

We hardly knew ye... goodbye, #dermtwitter?

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To the Editor:

Social media (SoMe) has become a useful tool in medical education and is widely used within the field of dermatology [1]. Twitter, in particular, facilitates rapid knowledge dissemination transcending distance and traditional hierarchies and can increase engagement in hard-to-reach audiences. The users of the #dermtwitter hashtag to facilitate academic discussion amongst dermatology practitioners have evolved into a thriving educational community [2].

Toward the end of 2022, Twitter experienced upheaval under new ownership, experiencing controversies, closure concerns, and loss of users. Within #dermtwitter, this has highlighted the uncertain foundations upon which SoMe medical education has been constructed. However, this is not the first-time medical education has been disrupted by platform transience. Vine was a highly popular platform owned by Twitter which hosted successful medical education resources [3]. Its sudden 2017 closure is a reminder that far-flung influences may threaten SoMe medical education. It is imperative to reflect upon how #dermtwitter has been successful and identify strategies to safeguard lasting mentorship and learning.

With over 5000 followers, the Dermatology Journal Club (@DermatologyJC) on Twitter enables worldwide critical appraisal engagement between dermatologists and trainees. Such short, virtual SoMe engagements foster interactions between dermatologists and learners which can further mentorship and typify excellence in SoMe learning. More broadly, dermatology journals have utilized

SoMe to improve dissemination, and SoMe is increasingly used for patient outreach, particularly with research design and recruitment [4].

Curiously, the U.K. dermatology community appears less active than that of our international colleagues

Table 1. Comparison of social media usage globally on Instagram and Twitter.

Instagram¹

	U.K.	U.S.	Canada	Elsewhere in world
Social media usage type				
Educational/webinar	0	0	0	15
Research opportunity	0	0	0	1
Self-promotion/private practice	4	15	2	163
Recruitment into programme	0	0	0	0

Twitter²

	U.K.	U.S.	Canada	Elsewhere in world
Social media usage type				
Educational/webinar	14	133	1	6
Research opportunity	2	12	1	0
Self-promotion/private practice	0	5	1	0
Recruitment into programme	0	21	0	0

¹Themes of 200 most recent Instagram posts identified by searching #dermatology on December 20, 2022, with the majority of use (N=184) being for self-promotion and private practice advertisement.

²Themes of 200 most recent Twitter posts identified by searching #dermtwitter December 18, 2022, with the majority of use being for educational opportunities (N=154).

Table 2. Recommended activities for dermatologists across all social media platforms.

Recommendation	Explanation
Ensure developed educational resources are backed up	Mitigates platform transience and prevents loss of resources, intellectual property, and learning opportunities.
Clearly display your professional role and delineate between personal and professional activity	Engaging as a member of the dermatology community online carries professional responsibilities. It can be challenging to navigate personal activity in parallel. Clear differentiation avoids confusion.
Actively challenge misinformation and direct to evidence-based practice	Improves trustworthiness and dissemination of reliable information, and helps to prevent harm.
Engage with patients as well as other doctors	Patient-led spaces are often devoid of medical presence, and this vacuum may risk sharing of inaccurate information. Engage with forum moderators to formulate strategies to narrow doctor-patient online gaps whilst respecting patient spaces.
Innovate with creative learning methodologies	Share content at dermatology conferences via hashtags, arrange SoMe journal clubs and debates, develop threads breaking down complex topics into bite-sized chunks, and develop interactive quizzes and polls.
Act as a role-model and mentor for the dermatology community	Empowering the next generation of dermatologists to engage on social media will ensure ongoing innovation in online practice. You may also aid the professional identity formation of future dermatologists and facilitate learning and career development of early career dermatologists who you historically may not have been able to reach.

(**Table 1**). Role-modelling often drives SoMe engagement and disparities may be explained by comparatively fewer U.K. dermatology leaders embracing SoMe. Instagram’s visual nature facilitates increased self-promotion activity, whilst Twitter’s text-based medium promotes a discourse-dominated culture [5]. From an educator’s perspective, evidence suggests successful social media learning strategies lean towards rapid discussion, with space for reflection and professional identity formation [6]. Understanding best educational practices for dermatologists regardless of the nature of a SoMe space is essential if platforms are at risk of collapse (**Table 2**).

If #dermtwitter were to collapse, where to next? Mastodon is a SoMe platform offering similar microblogging features to Twitter and has experienced recent rapid growth in users. Mastodon may provide similar opportunities for the dermatology community, potentially representing a fresh start to content creators and educators. However, the concurrent reset of followers presents challenges. Whilst a level playing field empowers

early career academics, this disruption of social capital may present risks to reliability of information, whereby an “influencer” may appear just as trustworthy as an eminent professor, highlighting the need to ensure the verification of clinicians on SoMe platforms. Whilst Mastodon offers more characters than Twitter, it splits users into individual servers, potentially reinforcing echo chambers. It remains to be seen if “#mastoderm” will take off or embody SoMe transience.

SoMe is a growing battleground in dermatology medical education. Despite clear benefits, recent online unrest is a reminder that clinician control of SoMe dermatology learning is illusory. Regardless of Twitter’s fate, our community should heed this warning as an opportunity to reflect on the sustainability and creativity of our social media practices.

Potential conflicts of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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