



## Editorial

# Social media is providing new horizons for medical research. Can it replace medical journals?

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Fast internet connections at a nominal cost, availability of android phones and I-phones have made communication among people very convenient. Various social networking sites are currently available. The popular ones are WhatsApp, Facebook, twitter, You Tube, Google+, Wikipedia and Instagram. Social websites are usually used to obtain updates and share clinical research. One of the major advantages is that it connects individuals with mutual interest in medical field. Podcasts' and YouTube are channels to share educational videos and discuss clinical problems. Videos can be accessed at one's own convenience and put to use for just in time training. Various interactive blogs such as the Indian Anesthetist forum, Anesthesia Today, ICU, etc.; allow visitors to leave comments and messages. Other invaluable resource is Slide share, where many PowerPoint presentations are available. Social Medias provides an interactive platform to share information. Data can be immediately shared and inferences can be discussed to clear doubts, if any. But the source and creditability of content is questionable as there are huge lacunae about the editorial responsibility, peer review and accountability of educational content.<sup>1</sup> There is inherent risk of privacy of users and photos as sometimes photos are published without patient's consent. This can compromise patient's confidentiality and privacy. Digital manipulation warrants the authenticity of digital images uploaded on

websites. Sometimes an argument can occur between users, which can bring disrepute to whole fraternity. As per the study published in JAMA, around 60% of US medical schools were found to report various incidents such as posting of inappropriate or unprofessional content on blogs, social networking sites, or other places on the Internet.<sup>2</sup> Digital images and electronic data can potentially bring such embarrassments out into the open. This can create a very bad impression, in case the patients read such language or view their doctors in compromising situations? Doctor patient relationship may get breached if patients are friends online and this is professionally inappropriate and professional reputation can suffer.

Having said that let us now consider the other side. Medical journals are a source of vast literature based on huge database and clinical research. The main goal of most medical journals is improving medical care by publishing sound scientific articles (both research and practice papers) and focusing on topics that are of great importance to its readership. They provide recent information published after extensive peer review. But they have their own flaws like there could be inherent biases. There is an issue of predatory journalism which publishes non peer reviewed articles/literature. Many a times, there are huge delays in publications because of various factors. The re is possibility of bias to please the sponsor's /society/ associations that are linked to journal. But with strict plagiarism checks, adhering to peer review norms laid by various indexing

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agencies, the problems can be minimized. Peer review processes filter the journals for articles or other papers that cannot be used as sources and publishes only those that can be released to the public. The data published in various medical journals is of top level of evidence. It is authentic, reliable and unbiased.

In spite of few limitations, medical journals are a reliable source of information gathered from clinical and non-clinical research. 4G network and iPad allows access to various journals and e-books available on internet while at work. Numerous search engines like Pub search are available, which allow access to medical literature from PubMed /Medline, which is the world's largest library with a resource consisting of more than 7 million books in various forms such as journals, technical reports, and manuscripts on medicine and related sciences, microfilms, photographs etc. So the current situation demands that the academic journals, publishers and societies should move on to social media. Few medical publishers are using social media aggressively, to promote knowledge, spread ideas, and create platforms among anaesthesiologists.<sup>3</sup> An active Twitter account of a medical journal directly correlated with higher journal impact factor and greater number of article citations, than journals not embracing social media.<sup>4</sup> It is a great way to attract new authors. Implementing digital strategy like integrating social media will help share relevant updates with target readers. Social media can improve reputation of a journal. In many ways, social media can prove to be a powerful resource for scholarly journals. On social media, conversations can develop, take shape and evolve. Various concerns can be addressed and clarified or a solution can be suggested in seconds. Educational resources on social media should be assessed for their impact and quality before their use. It is quite challenging to identify

appropriate resources on social media. So Social Media Index (SMi) has been developed to overcome this issue. Data from various social media platforms such as Facebook Likes, Twitter Followers, and Google + Followers for blogs and podcasts are used to derive this index. The SMi's stability over time and its correlation with journal impact factors suggest that it can be a stable indicator for the impact of medical education websites.<sup>5</sup>

To conclude, the Internet can provide many options for increased communication or for sharing clinically relevant data, it would be advisable to keep one's eyes open about the source and credibility of any site you visit and "not trust everything you read".

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