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Editorial

Social media for researchers – beyond cat videos, over sharing, and narcissism



Social media has acquired a worldwide presence for increasing research dissemination.^{1,2} A recent study evaluating the social media strategy of the *International Journal of Mental Health* found that tweeting twice each day increased the reach and readership of the journal-published manuscripts.³ However, the value and role of social media in critical care nursing have received mixed reception. Love or hate it, social media is a powerful tool for researchers and clinicians providing opportunities to network, diffuse new information, and improve patient outcomes. In this editorial, the important social media platforms available to critical care nurses are discussed, the value of social media to critical care nursing researchers is explained, and how *Australian Critical Care* (ACC) readers can engage positively with social media are described.

Along with the Internet, social media arrived in the 1980s however did not become a feature of everyday life until the turn of the century when Web 2.0 came along with more user-friendly devices and increased availability of the Internet.^{4–6} In 2018, 45% (3.484 billion) of the world's population had an active social media account; however, this is highly variable across different regions. Facebook remains the dominant social networking platform with 2.271 billion users, approximately twice as many as Instagram, WeChat, and QQ, six times as many users as Twitter, and eight times as many users of Snapchat.⁴

Scholarly communication has evolved in response to technological developments, and there are increasing demands from funders and administrations to meet targets.⁷ Considering the prevailing research practice gap, it is clear researchers need to be more proactive in promoting their research and current discussions revolve around the value of social media as a key dissemination strategy⁷ to diffuse ideas and communicate with a wider audience. No longer is it enough to present at a relevant academic conference or publish in top ranking journal. Instead, there is an increasing drive to ensure the study findings are used by clinicians to change clinical practice and implement new practices.

Healthcare professionals were quick to use social media to create virtual communities (VCs), so they could share relevant specialty knowledge and discuss professional issues.⁸ Although uptake has been varied between specialties and across professional groups,⁹ there is significant evidence that VCs are seen as valuable knowledge portals enabling access to clinically relevant information that can be applied to everyday practice.⁸ This positive view of VCs does not transfer easily to other platforms such as Twitter or Facebook, with many perceiving social media as a frivolous

indulgence comprising cat videos and narcissistic posts and a waste of valuable time.

Despite nurses having mixed reactions to social media, nurse researchers commonly use LinkedIn, ResearchGate, and Twitter because they consider these channels to be a powerful way to communicate their work, enhance their professional profile, and connect with others.¹⁰ Online conversations and content vary, but many researchers frequently use social media to post conference and meeting proceedings;¹¹ disseminate information about professional opportunities and events; share their opinions, research findings, and journal publications; and develop collaborative and international research networks. A recent randomised controlled trial found that articles promoted on Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn had higher website access and full-text downloads.¹ Twitter is the most widely used one by researchers where knowledge is predominantly brokered between researchers most commonly about their publications.^{12,13} Twitter is cost free and reliable and provides biographical information about the Twitter user, the latter enabling the reader to evaluate the credibility of the information in the tweet. Twitter activity appears to be positively associated with citation rates^{2,14,15} particularly for more frequent tweeters.^{16,17} Evidently an article is at least 10 times more likely to be cited if it has been tweeted.¹⁸ Thus, Twitter has the potential to promote nursing research, enhance implementation and translation of research findings, and promote the profile of researchers.

Interestingly, researchers tend not to consider social media as an important method of communicating their work with the public. This is somewhat surprising because 'Googling it' now constitutes the most common method of finding information about a topic or person. The lack of an online presence may reduce researchers' visibility. Evidence suggests that public visibility and constructive conversation on social media may pay dividends for researchers, e.g., making their presence known to funding organisations and user groups.¹⁹ Thus, critical care researchers need to actively engage in the community and promote their work widely using a variety of different mediums and platforms. Critical care research and innovation are crucial to patient quality and safety, but researchers will need to communicate their findings into the world beyond academia so that they can make real difference to patients' lives.

So what has this got to do with ACC and the journal readership? It turns out lots. Our journal, although small (relative to say *Critical Care Medicine*), has an excellent reputation and impact. However, given the quality of the work published within, if the journal's presence was more overt across social media, its impact could be even better. For example, currently there are just more than 1000 Twitter

^a Digital report <https://wearesocial.com/global-digital-report-2019>.

followers for Aus_CC (ACC's Twitter handle). This is low than that of other journals (*Medical Journal of Australia* >17,000 and *Critical Care Medicine* >22,000). Many early and mid career researchers publish in the journal, and any exposure bringing their work to the attention to key funding bodies is vital to their career progression and implementation and translation strategies. Posting, tweeting, and retweeting their important work may be just the break they need to set them on the path to further success and develop strategic and collaborative international research networks that may lead to further outputs in the form of publications or funding. As practitioners and researchers, we are arguably morally obliged to communicate important research (however small the perceived contribution to knowledge) for the betterment of humanity. Social media offers another (different) method of communicating with a broader network of individuals and therefore making a difference.

So what can we all do to help? Sign up to Twitter now! Follow @Aus_CC, retweet and encourage your colleagues to retweet all the @Aus_CC posts. Repost to LinkedIn and other social media too if you wish. You never know who is watching or will find the information useful. The journal has a dedicated social media team who are committed to developing @Aus_CC social media presence, improving professional communication, and building a Twitter community that values and embraces critical care research. The team is ready to work with our authors to actively promote the key messages from publications and promote the dissemination of valuable work. There really is more to social media than cat videos, over sharing, and narcissism!

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Kaye Rolls: Conceptualization, Writing - original draft. **Debbie Massey:** Conceptualization, Writing - original draft. **Rosalind Elliott:** Conceptualization, Writing - original draft.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aucc.2019.07.004>.

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