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Currents in Pharmacy Teaching and Learning 7 (2015) 804–810

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Research

Pharmacy students' attitudes about social media use at five schools of pharmacy

Maxwell Ian Weiler, PharmD^a, Catherine Dana Santanello, PhD^{a,*},
Diana Isaacs, PharmD^b, Ateequr Rahman, PhD^c, Edward Paul O'Donnell, PharmD^d,
Golden L. Peters, PharmD^e

^a Southern Illinois University Edwardsville School of Pharmacy, Edwardsville, IL

^b Chicago State University College of Pharmacy, Chicago, IL

^c College of Pharmacy, Rosalind Franklin University, North Chicago, IL

^d College of Pharmacy, Midwestern University, Downers Grove, IL

^e St. Louis College of Pharmacy, St. Louis, MO

Abstract

Objective: Several studies have examined the utility of using social media websites for educational purposes in pharmacy curricula; however, few studies have been published that examine students' independent use of social media websites inside the classroom. The purpose of this research was to examine the use of social media websites utilized by students at five pharmacy schools.

Methods: A 19-question survey was administered to students at five pharmacy schools in the Midwestern region of the United States. This survey contained four demographic questions [gender, age, year in school, and grade point average (GPA)] as well as 15-survey questions pertaining to students' use of and attitude toward social media websites. Data from the surveys were entered into a Microsoft Excel[®] spreadsheet for analysis.

Results: Over a four-month period, 948 surveys were completed by students and returned for analysis. Facebook[®] was among the most commonly used social media website, followed by Youtube[®]. There were 284 students (31.6% of all students who completed the survey) who reported that they use social media websites for longer than two hours each day. The average amount of time students reported spending on social media websites during a 50-minute class period was 9.3 minutes. Additionally, 99.5% of students reported observing other students using social media websites during class on a daily basis.

Conclusion: Self-reported use of social media websites inside and outside the classroom is high among pharmacy students. Discussion may be warranted among educators concerning the feasibility of deterring students from using social media websites in the classroom.

Published by Elsevier Inc.

Keywords: Social media; Distraction; Laptop use; Facebook

Introduction

Use of the internet has rapidly expanded over the last ten years. Between 2005 and 2013, internet usage has increased

more than 50% and 294% in developed and developing countries, respectively.¹ The term "social media" refers to tools utilized to share content and information digitally. Major activity themes within social media platforms include (1) creating a profile or community; (2) following or "friending" others, then being able to view their activity; (3) creating and/or sharing texts, photos, audio, or video; and (4) having the ability to vote or "like," share, tag, or comment on others' content.^{1,2} Social media can be divided

* Corresponding author: Catherine Santanello, PhD, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville School of Pharmacy, 220 University Park Drive, Edwardsville, IL 62026.

E-mail: csantan@siue.edu

into two types of applications: content-sharing applications (e.g., YouTube[®], Wikipedia[®], blogs, and Twitter[®]) and relationship-building applications (e.g., social networking websites such as Facebook[®]).¹

By mid-September 2012, Facebook was hosting one billion active monthly users, or 14.2% of the world's population.³ In 2012, Twitter users were sending 340 million tweets per day.³ Not surprisingly, social media has made its way into pharmacy education, either as a tool within a course or curriculum or as a way for students to communicate and stay connected with classmates. Students use social media during all times of the day, including class time.^{4,5}

In 2009, 87% of college students owned or leased laptops and/or portable electronic devices.³ The number of universities that have laptop leasing programs or require students to purchase a laptop continues to grow.⁶ This type of requirement increases access to technology in the classroom. However, this can serve as a significant distraction to students by facilitating unlimited access to websites that divert students' attention.⁷ One of the most common sources of distraction for students in the classroom is social media.¹ Social media websites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn[®]) are some of the most commonly visited websites for both college students and other young adults.⁸ A study that evaluated first-year pharmacy students' Facebook usage reported that approximately 88% of pharmacy students had a Facebook profile and 53% logged in to Facebook at least once per day.⁹ This was consistent with the general college population at the time of publication in 2009. Another study published in 2013 reported that 93% of graduating pharmacy students had at least one social media profile and 28% accessed it at least daily, with Facebook being the most common.¹⁰

A study conducted in the United Kingdom analyzed the usage and overall views of social media websites among pharmacy students.⁴ Most of the respondents (91.8%) reported using social media, with 98.6% of respondents indicating that they used Facebook and 33.7% used Twitter. Pharmacy students reported using social media between one and two hours per day. Respondents also reported the main reason for using social media was for personal reasons (98.0%) rather than for an educational or professional purpose.⁴ A study by Fox and Varadarajan⁵ implemented the use of Twitter in the classroom to encourage students' participation in certain lectures. Twitter was heavily utilized (>1800 tweets) and well received by the students in this course. Overall, 80% of the respondents indicated that Twitter facilitated classroom participation. The greatest complaints from students regarding the use of Twitter in the course were that it created a distraction from the learning environment (71%) and prevented note-taking (69%).⁵

A study published in 2013 by Clauson et al.¹¹ examined facets of social media use among first-year pharmacy students. This study of nearly 200 students found that the

majority of respondents use wikis, social networking websites, and video sharing websites. Most of the respondents in the Clauson et al.¹¹ study also believed that the integration of social media into the classroom would positively benefit their ability to learn. Many schools are incorporating Facebook into learning activities. One example is a study that utilized a Facebook group to expand on course content and access to outside experts.¹² Student feedback indicated that the majority of students appreciated using Facebook as an informal learning strategy.¹²

Many of the previous studies focused only on Facebook rather than all social media. Additionally, many identified pharmacy students' perceptions toward social media. However, there has been a lack of data related to the actual extent of pharmacy students' social media use (both inside and outside the classroom), why they use or do not use social media, and how their social media use may affect their ability to learn.

The purpose of the current study was to identify how often pharmacy students utilize social media websites, the purpose for using these websites, and where (e.g., during class, in the library, and at home) they use these websites. The data obtained from this study will help identify the need for tools and resources for classroom educators to respond to students' use of social media in an appropriate manner.

Materials and methods

This study was conducted as part of a capstone research project at the Southern Illinois University Edwardsville School of Pharmacy. Four additional regional colleges of pharmacy participated: St. Louis College of Pharmacy (StLCoP), Chicago State University (CSU) College of Pharmacy, Midwestern University (MWU) College of Pharmacy, and Rosalind Franklin University (RFU) College of Pharmacy. Characteristics of each individual college of pharmacy are listed in [Table 1](#).

A survey was developed and administered to students by the collaborating faculty member(s) within each pharmacy program. The survey consisted of four demographic questions, one question related to social media websites frequently visited, two questions that evaluated length of time spent on social media websites, two questions that determined the reason(s) for social media website use and possible deterrents from using social media websites during class, one question that explored perceptions of students' use of social media websites, and nine questions that looked to identify attitudes toward the respondent's own use of social media websites. Using responses based on a Likert scale, the students completed a self-administered questionnaire designed to test the research objectives. The full survey can be found in [Appendix A](#).

The questionnaire was assessed for flow and format of the various types of instruction and on the respondents'

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