

# Social Media and the Dermatologist

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## INTRODUCTION

From 2005 to 2020, the percentage of American adults using social media skyrocketed.<sup>1</sup> For many, social media is a means of “researching” everyday needs, including healthcare.<sup>1,2</sup> While mass dissemination of social media content can be helpful for patient education, posts are not standardized and carry a risk of misinformation.

Many dermatologists are joining the social media bandwagon, some maintaining high-profile accounts as “dermatologist influencer.” This requires regular engagement on social media outlets and consistent participation in trending topics, which can be time-consuming, expensive, and challenging to balance with clinical endeavors.

### Social Media and the Dermatologist: The Upside

Social media can benefit our patients. It builds communities and affords opportunities for patients to engage in discussion and education.<sup>3</sup> It helps dermatologists reach a large audience and is instrumental for both the individual dermatologist and for professional organizations. It can result in tangible benefits, whether increased appointment bookings, shared information, or increased revenue from product sales. Social media can be a creative outlet and may facilitate passive income through industry partnerships. It can raise awareness and spur change through advocacy. Finally, it is an excellent means of engaging younger audiences, who are the most active group on social media.

### Social Media and the Dermatologist: The Downside

Social media can misinform patients. Posts and accounts are unregulated, and individuals can post content without credentials. Such misinformation can propagate unrealistic patient expectations and, in the worst case, be harmful. When patients follow their own dermatologist, the possibility of “parasocial” relationships exists, creating the potential for blurred professional boundaries. Maintaining high-profile social media is time-intensive, and obtaining passive income through partnerships may pose conflicts of interest. Some social media trends may be frivolous, causing dermatologists to appear to the social media consumer as mere purveyors of skin care products and not the true medical experts of skin disease diagnosis, management, and therapeutics.

## DISCUSSION

Some argue dermatology is in an age where medical expertise is being undermined by social media.<sup>4</sup> Metrics that once impressed patients (eg, number of publications, presentations, and academic titles) appear to now be overshadowed by a dermatologists’ social media visibility. In effect, 2 forms of “experts” are emerging: “clinical experts” who advance the field through evidence-based research, product development, and teaching, and “social media experts” who influence a broad online audience through social media. The latter do so ironically based on “clinical experts’” work.<sup>4</sup> While some dermatologists successfully straddle both camps, these groups rarely overlap.

## CONCLUSION

Dermatology is a visual specialty and thus well-suited for social media. Alarming, the majority of dermatology-related content is not posted by board-certified dermatologists.<sup>5</sup> We, as a medical specialty, must meet the rising need for social media advancement professionally and sensibly. Dermatologic professional organizations should encourage social media engagement and aid in the promotion of evidence-based information. Additionally, the creation of clinical practice guidelines are needed to outline how to best incorporate social media presence into a dermatologist's daily practice.

## DISCLOSURES

The authors have no relevant conflicts of interest to declare.

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