

Radiologists and Social Media: Do Not Forget About Facebook

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Abstract

Purpose: Facebook (Facebook, Inc, Menlo Park, California, USA) is the most popular social networking platform worldwide. Facebook groups are virtual communities of people who share a common interest. Breast Imaging Radiologists is a Facebook group for radiologists with an interest in breast imaging. The purpose of this study was to analyze the membership and activity of the Breast Imaging Radiologists Facebook group (BIRFG) for 2 years since its inception.

Methods: Using both the Grytics (www.grytics.com) and Sociograph (www.sociograph.io) analytic engines, the activity of the BIRFG was analyzed retrospectively from its inception on February 11, 2015, through February 12, 2017. Activity data were exported for further qualitative and quantitative analysis using Excel (Microsoft, Redmond, Washington, USA). Member demographic data were obtained by querying public Facebook profiles, US News Doctor Finder (US News & World Report, Washington, DC, USA), Doximity (Doximity, San Francisco, California, USA), and Google (Google Inc, Mountain View, California, USA).

Results: Membership grew from 1 to 774 over the study period, and 84% of the members were female. There were 493 posts, 3,253 comments, and 1,732 reactions; 92% of posts received either comments or reactions. Each post received an average of 6.6 comments, and 55% of members were active over the study period. There was an increase in all measures of activity from year 1 to year 2.

Conclusions: Our findings indicate that radiologists find value in using Facebook groups as a forum to network and exchange information about breast imaging. This may be generalizable to other radiology subspecialties. Given the popularity and accessibility of Facebook for personal use, it may prove a more comfortable social medium for radiologists to interact professionally.

Key Words: Social media, Facebook, breast imaging, radiologists

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INTRODUCTION

Social media platforms such as Facebook (Facebook, Inc, Menlo Park, California, USA) and Twitter (Twitter Inc, San Francisco, California, USA) are increasingly popular outlets for entertainment, information exchange, and networking. To date, though, most research on the use of social media by radiologists has focused on Twitter.

A 2016 survey by the Pew Research Center showed that 69% of Americans use some type of social media. Since its creation in 2004, Facebook (www.facebook.com)

has become the most popular of the common social media networks. Currently, 68% of adults in the United States use Facebook, and 76% of Facebook users report daily use. Of Internet users in the United States, 83% of females and 75% of males use Facebook [1].

Like the general population, social media use is also prevalent among physicians and, particularly, radiologists. In a 2014 Australian study, 59.9% of surveyed physicians reported Facebook use [2]. In a 2016 survey, 85% of radiologists in Europe and North America reported use of social media, with Facebook being the most popular platform for general purposes. Twitter (www.twitter.com) and LinkedIn (LinkedIn Corp, Sunnyvale, California, USA; www.linkedin.com) were more popular among radiologists for professional use [3]. In 2017, Patel et al surveyed radiologists about social media use. Of the 59.1% of radiologists reporting use of social media for professional purposes, 69.1% were male and 30.9% were female [4].

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A Facebook group is a virtual community of members with a common interest. There are currently more than 500 physician groups on Facebook, with a variety of interests including physician finances, women in radiology, and telemedicine [5]. Depending on the group settings, membership may be open to the public or may be restricted. Members of the group interact by authoring posts, which may be in the form of a question, observation, photo, clinical case, or link. Colleagues can provide feedback on a post by commenting or reacting using one of six emojis (like, love, haha, wow, sad, and angry). In this way, members carry out a virtual conversation about a topic of interest.

The Breast Imaging Radiologists Facebook group (BIRFG) is for board-certified and board-eligible radiologists with an interest in breast imaging. The group was created in February 2015 and currently has over 950 members. Although a variety of studies have focused on the use of Twitter at radiology meetings and by radiology journals [6-8], the use of Facebook by radiologists has received very little attention in the literature. To our knowledge, there has never been an analysis of a radiology-specific Facebook group. Thus, we aimed to study the role of Facebook groups as a platform for radiologist engagement, focusing on BIRFG for the 2 years since its inception.

METHODS

This study utilized only publicly available information and therefore did not require oversight by our local institutional review board.

Grytics (www.grytics.com) and Sociograph (www.sociograph.io) are analytic engines that use the Facebook groups' application program interface to extract information about group interactions, activity, and membership. Leveraging features of both engines, we retrospectively analyzed BIRFG activity from the community's inception on February 11, 2015, through February 12, 2017.

Using both analytic platforms, the following data fields were extracted with dates and times: all posts, comments, reactions, and members from the study period. Separately, demographic data (eg, country, gender, practice type, years in practice, board certification) were collected for all group participants by manually reviewing each member's public Facebook profile, as well as physician profiles in US News Doctor Finder (US News & World Report, Washington, DC, USA; www.health.usnews.com), Doximity (Doximity, San Francisco, California, USA; www.doximity.com), and relevant related information

using Google (Google Inc, Mountain View, California, USA; www.google.com). These demographic data were then linked to the data fields obtained from Grytics and Sociograph.

All 493 posts from the study period were reviewed by three board-certified breast imaging radiologists. The radiologists agreed on 13 descriptive categories of posts after an initial qualitative review. Each post was reviewed and categorized by two of the three radiologists, and disagreements in category assignments were discussed between the two reviewers until consensus was reached. Quantitative analysis was performed using Excel (Microsoft, Redmond, Washington, USA).

RESULTS

Between February 2015 and February 2017, membership in the BIRFG increased from 1 to 774; 84% (n = 651) of members were female and 16% (n = 123) were male. Of the members, 82% (n = 636) lived in the United States, 15% (n = 114) lived outside the United States, and 3% (n = 24) were from unknown locations; 43% (n = 333) of members were in private practice, and 64% (n = 496) of members were board certified in diagnostic radiology by the ABR.

Members were deemed "active" in the Facebook group if they wrote posts, wrote comments, or reacted to posts and comments. Overall, 55% (n = 422) of members wrote at least one post, comment, or reaction over the entirety of the study period; 22% (n = 172) of members engaged by writing posts; 40% (n = 308) engaged by commenting on posts written by other members; and 46% (n = 358) participated by reacting with one of six emojis (like, love, haha, wow, sad, and angry) to posts and comments.

There were 493 posts written over the study period; of these, 149 posts were written in year 1 and 344 in year 2 (130.9% increase from year 1 to year 2). The number of members who wrote posts, wrote comments, and reacted with emojis increased by greater than 100% from year 1 to year 2 (Fig. 1).

Eighty-eight percent of posts were written Monday through Friday, and 12% were written on Saturday and Sunday. The most popular hours for posting were 2 PM, 9 AM, and 10 PM Eastern Standard Time, with 24% of all posts written around those hours. Ninety-two percent of posts received either comments or reactions. Each post received an average of 6.6 comments.

Posts were categorized by topic, with 20% of posts about imaging protocols and clinical practice questions

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