

Assessing the Impact of Social Media on Practice Growth Among Plastic and Cosmetic Surgeons

Executive Summary

- Patient online research: Most plastic surgery patients seek information online. Surveys find ~75% of PRS patients use digital/social media for information, and social media use correlates with higher patient “empowerment” (knowledge, decision-making)[1]. Social platforms offer a forum-like community, helping patients feel connected and informed[2].
- Practice growth: Studies show that a strong social media presence reliably brings new patients. For example, social media marketing yielded a “relatively high return on investment” in a start-up plastic surgery practice[3]. By maintaining active profiles, surgeons expand their reach and drive consistent bookings (higher case volumes) compared to relying on traditional advertising alone[3].
- Consultation quality: Patients who research online are better prepared for consultation. They arrive with specific questions and treatment awareness, leading to more efficient, patient-centered consults[1][4]. In one study, social-media-using patients scored significantly higher on knowledge and questions during consultation[5]. Surgeons sharing expert content online also build patient trust[4], further improving the doctor-patient relationship.
- Efficiency and ROI: Compared to costly media (TV, radio, print), social media marketing is low-cost and highly targeted. Empirical data confirm social media is cost-efficient for patient acquisition[3]. A US study documented that social media campaigns delivered substantial revenue and free organic patient leads, helping practices save on traditional marketing time and expense[3].
- Professional reputation (legacy): A consistent, educational social-media presence builds a surgeon’s brand and thought-leadership. Reviews note that social media is a “critical tool” for *peer-to-peer education and professional outreach*[6]. By publishing case examples and insights on Instagram/TikTok, surgeons create a lasting portfolio of expertise visible to colleagues and future patients alike, enhancing their legacy.

Patients and the Digital Era

Plastic surgeons are witnessing a paradigm shift: patients increasingly choose and evaluate surgeons online. Surveys show most people research providers via websites, reviews, and social media before booking. For example, an ASPS study found about three-quarters of cosmetic/reconstructive surgery patients sought information online during their surgical journey[1]. Importantly, those who use social media had higher “empowerment” scores – indicating better knowledge, awareness of options, and engagement in decisions[1]. In practice, patients now arrive at clinics having already



viewed before/after photos and surgeon profiles online. This trend means a surgeon lacking an online presence risks being invisible to many prospective patients.

Social media also satisfies patients' desire for connection and community. Platforms like Instagram or dedicated forums allow patients to ask peers questions and see real-life experiences. The ASPS report describes social media as providing a "sense of community or connection," where patients learn from each other[2]. When surgeons engage on these platforms (e.g. by answering questions or posting educational content), they meet patient expectations for transparency and information. In short, an active social media presence meets patients on their terms, building trust even before consultation.

Practice Growth and Patient Volume

A robust online reputation directly supports consistent patient acquisition. Analogous marketing research (outside plastic surgery) shows social media often yields lower patient-acquisition cost than traditional ads[3]. In plastic surgery specifically, Gould & Nazarian (2018) tracked a new practice's one-year revenues by referral source. They concluded that social media delivered a "relatively high return on investment"[3], contributing significantly to overall case volume. In other words, each pound/dollar spent on social-media marketing brought back sizeable patient revenue.

By contrast, passive marketing (print ads, billboards) reaches fewer targeted leads. Informed use of Instagram/TikTok – often free to post or inexpensive to boost – amplifies reach. Surgeons who regularly post before-and-after photos, videos, or patient testimonials on social media build brand recognition that translates to steady bookings. In sum, practices with strong digital engagement report higher case volumes and more predictable scheduling.

Consultations: Better Outcomes through Informed Patients

Social media doesn't just fill the pipeline; it makes consultations more effective. Patients who have researched procedures online tend to ask more pertinent questions and understand options better. The ASPS study found social-media-using patients scored higher on knowledge and preparedness measures[1]. Specifically, these patients reported a greater "*decision to consult*" and asked more questions during visits[5]. Surgeons therefore spend less time educating basic facts and more time customizing the plan to patient needs.

Crucially, well-informed patients are more likely to arrive with realistic expectations and contribute meaningfully to shared decision-making. Kinney et al (2024) review confirmed that social media exposure correlates with patient empowerment and autonomy[4]. Physicians who proactively educate online (post procedure videos or educational infographics) find patients coming in with baseline knowledge, allowing deeper discussion of risks, alternatives, and nuances. This *pre-consult preparation*



saves time in the clinic and enhances patient satisfaction, as patients appreciate being treated as informed partners.

Marketing Efficiency and ROI

Allocating marketing resources effectively is vital. Several sources highlight social media's cost-effectiveness. The Aesthetic Surgery Journal describes social media campaigns as a high-ROI marketing tool for surgeons[3]. Because platforms allow highly targeted ads (e.g. to specific regions or interests) and viral sharing of posts, the cost per new patient can be very low. One example from digital marketing data: paid social ads often acquire a patient for less than £300, whereas traditional ads (TV/radio) can cost over £400 per lead[7].

Beyond advertising, organic growth matters: by consistently posting quality content, surgeons earn free exposure via shares and likes. This further reduces marketing spend. In practice, many plastic surgery practices report that inbound inquiries (often via Instagram direct message or clinic website after a social post) have replaced cold-calling and print referrals. The net effect is that fewer resources are wasted on broad outreach, and marketing budgets go further.

Building Professional Brand and Legacy

A well-curated social media presence contributes to a lasting professional legacy. In the past, a surgeon's legacy was built on published papers, lectures, and word-of-mouth. Today, Instagram and TikTok can augment this by showcasing expertise in real time. Shauly et al (2023) emphasize that social media is a "critical tool" for *peer-to-peer education and outreach*[6]. By sharing surgical technique videos, case studies, or commentary on the latest research, a surgeon becomes known among peers as a thought leader. Over years, this digital footprint – visible to both colleagues and prospective patients – cements a surgeon's reputation.

Moreover, public engagement on social media can enhance trust. The Frontiers study notes that when doctors post professional medical information online, patient trust and adherence improve[4]. For a plastic surgeon, being recognized as a reliable source of knowledge online ("expert-voice") pays dividends: patients will specifically seek out and recommend that surgeon. In effect, social media content functions as a living CV: a potential patient or trainee scrolling through Instagram can see dozens of cases and educational posts, highlighting the surgeon's skills. Thus, long-term social media engagement is an investment in career legacy – ensuring a surgeon's impact is remembered by both patients and the next generation of practitioners.

Platform Strategies: Instagram and TikTok

Figure: Age-specific social media marketing for plastic surgery (Shauly et al. 2023). Younger patients (~17–35) are most active on Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, whereas older patients (especially 50+) favor Facebook (and websites)[8][9].

Effective social media use depends on platform and audience. Surveyed trends show Instagram and TikTok dominate younger demographics. For example, Pew Research reports that in 2023, ~62% of US adults 18–29 use TikTok (vs. 78% for Instagram)[10]. Shauly et al (2023) recommend targeting ages 17–35 on Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok[8]. In practice, video-rich platforms (TikTok Reels, Instagram Stories/Reels) drive the most engagement for cosmetic content. Indeed, Patel et al (2025) found plastic surgery posts got significantly higher average likes/views on TikTok than on Instagram[11]. In contrast, patients over ~50 still rely on Facebook and Google.

For UK surgeons, this means prioritizing Instagram and TikTok as the first channels. Consistent, aesthetic before-and-after photos, short procedure videos, educational content and patient testimonials on these platforms meet modern patients where they look. Posts should be factual and transparent, to reinforce trust. For older patients or general practice, cross-posting select content in certain cases to Facebook ensures no demographic is missed[8]. In all cases, high-quality visuals (professional images and videos) are essential – these form the first impression for many patients scanning social feeds. By matching content to platform norms (e.g. brief educational Reels on TikTok, carousels on Instagram), surgeons can maximize impact.

Conclusion

In summary, evidence strongly supports an active social media strategy for plastic surgeons. Patients now begin their surgeon search online, and those who use social media are better informed and more engaged in their care[1][4]. Conversely, surgeons without a social presence are at a competitive disadvantage. A professional Instagram/TikTok profile – regularly updated with patient-friendly content – generates leads, enhances consultations, and pays ongoing dividends in reputation. By integrating social media into practice marketing, UK plastic surgeons can enjoy higher booking volumes, streamlined patient education, and a strengthened professional brand backed by data and peer-reviewed studies[3][6].

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