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Dermatology on Google+

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Abstract

Google+ sets itself apart from other social media platforms through a number of unique features, including search engine optimization services and high user satisfaction. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the presence of dermatological entities on Google+. Searches were conducted to locate any Google+ accounts associated with the most popular dermatology journals, dermatological patient-centered organizations, and professional dermatology-related organizations on social media. Additionally, "dermatology Google+" was searched via Google, and Google+ profiles retrieved in the first page of results were assessed. Four of the five active Google+ profiles identified in the first page of Google search results were run by private dermatology practices. Only one of the 13 searched journals was active on Google+. Twenty-six of the 34 patient-centered and professional organizations had Google+ accounts, but only seven of these accounts were active in the last year. Therefore, unlike some private practices, the majority of dermatology journals and organizations have yet to take advantage of the exclusive opportunities offered by Google+ to expand their audiences and bolster their overall online presence.

Keywords: dermatology, Google+, social media, dermatology journals, dermatology professional organizations, dermatology patient-centered organizations

Introduction

Google+ (or Google Plus) is a social networking platform that differentiates itself from other social media sites by incorporating Google features and giving users more control over content sharing [1]. Following its launch in 2011 amidst an overflowing social media landscape with established giants such as Facebook and Twitter [2], Google+ had amassed roughly 111 million active users as of 2015 [3]. More recently in 2017 the number of active Google+ members was estimated at over 395 million, with the site receiving approximately 34 million unique visits per month [4]. Although these numbers may be seen as inferior when compared to Facebook's one billion plus active users, Google+ users typically rate it more favorably compared to other social networking platforms [5]. According to the 2017 American Customer Satisfaction Index "E-Business Report," Google+ was rated the highest in customer satisfaction among social media users with a satisfaction score of 81%, whereas Facebook and Twitter received customer satisfaction scores of 68% and 70%, respectively [6].

Google+ has several features catering to businesses and organizations that give its relatively small user base a competitive edge over non-users [5]. For instance, Google+ provides search engine optimization services through the creation of URLs for posts made on its platform. The URLs created via Google+ rank higher in Google search results, thereby allowing Google+ users to reach larger

audiences. The potential magnitude of such benefits is especially apparent when considering that over two trillion searches are conducted per year via Google [7]. Additionally, Google+ provides the opportunity for users with similar interests to join communities, allowing organizations to further grow and connect with their audiences.

The use of social media in the healthcare community continues to expand. A recently conducted study found that the number of dermatology journals and organizations active on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, as well as their number of likes or followers on these sites, increased substantially between 2012 and 2017 [8, 9]. Despite the advantages offered by Google+, including its search engine optimization features, the use of this social networking platform by dermatologic entities remains uninvestigated. This study, therefore, aims to assess the presence of dermatology journals, dermatological patient-centered organizations, and professional dermatology-related organizations on Google+.

Case Synopsis

Data collection was performed by the first study author (MKH) on December 21, 2017. A second author, RRP, confirmed methods and results. As identified in a recent 2017 study, lists were compiled of the top ten most popular dermatology journals, dermatological patient-centered organizations, and professional dermatology-related organizations on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn [9]. Following removal of duplicate journals and organizations, the total list consisted of 13 journals, 15 patient-centered organizations, and 19 professional organizations. The names of each of these entities were searched on Google+ for corresponding accounts. Additionally, the entities' websites were searched for links to Google+ accounts. If still unable to locate an entity on Google+, its name was searched along with "Google+" using the Google search engine. Both the English and any native language versions of entities' names were searched. The last public post date and number of followers were recorded for identified Google+ accounts. If an entity was found to have

more than one Google+ account, the profile with the most recent public post was recorded. Accounts were considered active if they had public posts within the last year. Lastly, Google was searched using the phrase "dermatology Google+," and the first page of search results was assessed. Specifically, the names and types of any retrieved Google+ profiles were recorded, as well as their number of followers, last public post date, and topics from their last ten posts.

Results: Of the 13 journals identified from a prior study of most popular dermatological entities on top social media sites [9], only two, *JAMA Dermatology* and *Cutis*, had accounts on Google+. *JAMA Dermatology* was the only active journal on Google+, with a last public post date of December 21, 2017 and 39 followers. Eleven of the 15 most popular dermatological patient-centered organizations had accounts on Google+. However, only four of these organizations were active within the last year: the National Psoriasis Foundation (12 followers), National Eczema Association (11 followers), Children's Alopecia Project (208 followers), and National Alopecia Areata Foundation (41 followers). Of the 19 top professional dermatology-related organizations, 15 had accounts on Google+, but only three had public profile posts within the last year. These three active organizations were the British Association of Dermatologists (13 followers), Associated Skin Care Professionals (345 followers), and American Society for Laser Medicine and Surgery (60 followers).

A search of Google using the phrase "dermatology Google+" yielded eight Google+ accounts in the first page of search results. Five of the profiles were active with public posts made in the last year, and the majority of these had public posts made within the past three days of the search (**Table 1**). Four of the active accounts were associated with private dermatology practices, and one was a Google+ community. Common topics from the accounts' last ten posts included general dermatology information, self-advertising, and information about products and procedures.

Table 1. Active Google+ Accounts Retrieved via Google Search for “dermatology Google+”^a

Account Name	Account Type	Number of Followers	Last Public Post Date	Topics of Last 10 Posts
Image Dermatology	Private practice	62	12/19/2017	General dermatology information, self-advertising, products, procedures, political commentary
Avail Dermatology	Private practice	37	12/20/2017	General dermatology information, self-advertising
Dermatology Associates of	Private practice	123	12/21/2017	General dermatology information, procedures, products, self-advertising
Elias Dermatology,	Private practice	10	12/21/2017	General dermatology information, self-advertising, procedures, products, holiday greetings
Cosmetic Dermatology	Google+ community	482 ^b	11/16/2017	Procedures, journal articles, self-advertising, hospital natural disaster preparation ^c

^a Represents active accounts retrieved via the first page of search results on December 21, 2017. Profiles were considered active if they had public posts made within the last year.

^b Represents number of community members.

^c Posts were made by multiple community members.

Conclusion

Our study concludes that Google+ is a useful albeit underutilized social media platform in dermatology. Although the majority of patient-centered and professional organizations had Google+ accounts, only a small proportion of them were active. Likewise, only one dermatology journal actively posted on Google+. This is especially surprising given Google+'s unique features catering towards organizations and overall higher satisfaction scores

compared to Facebook and Twitter. In particular, search engine optimization features can be successfully utilized to drive traffic to an organization's webpage and other social media accounts. Some private practices are already taking advantage of these resources, although we suggest more dermatological entities investigate integrating Google+ into their social media repertoire in order to produce a synergistic effect on their overall online presence.

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