by how users in the network
213 conversed with each other. Research has noted that Twitter topics can fall into 6-
214 types of shapes, as mentioned earlier. [15].

215 **Results**

216 There were a total of 2009 registrants for the virtual IGCS 2020 conference. Eighty
217 users referred to the meeting website from Twitter, during conference duration i.e.
218 from 10th to 13th Sept 2020. The total number of users within the network was 168,
219 and there were 880 edges connecting users. There were five types of edges. These
220 were as followed: 18 replies to, 221 mentions, 375 mentions in retweets, 198
221 retweets, and 68 tweets. The overall network shape (Fig 1) resembled a community
222 where distinct groups formed within the network. We define the phenotype of this
223 network as a community network shape with elements of broadcast. The figure is
224 created by taking all users tweeting during the conference and analyzing the
225 relationships between different users. The groups are formed based on retweets,
226 replies, and quotes. The groups are ordered by size, and the largest group is on the
227 top left and side (labeled G1) and the second-largest group underneath it (labeled
228 G2). The circles represent individual users. Lines between users indicate

229 relationships, and the graph is directed with arrows indicating the direction of the
230 relationship. The brighter lines represent stronger connections between users, and
231 the lighter lines represent weaker ties among users. The algorithm groups users
232 based on their connections i.e., mentions and replies are used to form the grouping.
233 This is so that users who interact more frequently are clustered together. The boxed
234 groupings are simply showing those users accounts that engaged with each
235 frequently enough to be clustered together in a group.

236 The network graph also highlights that users across the network were connecting.
237 The graph highlights that attendees can form groups on Twitter just as they may do
238 so in real life; for instance, different conference attendees may develop over a lunch
239 break. In the case of IGCS 2020's network, it can be seen that two groups of Twitter
240 users had connected the most, followed by a slightly smaller cluster and some other
241 smaller groups.

242 *Overview of Influential Users*

243 Table 2 demonstrates the ten most influential Twitter accounts within the network.
244 The most influential account was that of IGCS itself. There were five influential
245 individual users, one gynecologic oncology journal, one hospital, one journal's
246 fellow's group account, and another gynecologic oncologic society's account. This
247 study made use of betweenness centrality as it identifies users that are most
248 influential in terms of information propagation. However, there are also other ways of
249 measuring centrality such as InDegree and OutDegree. Moreover, some social
250 media studies may examine influence by looking specific at the most mentioned
251 users and/or the most followed users in a network.

252 *Overview of word-pairs and topics*

253 Table 3 depicts the most frequently occurring co-words within the network, i.e., two
254 words that were most used with each other. The most common co-words were
255 “ovarian cancer.” It is possible that “ovarian cancer” emerged as the top ‘co-word’ as
256 both medical as well surgical management of ovarian cancer continues to be
257 intensely researched. Words that contain a preceding ‘#’ relate to hashtags. This is
258 because our analysis also detected the occurrence of hashtags.

259 **Discussion**

260 *Summary of main results*

261 In this analysis of the IGCS 2020 annual meeting, we found that Twitter users were
262 clustered within several groups. Because these groups highlight different users
263 conversing amongst each other, we can conclude that the overall network
264 represented a community. Our results highlight that the most influential account
265 belonged to the society itself. Our overview of the most popular keywords such as
266 ‘ovarian’ and ‘cancer’ provided insight into the types of discussions that were taking
267 place. However, cervical cancer incidence is highest among the world in terms of
268 gynecological cancer, rating 18.8 per 100,000 in transitioning countries. [17] This is
269 several times higher than that of ovarian cancer

270 Our focus and research aim were to specifically examine content around the
271 IGCS2020 hashtag, which was officially promoted. We also wanted the ability to
272 complete follow up studies, for instance, in 2021 and 2022. By focusing on the main
273 hashtag, comparisons in the future can be more easily made. Moreover, although
274 other hashtags such as ‘#gynccsm’ may have been used by some of the meeting
275 participants, this is a broader hashtag that could include content from non-meeting
276 members.

277 Our study made use of simple word-pair analysis as the focus of the paper
278 was to conduct a social network analysis. Typically, word associates past four may
279 not be possible such that could link words that would appear later in the sentence.

280 *Results in the Context of Published Literature*

281 Twitter and similar social media platform users are encouraged, usually by
282 conference organizers, to actively tweet before, during, and after the conference.
283 Each conference has an official conference hashtag, such as #IGCS2020 for this
284 study. It has been found that conference tweeting can extend beyond official
285 hashtags. In this study, we found that #ovariancancer featured as another leading
286 hashtag in #IGCS2020 conversations. A similar study was conducted recently during
287 the American Society of Clinical Oncology 2020 virtual conference, where they
288 studied twitter engagement after introducing a new hashtag. This study had
289 suggested that gynecological oncology tweeting needs coordination and agreement
290 on a common hashtag to organize content at virtual events and between meetings.
291 [18] European Society for Medical Oncology 2018 Congress Twitter analysis had
292 found a difference between 'commercial' and 'non-commercial' tweeters. [9] Such an
293 analysis was out of scope of our study. Another study by Mackenzie et al. found that
294 conference tweeting during European Society of Surgical Oncology 39th clinical
295 conference extended beyond the conference hashtag. [10] We have planned to
296 conduct a similar analysis during the IGCS meeting in 2021.

297 *Strengths and Weaknesses*

298 This is the first study of its kind performing Twitter engagement analysis
299 related to an international gynecological oncology conference. We employed a
300 methodological design previously used in other studies for the analysis of interaction

301 in social networks, specifically Twitter, which is a platform with wide dissemination in
302 healthcare practitioners.

303 Our study is limited by the fact that the only social media platform analyzed
304 was Twitter. Other social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, etc., also
305 contribute to conference conversations and represent a different population of social
306 media users. Potential Conflicts of Interests of the participants in the network were
307 not checked, since it was not the objective of the study and is beyond its scope. But
308 this aspect could have influenced the most used words, for example, if there were
309 more researchers working on ovarian cancer in the network. The search for tweets
310 was restricted to the days of the conference, so we may have missed possible
311 interactions beyond the event, which also reflects the dissemination of the
312 conference. There is no way to log data from participants who only read the content
313 but do not tweet or re-tweet. Chaudhry et al. (19), reported that the “real value of
314 tweets at conferences often consists in reading the information, not in disseminating
315 it”. Some twitter users may forget to add # to their tweets, and such tweets will be
316 missed, similarly others may not use correct official hashtag and would be left out of
317 the captured data. Users may create new hashtags, and there could be parallel
318 conversations/discussions generated, apart from conference-related conversations.
319 Efforts should be made to include more social media platforms in future related work.
320 It is essential to consider that IGCS 2020 was a virtual meeting due to the COVID 19
321 pandemic; therefore, it is possible that more Twitter users engaged in conversations
322 this year. In the absence of comparative data from the last meeting, this remains
323 speculative.

324 *Implications for Practice and Future Research*

325 Our study provides baseline data for analysis of future International
326 Gynecological Cancer Society annual meetings. The results of our research would
327 allow future conference organizers to benchmark to other conferences and iterations
328 of the same meeting. We have planned to analyze the upcoming IGCS 2021
329 conference [20], which will again be predominantly a virtual event. This would
330 provide insight into trends in Twitter engagement during the meeting if any. Our
331 research aim was to examine the meeting dates itself to see the amount of activity
332 generated, content and discussions as a result of the meeting. Our reasoning was
333 that conferences, academic events etc might not contain relevant information prior to
334 or after the events. These tweets tend to be very general in nature 'Looking forward
335 to attend event X' and 'It was great to attend event X'. Although, future research
336 could seek to examine dates prior to and after the event.

337 Following strategies could be adopted to improve dissemination via
338 Twitter in future meetings. Using multimedia, URL or hashtags, and mentioning other
339 Twitter account (s), have been found to be independently associated with retweet
340 success. [21, 22] The location of the participants within the network is unknown. The
341 scope of the event is worldwide and not all countries have extensive use of Twitter.
342 This information would be very useful to generate regional strategies for the
343 dissemination of social networks in an upcoming event. This analysis was made at a
344 100% virtual oncology gynecology conference, which could have some positive
345 effects on the use of Twitter. These results may potentially differ when compared to
346 another congress that includes presential activity, an aspect that should be taken
347 into account in the next measurement.

348 *Conclusions*

349 This study demonstrates Twitter engagement in the IGCS 2020 virtual
350 conference. The results of this study could be used during future IGCS meetings to
351 benchmark. Our current analyses demonstrated that less than 10% of the total
352 members interacted on Twitter. Future research could seek to compare this to future
353 meetings and conferences.

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431 Figure 1: Social Network Analysis Results

432 Table 1: Description of 'Twitter' terms

| Term | Definition |
|-------------|---|
| Tweet | A tweet is a message that is posted on an individual user's account. |
| Hashtag | A hashtag, i.e., '#IGCS2020', can be added to tweets such that anyone following that hashtag can see tweets containing it. Hashtags are often used in conferences so all attendees can see each other's tweets. |
| Retweet | Users can also 'retweet' other users, which is sharing other user's tweets to an individual's own Twitter feed. |
| Reply | On Twitter, as well as sending individual tweets, users can also reply to other users. A reply will start with '@' followed by the username. |
| Quote | Tweets can also be quoted, which allows other users to add their views and opinions to them. |
| Network | The network is the collection of all users and their interactions with one another. |
| Edges | Edges are the connections between different users |

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| Network shape | The structure of the network after social network analysis is applied. The six types of the network are documented in Smith, Rainie, Shneiderman, and Himelboim (2014). NodeXL will cluster users into different groups to identify patterns. |
| Influential user | Twitter users may become influential due to their location within the network. There are several methods of calculating influence. |
| Betweenness Centrality | Betweenness centrality is one way to calculate the influence of Twitter users. These users are often the bridge within the network. |
| Co-words | These are words that occur together most frequently. It provides insight into the discussion. |

433

434 Table 2. Overview of most influential users ranked by 'Betweenness Centrality'

| Rank | User (Twitter handle) | Betweenness Centrality |
|------|---|------------------------|
| 1 | IGCS (@IgcSociety) | 14364 |
| 2 | Shannon Westin (@ShannonWestin) | 5554 |
| 3 | Mary Eiken (@MaryCEiken) | 2066 |
| 4 | Rebecca Previs (@BeccaPrevisMD) | 2055 |
| 5 | Kavitha Madhuri (@KavithaMadhuri) | 1590 |
| 6 | IJGC (@IJGConline) | 1270 |
| 7 | MD Anderson Cancer Center (@MDAndersonNews) | 1256 |
| 8 | IJGC Fellows (@IJGcfellows) | 1165 |
| 9 | The GOG Foundation Inc. (@GOG) | 1076 |
| 10 | Natacha Phoolcharoen (@NPhoolcharoen) | 976 |

435

436 Table 3. Overview of the 20 most frequently occurring co-words

| Word 1 | Word 2 | Count |
|----------------|-------------------|-------|
| ovarian | cancer | 39 |
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