To the Editor:

We applaud Fox et al1 and Circulation for designing a randomized trial of social media to study the potential impact of social media on journal reach. Similar to health care in general, journals themselves must adapt to a changing environment, and the use of social media and other emerging technologies will clearly alter this landscape.

Advocates of the use of social media in medicine and medical education have been quick to question the conclusions of this article and have used social media tools to comment on this article.2 Such discussions have led to this article itself having a much greater impact, as measured by altmetrics, than other articles in that issue of Circulation. Altmetrics evaluate how the article is used (viewed, discussed, saved, cited, or recommended) and by whom. Although journals and their publishers may be most interested in page views of individual articles, the discussion about this particular article within online social networks is just one demonstration that social media itself can extend the reach of any specific journal article. Ironically, this is the opposite of what the authors concluded. Another example is the Twitter #meded (“medical education”) chat,3 which featured this article in a 1-hour discussion on November 20, 2014.4

We feel that the use of social media extends beyond clicks on a journal Web site and has the potential for real engagement; how to measure that engagement is no easy task. As the authors suggested, more research should be done to demonstrate how social media can be used to improve a journal’s reach and ultimately might have the potential to improve health outcomes. Social media editors of medical journals might consider how to leverage social media to reach readers (which may include patients) beyond the traditional printed route.5 This adaptation is akin to medical education in which teachers should enhance their versatility in their teaching styles to interact with their learners “where they are.”

References

Letter by Djuricich and Madanick Regarding Article, "A Randomized Trial of Social Media From Circulation"

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The online version of this article, along with updated information and services, is located on the World Wide Web at:
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