First year nursing students' experiences of social media during the transition to university: a focus group study.

Contemporary Nurse

1) Dr. Caleb Ferguson RN, BScN, MHlth, PhD
   UTS Chancellors Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Graduate School of Health, University of Technology Sydney, Australia.

2) Dr. Michelle DiGiacomo BA, MHSc, PhD,
   Senior Research Fellow, Centre for Cardiovascular & Chronic Care, Faculty of Health, University of Technology Sydney, Australia.

3) Mr. Bernard Saliba B Med Sci
   Research Assistant, Faculty of Health, University of Technology Sydney, Australia.

4) Dr. Janet Green RN, MN NEd, MBioethics, MA e-Learning, PhD
   Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Health, University of Technology Sydney, Australia.

5) Dr. Calvin Moorley RN, PhD,
   Senior Lecturer, School of Health & Social Care, London South Bank University, UK.

6) Ms. Aileen Wyllie RN, BA, MHPEd, M Bioethics
   Director of Undergraduate Nursing Studies, Faculty of Health, University of Technology Sydney, Australia.

7) Professor Debra Jackson RN, PhD
   Professor of Nursing, Oxford Brookes University & University of New England, Australia.

Corresponding Author:

Dr. Caleb Ferguson RN, PhD
UTS Chancellors Postdoctoral Research Fellow,
Graduate School of Health, University of Technology Sydney.
PO Box 123, Jones St, Ultimo, Sydney NSW, 2007 Australia.
Tel +61 2 9514 7235
Email: Caleb.Ferguson@uts.edu.au
Twitter: @calebferg; @mdigiac3; @janetagreen; @uts_health; @calvinmoorley; @debraejackson

Final Word Count: 4892

Highlights

1. Social media can be an important and effective tool to facilitate student learning.

2. Facebook is a useful tool for nursing students in supporting their transition into university in the first year of a nursing degree.

3. Facebook is helpful in developing and strengthening both online and offline relationships of peers at university.

3. Students reported that Facebook was most useful around the time of assessments and during clinical placement.

Abstract

Background:

Social media platforms such as Facebook allow users to connect with each other online. They are also used as tools for creating communities, which can then be utilised as a mean for supportive, professional and social learning.

Objective:

This study aimed to explore first year Bachelor of Nursing student experiences with social media in supporting student transition and engagement into higher education.

Design: Qualitative focus groups

Methods: First year Bachelor of Nursing students were conveniently sampled for inclusion in this study. Ten students were included in three face-to-face focus groups which lasted between 45 minutes and one hour each. When it became apparent that no new information was emerging from focus groups, recruitment stopped. Sessions were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Data were analysed using qualitative thematic content analysis.

Results:

Three key themes emerged from the data that illustrates the experiences of transition and engagement of first year student nurses using social media at university. These were; 1) Facilitating familiarity and collaboration at a safe distance; 2) Promoting independent learning by facilitating access to resources; and 3) Mitigating hazards of social media.

Conclusion:

This study has demonstrated the importance of social media applications such as Facebook in supporting informal peer-peer learning and support, augmenting online and offline relationships, and building professional identity as a nurse. Students reported active increased use when assessments were due and while on clinical placement. Students found Facebook useful as an avenue to debrief and reflect, whilst on clinical placement, and as a tool to meet new friends and strengthen existing relationships. There is need for future research and evaluation of interventions that bridge the divide between traditional learning platforms such as Blackboard and social media platforms.

Keywords; Social media; Curriculum planning; Student engagement; Facebook, Student transition; Nurse education; e-learning; First year experience.

Background

The integration of social media technologies has been challenging for the nursing profession (Ferguson, 2012). Social media allows student nurses to connect directly, instantaneously and at low cost with communities of support (Archibald & Clark, 2014). It enables student nurses to share their experiences in supportive, collegial and connected communities both locally and globally. A survey of health students conducted at ten universities throughout Australia has reported the undergraduate health students preferences for digital media as a source of information, and have challenged academics to adopt social media technologies as validated learning platforms (Usher et al, 2014). Further, introducing social media within a professional context and embedded in an educational context is both responsible and fitting with regulatory requirements, and so may also stand to benefit students early in their studies and career. This may help in the transition to university life; as well as with engagement with course content and peers and the development of e-professionalism and professional identity.

Within the teaching and learning setting, social media are rapidly gaining attention as a method to increase engagement, attention and interaction amongst students. Social media represents novel approaches to teaching and learning that are both contemporary and innovative. Moreover, social media based activities can be adopted both in and out of class, and are highly useful when developing flipped approaches to curriculum development. There is no doubt that social media can be an important and effective tool to facilitate student learning when used appropriately (Cleary et al. 2013). Previous research has sought to explore Twitter as a method to foster student engagement; and McKay et al. (2014) successfully demonstrated that Twitter could be used to successfully capture "behind the scenes" conversations and experiences of students, which would have not otherwise be captured. Application of social media approaches to teaching and learning in nursing curriculum may assist in developing students' digital learning skills, and increasing student socialisation including providing enhanced informal peer support.

Objective

This study aimed to explore first year Bachelor of Nursing student nurses' experience with social media in supporting student transition and engagement into higher education. Further, this study examined two principles of Transition and Engagement of Kift's Transition Pedagogy. These included;

1) Exploring the ways in which social media could assist in transition academically and socially into learning in higher education and the nursing profession; and

2) Exploring students' experiences of how they engage in their learning and facilitate interactions with peers and academic staff.

Kift (2009) proposes that engagement of students during their transition into university depends on a number of factors including contact with academic staff, student-student engagement and commitment as well as the balancing of personal and student life. The theme of belonging is echoed throughout this framework and this was expected to be identified and discussed by students when asked about social media and their experience with it. Therefore, this study further aimed to

elucidate innovations in curriculum delivery for social teaching and learning, using technologies familiar to students.

Design, Setting and Participants

The design utilised in this study was a qualitative focus group approach. A convenience sample of 10 first-year nursing students was recruited. The focus groups were conducted at a one university in a large major city in New South Wales, Australia.

Methods

During October 2015, three face-to-face focus groups were conducted with first year Bachelor of Nursing students from one university in a large major city in New South Wales (NSW), Australia. Volunteer participants were recruited via posting of study flyers throughout classroom and laboratory areas, oral and email announcements via classroom visits and online university message boards, and social media. Snowball sampling was also employed by asking students to tell peers who may be interested in participating. Students were invited to attend one of three focus groups within a two week period. For ease of access, focus groups were held in private classrooms on the university campus. Because these sessions were held between classes, refreshments were provided. Focus groups were conducted by an academic researcher (MD) employed by the university who had no undergraduate teaching role. She was an experienced qualitative researcher who neither knew, nor was known, by any of the participants. A research assistant (BS) acted as a scribe during focus groups.

Conduct of the study was approved by the University of Technology Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee (Reference: 2015000678). Prior to commencing the focus groups, the facilitator re-stated the purpose of the study and ethical considerations concerning their involvement. Participants were offered written study information prior to providing their written informed consent. Most important in this context was the assurance of confidentiality and de-identification of transcripts for anonymity. Participants consented for the facilitator to audio record the proceedings. Recruitment continued until data saturation occurred, and information elicited during focus groups became repetitive as independently perceived by both the facilitator (MD) and scribe (BS).

Focus groups lasted between 45 and 60 minutes and were guided by a schedule containing open-ended questions about the students' experience of social media in relation to their transition to and engagement with studying at university. Probes were used by the facilitator to ascertain additional information about frequency, duration, and type of use, content of material, use of private online groups, applications, and instant chat features. Students were encouraged to respond to one-another's' comments, but were also asked questions directly.

Data Analysis

Interviews were transcribed verbatim. Data were analysed using qualitative thematic content analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Data analysis was undertaken by two members (MD and BS) of the research team to ensure validity and reliability. Each transcript was read independently by researchers and data coded by MD, BS, and CF, and initial themes were identified. Analysts discussed and debated themes until final themes and subthemes were agreed.

Results

Ten participants, of whom 50% (n=5) were male, comprised three focus groups. All of the participants were eight months into a three-year Bachelor's degree program in nursing. Most participants were in their early 20's. Seven participants had enrolled in their current degree immediately following high school, two participants had transferred from another degree program into first year, and one participant was a mature aged student. Eight participants were domestic and two were international students. Three key themes illustrating the experiences of transition and engagement of first year student nurses using social media at university were identified. These were; 1) Facilitating familiarity and collaboration at a safe distance; 2) Promoting independent learning by facilitating access to resources; and 3) Mitigating hazards of social media. These are presented in detail below.

Facilitating familiarity and collaboration at a safe distance

Students reported that the primary social media platform they used was Facebook, therefore the majority of focus group discussions centred around this platform. Students explained that Facebook enhanced their ability to interact with their nursing student peers which otherwise would have been limited to class contact hours, and restricted by factors such as geographic distances, and incompatible schedules. Facebook enabled connections in large groups (entire first year cohort), although communication and interaction was more prevalent in smaller, closer knit groups (single subjects, assignment groups, clinical placement groups).

Students used Facebook to initiate assignment groups and to check for reminders and updates.

> **Student 10**: *"as soon as I get an assignment, I go on Facebook to make a group. You know who's in the group and you can start planning, and if you need to participate heavily, you can use Skype".*
>
> **Student 9**: *"especially if everyone lives faraway"*
>
> **Student 6**: *"I think it could be useful for just even just for say for today, making sure we are wearing our uniform or getting info about things you might not have seen if you don't check your emails or something like that… so just like one person saying this is what's due"*

The number of group members appeared to impact on interaction quality. In larger groups, it was harder to get to know people. The following excerpts depict the nature and use of different sized groups:

> **Student 9**: *"oh yea we have this massive Facebook group"*
> **Student 10**: *"like 270 people of first year nursing"*
> **Student 9**: *"it's not a very tight knit group though, sometimes someone will post something and people will just ignore it"*
> **Student 9**: *"you don't know everyone"*

Student 3: *"I think it's helpful if you have both* [smaller and larger groups]*, like if you're seeing them in person in a class but then you know if you need help and you're not close enough to call... you'd just go on Facebook and be like 'hey I know you... can you help me with this' whereas in a Facebook group with all the nurses, anyone can answer and you have no idea who that person is, whereas if you know them you're like 'oh... my friend'"*

Facebook was important in connecting with peers and in developing and sustaining both online and offline relationships. A number of participants highlighted the fact that in transition to university they developed close friendships beginning in the first few days or weeks of university, and these friendships were supported by the use of Facebook.

Student 4: *"We got to know each other through the workshops. One of our first tasks was "yes we gotta create a Facebook" and even for one girl we had to teach her how to use Facebook for that to work. And there have been other classes where you got to know other students through the use and then you just sort of add people on Facebook"*

Students agreed that the collaborative nature of nursing and nursing education lends itself well to social media platforms with such a high degree of interactivity, such as Facebook. If more intensive group contact was required, Skype was another platform that was used. A sense of camaraderie was built from repeated contact online and this was reinforced in-person. Most participants explained that they mainly use Facebook in the context of working together on group assignments, getting reminders for peers, or asking and viewing questions and responses about assessment requirements or subject content. Participants reported engaging with their nursing Facebook groups increasingly around assignment deadlines.

Student 4: *"…Group assignments are when I'm using it the most because we are collaborating ideas or trying to meet up."*

Keeping in contact with peers and providing social support during and following clinical placements was another use of Facebook.

Student 7: *"When I went to my first placement day, I met them and two of my close friends live very close to me.. and it's very helpful to meet them at placement and where they live.. I think it's very good for me to contact them any time and after the placement we met at the uni and got information from everyone and explained our experiences and everything…"*

Student 4: *"I just need to tell someone…or see if it's happened to someone else. People share experiences if they're similar…so, Facebook is easy to do that to, like, tell people "this amazing thing happened" - they'd understand me."*

Participants also noted the use of Facebook for posting messages of a social or emotional nature. In some cases, student vented frustrations or stressors involving their studies, but not all group members expressed themselves in this manner on Facebook.

Student 9: *"Stress release too.. if you have a problem you just go to a friend and go "do you have any idea about this?" and they'd be like "no, I have no idea" so it's better than sitting alone in a room and completely stressing out"*

Student 6: *"…I think it's also for some (not for me) but I have noticed a lot of people talk a lot about their stress or frustrations about certain things… like when we had our maths test we had people saying interesting things about maths and what we need it for.. so it's kind of a fun way to alleviate frustrations."*

Despite the widespread adoption of Facebook in this these university students, one local student commented that international students may have different patterns of use of social media. International students were noted to congregate together in different spaces of the university campus.

Student 9: *"I reckon more local students use Facebook and that whereas internationals* [students] *are always together"*

One international student shared feelings of being a person without connections in a new country.

Student 5: *"I feel like I'm on my own. Like [the uni virtual learning environment], you feel alone… because I came from [another country] and I see the [international] groups are separated. So, I imagine someone who came from overseas and having the class finish and you need to connect and some time to share outside the classroom, like a society [club]. I was forced to create a Facebook group. I needed to send it to my leader so I didn't have any option other than to create. I wasn't able to get to know any student or know about the culture. People are so busy."*

Facebook has normalised an additional level of interaction that is less intrusive and direct. The preference for interacting via Facebook was described as a safer, more distanced form of communication that was not as personal or direct as telephoning a fellow student, for example.

Student 9: *"It's easier now to add someone on Facebook than ask for their phone number"*

Student 5: *"I use it to get in touch with friends. We jump on there, mainly group stuff not individually though".*

Student 5: *"…because the year is so big, I found it really helpful to try and connect with people on Facebook because it's a bit hard to ask for their number straight away. It's a bit easier to go to social media; it's not as personal at the start.*

Student 3: *"I think using social media is like next level of interaction…you meet someone in class and then the next level of acknowledgement of the relationship is like Facebook or social media, and when you say they're a good friend, it's like another level of interacting with people while still having distance from the relationship – so now like texting people or calling people is so rare…You're still using that distance from personal intimacy, it still gives that level of distance that people like"*

By viewing the ongoing dialogue between students in a given group, each was able to learn more about one another, as well as link names to faces which facilitated recognition and interaction when on campus. Further, students' Facebook posts provided information about their character and values in some cases, and this informed whether affiliations would grow or plateau.

> **Student 3**: *"I think it was the excitement of making new friends, it's like 'oh lets be friends on Facebook so I can talk to you if I need anything' so many people there all the time, like in the lecture halls… and by the 3rd week you could pick people like 'oh that's the person from that class' and it helped that you knew their name because they'd found you on Facebook and then it's like 'ooh THAT'S her name' so that was helpful…"*

> **Student 3**: *"…you meet people and think they're nice, and then they post something really weird or trashy on Facebook and then you will want to block their messages now because like 'too much information', you know? I find when I have met people in class, I was like 'oh I like them' and then when I see what they post I think, 'ok I really need to keep my distance now'".*

One student explained that they sometimes judged others' posts and was mindful that this behaviour may be reciprocated. Students were keenly aware of the lack of anonymity in these Facebook groups. Self-consciousness was exemplified in one student's description of exhausting many other avenues for obtaining information before resorting to asking his Facebook group a potentially 'stupid' question. His awareness of how he perceived others' posts had influenced the way he used Facebook and the image he wanted to portray to his peers.

> **Student 9**: *"you don't wanna ask that in front of 200 people judging, people kind of judge you and see your picture... so you get the feeling when you walk down the corridor the next day people notice and be like 'oh that's the stupid guy who posted that question online'"*

Promoting independent learning by facilitating access to resources

Students repeatedly emphasised the preference for instant responses to queries. When they encountered obstacles, they sought out alternate pathways. For example, students spoke of rarely directing questions to their lecturers (via email) as this could potentially take hours or longer to get a response.

> **Interviewer**: *"so you're more likely to get a response if you ask a friend, than if you ask a lecturer"*
> **Student 9**: *"within like a minute you get a response, the lecturer takes hours"*
> **Student 10**: *"it's messaging vs. email"*
> **Student 8**: *"and everyone's got their phone on them"*
> **Interviewer**: *"so you email the lecturer knowing they're not going to reply straight away"*
> **Student 10**: *"yeah you sort of know that everyone else is emailing them"*
> **Student 9**: *"you ask your friends and within like 5 mins you get a reply"*

Although this may be perceived as a lack of patience, it also indicates taking initiative in problem solving. Students likewise shared the ways in which they were engaging with other online media in that was not directly linked to assignments. Students said they used the internet to assist with locating job opportunities or to access websites for various health-related organisations or groups. A 'Men in Nursing' blog was visited by some of the male students because this was perceived as relevant to their experience. Some students spoke about how material they accessed on the internet increased their awareness of campaigns for solidarity and pride in nursing as a profession. This online engagement appeared to influence the students' thinking and motivation about their chosen profession and opportunities therein.

> **Student 1**: *"I follow nursing at uni[versity], and like certain groups like "Paramedics Australia", "Rural Flying Doctors Services" they're a bit more interesting because they post cool things like "check this guy out"*
> **Student 3**: *"yea some really motivating things. Occasionally a lot of it I find… I'm friends with other nurses or 3rd years they post things that are like 'proud nursing' like 'you should really be nice to nurses' and the other day I saw one, and my mum's a nurse and all of her friends are like 'this is so beautiful' and things like that it's just like 'yay nurses' and they just pop up sometimes.. Happy nurse things."*
> **Student 4**: *"yea very strong identity, on like Facebook with like the older years there's a lot of like PRO NURSING or PROUD TO BE A NURSE posts or kinda stuff and you're in first year and you're like 'what?'"*

Although the university uses an online interactive platform to post information and grades for students, students remarked that they did not use this platform very often, in some cases because it did not meet their needs, as it was not interactive enough, particularly as compared to Facebook. This led to students relying more heavily on Facebook for uni and study related information and updates although there is no regulation of the study information posted. For example, because students did not check the formal university platform, they sometimes missed vital information about an assessment, as it had not been posted to Facebook.

> **Student 9**: *"I'll admit I missed the quiz she was talking about, so Facebook is good for reminding you about things".*

Although seeking out more palatable and interactive online platforms demonstrates independence, students' neglect of official university information channels can have negative consequences.

Mitigating hazards of social media

Several students spoke about their excessive use or checking of Facebook. Estimating the number of times they checked Facebook per day was a challenge for some; in one case, a student described *mindlessly* checking. In recognition of their frequent usage, some participants described having imposed boundaries to curb their Facebook interaction. Such self-imposed limits included removing the instant messaging application from a mobile phone and only using Facebook when on a computer or tablet. One student described his experience of Facebook to be a love-hate

relationship in that he both enjoyed the ongoing interaction and information afforded, yet felt a type of loss of control over his perceived excessive engagement with Facebook.

> **Student 1**: *"It kinda sucks my soul… it's a love hate relationship .… I just don't wanna be on it all the time. I don't use it on my phone".*

> **Student 6**: *I have taken off the Facebook app on my phone, so I only use messenger to chat… but to check the newsfeed and see what's going on I do that on my iPad"*
> **Interviewer**: *"why did you delete the app?"*
> **Student 6**: *"Because I found that I was using it too much and I didn't need it in my face all the time.. a form of self-control. It's a lot harder to get on it that way".*
> **Student 6**: *"I probably check it every time I get on my iPad.. so like every time I open it.. so like 10-15 times a day"*

> **Student 9**: *"when you're not doing anything".*
> **Interviewer***: "how often is that?"*
> **Student 8**: *"say 10 times, not including the times you just pull it out without thinking"*
> **Student 10**: *"no joke… probably 100 or more"*
> **Student 9**: *"it's just natural now…everyone is the same like on the train, everyone is on it"*
> **Student 10**: *"and if they're not, it's probably because they are out of charge for using it too much"*
> [group laughter]
> **Student 9**: *"I didn't realise I used it so much"*

Participants also discussed the limited privacy in Facebook posting. They suggested that a level of caution and good judgement is required by Facebook users to avoid any potentially negative consequences of posted material. Participants gave the repeated example of a negative consequence that involved loss of or inability to gain employment due to unprofessional or inappropriate posted content.

> **Student 3**: *"yeah because now employers can look at Facebook and easily find you and you have to be a lot more cautious."*

> **Student 3**: *"yeah I went through a stage where I would have to approve tags and things like that, it's a huge issue because I trust most people on there.. but I just make sure I don't do anything that I don't want on Facebook.. yeah so there's a little bit of a privacy issue so you gotta be realistic about it if you're gonna join a social network, so things are gonna be exposed.. when you're going for jobs and stuff as well".*

> **Student 8**: *"someone at my old work had to be let go because of something they posted on Facebook.. so make sure you keep your social life separate"*
> **Interviewer**: *"how easy or hard is that to do?"*
> **Student 9**: *"it's not too hard, you can just use other things.. it's an adjustment"*
> **Student 8**: *"the whole week yesterday, like everyone changed out of uniforms so they can go out and not be seen in their uniform because if that goes on social media and you're holding a beer and you're in university uniform"*
> **Student 10**: *"people are smart these days"*

Discussion

Our findings are similar to that of Tower & colleagues (2014) who conducted a large online survey of 533 nursing students in Australia. Results of their Queensland (Australian) study demonstrated that students found using social media platforms including Facebook to be an innovative method for academics and students to engage in learning. Students who participated in a Facebook group perceived this as overwhelmingly positive and this has helped to relieve students of stress of upcoming assessments, particularly at the end of semester or during exam periods (Tower et al, 2014).

The issues of e-professionalism (including privacy and confidentiality) are evident from our study findings. Participants identified that they are regularly part of a *"massive Facebook group"* in excess of 200 students. However, they also identified that they used it to vent about *"stresses or frustrations"* and that they found it particularly useful whilst on clinical placement. This is a cause for concern. Whilst students may feel that Facebook has private or personal characteristics, this is highly debatable. There remains scope for improvement in the teaching or role modeling of e-professionalism, and recognising professional boundaries in the digital space. There have been a number of reports of 'nurses behaving badly on social media' published to date (Ferguson, 2013; Cleary et al, 2013). A contemporary example of this is an analysis of tweets conducted in 2011. Booth collected a total of 498 Tweets from nursing students, posted publically, over a six day period and coded 189 into five themes in his analysis. The five themes identified included (1) annoyance and stress targeting the educational process; (2) happiness and excitement regarding some element of nursing education; (3) vulgar or derogatory statements targeting elements of nursing education; (4) humour and humorous situations experiences in nursing education; and (5) declarative or questioning comments related to some elements of the education process. This study highlighted the need to improve the education of nursing students to both the benefits and dangers of social media platforms. Concerns and reservations remain about the use of social media, including accuracy, legal and privacy concerns (Kitching et al, 2015). Role modelling by nurse leaders in the digital environment may offer at least a partial solution to this problem (Moorley & Chinn 2016), as may guidance through regulatory bodies (Moorley & Watson 2015).

The complexity of appropriately embedding and augmenting social platforms into the nursing curriculum is recognised within existing literature. Yates and colleagues (2015) recently reported augmenting micro blogging technology into large multi-site lectures. Whilst some students reported feeling more connected, and increased feelings of support and improved lecture experience, some students found this distracting and unhelpful (Yates et al, 2015). As with all digital innovations in nurse education, it is important that educationalists examine the fitness for purpose prior to selecting tools, and designing curricula around these (Ferguson et al, 2016).

George and Dellasega (2011) study using social media with medical students education also found that students felt connected and supported by peers support. They identified collaboration and connectedness in terms of meeting researchers and others in their field of study. Social media is relatively new and little has been published and our finding of the instantaneous and informal

nature of social media and the inspiration in developing professional identity, can be used to support future findings. Our study indicated that social media has much more benefits than disadvantages.

The concept of the differences in patterns of use by local and international students is a point of interest. This is exemplified by a student maintaining *"I reckon more local students use Facebook and that whereas internationals are always together".* This may be associated with cultural nuances in approaches to social media, or social integration into the university community and adjustment to university life. Such differences warrant deeper exploration.

Facebook has provided a mode of what some considered being a safer, less personal, and more distanced form of communication with peers. This mode of communication appears to have been normalised within this cohort and student demographic. Facebook was considered to be less intrusive and direct by participants. This may provide an additional layer of informal support and additional opportunities for casual interaction for students when transitioning during first year at university.

Finally, the proportion of participation by male students was higher than expected. In Australia, 10% of the nation's nursing workforce is male; however enrolments at the selected study site have a leading gender diversity mix with male enrolments of 20% within the Bachelor of Nursing program.

Study strengths and limitations

This study has some limitations. Firstly, we recognise that participants highlighted primarily areas of social media that supports them as students, and were limited in expressing unprofessional information. Students may have feared disclosure of unprofessional activities within the constraints of this research project. Secondly, not all participants were open to having various social media accounts, and some identified that they do not actively use this for study purposes, yet they identified the importance in forming student networks and support groups. Thirdly, the unusually high rate of male participation within the study was noted, the research team hypothesise that perhaps generally more male students are interested in this topic. However the principle investigator of this study is male, and taught many of the participants, this may also explain the unusually high number of males represented. This study was a purposive sample of 1st year nursing students attending the same university from the same cohort with varied demographic characteristics. Therefore, results of this study may not have applicability to other higher education settings or students; however offer deep and rich insights of the student's experience. Finally, we recognise this is a study represents a small sample of student nurses, and recognise the potential for selection bias in recruitment. However, this study offers unique and in-depth insight into social media use of student nurses.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated the importance of Facebook in supporting informal peer-peer learning and support, augmenting online and offline relationships and building professional identify as a nurse. Students reported increased use at timing of assessment items, and clinical placement. Students found Facebook useful as an avenue to debrief and reflect, whilst on clinical placement, and as a tool to meet new friends and strengthen existing relationships. Privacy is an issue for some students, and they are careful what they post. Student expressed worry about what employers think

and the need for e-professionalism to safeguard future employability. Lastly, students liked to be inspired by the posts they read and engaged with. There is need for future research and evaluation of interventions that build the divide between traditional learning platforms such as Blackboard and social platforms.

References

Archibald, M. M., & Clark A. M. 2014. Twitter and nursing research: How diffusion of innovation theory can help uptake. *Journal of Advanced Nursing.* 70(3), e3-e5. doi: 10.1111/jan.12343.

Booth, R. G., 2014. Happiness, stress, a bit of vulgarity, and lots of discursive conversation: A pilor study examining nursing students' tweets about nursing education posted to Twitter. *Nurse Education Today.* (35) 322-327.

Braun, V., & Clarke ,V. 2006. Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology.* (3), 77-101.

Cleary, M., Ferguson, C., Jackson, D., Watson, R., 2013. Social media and the new e-professionalism. *Contemporary Nurse.* 45 (2),152-154.

Ferguson, C. 2013. It's time for the nursing profession to leverage social media. *Journal of Advanced Nursin.g* 69 (4) 745-747.

Ferguson, C., Davidson, P. M., Scott, P. J., Jackson, D., Hickman, L. D., 2016. Augmented reality, virual reality and gaming: An integral part of nursing. *Contemporary Nurse*. EPub Ahead of Print. DOI: 10.1080/10376178.2015.1130360

Hoffman, E. S. 2009. Evaluating social networking tools for distance learning *Proceedings of the 2009 Technology, Colleges, and Community (TCC) Conference*. Retrieved from http://etec.hawaii.edu/ proceedings/2009/hoffman.pdf

Kift, S. 2009. Articulating a transition curriculum to scaffold and to enhance the first year student experience in Australian higher education. *Final Report for ALTC Senior Fellowship Program.* Available via http://fyhe.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Kift-Sally-ALTC-Senior-Fellowship-Report-Sep-092.pdf Last accessed 1st Dec 2015.

Kitching, F., Winbolt, M., MacPhail, A., Ibrahim, J.E., 2015. Web-based social media for professional medical education: Perspectives on senior stakeholders in the nursing home sector. *Nurse Education Today.* (35) 1192-1198.

McKay, M., Sanko, J.S., Shekhter, I., Birnbach, D.J., 2014 Twitter as a tool to enhance student engagement during an interprofessional patient safety course. *Journal of Interprofessional Care*. 28 (6), 565-567.

Moorley, C., & Chinn, T., 2016. Developing nursing leadership in social media. *Journal of Advanced Nursing* Epub Ahead of Print. 6th Jan 2016. DOI: 10.1111/jan.12870

Moorley, C., & Watson, R., 2015 NMC Code Advice on Digital Communication. *Nursing Times.* 111 (14) 22-23.

Tower, M., Latimer, S., & Hewitt, J., 2014 Social networking as a learning tool: Nursing students' perception of efficacy. *Nurse Education Today.* (34) 1012-1017.

Usher, K., Woods, C., Casella, E., et al. 2014 Australian health professions student use of social media. *Collegian.* 21 (2) 95-101.

Yates, K., Birks, M., Woods, C., Hitchens, M., 2015. #Learning: The use of back channel technology in multi-campus nursing education. *Nurse Education Today.* 35 e65-69.