

# E-posters are Better than Traditional Posters: The Debate

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## ABSTRACT

With the advent of this century, information technology has become an integral part of medical education and research. Posters have always been a strong medium of information dissemination amongst researchers and students alike. E-Posters are the talk of the hour, with most of the major events having provisions for the same. Some researchers consider it a must in today's world, whereas others still consider traditional posters as being more personal and having a stronger impact. This debate has been put forth in the following article, with each author putting forth their points in favor of their respective preferences and finally coming up with a conclusion about the topic.

**Keywords:** Ephemera, E-Poster, Poster, Publications, Traditional poster.

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Oxford dictionary describes a poster as a large printed picture, notice, or advertisement displayed in a public place. The presentation of academic posters at medical conferences was a common method to disseminate information and new ideas to fellow doctors, where speaking time was limited and often when some original series were sufficiently large to warrant a speaking slot. Initially, it was seen as an innovative approach to professional presentations to encourage young surgeons, and to allow larger volumes of material with diversity to be presented at meetings with limited time; nevertheless, this was considered inferior to oral presentation, and a variety of issues were raised, some promoting while others detracting from this medium of information dissemination.<sup>1</sup>

Posters have acted as an alternative medium, which is not so "formal" as paper presentations; some viewed it as lacking in academic rigor that good professional knowledge exchange required; how could you explain a serious issue, by means of a "pretty picture"?<sup>1,2</sup>

## FOR THE MOTION

### E-poster—The Need of the Hour

This has changed in the 21st century; E-Posters are the new generation of posters, where the best of the components of the academic field and information technology come together to enhance the process of dissemination of knowledge. E-Posters have now evolved into a variety of forms, namely "digital interactive poster resantation (DIIP by De Simone et al.),<sup>3</sup>" MediaPosters,<sup>4</sup> PowerPoint Presentations, or Web-based E-Poster.<sup>5</sup> In all of these E-Posters, the essence is the presentation of a traditional poster format document made over personal computers by the presenter or presented on a wide LCD screen or board. The advantage is that parts of this can be magnified or clicked to open further documents, papers, images (especially digital X-rays, MRI's and other radiological, and clinical images), or videos, which is not possible with the usual traditional paper formats. These are not only visually more attractive but are interactive and more informative. Additionally, these can be transmitted and shared over electronic mails before or after conferences, can be presented at multiple conferences, can be easily made on personal computers and carried in portable storage devices; modern technology has allowed them to have QR codes which can be scanned on smartphones and the poster can thus be viewed on personal mobile devices by the viewers.<sup>5</sup> E-Posters can be used for poster sessions for a

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larger audience as it has fared better in terms of ability to hear better, see well, improve the poster's clarity and attractiveness, and capture the interest of the techno-savvy younger generation. This encourages discussion and interaction, all of which are vital to projecting the subject of the poster, especially when catering to a larger audience.<sup>6</sup> With state of the art facilities, the delegates can be allowed to search a computer database of abstracts and final E-Posters at conferences. The delegates can browse and choose the posters of their interest and go through them thoroughly whenever they get time and e-mail questions to the respective authors, thus allowing better national and international collaborations, which is one of the aims of such medical conferences.<sup>6</sup>

E-Poster organization does come at a cost; most involves scanning the database, computer software, enabling projection during the presentation (projectors, screens, and computers), and providing computer stations, and so on.<sup>6</sup> On the contrary, it has a better resolution and visibility than paper formats and does not burden the presenter with carrying posters manually for transport to the conference venue. We know of paper formats being stolen or misplaced while on the way to conference, with significant mental agony to the presenter. E-Poster is actually more economical for the presenter and hence more pocket-friendly than its counterpart in paper format. Paper posters occupy a finite, sizeable space at the conference venue, and all this comes at a price not worth investing.

Advances in information technology have coincided with increased rapidity in the pace of life and reduced time amongst medical professionals; E-Posters become interesting as a short "read" as they provide attractive data that can be assimilated over a short period of time in a less formal manner. Subsequent electronic interactions may lead to development of cordial

relationships amongst like-minded medical personnel. Thus, E-Posters have actually evolved into the “need of the hour,” as they not only maintain the essence of the traditional posters but add to the entire experience of poster presentation overcoming all the conventional problems that have plagued traditional posters. A school of thought feels that E-Posters used in tandem with traditional posters would extract the maximum benefit of both the techniques.<sup>6</sup> Thus, E-Posters have become more of a necessity, allowing medical professionals a variety in their presentation, and should be inculcated more in conferences and conventions as this would go a long way in maximizing the impact of posters and the research work going on behind them.

## AGAINST THE MOTION

### Traditional Posters are Better than E-posters

Even though technological advances bring in a lot of merits and advantages, they also bring along some demerits despite E-Posters being of three types; DIPP, Media Posters, or PPT, the most common form of e posters in medical conferences is undoubtedly the 3rd type (PPT), which limits the efficacy.

I feel that with the advent of E-Posters, the number of posters getting accepted has increased. This has led to organizers accepting almost all E-Posters with leniency, and this has diminished the quality of poster presentations. *“The real motto behind accepting the poster is to ensure that the submitting delegate attends the conference.”* More numbers of posters getting accepted do not necessarily mean they are of good quality; what we actually need is good quality research work getting presented in a shorter and more interactive format. The current scenario has led to a popular belief amongst all applicants that any submitted material will be accepted, and hence the seriousness of an academic poster is lost. Overall, the value of poster as such has decreased in value due to this practice.

For posters in electronic format, usually, a very small area is allotted (2–3 small halls), usually towards one side of the venue, with a few computers that will have the posters fed into them; the interested delegate will scroll through and read it and actually has to find the poster before he can read it. This in contrast to the traditional posters, wherein a dedicated hall/area that is specifically assigned, the visually pleasing posters are continually displayed and actually give a “snapshot” of the topic, the purpose for which posters were initially conceptualized. A simple tour of the poster area by the delegate can give a broad glimpse of specific topics, and he can choose which poster to read in detail, with the additional benefit of glancing at adjacent posters on a similar topic. Usually, the presenter of the poster is available near the poster and can explain the contents to the interested delegate, which leads to a personalized interaction that can also develop long-term relationships. With the advent of E-Posters, this aspect of the exercise is often circumvented, and the presenter misses a chance of face-to-face interaction with his potential audience, who can actually question him and give feedback in real time. It is a verifiable fact that E-Posters today attract very little attention, and most E-Posters go unvisited, which defies the very purpose of trying to get the data of this group of presenters across to the delegates of the conference.

Another fact that is ignored is that making traditional posters brings out the artistic nature of the presenter, as he has not only to condense the information into one single sheet but has to make it both visually attractive and informative. Ideal posters sticking to the “rule of 10”—a person should be able to scan your complete

poster within 10 seconds from 10 ft away. When someone stops, you should be able to introduce your poster in 10 seconds, and they should be able to assimilate all of the information and discuss it with you in 10 minutes, usually provide a list of the topic to the interested spectator.<sup>7</sup>

It is also a fact that despite the fancy computer-aided presentations, only traditional posters maintain the true essence of the “snapshot” of the topic, for which posters were first introduced. Traditional posters are also easier to judge by the referees and the delegate who evaluates the data for his own information, as the viewer has to go through just a single sheet of data as compared to multiple hyperlinks or slides.

Powell-Tuck et al. compared E-Poster presentation with traditional poster presentations at the British Association for Parenteral and Enteral Nutrition (BAPEN). Even though their results favored E-Posters more in terms of statistical significance for “seeing,” “interest capture,” and “favoring discussion;” they concluded and recommended that the maximum effect would be achieved if both the form of posters were used in tandem.<sup>6</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Both the types of poster presentations come with their own pros and cons, E-Posters allowing an easier process of creating and portability, although coming at the cost of the needed software and hardware logistics. Traditional posters, on the contrary, provide a snapshot of the topic as well as allow personal interaction with the delegate. In today’s world, where technology has become an integral part of medicine, both these formats need to go hand in hand. Conferences organized at a wider scale, with a large number of posters to be presented, should arrange for the needed logistics for E-Posters as this is convenient for the presenter as well as for the large delegate population, whereas in conferences with a limited number of delegates and poster entries, traditional posters in a confined space, allowing all the delegates to browse through most of the posters as well as talk to the presenter can serve the purpose.

Depending on the need of the hour, either way of information dissemination can be used and needs to be tailored by the organizing personnel according to the type and number of presenters and delegates that are bound to attend the conference.

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