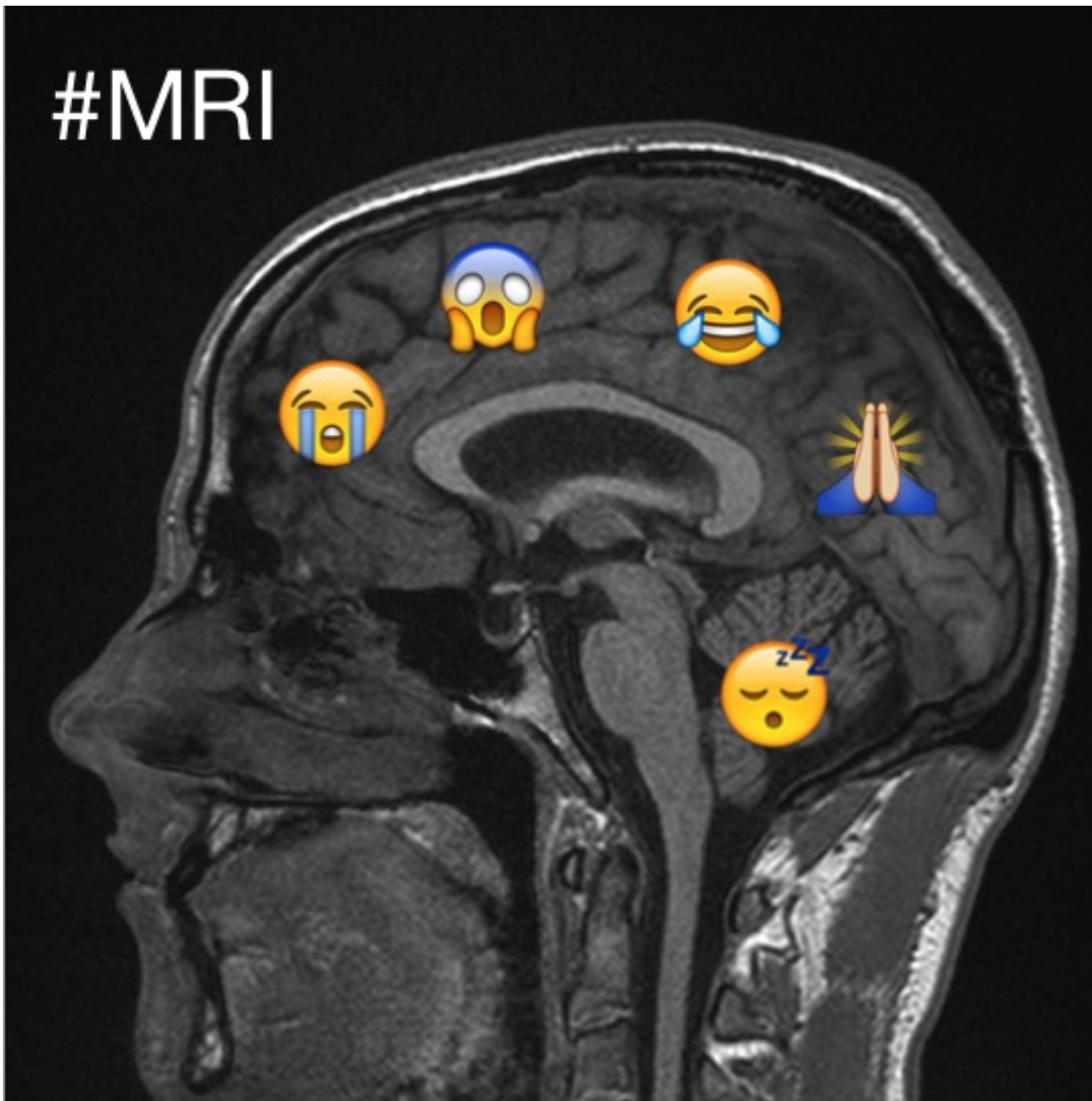


Twitter offers valuable insights into the experience of MRI patients

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MRI of Johnathan Hewis' brain: "Had a lovely nap in the MRI machine (very awkward)." Credit: Johnathan Hewis

Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) can be a stressful experience for many people, but clinicians have few ways to track the thoughts and feelings of their patients regarding this procedure. While the social networking site Twitter is known for breaking news and celebrity tweets, it may also prove to be a valuable feedback tool for medical professionals looking to improve the patient experience, according to a new study published in the December issue of the *Journal of Medical Imaging and Radiation Sciences*.

Johnathan Hewis, MSc, PgCert (LTHE), PgCert (BE), BSc Hon, an investigator from Charles Sturt University in Australia, analyzed 464 tweets related to MRI over the course of one month and found that patients, their friends, and [family members](#) were sharing their thoughts and feelings about all aspects of the procedure through the microblogging site. Tweets were categorized into three themes: MRI appointment, scan experience, and diagnosis.

Twitter is a giant in the social media space. In 2014, 19% of the entire adult population of the U.S. used Twitter, with almost 90% of those individuals accessing the service from their mobile phones. Because it is so ubiquitous, Twitter can provide crucial new insights to which practitioners would otherwise not be privy. In the study, patients expressed anxiety about many aspects of the process, including a lot of stress over the possibility of bad news. "The findings of this study indicate that anticipatory anxiety can manifest over an extended time period and that the focus can shift and change along the MRI journey," explained Hewis. "An appreciation of anxiety related to results is an important clinical consideration for MRI facilities and referrers."

The study found that tweets encapsulated patient thoughts about many other parts of the procedure including the cost, the feelings of

claustrophobia, having to keep still during the scan, and the sound the MRI machine makes. One particularly memorable tweet about the sound read, "Ugh, having an MRI is like being inside a pissed off fax machine!"

Not all the tweets were centered around stress. Many friends and family members expressed sentiments of support including prayers and offering messages of strength. Some patients used Twitter to praise their healthcare team or give thanks for good results. Others spoke about the fact they liked having an MRI because it gave them some time to themselves or offered them a chance to nap.

Twitter isn't just words, it's also a way to share pictures. "An unexpected discovery of the examination preparation process was the 'MRI gown selfie,'" revealed Hewis. "Fifteen patients tweeted a self-portrait photograph taken inside the changing cubicle while posing in their MRI gown/scrubs. Anecdotally, the 'MRI gown selfie' seemed to transcend age."

During the course of his analysis, Hewis discovered that many patients took issue with the fact that they were not allowed to select the music they listened to during the MRI. "Music choice," said Hewis, "is a simple intervention that can provide familiarity within a 'terrifying' environment." The findings of this study reinforce the 'good practice' of enabling patients' choice of music, which may alleviate procedural anxiety."

With such a broad reach, social networks like Twitter offer medical practitioners the opportunity to access previously unavailable information from their patients, which can help them continuously improve the MRI experience. "MRI [patients](#) do tweet about their experiences and these correlate with published findings employing more traditional participant recruitment methods," concluded Hewis. "This

study demonstrates the potential use of Twitter as a viable platform to conduct research into the [patient experience](#) within the medical radiation sciences."

More information: "Do MRI Patients Tweet? Thematic Analysis of Patient Tweets About Their MRI Experience,"
[dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jmir.2015.08.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jmir.2015.08.003)

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