Attitudes to Social Media Use as a Platform for Continuing Professional Development (CPD) within Occupational Therapy

Authors:

Kelly Murray

MSc Occupational Therapy (Pre-reg) Graduate

Department of Health, Psychology and Social Studies

University of Cumbria

UK

Kath Ward

Senior Lecturer in Occupational Therapy

Department of Health, Psychology and Social Studies

University of Cumbria

UK

Corresponding Author:

Kelly Murray

Kellymurray88@icloud.com

@OTontheTracks

Author Bio:

Kelly Murray:

Kelly Murray is a newly qualified Occupational Therapist who graduated from the University of Cumbria in 2016. Kelly is part of the #OTalk organising team and is passionate about utilising social media as part of education and within occupational therapy practice. She is also interested in the role of occupation in integration and inclusion.

Kath Ward:

Kath Ward is a senior lecturer in occupational therapy at the University of Cumbria. Her interests include educational research in higher education and the development of research capacity.

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Abstract

Introduction: This study explored what influences the use of social media platforms has within the continuing professional development of occupational therapy students and qualified occupational therapists within one university. It also considered perceived barriers to its use and whether age in line with generation theory, in particular digital natives vs digital immigrants impacted on willingness to utilise social media sites within CPD.

Method: A mixed method survey design was utilised to collect qualitative and quantitative data through an online questionnaire. Content analysis was used to code and identify themes. Descriptive statistics were used to quantify the findings, and consider variations across the digital native/immigrant divide.

Findings: Results highlighted there was a predominantly positive attitude to social media use within CPD. Accessibility, networking, learning and development were highlighted as advantages to its use. The results suggest that the digital native/immigrant divide does not impact on willingness to use social media within CPD but does impact on perceived knowledge and skills to utilise the platforms confidently.

Conclusion: The study has highlighted a need for more structured teaching on professional social media use within the occupational therapy curriculum in both undergraduate and post graduate pre-registration programmes. It has also highlighted a need for more training among qualified occupational therapists, if platforms are to be embraced more universally.

Keywords: Social Media; CPD; Education; Professional Development; Reflection; Curriculum Development

Introduction

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is an essential requirement for the 38,047 occupational therapists registered with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), (2017) to practice in the UK. It is also crucial if an Occupational Therapist is to develop as a practitioner and achieve the best outcomes for their service users, within an ever-changing profession and health and social care landscape (Plastow & Boyes, 2006; Smith & Morley, 2013). CPD is also important to occupational therapy students studying at the 31 accredited universities around the UK as they develop the skills to undertake CPD, as they transition to qualified practitioners (COT, 2015).

Increasingly health care practitioners and students are embracing advances in technology and social media within their CPD (Davis & Voyce, 2015). Social media is defined as "numerous online communities (or platforms) through which you can communicate with others" (COT, 2015). This study refers to social media use within a professional capacity and not for purely social exchanges or personal causes.

A number of benefits have been suggested including networking (Bodell & Hook, 2011), interactive reflection (Ezzamel, 2013), collaboration (Dielmen & Duncan, 2013), wider access to professionals and experts (Bodell & Hook, 2014) and the ability to engage with new and emerging concepts (Bodell *et al*, 2009). However, Bodell & Hook (2011) and Ezzamel (2013) argue that practitioners do have concerns regarding professional use of social media such as confidentiality, which can create a barrier to its use.

This study therefore aims to increase the evidence base by seeking to understand occupational therapists and occupational therapy students' attitudes to social media use within

their CPD. It will also explore perceived barriers to social media use, in order to understand how these can be overcome in the future.

Literature Review

Social media in CPD

Social media is being utilised by individuals across their working lives and a YouGov report revealed that 38% of their 1008 person sample were using it for either learning, networking or sharing knowledge (2014). Lawson & Cowling (2015) and Benetol *et al* (2015) similarly found that globally, health care professionals were using social media to aid networking, development and reflection. The uptake in social media as a CPD platform has led to the Royal College of Occupational Therapists (COT) releasing a briefing to aid practitioners in appropriate professional use (COT, 2015).

COT (2015, p.8) defines social media as *'numerous online communities/platforms in which you can communicate with others'*. This includes popular platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and a range of blogging platforms. These enable communication over a large geographical area virtually over the Internet.

Collaboration with other professionals and networking

Increasingly research is emerging to suggest social media sites are being utilised by healthcare professionals to discuss and develop their practice both as individuals and collectively, for example through Twitter chats #OTalk and #WeNurses (BJOT & #OTalk, 2016) as well as through 4OT Facebook groups (Bodell & Hook, 2014). These can aid

communication between professionals over a larger geographical area and across specialities (Dieleman and Duncan, 2013; Derdall *et al*, 2010).

Social media platforms also increase the opportunities to network professionally both for occupational therapy students and qualified occupational therapists as they develop their practice, access research findings and collaborate together (Bodell and Hook, 2014; Maclean *et al*, 2013). The findings by Bodell and Hook's (2014) small sample study highlighted the benefits of formal teaching on professional use of social media if they are to be used to their full potential for CPD.

Using social media in aiding reflection as an practitioner

Bodell *et al* (2009) refer to the benefits of blogging, which is being increasingly used by occupational therapists in relation to personal reflection. This is supported by Ezzamel (2013) who discusses how interaction through social media blogging sites allows for deeper understanding of events through peer discussion and supervision. Furthermore, Bodell *et al.* (2009) and Ezzamel (2013) emphasise the benefits of blogging both for individual and professional development through accessibility and timely information sharing. However, both Ezzamel's (2013) and Bodel *et al*'s (2009) articles were opinion pieces; therefore there is a need for more empirical evidence to understand further the barriers, benefits and usage of social media in aiding reflection, as well as identifying the credibility of the authors' contributions. Interestingly, despite the apparent benefits of blogging, Wild *et al* (2012) found that students did not engage well with using blogging to develop reflection skills although it was useful for peer support. They suggested that this may have been due to students perceiving the idea as extra work; impacting on engagement in the research data collection process resulting in a low response rate.

Barriers to Social Media Use for CPD

Bodell & Levins (2012) propose that enthusiasm by practitioners alone will not result in increased social media usage. For practitioners to be able to successfully utilise social media for CPD, certain barriers need to be addressed. These include organisational policies that prevent practitioners from accessing social media sites in the workplace and lack of awareness of the benefits that social media platforms can offer. There is evidence that the culture within larger organisations such as the NHS is changing and beginning to embrace the power of social media in the development of its staff (NHS Employers, 2013). Whether this shifting philosophy is having an impact on an occupational therapists' ability to utilise social media platforms within a work environment is yet to be documented. It is also important to understand individuals' perceptions of, and the challenges faced in using social media, such as skills and confidence, if these hurdles are to be overcome and it is to be utilised to its full potential for CPD (Bodell & Levins, 2012; Ezzamel, 2013, Bodell and Hook, 2014; Mclean *et al*, 2013).

Considering individuals' perception of the challenges they face in accessing and utilising technology and in turn social media within their CPD activities, it is wise to consider the impact of generation theory and in particular Prensky's (2001) suggestion that older generations as 'digital immigrants' may find their that their confidence in their knowledge and skills in using social media as a barrier to the uptake in using social media platforms within their CPD. Brown's (2011) editorial also suggests 'digital immigrants' limited digital understanding as another possible barrier in engaging in social media as part of CPD. The article also refers to the differences in attitudes between 'digital immigrants' - individuals born between 1946-1981) who have had to learn to use technology in their adult life,

compared with 'digital natives'- individuals born from 1982 onwards, who have been

educated in settings embracing the use of technology as part of learning.

Today as more 'digital native' therapists enter the workplace, educated in

environments embracing technology (Thorell *et al*, 2015; Vickers, Field and Melakoski,

2015), it is crucial that workplaces and higher education establishments can embrace their

learning style. Hill's (2013) research, conducted in Australia, considered the management of

'digital native' occupational therapists within the workplace and concluded that these

occupational therapists enjoy collaboration as part of their development, and often seek out

instant feedback and are at ease with social media. It could be argued that this may provide

potential to increase the use of social media within occupational therapy as this provides a

space to collaborate widely with other health professionals for the basis of professional

development. Research has also found that individuals will be more willing to seek out CPD

opportunities on social media sites they are familiar with, such as through 4OT groups on

Facebook and tweetchats like #OTalk and #WeAHP on Twitter (BJOT & #OTalk, 2016).

This echoes Gray's (2008) piece based on education within the UK, cautioning on the need to

embrace 'digital natives' preferences if they are to be managed successfully in the workplace

and allow for them to seek out continuing professional development.

It could be questioned whether the differences in early exposure to technology will

impact on how 'digital natives' need to be managed and continue to access their CPD (Hill *et

al*, 2013; Gray, 2008). Cain and Chretien (2013) argue that social media supports the

constructive learning theory involving learning through interaction. This is because social

media is a normal mode of communication particularly to 'digital natives' and in itself shapes

the socialisation process for students. Kivunja (2014) stressed the need to embrace technology

in learning and development, to enable 'digital natives' to connect and make meaning between new information and what they already know. This is supported by Lim, Lim and Hienrich (2014), who proposed that social media is accessed more readily by this generation through smartphones and mobile devices.. For 'digital natives' understanding the external barriers such as internet policy (Bolton et al, 2013), cultural perceptions (Bodell and Levins, 2012,) and time constraints (Dieleman and Duncan, 2013) to social media use are essential if their learning style is to be catered for within the workplace.

The ever-evolving occupational therapy workplace however is made up not only of 'digital natives', but also 'digital immigrants' (Brown, 2011, Hill, 2013), who may not have had the benefits of continuous technology use within their upbringing and education. It is therefore essential to understand the barriers these 'digital immigrants' may face in learning to use social media (McCrindle, 2006, Brown 2011) and their perceptions of its use for CPD, if it is to be used to its full potential. Bodell and Hook (2014) suggest that collaboration between both experienced and novice occupational therapists via social media can be fostered to aid both learning and research potential within occupational therapy, which is crucial if the profession is to continue to develop and evolve.

There is currently limited research into the role social media can play in CPD for occupational therapists. However considering broader healthcare specialities for example within nursing (Moorley & Chinn, 2015; Ferguson et al, 2017) and radiography (Lawson & Cowling, 2014) it can be seen that social media is already being utilised more widely as a valuable source of networking, a space to enable collaboration and access professional development.

The occupational therapy literature discussed above is limited, as it focuses on qualitative data of a small sample size and in some cases individuals' own experiences using specific social media platforms. More generalised research into the influences of social media usage with a larger sample group is necessary. The aim of this research is to consider opinions and attitudes of a larger sample size to the use of social media as a platform for CPD. This was undertaken by considering the following objectives:

(1) Explore opinions and attitudes to using social media within the continuing professional development of occupational therapy students and staff.

(2) Investigate perceived barriers to using social media for CPD

(3) Consider whether the differences between 'digital natives' and 'digital immigrants' impacts on a person's willingness and confidence to use social media platforms for CPD.

Method

Study Design

In order to meet the aims of the study, a relatively large sample was required. Quantitative data were collected in order to produce statistical information whilst qualitative data were deemed necessary to elaborate further. A mixed method survey design comprising an online questionnaire was used (Gaiser & Schriener, 2009). This enabled the collection of both qualitative data to meet objectives one and two and quantitative data to consider objective three, as well as providing context to qualitative findings within objectives one and two. The mixed methods design benefits from overcoming the weaknesses of lone use of qualitative

and quantitative research methods by offsetting the limitations of each (Denscombe, 2014). Online questionnaires have the benefit of allowing investigation of opinion and attitudes (McLafferly 2007) to social media use, over two campuses at one UK based university (Denscombe, 2014).

Ethics

Ethical approval to undertake this study was obtained from the University. Consent to email an invitation to participate to students on both BSc and MSc occupational therapy programmes was sought and agreed by programme leads and permission to contact OT staff was sought and agreed by line management within the University. Participant information sheets were emailed to sample groups along with the questionnaire link.

Sample

Nonprobability purposive sampling (Denscombe, 2014) was utilised within this research. The online questionnaire was sent via email to 251 occupational therapy students and qualified occupational therapy staff teaching on occupational therapy programmes at one university in the North West of England. The online questionnaire was live for 3 weeks, with a reminder email sent to the sample group after 2 weeks.

Survey Tool

The Bristol Online Survey (BOS) tool was utilised to collect data from the sample group (BOS, 2015). The questionnaire utilised a concurrent nested approach to allow for qualitative and quantitative data to be collected through one data collection method (Creswell, 2013).

The questionnaire was piloted following ethical approval and minor changes made to increase clarity within the questions before the link was emailed to sample group.

Data Analysis

The short text responses within the online questionnaire prompted the use of content analysis to explore the qualitative data, code it and identify broader theme categories (Carptner & Suto, 2008). The findings were then quantified using descriptive statistics to help establish trends within themes and presented within table 2 in the findings section. Particularly relevant quotes were utilised to enhance credibility of the findings (Elo & Kyngas, 2008), by providing qualitative data to support numerical findings among respondents.

The flexibility of content analysis meant it was appropriate for the use within a mixed methods study due to the ability to analyse both qualitative and quantitative data (Gbrich, 2012). Quantitative data responses were therefore analysed within the BOS system and percentages used to analyse variations according to digital natives and digital immigrants.

Findings

Response

There were 76 completed questionnaires, totalling an overall response rate of 30%. Of the total responses, 68% were BSc students, 25% were MSc students and 7% were qualified occupational therapy staff members. Table 1 provides response rates in each generation bracket, with a total of 41 responses in the 'digital native' category and 35 in the 'digital immigrant' category.

Table 1: Percentage of Respondents

	BSc Students	MSc Students	Qualified OT	Total
Digital Natives (Aged 18-34)	25 (61%)	16 (39%)	0 (0%)	41
Digital Immigrants (Aged 35-69)	27 (77%)	3 (9%)	5 (14%)	35
Response rate	52/183 (29%)	19/54 (35%)	5/14 (36%)	76/251 **(30%)**
Percentage of **total** respondents	68%	25%	7%	100%

Themes

The results bring together the qualitative themes identified through content analysis of the data responses from the survey and quantitative data collected and analysed through Bristol Online Survey software. Table two illustrates the themes that were identified during content analysis of the completed questionnaires and the sum total of the number of participants who identified the themes in their responses.

Table 2: Themes identified during content analysis and quantity of respondents highlighting it.

Reasons to Use Social Media		Barriers to Using Social Media		Potential Facilitators	
Accessibility		**Knowledge/Skills**		**Training**	
Accessibility	23	Knowledge - How to use SM	26	Training - How to use for CPD	15
Communicate over large geographic area	15	Knowledge - How to document as CPD	20	Training - How to use social media	14
Time effectiveness	12	Experience	17	Practice	6
Cost effective	7	Evaluating Credibility	15	Example of use	1
Ease of use	6	Confidence	11	**Guidance**	
Access Resources	4	Lack of guidance	2	Guidelines - Use	12
Networking		Not knowing where to start	1	Guidelines on Professionalism	4
Networking	30	**Time**		Group to develop CPD within SM	1
Communicating with colleagues	12	Time to use	19		
Support	10	Time to learn	4		
Publicising self/Impress Employers	9	**Value and Interest**			
Common Interest Groups	7	Privacy	20		
Promote OT	5	Personal/Professional Blurring	14		
CPD is less isolating	2	Professionalism	11		
Learning & Development		Attitude towards SM sites -	11		
Up to date information	36	Motivation	8		
Sharing knowledge/Resources	30	Prefer Face to Face	8		
Study/Learning/Teaching	21	**Design aspects of Social Media Sites**			
Following Events/Tweetchats	12	Advertising	4		
Broad range of views	12	Equipment	4		
Research	11	Not everyone on SM	3		
Ideas for interventions	10	Negative remarks	2		
Videos	9	Format of SM	2		
Reflection	6	Too many sites	2		
Info Gathering	5	Security	2		
Filing system	4	Too much information	4		
EBP/Best Practice	3	Paper version of CPD needed	3		
Creative	1	Employer opinions/rules	1		

Attitudes to Social Media Use

Findings revealed that 68% of respondents felt social media platforms can be used for CPD

purposes, with a further 24% being neutral on the topic. There did not appear to be any correlation between age and attitudes to social media use for CPD activities, with 90% 'digital natives' agreeable or neutral on its use, and in fact 'digital immigrants' came out marginally more likely to use it with 94% being agreeable or neutral to social media use.

Reasons for Using Social Media as a Platform for CPD

A number of reasons for using social media as a platform for CPD were highlighted through content analysis shown in table 2. These were detailed more broadly into themes of accessibility, networking and learning and development.

Accessibility

Social media sites appeared to be accessible to respondents within their CPD, offering the ability to communicate globally with other professionals around their work and personal commitments with one respondent commenting:

> *"It opens up opportunities from national and global organisations, which might be inaccessible in person due to geographical location and it's accessible 24 hours a day so you can do it whenever you have time." (MSc Student, Digital Immigrant)*

These benefits were echoed by a number of other respondents, with cost and time also being posited as a key factor in utilising social media platforms within their CPD activities.

Networking

Networking with other professionals and students was advocated as an advantage of social

media, with respondents expressing the benefits of connecting with other professionals (occupational therapists, students and wider professionals) both locally and globally increasing opportunities for learning and development among respondents. Participants also claimed that because social media allowed space for discussion and idea sharing, CPD became more of a social activity and in turn less isolating.

> "I have used our class Facebook page to share ideas and also seek assistance on intervention planning with my fellow OT students. I also like to use Twitter chat's such as OTalk to gain ideas about evidence based interventions, by connecting with OTs using them in practice." (MSc Student, Digital Native)

Social media sites also allowed for respondents to support and gain peer support from their existing colleagues when not situated in the same location. A number of respondents discussed the use of Facebook in fulfilling this need along with sharing CPD opportunities with one another. One respondent expressed the support they were able to gain from others through an online platform:

> *"Motivation to carry on when things don't seem to be going well" (BSc Student, Digital Immigrant)*

It is evident that the networking social media allows, enables development and encouragement from others, in a place individuals feel comfortable to seek support and opportunities.

Learning and Development

Social media platforms enabled respondents to keep up to date on best practice, policy changes and research developments. Respondents described a number of different uses of social media sites to aid their learning and development. These are detailed in table 3.

Table 3: Uses of Social Media Sites by Respondents

Increase Knowledge	Research & Improving Evidence Based Practice	Reflection	Ideas and Advice for Use in Interventions
Twitter • Source of up-to-date policy and research • #OTalk – Increase knowledge on different areas of practice • Follow conferences and study days	**Twitter** • Networking as a basis for research	**Blogging Sites** • Space for public reflections • Interactive reflection to enable deeper reflection	**Twitter** • #OTalk – Ideas for practice
Facebook • 4OT groups • Private groups with peers to share knowledge	**Facebook** • Research 4OT group		**Facebook** • Ask questions and advice from other practitioners
YouTube • Learning about academic subjects e.g. anatomy	**Research Gate** • Keep up to date on areas of interest		**Pinterest** • Gather ideas for OT interventions

The data suggests respondents are willing to access a range of social media platforms within their learning and development and consciously seek out the right tool for the task. Facebook was the social media site most used by respondents with 74% stating that they used the platform within their CPD. One respondent spoke of the benefits of using Facebook:

> *"I think that the sharing of professional experience with the speed at which others can respond and interact, allows for better communication and wider connections."(BSc Student, Digital Native)*

Respondents also highlighted the benefits of Facebook, in allowing a space to ask questions and gain insight from other professions both through the use of closed groups with colleagues and within the wider open groups which have focus on specialities. Facebook was followed by Twitter, with 55% of respondents stating that using this platform enabled access to CPD focused activities, with a respondent stating:

> *"I use #OTalk to gain knowledge and to be informed of practice to help me as an OT student. I also like to use Twitter to communicate with fellow OTs and OT students." (BSc Student, Digital Native)*

Other respondents also highlighted the benefits of using hashtags on Twitter to focus in on areas of thinking and development:

> *"I have enjoyed using #'s and found it a useful way for thinking quickly and clearly, responding to others and articulating my own thoughts both inside and outside the occupational therapy profession." (MSc Student, Digital Immigrant)*

Hashtags appeared to also allow for respondents to follow events they could not attend in person due to financial or geographical challenges:

> *"I utilise Twitter to join in with tweetchats for example #OTalk and more widely #WeAHP from the comfort of my own home as part of my CPD activities. I also use the site to network with other health professionals and follow OT conferences around the world by using the conference hashtags. I also use Twitter as a way of gaining up-to-date OT news." (MSc Student, Digital Native)*

Even for the 40% of respondents who defined themselves as 'lurkers' on social media (where they categorised themselves as only consumers of information rather that actively 'participating' in adding to discussions), there were clear benefits of accessing social media platforms as part of their learning and development.

Barriers to Utilising Social Media as a Platform for CPD

By far the biggest barrier in using social media as a platform for CPD was identified as an individual's knowledge and skills in utilising the platforms. Time, value and interest, as well as design aspects of social media sites were also highlighted as possible barriers to social media use within CPD (detailed in table 2).

Perceived Knowledge

As described in table 4, there was a marginally higher percentage of 'digital native' respondents perceiving they had an appropriate level of knowledge in utilising social media platforms whilst maintaining confidentiality of their clients as illustrated here:

> "I feel I have the have enough knowledge on my code of ethics and professional
>
> standard to use social media without breaching the confidentiality of my clients."
>
> (MSc Student, Digital Native)

"Digital native" respondents also stated they were more comfortable with using social media to interact with others and contributing to discussion on social media platforms than digital immigrants. Interestingly the only exception to this pattern was the knowledge on how to use

social media to aid reflection. The results showed a considerably smaller percentage of respondents in both 'digital native' and 'digital immigrants' categories.

Table 4: How well informed do you feel on the following aspects of social media use in CPD

		Unaware of this aspect	No knowledge on this aspect	Slightly knowledgeable on this aspect	Knowledgeable on this aspect	Very knowledgeable and confident on this aspect
Keeping confidentiality of clients and staff	**Digital Natives**	5%	7%	27%	22%	39%
	Digital Immigrants	9%	17%	14%	40%	20%
Interacting with other professionals	**Digital Natives**	2%	15%	24%	39%	20%
	Digital Immigrants	9%	14%	34%	32%	11%
Using social media sites to aid reflection	**Digital Natives**	15%	24%	36%	15%	10%
	Digital Immigrants	11%	26%	37%	23%	3%
Gaining learning from others	**Digital Natives**	3%	10%	17%	46%	24%
	Digital Immigrants	11%	11%	32%	35%	11%
Contributing to discussion	**Digital Natives**	5%	10%	36%	34%	15%
	Digital Immigrants	6%	26%	37%	20%	11%

Twenty respondents (26%) referred to a lack of perceived knowledge of how best to document CPD activity undertaken over social media, as a barrier to its use. It was also identified that respondents felt they lacked the perceived knowledge to evaluate the credibility of online information when trying to source content to learn and develop online.

"The information may not be valid or well informed so I would not like to use the information for anything other than personal interest." (BSc Student, Digital Native)

However others felt they could transfer the skills they had learnt as part of their university courses to assess the credibility of sources and information they accessed online, with one respondent stating:

"If the critical thinking/reflection skills learnt at university are used accordingly, I believe social media can be a very useful tool." (BSc Student, Digital Immigrant)

Skills

71% of 'digital natives' stated they have the necessary skills to use social media sites in a professional capacity. As predicted this decreased within the digital immigrants with 52% stating they did not have the skills to use it in a professional manner. One BSc Student stated:

"My digital skills are lacking and I have not found anywhere I could learn how to use them." (BSc Student, Digital Immigrant)

Confidence

Confidence appeared to be a barrier in social media use with 64% of respondents stating they

did not feel confident in using social media for CPD. Confidence was recorded as lower in digital immigrants with only 29% of respondents stating they felt confident. Respondents indicated a '*lack of training*' and experience as impacting on their confidence in utilising it.

> *"I don't know how I would go about it. I am not a contributor on social media in my personal life either."* (MSc Student, Digital Immigrant)

This also appeared to be an issue within the qualified occupational therapists that responded:

> *" We don't really get any training or any discussions on appropriate use of social media – there are polices and guidance but these are never explained – we just read them"* (Qualified Occupational Therapist, Digital Immigrant)

This was slightly higher in the 'digital native' category with 41% feeling confident in utilising social media sites within their CPD.

> *" I am confident in using SM for CPD purposes, and I am able to document this for CPD purposes through reflection on how this would impact on my practice.*" (MSc Student, Digital Native)

Time

Time was expressed as a barrier within all age groups in employing social media platforms within CPD. This is particularly evident within the respondents with lower confidence as they felt they required more time to learn how to use the sites appropriately. One respondent stated:

> *" I don't feel that I use it anywhere near as much as I could. Particularly with Twitter, I don't find that I have enough time to learn how to use it to its full potential."*
>
> (Qualified occupational therapist, Digital Immigrant)

This links to the building of confidence as respondents advocated that 'regular use' helped to increase their confidence. Respondents who had utilised social media within their personal life echoed this, expressing they felt more confident with their skills, which could be translated into professional use, in turn reducing the time taken to utilise the platform.

Value and Interest

Individual values and interest in social media impacted on its utilisation within CPD, with individual privacy concerns a recurring theme with 26% of all respondents. This linked with the perceived risks of professional/personal life blurring that could become more prevalent with social media use. This is due to it being used as both a source of entertainment and communication within personal lives and for CPD purposes within individuals' professional lives.

Design Aspect of Social Media Sites

Social media sites themselves were seen as a barrier to a small number of respondents. Problems cited were the amount of advertising on sites, the equipment needed to access them, as well as the need to filter information to find useful content when trying to utilise the platforms for CPD.

Potential Facilitators to Social Media Use

Potential facilitators for increased utilisation of social media were identified.. These could be a possible way to overcome the barriers identified, and increase the confidence of users.

Training

More training on both the use of social media and how to use and document it for CPD purposes was suggested by a number of respondents across the age spectrum as crucial if they were to increase their confidence in utilising it. It was indicated that this would be beneficial through face-to-face sessions such as workshops where they had more contact with the tutor. A number of respondents also suggested that teaching on the use of social media for CPD purposes would be beneficial within the university curriculum with one respondent stating:

> *"Formal training in use of social media for CPD would be beneficial to legitimise its use in occupational therapy."* (MSc Student, Digital Immigrant)

Guidance

A number of respondents indicated they would benefit from professional guidance on the appropriate use of social media for CPD. However this limited awareness of current available guidance documents by COT, highlights a need for more broadly distributed guidance documents.

Discussion

There was a predominantly positive attitude to social media use as a platform for CPD

activities across all age categories. Respondents identified the ease and accessibility of social media as drivers within their motivation to use the platforms. The ability to connect and communicate with other health professionals both local and globally facilitated CPD to be a less isolating experience for them. Respondents also valued access to up-to-date research and information relating to their own practice and the ability to collaborate with other practitioners, increasing their own development and the development of the occupational therapy community as a whole. These benefits echo earlier publications by Bodell and Hook (2011), Maclean *et al*. (2009) and Dieleman and Duncan (2013). The virtual environment of social media sites established a space where professional interaction could take place. This facilitates the sharing of professional skills and expertise over a larger geographical area through engaging in Twitter chats such as #OTalk and #WeAHP as well as through Facebook's 4OT groups. These results supported a mixed methods study by Dieleman and Duncan (2013), which demonstrated the benefits of sharing between different levels of experience and clinical expertise within forensic mental health occupational therapists dispersed over a wide area.

Although respondents saw the use of social media sites as a way to network and learn from other professionals through resource and research sharing, this did not appear to extend to their use for the purposes of reflection as argued by Ezzamel (2013). Reflection was rated relatively low among respondents in both 'digital native' and 'digital immigrant' categories, both in terms of individuals' currently utilising blogging sites to aid their reflection and for respondents' knowledge base on reflection through all social media platforms. The lack of knowledge reported reflects the limited empirical evidence available within the occupational therapy professional literature (Ezzamel, 2013; Bodel *et al*., 2009) and can be seen as a barrier to its use. Additionally, individuals' opinions and attitudes regarding the process of reflection,

being private in nature, appeared to limit the use of social media as a platform for reflection due to the unwillingness to share reflections within a public arena with their peers and other professionals. This restricts the positive interactive nature of blogging as part of reflection, as a way of receiving feedback from peers and supervisors, which is known to deepen thinking on events and experiences. It could however be argued that the 'digital natives' characteristics of seeking 'continuous feedback' and the preference for a constructive learning style, discussed by Hill *et al*. (2013) and Cain and Chretien (2013) respectively, could be well catered for through platforms that offer a space for interactive reflection. Indeed this supports Kivunja (2014)'s research into the teaching and learning styles which stresses the importance of allowing digital natives to embrace technology such as social media to enhance their constructive learning style. This would enable an accessible space to gain feedback from peers and managers to aid the development of concepts and experiences. Interestingly respondents within this study who used social media platforms to aid reflection were not solely from digital native category. A number of 'digital immigrants' also recognised the benefits of blogging, highlighting the limitations of generation theory classification with regard to technology use (Brown, 2011).

Hill *et al*.'s (2013) and Brown's (2011) findings, suggest that respondents classed as 'digital natives' would be more willing to embrace social media within their CPD activities than 'digital immigrants'. However, although the responses were mainly positive in this study, the 'digital natives' were marginally less likely to consider social media platforms appropriate spaces to conduct CPD. Respondents expressed concerns about the blurring of professional/personal lives as a barrier to engaging, indicating that utilising social media sites more frequently to communicate within their personal life impacted on how willing they were to have those aspects of their lives mixing. Previous use of social media, however, was not a

completely negative experience. 'Digital native' respondents recorded a higher level of knowledge and skills with regard to operating the social media sites, accounting for the increased confidence within this age category. In contrast, the 'digital immigrants' lacked the appropriate knowledge and skills to utilise social media confidently but were more willing to engage in a professional manner. This is in line with the generation characteristics for 'digital immigrants' highlighted by Gray (2008) and McCrindle (2006). It can also be noted that the lack of skills and experience within this group may account for the increased time it takes to navigate the unfamiliar platforms. Respondents indicated this as a barrier, making social media platforms less accessible.

Respondents in both the 'digital native' and 'digital immigrant' categories suggested that each of the social media platforms offered slightly different tools to be utilised in CPD and practice development. This signalled that using social media in CPD activities requires more than merely engaging with a familiar platform, rather it requires utilising the correct platform for the activity being undertaken. This presents a challenge in educating occupational therapists on what each platform can provide for them when engaging in CPD.

Respondents across both categories expressed the desire for more education on using social media professionally through formal curriculum, workshops and face-to-face sessions as well as more guidance from their professional body on professional use. A number of respondents appeared to be unaware of guidance produced by COT. This indicates a need for wider publication and distribution of guidelines among professionals in practice and occupational therapy students in training.

Bodell and Hook's (2014) practice analysis advocates the advantages of educating undergraduate students on professional use of social media sites and in managing their concerns in utilising platforms to seek out development opportunities online. However, their limited sample size of three may impact on the ability to generalise research with regard to a larger representation of the occupational therapy profession. Nonetheless, respondents in this study stressed the concept of formal education as important, if they were to develop the skills to use social media professionally within CPD activities and document this appropriately within HCPC (2015) standards.

Considering Bodell and Hook's (2014) and Wild *et al.*'s (2012) studies, if social media training is delivered as extra-curricular sessions, it could be perceived as extra work causing student engagement to be lower than if training is embedded within formal curriculum lessons. It is also important to take into account who is most appropriate to deliver teaching on the use of social media within formal curriculums. The qualified occupational therapists teaching on occupational therapy programmes in this study fell into the 'digital immigrant' category, and expressed lower levels of confidence in utilising social media platforms than the some of 'digital native' students. This could present an opportunity for peer education or joint working between staff and students as a format for delivering training. This would utilise the skills and confidence of individuals within the 'digital native' category alongside the experienced staff members' knowledge of CPD activities.

Implications for Practice

The positive attitude towards use of social media within CPD activities could inform the

planning of development activities within the occupational therapy profession, for example by improving accessibility by the provision of more networking opportunities over a wider geographical area. Additionally, the limited awareness of guidance from RCOT emphasises the need to more broadly distribute guidance documents to professionals in education and practice. The lack of knowledge and skills in social media use highlights a need for more structured education both within occupational therapy curriculums and for qualified practitioners to increase knowledge and confidence in the range of tools available for CPD.

Limitations

Although the study used a larger sample size than previous qualitative studies and practice analyses, the impact of using one university population will limit how far the results can be generalised for wider practice. As the majority of respondents were occupational therapy students, the paper is more reflective of their views as opposed to those of qualified occupational therapists. The use of online questionnaires as a method of data collection and resulting self-selecting nature of respondents may have resulted in a bias towards individuals with more advanced technological skills who in turn may have a preference towards social media use.

Further research to determine if the results of this study translate into the wider occupational therapy profession outside an educational establishment would be beneficial. It would also be valuable to consider how best the training on use social media could be implemented into occupational therapy curriculum for both undergraduate and pre-registration post-graduate programmes within the UK.

Conclusion

The study has demonstrated that there is a willingness among both 'digital natives' and 'digital immigrants' to use social media platforms within their CPD activities. However respondents appeared to lack the knowledge and skills to use it in an advantageous way within their CPD activities and this impacted on their confidence when attempting to use the platforms. This was particularly evident when considering the use of social media platforms to aid reflection. A number of external barriers were expressed among respondents such as availability of time to use and design aspects of social media platforms. The internal barriers identified such as personal values and knowledge and skills appeared to be a greater barrier to its use for the respondents. This study demonstrates there is requirement for more education on how to use the platforms appropriately if the sites are to be utilised more widely by occupational therapy professionals.

Key Findings:

- Social media platforms offer a variety of tools to use within individuals CPD activities.
- Social media can make CPD a less isolating experience.
- Age does not impact on willingness to use social media within CPD

What the study has added:

This study has suggested a need for more formal education within occupational therapy curriculums on how to use social media within CPD, if it is to be used more widely and effectively.

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