

Instagram as a Vehicle for Education: What Radiology Educators Need to Know

Serena Shafer, Michael B. Johnson, Rachel B. Thomas, BA, Pamela T. Johnson, MD, Elliot K. Fishman, MD

Since its inception in 2010, Instagram has rapidly grown into one of the world's largest social media forums, with over 700 million registered users. In the field of medicine, Instagram has been used for professional development and is also being added to the armamentarium of social media vehicles for education.

Utilization of Instagram for medical education lags behind Facebook and Twitter, as many educators may not recognize the potential role. The purpose of this manuscript is to describe unique features of Instagram that are not found on Facebook and Twitter, with the aim of facilitating use of Instagram for radiology education.

Key Words: Social media; Instagram; education; internet.

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INTRODUCTION

The Problem

Since its inception in 2010, Instagram has rapidly grown into one of the world's largest social media forums, with over 700 million registered users (1). Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger founded Instagram with the goal of creating a simple-to-use photo and lifestyle sharing application (2). However, social media users quickly embraced Instagram as a personal communication platform.

Beyond individual engagement for social interaction, companies such as National Geographic and Forbes use Instagram as a marketing platform (3,4). In the field of medicine, Instagram has been used for professional development and is also being added to the armamentarium of social media vehicles for education (5–8).

Utilization of Instagram for medical education lags behind Facebook and Twitter, as many educators may not recognize the potential role. A 2015 survey found that the top four social media resources used by educators to communicate with students were Facebook (52%), Twitter (47%), LinkedIn (21%),

and Google + (16%), whereas the medical students most commonly used Facebook (100%), YouTube (43%), Twitter (31%), and Instagram (30%) (6). The highest population of Instagram users are between the ages of 18–29, correlating to the years spent in college and medical school (9). Instagram is ideally suited for radiology education because the biggest difference between Instagram and other widely used social media tools is its primary content: images. Instagram posts require an image with text as an optional supporting element, whereas other social platforms like Facebook and Twitter, allow text-only posts. Instagram also has the potential to reach across professional roles (student, resident, technologist, and physicians) and to inspire more medical students to pursue radiology as a career by reaching them early in their premedical and medical school education. The application, however, is not the most intuitive for the inexperienced user. The purpose of this manuscript is to describe features unique to Instagram that are not found on Facebook and Twitter, with the aim of facilitating use of Instagram for radiology education.

What We Did

CTisus.com is a radiology teaching website that has been actively using Instagram (Fig 1) as an educational tool since July 2016, enabling experience-based guidance on how to use the resource. One major distinction from Facebook and Twitter is that Instagram is a smartphone- and a tablet-based program, not designed for content building on a computer. Images and videos are easily viewed on a desktop or a laptop computer

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From the Department of Radiology and Radiologic Science, Johns Hopkins Hospital, 601 N Caroline Street, Room 4223, Baltimore, MD 21287. Received December 3, 2017; revised March 4, 2018; accepted March 8, 2018. The authors have no relevant disclosures. **Address correspondence to:** P.T.J. e-mail: PamelaJohnson@jhmi.edu

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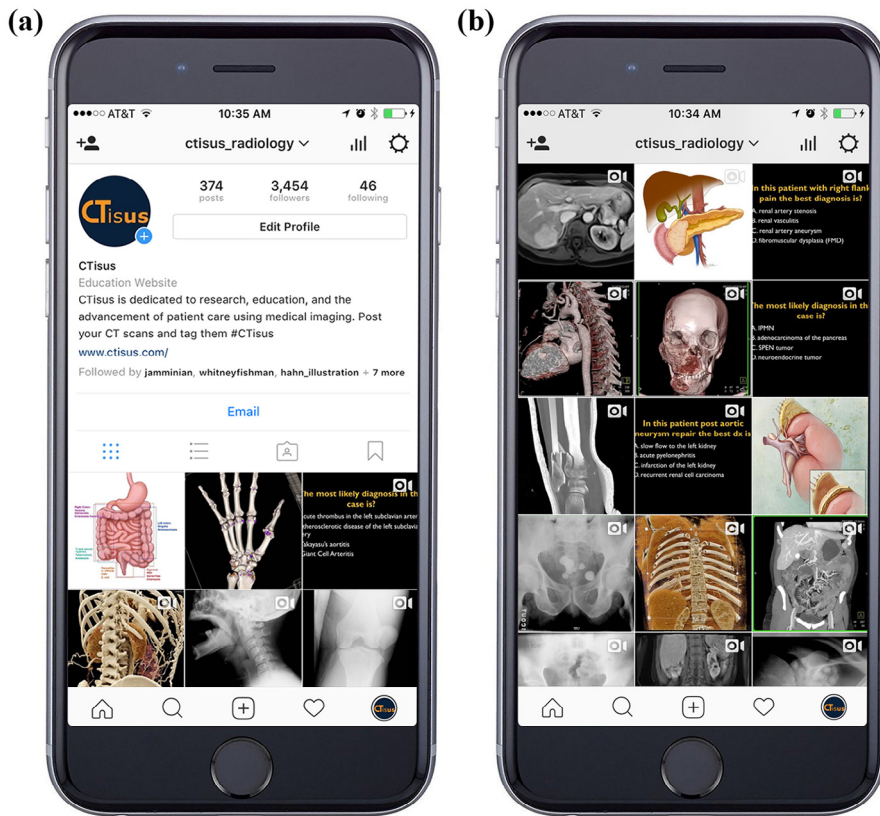


Figure 1. CTisus Instagram account (a) with representative images and videos that CTisus posts to Instagram (b).

in news feed format, but creating and building a library is performed on handheld devices.

There are five main buttons at the bottom of the Instagram screen on a smartphone or a tablet (Fig 1). The first button is “Home,” this is an infinite scroll of images posted by people you follow. The second button is “Browse,” this button curates suggested images based on the likes of the people you follow as well as a search function at the top of the “Browse” page. The third button is a plus sign, with which you add images and videos by accessing the phone’s photos or the phone’s camera. The fourth button looks like a heart and lists account activities such as likes, comments, and new followers. The last button is the account profile. Here you can edit the account profile (including profile picture and bio) and view previous posts. Customizing the user profile gives credibility to the account and is an opportunity to educate users on what to expect from the account. To use Instagram for education, the account should be set to public mode. In the upper right-hand corner of the profile page, a gear button lists a drop down that includes a button to switch from private to public mode. A large following could be helpful in promoting radiology education to as many people as possible.

The keys to creating a successful Instagram account that will garner a large number of followers are content and timing. Users that follow your account receive posts in their news feed, and all Instagram account contents are categorized through hashtags, which are explained further in the present study.

Experience-based tips to create a successful Instagram platform for radiology education include the following subsections.

Theme

All images should relate to radiology education. Some educational social media sites post content other than radiology education. For example, the CTisus Facebook includes nonradiological medical news, articles from Harvard Business review, and entertainment topics. An educational Instagram account needs to be restricted to radiological education content only.

Regularity

As found in a study by Union Metrics, followers respond to a steady, regular posting pattern rather than merely the quantity of posts (10). Adhere to a daily posting quota (eg, five posts a day).

Variety

Within the scope of radiology education, images should retain a degree of variety depicting, for example, multimodality findings in a single disease, multiple imaging exams in a single patient, inclusion of advanced postprocessing displays or innovative imaging technologies and illustrations related to anatomy and pathology (Fig 1).

Hashtags

A hashtag is a means of creating a link from your pictures to other pictures in the same category. It consists of relevant

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