

Medical Student Social Media Utilization in Today's Residency Application Process



Benjamin Wharton BA¹, Anthony Smyth BS¹, Nicholas Felan BS¹, Miranda Manfre BS¹, Daniel Stokes MD¹, Carson Keeter MS¹, Alex Johnson MD², Rachel M Frank MD¹

¹ University of Colorado School of Medicine, Department of Orthopedics, Aurora, CO

² St. Luke's University Health Network, Department of Orthopedics, Phillipsburg, NJ



Introduction

Social media (SM) use by Graduate Medical Education (GME) programs has been steadily growing for both education and recruitment purposes¹. In an environment where most adults, including medical students in the United States, consume some form of SM, it has become essential for residency programs to establish an SM presence^{2,3}. Despite residency programs using SM for recruitment and the high utilization of SM by medical students, no recent literature has discussed evidence-based strategies that residency programs should employ to attract medical student applicants.

In an effort to inform residency programs on best practices, this study works to evaluate what type of content is viewed as favorable or unfavorable by medical students in the current match process and recently matched first-year residents. This will allow residency programs to create material that both highlights their program's academic goals and appeals to their target audience.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to identify medical student perceptions of social media posts by residency programs and the influence SM has on application decisions. Additionally, this study worked to discern if these perceptions differ for students applying to the Match compared to those who have recently matched.

Methods

Using a five-point Likert scale, a survey was written to assess medical student perceptions of social media posts by residency programs. To create this survey, Instagram and X (formerly "Twitter") accounts of 20 residency programs were examined and posts were categorized by relevant content types. The survey was administered to the University of Colorado School of Medicine class of 2024 and the recently matched and graduated class of 2023 via an emailed link to each student. Students' responses were assessed for positive, neutral, or negative perceptions of varied SM content types, as well as meaningful statistical differences between classes.

Figure 1. Utilization of Social Media among Medical Students

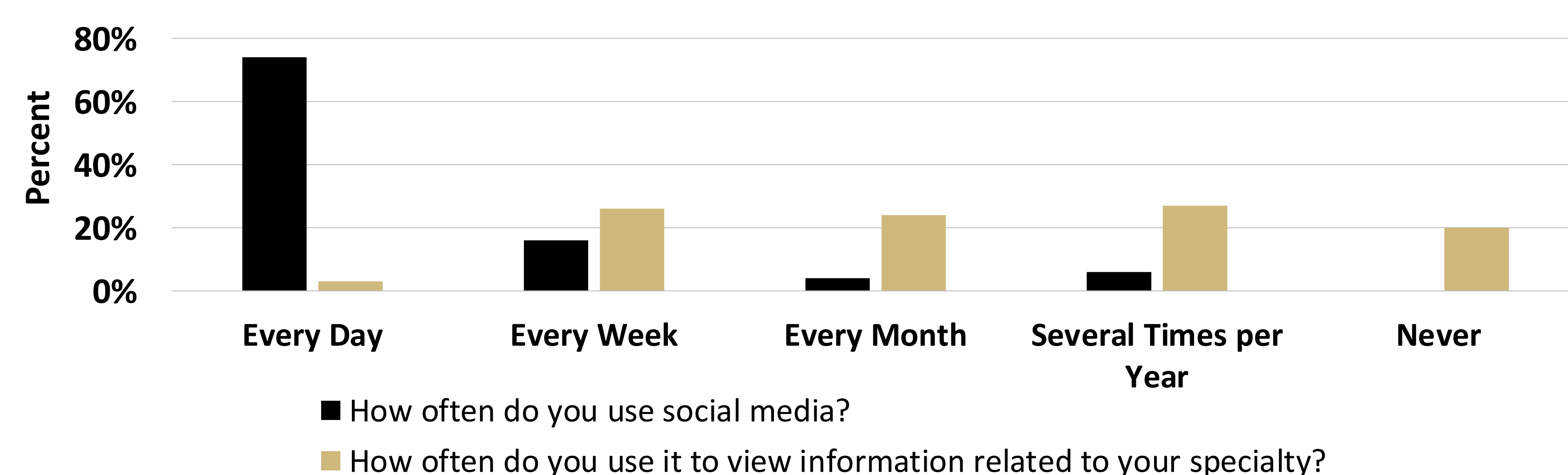


Figure 2. Influence of Social Media on Residency

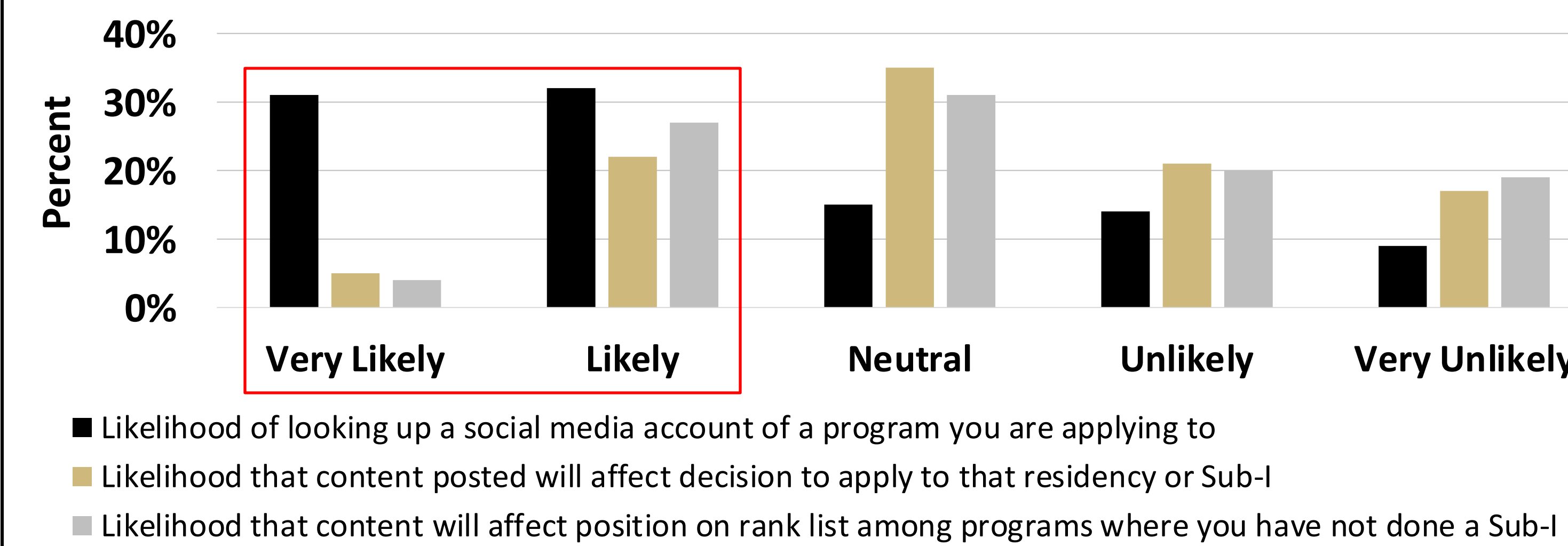


Figure 3. Agreeableness to Residencies Highlighting Aspects of the Evaluation Process

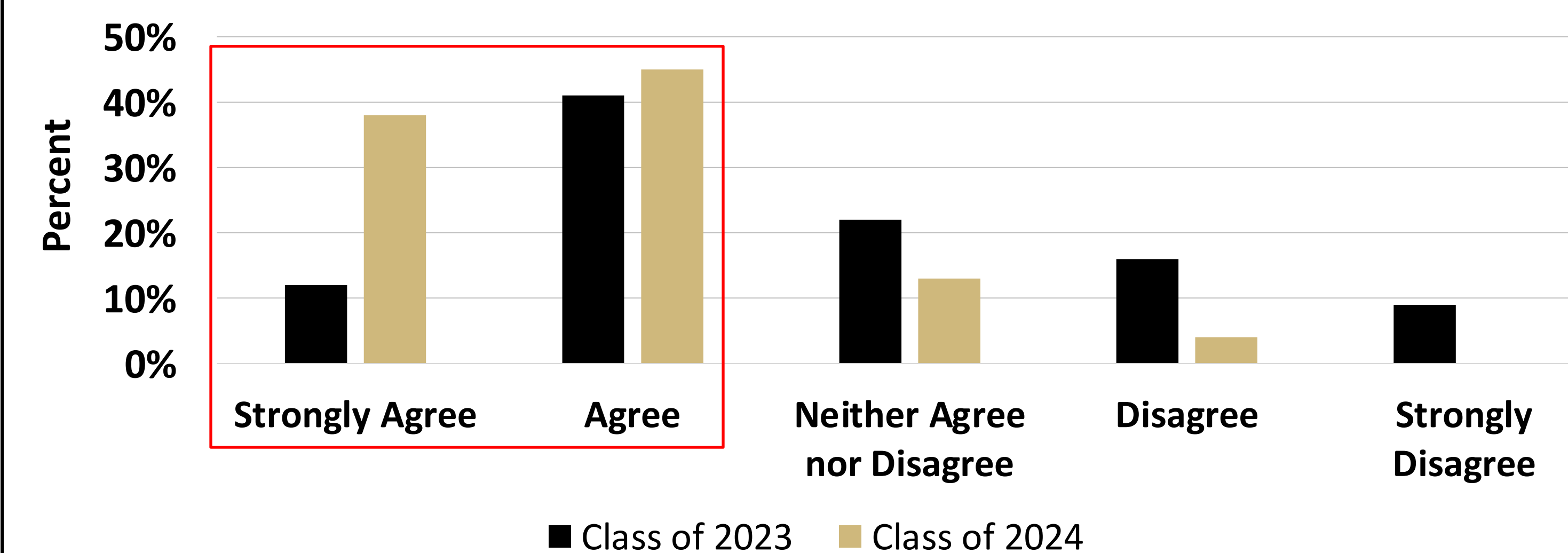


Table 2. Consistently Positive Resident-Based Posts

Residents' Personal Lives & Interests
Fun Activities for Residents
"Day in the Life" of Residents
Current / Former Resident Testimonies (median 4 – agree / IQR – 1)

Table 3. Consistently Positive Metric-Based Posts

Support & Compensation for Residents
Valued Aspects of the Evaluation Process
Application Stats for Current Residents
Support for Diversity/Marginalized Groups (median 3 – neither agree nor disagree / IQR – 1)

Table 4. Posts Favored by Class of 2024 (MS4)

Insights into Application Process
Statistics of Current Resident Classes
Clinical Techniques or Additional Education (each with IQR – 1)

Table 5. Posts Favored by Class of 2023 (PGY-1)

Specialty Choice - Specific Information (each with IQR – 1)
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Results

A total of 196 students started the survey, with 140 completing it. Overall, 90% of respondents endorsed SM use at least "every day" or "every week;" 80% reported using SM to seek or view information related to their specialty choice. Similarly, 66% of respondents used SM at least "several times" to view the accounts of specific residency programs. In 27% of the students, SM content posted by a residency program was "likely" or "very likely" to influence their decision to apply for an acting internship. A large number of followers was not important for 98% of students. Strongly positive posts included those that highlight (1) a "day in the life" of a resident, (2) current residents' lives, accomplishments, and interests, (3) fun activities organized for residents, and (4) the compensation and support provided by the program. SM posts describing the program's research involvement / accomplishments and political positions elicited polarizing responses. Recently matched students were more likely to view the accounts of residency programs ($p = 0.0295$) and posts containing information related to their specialty choice ($p = 0.0345$). Current fourth-year medical students were more likely to favor posts providing insights into the application process ($p < 0.01$) and the statistics of current resident classes ($p < 0.01$), as well as those that provided educational content and information on clinical technique ($p = 0.038$).

Discussion

This study aims to highlight the importance of a residency program's SM presence in attracting medical students. In an era where SM has become integral to daily life and continuously intertwined with academics, many medical students have turned to SM to get a feel for a program's culture^{4,5}. In our cohort, 80% of students said they use SM to view information related to their specialty, and 66% have used it specifically to look at residency programs. Residencies that wish to effectively engage with medical students should consider posting content that highlights residents' personal lives, fun class-wide activities, "day in the life" videos, and compensation. Additionally, posts outlining key components of the residency program's evaluation process may provide medical students with valuable insight into their competitiveness for specific programs as well as their cultural and academic fit. Further study is required to understand any differences between MD and DO medical schools nationwide, as well as strategies to engage with younger generations of medical students via other SM platforms.

Conclusion

SM is likely a valuable tool to help medical students interact with and learn about residency programs. Residency programs who wish to effectively interact with students should consider posting content viewed most positively, including those that highlight (1) a "day in the life" of a resident, (2) current residents' lives, accomplishments, and interests, (3) fun activities organized for residents, and (4) the compensation and support provided by the program. Content that is viewed less favorably should be posted sparingly.

References

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