

# Social Media as a Force for Good: How to Think Like a B Corp



For dermatologists, social media networks are underutilized when marketing their practices—create quality and trusted material, deliver practice-specific messaging strategies, and convey and sustain reliable information.

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>> Like most things, social media is nuanced. Depending on how it is leveraged, social media platforms can be tools that result in an array of negative or unintended consequences, or they can be used for substantial good. There are many benefits to responsibly harnessing these channels due to their considerable “reach” and influence.

In May 2021, Springer Nature’s *Cureus* published findings from an analysis of 300 “highly engaged posts” on Reddit and other platforms and dermatology-relevant social networks.<sup>1</sup> This analysis pinpointed significant themes in online dermatology conversations and interactions across multi-platforms and specialized networks. Notably, research centered on dialogue among the 1.2 million-plus members of the Reddit *r/SkincareAddiction* community. This subreddit reportedly functions as a support group/clearinghouse for information from various channels.

## AMONG THE FINDINGS:

- Advice to improve mental health and general well-being accounted for 71% of analyzed posts.
- A “large portion” of such counsel reportedly lacked evidence, and “pseudoscientific recommendations” are “often accepted as factual.”
- Of the entries, 31% were sourced from other sites (a nod to the community’s status as an “aggregator” of information from different places).
- General conversations about skin health and well-being represented the most prominent theme, accounting for nearly 40% of all discussions.
- The balance of prominent themes included tips on regimens and products; the impact of ailments and potential treatments; and “social concerns” (ie, self-image, the role of the media) – at 33% and 14% for both latter themes, respectively.

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- Taking a deeper dive into the quality of content, it was reported that users credited the subreddit with “significantly improving their knowledge of skin health.”
- Additionally, posts incorporated predatory corporations, labor abuse, and other ethical questions when discussing skin products and the manufacturers behind them.
- Posts tended to connect skin health to feelings of security, happiness, and self-fulfillment, emphasizing skin care as a “catalyst for general health and wellness.”
- So-called “unrealistic beauty standards in the media” were also highlighted, with the community reportedly multi-tasking to combat unfair media portrayals; for instance, heavily edited photos of models or celebrities touting the latest “miracle” product.

At their worst, such channels have been implicated in the “digital dermatoses” phenomenon. In a report featured in *Current Opinion on Pediatrics*, New York University-affiliated researchers analyzed the impact of photograph-based social media among youth.<sup>2</sup> Specifically, the research isolated adverse health effects from buzzy, image-centric, social-media-driven “challenges” like the Kylie Jenner-inspired lip-inflating contest.

Researchers also scrutinized the links between body image and media-driven trends in children and teens. In summary, these platforms were acknowledged as important vehicles for youth to communicate with their peers and to express themselves; however, the clinicians’ responsibility to stay on

top of dangerous social trends and to look for red flags for dangerous behaviors was also underscored.

### A LEARNING OPPORTUNITY

A practice owner or management team can glean much from comprehensive reviews and analyses of collective posts and content shared via online communities and networks. As dermatology services providers, we can use these findings to strengthen our communities. We can also do our part to advance improvement in the quality and credibility of the information and discourse available on these platforms and shared among these communities.

It therefore serves us well to “think like a B Corp.” Assess bright spots to promote and areas for improvement to work on and to later communicate following a positive turnaround. This business certification is designed to support high-quality standards and sends a positive message not only to customers and patrons but also to potential vendors, partners, and other stakeholders. In all, for corporations to achieve such certification, they must successfully demonstrate proficiency and competency associated with the following functions and aspects of the business:

- High social performance
- High environmental performance
- Accountability to all stakeholders (not “just” shareholders)
- Transparent governance structure and operations
- Holistic support of responsible practices in hiring, employee benefits, community giving, supply chains, material use and disposal, and other areas

These principles must be consistently considered, advanced, and incorporated into all conversations within online communities and across platforms. All patient touchpoints, from content posted by your practice on various sites to responses to questions posed by members of different social communities, should be approached with care. You and your team must be as transparent, responsible, authoritative, honest, and warm in these online engagements as you all are in person and during face-to-face interactions with existing patients. Today’s inquiring or curious mind online may be tomorrow’s invaluable and loyal patient.

### BE THE “GOOD” ON SOCIAL

In their exploration of social media in dermatology, Baylor College of Medicine-affiliated researchers asserted

that these networks are “underutilized” by clinicians when marketing their practices.<sup>3</sup> They underscored the untapped potential to originate quality and trusted material, deliver practice-specific messaging strategies, and convey and sustain reliable information on conditions, behaviors/habits, and treatments.

Do not let opportunities to cross-promote your practice pass you by. Be mindful of the positive and negative ways that researchers have isolated social media to be leveraged by dermatologists and their teams. Use this research and the basic tenets of B Corp certification to avoid the pitfalls and to “do good.” The following steps provide a good starting point:

- Craft empathetic, inspiring, and supportive content that acknowledges the holistic power of healthy skin to transform individuals’ lives for the better.
- Do not be afraid to dispel misinformation when you see it.
- Serve as a trusted, reliable sounding board and authority on those platforms that could use the insights from actual clinicians to combat harmful or even dangerous information.
- To further combat unrealistic expectations, assess the photos that you use online. Think beyond stock photos. Emphasize realness – actual patients and patient results.
- Practice what you preach. Consider the reputation and practices of the vendors, suppliers, and others you partner with, and extend this same thoughtfulness when hiring, onboarding, and retaining associates and staff.
- To avoid rainbow washing, greenwashing, and like forms of seemingly disingenuous marketing and communications, showcase your actions. Highlight participation in community events. Earth Day posts every April and rainbows every June do not resonate in the same way as acting on your beliefs.

You are already a force for good in the offline world. Now, ensure your online identity aligns with the values and approach that you take in your day-to-day, face-to-face operations. ■

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3. DeBord LC, Patel V, Braun TL, Dao H. Social media in dermatology: clinical relevance, academic value, and trends across platforms. *J Dermatolog Treat*. 2019;30(5):511-518. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/09546634.2018.1530444>