

# Use of Social Web and Perceptions of Professional Behaviours Regarding Social Web Postings among Physiotherapy Students

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## Abstract

**BACKGROUND:** Social media websites which facilitate exchange of user-generated content has enormous potential in health care which allows Physiotherapists to post educational information for patients also to share ideas as it acts as a great source of information for research and learning. **OBJECTIVE:** To survey students enrolled in professional physical therapy programs regarding their use of social web and perceptions of professional behaviors regarding social web postings. **MATERIALS AND METHODS:** A non-experimental observational type of study has been done with 100 Physiotherapy students of three different years and were selected according to the selection criteria. The survey instrument was provided to participate in the study addressing students use of social web. **RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS** Students are unaware about the social media policy and its importance. Students should learn about the privacy concern and professional boundaries. There is a need for social media policies and education regarding the proper use of social media

**Key words:** Social media policy, Digital professionalism, privacy concern, Health care providers,

## Introduction

Social media is used as the means of communication for general population as it acts as a great platform for patient engagement<sup>1</sup> and creates opportunities for creativity and innovation for Physiotherapy program.<sup>3,12</sup> The use of social web is more prevalent among all age groups and professions and this have been connected to health care professionals. They are also provided with tools for sharing information on medico legal aspects of health and on promoting health behaviors.<sup>2</sup> Since social web plays a vital role in providing health information to the community Specific attention is required to address the gap between Physiotherapist and patient in health care delivery service.<sup>2,3</sup>

Although Social media plays abundant role in health care development and patient engagement, on the contrary

it could also possess possible legal, ethical and licensing issues due to its inappropriate use.<sup>3,12</sup> New professionals becoming familiar with the professional health care environment may be particularly vulnerable to this sort of ethical issues.<sup>3</sup> To avoid such circumstances students must be provided with the knowledge social media policy and what is appropriate/ inappropriate to post on social media.<sup>4</sup> **Gragnon** and **Sabus** suggested that developing digital professionalism among Physiotherapy students may result in improving the quality of treatment care and patient welfare.<sup>3,11</sup>

Physiotherapists are intended to work with patients quite more often than the general physicians. At times there may arise conflicts of interests between patient and the Therapist in providing best treatment due to difference of opinion of patients on treatment techniques.<sup>5</sup> To overcome such scenario Physiotherapists must provide quality treatment respecting the patient's privacy concerns. Provided with the social media policy still queries remain on how to maintain professional boundaries with patients while using social media.<sup>6</sup>

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Studies shows that seeking information about patient through online is actually helpful in knowing the truth and also in gathering more information on patient’s condition.<sup>7</sup> This information seeking could get affected by intruding privacy concern of patient and unclear ethical dilemmas regarding professional boundaries. It also prevents its users from benefitting through social web interaction.<sup>8</sup>

Health care professionals using social web sites must focus on their responsibilities as their postings on the wall could reflect their professionalism.<sup>9</sup> The adoption of Digital professionalism and discussion on social media policy may be the best method to teach students on the appropriate use of social media. However proper data on the physiotherapist students use of social media and its postings is required to implement such discussion forum. Hence this study aimed to survey students regarding their use of social media, social media postings, their judgements about behaviors of others using social media and their own rating of privacy concerns.

**Materials and Methods**

**Participants:** This study surveyed Undergraduate Internship and first and second year Post Graduate Physiotherapy students. The survey instrument was distributed to all the three-year students (N=100) of both the genders who were volunteered to complete the survey. It was limited to particular group based on their clinical exposure and practical experiences of duration of minimum 6 months.

The survey instrument used in this study was similar to the Instrument used in the other published studies<sup>3</sup> enquires about Familiarity with their professional program and its social media policy, personal use of social media. Also enquires about posting habits, rating of behaviors according to their perception, acceptable use of social media and privacy concerns relating to various scenarios. The focus of this study was aimed at the students’ knowledge of social media policy, rating of acceptable behaviors of other people’s posts to social media site and rating of level of privacy concern to various scenarios which is applicable to their clinical practice.

**Data Analysis**

The statistics were calculated using the SPSS

20 software. Descriptive statistics were made on the participants gender, year of program and age. The frequency and percentage of each response under category were calculated and tabulated.

**RESULTS:**

**PARTICIPANTS:** This study surveyed Physiotherapy students of about 100 in total. Among which 57 participants are from Undergraduate Internship, 19 from Post Graduate first year and 24 from Under Graduate second year which included 50 male and 50 female participants. When asked about their professional program’s social media policy 74% of the respondents did not know about it. 79% did not know if their sites were being monitored by their professional program but almost 70% of the respondents thought that employers would monitor their social media sites as a screening tool prior to their employment.

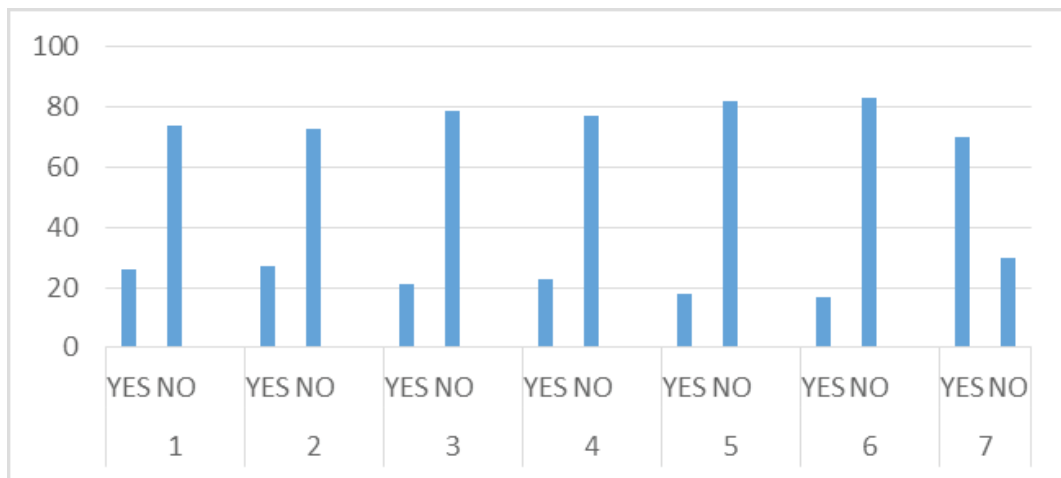
**TABLE 1- Demographic characteristic of the participants**

Characteristic	N
Gender	
Male participants	50
Female participants	50
Year of study	
Internship	57
PG year1	19
PG year2	24
Age group	
20-22	50
23-25	46
>26 years	4

**Social Media Policy:**

When investigated about whether their institution had social media policy, 74% of the respondents did not know about it, 82% responded that they did not read about the social media policy in their institution and 79%

of respondents mentioned that their professional program did not monitor students' social media sites. The numbers 1,2 ...7 represents the questions asked regarding social media policy.



**GRAPH 1- Knowledge of social media policy**

**Social Media Behaviors:**

**TABLE2- percentage of students posted or shared pictures on social media**

	YES	NO
Partially or fully nude	0	100
Smoking	5	95
Holding an alcoholic beverage	3	97
At parties	17	83
Kissing a person of the same gender	13	87
Kissing a person of the opposite gender	4	96
While intoxicated	5	95
During sexual activity	2	98
Using obscene gestures	3	97
With a patient	11	89
During physical therapy classroom activities	23	77
During physical therapy laboratory activities	21	79

**TABLE 3- Rating of students according to their beliefs regarding others’ posts to social media sites**

	Acceptable n(%)	Not acceptable n(%)	Neutral n(%)
A Photograph of someone holding an alcoholic beverage	18	51	31
A Photograph of someone who is intoxicated	11	68	21
A photograph that is sexually explicit	10	82	8
A comment containing profanity	6	85	9
A comment containing discriminatory language	4	91	5
Disparaging remarks about one’s institution	8	81	11
Disparaging remarks about faculty	10	79	11
Disparaging remarks about one’s health profession	7	89	4
A description of a patient encounter	10	74	16

**TABLE 4- Responses of participants indicating awareness of classmates engaging in negative behaviors**

	YES	NO
Posting information that violates patient confidentiality	15	85
Posting examination questions online	19	81
Ridiculing or making fun of another classmate	38	62
Ridiculing or making fun of a faculty member	30	70
Posting pictures that you feel reflect unprofessional behaviour	20	80

**Social Media Usage**

**TABLE 5- Rating of students according to their beliefs regarding the acceptable use of social web**

	Acceptable	Not acceptable	Neutral
<b>Look up patients</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>22</b>
Communicate with patients	70	5	25
Send a friend request to a current faculty member	54	21	25

**Cont... TABLE 5- Rating of students according to their beliefs regarding the acceptable use of social web**

Send a friend request to a former faculty member	53	23	24
Send a friend request to a current patient	30	51	19
Send a friend request to a former patient	31	48	21
Send a friend request to a current student in your class	71	15	14
Accept a friend request from a current student in your class	76	12	12
Use a fake identity	6	86	8
Conduct an internet search on people with whom you work(stalking)	22	46	32
Conduct an internet search on classmates	32	39	29
Conduct an internet search on a patient with whom you are working	26	47	27
Conduct an internet search for a patient with whom you have worked	23	46	31
Conduct an internet search of faculty in your professional program	37	26	37
Conduct an internet search of potential future employers	42	25	33
Conduct an internet search of potential future colleagues	37	27	36

### Level of Privacy Concern:

Over 30% of Respondents thought that Posting pictures and videos of a de-identified patient is not a privacy concern. 40% don't know that it is wrong to enquire about his patient's progression through a third person. 31% reads an email with de-identified information and 19% had no concern about it. 53% thought it is definitely a privacy concern to share a picture of a patient with a pressure sore with his classmates. 38% of respondents thought that it is not a concern to post a picture of himself/herself with the patients.

### Discussion

Social media acts as a communication tool between the patient and the Therapist for patient engagement.<sup>2</sup> The unprofessional content of students in their social

websites can reduce their own dignity which in turn reduces confidence of patients towards Therapist.<sup>4</sup>

Health care professionals skips communication through online due to the ethical dilemmas arising related to patients' privacy concern and posting of inappropriate contents in social media.<sup>14</sup> Digital Professionalism is an indeed method to teach Physiotherapy students regarding social media policy and instruct them on appropriate use of social web sites. Adopting such measures might reduce the chances of ethical dilemmas faced especially by the New professionals.<sup>3</sup>

Although all the Physical therapy programs have social media policy most of the students did not about its existence and did not read the policy even if they are aware about it. This information suggest that the educational

institution must focus on the social media policies and make sure about its awareness among the students. Since implementation of Digital Professionalism is much more important way in reducing the rates of legal and ethical issues the Physiotherapy educators must support its development.<sup>3,6</sup>

Students are found to have difference of opinion on what to be posted and what not through online. This could be due to the lack of knowledge and awareness of social media policy. Students response regarding posting of pictures on social web sites shows majority of participants did not have such experiences whereas few others are found to have posting pictures of classroom and lab activities, with a patient, kissing a person of same gender which is completely depicting their personal activities which has not be addressed in the social web sites. Some behaviors in one's personal life (harassing, abusing) might have legal impacts on their professional life.<sup>10</sup>

When the subjects were asked to answer according to their beliefs, few answered that it is acceptable to pass on a comment containing profanity or discriminatory language and few felt acceptable for disparaging remarks about faculty. The appropriateness of social media contents posted by the students might not be felt accepted by others.<sup>4,8</sup> So if they have a feel that their social media sites has been monitored by their institution it has to be ensured by the students regarding the appropriateness of contents. **Adam G. Pizzuti et al., (2020)** concluded that studies are needed to analyse the utilization of social media platforms efficiently for better healthcare related education.<sup>15</sup>

Students are often unaware that their unprofessional behaviors in the social media sites can have an influence on their Professional life particularly when it comes to violating the rules of Indian Association of Physiotherapy and World Confederation for Physical Therapy. When questions were asked regarding privacy concerns, over 20% of the participants responded that it is not a privacy concern to share the pictures or video of a patient in the social web sites. 38% felt not a privacy concern to post the pictures with the permission of his patient. Over 40% did not know that it is not a privacy concern to enquire the progression of a patient and thinks not a privacy to share information regarding his patient to their friends.

**Carlos DeLas Heras- Pedrosa et al., (2020)** concluded that patients expect hospitals to identify their problems and interact regarding health care conversation as patient engagement is still lacking in this digital world of communication.<sup>16</sup> The rapid development of social media has replaced face to face interaction. It enhances communication by creating a comfortable environment for patients in order to interact for treatment purposes.<sup>17</sup>

Students must be taught with the social media policy and its importance and they should be reminded that their own perceptions of appropriate of social web postings might not be the same as compared with their patients, faculties and employers. Posting pictures of patients without their consent should be prevented. The proper use of social media by Health care professionals must take the following points into consideration- Be informed, Think before your post something in social web sites, Protect your Professionalism and reputation.<sup>18</sup> Class Discussion and workshops on Digital professionalism appears to be the best method of understanding implications, positives and negatives of using social websites.<sup>3</sup>

## Conclusion

Students are unaware about the social media policy and its importance. The perception of students regarding social web postings might not be the same as others and this has to be reminded. Students should learn about the privacy concern and professional boundaries. There is a need for social media policies and education regarding the proper use of social media.

## Limitations and Recommendations

The number of participants surveyed in this study is limited. Students were included from various three years of programs having differences in their practical experience. Almost half of the participants are from the Internship the practical experience of Interns is comparatively less than the Post graduates. So future studies can be concentrated on the selective year of program.

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