


A Response to “Educational Utility of Social Media for Laparoscopic Surgery in India: A Cross-Sectional Survey of Popular Indian Communities on Facebook” [Letter]

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Dear editor

I read, with great interest, the recent article by Rajan et al¹ regarding the focus on innovative approaches to postgraduate training in laparoscopic surgery, which is a pertinent issue against the backdrop of the current COVID-19 pandemic and its social distancing requirements. The authors offered a unique viewpoint by investigating how social media can be used in developing countries to offset training challenges during the pandemic. As a junior doctor who utilises social media for surgical exam revisions, I am familiar with the use of social media in accessing a variety of medical education resources and aware of the potential application in learning laparoscopically through virtual reality training and simulations.²

The paper correctly identifies alternative training techniques and how they can be capitalised upon to address the inability to use conventional apprenticeship methods for postgraduate training. The study is, however, limited due to its methodology. The cross-sectional design of the study may be concomitant with some biases since its sample size was undefined and there is also the potential for selection bias. Since the data was collected during the pandemic, the study does not account for the fact that more learners have transitioned to learning online due to the pandemic.³ The social distancing protocols associated with the pandemic have compelled universities to adopt new learning techniques predominantly based on virtual platforms. There is an argument to be made, which in the current climate, it could also be the case that the research sample is predisposed to, or has become familiar with online modes of learning. This may, in turn, imply that social media is not necessarily a better learning option for students, but one that they have become increasingly familiar with due to the pandemic.

Furthermore, the nature of the Facebook educational posts and reactions may have been influenced by confounding factors such as the mental health of group participants. The COVID-19 pandemic has been shown to have a psychological impact on individuals in the form of anxiety, depression and stress.⁴ Anxiety has also been linked with conforming behaviours, whereby people who are anxious tend to keep their opinions in agreeance with that of the majority.⁴ There is the possibility that the research participants may be conforming with what they believe to be the dominant perception in the research; however, this has not been accounted

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for by the researchers. Mental health as a confounding factor must be incorporated into future studies that are pandemic-related, in order to mitigate against any biases.

To conclude, the potential benefits of utilising social media platform can be complementary to traditional teaching methods. However, future studies are needed to investigate how familiarity with online learning linked to the pandemic may introduce biases in the responses of respondents.

Disclosure

The author reports no conflicts of interest in this communication.

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