Digital Professional Identity: Dear Internet! Who am I?

Saira Jawed[1], Usman Mahboob[2], Rahila Yasmeen[3]

[1]Department of Anatomy, HBS Medical and Dental College, Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto University, Islamabad, [2]Institute of Health Professions Education and Research, Khyber Medical University, Peshawar, [3]Riphah Academy for Research and Education, Riphah International University, Islamabad, Pakistan

ABSTRACT

Background: There is an emphasis on identity formation to complement the competency-based medical education in tomorrow's doctors, with a focus from "doing" to "being," to deeply learn the role as a health professional. Medical students spend a considerable time on internet-based online social networking platforms. These internet-based avenues can have certain implications in the formation of their identity. **Methods:** The aim of this article is to discuss a highly significant way to form the professional identity that is through online social networking, which can be labeled as digital professional identity (DPI). **Results:** DPI is defined as "professional identity that develops through internet-based social interactions by utilizing online platforms and communication tools." Medical students develop certain constituents of professionalism as part of their lifelong professional identity during the course of their graduation. They learn the professional ways and means to communicate on internet-based social media platforms, which affect their professional identities. **Discussion:** We suggest to provide institutional guidance for the medical students regarding the usage of social networking sites and forming their DPIs as a medical professional by explaining the related advantages and disadvantages. In addition, accreditation bodies need to incorporate the aspect of DPI in their competencies for professionalism.

Keywords: Digital, doctors, health professional, identity, identity formation, medical students, online social networking, professional

Identity is " what it means to be who one is including the qualities and beliefs, distinguishing a person or a group from others."[1] It is a process that is dynamic in nature by which people identify and sort their place in the society both individually and collectively. Scholarly work confirms the development of identity through social interaction; in addition to an individual's personal emotions and cognitions.[2]

Professional identity is professional self-concept of an individual grounded in attributes, beliefs, motives, values, and experiences.[3] Professional identity, from a medical perspective, is how a doctor defines himself/herself in his/her profession. The literature has identified certain factors responsible for medical students' professional identity formation such as role modeling of faculty;[4] students' cultural, emotional, and personal stories; linguistic rituals; and interactional relationships.[5] However, internet-based social interactions, responsible to shaping the medical students' professional identity, have not been critically explored.

The modes to develop social interactions such as online platforms, and the subsequent formation of their professional identity bear an important implication on the future of medical students.[5] Internet-based communication through instant messaging and E-mail, as well as communication-oriented internet sites and public forums such as Facebook, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, Instagram, Twitter, and blogs and sites for sharing

Address for correspondence:
Dr. Usman Mahboob, Institute of Health Professions Education and Research, Khyber Medical University, Peshawar, Pakistan.
E-mail: usman.mahboob@kmu.edu.pk

How to cite this article: Jawed S, Mahboob U, Yasmeen R. Digital professional identity: Dear Internet! Who am I? Educ Health 2019;32:33-5.

photographs and videos, have become ubiquitous and are heavily used nowadays.[6,7] Medical students, whether undergraduates or postgraduates, spend a considerable time in using these social networking platforms.[8]

These internet-based avenues can have certain implications in the formation of their internet-based online identity, labeled as "Digital Professional Identity (DPI)," that is "professional identity which develops through internet-based social interactions by utilizing online platforms and communication tools." This leads us to a question: How does online social networking and the online platforms develop DPI of medical students? In our opinion, online social networking develops the DPI in a similar fashion as professional identity. The DPI is dynamic just like the identity itself, strongly influenced by how we see ourselves and the way others and the society perceives us, based on our online interactions.[9] In addition, modern culture and healthcare structure restricts the interpersonal and intraprofessional communication due to professional workplace-based commitments and busy schedules.[10]

Medical students develop certain constituents of professionalism as part of their lifelong professional identity during the course of their graduation. Hence, they learn the professional ways and means to communicate on social media and inculcate the digital networking in their professional identities. The Internet can help in this regard where students can interact with one another and form communities labeled as virtual communities.[10] Interactions in virtual communities are usually frequent because of the availability of Internet on handheld gadgets and ease of time and venue.[11] Connecting to certain communities of practice gives meaning to the professional identity.

Previous studies also emphasize the importance of incorporating the concept of identity in the undergraduate and postgraduate medical education and making it a part of curriculum.[12-14] Students heavily rely on the Internet for gathering information and discussions as it is quick and saves time and energy.[7] The Internet being an inevitable component of medical education can develop the DPIs. Thus, it would be fruitful to explore the role of the Internet in developing DPI by qualitative and quantitative studies. Apart from social and professional interactions, paying sufficient attention to the concept of DPI of medical students would also influence other elements that affect identity formation, such as peer learning, team working, collaborative learning, leadership, managerial and communication skills, mentorship, ethics, and professionalism. A robust group identity is linked to enhanced social support and improved well-being, but unhealthy group norms may engage the individuals in behaviors and activities that place their well-being at risk.[15] Literature suggests that medical students are often unaware of the positive intersection of personal and professional identities during social

networking.[16] Time spent on social networking sites may negatively affect academic performance[17] and reduce students' interpersonal communication skills including command over language usage and creative writing skills.[18] With increasing use of the Internet, in-person social interactions are reduced, creating physical and mental health issues.[19,20]

We suggest that there should be institutional guidance for medical students regarding the usage of social networking sites and forming their DPIs as a medical professional by explaining the related advantages and disadvantages. In addition, accreditation bodies need to incorporate the aspect of DPI in their competencies for professionalism for a worthwhile tomorrow's doctor.

Financial support and sponsorship

Nil.

Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

References

1. Burke PJ, Owens TJ, Serpe R, Thoits PA. Advances in Identity Theory and Research. US: Springer; 2003. Available from: https://www.books.google.com.pk/books?id=_rHco9aviVMC. [Last accessed on 2017 Jul 10].
2. Ashmore RD, Deaux K, McLaughlin-Volpe T. An organizing framework for collective identity: Articulation and significance of multidimensionality. Psychol Bull 2004;130:80-114.
3. Ibarra H. Provisional selves: Experimenting with image and identity in professional adaptation. Adm Sci Q 1999;44:764. Available from: http://www.jstor.org/stable/2667055?origin=crossref. [Last accessed on 2017 Jul 04].
4. Hendelman W, Byszewski A. Formation of medical student professional identity: Categorizing lapses of professionalism, and the learning environment. BMC Med Educ 2014;14:139.
5. Monrouxe LV. Identity, identification and medical education: Why should we care? Med Educ 2010;44:40-9.
6. Sundar SS. Handbooks in communication and media. In: The Handbook of the Psychology of Communication Technology. Wiley; 2015. Available from: https://www.books.google.com.pk/books?id=pmezBQAAQBAJ. [Last accessed on 2017 Jul 12].
7. Spector ND, Matz PS, Levine LJ, Gargiulo KA, McDonald MB 3rd, McGregor RS, *et al.* E-professionalism: Challenges in the age of information. J Pediatr 2010;156:345-6.
8. Endreddy A, Prabhath K, Rajana B, Raju Srijampana VV. Prevalence and patterns of internet addiction among medical students. Med J Dr. D.Y. Patil Uni 2014;7:709. Available from: http://www.mjdrdypu.org/text.asp?2014/7/6/709/144851. [Last accessed on 2017 Jul 12].
9. Beijaard D, Meijer PC, Verloop N. Reconsidering research on teachers' professional identity. Teach Teach Educ 2004;20:107-28.
10. Renninger KA, Shumar W. Learning in doing: Social, cog. In: Building Virtual Communities: Learning and Change in Cyberspace. Cambridge University Press; 2002. Available from: https://www.books.google.com.pk/books?id=GY195ZNrLZ0C. [Last accessed on 2017 Jun 15].
11. Bourhis A, Dubé L, Jacob R. The success of virtual communities of practice: The leadership factor. Electron J Knowl Manag

2005;3 (1):23-34.

12. Goldie J. The formation of professional identity in medical students: Considerations for educators. Med Teach 2012;34:e641-8.

13. Cruess RL, Cruess SR, Steinert Y. Cambridge medicine. In: Teaching Medical Professionalism: Supporting the Development of a Professional Identity. Cambridge University Press; 2016. Available from: https://www.books.google.com.pk/books?id=Vyb-CwAAQBAJ. [Last accessed on 2017 May 10].

14. Cope A, Bezemer J, Mavroveli S, Kneebone R. What attitudes and values are incorporated into self as part of professional identity construction when becoming a surgeon? Acad Med 2017;92:544-9.

15. Mavor KI, McNeill KG, Anderson K, Kerr A, O'Reilly E, Platow MJ. Beyond prevalence to process: The role of self and identity in medical student well-being. Med Educ 2014;48:351-60.

16. Thompson LA, Dawson K, Ferdig R, Black EW, Boyer J, Coutts J, *et al.* The intersection of online social networking with medical professionalism. J Gen Intern Med 2008;23:954-7.

17. Paul JA, Baker HM, Cochran JD. Effect of online social networking on student academic performance. Comput Hum Behav 2012;28:2117-27.

18. Ansari H, Mohammadpoorasl A, Shahedifar N, Sahebihagh MH, Fakhari A, Hajizadeh M. Internet addiction and interpersonal communication skills among high school students in Tabriz, Iran. Iran J Psychiatry Behav Sci 2017;11:e4778.

19. Lam LT, Peng ZW. Effect of pathological use of the internet on adolescent mental health: A prospective study. Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med 2010;164:901-6.

20. Anderson EL, Steen E, Stavropoulos V. Internet use and problematic internet use: A systematic review of longitudinal research trends in adolescence and emergent adulthood. Int J Adolesc Youth 2017;22:430-54.