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Extension Needs Outreach Innovation Free from the Harms of Social Media

Abstract

Despite the outreach-building benefits of social media for Extension, it is time for Extension professionals to find new innovative ways to reach out that do not involve social media. An increasing body of research has demonstrated the harms social media use imparts on the health and well-being of those in our communities. Our future use of social media as a primary method of outreach may perpetuate these harms, requiring our best efforts to develop new methods of outreach that do not negatively affect those we serve.

Keywords: [social media](#), [outreach](#), [health](#), [well-being](#), [innovation](#)

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Introduction

As Extension professionals face increased pressure to innovate programming and prove impact, creative means for outreach have been implemented (Meyer, Boyce, & Meyer, 2015; Wise, 2017; Zimbrotff, 2019). Gharis, Bardon, Evans, Hubbard, and Taylor (2014) suggested that a primary means of outreach innovation for Extension professions is the use of social media. Much has been published regarding the benefits of using social media for Extension professionals (Allen, Jolly, & Barnes, 2016; Anbiah & Vijayalakshmi, 2017; Brinkman, Kinsey, & Henneman, 2017; Christensen, Hill, & Horrocks, 2015; Cornelisse et al., 2011; Davis & Stollar, 2019; Doyle & Briggeman, 2014; Ferree, 2015; Hill, 2014; Kinsey, 2010; LaRoe & Corrales, 2019; Newbury, Humphreys, & Fuess, 2014). However, the literature has failed to address many of the society-wide health-related problems associated with social media use that may be enabled or even encouraged if Extension continues to make social media a primary vehicle for outreach.

Social Media Use in Extension

A search of peer-reviewed literature for the past decade yielded many articles touting various beneficial uses of social media by Extension, including as a tool for marketing, outreach, and education; a means to improve communication among volunteers and Extension professionals; a way to stay in contact with 4-H

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