

# Professionalism in social media: The 3Cs rule

Dr Gemma Sinead Ryan, School of Health, Wellbeing and Social Care, The Open University

## Introduction

The concept of e-professionalism or e-accountability relates to the attitudes and behaviours that reflect professional values in the online environment. Despite professional guidance and organisational policy being in place for several years, literature outlines issues associated with e-professionalism in nursing still remain.

## Method

Critical realist ethnography. Use of secondary sources of evidence: professional guidance and published research. Focus groups with registered nurses (n=8) and observation of nursing related, publicly accessible Facebook groups/pages over 3 months. A realist approach to analysis and concept mapping explained the complex interaction of components within social networks: entities, structures, tendencies, actions and events.

## Aim

To explain the complex relationships that exist between professionalism, accountability and social media and, make recommendations about how this might be managed consistently.

## Results

### Issues with clarity, context & confirmability

- Actions such as breach of confidentiality, 'friending' patients (breach of boundaries) were unanimously 'unprofessional'. Other behaviours were more subjective, with no consensus about whether individuals should be held to account (e.g. being obviously drunk, pole dancing).
- Differences of opinion were best explained by background, personal values and also the difficulties with 'confirming context' in social media (e.g. the currency of the post, the person who actually posted it).

### Influencing factors

- External factors changed behaviours the concept of 'acceptability' (e.g. there was initially consensus that posting pictures at work and in uniform was unprofessional).
- However, in response to politician comments in the media, nurses were actually doing this publicly; accepting and promoting such behaviour

## Conclusion

Social media adds a new dimension to professionalism, with a range of factors that influence online behaviours and perspectives about these behaviours.

The 3Cs can be used to:

- Raise awareness of professionalism and
- Assess and make decisions about online behaviours.



Watch  
The 3Cs rule  
video



**Suggested references**  
Duke et al. (2017)  
Social media in nurse education: Utilization and E-professionalism. *Nurse Education Today*. 57: 8-13  
NMC (2016) Guidance on using social media responsibly. NMC: London  
Ryan, G.S. (2018) Professionalism in social media: The 3Cs rule. [Online] <https://youtu.be/Sv5NkyXeVwY>