

# Meaningful use of Twitter in nursing education may improve student learning and should be considered as a viable educational tool to assist in the development of digital professionalism

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**Commentary on:** Jones R, Kelsey J, Nelmes P, *et al.* Introducing Twitter as an assessed component of the undergraduate nursing curriculum. *J Adv Nurs* 2016;72:1638–53.

## Implications for practice and research

- Nurse educators should consider incorporating the meaningful use of Twitter into curricula as a mechanism to offer students an interactive and dynamic learning experience related to digital professionalism.
- Further research is needed to measure learning outcomes and develop deeper insights towards appropriate pedagogic theories that can be used to underpin social media use in nursing education.

## Context

The literature exploring social media in nursing education is growing and suggests there is value in using this online, interactive medium to engage students in a range of topics to enhance learning and develop elements of digital professionalism.<sup>1 2</sup> This study by Jones and colleagues delved into the practicalities of deploying Twitter as an assessed element in an undergraduate nursing programme and discussed various implications for students and faculty.

## Methods

This research adopted a case study design and mixed methods to explore the use of Twitter as an assessed component within undergraduate nursing curricula. A short digital professionalism session/webinar provided the study backdrop and the rationale for incorporating Twitter into a blended, introductory educational module undertaken by students at Plymouth University. Two cohorts of nursing students participated in the study, after an initial pilot phase: 450 first year students in the first group, followed by a subsequent 97 first year students in the second cohort. The study used surveys to gather student demographics and opinions related to the value of the activity. Twitter analytic data were also collected to measure online engagement between study participants and a range of external Twitter user accounts (eg, @WeNurses, NHSEngland). The researchers used multiple statistical tests to analyse quantitative findings. Thematic analysis was used to explore qualitative data.

## Findings

Most nursing students thought Twitter was a worthwhile activity and felt they had 'learned something' by being involved in the study. Nursing students valued gaining a wider understanding of healthcare issues and professional development insights through their interaction with other Twitter users. The findings also enabled nurse educators to quickly refine teaching and assessment strategies related to the use of Twitter, including the generation of a student-focused value proposition addressing the question of 'why social media', and the need to step student adoption expectations in relation to technical competency and usage.

## Commentary

This study focused on the viability of using Twitter as a platform to educate nursing students to the importance of digital professionalism. Students' perception of the activity's worthiness and whether learning occurred were key variables explored, along with findings related to the pedagogical complexities of introducing, supporting and sustaining educational opportunities using social media. These findings generate useful and pragmatic insights for educators contemplating using social media technologies as an assessed element in nursing curricula. Other literature examining social media in nursing education has highlighted a range of potential benefits and pitfalls of using these technologies as an educational innovation.<sup>3</sup> The findings of this study add important empirical evidence supportive towards the meaningful and purposeful use of social media technology like Twitter within nursing education, especially in terms of knowledge and network development functionalities.

Another important consideration highlighted by the study and voiced by other authors<sup>2 4</sup> is the growing importance of digital professionalism in nursing education. This study reinforces the concept of digital professionalism suggesting that this competency should be commensurable with numeracy and communication skills, and purposefully avoiding social media within education constitutes a lost opportunity. The authors also project a refreshing interpretation of nursing students' receptivity towards participation in educational activities underpinned by social media technology. They stress that careful management of expectations relating to students' abilities and desire to interact with the wider public online is required. Similarly, the authors reinforce that students are not always cognisant of the professional and networking potentials of Twitter, even among students who use social media in their personal lives. Further research building from this study should consider exploring the theoretical underpinning of educational activities using social media, and whether this type of communication technology has meaningful applicability for learning within clinical or professional practice settings.

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Competing interests None declared.

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