

An Approach to Using Social Media as a Research Platform

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Abstract AIM: To examine the use of the social and technology features of Facebook to recruit research participants from a closed-group. BACKGROUND: Limited research in healthcare focuses on the use of Facebook despite the many opportunities that exist. METHODS: The experience of gaining access to and recruiting participants from a closed-Facebook group using two different types of posts to advertise the study. DISCUSSION: The paper focuses on the lead author's experience of recruiting participants from a closed-group on Facebook and her experience of using two different types of posts to advertise the study. A personal post with a picture of the lead author receiving a grant to conduct the research resulted in 32% of the completed survey responses in 24 hours. CONCLUSION: Using a closed-group on Facebook was an inexpensive and successful method to survey many respondents with a shared identity from all over the United States in a short period of time. Future researchers choosing to utilize social media as a research platform should share their methods to better understand how social media can be leveraged in nursing research.

Keywords: Facebook, social media, research methods, survey, travel nurse, nursing research, onboarding, orientation, recruitment

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Social media is already the focus of industry and academic research such as advertising, communication, marketing and public relations. Research foci in social media can range from complex multifactorial influencer analyses to ethnographic assessment of specific communities of interest [1]. The healthcare industry is just beginning to discover the myriad opportunities that exist to leverage research using social media [2]. The aim of this brief report is to share what we, as nurse researchers, have learned from utilizing Facebook as a platform to advertise our research.

Our research population was an existing community of travel nurses across the United States on the closed Facebook group The Gypsy Nurse – Travel Nurse Network (TNN). We surveyed these travel nurses to find the specific and measurable information needed to create an evidence-based onboarding for travel nurses. Our survey yielded 306 completed responses, the success of which we attribute largely to the social and technology features of Facebook.

After reaching out to the president of TNN, our survey was welcomed with open arms as the aims of our research closely aligned with the mission of the company. We posted the survey advertisement on the TNN Facebook page with a very professional-looking graphic. The post was shared on multiple occasions by the TNN marketing team and we continued to re-post the same advertisement almost daily. These posts were mildly successful, gaining an average of 12 completed survey responses (see Figure 1).



Figure 1.

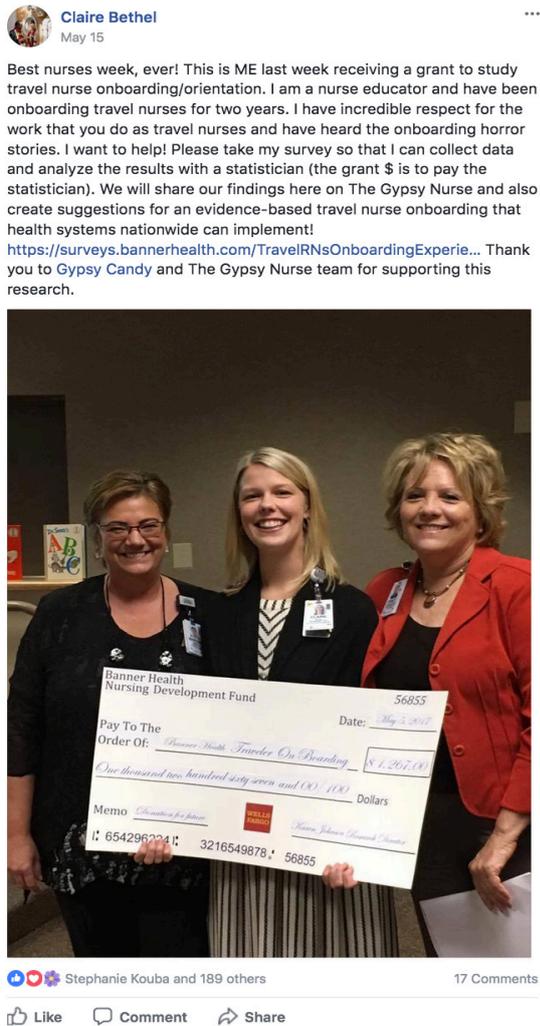


Figure 2.

We tried a different approach to advertising our survey by posting a picture of the principal investigator receiving a grant to conduct our research (see Figure 2). This post quickly gained 190 ‘likes’, boosting our post in the Facebook thread and in less than 24 hours there were 97 newly completed survey responses. The interest in the survey peaked with the personal post and was also high early and toward the end of the data collection period (see Figure 3).

When contemplating Facebook as a platform to advertise or conduct research, first make sure to research the users of the Facebook page. People are drawn to personal stories and pictures. Consult with marketers and/or communication experts to maximize advertisement efforts. Contact the administrators of the page to gain permission to post and gain research support as this can prevent a post from being taken down. If the administrators of the Facebook group are willing, investigate the possibility of having the post ‘pinned’ the top of the page so it is the first thing a Facebook user sees when they click on the page. If ‘pinning’ is not an option, opt to post the advertisement frequently to increase visibility. The more ‘likes’ and comments on a post, the higher on the Facebook page thread it will remain. It is possible to turn off the capacity for Facebook users to make comments on a post, however this may be a detriment to the visibility of the post. ‘Tagging’ the Facebook page administrators will help validate that the research is trusted and valid.

Social media offers rich platforms for community-engagement in nursing research. The savvy investigator will take advantage of the technology and social features of the platform to maximize research efforts. Further research is needed to understand how the features of social media can be used to leverage research in nursing.

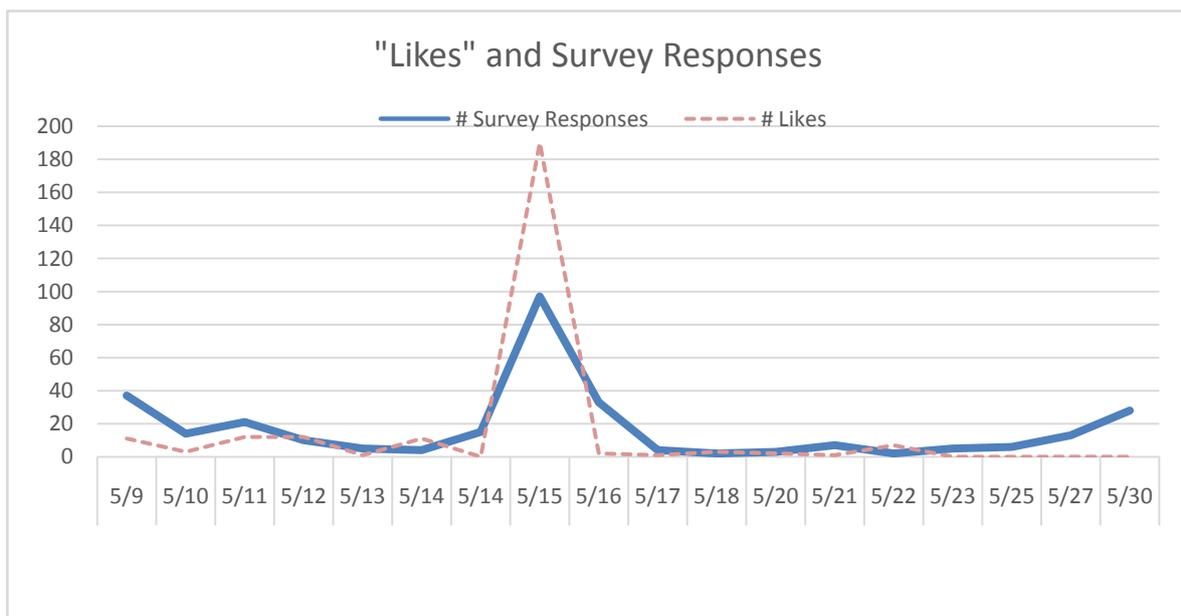


Figure 3.

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