

## Prepping the eulogy for social media in urology?

Michael  
Leveridge

Editor-in-Chief

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A little-known true story: In 1912, a great steamer ship known as Titanic had its hull plates pierced by an iceberg. The bow cargo and boiler compartments flooded, and the ship slowly sank. The eight-man band played unabated as the calamity unfolded, feigning an air of calm. They made a movie about it.

No hurricane or flooding news report would be complete without headshaking over a grizzled local stubbornly hunkering down while their home and town come under direct assault. Very online Gen X parents bemoan the loss of cursive writing instruction in schools. The Luddites sabotaged machinery in 19th century Britain.

Whether honourable, agitated, or ensnared in the sunk cost fallacy, we cling to status quo, rose-tinted memory and the unpleasantness of facing change. Might we soon face such a scenario in urology's social media space? The discourse around tech giants has long left awe and adulation and is now focused increasingly on social media as an auction of attention to advertisers at best, and as a Dutch oven bubbling with misinformation, conspiracy, and agitprop at worst. The realization that capricious leaders could maim or even kill these services sends notice that the edifice of communication, networking, and learning through social media could simply disappear in the flick of a switch.

First, a quick catch up on what is meant by #UroSoMe, the hashtag encompassing urology in the social media space. We are really only talking about Twitter. This is essential to the fragility I'm speaking to. Facebook and Reddit have robust patient communities, and Instagram, YouTube, and even TikTok are effective one-way showcases for a small number of urologists. Twitter has really been the only place where urologists have congregated for information sharing and discussion. For a hair over a decade, Twitter has been the space for a great and meandering discussion between thousands of urologists, riffing on new data, sharing pearls and frustrations and

congratulations. Journal clubs have flourished and faded, and virtually every urology journal now promulgates its papers on the platform. Every sizeable urology meeting, beginning with the AUA at #uro12 (then #aua13, #eau18, #cua22, and what have you) has an endorsed meeting hashtag for the backchannel discussion of meeting material (and the sharing of pictures of food from Milan to San Diego, of course). Participate or don't, there is no controversy in saying that #urotwitter is well-entrenched, and an important part of professional life for many people and institutions. There is no "other place" where any facsimile of this community exists.

Twitter, now known as "X," has been exceptionally newsworthy in the past 18 months since its purchase by the steward of many of your cars, among other things (rockets and such). Among the literal changes have been an overhauled verification system (once reserved for journalists, agents of government, and other vetted notables) to a base of subscribers, the reinstatement of once-banned accounts, and a large decrease in the content-moderation team headcount. Financial viability has been a focus, based on revenue, debt service, and the high purchase price. Much ink has been dedicated to qualitative changes in the service, including perceptions of increased trolling — inexhaustible jerks and bots, harassment, and a safe space for objectively vile worldviews. There is a sense that X is becoming untenable for garden-variety users, and that the entire service may become non-viable.

My take (if you can't tell from the prior paragraph's lack of punch ;) is moderate. My sense is very much that in policy and politics Twitter, no statement is too bland to be interpreted as moronic, hyper-partisan, or coded to punish some outgroup. "Build more four-story apartments in suburbs" or "Inflation is y%" or "The #Bluejays are fine" foments spitting rage. My belief in the Horseshoe Theory of political leaning (extremists on both sides are authoritarian kooks) is ever jus-

tified when I eat my popcorn and doomscroll a few idle minutes away. Medical twitter is often subject to the same, particularly in C-19 or other public health discussions. No view is above attack — even avowed centrist tweets are considered elitist denialism by both sides.

I haven't seen nearly this vitriol in the #urotwitter sphere, however, notwithstanding forays into reproductive health, for which many Dorito-crumbed chin-beards have no love but endless energy. Research is still discussed, rad oncs and urologists and statisticians lightly chirp one another, journals (including ours) highlight papers, and associations promote "Who to follow" for #aua23 and #eau23. Granted I may be missing those users who have gone silent without my awareness, but still the band plays on.

Let's turn the corner. Is X/Twitter really a mess for the average user? Political twitter is definitely ground zero for the bellowing and the bellicose, but to consider this the digital "town square" that represents the feelings of the majority would be fallacious. While Pew Research note that the partisan divide has increased in political twitter, they have also noted that just 6% of users account for 73% of political tweets.<sup>1,2</sup> This makes the "town square" analogy somewhat fraught. As author Cal Newport has suggested, perhaps X ought to be thought more like the Coliseum, where most of us are spectators to a small cohort of battling gladiators.

Still, what matters is how users feel. It seems reasonable that those who view X's current state — or some sentinel future post or implication from its leadership — as morally unacceptable will leave, degrading representation in the remaining discourse. This degradation is one of the possible #UroSoMe apocalypse scenarios, should the value of staying breach some minimum threshold. Another is that whim, financial pressure, or regulation result in lights-out. A private company is free to sunset its service as it sees fit.

So why do people stay in a situation that many feel is irreparably diseased? Perhaps the community of #UroSoMe is intact and healthy, and its benefits remain, with confidence about the resilience of Twitter and its more-than-just-a-company place in society. Many users have built significant followings and networks effortfully and meritoriously over the decade, and there is a high cost to their loss or abandonment. These networks may be informative and useful (I admit a large proportion of my urology learning comes from that which bubbles up on Twitter), and in many cases legitimately fruitful. A vein of academic inquiry has come from studying social media in urology, and many have built

academic partnerships online. Many have also benefited from the second-order effects of their online presence; conference invitations, editorial board memberships, and the like occur through the expanded networks and word-of-mouth (this is autobiographical but true of dozens of others). There are even a few micro-celebrities in the #UroSoMe space — high-follower and high-interactivity accounts — whose status in the discourse may be particularly at risk.

And where would the discourse move if X meets its end? There are several candidates with an ostensibly similar user experience, but close to zero uptake thus far. Mastodon, a decentralized short messaging platform in which moderators host myriad interacting servers, was an early candidate, and many users (sanctimoniously?) added their handles to their Twitter bios. It is reputed to have a high activation energy and finicky usability. A quick search of "urology" and "urologist" reveals 21 accounts with a combined two followers. Meta has introduced Threads, now three months old, with a huge pre-installed user base of Instagram accounts. There is a smattering of urologists, and almost no conversation, but the future is undecided. Still, there is no service with the attributes of Twitter, and no imaginable prospect for replicating the community, for better or worse. Enter the parable of all the eggs in one basket. Like a single BCG manufacturer with one bad brew, like a hurricane addling a key manufacturing plant, like BlackBerry at the dawn of iPhone, #UroSoMe is fragile.

For me, the prospect of X — and #urotwitter — disappearing is just a bummer, and a shame. I like it there. Life, of course, goes on, and I wouldn't elevate the expectation of its loss to worry, nor to the feeling to grief, but it has been a place of value, learning, and new friendship. I'm not calling this a eulogy yet. The community is robust, and the future of X is unwritten. For now, keep a short list of your favourite accounts in mind in case the evacuation siren blares.

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CORRESPONDENCE: Dr. Michael Leveridge, Department of Urology, Queen's University, Kingston, ON, Canada; Michael.Leveridge@kingstonhsc.ca