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Medical Student Peer-created E-learning Resources in Social Media: A Mixed-methods Study

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Introduction: Social media for medical education is an area gaining acceptance from both educators and users. A number of studies have reported social media learning innovations originating from medical educators, but few have examined medical students' own creative endeavours in this arena. Such resources can be difficult to identify, particularly if they are not accessible in the public domain. This study examined both the overt and hidden elements of student-created social media resources, why they were created and how they were used.

Method: A mixed-methods study was employed at the University of Hong Kong. An exploratory qualitative phase of ethnographic fieldwork was conducted for four months, including online interactions on social media. Data were entered into qualitative analysis software (NVivo Version 10) and analysed using a grounded theory framework by two coders. This was followed by a cross-sectional quantitative survey developed based on the findings of the first phase.

Findings: There were four main qualitative themes elicited: the diversity of use and range of resources, the motivations behind sharing on social media, the digital culture of sub-groups such as school alumni or Problem-Based Learning groups, and the technological accomplishments including the cloning of an entire interactive digital platform (MOODLE) by students. Extraordinary student creativity was demonstrated through a range self-initiated and curated resources. The 656 respondents (56.1% response rate) reported universal use of social media with Facebook (100%) and Instagram (33.9%) being the most popular. Around half (50.4%) of respondents reported uploading e-learning resources via social media and 62.0% found these helpful.

Conclusion: Our study demonstrates that students are meeting their own learning needs through digital innovation and following the theoretical framework of social media content as 'by users for users'. The findings indicate that students could play a helpful role as collaborators in faculty-based social media education initiatives.