

The Survey on the Use of Social Media by Thai Community Pharmacists in Bangkok, Thailand

Wirat Tongrod*, Nuttapon Rungswang, Kalunyuta Prateep na Talang
Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences, Huachiew Chalermprakiet University, Thailand

*E-mail: freshwirat@yahoo.com

Abstract

Social media users are rapidly expanding worldwide including pharmacists. There were many international researches on pharmacist's use of social media. However, this issue among Thai community pharmacist remains unknown. Thus, this survey was conducted to describe the utilization of social media by community pharmacists in the Capital of Thailand, Bangkok. A questionnaire was used to collect data from 249 community pharmacists during January, 2017. The content validity ratio was tested and the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.90. The results showed that there were 57.4% of female and 42.6% of male samples with average age of 39.4 years old. About half of them were single, 52.6%. Two-thirds of them worked as full time pharmacists. The mean of their income were 78,963.86 Baht/month. All of them currently used social media to communicate with patients (82.3), pharmacist (72.7%), other health professionals (34.9%), and physician (20.9%). For online connecting, they used smartphone (87.1%), notebook (83.1%), tablet (42.2%) and desktop (19.3%). Line® (97.2%) was the most popular social media, followed by e-mail (75.1%), Facebook® (64.7%) and website (24.1%). The purposes of social media using were for chat, search, get news, and post and share with 84.7%, 79.5%, 79.1% and 45.0% respectively. About two-fifths of them (40.96%) used social media every day for communication on drug therapy related information to patients. For the attitude on using social media for communicating with patients, the results showed that social media became a new channel to improve pharmacist-patient communication. In conclusion, Thai community pharmacist in Bangkok routinely uses social media to chat, search, get news, and post and share with patients, pharmacists, other health professionals and physicians. They also perceived that social media has become a new channel to improve pharmacist-patient communication.

Keywords: *Use of social media, Community pharmacist, Thailand*

1. Introduction

The term, social media, is defined as a form or a tool of online or internet communication, such as, Facebook®, Line®, Twitter®, or other websites to share information, idea, personal messages, and other content among individuals. (American Society of Health-System Pharmacists, 2012; Merriam-Webster, 2016.) In January 2017, the number of social media users is approximately 2 billion worldwide and these numbers are still growing as mobile device usage and mobile social networks are multiplying. In Thailand, the social network users accounted for 56% of total population or about 37 million people with any social network in 2015. The top five popular social

network were Facebook® (32%), Line® (29%), Facebook® Messenger (28%), Google+® (22%) and Instagram® (19%). (Statica, 2017)

Health care professionals, like pharmacists, also use social media increasingly for social and professional purposes. (O'Hara, Fox and Donahue, 2013; Alsobayel, H., 2016) This led to many pharmaceutical professional organizations (e.g., the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists [ASHP], the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain) to develop policy statements or guidelines to support pharmacists who wish to use social media for professional purposes. (American Society of Health-System Pharmacists, 2012; Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain, 2016) Thus, pharmacists could use social media, as a new tool, in pharmacy practice and apply them with professional judgment to meet the goal of helping people make the best use of medications.

There were many studies of pharmacists' use of social media. For examples, in a survey of independent community pharmacists in Texas published in 2013, 56% of samples use email, 34% use text messages, and 5% use Facebook® to communicate with health care professionals. To communicate with patients, 36% of samples use email, 30% use online text messages and 7% use Facebook®. These samples communicate with patients using online tools about drug therapy related information once a month. (Shcherbakova and Shepherd, 2014)

The second survey used an online questionnaire during March and April 2014 in Alberta, Canada. Almost all of the subjects (82.8%) of samples used social media for personal or professional purposes. The most common social media were Facebook® and Twitter® by smartphones. About three-fourths (75.5%) of samples had a Facebook® account, and 49.0% of them used Facebook® for professional purposes. More than one-third (38.1%) of samples were Twitter® users and had a higher rate of professional utilization (54.8%). The factors predicted the use of social media for professional purposes included younger age and fewer years of professional experience. Subjects perceived that the most benefit of social media in professional aspect was to connect with pharmacy colleagues. (Barry and Pearson, 2015)

However, the use of social media for professional purposes among community pharmacists in Bangkok, Thailand, remains unknown. This study was conducted to examine the use of social media by community pharmacists in the capital city of Bangkok, Thailand.

2. Objectives

To examine on the use of social media in Thai pharmacist community in Bangkok, Thailand.

3. Materials and methods

This cross-sectional study is to examine on the use of social media of Thai community pharmacists in Bangkok, Thailand. In January 2017, a survey was conducted with 249 subjects. This study used a convenience sampling. A questionnaire was designed by researchers and some items were modified from the research tool of Shcherbakova and Shepherd. (2014) The content validity was tested to be satisfactory based on the feedback from three experts and the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.90 for internal consistency testing. Data were analyzed by SPSS program version

HSI-64

16.0. Descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation (S.D.), frequency and percentage were used.

4. Results

1. Demographic data

The results showed that there were 57.4% female and 42.6% male. The mean age was 39.4 ± 9.76 years old and the majority of them (80.3%) were 21-50 years old. Approximately half of them were single (52.6%). About three-fourths (78.3%) were graduated as bachelor degree in pharmacy and 2/3 of them worked as full time pharmacists, as shown in table 1. The monthly average income was $78,963.86 \pm 56,275.91$ Baht and about a half of them had income less than 50,000 Baht/month.

Table 1 The demographic data of /249 community pharmacists.

Demographic data	Frequency (N ¹ = 249)	Percentage
Gender		
• Male	106	42.6
• Female	143	57.4
Age		
• 21 – 30 years	51	20.5
• 31 – 40 years	86	34.5
• 41 – 50 years	63	25.3
• ≥ 51 years	49	19.7
Status		
• Single	131	52.6
• Married	118	47.4
Education		
• Bachelor degree	195	78.3
• Master degree	54	21.7
Type of pharmacist		
• Full-time pharmacist	150	60.2
• Part-time pharmacist	99	39.8
Income/month (Baht)		
• ≤ 50,000 Baht	126	50.6
• 50,001 – 100,000 Baht	53	21.2
• 100,001 – 150,000 Baht	50	20.1
• 150,001 – 200,000 Baht	8	3.2
• ≥ 200,001 Baht	12	4.9
Total	249	100.0

¹N = the number of sample

2. Behavior on use of social media

2.1 Target groups of use social media

All subjects in the sample use social media. The most cited reason was to communicate with their patients. More than 80% of community pharmacists used social media to connect with their patients. The second group that they communicated was pharmacists (72.7%), and the third and the fourth were other health professionals (34.9%), and physician (20.9%), as shown in table 2.

Table 2 Target groups that community pharmacist connected by social media.

Target groups	Frequency (N = 249)	Percentage
● Patients	205	82.3
● Pharmacists	181	72.7
● Other health professionals	87	34.9
● Physicians	52	20.9

2.2 Equipment for using social media

As shown in table 3, the most common tools, that community pharmacists used, were smartphone (87.1%), notebook (83.1%), followed by tablet (42.2%) and desktop was the last (19.3%).

Table 3 Equipment for using social media.

Equipment	Frequency (N = 249)	Percentage
● Smartphone	217	87.1
● Notebook	207	83.1
● Tablet	105	42.2
● Desktop PC	48	19.3

2.3 Types of social media

As shown in table 4, the most popular social media program used by community pharmacists used was Line[®] (97.2%). The second type of social media using was e-mail (75.1%) followed by Facebook[®] (64.7%) and website (24.1%). No subject used twitter[®].

Table 4 Types of social media.

Social media	Frequency (N = 249)	Percentage
● Line®	242	97.2
● Email	187	75.1
● Facebook®	161	64.7
● Website	60	24.1
● Twitter®	0	0.0

2.4 Objective of using social media

Subject in the sample frequently used social media for chat, search, and get news which accounted for 84.7%, 79.5% and 79.1% respectively. "Chat" or online message sending was the most popular and a little more than "search" and "get news". About a half of them posted and shared on social media, as shown in table 5.

Table 5 Objective of social media using

Objective	Frequency (N = 249)	Percentage
● Chat	211	84.7
● Search	198	79.5
● News	197	79.1
● Post and share	112	45.0

2.5 Frequent use of social media

As shown in table 6, there were 4 items that these samples response in 5 levels on frequency of social media use. For communication on drug therapy related information to patients, 40.9% of them used social media every day. About one-fourth of them (23.7%) daily used for searching disease-related information. The majority of sample used social media 1-2 times/week for searching disease and drug-related information. And the last issue that was seldom used by samples is for searching sale promotion and price of drug products.

Table 6 Frequent use of social media

Behavior	Frequency (percentage)				
	Though out the day	Once a day	3-4 times per week	1-2 times per week	Seldom
1. Communication on drug therapy related information to patients	18 (7.2)	84 (33.7)	86 (34.5)	61 (24.5)	0 (0.0)
2. Searching disease-related information	11 (4.4)	48 (19.3)	19 (7.6)	134 (53.8)	37 (14.9)
3. Searching drug-related information	23 (9.2)	0 (0.0)	73 (29.3)	153 (61.5)	0 (0.0)
4. Searching sale promotion and price of drug products.	11 (4.4)	12 (4.8)	49 (19.7)	57 (22.9)	120 (48.2)

3. Attitude of community pharmacists on use of social media for patient-pharmacist communications

For the attitude of subjects on using social media for communicating with patients, the results showed that social media became a new channel to improve pharmacist-patient communication because the percentage of results as "most agree" and "more agree" of two issues were 29.7, 42.3 and 29.3, 41.0 respectively, as shown in table 7.

However, they answered that social media may be used moderate frequently in communicating with patients (the percentage of "moderate agree" = 43.0), social media takes too much time to communicate with patients, (the percentage of "moderate agree" = 43.0), social media may improve patients' quality of life (the percentage of "moderate agree" = 40.6), social media may improve patients' knowledge, (the percentage of "moderate agree" = 34.9), and social media may improve the compliance of drug therapy (the percentage of "moderate agree" = 26.1).

Table 7 Attitude of community pharmacists on use of social media for patient-pharmacist communications

Benefit	Frequency (percentage)				
	Most agree	More agree	Moderate agree	Less agree	Least agree
	5	4	3	2	1
1. Social media can improve pharmacist-patient communication.	74 (29.7)	195 (42.3)	70 (28.1)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)
2. Social media become a new channel for pharmacist-patient communication	73 (29.3)	102 (41.0)	74 (29.7)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)
3. Social media may be used more frequently in communicating with patients	0 (0.00)	99 (39.8)	107 (43.0)	43 (17.3)	0 (0.00)
4. Social media may improve the compliance of drug therapy	0 (0.00)	104 (41.8)	65 (26.1)	24 (5.6)	66 (26.5)
5. Social media may improve patients' quality of life.	0 (0.00)	68 (27.3)	101 (40.6)	32 (12.9)	48 (19.3)
6. Social media takes too much time to communicate with patients	0 (0.00)	37 (14.9)	107 (43.0)	105 (42.2)	0 (0.00)
7. Social media may improve patients' knowledge.	0 (0.00)	68 (27.3)	87 (34.9)	14 (5.60)	48 (19.3)

5. Discussion

The results of this study showed that Line[®] (97.2%) was the most popular social media using by Thai community pharmacists, followed by e-mail (75.1%), Facebook[®] (64.7%) and website (24.1%). These results are different from the previous reports of Shcherbakova and Shepherd (2014) and Barry and Pearson (2015). The first report surveyed independent community pharmacists in Texas in 2013 and showed that 56% of samples use email, 34% use text messages, and 5% use Facebook[®] to communicate with health care professionals. To communicate with patients, 36% of samples use email, 30% use online text messages and 7% use Facebook[®]. The second report was conducted in March and April 2014 in Alberta, Canada and found that the most common social media were Facebook[®] and Twitter[®] by smartphones. This difference can be described by the trend of smartphone and social media users in Thailand. The top three popular social media, for 2017, were Facebook[®] (32%), Line[®] (29%), Facebook[®] Messenger (28%) and the number of smartphone users in Thailand is increasing to reach 21.8 million. (Statica, 2017) Both trends support Line[®] to be the first social media that Thai pharmacists use by smartphones because this application is easy to use and they can use Line anytime when they want. They easy to use Line for chat, search, get news, and post and share.

For the attitude on using social media for communicating with patients, the results showed that social media became a new channel to improve pharmacist-patient communication. The patients were the top of community pharmacists used social media connected with. These results are the same as the results from Shcherbakova and Shepherd (2014) and Barry and Pearson (2015) that they communicate with patients using online tools about drug therapy related information once a month and they perceived that the most benefit of social media in professional aspect was to connect with pharmacist colleagues.

From this study, community pharmacists widely use social media to connect with patients at anytime and anywhere as they want. Thus they should try to use social media such as Line[®], email and Facebook[®] more frequently to chat, search, get news, post and share health-related information with patients. These are new channel of communication between providers and clients that will promote their relationship, and also patients' knowledge, quality of drug use, health status and well-being.

However, this study was conducted with community pharmacists in Bangkok, only. It may not represent the whole kingdom of Thailand. The future study may conduct to survey the use of social media with the samples from all regions of Thailand.

6. Conclusion

Thai community pharmacists in Bangkok daily used social media to chat, search, get news, and post and share with patients, pharmacist, other health professionals and physician. They used smartphone, notebook, tablet and desktop. The top four social media used by pharmacists were Line[®], e-mail, Facebook[®] and website. They also perceived that social media became a new channel to improve pharmacist-patient communication, patient's knowledge, relationship, quality of drug use and well-being.

7. Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank assistant professor Dr. Monthira B. Thaveesri, Dr. Sarun Gorsanan, and Lecturer Payut Tavornsatit for their supports in content validity testing.

8. References

- Alsobayel, H. (2016). Use of Social Media for Professional Development by Health Care Professionals: A Cross-Sectional Web-Based Survey. *JMIR Med Educ*, 2(2), e15.
- American Society of Health-System Pharmacists, (2012). ASHP Statement on Use of Social Media by Pharmacy Professionals. Retrieved February 25, 2017, from <https://www.ashp.org/doclibrary/bestpractices/autoitstsocialmedia.aspx>.
- Barry, A.R., Pearson, G. J.(2015) Professional Use of Social Media by Pharmacists. *Can J Hosp Pharm*, 68(1), 22–27.
- Merriam-Webster Dictionary and Thesaurus. (n.d.). Social media. Retrieved February 25, 2017, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/social%20media>.
- O'Hara, B., Fox, B.I., Donahue, B. (2013). Social media in pharmacy: heeding its call, leveraging its power. *J Am Pharm Assoc*, 53(6), 561-4.

HSI-70

- Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain. (2016). Top Social Media Best Practice Tips for Pharmacists. Retrieved February 25, 2017, from <http://www.rpharms.com/support-pdfs/top-social-media-tips-for-pharmacists.pdf/>.
- Shcherbakova, N., Shepherd, M. (2014). Community pharmacists, Internet and social media: an empirical investigation. *Res Social Adm Pharm*,10(6), e75-85.
- Statista. (2017). Most famous social network sites worldwide as of January 2017, ranked by number of active users (in millions). Retrieved February 25, 2017, from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/>.

