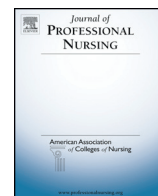


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Social media use and cybercivility guidelines in U.S. nursing schools: A review of websites

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ABSTRACT

This research analyzes to what extent U.S. nursing schools use social media, their policies or guidelines on cybercivility in social media, online classrooms, and email correspondence, and whether these protocols are readily available to students. This website-based study employs a descriptive, cross-sectional, non-experimental search design. Data were collected in nursing schools offering master's programs ($n = 197$) and online graduate programs in master's degree ($n = 110$) listed in the 2017 edition of *U.S. News and World Report*. School ranking was positively correlated with the total number of social networking sites being used in the schools, but not with the presence of cybercivility guidelines. About a third of the nursing schools in the sample had policies/guidelines concerning social media, while fewer than 10% had policies/guidelines about online classroom conduct ($n = 14$) or email use ($n = 16$). Key features of these protocols were professionalism, expected behaviors, and consequences. Establishing and implementing policies and guidelines regarding cybercivility is a vital step to promote a culture of civility online. It is especially important to do so in nursing schools where standards should reflect the values of the profession.

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Introduction

The rise of social media is radically and rapidly changing the way individuals communicate, learn, and network. Email has become one of the most commonly used modes of communication in business and academic settings—for requesting information, interacting with instructors, and applying for jobs. Digital technology helps students overcome geographic and financial barriers to education, to take classes remotely, and to communicate with professors and peers without ever meeting any of them face to face. Despite the significance of cybercivility as a foundational virtue in the online environment, little is known about the extent to which U.S. nursing schools use social media and whether cybercivility guidelines are available on websites of nursing schools for their students.

The purpose of this research is to analyze to what extent U.S. nursing schools are using social media platforms and to determine whether explicit policies or guidelines regarding cybercivility in social media, online classrooms, and email correspondence are available to students in

these programs. Schools were chosen from a *U.S. News and World Report* (*U.S. News Best Schools, 2016*) publication that ranked master's and online graduate programs in master's degree. This study specifically examines the relationships between the ranking of schools' graduate programs and (a) the number of SNSs being used by these schools as well as (b) the presence of protocols for social media, online classroom conduct, and email use. We also document key features of the policies and guidelines in selected programs in order to inform nurse educators and administrators about how best to maintain a culture of cybercivility in nursing education and practice.

Review of the literature

According to a newly released survey of social media usage in the United States, 90% of young adults use social networking sites (SNSs), and individuals with higher levels of education lead its adoption rate (Perrin, 2015). As such, educational institutions increasingly use the Internet to facilitate communication, to teach, for publicity, and for marketing. However, despite the universally recognized benefits of the Internet, new challenges for users in cyber environments have emerged, of particular concern *cyberincivility* (De Gagne, Choi, Ledbetter, Kang, & Clark, 2016). Defined as the disrespectful, insensitive, or disruptive behavior of a user in cyberspace, cyberincivility is a pervasive and rampant issue that negatively affects one's personal, professional, social, and

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educational well-being (De Gagne, Choi et al., 2016). This phenomenon is evident daily on Twitter, Facebook, and blogs, as well as in online forums, email, texts, and instant messages (De Gagne, Choi et al., 2016).

Incivility in society is not just a mere perception but a harsh reality offline as well as online. According to a nationwide poll of 1000 American adults, 70% believe that the Internet encourages uncivil behavior and that incivility in everyday life has risen to crisis levels (Leslie, 2013). The findings also reveal that Americans encounter incivility on average 17.1 times a week, or 2.4 times a day; almost equally offline (8.5 encounters/week) and online (8.6 encounters/week) (Leslie, 2013). In workplace settings, frequent rude or discourteous emails are associated with lower levels of mental, emotional, and social energy, poorer task performance, increased negative mood, and decreased positive mood, as well as lower levels of engagement (Giumetti et al., 2013).

In the online learning environment, uncivil behaviors that interfere with a safe and productive atmosphere may include posting terse responses that do not add substance to the discussion; refusing to participate in required discussions; belittling a classmate or faculty member; making racial, ethnic, sexual, or religious insults; failing to fulfill group responsibilities; breaching confidentiality; cheating on exams or quizzes; and ignoring disruptive behaviors (Clark, Ahten, & Werth, 2012; Clark, Werth, & Ahten, 2012).

Although the literature supports that cyberincivility is rampant and on the rise in our society and that health professions students are also negatively affected by this phenomenon (De Gagne, Choi et al., 2016), it is not known to what extent nursing schools with masters' degree programs use social media and to what extent these schools provide cybercivility policies on their public websites. Thus, this study would fill the information gap in the literature and trigger more research concerning cybercivility policies/guidelines in nursing schools to promote a culture of civility in nursing practice.

Methods

Design and sample

This study employs a descriptive, cross-sectional, and non-experimental website search design. Data come from nursing schools of master's programs and online graduate programs in master's degree that are listed in the 2017 edition of *U.S. News and World Report*. Based on different nursing programs and specialties, 197 schools of master's programs and 110 schools of online graduate programs in master's degree were ranked in the report (*U.S. News Best Schools, 2016*). However, due to overlap between the two categories, the final number of school websites reviewed in this study was 230.

Search strategy and data collection

From May through October 2016, three investigators independently reviewed the schools of nursing websites in the sample to identify and record the number and types of SNSs specific to those schools and the presence of protocols on social media, online classroom conduct, and email use. We first noted any social networking site listed on the schools' homepages and then searched for a link to each school's master's or online program student handbook. Using a search box on the websites or a Find tool on web browsers, we looked for terms such as "social media," "social network," "electronic," "email," "online," "virtual," "distant," or "distance" to locate documents. We also browsed the Table of Contents in each student handbook for relevant policies or guidelines. If no student handbook was found, we looked through the school website for the same terms to identify sections and links available to graduate students in their applicable programs. The data collection process was organized using a matrix spreadsheet. To reduce the risk of unusual interpretations or biased decisions, we used investigator triangulation during the data collection and analysis period. The study

was determined to be exempt from review by the authors' University Institutional Review Board.

Data analysis and rigor

The sample characteristics of cybercivility guidelines in social media, online classroom conduct, and email use were analyzed by using counts and frequencies. Correlations between the total number of SNSs used by the schools and the school rankings in the report were evaluated using Spearman correlation coefficients due to the non-normal distribution of the ordinal characteristic of the program ranking measures. The mean and standard deviation (SD) of the ranking of master's programs and online programs among schools having cybercivility guidelines or not were calculated. Logistic regression models were used to evaluate the association between schools' program ranking and the presence of cybercivility protocols. The Statistical Analysis System, Version 9.4 (SAS Institute Inc., Cary, NC) was used for all statistical analyses, and assumptions for parametric statistics were examined.

The qualitative data analysis identified common elements of existing policies and guidelines and provided an overall picture of how U.S. nursing schools are governing the conduct of students in virtual environments. To accomplish this goal, the data analysis was performed at the individual and group level. We assessed each policy and agreed on whether it was to be included in the data analysis. To be included in the data analysis, each document must have been specified as a "policy," "guidelines," or the like, and it should have provided at least one comprehensive set of recommendations or rules for behavior in cyberspace. Protocols on social media, online classrooms, and email were separated into three folders, and then each investigator read the policies and guidelines and noted meaningful and recurrent information. The investigators' tabulations were then combined, and conclusions were drawn for final interpretation and resolution of any questions or disagreements. Categories were added to provide more detail, and all data were reanalyzed and verified.

Findings

Sample characteristics

The most common SNSs used in the 197 master's nursing programs ranked were Facebook (58.9%), followed by Twitter (50.8%), YouTube (26.9%), LinkedIn (21.3%), Instagram (15.7%), Flickr (7.1%), Nurses Lounge (6.1%), Pinterest (5.9%), Google + (4.6%), Vimeo (1.5%), Tumblr (1.0%), and SmugMug (0.5%). About a third of the programs had social media protocols, while fewer than 10% had policies or guidelines for online classroom conduct ($n = 14$) or email ($n = 16$). The distribution of SNSs being used in the schools and the presence of cybercivility guidelines for the 110 online graduate programs in master's degree were similar to those for master's programs (see Table 1).

The total number of SNSs being used in the schools was moderately but significantly correlated with the rankings of both master's ($p < 0.0001$) and online graduate program ($p < 0.0001$). The higher the program's rank, the greater the number of SNSs used. This correlation was stronger in the master's programs ($\rho = -0.54$) than in the online graduate programs in master's degree ($\rho = -0.37$).

Associations between the school's program ranking and the presence of each cybercivility guideline are presented in Table 2 for means and odds ratios (ORs). As shown, logistic regression analyses revealed that the presence of guidelines for social media, online classroom conduct, and email use was not significantly associated with program rankings.

Key features of cybercivility guidelines

Social media

Of the 230 school websites reviewed, 80 (34.8%) programs had social media or SNSs use policies or guidelines. Maintaining confidentiality or

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