Enhancing Nurse Leader Influence: Optimizing Communication Traits through the Use of Twitter

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Background and significance

Social media is described as the "constellation of Internet-based tools that enable a user to connect, collaborate, and communicate with others in real time."[1] Its functionality and appeal lie in its ability to connect and engage through the creation of, interaction with, and dissemination of content and resultant conversation.

Social media is a burgeoning portion of the online experience. In 2014, 74% of Internet-using adults used at least one social media site[2] and time spent on social media sites represents the activity that Americans spend the most time on out of any online activity.[3] First marketed for personal use for individuals to maintain and create social connections,[4] social media now has appeal and utility in a professional capacity, with opportunities for use by both institutions/organizations and individuals. Most people use social media platforms for traditional networking activities such as connecting and communicating with friends and family members;[4] However, the differing formats of various social media platforms lend themselves to numerous other beneficial professional activities. These include networking and engagement within fields, enabling discipline-specific information sharing, staying current published media, events and proceedings.

Social Media Medium (Twitter)

There are multiple social media platforms, ranging from Facebook to YouTube to LinkedIn. Twitter will be discussed here because it is a widely used micro-blogging platform,[5] although it is not yet widely used by nursing. Twitter has been credited with influencing significant social change throughout the world[6] and given that there are continuous opportunities for massive social change in health care, the 3.1 million nurses in the United States can now be engaged in that work using social media. Whereas blogs are a broadcast medium through which text is used for communication, microblogs (like Twitter) allow for content sharing but with significantly less text, or even pictures or hyperlinks. The brevity of micro-blogging allows for fast communication, frequent use of the platform,[7] and facilitates the ability to follow a multitude of users and topics. Messages (termed "tweets") are limited to 140 characters and instead of being captured in an email inbox, show up in real-time as they are submitted ("tweeted"). Although brief, tweets can contain worded messages and pictures, hyperlinks to outside websites, news and journal articles, other social media pages, and other resources. The same streamlined experience of visualizing messages makes the platform notable for the ease with which one can scan and receive information.[8]

Table 1: Key Aspects of Twitter

Term	Explanation	Advantage	Example
Handle	username; how a user is identified	creates an identity	@tweetAONE
Hashtag	keyword used to categorize a tweet	allows users to search for and follow topics; expands visibility of tweets	#nurseleaders
retweet (RT)	reposting a tweet; similar to forwarding an email	your followers can see something you consider important (source can also recognize that you RT their content)	RT "@NPRhealth Nursing is the most trusted profession"
modified tweet (MT)	a reposted tweet that has been modified	(source can also recognize that you MT their content)	MT @NPRhealth: #Nursing - most trusted profession
hat tip (H/T)	way of acknowledging the source of the information one is tweeting	creates an connection to the original source (source can also recognize that you MT their content)	h/t @RWJF

Nurse Leaders Applying Twitter to Enhance Influence

Use of social media is an untapped opportunity for nurse executives to enhance and expand their influence. Adams' [9] suggests that influence is the ability of an individual to affect another person or group based on such factors as use of time and timing, status, knowledge-based competence, authority, and communication traits. We discuss social media opportunities for nurse executives using the Adams Influence Model

Use of Time and Timing: Time to sell and deliver[9-10]

Twitter facilitates rapid and dynamic sharing of ideas. Users can read the short messages almost instantaneously and create tweets almost as quickly. This high throughput aspect exposes users to numerous tweets in the time frame of a matter of minutes. This requires new considerations. First consider the time of day when tweeting. Tweeting in the middle of the night has been shown to be not as effective.[11] Choose optimal timing of the message relative to events. E.g., the day after a campaign is not the time to initiate a get out the vote campaign. Second, consider influence. Ask what tactics are needed given the amount of time available to influence

the outcome. Inherently, creating a 140-character tweet never takes much time and each tweet and retweet creates an ever increasing awareness.

Status: Standing, prestige, hierarchical position, key relationships, reputation, and informal position. [9-10]

By virtue of their involvement in the most trusted profession,[12] nurse leaders carry status on Twitter via their reputation and key supportive relationships (followers). Followers serve as the primary "audience." Their status is also important because someone who retweets a message to their audience further disseminates the message to a larger number of people, some of whom may also retweet it. Having one's tweet retweeted by other influential users on Twitter is informal recognition that a user has something worthwhile to contribute.

Developing a following on Twitter involves finding other users with whom there exist mutual or overlapping interests and often either some shared viewpoints or opinions you want to assess. Hierarchical and informal position are extremely important for this. Those who hold senior positions in health care organizations are well positioned to attract followers. Informal position can be attained by people with large numbers of followers or catchy titles, e.g., "doctorpreneur."

Knowledge-based Competence: Intellectual qualifications, meeting standards of performance, empirical, aesthetic, personal, ethical, and sociopolitical knowledge types. [9-10]

Twitter requires a knowledge-based competence in order to sustain influence. As a real-time thought dissemination platform, there is no peer-review process. Nurse executives have a responsibility to use knowledge of nursing process, practice, management, evidence-based nursing and research, must determine and filter out quality information to be shared. For example, consider your hospital is consulting in another country. It is helpful to be empirically, aesthetically, personally, ethically, and socio-politically knowledgeable about care delivery there prior to tweeting about differences between the US and that country's nursing practice characteristics.

Authority: Taking action, responsibility, accountability, resource access. [9-10]

An executive represents the organization. There is a broad responsibility and defined accountability for using social media. Seventy percent of health care organizations have a social media policy[13] demonstrating the importance that organizations feel for their own employees' accountability.

Aside from access to the physical devices and connectivity that allows one to utilize social media, i.e., computer, smart phone, etc., the most valuable resource is access to current information resources, such as published literature, presentations, meetings, and informal conversations. Utilization of these resources in social media contexts requires a high level of accountability and responsibility.

Communication Traits: The proficiency or dexterity with which one relates or interacts with individuals. [9-10]

Confidence is an attribute of what makes someone influential and is inherent in the language used in tweets. Similarly, the physical appeal of environment and self is largely related to where someone is when they read the tweet and the way in which the tweet is worded (spelling, abbreviations, use of emoticons, etc.). However, the most applicable communication traits include message articulation, emotional involvement, persistence, and presence. Message articulation is how well a message is worded and thought out-does the tweet convey the intended message? In Twitter there can be a blurring of many of these concepts. Consider the statement "here is a really important finding" versus "hey, check this out!" This is a variation in message articulation and conveys differences in emotional involvement. Likewise, a blurring of these concepts might be the idea of persistence and presence whereby one tweets on the concept of "vote for Jane for nurse of the year" every day, as an example of persistence, versus being more thoughtfully present on Twitter and explaining why Jane should be nurse of the year.

Twitter Basics: the "How To"

Creating an Account

Signing up for Twitter is a free process that involves visiting the Twitter homepage (www.twitter.com) and following the instructions to create an account. Create a username (your "handle"). You are identified by your handle on Twitter, so keep it simple such as a variant of your name orsomething related to your profession or interests.

(textbox) Most organizations have a presence on twitter, here are a few examples of users you may want to follow:

@RWJF

@ANANursingWorld

@tweetAONE

@STTI

@AmJnurs

@NANDA_INT

@NIH

Following

Following other users is easy and does not require permissions. Simply click the "follow" button on a user's homepage. This will lead you to their homepage, where you can see their statistics regarding who and how many people they follow and who follows them, and their recent tweets. Messages you tweet can be seen by anyone; so if you want to send a private message to someone you follow, use the direct message function. Similarly, on your home page

you can see the running documentation of tweets sent by you and those you follow, and access the list of your followers and people you are following.

Implications

Strategies to engage in established, yet newly emerging innovative technologies, including Twitter, is essential for leaders to be influential and practice at the top of their profession. Nurse leaders need to enhance their influence to optimize their roles within the organization, their practice environments of their constituents and most importantly to benefit the patients they and their organizations serve. Twitter, microblogging and social media are important and emerging means by which they can do this.

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