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ORIGINAL RESEARCH

PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDE ON USING SOCIAL MEDIA RESPONSIBLY: TOWARD SOCIAL MEDIA LITERACY IN NURSING EDUCATION

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Abstract

Background: As future professionals, nursing students are expected to exhibit online professionalism and to be responsible users of social media. However, the rapid sharing of information on social media exposes nursing students to the risk and danger of spreading unprofessional behaviors like breaches of privacy and confidentiality.

Objective: This study looked into the nursing students' perceptions and attitude toward responsible use of social media.

Methods: A descriptive cross-sectional research design was utilized and participated by 298 nursing students in a College of Nursing in Iloilo City, Philippines. The Responsible Use of Social Media Attitude Scale (RUSMAS) created by the researchers was used to collect the data.

Results: Findings indicated that nursing students widely use social media and that nursing students had good perceptions and had positive attitude toward responsible use of social media. A significant difference was found in the attitude of nursing students when grouped according to year level.

Conclusion: Social media continue to gain interest among nursing students and using it responsibly must be continuously upheld. Academic nursing institutions should develop approaches promoting social media literacy in nursing education.

KEYWORDS

nursing students; nursing education; professionalism; social media; social media literacy

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INTRODUCTION

Social media which include a mixture of online tools and Web-based technologies via the internet like Facebook, Twitter, and Youtube have become a popular communication system of choice and popular activity among students (Nyangeni et al., 2015). Social media sites are generally used to communicate with others by sharing personal information, photos, videos, comments, etc., and therefore have user-generated or user-created contents (Berthon et al., 2015) that must be used responsibly. As consumers and creators of social media contents, it is common to assume that social media users are responsible for the contents posted or shared on these platforms.

Responsible use of social media is linked to terms like digital, online or e-professionalism (Cain et al., 2009; Duke et al., 2017; Jackson et al., 2018; Prescott et al., 2013), social media etiquette (Harrison et al., 2014) and cybercivility (De Gagne et al., 2016; Marnocha et al., 2017). Likewise, responsible use of social media relates to social media literacy or the competent handling of contents published on social media platforms (Beheshti-Kashi & Makki, 2015).

Social media offer many benefits since these platforms have no limitations in terms of time, place and distance (Nyangeni et al., 2015). As with any technology, there are also legal and ethical

issues associated with its use (Nyangeni et al., 2015; Ross & Myers, 2017) that can have potential implications on one's professional fitness to practice (Kenny & Johnson, 2016). It is within the legal and ethical responsibility of nurses to maintain the privacy and confidentiality of their patients (Nyangeni et al., 2015). The Code of Ethics for Nurses by the International Council of Nurses (2012) and the Philippine Board of Nursing (2004) strongly dictate that nurses should keep confidential information private. On the legal aspect, federal laws like the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) of 1996 in the United States have a primary goal of protecting the confidentiality and security of healthcare information (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2013). In the Philippines, Republic Act 10173 or Data Privacy Act mandates that the human right of privacy must be secured and protected (National Privacy Commission of Philippines, 2012). As the popularity of social media continue to grow, healthcare professionals need to be mindful of their professional interactions either face-to-face or in the online environment (Nason et al., 2018). There are international and local news reports as well as pieces of anecdotal evidence that nurses get terminated or even sued after posting offensive, sensitive or confidential information on social media. More importantly, the misuse of social media can potentially jeopardize the nurse-patient relationship (Smith & Knudson, 2016).

Usage of social media is not only limited among professional nurses but involves nursing students as well (Wahila et al., 2018). In nursing education, social media is beginning to be integrated into the undergraduate nursing program as an innovative teaching strategy (Ross & Myers, 2017). However, misuse and irresponsible use of social media may result to disciplinary actions and program dismissal (Westrick, 2016). Unfitting online activities possess a risk to the reputation of universities and teaching programs, hence students should be educated on the dangers of social media (Nason et al., 2018).

Issues of professionalism on social media are prevalent (Soares et al., 2017) causing emerging concerns in the medical and allied health professions education. Previous studies have documented that students engage in unprofessional behaviors on social media. One survey reported that of 293 schools of nursing, 77% encountered at least a single occurrence of students posting unprofessional content on social media (Marnocha et al., 2015). Misconduct and indiscriminate use of social media by nursing students have also been reported in South Africa (Nyangeni et al., 2015). A study in Canada revealed that all nursing students conveyed they had posted information on social media that they would not have any desire to be seen by a future employer or member of the academic staff (Duke et al., 2017). Another study disclosed that posting of unprofessional content was highly prevalent among medical students despite awareness of professionalism guidelines (Barlow et al., 2015). There was also a concerning level and exposure to unprofessional and inappropriate social media content among dental students (Kenny & Johnson, 2016; Nason et al., 2018).

Perceptions, beliefs, and feelings are affective and cognitive components of attitude (Pickens, 2005). Attitude is theorized to influence behavior. According to the Theory of Planned Behavior, attitude is a determinant of behavioral intention (Ajzen, 1991). That being said, the attitude of nursing students toward social media may influence their behavior. It has been documented that nursing students' unethical behavior is significantly related to their use of social media (Smith & Knudson, 2016). As nursing schools continue to produce future professional nurses, there is a need to explore nursing students' views regarding the responsible use of social media to prevent impending online misconduct and avoid legal and ethical issues that may arise regarding the use of social media.

While the use of social media among nurses and nursing students have been previously investigated, there is a dearth of study on social media use among nursing students in the Philippine setting. The aim of this study was to determine the perceptions and attitude toward responsible use of social media among nursing students and whether or not significant differences existed in their attitude when grouped according to sex, year level and hours spent daily on social media.

METHODS

Study Design

A descriptive, cross-sectional survey research design was utilized in this study.

Setting

This study was conducted in a College of Nursing located in Iloilo City, Philippines and self-reported data were collected between August to September of 2018 during the first semester of academic year 2018 to 2019.

Participants

A total of 298 nursing students (141 first-year and 157 fourth-year) participated in the survey. All nursing students who were willing to participate and who were available at the time of the conduct of the survey were included. This study involved only first and fourth-year nursing students since these were the only existing year levels in the College where the study was conducted. The University opted not to accept first-year college enrollees in 2016 and 2017 to prepare for the implementation of the new curriculum in its colleges. This was also a consequence of the transition of the country's educational system into the K to 12 program.

Instrument

The data were gathered using the Responsible Use of Social Media Attitude Scale (RUSMAS). The RUSMAS is a researcher-made, self-administered questionnaire developed to assess the perceptions of nursing students toward responsible use of social media. The development of items in the RUSMAS was based on relevant existing literature. Identification of unprofessional behaviors was based on the work of Barlow et al. (2015). The scale was subjected to face and content validation in a panel of four (4) jurors: faculty members in the

College of Nursing and College of Communication, a lecturer of the Bioethics course in Nursing, and a professor with a degree in Information Technology and Nursing. Jurors were asked to evaluate each item on the scale for relevance and clarity. Irrelevant items were removed and ambiguous items were revised for clarity. The comments and suggestions of the validators were incorporated in the final version of the scale. The participants were asked to indicate their responses to the items using a 5-point Likert scale format ranging from “1 = strongly disagree” to “5 = strongly agree”. For the scoring of attitude, a “strongly agree” response was given a score of 5 for items 1 to 6 while scoring was reversed for items 7 to 14. It must be noted that the sequence of items on the actual questionnaire is not similar as it appears on this report. Moreover, the following interpretation of mean was used: 1.00-2.33 = negative attitude; 2.34-3.66 = ambivalent; and 3.67-5.00 = positive attitude. A pilot study was conducted among 33 nursing students in another College of Nursing in the City to ensure the clarity of items of the scale. The RUSMAS has a reliability of Cronbach’s alpha values ranging .65 to .76 based on the pilot and actual survey data.

Data Analysis

All statistical computations were carried out using SPSS version 23. Mean, standard deviation, t-test and ANOVA were used to analyze the data. A p-value less than .05 was considered significant.

Ethical Consideration

Ethical conduct of research was followed in the entire duration of the study. Initially, written permissions to conduct the study were secured from appropriate academic heads of the College. Written informed consent was then obtained from the participants as a manifestation of their voluntary involvement in the research. Full disclosure of the study was given and the participants were assured of their confidentiality and anonymity. No formal ethics review committee scrutiny was undertaken for this study. Nevertheless, the technical and

ethical soundness of the study was reviewed by the thesis panel of the College. The University has not fully instituted ethics review for all types of research. The National Ethical Guidelines for Health and Health-Related Research states that research not involving more than minimal risks or survey procedures may be considered by the Research Ethics Committee for exemption from review ([Philippine Health Research Ethics Board, 2017](#)).

RESULTS

Table 1 shows that on the average, nursing students strongly agreed that social media posts should be thoroughly thought out (M=4.58; SD=.82) and that clinical cases of patients should not be shared on social media (M=4.49; SD=1.01). Moreover, nursing students agreed that only genuine news should be posted (M=4.16; SD=1.11), everything should be direct and clear when commenting (M=4.04; SD=.91), it is not a good idea to post photos or videos taken in a clinical environment (M=3.78; SD=1.20) and it is bad to swear (M=3.61; SD=1.07) on social media. On the other hand, nursing students generally disagreed that fake name or pseudonym on social media profile is considered “cool” (M=2.07; SD=1.03). They also disagreed in statements stating that it is okay to accept a friend request from a complete stranger (M=1.93; SD=.95) and to post photos or videos while smoking (M=1.83; SD=1.04). Furthermore, nursing students strongly disagreed that confidential information of patients can be posted on social media (M=1.59; SD=1.17). They also strongly disagreed in statements that convey it is appropriate to support posts containing racism (M=1.55 SD=.99), it is fine to post photos or videos that contain people on illegal drugs (M=1.49; SD=.83), it is acceptable to bash to hate others (M=1.48; SD=.83) and it is alright to post sexually suggestive acts and contents (M=1.41; SD=.74) on social media. Overall, nursing students had positive attitude toward using social media responsibly (M=4.23; SD=.42).

Table 1 Perceptions and Attitude Toward Responsible Use of Social Media

Category	M	Description	SD
1. Social media posts should be thoroughly thought out.	4.58	Strongly Agree	.82
2. Clinical cases of patients should not be shared on social media.	4.49	Strongly Agree	1.01
3. Only genuine news should be posted on social media.	4.16	Agree	1.11
4. When commenting on social media, everything should be direct and clear.	4.04	Agree	.91
5. It is not a good idea to post on social media photos or videos taken in a clinical environment.	3.78	Agree	1.20
6. It is bad to swear on social media.	3.61	Agree	1.07
7. Fake name or pseudonym on social media profile is considered “cool”.	2.07	Disagree	1.03
8. It is okay to accept a friend request from someone who is a complete stranger.	1.93	Disagree	.95
9. Posting photos or videos on social media while smoking is okay.	1.83	Disagree	1.04
10. Confidential information of patients can be posted on social media.	1.59	Strongly Disagree	1.17
11. Supporting social media post that contains racism is appropriate.	1.55	Strongly Disagree	.99
12. It is fine to post on social media photos or videos that contain people on illegal drugs.	1.49	Strongly Disagree	.83
13. Offending in the means of bashing or hating others on social media is acceptable.	1.48	Strongly Disagree	.83
14. It is all right to post sexually suggestive acts and contents on social media.	1.41	Strongly Disagree	.74
Overall	4.23	Positive Attitude	.42

Table 2 Differences in Attitude Toward Responsible Use of Social Media

Variable	N	M	SD	Interpretation	t/F	df	Sig.
Sex					-1.242	296	.215
Male	79	4.18	.45	Positive attitude			
Female	219	4.25	.41	Positive attitude			
Year Level					3.385	294	.001*
First Year	141	4.32	.41	Positive attitude			
Fourth Year	157	4.16	.42	Positive attitude			
Hours Spent Daily (M = 4.7)					1.411	294	.240
1-2 hours	46	4.15	.47	Positive attitude			
3-4 hours	108	4.28	.40	Positive attitude			
5-6 hours	96	4.25	.42	Positive attitude			
7 hour and above	48	4.18	.40	Positive attitude			

*significant if $p < .05$

Table 2 shows that on average, nursing students use social media for about 5 hours (M=4.7). The t-test and ANOVA result revealed that there were no significant differences in nursing students' attitude toward responsible use of social media according to sex ($t(296) = -1.242, p = .215$) and hours spent daily on social media ($F(294) = 1.411, p = .240$). However, while both first and fourth-year nursing students posted positive attitude toward responsible use of social media, statistical analysis using t-test revealed a significant difference in the attitude of nursing students according to their year level ($t(294) = 3.385, p = .001$). First-year nursing students (M=4.32; SD=.41) had a better attitude than fourth-year nursing students (M=4.16; SD=.42).

DISCUSSION

This study assessed the perceptions and attitude of nursing students toward responsible use of social media. Understanding the demographics and perceptions of students are imperative in developing better student guidelines related to social media literacy. While it is considered essential to back the results of this present investigation with related studies regarding perceptions and attitude toward responsible use of social media, there is a paucity of published information regarding differences in attitude on the responsible use of social media among nurses and nursing student cohort. Nevertheless, prior studies available to the researcher to substantiate the findings of this study are discussed.

In this study, there is a high report of daily usage of social media among nursing students. This is consistent with earlier findings where both students and faculty widely use social media (Cain et al., 2009; Duke et al., 2017; Kitsis et al., 2016).

This study also found that nursing students had positive attitude and had good perceptions about using social media responsibly. Perhaps, this may be attributed to the fact that issues relating to privacy, confidentiality, and maintaining professionalism whether in person or online are being upheld in nursing school.

This result is consistent with most of the studies pertaining to attitude toward social media concerning professionalism, privacy, and confidentiality. Jordanian student nurses held positive attitude toward professional and academic use of social media (Al-Shdayfat, 2018). It was also reported that dental students were aware of the relationship between social media use and professional practice and considered that it is unprofessional to post drunken photographs and interact with staff and patients online (Kenny & Johnson, 2016). At the same time, nearly all students, including nursing students in UK University were aware of the availability of Facebook's privacy settings and used them to limit public access to their profiles (Prescott et al., 2013). Likewise, it was also noted in previous studies that students were aware and concerned of breach of confidentiality when posting patient identifiers on social media platforms (Barnable et al., 2018; Marnocha et al., 2015). Student concerns about educational and professional affiliations on social media were also documented (Marnocha et al., 2015). On the contrary, among pharmacy students, many felt that they should not be held accountable to authority figures for information posted on social media (Cain et al., 2009).

It is significant to note that while nursing students in this study generally had favorable attitude toward using social media responsibly, looking closer at the numerical mean (5 as the highest), not all students in this study strongly agreed that clinical cases of patients should not be shared on social media. Likewise not all strongly disagreed that confidential information of patients can be posted on social media. It has been held that details of diagnosis, procedure, or emergency medical event in the clinical setting can lead to the inadvertent release of the patient's identity on social media among those familiar with the healthcare facility (Reiling, 2006). Therefore, it is important to consistently enhance social media literacy among nursing students to properly address professionalism concerns as reports of irresponsible and indiscriminate use of social media are prevalent in medical and nursing literature (Barlow et al., 2015; Duke et al., 2017; Kenny & Johnson, 2016; Nason et al., 2018; Nyangeni et al., 2015). Issues related to context, clarity, and confirmability in the use of social media

must be taken into consideration ([Ryan, 2018](#)). In this digital age, nursing students do not only require guidance in the areas of academic, social and career aspects ([Oducado et al., 2017](#)) but as well as in using social media responsibly.

This study also revealed that not all nursing students seem to strongly agree that it is not appropriate or acceptable to swear and to bash or hate others on social media. Students may view these types of posts as simply personal expressions. However, any perception of disrespect can be viewed negatively and can be disadvantageous to the professional reputation of a nursing student ([Edge, 2017](#)). Moreover, not all nursing students in this study seem to strongly agree on the idea that certain behaviors on social media such as using fake names, posting smoking, and sexually suggestive acts are inappropriate, unacceptable or unprofessional. This can be due to the idea that except for privacy and confidentiality related concerns, consensus on what constitutes unprofessional behaviors remain vague and unclear ([Soares et al., 2017](#)). This is supported in a study where nursing students' lack of awareness of a universally acceptable description of responsible use of social media resulted to varying perceptions on how to use it responsibly ([Nyangeni et al., 2015](#)). Likewise, it was earlier reported that students of healthcare courses had varying definitions of cyberincivility ([De Gagne et al., 2016](#)). On the other hand, while the use of fake names may not be considered by some to be an unacceptable behavior on social media, the proliferation of fake social media accounts is argued to likely perpetuate behaviors like cyberbullying ([Barlett et al., 2018](#)).

Moreover, no significant difference in the attitude of nursing students toward social media in terms of sex was disclosed in this study. In the same way, a prior study found no significant difference in the attitude toward privacy in social networking sites between male and female students ([Kim & An, 2017](#)). However, one study revealed significant differences in sex regarding accountability related questions on social media ([Cain et al., 2009](#)). For example, female students pointed out that individuals should be held accountable for unprofessional attitude on Facebook ([Cain et al., 2009](#)).

This study as well demonstrated that there is no significant difference in the attitude toward responsible use of social media according to hours spent on social media daily. Regardless of how many hours they use social media in a day, nursing students in this study had positive attitude on social media. On the contrary, it has been reported that nursing students' unethical behavior is significantly related to their social media usage ([Smith & Knudson, 2016](#)).

Surprisingly, this study indicated a significant difference in the attitude toward responsible use of social media between first-year and fourth-year nursing students in favor of the first-year students having better attitude. This is opposed to the popular belief that as students progress through the university and become familiar to the professional school climate, they become more aware of professionalism ([Prescott et al., 2013](#)). As neophytes in the nursing program, first-year nursing students in this study may feel more compelled to behave

appropriately and follow the rules compared to the senior ones. Moreover, senior ones may have gained more confidence in dealing with professionalism issues or may have strengthened their positions to certain behaviors on social media that could be considered vague and elusive. Similarly, a previous study found that there were significantly more third year than first-year students who agreed that students in their profession should not register on Facebook ([Prescott et al., 2013](#)). Varying opinions based on educational status on whether Facebook profile information should be referenced for hiring decisions of employers was also noted in an earlier investigation ([Barnable et al., 2018](#)). Likewise, a study found that second-semester students had less unethical behavior than other students ([Smith & Knudson, 2016](#)). Another study even reported that younger nursing students had better skills in using social media applications ([Tuominen et al., 2014](#)). In contrast, it was previously revealed in a study that there was no association between year of medical school and posting of unprofessional content on social media ([Kitsis et al., 2016](#)).

Notwithstanding the interesting findings, this study has its limitations. This study is limited to a single college of nursing in two-year levels limiting the generalizability of the results. A larger sample size for future research that may involve different year levels may be considered. Also, this study used self-report data. While self-report is generally used to study attitude and perceptions, this is subject to self-report bias. Also, some listed unprofessional behaviors such use of fake names may be considered subjective as certain unprofessional online behaviors remain unclear. Moreover, the study may have benefited from an additional qualitative investigation to support the quantitative aspect of the study. Due to these limitations, the researchers recommend using caution in the analysis and interpretation of the findings of this present study. Nevertheless, this study contributed to the existing body of knowledge about responsible use of social media, online professionalism or social media literacy among nursing students. More importantly, the findings contributed to the limited literature about social media literacy and responsible use of social media of nursing students in the Philippine setting.

CONCLUSION

Extensive use of social media remains to be pervasive in nursing education and nursing students have good cognitive evaluations on the responsible use of social media. Nevertheless, students must be reminded always to consider the potential effects of their social media use. Continuous guidance and effort to raise social media literacy and prevent cyberincivility are imperative in the undergraduate nursing program. Nursing schools must provide clear expectations of acceptable student behaviors online such as specifying social media behaviors that could lead to disciplinary action. Moreover, specific and up-to-date policies must be in place within academic nursing institutions on what constitutes unprofessional, unethical, and unacceptable behaviors on social media. Without proper guidance and awareness of professional conduct on social media, a potential rise in the number of

unprofessional behaviors on social media can be anticipated that may steer ethical and legal consequences.

DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTEREST

Authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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AUTHORS CONTRIBUTION

All authors have contributed from conception to the finalization of this study. Most of the significant intellectual content of this publishable copy of the article was done by the corresponding author.

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