

#Wasted: the intersection of substance use behaviors and social media in adolescents and young adults

Megan A Moreno^{1,2} and Jennifer M Whitehill³

Social media and mobile applications (apps) are popular among and frequently used by adolescents and young adults. These digital platforms allow access to content that is influential regarding substance use. Previous research on social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter have described best practices in social media research, documented the prevalence and types of substance use displayed on social media, determined associations between displayed content and offline behaviors, and highlighted potential for interventions. Research on substance use apps has been more limited and can be framed considering both the risk-protectiveness and connectedness of the app.

Addresses

¹ Seattle Children's Research Institute, C/W 8-6, PO Box 5371, Seattle, WA 98105, USA

² Department of Pediatrics, University of Washington, Seattle, WA, USA

³ Department of Health Promotion and Policy, University of Massachusetts Amherst, 715 N. Pleasant St, Rm 326, Amherst, MA 01003, USA

Corresponding author: Moreno, Megan A
(megan.moreno@seattlechildrens.org)

Current Opinion in Psychology 2016, 9:72–76

This review comes from a themed issue on **Social media and applications to health behavior**

Edited by **Melissa A Lewis** and **Clayton Neighbors**

For a complete overview see the [Issue](#) and the [Editorial](#)

Available online 8th December 2015

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2015.10.022>

2352-250X/© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Introduction

Social media is often defined as “forms of electronic communication through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, messages and other content” [1]. Social media is nearly ubiquitously used and frequently accessed by adolescents and young adults [2,3]. Approximately a quarter of adolescents describe themselves as ‘constantly connected’ to the internet [2]. Social media includes social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, which are accessible via web-browsers or dedicated mobile applications (apps), as well as other apps that maintain the unique features of social media; these formats are diverse and yet share many similar features. In most cases, a social media user creates

an account, links to a network of other individual users or groups, and uses the site or app to share content with and access information from other users [4]. This multi-directional and user-generated communication about content differentiates social media from traditional mass media, traditional video games, and from the earlier days of the internet when websites generally provided content in a one-directional manner [5]. Adolescents and young adults represent a key population for substance use prevention and harm-reduction efforts; the prevalence of use is high and substance use is associated with the major causes of morbidity and mortality [6–9]. Thus, understanding the challenges and opportunities provided by social media related to substance use in this population is important.

Social media influence on substance use behaviors

For young people, social media is a source of exposure to peer behavior that is associated with substance use in the offline world [10,11]. Social media may influence teens via a classic health behavior theory framework and a classic media theory framework. First, social learning theory describes that adolescents learn both by direct experience as well as by observation of peers [12,13]. This observation may include seeing substance use behaviors modeled on social media. For example, an adolescent may see Facebook posts related to peer marijuana behaviors and be influenced to try marijuana. Second, the Media Practice Model describes that adolescents choose and interact with media based on who they, or who they want to be, in that moment [14]. This model suggests that media users can explore information or display content based on experiences or behaviors they are considering, which may lead to reinforcement or advancement of these ideas. Thus, an adolescent who views a movie clip posted on Twitter depicting drinking at a party may be influenced to partake in such a party in the future.

Social media and substance use research

The majority of research focused on social media and substance use has focused on alcohol and marijuana. For this review, we will focus on the two social media sites Facebook and Twitter on which the majority of substance use studies have taken place. We will also provide an overview of the landscape of substance use related mobile applications and related research.

Social media sites: Facebook and Twitter

Studies of social media such as Facebook and Twitter related to substance use have focused on several key

areas. First, there are studies focused on the feasibility and accessibility of using social media for research. These include studies that illustrate how to develop content analysis methods for use on social media applying existing theoretical or clinical guidelines [15,16]. Research methods studies also include papers that describe key ethical considerations when conducting research on social media, such as maintaining participant privacy when reporting data such as tweets or photographs by avoiding copy/paste of data into manuscripts [17–21]. Some papers have focused on adolescent and young adults' views on acceptability of using social media research methods, and generally found these methods to be acceptable to this population [22,23].

A second area of study is observation of social media data to understand displayed content. These studies include observation of individual's substance use related posts on Facebook; such studies have often found that displayed substance use behaviors on social media are common and are often consistent with patterns reported in offline survey research [24,25]. These social media observation approaches can also be used over time to evaluate the emergence of substance use references and predictors of which young adults will display these references and when [26]. Another social media observation approach has been to use Twitter applying 'big data' approaches to understand larger scale epidemiologic trends in marijuana displays [27–29] and alcohol displays [30]. These approaches are of interest given that methods often parallel efforts on Twitter to track infectious diseases or other health concerns using these big data approaches [31–33].

A third area of study is to determine associations between substance use displays on social media and self-reported substance use. Studies have illustrated positive associations between displayed references to alcohol on Facebook and problem alcohol behaviors [34,35], as well as a connection between displayed Facebook alcohol references and recent binge drinking behaviors [36]. This study approach has also been applied to understand displayed alcohol content at an alcohol-themed event and its association with attendance and drinking patterns at that event [37].

A fourth area of study is to understand the influence of social media on substance use behaviors. One study conducted focus groups with younger teens who reported that they felt alcohol depictions on social media were influential to younger teens, regardless of whether these depictions represented real behaviors [38]. Another study showed adolescents fake Facebook profiles, either with or without alcohol references on the profile. Adolescents who viewed profiles with alcohol references present reported increased intention to try alcohol [39]. Finally, the Facebook Influence Model describes ways in which

social media sites such as Facebook may influence teens, the model includes 13 clusters, clusters include 'influence on identity', 'connection to people' and 'social norms' [40].

A final area of study is use of social media for interventions to reduce substance use. Studies have explored key concepts in intervention development, such as feasibility of approaches [41,42] and communication preferences [43]. One study evaluated social media use during an alcohol event and found that social media use was common, investigators concluded that social media could be used for future intervention approaches at alcohol-themed events to promote services such as safe rides [44]. One study used social media to deliver a message about displayed content, they found that the message influenced adolescents to remove sexual content but not substance use content [45].

Mobile applications

Mobile devices, including smartphones and tablets, are ubiquitous in the United States and many other nations, and highly integrated with users' lives and behavior [2]. The published literature on mobile applications (apps) related to substance use is scant, but growing. 95% of mobile phones worldwide utilize either Apple's iOS or Google's Android platform [46]; thus, the two primary methods for downloading apps, and the focus of most research in this area, are the Apple's iTunes and the Google Play store. Researchers have documented hundreds of publically available, downloadable, alcohol-related smartphone apps [47] available via iTunes and Google Play. Apps related to marijuana use are prevalent within these two marketplaces, but publication of research on marijuana-related apps is limited to a single 2015 pilot study of one app in development; findings indicated the app had potential to reduce cannabis use among veterans [48].

The stated purpose and features of substance-related apps varies tremendously. Crane and colleagues [49] used the search terms 'alcohol' and 'drink' in the English-language version of iTunes and the Google Play store and analyzed the first 200 results for each term and store. They found 662 unique apps with approximately 14% dedicated to alcohol reduction, 54% entertainment (e.g. drinking games, bar finders, mixology apps), 19% blood alcohol content (BAC) measurement, and 14% other apps [49].

We consider apps on two primary, intersecting axes—*risk-protection* and *connectedness* (Figure 1). Risk-protection refers to an app's potential to reduce an individual's risk of using substances or experiencing negative substance-related outcomes. On the two sides of this spectrum are apps that encourage substance use (risk-promotion) and those that disseminate evidence based substance use prevention strategies (risk-protection). For example, a high risk-promoting app would be *Marijuana Recipes* &

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/879335>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/879335>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)