

BREAKING THE LIMITS OF TIME AND SPACE: HOW #MEDLIBS ARE COLLABORATING VIA TWITTER

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INTRODUCTION

The microblogging site Twitter allows people to communicate in real time across the world, enhancing opportunities for colleagues to connect and collaborate. Twitter users post brief, 140-character messages to communicate personally and professionally, and many in the medical librarian community have embraced this technology.

OBJECTIVE

To explore how medical librarians (#medlibs) use Twitter to share ideas and collaborate.

METHODS

Investigators hosted a session of the weekly #medlibs chat on Twitter. A short Google Forms survey entitled, "How do medical librarians use Twitter to communicate and collaborate?" was developed based on the conversations during the session. The survey was distributed to participants in the MEDLIBS-L, CANMEDLIBS, and HTAi IRG email list servers and through the #medlibs and #canmedlibs hashtags on Facebook and Twitter.

RESULTS

A total of 151 respondents completed the survey. The majority of respondents indicated that they consider themselves users of Twitter (n = 125; Figure 1). Respondents also reported on their frequency of Twitter use (Figure 2a, Figure 2b), content of Tweets (Figure 3a, Figure 3b), following behaviours (Figure 4), and collaborative activities within the community (Figure 5, Figure 6).

DISCUSSION

From the Twitter chat and survey, the investigators were able to identify 10 overarching themes that relate to how #medlibs use Twitter in their work. According to the results, #medlibs use Twitter to meet colleagues; collaborate with like-minded colleagues on projects; follow conference hashtags in real time; facilitate and participate in discussions, leading to the sharing of information and opinions; network, promote, and build relationships; and increase impact and outreach opportunities. Twitter is also used as a news feed to keep up to date with methods, tips, tricks, technology, and medical news; as a source of professional development

and constant learning; and as a starting point for project ideas. The limitation of 140-character messages, questions left unanswered by the community, and the steep learning curve for social media use in general were not rated favourably by respondents. Other interesting points from the data include the diverse nature of the content of Tweets (personal versus professional, library-related versus medical or scientific), the wide-ranging frequency of use, and the varied motivations for Twitter use.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

More information regarding the use of Twitter and other social media platforms is needed to fully understand their value for medical librarians in a quantifiable way. Further research is also needed to assess whether Twitter is viewed as useful only by North American #medlibs, or if it is a widely accepted international tool for collaboration. Reasons for resisting the use of this technology by some #medlibs also need to be explored.

Figure 1 Breakdown of Respondent Account Types



Figure 2a Tweeting

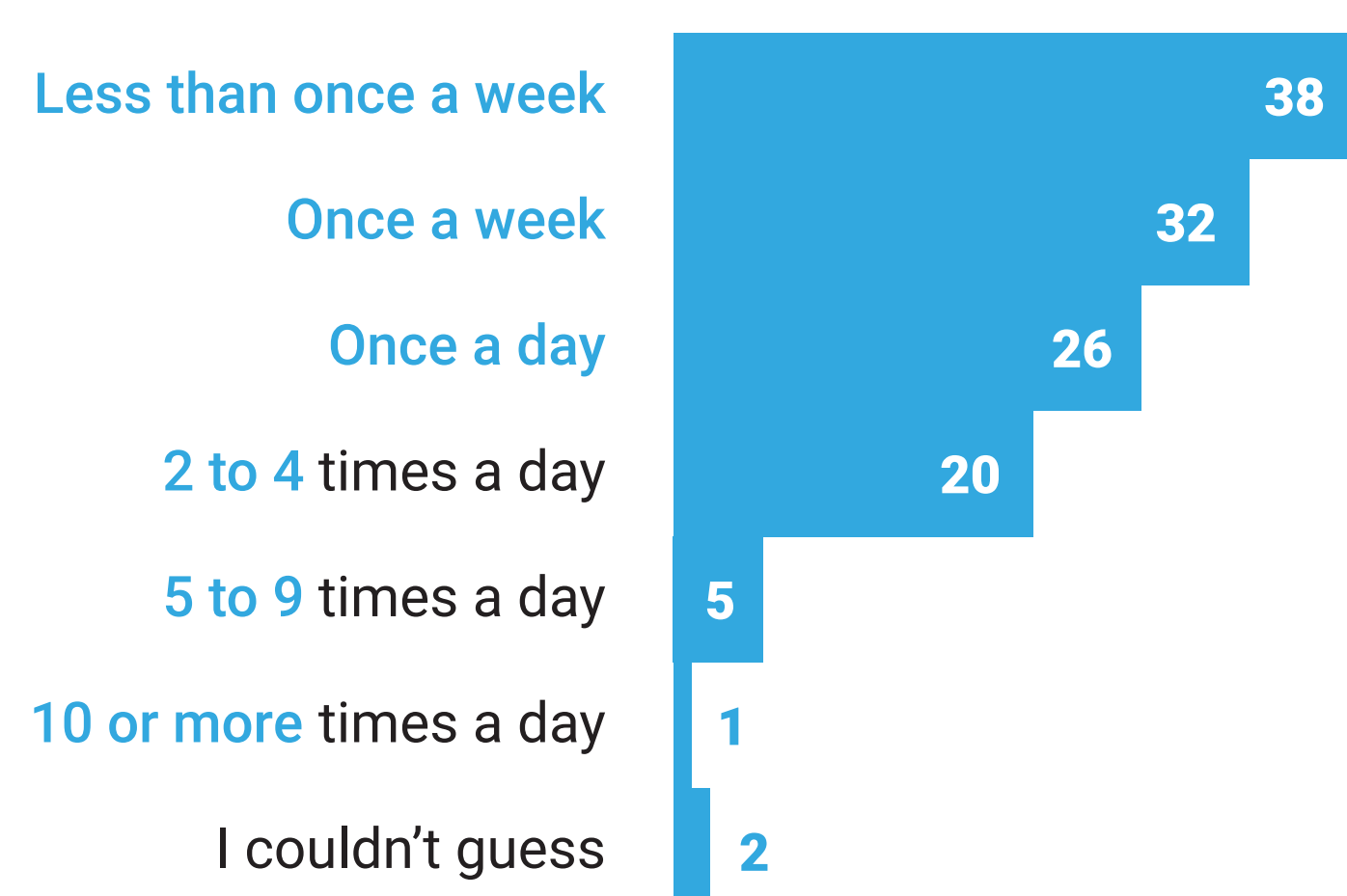


Figure 2b Reading Feed



Figure 3a Personal vs Professional Content

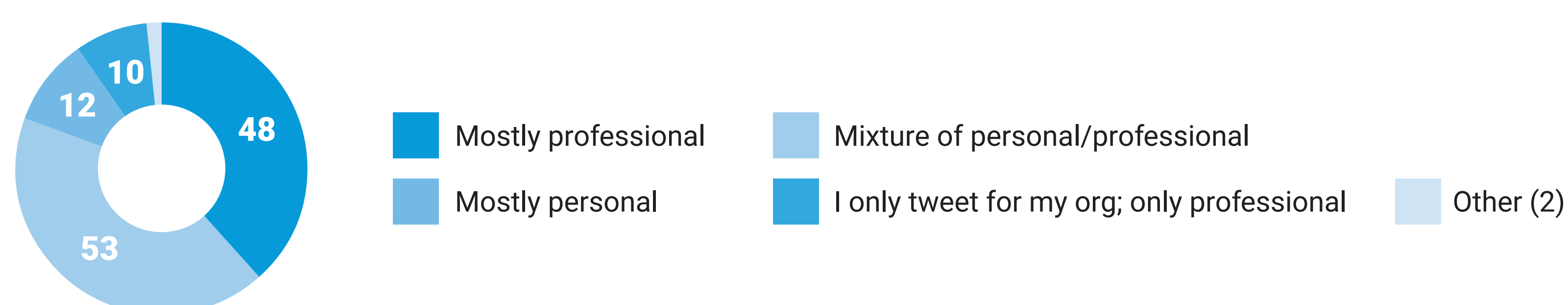


Figure 3b Library vs Medical/Science-Focused Content

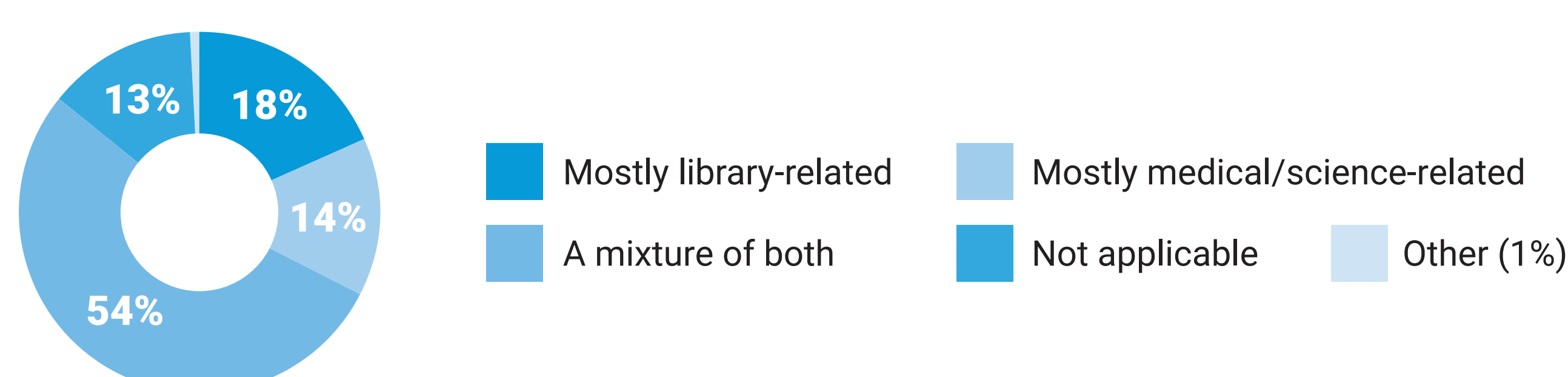


Figure 4 Percentage of Colleagues Followed

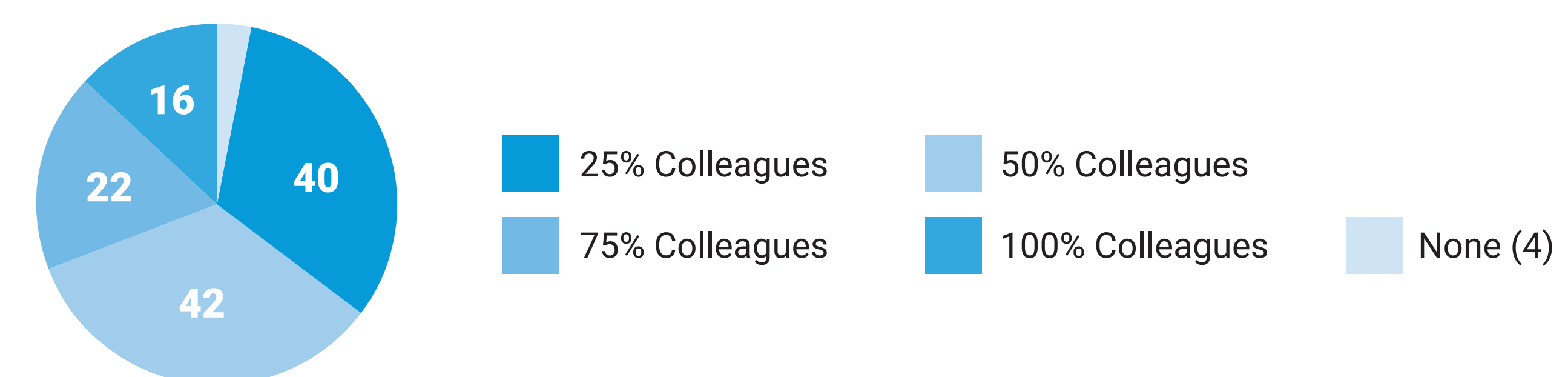


Figure 5 Seeking and Offering Help

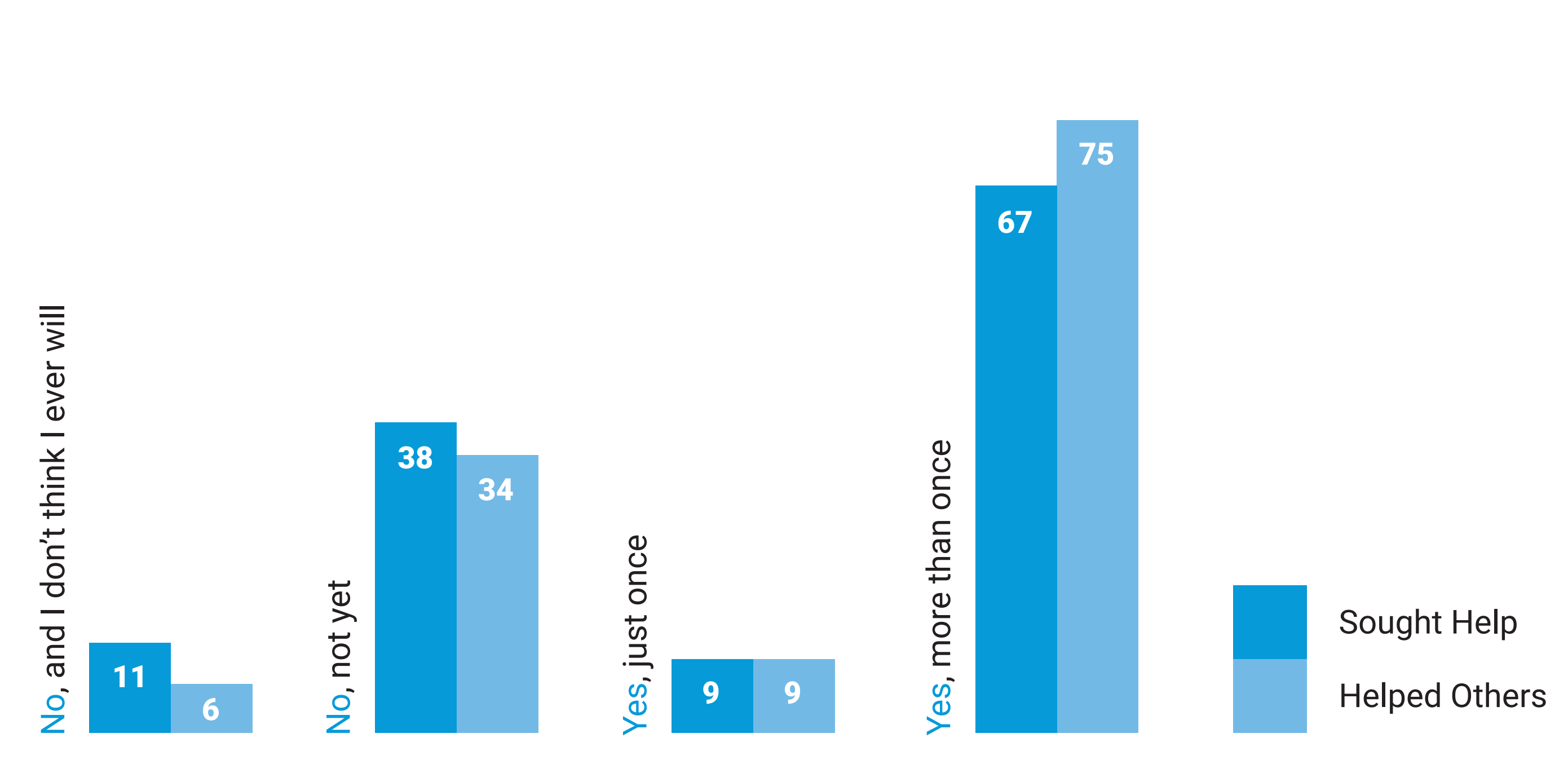


Figure 6 Has Twitter Helped You Collaborate With Fellow #medlibs?

