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Social Networking Experiences on Facebook pertaining to Accountability and E-Professionalism: A future perspective

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ABSTRACT

The present study was planned to investigate students' Facebook activity and opinions regarding accountability and e-professionalism. A cross sectional study was conducted from Oct'2013 till Jan'2014. The study population includes the students enrolled in MBBS, BDS and Pharm.D program belonging to different institutes of Karachi. Descriptive statistics were determined to illustrate participant's characteristics and their response to the questionnaire items, following a presentation regarding potential e-professionalism issues with Facebook. Logistic regression model was used to evaluate the association of gender, institute and bachelor program of students with their response. It revealed that 84.2% of the students were aware of the privacy settings available in Face book and 81.8% uses them to limit public access to their information. Male students belonging to private sector are more likely aware of privacy settings available in Facebook. It is necessitating for young generation to be more aware of online professionalism for gearing up their careers as healthcare providers.

Keywords: Facebook activity, e-professionalism, accountability, Pakistan

INTRODUCTION

The 21st century continues to steer in technological progresses that transform the nature of socialization, communication and public versus private information[1]. Social networking websites (SNWs) have become a trendy virtual assembling place that allows consumers to willingly post their individual information, communicate through messages, or share photos, videos, blogs, private messages and join groups. It is a routine practice , prevailing very commonly that the people spends their qualitative time on social networking websites such as You Tube, Facebook, Google+, LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, Hi5 etc. Users have explored a variety of features for facilitating socialization through SNWs. These ''relationship facilitators'' allows individuals to remain in relatively close social contact with others through the use of these web sites [1-7]. SNWs popularity has grown exponentially among university students [7, 8]. The SNW that has experienced the maximum growth and prolonging to be the most widely used globally is Facebook.

Mark Zuckerberg, a sophomore at Harvard University was the originator of Face book. In February 2004; the site was created with the aim of providing a platform to the Harvard community with students' directory and ID pictures. An untimely response was observed when two-thirds students in Harvard posted their pictures and information on the site only in two weeks [9]. Initially use of the site was limited to those with .edu email addresses; however, it has now been made available to everyone[10]. Face

book is highly interactive virtual network because of distinctive features. "The site's authenticated network structure" is the most attractive feature among all [11] . It is used mostly to unite, relate and continue in touch with contacts that the user knows personally including friends, family and colleagues. People can generate their own profiles, write on each other's walls and share their desired images and videos [9, 12, 13]. Face book has profoundly changed the nature of communication, especially among the millennial generation (born after 1980), also considered as digital natives [14] . Online social networking services offer several advantages which can be very helpful for the betterment of the whole community like students can raise serious professional issues [1] . Young pre-professionals, medical students and residents communicate and share their information with peers via personalized online profiles. By flaunting information in these mediated public sites, students can potentially depict private information to an unfamiliar public [15]. Unfortunately, medical students and residents , during their under graduation and training period have no idea that their publicly available content directly reflects their professionalism[16]. Research on medical student's use of SNWs tends to suggest that students do not alter their default privacy settings and therefore, their Facebook accounts are accessible to the public. Research proposes a need for students in the professions to be more sentient regarding the probable consequences of making information perceptible and accessible to the public, and to be more professional online[17]. There exist a conflict between how Facebook was intended to be used and how it may actually be used by some for insight into the member's character, judgment, and professionalism [16, 18, 19]. Privacy is one of the most worrying problems for the Facebook users, which flickered strict debate in recent times. The privacy disclosure may bring hassles to its users, which may lead to detrimental consequences[20]. These relatively new issues are evolving because of the changing paradigm and need to be dealt effectively through educating the medical, dental and pharmacy students about e-professionalism[16, 18].

For this purpose, Facebook accessibility, proficiency and accountability should be analyzed, which is the main objective of this study. Being an educationalist, it is our liability to provide training and skills for our students to be triumphant in the future workplace. There have been very few studies from South Asia especially Pakistan exploring such interesting findings [21]. Furthermore, these studies did not target on dental and pharmacy students. Therefore, the present study was planned to investigate Pakistani

medical, dental and pharmacy students' Facebook usage, accountability and professionalism.

MATERIAL AND METHOD:
Study design, period and population: A cross sectional study was conducted for the period of four months, from Oct'2013 till Jan'2014. The study population includes the students enrolled in MBBS, BDS and Pharm.D program belonging to different private and public sector institutes of Karachi. Participation in the study was voluntary and identity of each participant was anonymous.

Data collection: A previously validated questionnaire used in another research [22] was adopted and distributed among students. The questionnaire addressed issues related to Facebook usage, accountability, privacy settings, online image, information provided and e-professionalism standards. The students were asked to have Facebook account or not and those who did not have an existing Facebook profile were directed to leave the remaining questions unanswered. Participants were requested to answer the questionnaire on spot and were subsequently collected after completion for further analysis. After completing the questionnaire, the students received a 15-minutes power point presentation on e-professionalism at each respective institution. The presentation accentuates how negligent behavior in one's personal life has the potential to affect professional reputation, and that students should carefully consider the type of information they reveal through online and social network settings. Following the presentation, those with existing Facebook profiles were administered supplementary questions concerning probable changes they would make in their Facebook behavior based upon what they learned from the presentation.

Data analysis: The filled questionnaires were entered into Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 20.0) for analysis. Descriptive statistics were determined to illustrate participant's characteristics and their response to the questionnaire items. Logistic regression model was applied to evaluate the association of gender, institute and bachelor program of students with their response. A p value < 0.05 was considered as significant.

Ethical issues: The study was conducted in different private and public sector institutes after taking verbal approval from each institution's head of the department. Demographic and responses of the students collected during the present study were kept confidential and only being used for this research

paper. Students were briefed about the purpose of the study prior to conduct the research.

RESULTS

The present study comprises of four hundred and twenty four students belonging to different private and public sector institutes of Karachi. Participating students were MBBS (34.7%), BDS (25.9%) and Pharm D (39.4%) students. Two third of the respondents were females (Table 1). It is revealed that majority of the students 78 % had a Facebook account. Near about 75% logged on Facebook on daily basis. Most students 89% have their Facebook account listed under their real name. Majority of the students did not share their personal information including date of birth, contact details, views and photographs etc.

Responses to the questionnaire items exploring the accountability of face book activities are recorded in Table 2. It revealed that 84.2% of the students were aware of the privacy settings available in Face book and 81.8% uses the privacy settings available in Face book to limit public access to their information. More than 60% of the respondents felt that photos, postings, comments and other information posted on Face book affect people's opinion of them as a professional healthcare provider. More than 50% of the students agreed that they should be accountable for an illegal act discovered through Face book postings. 13.9% and 17% of the respondents did not have ever provided any information (photos, message, joined a group etc) for a patient or Faculty member to view respectively. More than 70% believed that the profile information should not be considered when making a hiring decision in employment. Nearly 64% of the students did not consider that online image presented through Facebook accurately present who they are as a future professional. More than 45% considered that they should be accountable for unprofessional behavior discovered through Facebook postings. Only 34.9% of the students want to develop friendship with Faculty members using Facebook. In response to the questions concerning their future online information posting behavior after the e-professionalism presentation, 39.4% indicated that they already took the necessary precautions with their profile and therefore, did not plan to change their posting behavior. Whereas around 60% agreed to make some changes in their future posting and profile information. A logistic regression model revealed significant differences in how male and female students belonging to public and private institutes responded to the accountability questions. Male

students were more likely aware of privacy settings available on Facebook (p= 0.031) and to develop friendship with Faculty members (p < 0.0001). Public college students were less likely aware of privacy settings (p=0.021) and considered themselves less likely to be accountable for unprofessional behavior discovered through Facebook posting (p=0.042). Private sector MBBS students considered more likely that photos posting comments and other information posted on Facebook affect their opinion as a healthcare provider (p = 0.035) and were more likely to develop friendship with Faculty members (p= 0.009). Pharmacy students were more likely to be accountable for an illegal act discovered through Face book postings as compared to dental students (p < 0.0001) , considered that the online image they presented through Facebook accurately present who they are as a future professional (p=0.028) and as a person (p< 0.0001). Pharmacy students were more likely to develop friendship with Faculty member as compared to both medical and dental students (p< 0.0001). Dental students have more likely provided any information (photos, message, joined a group etc) that they do not want a Faculty member (p=0.001) or patient (p=0.033) to view as compared to pharmacy students.

DISCUSSION

The millennial generation is growing up online and leaving a digital footprints [23]. These digital paw marks may include information and activities that individuals would not explicitly share as professionals [24]. Nearly 54% of the students agreed that they should be accountable for an illegal act discovered through Face book postings. More than 45% of student considered to be accountable for unprofessional behavior discovered through Facebook postings. The results indicates the Pakistani student considered themselves accountable to a lesser extent as compared to the study conducted by Prescott et al in 2012[25]. Both the general medical and the medical education literature emphasized the Professionalism as the subject of much recent discussion [26-28]. Most researchers agreed on the centrality of professionalism to sustain the public's trust in the medical profession [26]. Majority of the respondents felt that photos, postings, comments and other information posted on Face book affect people's opinion of them as a professional healthcare provider and did not consider the online image presented through Facebook accurately present who they are as a future professional. This is in compliance with the study carried out by Cain [22] , the students whose online profile did not reflect who they were as a future professional were less likely to

the use of Facebook information for hiring decisions. There have also been reports of doctors being declined for positions due to information employers have found on Facebook [29]. These studies also put forward a necessitate regarding more education to e-professionalism, and the impact images and information placed on SNWs such as Facebook can have on their professional reputation and identity. It is also suggested that generating unprofessional content online can portray negatively on a profession itself [30]. Several studies have been reported regarding the area of student doctors' use of SNWs, that concludes a need for clearer guidelines about online professional behavior [1, 30]. Cain[1] puts forward the notion of e-professionalism and emphasized on educating students on the issues related to social networking and its impact on their future careers as professionals. Pharmacy organizations are progressively using more social networking sites with the aim of improving both communication and the dissemination of information [31].

Our results reflected positive attitude among the students as they started to make the information about them less available to the public. Majority of the students were aware of the privacy settings available in Face book and applied them as well to limit public access to their information. These results are comparable to result of study conducted by Prescott *et al* (2012) that showed 92% student awareness and 85% student claimed to use privacy setting to limit public access to their information on Facebook [25]. Previous studies have shown that many students who use Facebook have been found to show little concern about privacy despite of the knowledge regarding privacy settings available [32]. Majority believed that the profile information should not be

considered when making a hiring decision in employment. It reflects that some students considered Facebook a part of their personal lives and therefore should be separated from their professional lives. It emphasized clearly that students need to be more aware that information made publically online via SNWs such as Facebook could impact on their careers [25]. Public and private information boundaries become less apparent, the criteria for judging one's professional image becomes more ambiguous, especially with regard to attitudes and behaviors displayed to patients. Thus, the current advice given to students about the maintenance of professional boundaries, already a challenging area for students, may need to be adapted [33, 34].

CONCLUSION

Majority of the imminent healthcare providers uses social networking sites like Facebook that offers new venues for them to express themselves and to interact with one another. Social networking sites permit to construct profiles and connect in activities that reflect identity markers. It is recommended to integrate student's competency of computer skills, in their medical and health education, as a tool to excel in their academic and professional career. It is necessitating for young generation to be more aware of online professionalism for gearing up their careers as healthcare providers.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST:
Author declares no conflict of interest.

Table 1: Characteristics of study population

Characteristics	Number (Percentages)
Gender	
Male	107 (25.2%)
Female	317(74.8%)
Bachelor program	
Medical	147(34.7%)
Dental	110 (25.9%)
Pharmacy	167(39.4%)
Institute	
Private	138 (32.5%)
Public sector	286 (67.5%)

Table 2:Students'responses exploring the accountability of face book activities

Opinion	Yes	No
Should a student be accountable for an illegal act discovered through Face book postings	221(52.1)	203(47.9)
Should a student be accountable for unprofessional behavior discovered through Facebook postings	193(45.5)	231(54.5)
Should the profile information be considered when making a hiring decision in employment	113(26.7)	311(73.3)
Are you aware of the privacy settings available in Facebook	357(84.2)	67(15.8)
Do you use the privacy settings available in Facebook to limit public access to your information	347(81.8)	77(18.2)
Does the image you present online through Facebook accurately present who you are as a person	227(53.5)	197(46.5)
Does the image you present online through Facebook accurately present who you are as a future professional	154(36.3)	270(63.7)
Do you feel that photos, postings, comments and other information posted on Facebook affect people's opinion of you as a professional healthcare provider	258(60.8)	166(39.2)
Have you ever provided any information (photos, message, joined a group etc) that you do not want a potential employer to view	89(21.0)	335(79.0)
Have you ever provided any information (photos, message, joined a group etc) that you do not want a Faculty member to view	72(17.0)	352(83.0)
Have you ever provided any information (photos, message, joined a group etc) that you do not want a patient to view	59(13.9)	365(86.1)
Should professional students be held to higher standards than other regarding the image, they portray on Facebook	150(35.4)	274(64.6)
Do you want a Faculty member to use Facebook to friend you	148(34.9)	276(65.1)

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