

# Social media and rheumatology societies: Strategic insights

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## Abstract

The use of social media has heralded a new era of communication and social interaction, presenting important and often untapped potential and opportunity for professional organizations to thrive. In this article, we discuss the use of social media by rheumatology societies, focusing on strategy and marketing development. We share first-hand insights and tips for using social media in a way that can help rheumatology societies and professional organizations overall to thrive.

## Keywords

social media • rheumatology • communication • dissemination • content creation • marketing • campaign development

## Introduction

The use of social media among professional societies has provided a dynamic platform for communication and interaction, enhancing information dissemination and engagement with target groups. Rheumatology societies, including the European Alliance of Associations for Rheumatology (EULAR), are no exception to this. The use of social media in reaching out and informing the community, highlighting educational and collaborative opportunities, and simply linking people together, among others, has revealed a new era of communication.<sup>[1]</sup> Embracing this new era and using social media in a strategic manner to promote the society and enhance information sharing, certainty comes with a huge potential. The latter includes bringing communities together and leveraging educational, networking, and collaborative opportunities.

A variety of social media platforms are being used by rheumatology societies, some of them being Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn.<sup>[1]</sup> Many of these social media platforms have played a crucial role in the “growth” of professional societies and in strengthening information channels. The potential of using such platforms for educational activities has

been viewed with much enthusiasm, despite the recognized challenges.<sup>[2]</sup> Attempts to understand the use of social media among members of professional societies have highlighted a need for providing learning resources as well as increasing awareness on the use of social media and its potential. A good example of innovation in this regard has been the use of Twitter to facilitate online Journal Clubs, going beyond the borders of a room and maximizing participant engagement across the globe. More recently, the potential value of Instagram<sup>[3]</sup> and the use of Infographics<sup>[4]</sup> have been highlighted in the context of academia and scientific research.

In this article, we take a closer look into the use of social media by rheumatology societies, discussing various means of using social media to support professional “growth.” Specifically, we share first-hand insights and tips for advancing efforts in strategy and marketing development.

## Social Media Canvas for Strategy Development

For using social media to promote your activities and/or share information to your target audience and community, it is imperative to develop a strategy on how to deliver results according to your objectives. Using the Social Media Canvas is a starting point as it is a single-page plan with guide sections for you to fill out accordingly.<sup>[5]</sup> By completing the canvas, you have a better understanding of your organization’s marketing needs and requirements. This is what makes the

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Social Media Canvas an attractive part of strategy development by many professional societies, including rheumatology societies.

Firstly, define your goals because it will be difficult and a waste of effort to plan for something that does not have a goal. Do you want to find your tribe or grow your community? Do you have events and activities for them to join or participate in? Or do you want to share educational and informational content that they can always refer to and share with their friends, family, or peers? List your goals and assign key performance indicators (KPIs) with which you can also measure quantitative results.

Next is to list your content topics such as core items that you would promote regularly, perhaps a membership subscription. Another source of content inspiration or ideation is when you practice social listening. Based on the hashtags and keywords used in your posts, what is the community talking about? Is it a topic that you can join? Do you have existing static content that you can promote again, given its relevance? Also, there are key dates in the year that anyone can join the conversation, such as world days and awareness days. They are annually celebrated and already have a community that you can also reach to further grow your community.

Now that you know what topics you will be covering, you can choose various formats that would be most effective to deliver your message. Social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram no longer show content to the feeds of users according to the timeline, Instagrammers prioritize video content more than images to improve their post reach and engagement, Twitter and LinkedIn polls are great engagement drivers, and Twitter Space is gaining popularity as an audio chat room or live podcast platform as it competes with Clubhouse. Weigh your options and find the best solution that your content will be seen or heard by many.

Do you know which social media platform your target audience is using? Do you know what they use each platform for? Some platforms may be used because of their hobbies and are therefore not following users that publish content about their work. In every profession, there are age groups that have varying habits.

According to Sprout Social's social media demographics report for 2022,<sup>[6]</sup> Facebook has 2.91 billion monthly active users and its largest age group is 25–34 years old, also known as Millennials. Instagram has 2 billion monthly active users and its largest age groups are 18–24 (31%) and 25–34 (31.2%) years old, also Millennials. TikTok has 1 billion monthly active users, and its largest age group is 10–19 years old, also known as Gen Z. Twitter has 211 million daily active users aged 18–29 years, also Millennials. LinkedIn

has 810 million monthly active users aged 25–34 years, also Millennials. Lastly, YouTube has more than 2 billion monthly active users of age 15–35 years, who are also Millennials.

Reflecting on the example of EULAR, as an organization, EULAR has various audiences that are most engaged in different social media platforms, including Facebook and Twitter. Younger professionals in the field of rheumatology are also more well versed in newer platforms such as Instagram and LinkedIn. LinkedIn is especially important when they are building their careers, whereas Instagram is still perceived as a gallery of curated media assets to attract interest in various promotions or awareness-building campaigns.

By reviewing these results, it is easier to identify which platforms we should be using the most to reach our target audience. In the event your target audience is not actively using social media, what other communication channels would you be able to reach them? Perhaps, newsletters and even communication by post may help if necessary, but keep in mind your costs in the long term.

We mentioned earlier that both Facebook and Instagram no longer show the users content according to the timeline, therefore, identifying the days in which the users are most active would help increase your visibility and reach. However, do consider how much time you have to prepare your media asset(s), draft your copywrite, and schedule your posts. If you are joining conversations of key dates in your industry during world days and awareness days, when will you be able to start preparing for them?

A key day in rheumatology is the World Arthritis Day, wherein EULAR has various activities from the week leading to the day itself. Key stakeholder communities align with EULAR Advocacy, focusing on important themes such as work and pain. The Emerging EULAR Network (EMEUNET), a community for young rheumatologists and researchers, and the network of national organizations of people with arthritis/rheumatism (PARE) collaborated on a series of videos answering key questions from alternating perspectives. The community of health professionals in rheumatology (HPR) also collaborated with PARE on a Twitter Space broadcast, raising awareness. Across the communities, the efforts taken saw a significant increase in key performance indicators such as engagement and audience growth.

The next important section is identifying the team. In any project, everyone involved should know what they need to do to fulfill the brief and someone who will lead them to success. To be efficient and productive, the manager or coordinator must delegate tasks across assistants and/or service providers. The lead should have an overview of everyone's work to identify if there is wastefulness, unevenness, or overburden and should act quickly to sort the problem. The lead should

also ensure that branding is aligned because it is important that the organization's identity is present, whether it is in the tone of the copywrite or the standard graphical elements such as color themes and logos.

Budget is a consistent topic of discussion. Depending on the yearly amount allotted for expenses, consider what skills and talents you already have internally that can allow you to run your process without spending more. Any other important skill set unavailable internally should then be outsourced to a service provider. Do take your time in finding the right service provider. Transparency is very important, especially when you have a tight budget to manage.

### Design Your Own Social Media Marketing Mix

In your social media marketing mix, ensure that it is well rounded. It should cover four values, namely, sell, create, share, and play. In value sell, list the channels your target audience is able to access your content or take part in your events. Do you have a brick-and-mortar location where they can meet you in person? Do you have a website where they can login to access information? Do you have an app that allows them to register in your events or purchase content they find relevant or valuable?

It is also important to know how much value is created by identifying how high your brand awareness is. Are other organizations, influencers, and/or public figures talking about you on their websites, blogs, or social media profiles? Are you discussed or reviewed on news media and other informational websites? Identify the sources of those who are helping share your work to a wider audience.

Regarding the subject of sharing, value share is very simple to understand. You merely need to list the communication channels you are present on, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube, TikTok, Snapchat, Clubhouse, Spotify, Apple Podcast, and other. If you run a blog, then include that as well, as it is considered static content that your community may find relevant for a certain amount of time.

Value play can be tricky since it requires you to list interactive content, if you have any. We may not yet be at the stage of having a digital twin to practice techniques, nor is the Metaverse ready to support the medical field through immersed gamification. The least that could be part of your social media marketing mix is hosting games as a way of connecting with your community. It is not uncommon to host a pub quiz to meet and greet your members to become acquainted with them or challenge them to an academic escape room activity. Sometimes, adding an element of fun can improve your engagement and as the proverb goes, "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy."

### Continuous Improvement in Marketing

Because of how frequent platform updates occur, it is important to strive for incremental changes throughout your marketing year as opposed to waiting to make a major change. Continuous Improvement is a lean methodology in operations management. When applied in marketing, it supports achieving milestones, such that it emphasizes the need to deliver quality products/services and reduce waste. Continuous Improvement is associated with "Kaizen," a Japanese term for improvement without spending too much and involving everyone that is part of the process.<sup>[7]</sup> It is a process that is ongoing and never ending.

Ensure that you have established a standard process such as planning, producing, scheduling, publishing, evaluation, improvement, and repetition. The key is to review the performance of your campaign efforts. Identify which posts generated leads, and inspect which format(s) were published. You then have an idea on how to move forward knowing what format(s) captured the attention of your target audience and improve the format(s) of your upcoming posts and of those that underperformed, unless there is another reason why they underperformed to begin with.

Posts on social media have a short lifespan. Having static content on your website or on your YouTube channel will also drive more followers when they see the posts are also connected with other valuable information. This suggests that the audience has been in search of the information provided in these videos. Content that is continuously searched increases the search rankings of the content. You then have the possibility to repeat the promotion of the static content when appropriate.

Do not stray from your strategy and start paying for follows and engagements or joining engagement pods. You would be not only wasting time, but also hurting your own work as you are trying to reach many of whom have nothing to do with your industry that would follow through a call to action. Quality trumps quantity. If we do not give value to our audience, they would cease to listen to what we have to say regardless of its importance because the platforms will not continue to push our posts to the feeds of more users once it has been ignored by even our own existing followers.

The bottom line is that we are creating content that our target audience finds relevant and valuable. By not listening to our community, we would fail to deliver quality content or risk isolating them if we continue to publish only promotional content consistently. Take the time to think, plan, execute, review, and improve.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, there is no doubt that social media represents an important means for professional growth, not just at the individual level, but also at the organizational level. Having the

right mindset and carefully planning a fine-tuned strategy for development and marketing are crucial at the organizational level. Bridging gaps in communication, giving value to target audiences, and continuously reviewing and improving the “service” provided will only come with significant gain.

## Conflict of Interest

*None declared.*

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