

Following #ehps 2017 back to the future

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I have recently been listening to the fascinating podcast series called Revisionist History by the Canadian journalist and author Malcolm Gladwell. Malcolm Gladwell is probably better known for book titles such Tipping Point or Outliers than for this podcast series but maybe that is changing as the second season comes to an end. Revisionist History is about re-examining the context, implications, and interpretations of influential ideas, songs or events from the past. Malcolm Gladwell does this in a way that is engaging, thought provoking and above all, enjoyable even if the topics are not exactly easy-listening.

So, with this context in mind I have been looking back to the previous reports I've written about the annual EHPS conferences from 2015 and 2016. While I do not have the time or resources to fully explore or follow-up on tweeted reports from the conferences of previous years in a way that Malcolm Gladwell might, I have wondered what might similarities and differences might exist between the twitter mediated experiences of following a conference from afar. Similarly, what did I write about in the previous two years that still is relevant or holds true now?

For one, the time and financial restraints that limited my conference attendance then are just as applicable now. I know for sure though that I am not the only one who has to take these factors into consideration when planning conference activities over a year. Another experience that has been

consistent over the years is the level of interest and excitement I feel from following the tweets. I am admittedly still surprised by this, but realise simultaneously that I probably should not be. After all, why wouldn't the steady release of new information be stimulating?!

And this year the flow of information/tweets was greater than I had previously seen. In 2015 the most prolific tweeter sent out 62 tweets, last year, the most was a little over 90, and then this year the most tweets from a single account was 134! There was a similarly large increase in the number of people contributing to the conversation taking place at #EHPS2017 – from 216 contributors in 2015 up to 517 in Padova. What is driving the increase in use? There could be many explanations, but I am curious about the role that the need to demonstrate interest, influence, and impact in a grant or job application has had. I have, for example, recently been in the position where one criterion for assessing the merit of my application for a travel grant is the “social media presence” that a video I post about my work receives. That is, applicants (in this case PhD students and early career researchers) are required to post a video of themselves talking about why they should get the grant to attend the conference on the Facebook page of the conference. A panel of assessors then take into consideration (in addition to other criteria) how widely the video is shared and liked on social media. I can see from the perspective of the conference organisers that this a novel way of promoting the conference, but I wonder if academic quality and the consideration of financial needs of

the applicant is jeopardised by this criteria which better resembles a popularity contest.

Not that it is a popularity contest, but #mHealth was most frequently used (again!) in conjunction with #EHPS. Clearly the interest and work in online interventions is not diminishing! The third most frequently used hashtag was an unusual one at first glance #loveirishresearch but makes more sense if you know that the next EHPS conference will be in Galway, Ireland next year. (By the way, you can get updates for that conference by following @EHPS2018.)

Before concluding I wanted to return to something I referred to last year and alert readers to the fact that some results from the EHPS Social Media Survey, conducted in 2016 in Aberdeen, Scotland, are available online. There are some interesting results, but perhaps the most significant one was that most respondents (nearly half of whom were not EHPS members) thought that it would be useful to have an official EHPS Facebook page. This belief seemed to be correlated with the rate at which people checked their Facebook account. That is, as respondents indicated that they thought there would be more benefits of having an official Facebook page, they also appeared to be more likely to report that they checked Facebook more frequently. The web address is long and unwieldy to include here, but if you are interested in finding out more details of the survey, it is easy enough to find via your favourite search engine.

For those who want to check their own memories of the conference for examples of biases or cognitive distortions of one sort or another, the EHPS conference website and Flickr now have a selection of photos and videos available from the event in Padova. You can access them here: <http://ehps2017.org/gallery/>

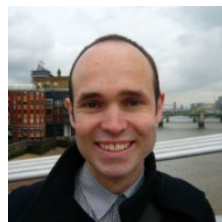
From the past to the future it is now time to follow @EHPS2018 and find a way to get to Galway.

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undertaking a PhD at Maastricht University, The Netherlands. You can follow him on twitter @fuller_notes

Note: If you want to try Revisionist History, you can listen to it here: <http://revisionisthistory.com/>

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