

Use of Social Media as a Supplement to Medical Education Curricula

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Though the majority of medical education literature has studied social media and issues of professionalism in relation to its use, medical professionals are beginning to recognize its potential as a powerful educational tool. Twitter and Facebook represent two of the largest and most widely studied social media platforms in medical education, with healthcare professionals finding creative uses of the apps to enhance learning.

Bahner et al. supplemented a novel ultrasound curriculum with Twitter's "push technology" (i.e., "pushing" information/messages to followers from publishers, rather than requested, or "pulled," by followers from publishers) and supplemented this delivery with online discussions in Facebook "Pages" and/or "Groups." The writers offered the following easy-to-follow guide on how to implement its use. Learners will be required to have memberships to Twitter and Facebook, while teachers will benefit from the use of third-party apps in addition to these two platforms.

Step 1: Register for **Facebook** and **Twitter** accounts (once registered with these social media outlets, third-party apps will allow you to "sign in" using account name and password from Facebook or Twitter). Instruct learners that they must register for these accounts to participate in discussion and must "follow" the account you create (be sure to share username with potential audience members).

Step 2: Create a "Page" in Facebook to facilitate tweet-related discussions (e.g., "ED Ultrasound page"). Learners can find this page by using the "search" function (be sure to inform them of the Page name). Pages are open for anyone to view and may be linked to Twitter for simultaneous displays of tweets on Facebook. If a private group discussion is required, a "closed" group will need to be created. Learners can join this Group one of two ways:

- (1) By invitation (using Facebook names and/or email address), or
- (2) Pressing the "Join Group" button on the Group's page and awaiting approval from the Group Creator/Administrator.

Step 3: Sign into third-party app (**Twuffer** or **HootSuite**) to upload educational pearls as scheduled tweets (≤ 140 characters +/- image), which will be simultaneously posted to your Facebook Page. Posting once per day at a consistent time is ideal, as this allows time to discuss the pearl before progressing to the following day's lesson. Use the **bit.ly** app to include links to articles that would otherwise exceed Twitter's 140-character limit.

Step 4: Ensure learner engagement through topical conversation in an “open” (viewable by all) Facebook “Page” or a “closed” (viewable only by invitation) Facebook “Group.”

In-depth descriptions of the above-mentioned apps are included in the attached table.

The use of social media as an educational tool in medicine is an emerging area of research in a rapidly progressing technological field. A trial of the above plan is an excellent starting point to gain familiarity with the use of social media, while also acting as a good starting point from which to exercise creativity in its use as an educational resource.

Social Media	What?	Pros	Cons	Notes
Facebook www.facebook.com	Users make account profiles with personal demographic and post messages on Users' / Groups' / Pages' "walls"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Open or closed groups for discussion of common interests Tweets can be simultaneously linked to Facebook (allows audience expansion & further discussion) 	Personal account required (privacy concerns)	~1.59 billion active monthly users
Twitter www.twitter.com	Users post "tweets" (≤140 characters each) that are received by "followers" (audience) but visible to the public.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 140 character limit allows for high yield info in short statement Easy image posting (e.g., radiology, derm, etc.) Large reach allows for sharing of educational info outside of institution's boundaries. Useful for real-time discussion in conference/lecture environments w/ live twitter feed on large screens 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussion uncommon - unilateral receiving of information more common (see Facebook "Pros" for remedy) Still relies on users to sign up for content 	~305 million active monthly users
Twuffer ("Twitter Buffer") www.twuffer.com	3rd-party app allows scheduling of posts for later date & time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allows consistent delivery time of tweets. Relieves daily posting burden (schedule multiple tweets at once) 		
HootSuite www.hootsuite.com	3rd-party social media managing app allows easy use of multiple social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allows posting to multiple platforms simultaneously. Allows scheduling of future posts. Allows scheduling and batch-uploading of many tweets from a single text file (greater ease/speed of uploading) 	\$6/month fee required for most features	
bit.ly	3rd-party app that	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allows posting of links that would 		

www.bitly.com	compresses web addresses	otherwise have exceeded Twitter's 140 character-limit <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows archiving of links • Produces basic statistics for assessing usage by Twitter followers 		
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Other useful/interesting social media apps:

- I. **Figure 1:** Medical image sharing for healthcare professionals. Find/share de-identified info of new and interesting cases, page specialists for quick feedback, take part in discussions of cases, and customize app to your experience/specialty. Includes an in-app consent form, the ability to remove details by swiping, and automatic face blocking for HIPAA-compliant de-identification.
- II. **YouTube:** Useful for visual walk-throughs of some clinical procedures.

Other well-known social media platforms with potential use as educational tools include **Google+**, **Blogs**, **Podcasts**, **Picasa**, and **Flickr**.

1. Bahner DP, et al. How we use social media to supplement a novel curriculum in medical education. *Medical Teacher*. 2012: 1-6.
 - a. Twitter account used for the above study:
 - i. "@EDUltrasonnd," <http://twitter.com/#!/EDUltrasonnd>
2. Paton C, et al. Experience in the use of social media in medical and health education. *Nursing and Health Professions Faculty Research*. Paper 6.