

Taking Photos of Presentations: Dissemination or Distraction?

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Taking and posting images of slides may result in dissemination of potentially invalid conclusions that, at best, may be useless and, at worst, harmful to patients.

I am quite active on social media, much of it on Twitter, where I post mostly about professional subjects and occasionally negative comments about airlines. A recent tweet from a stranger with accompanying photo struck a chord with me. The tweet was this:

We need to come up with a name for the phenomenon of dozens or hundreds of iPhone/iPad/camera holding hands coming up simultaneously every time a new slide is put up by a speaker. (Blackman, 2018)

I immediately responded by posting the following:

It's also potentially a theft of intellectual property; there are concerns due to not going through peer review if not previously published and interrupts others' learning. Unless presenter gives permission—this should not be permitted. (Katz, 2018)

Despite the poor grammar I used to conform to the character limit imposed (thankfully) by Twitter, this is an issue that has long caused me concern.

I am sure that all of us have been to conferences where the same thing occurs. Sitting in the audience, the person next to or in front of you reaches up with his or her phone or other device and snaps a photo of

whatever is on the screen. Or perhaps you are the one doing just that. I understand the reasons for this; we want to remember the information being presented and/or we want to take that nugget of information back to our colleagues at work. But is this an appropriate thing to do?

The presentation that is being photographed is the intellectual property of the presenter and, by making an image, you are potentially in violation of their ownership. Unless the presenter gives you explicit permission to take and subsequently use that image, for whatever purpose, you are not authorized to do that. I often see images of what is on the screen posted to Twitter and other forms of social media. In many cases, the name of the presenter is not included in the post, and neither is the rest of the presentation, so context is lacking. The information is now in the public domain and can be used—and misused—by anyone.

The content of the slide(s) posted on social media may not have been through a rigorous peer review process like most journals require before acceptance and publication. Abstracts for conferences are generally reviewed, but the process is not as rigorous or may be preliminary. Taking and posting images of slides may, therefore, result in dissemination of potentially invalid conclusions or recommendations that, at best, may be useless and, at worst, harmful to patients. As the editor of this journal, I want the findings of studies to be rigorously reviewed and published so that readers can use the results and recommendations to improve the care of their patients or to support other research. Although presenting the findings at a conference does not preclude publication, it may appear to be “old hat” to some readers who attended the presentation.

KEYWORDS intellectual property; permission; conference

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In addition, the relentless movement of hands and arms in the air with devices held aloft is distracting and interrupts others' view or concentration. It also prevents those who are taking the photo from listening and focusing on what the speaker is saying. Reviewing the photos later is not necessarily helpful because the images taken are usually just the highlights of the presentation and do not present all the details. Also, the images are usually of low quality with poor lighting, so the whole exercise becomes questionable.

I have thought about potential solutions. As a member of scientific committees for many conferences in different disciplines, including the Oncology Nursing Society's annual Congress, I have spoken out about this issue and, once or twice, conference organizers have asked audience members to refrain from this practice. Providing access to the presentation abstracts should prevent attendees from this practice; however, what I have seen at conferences that do this suggests that old habits persist. Despite having access to the abstracts, arms with devices are still in the air. I have, on occasion, heard presenters asking the audience to not take photos of their slides. I have also done that before presenting. I find it disconcerting to be standing at the podium facing a forest of phones and tablets held aloft, and I am sure I am not alone in feeling this way. I am interested in your thoughts—is

taking photos of slides on the screen part of the price of registration and attendance? If you are a presenter, do you object to people taking photos of your work, or do you see this as another form of dissemination? As always, I welcome your thoughts (but not your photography).



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