

Contemporary Issues

“The power of Twitter”: Using social media at a conference with nursing students



A B S T R A C T

The potential impact of social media use in nursing education, continuing professional development, and nurses' advocacy is unfolding at a rapid pace. Nurse educators are uniquely placed to incorporate the use of social media to enhance students' learning experiences and support students to develop competency in the use of social media for patient benefit. This paper outlines a novel way in which professional education on social media use was integrated into an undergraduate nursing programme. Digital professionalism was cultivated together with collaborative active learning. Students connected using the Twitter hashtag #kclciat18 registered for the ‘Connecting it all Together 2017’ conference held at the Florence Nightingale Faculty of Nursing, Midwifery & Palliative Care, King's College London. Students were invited to participate in an education session on social media, and live activities using Twitter. The conference provided students with a forum to learn about Twitter and practice using Twitter in a professional capacity. Utilising the healthcare conference hashtag repository, Symplur, quantitative and qualitative measures were accessible indicating the reach and extent of connectivity. A combination of qualitative and quantitative outcome measures will help student nurses appreciate the power of Twitter for patient benefit.

1. Introduction

Social media is widely used by nurses, and is gaining prominence in nursing education. While there are many cautions about the use of social media, there is increasing recognition of the value of this technology for nurses (Nursing and Midwifery Council, 2017). This value extends to student nurses, where social media can support cognitive development and writing skills (Norris and Gimber, 2013) and promote collegiality (Stephens and Gunther, 2016). Authors have recognized the need for nurses to embrace social media (Ferguson, 2013; Jackson et al., 2014). The vast majority of nursing students are using social media for educational and academic purposes (Duke et al., 2017). There are many articles advising nurses to use social media at an individual level, such as Bressler and Caceres (2018). It is increasingly commonplace for qualified nurses to use Twitter, connecting with online communities such as #WeNurses, #WeMHNurses and #WeCYPnurses. However, little formal guidance has been provided on how to develop social media use as a nursing competency.

The majority of nursing students use social media to discuss educational issues (Duke et al., 2017) and reported benefits from using social media (Price et al., 2018). However, there are limited published examples of social media use in nursing education (Smith and Lambert, 2014). The adoption of social media for nursing education purposes is in early days. It is advantageous for nurse educators to develop specific opportunities for nursing students to use social media as a professional

activity. This article describes the novel way in which professional education on social media use, specifically Twitter, was integrated into an undergraduate nursing programme through a conference in the students' first year of study.

2. Context for Students' Use of Twitter

Educators at the Florence Nightingale Faculty of Nursing, Midwifery & Palliative Care at King's College London hosted a family-centred care conference for nursing students in adult, mental health, and children's nursing. This conference convened speakers around a variety of subjects relating to family-centred care. The purpose of the conference was to host unique speakers and familiarize students with conference proceedings, with a view to cultivating professionalism and providing an insight into engaging with continuing professional development in the future. Twitter is increasingly popular at nursing conferences, and was integrated into the students' experiential learning at this conference. The Twitter use was also intended to empower students, and demonstrate the potential impact of their online advocacy. Students were invited to participate by using Twitter but this was not required. Participation was not mandatory as not all nursing students are comfortable or interested in using social media in an educational context (Price et al., 2018).

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3. Preparing to Tweet Professionally

In advance of the conference, students received information about professional social media use. While it was important to acknowledge and manage risk, for example, around confidentiality and privacy (Lambert et al., 2012) emphasis was also placed on promoting constructive use of social media with a view to preventing risk avoidance (Ferguson, 2013). Students were directed to the King's College London's *Social Media Communications Policy* (KCL, 2016) together with the Nursing and Midwifery Council's *Social Media Guidance* (NMC, 2017). They were given instructions on setting up a Twitter account and were asked to come to the conference with a fully-charged mobile device of their choice with their activated Twitter account.

A unique hashtag was created for the conference: #kclciat17, for 'King's College London Connecting It All Together 2017'. This hashtag was registered on Symplur, which contains a free healthcare conference hashtag repository. Registering the hashtag enabled the authors to access transcripts of tweets and analytic data during and after the conference. Symplur also promoted the conference through their channels, potentially increasing the reach of the Tweets. Speakers at the conference were also encouraged to set up Twitter accounts if they had not already done so, and their Twitter usernames were circulated to students in advance of the conference. Speakers were aware of the efforts to include Twitter, and were urged not to be concerned if they saw students using mobile devices during the presentations.

4. Practical Guidance

The conference began with an hour-long teaching session on social media use. The first author presented a session on Twitter use in nursing. The first portion of the session focused on the reasons for using social media, and its value for nurses. Specifically, Twitter creates an exponential increase in the amount of information that can be exchanged and broadcast amongst users. This accounts for the staying power of social media, as it creates new communication capacity, not previously available from other technology (Shirky, 2009). Students were encouraged to use this language and framing when discussing the merits of social media with colleagues who may see the technology as a fad, or of limited value.

The presentation also included practical information on how to use Twitter during a conference. This portion included guidance like reminders to include the hashtag in all Tweets, encouragement to follow other participants, and how to summarize key points from presentations. The student questions brought forward valuable conversations, including the ethics of discussing politics online as a nurse. The presentation concluded with encouragement for the students to Tweet throughout the conference. The presenter emphasised how to Tweet during a conference, and also provided information for students to support their use of Twitter beyond the conference as well.

5. Monitoring and Sharing Real-time Twitter Activity

A nurse educator with expertise in social media was available throughout the day, monitoring the Tweets online. This was to ensure that Tweeting adhered to a professional standard, and to screen for any problematic Tweets during the conference. In addition, this presented a role modelling opportunity for students. The main outcome of monitoring the Tweeting was to remind participants to use the hashtag in their Tweets, and to share students' posts. The monitoring was done onsite using a laptop, by searching the hashtag through Twitter and Symplur, and also tracking replies to the Tweets.

Twitter use was supported by having two Twitter Roundups throughout the conference. The first Roundup occurred before lunch, with the second at the end of the day. The Roundups consisted of a brief slideshow of prominent student Tweets from the previous sessions, analytic data from the hashtag, and an opportunity to ask questions and troubleshoot Twitter use. This was led by the nurse educator who monitored Twitter throughout the day. The slideshow of Tweets was created during the conference, as students engaged with the hashtag. The Roundups proved valuable, as Tweeting increased considerably in the afternoon sessions. For example, students were surprised to learn that their Tweets had generated over 200,000 Impressions in the morning session. An Impression is the number of unique Twitter accounts reached by the hashtag's Tweets. In essence, it is a rough measure of number of people who have seen the Tweets. The Roundups also facilitated student reflection about the use and potential impact of Twitter as an application of nursing skills. The images in the Roundup slideshows were screenshots of Tweets; while paid apps are available to project Tweets in different styles, these were beyond the capacity of this event.

6. The Resulting Reach and Extent of Connectivity

The need to identify qualitative and quantitative outcome measures in relation to social media use in nursing education has been acknowledged (Ross and Myers, 2017). Utilising Symplur enabled the conference Twitter activity to be measured by number of Tweets and Impressions as well as ascertaining content of Tweets. The method of supporting Tweeting throughout the conference proved to be feasible and acceptable to students.

In total, there were 215 Tweets using the conference hashtag, which generated 404, 241 Impressions (Fig. 1). Impressions are the number of unique Twitter accounts which have been reached by Tweets. The Tweet content included reflections on the presentations, thanking speakers, asking questions, and sharing others' Tweets. This method of supporting Tweeting throughout the conference proved to be feasible and acceptable to students. Tweet content accessed through the healthcare social media transcript of #kclciat17 indicated a variety of comments, including reference to 'mental health and the role of nurses from all disciplines', and 'The conference today taught me so much, including the power of Twitter'. Students' Tweet content indicated a feeling of belonging and connectedness recognized in the growing body of research around Twitter use in nursing education (Stephens and Gunther, 2016).

The content of conference presentations coupled with the use of Twitter throughout the conference raised students' awareness of charitable organisations such as The Young Foundation and Young Minds; thereby enabling student to engage effectively with online resources and to develop ways to signpost patients and their families to access support. It was therefore seen that students were actively learning (Ross and Myers, 2017), engaging 'in the moment' with online resources while they came to recognise their relevance to nursing practice. In addition, a healthcare news and marketing Twitter account 'Healthcare Communication and Social Media News' featured in the Impressions; this online platform boosts connectivity across healthcare-related conferences. Connecting with these organisations added value to the students' Twitter experiences.

There were no instances of inappropriate use of Twitter by students during the conference. There were contributions from people outside the conference, including students who were not unable to attend due to illness. There was an exciting degree of engagement, and anecdotally, some students have continued to utilise Twitter following the

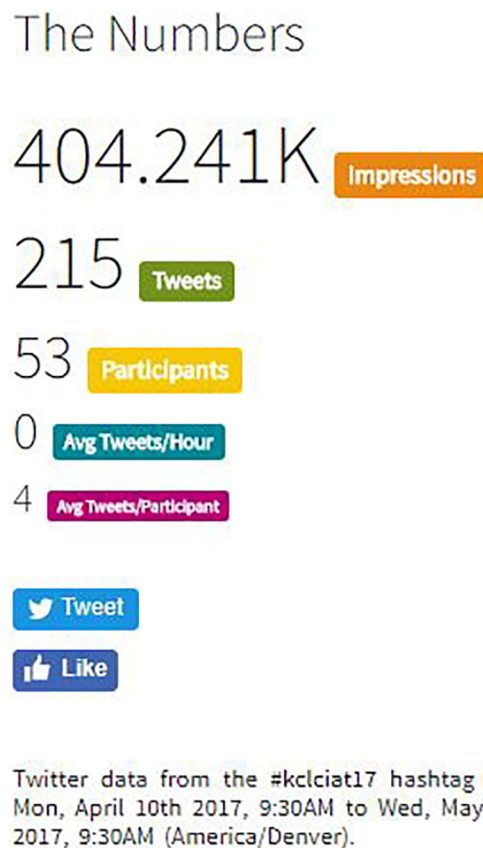


Fig. 1. Analytic data for #kclciat17.

conference. The use of Twitter by the educators and the students increased their interactions, which was positive for both groups when large numbers of students are being taught, and it is difficult to have discussions with large numbers face to face.

7. Summary and Recommendations

Using Twitter with nursing students in this setting was an engaging aspect of the conference experience, facilitating an interactive and dynamic learning experience promoting digital professionalism (Booth and O'Connor, 2017). Students developed their ability to think clearly and communicate reflections on their learning succinctly, demonstrating metacognitive benefits of using the Twitter platform in nursing education (Educause Learning Initiative, 2007). Social media has many potential benefits for the professional development of nurses and provides greater scope for advocacy in the nursing profession. Integrating Twitter into nursing education contextualised within activities or events such as conferences supports the development of social media use as a nursing competency. Future projects could include a formal evaluation of Twitter use amongst students, alongside quantitative and qualitative outcome measurement, and additional follow up initiatives to encourage students to continue collaborating in discussions online. Efforts to include social media in nursing education can help students

drive the changing discourse around nursing, rather than passively adopt new technology. Social media has many potential benefits for nurses, and integrating Twitter into student events is one way to support the development of social media use as a nursing competency.

Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest has been declared by the author. There are no acknowledgements or disclosures.

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