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Initial Teacher Preparation Faculty Views and Practices Regarding E-Professionalism in Teacher Education

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This study analyzed initial teacher preparation faculty views and practices regarding e-professionalism (professionalism in online environments) in teacher education with an emphasis on social media. While most faculty participants agreed that social media use should be addressed with preservice teachers, few actually addressed e-professionalism in their courses or field experiences. Faculty participants were also divided on whether social media policies were needed and whether inappropriate use of social media should be considered an ethics violation. A lack of professionalism when using social media may have implications for future employment opportunities as a teacher; therefore, suggested components of an e-professionalism curriculum are provided.

Members of the P-12 teaching profession are held to a higher standard than those in some other professional fields, given the trust and responsibility afforded them due to their work with children (National Education Association [NEA], 2020). While teacher professionalism has many aspects, one area of emphasis is the behaviors and actions of teachers. Furthermore, the expectation for a professional demeanor extends beyond the classroom (Noakes & Hook, 2021). The Georgia Professional Standards Commission's (GAPSC, 2021) Code of Ethics (Standard 9) mandates that in-service teachers conduct themselves in a professional manner. This professionalism requirement is also applicable to preservice teachers.

Teacher ethics and professionalism are typically addressed in the teacher education curriculum, especially as it informs preservice teachers' work in the schools during field experiences and clinical practice (e.g., Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation [CAEP], 2022; Malone, 2020; Tatto, 2021). Preservice teachers learn about topics such as professional attire in the classroom, issues associated with taking photos of students, and the need to maintain appropriate relationships with P–12 students (Creasy, 2015). However, given the ubiquity of social media use, the question has arisen as to what it means for a teacher to be professional in the digital age. This question is relevant for many preservice teachers, since many undergraduate college students fall within the age range (18–29) with the highest social media use (Pew Research Center, 2021).

Previous researchers (e.g., Curtis & Gillen, 2019; Griffin & Lake, 2012) have noted that educator professionalism extends to online social media behavior and actions. The term e-professionalism was coined to refer to professionalism in online environments, with more recent literature also using “digital professionalism” (e.g., O'Connor et al., 2021). E-professionalism has been studied in professional fields including health profession-related preparation programs (e.g., medical, dental, nursing, and pharmacy education; e.g., Bacaksiz et al., 2020; Barnable et al., 2018; Curtis & Gillen, 2019; Gomes et al., 2017; Kang et al., 2015; Nasseripour et al., 2019; O'Regan et al., 2018; Rocha & de Castro, 2014; Zhu et al., 2021) and teacher education (e.g., Carpenter et al., 2019; DeMitchell & Schram, 2013; Griffin & Lake, 2012; Griffin & Zinskie, 2020; Poth et al., 2016).

A lack of professionalism when using social media can have serious consequences for preservice teachers; however, many preservice teachers remain uninformed regarding the risks and advantages of social media use in their role as future P–12 educators. Researchers have called for better training in social media use for preservice teachers (e.g., Carpenter, Hervey, et al., 2016; Crompton et al., 2016; Damico & Krutka, 2018; Kelly et al., 2017; Marín et al., 2021), while others have noted the need to help preservice teachers better understand opportunities offered by social media (e.g., Carpenter et al., 2017; Carpenter & Green, 2018; Damico & Krutka, 2018; Eubanks et al., 2021; Iredale et al., 2020; Manca & Ranieri, 2017; Saini & Abraham, 2019; Zimmerle, 2018). Some (e.g., Carpenter, Hervey, et al., 2016; Fenwick, 2016) have noted the need to increase focus on the positive uses of social media for educators, such as sharing and curating educational content (e.g., Carpenter et al., 2018; Torphy et al., 2020), and seeking community and professional learning opportunities (e.g., Carpenter & Green, 2018; Greenhow & Galvin, 2020; Kearney et al., 2020).

Researchers have noted that it is the responsibility of initial teacher preparation programs to provide guidelines for social media use (e.g., Carpenter, Hervey et al., 2016; Carpenter et al., 2019; Carpenter, Tur, & Marín, 2016; Crompton et al., 2016; Griffin & Lake, 2012; Hughes et al., 2015; Iredale et al., 2020; Kelly et al., 2017; Marín et al., 2021). Therefore, it is incumbent upon teacher education programs, and the faculty members in these programs, to recognize and address this need through developing social media policies, incorporating social media topics into the curriculum, and modeling appropriate uses of social media. Given this

fact, it is important to determine initial teacher preparation faculty views and practices regarding e-professionalism in teacher education.

Literature Review

Professionalism in the Digital Age

Young adults are active users of social media, with a majority of those ages 18–29 using Facebook (70%), Instagram (71%), and Snapchat (65%) and slightly less than half (48%) using TikTok (Pew Research Center, 2021). Much of this use can be characterized as personal, for example, connecting with friends and family, using as an information source, easing boredom, and so forth (e.g., Stockdale & Coyne, 2020; Zhu et al., 2021) and often inappropriate (e.g., Darr & King, 2018; Griffin & Zinskie, 2020; Miller, 2020). Given the digital native status of this population, the personal digital identity established on social media has the possibility of being “unchecked...and quite extensive” (Nasseripour et al., 2019, p. 74).

Therefore, as these young adults transition into their selected professions, they run the risk of experiencing a context collapse as their private and public online personas overlap, as well as a time collapse where past and present social media use collide (Brandtzaeg & Chaparro-Domínguez, 2020; Davidson & Joinson, 2021). Davidson and Joinson found that most university students use different platforms for different identities—professional vs. social. However, Banghart et al. (2018) cautioned that it has become more difficult to regulate these boundaries.

Forbes (2017) stated that “it is the responsibility of each individual to proactively protect and project online identities that are in keeping with our best selves” (p. 187). However, by the time a young person is seeking a professional position, it may be too late to repair one’s online reputation, tarnished due to inappropriate social media content. Furthermore, increased cybervetting of position applicants increases the likelihood that one’s social media content may have consequences for future employment (Darr & King, 2018; Melton et al., 2021). Given this circumstance, higher education institutions need to educate their students regarding appropriate online communication (Hickerson & Kothari, 2017; O’Connor et al., 2021), the fallacy of maintaining separate personal and professional selves on social media (Davidson & Joinson, 2021), and the need to transition from a personal to a professional identity early on in their postsecondary pursuits (Novakovich et al., 2017).

E-Professionalism and Preservice Teachers

Professional and ethical conduct is an expectation for P–12 teachers given the responsibility and public trust associated with educating children (GAPSC, 2021; NEA, 2020). By extension, those in training to become teachers (i.e., preservice teachers) are held to the same standards. In Georgia, the setting for the current study, education students are bound by the state code of ethics at the time of admission to their teacher education program. Researchers concur that ethical and professional standards established for those in professional fields such as teaching and healthcare also apply in the digital world (e.g., Curtis & Gillen, 2019;

Griffin & Lake, 2012; Nasseripour et al., 2019); therefore, educator professionalism must also extend to online social media behavior and actions.

Agreement is lacking, however, regarding the reach of teacher professionalism into the private lives of teachers, including preservice teachers. With the pervasiveness of social media has come a “blurring of boundaries” (DeMitchell & Schram, 2013) regarding teachers’ personal and professional lives. Some support the right for those in professional fields, such as teachers or preservice teachers, to maintain a personal identity on social media, separate from their professional persona, with the caveat that appropriate privacy settings are in place (e.g., DeMitchell & Schram, 2013; Foss & Olson, 2013; Marín et al., 2021; Noakes & Hook, 2021; O’Regan et al., 2018; Warnick et al., 2016). However, Novakovich et al. (2017) stated that the behaviors and actions displayed on social media platforms are considered as part of one’s professional identity, and as such, individuals must transform their social media practices to best reflect their role as a professional.

Several studies of social media use among students pursuing professional fields found that, while some seemed to understand the need for online professionalism given concerns about others (e.g., faculty, peers, and public) viewing their social media sites, these same participants also expressed uncertainty about the standards for e-professionalism (e.g., Kang et al., 2015; Marín et al., 2021), as well as what is considered appropriate and inappropriate social media content (e.g., Crompton et al., 2016; Poth et al., 2016; Ross et al., 2013). An analysis of social media content of students in health profession-related preparation programs (e.g., Curtis & Gillen, 2019; Nasseripour et al., 2019; Rocha & de Castro, 2014; Zhu et al., 2021) uncovered improper photos and language (e.g., sexually suggestive content or depictions of alcohol use). Similarly, Griffin and Zinskie (2020) found that preservice teachers conveyed inappropriate personal images on social media and were also likely to post problematic content.

Kimmons (2020) noted that preservice teachers are responsible for maintaining appropriate content and privacy settings on their social media; however, Poth et al. (2016) found that preservice teachers were uncertain of how to modify social media behaviors for professionalism purposes. Complicating matters is a possible generational difference between students and faculty members regarding what is appropriate social media use (Chretien & Tuck, 2015; Darr & King, 2018; Duke et al., 2017; Gomes et al., 2017; Hughes & Diego-Madrano, 2019). Carpenter and Green (2018) noted that it would be wrong to assume that the digital native status of most preservice teachers today equates with their knowing how to use social media appropriately. This point was confirmed by Marín et al. (2021), who concluded that preservice teachers in their study did not possess sufficient data literacy regarding their social media use as educators.

In their study of Facebook profiles of elementary education majors, Olson et al. (2009) found that 78% of Facebook profiles reviewed contained content that was not aligned with the professional dispositions expected of teachers. Preservice teachers studied by Hughes et al. (2015) expressed

concern regarding possible misuse of information posted on social media and whether their social media history would be seen by others. In contrast, Crompton et al. (2016) concluded that preservice teachers are not familiar with social media privacy issues and are not fully aware of the types of posts that are inappropriate (e.g., sharing and “liking” of existing posts can be just as problematic). Furthermore, preservice teachers need to be informed that one’s social media activity may have long-term implications (Brandtzaeg & Chaparro-Domínguez, 2020; DeMitchell & Schram, 2013), including impact on future teaching opportunities.

E-Professionalism in Professional Education Programs

Training in and research on e-professionalism has become an area of focus in health profession-related preparation programs such as medicine, dentistry, and nursing. Researchers from these fields concurred that it is the responsibility of their training programs to provide guidance to their students regarding appropriate use of social media and to develop e-professionalism guidelines and policies for their programs and institutions (e.g., Bacaksiz et al., 2020; Barnable et al., 2018; Hussain et al., 2021; Jain et al., 2014; Nasseripour et al., 2019). However, in a literature review that focused on 44 articles published between 2015 and 2020, Guraya et al. (2021) concluded that only a limited number of health profession-related preparation programs had instituted a formal e-professionalism curriculum or developed guidelines and policies regarding professional social media use, resulting in a more reactionary approach when inappropriate social media use occurs.

In contrast, O’Connor et al. (2021) found that health profession-related preparation programs that incorporated a pedagogical approach to e-professionalism had a positive influence on their students’ social media use and behaviors. Given that P–12 teaching is a professional field similar to healthcare due to the expectation for ethical conduct, there is relevance in these findings for teacher education programs.

While research focused directly on e-professionalism and preservice teachers is limited, there is consensus in the literature that teacher preparation programs should educate preservice teachers about inappropriate social media use (see Carpenter et al., 2017; Carpenter & Green, 2018; Carpenter & Harvey, 2019; Carpenter, Hervey et al., 2016; Carpenter et al., 2019; Crompton et al., 2016; Iredale et al., 2020; Kelly et al., 2017; Muñoz & Towner, 2009; Poth et al., 2016; Saini & Abraham, 2019). Creasy (2015) stated that it is often assumed that preservice teachers who complete a teacher education program leave with an understanding of what it means to be professional and ethical.

Malone (2020) noted, however, that ethics training often does not receive the appropriate attention in teacher education programs, despite the importance of ethics training stressed by accrediting bodies (e.g., CAEP, 2022). Hughes and Diego-Madrano (2019) explicitly taught professionalism as part of their teacher education program and discovered that, while preservice teachers increased their professionalism knowledge, the students noted that more information was needed regarding professionalism, especially with regard to field experiences.

It is recommended that colleges and schools of education establish policies specifically focused on social media use for their preservice teachers (Coleman et al., 2018; Griffin & Lake, 2012). As preservice teachers need guidance in how to manage their personal and professional use of social media (Carpenter et al., 2019), it is also recommended that the topic of e-professionalism be embedded in the curriculum of teacher education programs (Carpenter & Green, 2018; Muñoz & Towner, 2009).

An e-professionalism curriculum should demonstrate appropriate use of social media, including how to balance personal and professional use of social media, and an understanding of professional policies regarding social media, including the implications of inappropriate social media use (e.g., Barnable et al., 2018; Carpenter et al., 2019; Duke et al., 2017; Johnson, 2016; O'Connor et al., 2021). These implications include impact on future hiring decisions as a P–12 teacher and possible sanctions for preservice teachers due to violation of social media policies in P–12 schools/districts.

Crompton et al. (2016) provided eight professional development guidelines for use in educating preservice teachers regarding e-professionalism. These guidelines addressed such topics as inappropriate content for posting on social media (e.g., no alcohol, drugs, or sexual matter), issues with sharing or liking inappropriate or unprofessional posts, misconceptions about social media privacy, and the need for boundaries between students and teachers on social media. Furthermore, Crompton et al. recommended that e-professionalism training occur early in the teacher preparation program.

In addition to conveying the risks of inappropriate social media use to preservice teachers, an e-professionalism curriculum should address the benefits of professional social media use. Social media can be used to convey a positive image of teachers and the teaching profession (Chang-Kredl & Colannino, 2017; Kelly et al., 2017). Poth et al. (2016) also noted that any discussion of e-professionalism should include ways preservice teachers can be positive role models for their P–12 students regarding appropriate social media use.

Carpenter and Green (2018) stated that inclusion of positive examples of social media use in education will require teacher education faculty members to have a well-informed understanding of social media applications and their use. In fact, it is suggested that teacher educators share their own social media experiences with preservice teachers to assist them in developing their own personal and professional guidelines (Carpenter et al., 2017; Damico & Krutka, 2018; Muñoz & Towner, 2009). Finally, it is important for teacher education programs to demonstrate how preservice teachers can take advantage of social media as a means of teacher development (e.g., Carpenter et al., 2018; Eubanks et al., 2021) and for building professional community (e.g., Carpenter & Green, 2018; Greenhalgh et al., 2021; Rosenberg et al., 2016).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine initial teacher preparation faculty views and practices regarding social media and preservice teachers with an emphasis on e-professionalism. The following research questions were addressed by data collected in this study.

1. What are initial teacher preparation faculty views regarding the role and use of social media in teacher education?
2. To what extent do initial teacher preparation faculty members address e-professionalism in their teacher education classes and field experiences?

Method

Participants

Participants of this study were initial teacher preparation faculty members employed at University System of Georgia public higher education institutions or private Georgia colleges and universities that offer initial teacher preparation programs. Institutional websites were reviewed to identify faculty members who taught in bachelor of science education or masters of arts in teaching programs, and a survey was sent to approximately 750 faculty members via publicly accessible email addresses. After removing a number of incomplete survey item responses, the resulting sample consisted of 123 faculty respondents.

Respondents' experience teaching in higher education ranged from 1 to 35 years ($M = 10.05$, $SD = 7.38$, $Mdn = 8.00$) with experience teaching in P-12 education ranging from 0 to 48 years ($M = 12.35$, $SD = 9.65$, $Mdn = 9.00$). Almost all faculty (88.6%) taught in one of the following fields: elementary education, middle grades education, secondary education, and special education, with some teaching in more than one field (e.g., elementary and special education). Faculty members were also asked to report the frequency of their social media use for both personal and professional reasons. Results revealed more personal than professional use (see Table 1).

Table 1
Initial Teacher Preparation Faculty Use of Social Media

	Quite a Bit %	Somewhat %	Very Little %	Not at All %
Extent of participation in social media for personal use	33.3	33.3	22.0	11.4
Extent of participation in social media for professional use	20.3	35.0	30.1	14.6
<i>Note. n = 123.</i>				

Instrument and Procedures

We conducted a review of recent literature on social media use in teacher education and other professional education fields (e.g., nursing education, medical education, and dental education). Emphasis was placed on topics associated with e-professionalism of preservice and in-service teachers. Approximately 150 sources were located, primarily articles published in academic journals with a few conference presentations, and these were reviewed as a basis for informing item development for an instrument focused on social media and preservice teachers. Most sources were published between 2015 and 2019, and articles were published in some of the top journals in the field (e.g., *Computers and Education*, *Computers in Human Behavior*, *Contemporary Issues in Technology and Teacher Education*, *Journal of Technology and Teacher Education*, *Technology and Teacher Education*, and *TechTrends*).

The current study focused on two sections of this instrument: faculty views of social media and preservice teachers (e.g., Akçayir, 2017; Lackovic et al., 2017; Manca & Ranieri, 2016) and training in the professional education curriculum regarding e-professionalism (e.g., Barnable et al., 2018; Nasseripour et al., 2019; O'Regan et al., 2018). The content validity of this instrument is enhanced due to alignment of items with current literature on professionalism of preservice teachers and social media use.

Section I of the instrument includes 14 items that assess initial teacher preparation faculty views regarding social media and preservice teachers. Ten of these items focus on risks of inappropriate social media use and views on addressing these risks, while the remaining four items target faculty perceptions regarding advantages of social media use for preservice teachers. Faculty participants responded to these items using a 4-point Likert scale ranging from *Strongly Agree* (4) to *Strongly Disagree* (1).

Section II of the instrument contains 18 items that focus on initial teacher preparation faculty practices regarding social media and e-professionalism. Participants were asked to indicate the frequency of their practices using a 4-point response scale consisting of *Quite a Bit*, *Somewhat*, *Very Little*, and *Not at All*. Items address e-professionalism topics such as social media policies, consequences of inappropriate social media use, privacy settings, and development of a professional identity on social media. Internal consistency reliability for the survey instrument, as measured by Cronbach's alpha, was good for Section I ($\alpha = .79$) and excellent for Section II ($\alpha = .97$).

We received approval to conduct this research from our institution's Institutional Review Board. Both the survey items and the informed consent letter were entered into the Qualtrics online survey tool. Potential participants were contacted in March 2021 via their publically accessible email addresses. If informed consent was granted, participants proceeded to the survey. Two reminders regarding survey completion were sent to enhance response rate. Results were imported into SPSS statistical software and data were analyzed descriptively. The percentage of respondents selecting each point on the response scale was calculated for all items in Sections I and II of the instrument. In addition, mean and standard deviation are reported for each of these items.

Results

Views Regarding Social Media and Preservice Teachers

Survey results for initial teacher preparation faculty views regarding social media and preservice teachers are presented in Table 2. Almost all (95.1%) of the teacher educators strongly agreed or agreed that issues associated with social media use should be addressed in the teacher education curriculum. Respondents agreed that teacher education programs should educate preservice teachers about inappropriate social media use (61.8% strongly agreed) and that educator professionalism extends to online social media behavior and actions (67.5% strongly agreed); however, a much smaller percentage (35.8%) strongly agreed that colleges/schools of education should establish policies on social media use for their preservice teachers. Respondents were divided, 43.9% agreeing and 56.1% disagreeing, as to whether unprofessional online behavior of preservice teachers should be reported to the Georgia Professional Standards Commission. Approximately one third (34.1%) were not supportive of considering social media usage as a factor when deciding to employ future teachers.

Table 2 also contains four statements that assessed initial teacher preparation faculty views regarding benefits associated with preservice teacher use of social media and these students' preparedness to use social media for professional purposes. Almost all of the respondents (98.3%) strongly agreed or agreed that social media can be used to promote a positive image of teachers and the teaching profession. A large number were in agreement that social media can be used for teacher professional development (29.3% strongly agree, 56.1% agree); similarly, respondents agreed (30.9% strongly agree, 55.3% agree) that social media would play an instructional role in their students' future P-12 teaching positions. While initial teacher preparation faculty were cognizant of the potential of social media use for educators, almost two thirds (67.4%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that their preservice teachers were well-prepared to incorporate social media into their teaching or professional learning.

Faculty Practices

Table 3 presents self-reported information regarding faculty practices regarding social media and e-professionalism. When asked about the extent to which they address e-professionalism in their teacher education classes or field experiences, topics addressed *somewhat* or *quite a bit* include professional risks associated with social media use (65.0%), positive uses of social media (63.4%), teachers being held to higher standards regarding social media use (63.4%), how social media content may inform future employment decisions (63.4%), upholding the ethical standards of the profession in social media use (61.8%), and e-professionalism when discussing teacher ethics (59.4%).

Table 2
Initial Teacher Preparation Faculty Views Regarding Social Media and Preservice Teachers

Survey Items	SA %	A %	D %	SD %	M	SD
Social media can be used to convey a positive image of teachers and the teaching profession.	64.2	34.1	0.8	0.8	3.62	.55
Teacher education programs should educate preservice teachers about inappropriate social media use.	61.8	33.3	3.3	1.6	3.55	.64
Educator professionalism extends to online social media behavior and actions.	67.5	23.6	5.7	3.3	3.55	.75
The teacher education curriculum should address issues that may arise due to social media use.	48.8	46.3	4.1	0.8	3.43	.62
Teacher educators must have knowledge of and experience with social media to guide their preservice teachers regarding e-professionalism (professionalism in online environments).	47.2	42.3	8.1	2.4	3.34	.73
Preservice teachers should be allowed to engage in personal social media use as long as appropriate privacy settings are in place.	41.5	49.6	8.9	0.0	3.33	.63
Social media is likely to have an instructional role in the schools where preservice teachers will be employed.	30.9	55.3	12.2	1.6	3.15	.69
Social media can contribute to preservice teachers' professional development as a teacher.	29.3	56.1	12.2	2.4	3.12	.71
Colleges/schools of education should establish policies on social media use for their preservice teachers.	35.8	31.7	26.0	6.5	2.97	.94
There is a generational difference between preservice teachers and teacher education faculty regarding what is appropriate social media use.	30.1	39.8	28.5	1.6	2.98	.81
Teacher educators should share their own social media experiences with preservice teachers to assist them in developing their own personal and professional guidelines.	20.3	56.9	20.3	2.4	2.95	.71
Social media usage should be considered in employment decisions of future teachers.	8.9	56.9	25.2	8.9	2.66	.77
Teacher educators should report to the Georgia Professional Standards Commission any unprofessional online behavior of preservice teachers.	17.1	26.8	43.1	13.0	2.48	.93
Graduates of our teacher education program are well prepared to incorporate social media into their teaching or professional learning.	3.3	29.3	58.5	8.9	2.27	.67
<i>Note.</i> n = 123. SA = Strongly Agree (4); A = Agree (3); D = Disagree (2); SD = Strongly Disagree (1)						

Table 3
Initial Teacher Preparation Faculty Practices Regarding Social Media and E-Professionalism

Survey Items	Quite a Bit %	Somewhat %	Very Little %	Not at All %	M	SD
Professional risks associated with social media use	21.1	43.9	22.8	12.2	2.74	.93
Teachers being held to higher standards, even in private life, regarding their social media use	27.6	35.8	16.3	20.3	2.71	1.08
Upholding the ethical standards of the profession in social media use	24.4	37.4	19.5	18.7	2.67	1.04
E-professionalism when discussing teacher ethics	23.6	35.8	24.4	16.3	2.67	1.01
How social media content may inform future employment decisions	20.3	43.1	18.7	17.9	2.66	1.00
Social media boundaries that should be in place between preservice teachers and their students	24.4	35.8	20.3	19.5	2.65	1.06
Positive uses of social media	17.1	46.3	21.1	15.4	2.65	.94
How social media use can influence future credibility as a P-12 teacher	21.1	37.4	17.9	23.6	2.56	1.07
Inappropriate use of social media	17.1	41.5	23.6	17.9	2.58	.98
Being familiar with P-12 school or district policies on social media	20.3	33.3	22.0	24.4	2.50	1.07
Cleaning up social media profiles prior to applying for a teaching position	20.3	35.0	17.9	26.8	2.49	1.10
How to engage appropriately and effectively with social media	9.8	45.5	26.0	18.7	2.46	.91
Possible sanctions for teachers due to violation of social media policies in P-12 schools/districts	21.1	28.5	23.6	26.8	2.44	1.10
Which online behaviors should be restricted	15.4	32.5	26.8	25.2	2.38	1.03
Social media incidents involving teachers that have resulted in disciplinary sanctions or firing	13.0	39.0	20.3	27.6	2.37	1.03
Social media privacy settings	15.4	30.9	26.0	27.6	2.34	1.05
Any existing program/college policies on social media use	11.4	29.3	27.6	31.7	2.20	1.02
Developing a professional identity on social media	8.9	30.9	29.3	30.9	2.18	.98

Note. n = 123. Quite a Bit = 4; Somewhat = 3; Very Little = 2; Not at All = 1

E-professionalism topics addressed *to a small extent* or *not at all* included developing a professional identity on social media (60.2%), social media privacy settings (53.6%), which online behaviors should be restricted

(52.0%), and possible sanctions for teachers due to violation of social media policies in P–12 schools/districts (47.9%). Over half (59.3%) of respondents reported no (31.7%) or limited (27.6%) discussion with preservice teachers regarding existing program/college policies on social media use. It cannot be ascertained from this response whether it was due to no or limited social media use policies established at their institution.

Discussion

Almost all of the initial teacher preparation faculty members participating in the study noted agreement with the statement that social media use should be addressed with preservice teachers. This aligns with the call of previous researchers regarding the need for e-professionalism training in teacher education programs (e.g., Carpenter, Hervey et al., 2016; Crompton et al., 2016; Damico & Krutka, 2018; Kelly et al., 2017; Marín et al., 2021). However, when asked about the extent that aspects of e-professionalism are addressed in the teacher education program, fewer participants reported actually addressing selected e-professionalism topics in their courses or field experiences. This discrepancy was not unexpected due to a noted lack of attention to ethics training in some teacher education programs (Malone, 2020) and possible socially desirable responses regarding needed emphasis on e-professionalism.

Faculty survey responses aligned with previous literature on social media and educator preparation that stated faculty in these programs should focus on issues associated with their students' inappropriate use of social media (see Carpenter et al., 2017; Carpenter & Green, 2018; Carpenter & Hervey, 2019; Carpenter, Hervey, et al., 2016; Carpenter et al., 2019; Crompton et al., 2016; Iredale et al., 2020; Kelly et al., 2017; Muñoz & Towner, 2009; Poth et al., 2016; Saini & Abraham, 2019). Yet, in practice, initial teacher preparation faculty participants placed limited emphasis on which online behaviors should be restricted by preservice teachers (Forbes, 2017), the need for developing a professional identity on social media early in one's educator preparation program (Novakovich et al., 2017), and the fallacy that social media activity can remain private (Crompton et al., 2016).

Many initial teacher preparation faculty participants reported limited or no discussion with preservice teachers regarding policies governing social media use. As noted previously, it is not clear whether this response was due to lack of existing policies at program or college/school level. Interestingly, in contrast to previous research literature calling for professional policies regarding social media use of educators (e.g., Carpenter, Hervey et al., 2016; Carpenter et al., 2019; Carpenter, Tur et al., 2016; Crompton et al., 2016; Griffin & Lake, 2012; Hughes et al., 2015; Iredale et al., 2020; Kelly et al., 2017; Marín et al., 2021), only one third of respondents agreed that such policies should be established at their institution. The consequence of having no social media policy in place is that initial teacher preparation faculty members are forced to be reactive regarding any social media use issues that come to light for their preservice teachers.

Some faculty participants were possibly concerned that having social media policies in place meant that they must monitor the social media

activity of all of their preservice teachers to ensure all students are evaluated equitably in terms of their e-professionalism. This would place quite a burden on the initial teacher preparation faculty. Furthermore, survey participants were divided regarding whether social media misconduct rose to the level of an ethics violation that should be reported to the Georgia Professional Standards Commission, the state-level organization that establishes and implements guidelines for the preparation, certification, and continued licensing of public educators.

Although some initial teacher preparation faculty participants were not in favor of potential employers considering preservice teachers' social media activity as part of an employment decision, the majority (65.8%) of study participants supported this common hiring practice (Drouin et al., 2015; Gruzd et al., 2020; Henderson, 2019). This finding supports 2020 Harris Poll results, which showed that 70% of employers agreed that employers should conduct a social media screening of potential employees and that 78% of employers agreed that employees should maintain a professional social media profile (Karami, 2022).

Some teacher preparation faculty participants may have a developmental perspective, believing that college students should not be held accountable for their social media behavior as a youth/young adult, especially to the detriment of their future career as a P-12 teacher. Some faculty respondents may be at an age where they never had to deal with their life being documented online, and, thus, feel that their students deserve an opportunity to rectify and learn from their social media mistakes. However, failing to inform preservice teachers of the long-term implications of inappropriate social media content does a great disservice to these students (cf., Karami, 2022).

Initial teacher preparation faculty participants demonstrated recognition of the positive uses of social media for both instructional and professional development purposes noted by social media researchers (e.g., Carpenter, 2015; Krutka et al., 2017), yet did not prepare their preservice teachers to take advantage of the instructional and professional benefits that are possible with social media. This disconnect may result in students leaving their teacher education program unaware of the professional knowledge and innovative learning opportunities that can be afforded them via social media. Furthermore, these future P-12 teachers may leave with a limited understanding of the nuances of how social media can be used to portray a positive image of teaching and teaching profession (Bowman et al., 2018).

Conclusions

Teacher education programs that are not currently addressing e-professionalism in a formal, systematic manner must develop a curriculum that speaks to the ethical concerns associated with lack of e-professionalism and highlights the positive uses of social media for preservice teachers. At a minimum, this curriculum should address appropriate and inappropriate use of social media for preservice teachers, professional risks associated with inappropriate use of social media, social media privacy settings, developing a professional identity on social media, establishing appropriate social media boundaries when working with

children, and social media policies for colleges/schools of education and P–12 districts (if applicable).

Programs must also consider when and how e-professionalism will be incorporated into the teacher preparation program (e.g., stand-alone course or embedded throughout the program of study). Initial teacher preparation programs and colleges and schools of education must also work to establish social media policies (if none exist) and to ensure that preservice teachers are informed regarding these policies and the short- and long-term consequences of policy violation.

Finally, programs should not limit social media topics in the curriculum to the risks associated with social media use. It is equally important that initial teacher preparation faculty members prepare their students for using social media in a positive manner, specifically, for instructional purposes and professional development. Preservice teachers should also be aware that social media is an avenue for obtaining mentorship and establishing community—important objectives for future and current educators.

Limitations and Future Research

One major limitation of this study was the small response rate. Data were requested during the spring 2021 semester when most public colleges and universities in Georgia returned to face-to-face instruction in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Further, researchers were limited by use of publicly accessible email addresses from institutional websites for developing their list of possible study participants.

Given the growing importance of e-professionalism in both teacher preparation and in teacher practice, continued research is needed on this topic. The current study should be replicated using a larger, representative sample of initial teacher preparation faculty members from both the United States and abroad. In addition, future research on social media and preservice teachers should focus on the pedagogical approach to e-professionalism, including what approach is most effective (e.g., embedded throughout curriculum, stand-alone course or unit).

Attention is also needed regarding the specific types of social media behaviors and actions that have been problematic for both preservice and in-service teachers, including policies for addressing these situations and consequences of this inappropriate social media usage. Qualitative research with initial teacher preparation faculty members would provide an in-depth exploration of the context in which preservice teachers interact with social media and how and why these faculty members do (or do not) address e-professionalism in their teacher education program.

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