"How to Connect the Two": Social Media in Field Education

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Abstract

Social media use is growing rapidly among the general public. This study examined social media use patterns among field instructors and explored the benefits and barriers of using social media in field education. Data were collected through a cross-sectional survey with close- and open-ended questions. A total of 153 field instructors participated. The results showed that the majority of field instructors have not used social media in field education. They also identified advantages and challenges of social media use in field education. Future research should further explore how social media can be used to strengthen the field education effort.

Keywords: social media; social networking; field education; social work education; student supervision

Introduction

The rapid surge in the use of social media and other technologies has changed how people communicate and obtain information. This trend is impacting social work education (Boddy & Dominelli, 2017; Fang, Mishna, Zhang, Van Wert, & Bogo, 2014; Sitter & Curnew, 2016; Turner, Bennison, Megele, & Fenge, 2016). Social media refers

to user-generated, internet-based technologies and platforms intended for social interactions (Eckler, Worsowicz, & Rayburn, 2010; Kind, Greysen, & Chretien, 2011; O'Keeffe, Clarke-Pearson, & Council on Communications and Media, 2011) and is popular among the general population and particularly among young people. As a ubiquitous, virtual milieu, social media allows communications to be instantaneous and multi-directional, which is radically different from traditional forms of communication (Mazer, Murphy, & Simonds, 2007). According to Smith and Anderson (2018) with the *Pew Research Center*, the most popular forms of social media reported include YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, WhatsApp, Pinterest, and LinkedIn, with 73% of Americans using more than one of these eight platforms. Among users aged 18 to 29, any form of social media use is reported at 88%, 78% among those aged 30 to 49, 64% for those aged 50 to 64, and 37% for those aged 65 or older (Smith & Anderson, 2018).

Literature has documented the potential for incorporating social media use into direct social work practice (Blaschke, Freddolino, & Mullen, 2009; Dombo, Kays, & Weller, 2014; Eamon, Wu, Moroney, & Cundari, 2013; Masson, Balfe, Hackett, & Phillips, 2013; Mishna, Bogo, & Sawyer, 2015; Perron, Taylor, Glass, & Margerum-Leys, 2010; Siibak, Forsman, & Hernwall, 2012; Zelnick, 2011) and in disseminating information and services (Nah & Saxton, 2013; Svensson, Mahoney, & Hambrick, 2015). Furthermore, social media can promote client engagement and access to services (Dombo et al., 2014; Masson et al., 2013; Mishna, Bogo, Root, Sawyer, & Khoury-Kassabri, 2012), reaching geographically diverse communities that may lack services and facilitating the productive use of technology by emerging users (Ali, 2011). In a scoping review by Chan (2016), social media has been documented to assist in ensuring intervention fidelity (Sage, 2014; Schoech, Boyas, Black, & Elias-Lambert, 2013) and service quality in social work. Social media is also used in macro-level social work through the promotion of advocacy and social change (Edwards & Hoefer, 2010; Guo & Saxton, 2014; Powell, Garrow, Woodford, & Perron, 2013; Sitter & Curnew, 2016), the increase of community-building (Cain, 2008; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012), and the revitalizing of fundraisers and volunteering endeavors for organizations (Ilten, 2015; Saxton & Wang, 2014).

Social media has the potential to increase student engagement and provide students with an enriched academic experience (Welch & Bonnan-White, 2012); allow for international collaborations with communities of practice (Cronin, Cochrane, & Gordon, 2016; King, Greidanus, Carbonaro, Drummond, & Patterson, 2009); enable the sharing of content, ideas, and knowledge (Casey, 2013); and facilitate further interactions between instructors and students in promoting more analytical and

reflexive learning experiences as well as enable students to rehearse practical skills (Hollinderbäumer, Hartz, & Ückert, 2013). Social media has been reported to support student learning and collaboration (George & Dellasega, 2011); provide opportunities for observation, debriefing, rehearsing practical skills, and student assessment through videoconferencing for field supervision (Panos, Panos, Cox, Roby, & Matheson, 2002); promote analytical and reflexive learning experiences and deepen overall learning (Friesen & Lowe, 2012; Hollinderbäumer et al., 2013).

Despite the benefits of incorporating social media in curriculum development, literature concerning social media use by trainees of helping professions has underscored the challenges and dangers due to social media misuse. Such challenges are often related to professionalism and ethics, including unprofessional behavior on publicly accessible social media outlets by students, privacy and confidentiality breaches, and client-provider boundary violations (Cain, 2008; Chretien, Goldman, Beckman, & Kind, 2010; Fang et al., 2014; Farnan et al., 2009; Greysen, Kind, & Chretien, 2010; Kreuger & Stretch, 2000; Reamer, 2013; Thompson et al., 2008). Notably, most of the literature comprises expert opinions. To the authors' knowledge, no empirical study has examined the use of social media in field education.

An integral part of social work education with regard to the practicing of skills and knowledge in a structured setting, field education provides opportunities for students to practice with clients and to observe and debrief with experienced practitioners. Despite the increasing popularity of social media use among many client populations (Chou, Hunt, Folkers, & Augustson, 2011; Gibbons, 2011; Lober & Flowers, 2011; O'Keeffe et al., 2011) and the availability of professional guidelines (Canadian Association of Social Workers, 2014; National Association of Social Workers, 2017) and tool kits for field educators (Curington, Hitchcock, & Carroll, 2018), there is scant research that examines the use of social media in social work education, including field education. As information and communication technologies continue to advance rapidly, students in the process of becoming social work professionals likely encounter situations involving social media use during their studies and field practice. As such, it is important to understand whether and how social media is used in field education. To this end, this exploratory study had two aims. First, the study explored social media use prevalence, preferences, and patterns among field instructors. Specifically, the authors sought to understand field instructors' use of social media in general and in field instruction. Second, the study identified the benefits and barriers of using social media in field education.

Methods

A cross-sectional survey design was used. An online survey that consisted of both close- and open-ended questions was distributed through a listserv of 547 field instructors in the Greater Toronto Area in Canada. Between April and October 2016, a total of 153 field instructors consented to take the survey and responded to the questions pertaining to social media use (28.0% initial response rate) and 139 completed the study in its entirety and provided their demographic information at the end (25.4% final response rate). At the end of this survey, participants were invited to enter a drawing to win one of twenty $15 gift cards. If they wished to do so, they were redirected to a different webpage so that their contact information would not be linked to their survey responses. The study was approved by the university's research ethics review board.

Measures

The survey was developed after the authors consulted the social media survey conducted by the *Pew Research Center* (Lenhart, 2015) and literature on social media in higher education (Kennedy, Judd, Dalgarno, & Waycott, 2010; Thinyane, 2010). The authors pilot tested the survey with a small sample and refined the survey based on user feedback. Participants were asked to indicate their use of social media in general and as part of practicum teaching through the close-ended questions. In addition, they were asked to describe the barriers and facilitators of using social media in field education through the open-ended questions. Finally, they answered demographic and background questions.

    General use of social media. Three questions were used to assess participants' general use of social media. After reading the statement, "Social media involves the use of any information and communication technologies for social interaction, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Tumblr, Pinterest, or LinkedIn," participants were asked one question, "Have you ever used social media?" (0 = No; 1 = Yes). Participants who stated that they have used social media were then directed to answer two questions. The first question, "Below is a list of commonly used social media platforms. Please indicate how often you use any of these platforms," concerned the frequency of their use of 11 different platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Youtube, LinkedIn, Snapchat, Vine, Tumblr, Pinterest, ResearchGate, and Academia. edu. The second question, "How often do you use social media to make connections with…?" asked participants to indicate the frequency of their use of social media with current friends, past friends, family members, students, work colleagues, social work

faculty members, and other professional networks. Both questions used a 5-point Likert scale (1 = never to 5 = always). For the purpose of the analysis, we dichotomized the responses (0 = never used, 1 = ever used).

   Use of social media in field education. Participants were asked about their use of the 11 social media platforms on five sets of matrix questions. These questions concerned the field instructors' use of social media: 1) as a support network among field education students (i.e., "How often do you use the following social media platforms as a support network among students in the field?"); 2) in field instruction (i.e., "How often has each of the following social media platforms been used in your field instruction"); 3) as field assignments (i.e., "How often has each of the following social media platforms been used as part of field practicum assignment?"); 4) to facilitate the field instructor's own learning and capacity as a field instructor (i.e., "How often do you use each of the following social media platforms to facilitate your learning or skill-set as a field instructor?"); and 5) to gain knowledge on an issue that emerged from field placement (i.e., "How often do you use each of the following social media platforms to gain knowledge regarding an issue, such as concerns or questions from practicum students, to help inform your field instruction?"). All questions were on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = never to 5 = always). For the purpose of the analysis, we also dichotomized the responses (0 = never used, 1 = ever used).

   Demographic and background information. Participants provided information on their age, gender, ethnicity, geographic area of field practice, type of practice, length of time as a field instructor, and number of students supervised.

   Barriers and facilitators for field education. On three open-ended questions participants were asked what they noticed as: 1) an issue/barrier, 2) an advantage, and 3) ethical challenges in their professional or educational use of social media.

Analysis

Descriptive analysis was used to analyze the close-ended questions with SPSS 24.0. Cross-tabulations were used to assess whether field instructors' use of social media differed by the participants' demographic and background characteristics. Thematic analysis was used to codify the qualitative responses to the three open-ended questions by the study principal investigator and a research assistant.

Results

Seen in Table 1, among the 139 field instructors who completed the survey and provided demographic information, the majority identified themselves as female (86.3%), aged 30 to 34 (23.7%) or 35 to 39 (18.0%), and White (72.2%). Most of the respondents practiced in an urban setting (80.6%) and the vast majority provided direct practice (92.4%). While more than half of the respondents had supervised students for less than 3 years (35.3%) or between 3 and 6 years (27.3%), over 25% of the field instructors surveyed had supervised students for more than 9 years. The majority of the field instructors had supervised 5 or fewer students (58.3%), followed by those who had supervised 6-10 students (23%), 11-15 students (9.4%), and 16-20 students (3.6%).

General Social Media Use

Table 2 shows the general use of social media by field instructors. Out of 153 participants who responded to the social media use questions, an overwhelming majority of the study participants (94.1%) indicated that they had used some form of social media. The most popular social media platforms used by participants were YouTube (89.5%), Facebook (82.4%), Pinterest (57.5%), LinkedIn (55.6%), Instagram (49.7%), and Twitter (42.8%). Over 90% of participants reported they used social media with their current friends, followed by use with family members (86.3%), past friends (85.6%), work colleagues (72.5%), and other professional networks (54.9%). Bivariate analysis between demographic variables and general social media use suggests that field instructors in the younger age group have more general use of social media than those who are in the older age groups (e.g., 23.7% in the 30-34 age group and 17.3% in the 35-39 group compared to 7.9% in the 50-54 age group and 5.8% in the 55-59 age group; $p < .01$). The general use of social media did not differ by all other demographic variables collected in the study.

Use of Social Media in Field Instruction

Less than a quarter of field instructors (22.9%) stated that they had ever used social media with students. Shown in Table 3, 22.2% used social media in field instruction, 21.6% used social media as a student support network, and 20.3% used social media as part of a field assignment. YouTube appears to be a relatively popular platform (range from 13.7% to 17.0%) for these uses.

Field instructors also used social media to enhance their own learning. Over 60% of field instructors have used social media to facilitate their own learning in relation to field instruction, and 46.4% used social media to learn about a question or concern raised by their students. While YouTube remains the most popular platform (35.9% to 45.8%), field instructors have also used other platforms such as Facebook (23.5% to 34.0%), LinkedIn (15.7% to 24.8%), and Twitter (11.8%) for their learning purposes.

The authors also conducted bivariate analysis between field instructors' background information and whether they ever used social media in their field instruction or their learning as field instructors. The authors did not find any difference between the respondents' demographic and background information and their social media use in relation to field instruction.

Results of Open-Ended Questions

The survey asked participants to identify the advantages as well as the issues or barriers in their professional or educational use of social media. In addition, participants were asked to identify the ethical challenges that they experienced in using social media as field instructors. Due to thematic overlap in responses, we have combined the data on ethical challenges and barriers into an overarching discussion of the challenges of professional or educational social media use. Analysis of these responses resulted in several major themes (see Table 4). Among the advantages of social media use were: connecting with others, information sharing and knowledge dissemination, learning enhancement, and accessibility. The challenges of social media use included: information reliability, confidentiality and privacy, unprofessionalism and inappropriateness, blurring boundaries, lack of training, and organization policy and guidelines.

   Advantages of social media use. Participants cited several advantages of social media use in a professional or educational context. Many field instructors reported that *connecting with others*, whether colleagues or community partners, was one of the main benefits of social media use. Respondents specified that they used social media to network and to maintain professional or personal contact with colleagues. For example, two participants wrote:

   An advantage is definitely being able to connect with others in my industry. (Respondent #133)

> *In my setting (which focuses largely on community development, stakeholder engagement, and research) social media provides another method of finding out information and connecting with community partners.* (Respondent #24)

Besides offering a venue for professional networking, social media platforms provide a way to connect with clients. For example, one field instructor identified Facebook as a platform that allows them to reconnect with clients when all other contact is lost:

> *I do have a work Facebook account which can be helpful in contacting clients to ensure they are safe (the moms I work with often "disappear" after their baby is born).* (Respondent #94)

Some participants suggested that due to social media's ability to facilitate a "less structured" way of connecting (as phrased by Respondent #171) and communicating with others and the widespread use of social media as a preferred means of communication, it might be especially useful for connecting to younger generations. Some field instructors even stated that the prevalent use of social media among students is an advantage in itself. Participants wrote:

> *Most people use social media so it may be a good way to connect with people, especially the millennial generation that appears to prefer social media platforms over other methods of communication.* (Respondent #23)

> *[Social media includes] interesting, engaging forms of communication, a meaningful way to connect young adults and adolescents because platforms like Vine, Instagram, Snapchat etc. are heavily relied upon communication tools.* (Respondent #66)

Another advantage emerging from the survey included *information sharing and knowledge dissemination,* with a number of respondents citing social media's value for spreading information and resources among colleagues, students, and clients. For instance, two field instructors wrote:

> *Social media is a quick and easy way to share information that has a far-reach.* (Respondent #23)

> *[Social media] helps to keep me more informed of resources that I share with students and colleagues alike.* (Respondent #103)

Other participants noted that social media presents a particularly convenient medium for transmitting knowledge. As one respondent observed, "it democratizes access to information, and it makes it eas[y] and share-able" (Respondent #63). Another participant wrote that social media facilitates information exchange "in a way that is familiar and relevant for students and clients" (Respondent #45).

In addition, participants indicated that *learning enhancement* is another benefit of social media use for professional and educational purposes, as social media provides access to additional training and enables users to seek out online educational opportunities. Multiple field instructors identified specific platforms or formats, such as YouTube or TED talk videos, as particularly helpful learning and teaching supplements:

> *I do find YouTube videos can be very helpful in conveying a complex idea quickly and often compellingly. I have used them for my own learning, with my student in supervision, as well as with clients on occasion.* (Respondent #138)

> *There are a lot of good articles and materials disseminated online through Twitter, Facebook, or Pinterest. There are some great instructional videos for different therapeutic approaches that can be found online (particularly on YouTube).* (Respondent #118)

> *In terms of field education, I have found some interesting ways to do reflection in supervision with my practicum students using Pinterest ideas.* (Respondent #77)

A number of participants also reported *accessibility* as another benefit of social media. Specifically, respondents cited the speed, efficiency, and ease of use of social media, as well as its ability to expedite access to publications, resources, and diverse perspectives. For example, one participant listed:

> *[...] broad input from people/places I might not ordinarily access, ability to access a range of info quickly, exposure to ideas or streams of information that lead to unexpected interest/knowledge acquisition.* (Respondent #73)

Challenges of social media use in field education. Although the majority of field instructors reported various advantages of social media use in professional or educational contexts, a small number of participants expressed uncertainty about its benefits. A few respondents stated that there are no advantages to social media, and one participant remarked on social media's tendency to distract the user, writing:

I'm having a hard time picturing how it would be used other than as a fluff, distraction type project. (Respondent #126)

Similarly, another participant was doubtful about the value of social media, considering the potentially negative impacts of social media use on concentration and focus as well as its implications for research process, responding:

But I sometimes wonder whether the advantage outweighs the negative impact of social media on people's ability to focus on tasks, be mentally present, and appreciate the "old school" research methods rather than relying on Twitter and Google for much of their knowledge. (Respondent #24)

A few field instructors suggested *reliability* as another challenge, noting that material disseminated through social media often lacks verifiable and credible sources and is not upheld to academic standards of intellectual rigor and reliability. One participant articulated this distinction:

[...] the information being posted is informational, in some respects, for purposes of understanding where society is and what they are "liking" and/or "sharing." But the lack of peer reviewed articles and the level to which people tend to accept and respect the information shared in blog posts and opinion editorials and such is greatly concerning to me. (Respondent #57)

Participants also reported a variety of ethical and practical challenges that impeded the implementation of social media in professional and educational settings. Issues around *confidentiality and privacy* emerged as one of the main barriers to social media use among field instructors. As one participant wrote, "Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed on social media" (Respondent #61). Several participants stressed the high risk of error of disclosing confidential information, especially with regard to students' use of social media. For example, a participant described how easily a breach of confidentiality can occur and explained that, for this reason, they discourage the use of social media in a practicum environment:

Patient confidentiality and professionalism are not conducive to using social media. As a FI, I do not encourage use of social media in this practicum. I require students to connect with me face-to-face or by email or phone. The risk of result of errors is to[o] serious to use social media [...] it's too big a risk to use social media. My professional reputation is also on the line in being a FI and I would not offer a practicum placement if a student were incorporating use of social media in their practicum. I also know of volunteers being

audited for use of social media - blogging about their own experiences and inadvertently violating patient confidentiality - it can be a reputation/career killer. Just not worth it. (Respondent #156)

Unprofessionalism and inappropriateness were another challenge of using social media in an institutional setting. Participants noted that social media is not favorably perceived and is regarded as inappropriate for interacting with students or clients. A number of respondents also related unprofessionalism to the failure to retain boundaries between personal and professional communication. For instance, one participant commented:

Social media has the stigma of being unprofessional. It crosses from the professional world into the personal world. So, it feels unprofessional to be used with students or with certain colleagues. (Respondent #23)

Another frequently reported challenge of social media use was the potential for *blurring boundaries*. Many participants expressed the view that professional and personal identities should remain separate, and that the exposure of one's personal life through social media may lead to issues in the workplace. For instance, one field instructor commented:

I strictly do not use social media in relation to work, including using/opening social media websites at work. Unless there are completely separate profiles and accounts for professional use and personal use, I think the boundaries are too blurred and would create problems. (Respondent #126)

Although participants acknowledged that maintaining boundaries poses a challenge to professional or educational use of social media, some noted the existence of social media platforms intended for professional use, such as LinkedIn. These participants specifically noted the distinction between acceptable social media platforms, such as YouTube and LinkedIn, and unacceptable forms of social media intended for casual interpersonal communication, such as Facebook or Instagram. For example, one participant stated:

Social media is not regarded as a secure method of communication and is sometimes regarded as unprofessional by members of the health care team. [...] Different personal and professional boundaries are held across different social media platforms. Just as I would not share the details of my weekend with a student, I would not share the details of my personal Facebook page. I would network on LinkedIn, however, where my professional identity and more professional boundaries are kept. Using social media that

has a professional focus (such as LinkedIn) is a more acceptable form of communication and networking. (Respondent #74)

With regard to practical challenges, *lack of training* was cited as a common barrier to incorporating social media in the professional or educational context. Field instructors communicated an interest in using social media as a tool but reported a lack of sufficient knowledge to support its implementation. Several participants wrote:

I myself am not sure how to integrate it into practice. I was not trained on it professionally, and my personal use of social media is limited. (Respondent #131)

The organization I work for is not as advanced with social media. Our education department is starting to slowly use more social media applications to further education. The resources available at the organization are a barrier. Not all clinicians feel comfortable with using social media. I also need to expand my knowledge in how I can use social media as an education tool as a supervisor. (Respondent #120)

Finally, some participants reported *organization policy and guidelines* as a barrier to professional or educational use of social media. For example, one participant wrote: "I do not use social media in my professional role. Our hospital has very strict email rules and I bet they would apply to the use of social media" (Respondent #114). Participants further indicated a need for clear professional guidelines so that the benefits of social media for students and clients can be realized appropriately. One participant wrote:

I think we need clear professional guidelines on how to use social media in our professional lives both with colleuges [sic], students, and clients. Many of these applications are new (ish) and it would be helpful for either the college or our employers to help develop guidelines. What I think is a shame is that social media is here, our students and clients use apps, however we are not encouraged to think about how to connect the two. (Respondent #56)

Discussion

A popular form of technology, social media has transformed how individuals communicate, relate and interact, form relationships, and participate in a wide range of activities, and social media has the potential to advance professional education (Friesen & Lowe, 2012; Giordano & Giordano, 2011; Hanson, 2011). The study results show that while the vast majority of field instructors do use social media for personal

reasons, their uptake of using social media in field education is relatively low, with approximately 60% of field instructors using social media to gain knowledge in relation to field education and slightly over 20% using social media with their students. Although younger field instructors use social media in their personal life more than those who are older, the use of social media in field education does not differ by any of the field instructors' reported demographic or practice backgrounds.

As the functions of social media platforms vary, this study's data provides information as to how social media is used by supervisors in field education. YouTube is the most popular platform in the study. Responses from the open-ended questions suggest that field instructors are more receptive to this video-content sharing community as it allows the field instructors and students to learn specific practice techniques. Other platforms such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter were also used in field education, although to a lesser extent. Qualitative results show that aside from LinkedIn, which is a professional social network that field instructors do not appear to have issues with, field instructors have mixed reactions towards other platforms, especially Facebook, due to ethical concerns. The authors should also note that the two academic social media sites, ResearchGate and Academia.edu, were barely used by field educators and were not mentioned in any qualitative comments. Such findings suggest that these academic platforms may have limited reach beyond the research community. Research knowledge shared on these platforms has not yet become relevant to field educators.

Consistent with past studies that highlight the benefits of social media in higher education (Giordano & Giordano, 2011; Hanson, 2011; Nah & Saxton, 2013; Svensson et al., 2015), qualitative responses suggest that field instructors also value social media in its ability to promote networking and accessibility to information. In addition, social media can help field instructors and their students to engage with client populations that may be hard to reach through traditional forms of communication. Notably, while some field instructors discuss using social media in supervisions or student reflections or using social media to share information with students, most of the accounts from field instructors speak to the potential of social media in social work practice in general, rather than field education itself. In this study, some field educators reported that they integrated social media and field instruction in creative ways such us working with students to use Pinterest to record reflections in supervision. Past literature also indicates that innovative use of social media in field placements and practice can emerge from a collaboration between supervisors and students (Hitchcock, 2014). It is possible that field instructors can use social media to communicate with students, to enhance networking opportunities for students, and to disseminate practicum-related knowledge and information to students. Field

instructors can also teach students and demonstrate advocacy using social media. Given these possibilities, further research needs to unpack how the functions of social media can be further realized in social work and in field education.

Despite some endorsement of the advantages of social media, many field instructors have concerns about using such technology in field education. The main concerns are related to professionalism and ethics, including privacy and confidentiality breaches and boundary violations, issues that were shared by previous studies concerning social media use by trainees of helping professions (Boddy & Dominelli, 2017; Cain, 2008; Chretien et al., 2010; Farnan et al., 2009; Greysen et al., 2010; Kreuger & Stretch, 2000; Reamer, 2013). Indeed, the very features that make social media unique – persistence, searchability, replicability and invisible audience (boyd, 2007) – from other forms of interaction inevitably engender the ethical challenges for social workers to contend using social media, let alone incorporating it into field education. More guidelines by either scholars (Boddy & Dominelli, 2017; Reamer, 2013) or professional associations (Canadian Association of Social Workers, 2014; National Association of Social Workers, 2017) have recently become available for social workers on the use of social media and other information and communication technologies, and they suggest that social workers should be aware of their involvement with social media and the possible implications of such use on their professional practice. Based on the study findings, it appears that field instructors are cognizant of ethical issues associated with the use of social media, and as a result, many of them do not use or do not see the value of social media in field education.

Field instructors' lack of interest and the ethical challenges in relation to social media, however, may do little to prepare students with the knowledge and skills to navigate the digital space in their professional development, particularly given that the use of social media is prevalent in the general public and continues to rise. While some field instructors recognized the potential benefits and expressed a desire to incorporate social media into field education, they indicated a lack of training and knowledge being a major barrier. The authors argue that the blanket, "just say no" approach may be insufficient. Field instructors need to be versed with both the pitfalls and possibilities of social media use in field education, and to know when, how, and what to use, and whom to use with. Field education departments can play a critical role in facilitating training and providing guidelines for both students and field educators to keep them informed with the current state of practice. For example, field education seminars and workshops tailored for field instructors can incorporate discussion on the use of social media. Field education departments should also identify, promote, and showcase innovative use of social media in field instruction and supervision.

Moreover, during site visits and conversations with field educators, field liaisons can proactively engage with students and field instructors about the use of social media and other technologies in field.

The study has several limitations. First, given that the sample was relatively small and was recruited from the Greater Toronto Area, the generalizability of study findings is compromised. Second, given that study participants were recruited from a listserv, it is possible that only field instructors who were already interested in social media responded to the survey, and as a result, they were over-represented in the sample. Third, although the study was exploratory in nature and did not involve hypothesis testing, the cross-sectional survey design does not offer the opportunity to assess the use of social media by field instructors over time. Fourth, while the authors received many insightful responses to the open-ended questions, the cross-sectional survey design does not allow us to further unpack comments from field instructors. Lastly, students were not surveyed. The insight from students is imperative to the development of responsive social work pedagogy. In order to understand how social media can be integrated into field education, and how social media may contribute to shifting norms and practices within social work, it is critical to obtain nuanced and balanced perspectives from both field instructors and students.

Conclusion

Social work education has dual functions in not only educating students, but also socializing practitioners into the profession (Duncan-Daston, Hunter-Sloan, & Fullmer, 2013). Many of today's social work students have grown up with the internet and may rely on technologies such as social media as a primary communication tool. The features of social media, together with its rapidly increasing prevalence, can considerably impact the teaching and learning environment of field education. This study provides some initial evidence of the current state of social media use by field instructors. Future research should seek to understand the student perspective to further assess how social media or other forms of information and communication technology can be used to enhance student learning in field education. In addition, future investigations should examine the role of other relevant stakeholders or resources, such as the university, field liaisons, or field seminars, in educating students and field instructors on the use of social media. Efforts should also be made to assist instructors to be familiar with the fast-growing, ever-expanding social media platforms, and to discern those that may benefit field education. Such knowledge will be imperative as we the younger generation is prepared to enter the social work profession and move the profession forward.

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Table 1: Demographic and Background Information of Study Participants (*N*=139)

Age	*n (%)*
25–29	16 (11.5)
30–34	33 (23.7)
35–39	25 (18.0)
40–44	19 (13.7)
45–49	12 (8.6)
50–54	13 (9.4)
55–59	10 (7.2)
60+	11 (7.9)
Gender	
Female	120 (86.3)
Male	15 (10.8)
Other	4 (2.9)
Ethnicity	
White	109 (72.2)
South Asian (East Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan)	8 (5.3)
Chinese	7 (4.6)
Filipino	1 (0.7)
Aboriginal, First Nations (North American Indian), Métis or Inuk (Inuit)	3 (2.0)
Black	3 (2.0)
Latin American	3 (2.0)
Arab	1 (0.7)
Korean	1 (0.7)
Other	7 (4.6)
Prefer not to specify	3 (2.0)
Geographical Area of Practice Location	
Urban	112 (80.6)
Suburban	25 (16.3)
Rural	2 (1.3)
Type of Practice	
Direct practice	122 (92.4)
Indirect practice	10 (7.6)
Length of Supervision	
Less than 3 years	49 (35.3)
3–6 years	38 (27.3)
6–9 years	17 (12.2)
9–12 years	14 (10.1)
12–15 years	7 (5.0)
Over 15 years	14 (10.1)

Number of Students Supervised

Less than 5 students	81 (58.3)
6–10 students	32 (23.0)
11–15 students	13 (9.4)
16–20 students	5 (3.6)
21–25 students	3 (2.2)
31–35 students	1 (0.7)
36–40 students	2 (1.4)
Over 50 students	2 (1.4)

Table 2: General Use of Social Media (*N*=153)

	n (%)
Any use	144 (94.1)

Specific Platform

YouTube	137 (89.5)
Facebook	126 (82.4)
Pinterest	88 (57.5)
LinkedIn	85 (55.6)
Instagram	76 (49.7)
Twitter	64 (42.8)
ResearchGate	20 (13.1)
Snapchat	20 (13.1)
Tumblr	17 (11.1)
Academia.edu	12 (7.8)
Vine	5 (3.3)

Type of Network

Current Friends	138 (90.2)
Family	132 (86.3)
Past Friends	131 (85.6)
Work Colleagues	111 (72.5)
Other Professional Networks	84 (54.9)
Students	35 (22.9)
Social Work Faculty	24 (15.7)
Other	4 (2.6)

Table 3: Social Media Use in Field Education (*N*=153); *n* (%)

	As student support network	In field instruction	In field practicum assignments	To facilitate your learning	To learn student concerns
Any use	33 (21.6)	34 (22.2)	31 (20.3)	93 (60.8)	71 (46.4)
Specific Platform					
YouTube	21 (13.7)	26 (17.0)	23 (15.0)	70 (45.8)	55 (35.9)
Facebook	10 (6.5)	3 (2.0)	7 (4.6)	52 (34.0)	36 (23.5)
LinkedIn	13 (8.5)	6 (3.9)	1 (0.7)	38 (24.8)	24 (15.7)
Pinterest	4 (2.6)	6 (3.9)	1 (0.7)	19 (12.4)	9 (5.9)
Twitter	4 (2.6)	2 (1.3)	3 (2.0)	18 (11.8)	18 (11.8)
Instagram	6 (3.9)	1 (0.7)	1 (0.7)	8 (5.2)	5 (3.3)
ResearchGate	3 (2.0)	2 (1.3)	3 (2.0)	12 (7.8)	10 (6.5)
Academia.edu	3 (2.0)	3 (2.0)	3 (2.0)	5 (3.3)	6 (3.9)
Snapchat	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (0.7)	1 (0.7)
Tumblr	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3 (2.0)	3 (2.0)
Vine	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (0.7)

Table 4: Advantages and Challenges of Social Media Use in Field Education

1. Advantages of Social Media Use
   - Connecting with others
   - Information sharing and knowledge dissemination
   - Learning enhancement
   - Accessibility

2. Challenges of Social Media Use
   - Confidentiality and privacy
   - Unprofessionalism and inappropriateness
   - Blurring boundaries
   - Lack of training
   - Information reliability
   - Organization policy and guidelines