

Impact of Social Media on Veterinary Medicine Practice

Vikas Saxena*

Center for Vascular and Inflammatory Diseases, School of Medicine, University of Maryland, Baltimore, MD 21201, USA

***Corresponding Author:** Vikas Saxena, Center for Vascular and Inflammatory Diseases, School of Medicine, University of Maryland, Baltimore, MD 21201, USA. Email id: VSaxena@som.umaryland.edu

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Social media has a great impact on our day-to-day lives. There were about 2.46 billion users of social media around the world in year 2017. The social network Facebook is currently the market leader, with more than 1.86 billion monthly active users. Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, blogs etc. are other social media platforms. Professional and personal connections are being made through social media. Besides those advantages, there is a lack of understanding and clear definition of its use professionally. Usage of social media has been an important factor in discussion about users' privacy and raises questions to differentiate the personal and public profile of the users.

Practitioners of veterinary medicine are also vulnerable to the impact of social media. Both students and veterinarians have their profiles on various social media platforms. They post information that could affect an individual, the affiliated institution or practice. This information ranges from comments about the course work and academic environment at the particular institute or about clinical cases, clients, or patients. Besides, several institutes and veterinary practices are creating their profile on these social media platforms in order to increase their visibility.

This ever-increasing use of social media present several challenging questions for governing authorities, administrators, and veterinarians to identify the boundary of professionalism and whether work related experience could be shared without compromising privacy and confidentiality of patients and owners of the patient. The misrepresentation of credentials or clinical outcomes and boastful marketing statements are also points of concern.

Social media usage could be a make-or-break moment for an organization, practice, or an individual. Bad things could be posted- true or not- that can damage the reputation. At the same time, positive comments can promote the facility. Thus, it is imperative to learn highlighting the positives and manage the negatives for any professional embarking the social media.

While medical healthcare had been at the forefront in setting-up guidelines on the use of social media, such a guideline is in a preliminary stage in the realm of veterinary profession. The American Veterinary Medical Association has published its list of do's and don'ts for social media, entitled as "Social Media 101 for Veterinary Clinics". However, there are no clear policies among various institutes or governing bodies of veterinary medicine on use of social media.

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For any organization, institute, veterinary practice, or practicing veterinarian a guideline should require clarity on at least following issues.

- Who can use organization's network to access social media
- Activation of network settings to limit the exposure and protect privacy and confidentiality
- What constitute inappropriate use of social media
- Consequences of inappropriate use (statement of disciplinary actions)
- Policies related to codes of conduct
- Responsibility of users

Further, at an individual level, veterinarians should observe ethical standards of candor, privacy, and integrity while using social media. They should be cautious while interacting with owners of the patient, discussion of medicine online, and should use their professional judgment while posting any content online.

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