



# A cross-sectional study of the presence of United Kingdom (UK) plastic surgeons on social media<sup>☆</sup>

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Received 15 July 2013; accepted 16 December 2013

## KEYWORDS

Social media;  
Technology;  
Patient education;  
Public relations

**Summary** *Introduction and aims:* To determine the uptake and usage of websites and social media (SM) by UK consultant (attending) plastic surgeons.

*Methods:* Professional profiles of full BAPRAS members were searched on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, RealSelf, YouTube, ResearchGate in May 2013. Additional surgeons were identified from the follower lists of @BAPRASvoice and @BAAPSMedia. Website ownership was determined on Google. Searches were repeated three times. Dual BAAPS-BAPRAS members were identified from [www.baaps.org.uk](http://www.baaps.org.uk).

*Results:* There were 156 (48.3%) dual BAAPS-BAPRAS members and 36 BAPRAS-only members. Fifty seven (18%) surgeons had no account on any platform whereas 266 (82%) were on at least one platform. One hundred and sixty four (51%) had personal websites whilst 37 (11%) had profiles on partnership websites. One hundred and sixteen (36%) had no website presence whilst 2% had websites under construction. The platform most surgeons use is LinkedIn (52%) whilst smaller proportions used Facebook (4%) and Twitter (22%). Surgeons had a mean of 126 (range: 0–3270) Twitter followers and 368 (range: 7–3786) fans/‘likes’ of their Facebook profiles. Time spent in postgraduate practice was not predictive of website ownership or SM use. However, dual BAAPS-BAPRAS members were significantly more likely to own a personal website, Twitter, RealSelf and YouTube accounts.

*Conclusions:* There has been an increase in the uptake of social media by UK plastic surgeons, especially in those with aesthetic surgery interests. However, very few surgeons have

<sup>☆</sup> Presented at winter BAPRAS 28 November 2013 Dublin (Poster) and BAAPS 26 September 2013 London (Oral).

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optimised their web presence. Continued education and appropriate usage guidance may promote uptake, particularly by reconstructive surgeons.

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## Introduction

Plastic surgery traditionally adopts new technologies early. New technologies such as social media (SM) may enhance surgical practice and should therefore be explored. Professional plastic surgery societies have led by establishing active multi-platform SM presence. However, few studies have comprehensively examined the use of SM by individual plastic surgeons.<sup>1–4</sup> The sole UK study found that, in 2011, 36.2% of plastic surgeons used social networking.<sup>1</sup> However, this study had a low response rate of 16.3% and may not be representative.

The present study primarily investigated the presence of UK accredited consultant plastic surgeons (attending surgeons elsewhere) on popular social and professional networks using a representative sample. A representative sample was obtained by including all full British Association of Plastic, Reconstructive and Aesthetic Surgeons (BAPRAS) members, the largest UK plastic surgery association. Membership of BAPRAS is only permissible following admission to the specialist register (board certification). A secondary aim was to determine whether additional British Association of Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons (BAAPS) membership predicted SM or website use. Members of either organisation may work only as NHS surgeons, may work in both the National Health Service (NHS) and in private practice, or may exclusively work privately. The vast majority of UK aesthetic procedures are performed privately. Other determinants of SM and website usage were also explored.

## Methods

Full BAPRAS members were identified from <http://www.bapras.org.uk> in May 2013. BAAPS membership status was recorded from <http://www.baaps.org.uk/>. Each surgeon's year of first qualification was recorded from the General Medical Council (GMC) register ([www.gmc-uk.org/doctors/register/LRMP.asp](http://www.gmc-uk.org/doctors/register/LRMP.asp)). Surgeons' "personal websites" (those owned by a single surgeon) were searched on Google. The presence of [Addthis.com](http://Addthis.com) sharing plugins, Twitter news feeds and direct links to the owner's Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn accounts on personal websites was noted. Surgeons listed solely on "partnership websites" (websites run by two or more surgeons but not belonging to private healthcare organisations/hospitals) were noted.

Surgeons were searched on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, RealSelf, ResearchGate and YouTube. Only the most recently updated and complete account was included for surgeons with more than one profile. Surgeons not found on direct platform searches were also searched on Google. Searches were designed to return professional profiles only. Additionally, 'follower' lists of @BAPRASvoice and @BAAP-SMedia were manually searched. Searches were performed

in one 24-h period to achieve cross-sectionality. Searches were repeated three times.

Details of each Facebook, ResearchGate and LinkedIn profile were noted. To exclude personal accounts, only Facebook business/fan pages were included.<sup>5</sup> Twitter activity was analysed using [twanalyst.com](http://twanalyst.com).

Chi-square tests were used to examine the difference in SM ownership between dual BAAPS-BAPRAS members and BAPRAS-only members. *T*-tests were used to compare means.

## Results

There were 323 full BAPRAS members. Of these, 165 (51%) had personal websites whilst 37 (11%) were profiled on partnership websites ([Figure 1](#)) and five (2%) had websites in development. One hundred and sixteen (36%) had no website presence. The mean time in postgraduate practice between those with and without personal websites was similar (26.6 and 27.7 years respectively,  $p > 0.05$ ).

The presence of surgeons on SM is summarised in [Table 1](#). Only fifty-seven (18%) surgeons had no account on any platform. The mean time in postgraduate practice for surgeons with no SM subscriptions and those with at least one subscription was similar (26.8 and 27.2 years respectively,  $p > 0.05$ ).

### BAPRAS-only versus dual BAAPS-BAPRAS members

One hundred and fifty six (48.3%) surgeons were dual BAAPS-BAPRAS members. The remaining 167 (51.7%) were BAPRAS-only members. Dual BAAPS-BAPRAS members were significantly more likely to own personal websites than BAPRAS-only members (66 versus 36.5%,  $p < 0.0001$ ) ([Table 2](#)). Dual membership holders were also more likely to own Twitter, RealSelf and YouTube accounts ( $p < 0.05$ ). No difference was seen in LinkedIn, Facebook and ResearchGate account ownership ( $p > 0.05$ ). Only 36 actively practicing plastic surgeons were BAAPS only members.

### Social media plugins on websites

Of 165 surgeons with personal websites, 24 had direct links to Facebook accounts, 16 to LinkedIn and 27 to Twitter: four of whom had Twitter news feeds on their websites ([Figure 2](#)). Ten websites (6%) had [Addthis.com](http://Addthis.com) plugins.

### Analysis of LinkedIn accounts

With 168 surgeons, LinkedIn was the most subscribed platform. The mean number of connections was 106 (range: 0–500). The mean number of endorsements was 32 (range:

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