

Example Master's Project Proposal

(FPH 8990: 2013-2014)

- 1) This MPH Project Proposal form will be completed during the FPH 8990 Master's Project seminar semester.
- 2) Attachments:
 - a) CITI training in research ethics is required.
 - b) Include a Letter of Understanding from an external research advisor, if appropriate.
 - c) IRB: The Project cannot begin until the student provides documentation of approval, exemption or a waiver from the WSU Institutional Review Board (IRB).
- 3) Approvals: Students should use this form to seek advisor and course director approval for study concept.
- 4) MPH Project Proposal forms should be submitted electronically: typed name and access id on page 3/3 signifies approval. Further instructions are available on page 3/3
- 5) The MPH Office notifies the student that research can formally begin after all signatures are obtained and the student provides documentation of IRB approval/exemption.

Name:	Anonymous; used by consent	ID#		Date:	01/12/2014
Major <u>PHP</u>	Academic Advisor	Judy Arnetz, PhD	Research Advisor	Judy Arnetz, PhD	
Credit Hours previously registered for in this course	3	Total credit hours for the Project	3		
Estimated completion date:	June 2014				
Study Type (see FPH 8990 Project Guidelines section II):	Case Study/Survey				

Research Project Title: Informal Social Media in Public Health: A Case Study and Survey Project on the Motivations for Creating and Following an Informal Health Blog.

1. Statement of the problem, its scope and rationale:

The internet is playing an increasingly important role in our lives. It is estimated that approximately 85% of the adult population in the United States currently uses the internet (Fox, 2013). The internet has also become a common source for health information. A 2012 survey found that over 70% of adults reported using the internet to obtain health information over the past year (Fox, 2013). The World Wide Web has changed significantly over the years and the term Web 2.0 is commonly used to designate the changes that have occurred in the last two decades or so (O'Reilly, 2005; Sundar, Edwards, Hu & Stavrositu, 2007). Web 2.0 is characterized by advances in internet technology that permit greater user interaction. Under Web 1.0 users were primarily information consumers; Web 2.0 permits users to be information creators as well (Hardey, 2008). Blogs and other social networking sites are examples of Web 2.0 tools (Parise, Guinan & Weinberg, 2008). The term "blog" comes from the combination of the words "web" and "log" ("weblog", Miller & Pole, 2010; Singh, Veron-Jackson & Cullinane, 2008; Kovic, Lulic & Brumini, 2008). A blog is a personal web site with dated entries, presented in reverse chronological order, typically focused on a particular topic (Miller & Pole, 2010; Adams, 2010). Visitors to the site can typically leave public comments, subscribe to the web page (receiving notification when a new post is made), and individual blogs can be connected to other blogs. The term "blogosphere" is used to refer to the various blogs and their interconnections (Kovic, Lulic & Brumini, 2008; Adams, 2010). With the advent of Web 2.0 blogs are another potential source of health information available on the internet.

Information is lacking regarding why informal health blogs are created and how and why they are utilized by blog followers. This is an important public health concern for a number of reasons. Understanding why health blogs are created and followed will provide information on the potential usefulness of this form of social media for the field of public health. For example, if blog followers report accessing the blog for health and treatment information then public health officials may want to utilize this form of social media for patient education. In addition, blogs that

focus on rare health conditions may be a way for health professionals to identify and reach various target audiences that have previously been elusive (Viswanath, 2011). Finally, it is important to understand how and why such blogs are utilized by the public because the accuracy of the information available on such informal sites is often unverified (Moretti, De Oliveira & Da Silva; Moorhead, et al., 2013). Previous research on the motivations of health bloggers has identified factors such as social support (Chretien & Kind, 2013; Sundar et. al; Baker and Moore, 2008), empowerment (Sundar et al., 2007), coping (Sundar et al., 2007), identity formation (Sundar et al., 2007), knowledge sharing, influencing others, and creative expression (Kovic et al., 2008) that serve as motivation for blog creators.

This project will present a case study of one informal health blog. As part of the case study we will ask the blog creator to complete a brief questionnaire on their motivations/goals for creating and maintaining the blog. We will also collect basic demographic information on the blog followers/subscribers as well as their reasons for following this blog.

2. Questions and/ or hypothesis to be addressed:

The purpose of this project is to describe an informal health blog and to collect information from both the blog creator and blog followers regarding their respective reasons for developing and following this particular health blog. The health blog under study is one written by the parent/care taker of a child with a relatively rare condition (congenital blindness). It is therefore hypothesized that the author will report social support, coping, and knowledge sharing as primary motivating factors for creating/maintaining this blog. It is also hypothesized that blog followers will report similar reasons for following this particular health blog.

3. Source of materials, subjects, etc.:

Case study to be written on the following public blog:

The blog creator has already agreed to allow a case study to be written about the blog and to allow me to post the survey link on her public blog for her followers to complete. A letter granting me permission to use her public blog for this project as described above is attached. An information sheet will be included as part of the survey.

Blog followers will also be asked to complete a brief anonymous survey. The survey will contain basic demographic questions (sex, age range, race/ethnicity, income) and questions asking followers to report their reasons for following this blog. The blog currently has 108 followers. The number of potential respondents may be higher because some people may read the blog, but may not officially follow/subscribe to the blog.

4. Methods, study design, statistical analysis:

Blog followers:

A survey will be developed using Survey Monkey. The link to the anonymous survey will be posted on the blog along with a brief description of the purpose of the survey and this project. The survey will collect basic demographic data and respondents will be asked to report their reasons for reading or following the blog. The survey questions will be a mix of forced choice and open ended questions (see attached survey). Data will be analyzed using SPSS. Content analysis will be done on the open ended responses. Descriptive statistics will be provided for the results. The results of the survey completed by blog followers will be posted on the blog once data analysis is complete.

Blog creator:

The blog creator will be asked to complete a questionnaire (see attached) regarding her motivations for creating this blog. Hollenbaugh (2011) developed an original measure to assess the motivations of blog creators. The scale included 25 items that measured 7 factors or motivations for blogging. The survey for the blog creator will include 13 questions from this measure which represent the following factors: Helping/informing, social connection, get feedback. The other questions will not be included in the survey as the factors they represent are not relevant to the present

project. Three additional questions were formulated based on other research on blogging motivations (Sundar et al., 2007). An open ended response question asking the blog creator to provide additional information on her motivations for creating this blog will also be included. Data will be analyzed using SPSS. Content analysis will be done on the open ended responses.

Hypothesized results:

It is hypothesized that, due to the relatively uncommon nature of the blog subject's condition, a large number of blog followers will report accessing this blog for information and resources for a child with similar health issues. Specifically, it is hypothesized that the blog creator will report social support, coping, and knowledge sharing as primary motivating factors for creating/maintaining this blog. It is hypothesized that blog followers will report similar motivating factors for following this blog.

6. Relevance to the field of Public Health (see following section): The internet is playing an increasingly more important role in the delivery of health and health care information. Informal blogs are one potential source of health information available on the internet and an understanding of how and why such sites are used may present potential opportunities for public health professionals and the dissemination of health information. In addition, it is also important to understand how and why such blogs are utilized by the public because there is some concern regarding the quality of the information available on such informal sites (Moretti et al., 2012; Moorhead, et al., 2013).

7. MPH Program Objectives and Competencies: The MPH Project is a culminating experience of the MPH program and therefore, the objectives of student research proposals must be consistent with meeting the core public health competencies of the MPH degree. Indicate how your proposed Project will demonstrate competency in the following *MPH Program Core Public Health Competencies* (part I) and *Additional Core Public Health Competencies That May Apply to the Research Project* (part II):

<p>I. MPH Program Core Public Health Competencies</p>
<p>Application of evidence-based knowledge from behavioral and social sciences, biostatistics, epidemiology, environmental health, or health care organization to understanding and improving the health the public:</p> <p>This project will explore the role of an informal health blog in public health. The design of the study and analysis of the data will apply knowledge from behavioral and social sciences and biostatistics.</p>
<p>Usage of appropriate research and analytical strategies to address public health issues.</p> <p>Survey Monkey will be used to collect anonymous data from blog followers. The survey data will be analyzed using statistical software (SPSS) and descriptive statistics will be calculated. Content analysis will be done on the open ended responses</p>
<p>Communication of public health principles and findings to professional and/or community audiences using a variety of media and methods.</p> <p>The final paper will be reviewed by public health professionals and a presentation describing the project and results will be given to an audience of public health professionals/peers.</p>
<p>Understanding of the ethical choices, values, and professional practices implicit in public health decisions, giving consideration to the effect of choices on community stewardship, equity, social justice, and accountability.</p> <p>This project will describe an informal health blog and will collect information on followers of the blog. In doing so, the project will describe the role such a health blog provides in public health and dissemination of health information. The final paper will discuss limitations of informal social media in health care (Accuracy of information, confidentiality issues, etc.)</p>

II. Additional Core Public Health Competencies That May Apply to the Research Project:

Collaborate sensitively, professionally, and ethically with individuals from diverse cultural, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

The case study portion of this project will describe a health blog dedicated to a special needs child.

This project will be submitted to and approved by the WSU Institutional Review Board before initiation. The survey will be anonymous and a consent statement will inform respondents that participation is voluntary.

Recognize dynamic interactions between human and social systems and how they affect relationships among individuals, groups, organizations, communities, and other structures.

This project will explore the relationship(s) between the blog creator and blog followers by collecting information on (1) the reasons why the blog was created and (2) the reasons why the blog is followed. The case study portion of this project will explore the relationships created between this blog and other linked blogs. The survey portion of this project will explore the interactions between humans in the online community created by blogs.

Evaluate the roles of health care delivery systems, public health infrastructure, financing, and health policy in solving public health concerns:

This project will explore the role of blogs in the delivery of health information to the public.

Student: Type in the names below; Add your own Access ID and Date. Save this form to your computer as NAMEMPHPROJECTPROPOSALDATE. Forward the Project Proposal to the Research Advisor.

Faculty: Type in your access id and date to signify approval. Please note that the MPH Project Proposal form is submitted electronically using WSU email addresses. After you type in your name and access id, please forward this form to the next individual for approval. Please copy the student in all communications.

Candidate's Signature (Type Name):	Access ID: ab1234	Date: 3/24/2014
Approved by Research Advisor (Type Name):	Access ID: ab2345	Date: 2/16/2014
Approved by Academic Advisor (Type Name):	Access ID: ab3456	Date: 2/16/2014
Approved by Course Director (Type Name)	Access ID: ab4567	Date: 3/24/2014

Letter of Understanding, if applicable Yes

CITI IRB Training Documentation Yes

NOTE: Research cannot begin until IRB approval or waiver is provided to MPH Office

Notice of IRB Approval Enclosed IRB #: _____ Yes

Notice of IRB Waiver Enclosed Yes

References

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