Social Media and Social Work Education Curriculum in Aotearoa New Zealand: An Integrated Framework

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ABSTRACT

This article offers selected findings of a mixed methods research project carried out in Aotearoa New Zealand which asked broad questions about how social workers in this country use social media professionally, and for their opinions about its importance to social work. Prevalent in the findings were themes about the place of professional identity and knowledge in the use of social media, a call for leadership, and ideas about what social workers should know or learn about social media. The focus of this article is on this last theme; findings were selected based on their contribution to the realm of social work education and professional learning about social media. For example, focus group participants discussed what social workers need to know about social media and how they can best learn about it, and highlight the role of academia in this learning; those who contributed to an online survey supported the imperative of learning about social media as a priority; and key informants considered ways forward for social work education and the profession generally. Through these combined voices, together with a review of current academic writing, a vision is created of social work graduates suited to practise in a digital society. The findings of this study are explored within a framework which recommends a holistic integration of social media learning across four main areas of social work curriculum and concludes with some broad findings from the study pertinent to the delivery of social work education.

Keywords: *Social work education; Social media; Technology; E-professionalism; Digital competence*

INTRODUCTION

For most of us, the reality of social media merges into our daily lives as an inevitable necessity; we are more likely to be affected by the absence of social media than its presence. We communicate using social media, share and access knowledge via social media, are inundated with a plethora of emerging applications, or social networking sites that allow us to use social media in increasingly nuanced and complex ways. As social media becomes less dispensable, more woven into our personal and public lives, as its novelty wears off, we are less likely to notice in an acute way the ongoing impact social media has on our world (boyd, 2011; Fuchs, 2017). The more we become inducted into its use, bedazzled by what it can do, the harder it becomes to see clearly where it can and does go wrong – where it becomes exploitative, dangerous and dark (Bartlett, 2014; Csiernik, Furze, Dromgole, & Rishchynski, 2006).

The people of Aotearoa were sadly and sharply reminded of this reality by the tragic terrorist attacks on Muslim worshippers in Christchurch in March 2019. The terrorist was dependent on social media to disseminate footage of the shootings, and the global impact of this was swift and devastating. The pervasiveness of social media, together with an ignorance and apparent naivety of its power, signals the need for the social work profession to keep its eyes wide open to its implications for society and to its impact on the lives of people it serves. Social workers are thus challenged to be fully informed, and urgent in their practice responses.

The view is put forward overwhelmingly in the social work literature that the profession should engage with internet technology and social media on all levels (Bullock & Colvin, 2015; Giffords, 2009; Perron, Taylor, Glass, & Margerum-Leys, 2010; Schembri, 2008; SCIE, 2019; Taylor, 2017; Turner, 2016). There is a repeated message that social workers cannot choose to ignore technology but rather be critical of its significant role in society (Edwards & Hoefer, 2010). For example, social workers must advocate on behalf of those who experience disparity in accessing the internet and provide an educative role in the safe use of social media. They are required to be prepared for unanticipated practice challenges and ethical dilemmas: should Facebook be used to monitor the activities of young people or families (Cooner, Beddoe, Ferguson & Joy, 2019), or social media platforms to advertise for foster carers (Walters, 2018)? The ethical implications for social workers using social media are multi-dimensional, raising issues related to privacy and confidentiality, informed consent, professional boundaries and dual relationships, and the implications for record-keeping and documentation (Barsky, 2017; Reamer, 2017).

Related to this, social workers are obliged to understand the place of *big data* in society, the reality of surveillance and the use of algorithms to predict risk, and the many implications these practices have for social work (Gillingham & Graham, 2017; Keddell, 2015; Lupton & Williamson, 2017). There is also a key requirement for social workers to understand the risks and benefits of social media use by young people (Chan & Holosko, 2016; O'Carroll, 2013a). From a macro perspective, social workers are challenged to take advantage of "every advocacy tactic available to the greatest extent possible to ensure timely policy change for vulnerable populations" (Edwards & Hoefer, 2010, p. 220).

The practice of social work is therefore firmly located in what has become a social media world and social work education has cautiously responded to this reality. The following is a

review of social work literature focussed on social media in the context of social work education, and a description of a mixed methods research project conducted in Aotearoa New Zealand which explored social work attitudes, opinions and behaviour regarding professional use of social media (Stanfield, 2019). Rationalised by the literature and supported by the views of participants in this study about what social workers should know about social media, a framework for social work education curriculum is proposed. This framework recommends a holistic integration of social media learning across four main areas of social work curriculum and concludes with some broad findings from the study pertinent to the delivery of social work education.

SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION AND SOCIAL MEDIA: THE LITERATURE

This article relies on the widely used definition of social media as "a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61). There are various "types" of social media including collaborative projects (like Wikipedia), blogs (personal web pages), content communities (Flickr, YouTube), and Virtual Game Worlds/Social Worlds (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). There are also a growing number of collaborative workspaces (Basecamp, Slack). The most commonly used form of social media are social networking sites (SNS) like Facebook or Twitter, which are defined as:

> …web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system" (boyd & Ellison, 2007, p. 211)

Social media is a means to interactively communicate with individuals and communities using digital technology, and social work education has responded with ideas about: 1. how social media can be used to deliver learning programmes; and 2. what social work students need to learn *about* social media to practise effectively and ethically in contemporary society.

TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIAL MEDIA AS LEARNING DELIVERY SYSTEMS

Writing and research focussed on social work education constitutes a substantial portion of the general international literature about social work and social media. The value of technology in higher education to advance learning is generally acknowledged and encouraged (Megele, 2014; Wretman & Macy, 2016). A range of knowledge is offered about how social media and technology can be incorporated as tools to facilitate learning, and how pedagogical approaches are applied or developed to underpin this practice (Kellsey & Taylor, 2016). There is ongoing recognition of the impact of social media on the future of social work education, its pedagogy and course formats (Hitchcock & Young, 2016; McAuliffe & Nipperess, 2017; Robbins, Coe Regan, Williams, Smyth, & Bogo, 2016; Waldman & Rafferty, 2008).

Social work education occurs in the context of the wider tertiary education environment which is active in incorporating a range of new teaching theory and practices in response to, and in collaboration with, social media technologies (Westwood, 2014). Blended learning

and technology-enhanced learning are commonplace, and existing pedagogies have found their place in the new learning environments. The community of learning/inquiry approach is applied favourably to online social work education and professional development (Bentley, Secret, & Cummings, 2015; LaMendola, Ballantyne, & Daly, 2009; Zorn & Seelmeyer, 2017). There are numerous examples of specific social media activities being "embedded" into learning programmes (Anthony & Jewell, 2017; Hitchcock & Young, 2016; Jones, Sage, & Hitchcock, 2019; Martin, 2017; Megele, 2014; Teixeira & Hash, 2017).

A recently published book adds to this collection, providing social work educators with pragmatic and creative applications of technology relevant to the social work classroom (Hitchcock, Sage, & Smyth, 2019). It is apparent that social work educators have an increasingly rich resource to draw on for designing and delivering programmes using technology and social media; however, there remains a guarded confidence that digital professionalism has progressed sufficiently in this regard (Taylor, 2017). Cautious optimism is also expressed about the suitability of contemporary neoliberal tertiary institutions to adopt technology most suited to social work education (Ballantyne, Wong, & Morgan, 2017).

LEARNING ABOUT SOCIAL MEDIA

The value of technology in social work education is generally acknowledged (Megele, 2014); however, there is a perceived "disjointedness" between the technology needed for learning and for practice (Taylor, 2017), and a need to differentiate between the two so that social work educators are prepared to support students to become "fit for virtual practice" (Rafferty & Waldman, 2006, p. 19). It is important to guard assumptions about the extent to which online learning leads to digital literacy, for example, "using a learning management system (e.g., Blackboard) doesn't mean students are learning to navigate the digital world beyond those cloistered environments" (Robbins et al., 2016, p. 391). This is evidenced by the number of practitioners being called to account for failing to demonstrate professional online behaviour (Ryan & Garrett, 2017; Taylor, 2017). Recognition of this reality has led to increasingly strong arguments for the inclusion of the study of social media in social work education as a core subject (Hill & Shaw, 2011; Watling & Rogers, 2012; Wolf & Goldkind, 2016).

As examples, Chan and Holosko (2016) propose a social work practice framework for social media use based on a case study undertaken of a social media youth outreach project; Curington and Hitchcock (2017) offer a practice-focused social media guide for social work field educators designed to assist social work students achieve the competencies required of them regarding use of technology in social work practice. Response to the need for new practice skills (for example, online counselling, chat and email communications, online advocacy) has emerged in social work textbooks (Beddoe, 2015; Dunlop & Holosko, 2013; Watling & Rogers, 2012).

In summary, it is clear from the literature that tertiary learning about social media can occur (and is currently occurring) for social work students. Pedagogy aligned with the participatory, democratic promise of social media has been adopted by social work educators (Hitchcock et al., 2019; Wretman & Macy, 2016); it features collaborative

learning principles, community of enquiry, and blended delivery designs (Kellsey & Taylor, 2017; LaMendola et al., 2009; Westwood, 2014). What is less apparent in the literature is guidance on what social workers should be taught *about* social media, its ideology, cultural discourses, and meaning for citizens. Given how quickly technology changes, and its frequently unknown implications, social workers must be prepared to seek a deeper analysis of its relevance, both globally and within local, unique practice environments.

LEARNING ABOUT SOCIAL MEDIA: THE STUDY

The following selected findings were generated from a wider mixed methods study about the professional use of social media by social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand and, in particular, were drawn from a key theme in the findings related to what participants felt was important to *know* about social media (Stanfield, 2019). Three data sets were analysed in this study: 1. An online survey which collected both quantitative and qualitative data from 342 social workers; 2. qualitative interviews of 12 key informants (social workers); and 3. two social work focus groups. Survey and focus group participants were drawn from the membership of the Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (ANZASW), and the key informants were generated via the researcher's networks, chosen for their expertise as social media users and/or for their positions of leadership in the social work community.

The analyses were carried out both concurrently and sequentially; that is, the data from the survey and the interviews were generated concurrently, analysed separately, and then interpreted jointly for meta-themes; these themes led in a sequential manner to the formation of new and revised questions and to the use of focus groups to answer these questions. The focus groups findings were then juxtaposed with the initial meta-themes, so that all findings could be "in conversation with one another and appear to weave a richer and more complex story" (Hesse-Biber, 2010, p. 67).

This was practically achieved by creatively comparing the themes from each phase of the study aided by mind-maps representing themes and sub-themes. The themes were interrogated for where they diverged and converged with each other and "joint" or "enriched" themes were developed. Finally, themes most worthy of further exploration were chosen depending on their strength and relevance to the research questions and to the research participants, and are as follows:

- Social work identity and social media use
- The place of social work knowledge in social media practice
- What and how to learn about social media
- Leadership and ways forward for the profession

The writing of this article is primarily inspired by the findings related to the meta-theme, *what and how to learn about social media*. This theme focuses on what participants offered the study about professional development and social work education. For example, the key informants who contributed to this study strongly argued the professional relevance of

social media for social workers. Social workers who participated in the survey agreed that learning about its use (ethical and potential) should be undertaken by social workers, and that development of this knowledge is important for the profession. The findings from the first phase of this project therefore emphasised the need to develop good strategies and leadership in this regard and, as one key informant stated: "To open up social media as an area where social workers can see themselves legitimately doing social work, being social workers." The second phase of this project, which employed the use of focus groups, further explored what social workers already knew about social media, asked questions about what further knowledge was required, and how this knowledge would be best acquired.

This study received ethical approval from the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee (UAHPEC) on two occasions. The first approval was granted to carry out the survey and key informant interviews and the second approval was granted to conduct the focus groups.

FINDINGS: TOWARDS AN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION FRAMEWORK

The participants in this study brought a distinctly local flavour to this topic, highlighting the reality that, although social media is a global phenomenon, it is experienced and used in many culturally diverse and personal ways. This article now draws threads through what was found in the social work education literature, and the voices of the participants. It will first make a case for the integration of social media learning into the general social work curriculum, and then offer a framework comprised of the following four headings: *professional practice, social work principles, social work practice, theories and knowledge.*

SOCIAL MEDIA LEARNING – AN HOLISTIC, INTEGRATIVE APPROACH

As argued above, social media intersects with social work practice at multiple practice points – at both micro and macro levels (Berzin, Singer, & Chan, 2015; Reamer, 2017; Wolf & Goldkind, 2016). It is rationalised, therefore, that social media learning be integrated into all aspects of social work education, rather than be offered as a segregated lesson, or discrete area of study (Curington & Hitchcock, 2017; Watling & Rogers, 2012). This is not a new concept and picks up on work already done in this regard (i.e., Zorn & Seelmeyer, 2017). This aim of this article is to extend and deepen this work by offering the wisdom of the participants in this project which represented a grassroots, cultural and social-work-led exploration into professional relationships with social media.

The framework presented in Figure 1, which will be used to structure this discussion, was constructed in the first instance by consulting the New Zealand Social Workers Registration Board (SWRB) programme recognition standards (SWRB, 2017), and the Core Competence Standards (SWRB, 2016) to establish the four basic areas of the curriculum. The international definition of social work was also consulted and led to inclusion of the main principles and areas of knowledge foundational to social work (International Federation of Social Workers [IFSW], 2014). *Te Tiriti ō Waitangi* principles promoted focus on notions of bicultural practice using social media, the use and impact of social media on Māori and how social work can both learn from anwd respond to this. This deductive and iterative exercise

generated a map into which areas of social media learning raised in the literature, and by the participants in this research project, were then incorporated.

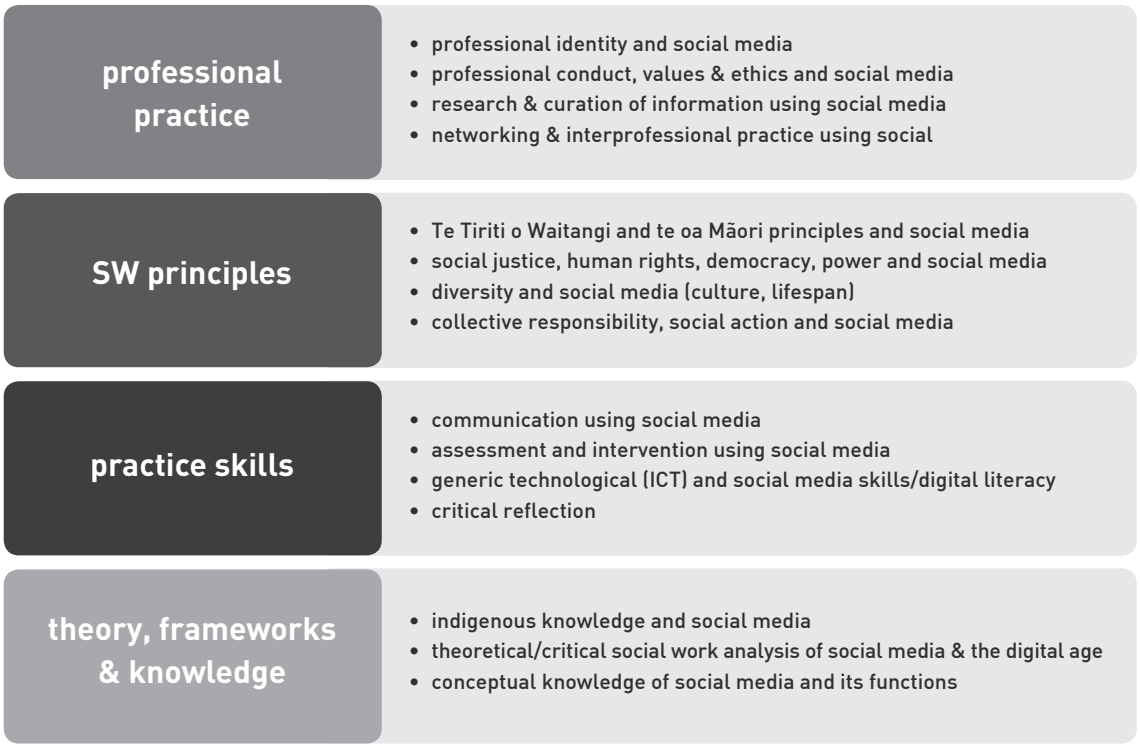

Figure 1. Social work curriculum with integration of social media learning.

Professional practice

The first curriculum area is that of professional practice, or *e-professionalism*, which focusses on the development of professional and cultural identities, ethical guidelines and policies, and the management of professional relationships using social media. This area of learning is served particularly well by applying social media as a learning delivery method because it offers social work students a practical and powerful opportunity to develop "real-time" understanding of its realities (Cooner, 2013; Hitchcock & Young, 2016; McKendrick, 2014). This is complex task, however, involving more than prescriptive guidelines, as expressed in the following comment by a key informant in this research:

> I think it will require multiple different ways of learning. It's not just upskilling. I think it's more than just knowing how to do things, I think it's also thinking through the issues. And having some ethical principles that are consistent with the code of ethics.

A lack of guidance in this regard was generally expressed by participants in this study, key informant participants called for leadership, and the focus groups, regardless of their confidence that the profession could generate its own knowledge about the ethics of social media use, expressed curiosity about who was "in charge" of social media in Aotearoa. The focus group comment below refers to the concept of *tikanga* (custom or correct practice) and *tika* (acting in the right way) and is seeking someone to act as *kaitiaki*, or guardian of this practice:

> So what is the tikanga, what is the tika about social media? Who enforces that? It comes from the home and the norms within the home or the norms within the school of social work or within what's modelled through ANZASW rightly or wrongly, or SWRB. Who's the kaitiaki of social media? (focus group participant)

A focus on cultural concepts introduced by the participants in this project provides a point of reflection on the ethical use of social media by social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand. As with research, social media is a repository for knowledge; it is a place where knowledge is both communicated, stored and interpreted. Participants in this research expressed concern about how social workers conduct themselves ethically on social media, how they communicate and respect what is communicated to them. One focus group for example, conversed about the need for care in how we relate to the words of others on social media, how we must deliberately retain our cultural obligations to those we speak with in the same way we do when meeting face to face. They expressed a wish to "keep those [obligations] alive in the way we type words out, or post, or like, because whatever we say we're held accountable ….".

The competence to practise bi-culturally in Aotearoa New Zealand is a requirement of the SWRB and the ANZASW and, as such, is an intrinsic aspect of the graduate profile of social work education programmes in Aotearoa and of practice in this country. Biculturalism is defined as the reciprocal learning, sharing and supporting of cultural values – this is achieved by a requirement that social workers educate themselves with the "knowledge and understanding of their own ethnicity and the Tangata Whenua and Tauiwi histories of Aotearoa New Zealand" (ANZASW, 2019, p. 6). Social work educators in Aotearoa have responded to the need for this development by incorporating relevant pedagogy and content (for example, Tsuruda & Shepherd, 2016).

Technology is not "values-free" (Csiernik et al., 2006), and it is suggested social work students be supported to critically reflect on how their cultural selves and bicultural principles are showcased in their behaviour in social media environments, how *tikanga* is demonstrated. For example, there are studies about how *whakawhanaungatanga* (making connections) is enacted in social media interactions (O'Carroll, 2013b). This is a customary practice used by Māori in Aotearoa through which relational ties are formally acknowledged, and relationships forged, and it is necessary for social work students in Aotearoa to develop cultural knowledge and develop the skill of applying this respectfully across all aspects of professional communication, including how identities and relationships are formed on social media.

It widely accepted that a specific focus on the ethical use of social media must be included in social work education (Chan, 2016). The professional organisation and registration bodies for social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand have produced social media guidelines and amended ethics to respond to the social media reality; however, these are currently inadequate, and it is still necessary to look to other jurisdictions (for example the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) in America) (ASWB International Technology Task Force, 2015) for examples of more robust guidelines to inform the content of social work education programmes (McAuliffe & Nipperess, 2017).

There is some agreement in the literature that ethical issues are manageable with close attention to existing social work ethics and codes of conduct (Beaumont, Chester, & Rideout, 2017; Kimball & Kim, 2013; Reamer, 2017; Sage & Sage, 2015), and these can be taught as content and applied in the social work classroom. However, it is argued that the increased complexity of ethical decision-making as applied to social media use calls for a more sophisticated, creative interpretation of current professional ethics than has historically been the case. "Social workers have core values and principles related to human rights, social justice, integrity, competence, and respect to deploy in online space, but this alone is insufficient" (Boddy & Dominelli, 2017, p. 181).

This sentiment is extended by the participants in this study who highlight the culturally diverse nature of professional relationships, and the need to attend ethically to the many enactments of these on social media. It is also reflected in the new ANZASW *Code of Ethics* (2019), which is based on seven core cultural values and their corresponding ethical principles and therefore firmly located in the cultural context of Aotearoa New Zealand. It is an expectation for example, that the value of *manaakitanga* (translated directly to mean respect, generosity and care for others) be applied intentionally and creatively to all professional relationships, including those on social media.

In summary, given the complexity of professional boundaries introduced by the presence of social media, and the reality of culturally difference, it is suggested that the teaching of social work ethics goes beyond the learning of text book ethics, and into the realm of everyday ethics which "encourages greater reflexivity and a move beyond simple models of ethics as individual decision-making or external regulation" (Banks, 2016, p. 46). This approach to ethical practice aligns with the findings of this study, where focus group participants exercised their ethical thinking in a way that considers "a broader social, political and cultural context and sees responsibility in a wider, more relational sense, beyond the isolated individual decision-maker" (Banks, 2016, p. 36).

Social work principles

The second proposed curriculum area considers the place of social work principles in social media use, further promoting the development of social work identity and ethical behaviour, and the role of social media in the pursuit of social justice, human rights, collectivity and democracy (IFSW, 2014). Although strongly linked to the previous discussion about professional ethics and cultural identity, it is further argued here that a distinct focus on the relationship between professional principles and social media further challenges the profession to align its mandate and obligations with the realities of a networked society.

For example, social media provides a new platform for the pursuit of social justice via social action and other collective activities that challenge structural inequalities. The study reported in this article found that less than half of social workers surveyed used social media for professional reasons, and of those who did, the activity they were least likely to use it for was to advocate for clients or for the profession (Stanfield, 2019, p. 70). Both focus groups were critical of their profession for not embracing social media to promote social change, however, they also discussed the challenges faced in doing so, including the management of online safety and lack of knowledge about social media as a political space. It is also possible

that the dissatisfaction felt by participants was linked to a more general need for renewed knowledge about macro social work practice (Mattocks, 2018), and further promotion of the critical or radical approach to social work necessary for effective collective social action (Morley, 2016). Social media holds promise as an accessible, democratic space for social change activities; however, its application is deceivingly complex, and relies explicitly on knowledge both about effective collective action, and social media as a political space.

It is also necessary for social workers to be critically aware of the multiple ways in which social justice is impacted by social media. For example, the global "digital divide" describes not only unequal access to the internet, but also unequal opportunity to become culturally and socially competent in its use (Jenkins, Clinton, Purushotma, Robison, & Weigel, 2009). It is imperative that students are supported to analyse social media according to social justice, human rights, and *Te Tiriti* ō *Waitangi* principles, and be guided in the formation of relevant practice responses (Edwards & Hoefer, 2010; Perron et al., 2010: Schembri, 2008; Steyaert & Gould, 2009; Voshel & Wesala, 2015).

Social work skills

The third curriculum area proposed in this framework addresses social work practice skills, including the skills related to the use and management of technology (digital literacy), and the use of social media in assessment and intervention (e-social work). The following participant summarises the challenges faced in this regard, and queries the extent to which social work graduates are prepared for practice in a digital world:

> … they know how to work with families, engage and use these particular skills but I don't get a sense that they come out thinking, "right, I know all about the risks of social media and how to ensure that the families that I work with are kept safe." (key informant)

There is argument that the emergence of social media has created a new field of online specialisation for social work, or e-social work which requires the technical skills to design new programs specific to the needs of social work (López Peláez, Pérez García, & Aguilar-Tablada Massó, 2017). Whether the future sees social workers gaining additional skills to contribute in this way, it is clear all social workers require at least a baseline of expertise as is highlighted again in the following participant comment and the need to be "technologically fluid":

> I think that's the ongoing challenge, understanding how to use the media to start with, the social media, and what it actually does and being aware of the various settings and the changes of settings and how things can change overnight. I think that's probably the biggest challenge, the awareness of the implications of the digital age and also your digital device in your hand. (key informant)

The use of social media skills in practice as described above can be further understood by the concept of *digital literacy*, which refers to how internet communication technology is used both confidently and critically (Hall, Nix, & Baker, 2013). This includes the technical skills of creating content using various types of media for professional purposes, in addition to being reflective and analytical about how these promote professional goals (Robbins et

al., 2016). *Media literacy* similarly refers to cultural competencies and social skills, including the understanding of the participatory culture of social media (Jenkins et al., 2009). Social media and its platforms change quickly, therefore social workers are urged to develop an enduring and conceptual, rather than a prescriptive, understanding of it (Chan & Holosko, 2016). An example of digital or media literacy in social work practice is illustrated in the following comment, in which the participant was discussing the types of clinical discussions that took place in their agency related to social media:

> All of the difficulties were blamed on social media, rather than understanding what the social interactions were, how social media facilitated those, what other things might have been going on that may actually have mitigated the problems that are also an aspect of social media. (key informant)

Repeated throughout the data in this study was a recognition of the clear relevance of social media to social work. One participant described it succinctly as "being about people and their lives, understanding the person and their environment, a new social setting, a new social environment." Related to developing digital literacy as described earlier, it is argued social work students are supported to understand this relationship. The inclusion of online worlds as a legitimate aspect of the "person in environment" assessment for example, is widely recognised as essential for social work practice (Baker, Warburton, Hodgkin, & Pascal, 2014; Belluomini, 2013; Simpson, 2017). There is an agreed educative role for social workers in helping clients to be *internet savvy*; to educate about the dangers of the internet (for example, cyber bullying and mis-use of technology), to provide education and lead development of well-informed social media safety plans (Giffords, 2009; Taylor, 2017).

It has been evident for some time that use of technology to engage younger generations is increasingly necessary (Schembri, 2008), and this trend continues as cyber-communication or ICT is recognised as an essential tool for "administrative and therapeutic exchanges" with this group of citizens (Mishna, Bogo, Root, & Fantus, 2014, p. 179). Further examples include challenges in understanding the role of social media in violent extremism (Alava, Frau-Meigs, & Hassan, 2017), the recruitment of young people to gangs (Owen, 2019), and children's rights regarding gathering and storage of their digital data on social media (Lupton & Williamson, 2017).

The use of mobile technology has been studied to explore how it can foster effective professional relationships across all age groups (Simpson, 2017), and there are examples of how social media can augment and enhance traditional, face-to-face engagement (Turner, 2016). Research is emerging about social media use in diverse fields of practice, from client-centred child protection social work (Dodsworth, Bailey, Schofield, Cooper, Fleming & Young, 2013; Ryan & Garrett, 2017; Sage & Sage, 2015; Tregeagle, 2016), to community-based and macro social work (Gelman & Tosone, 2010; Hill & Ferguson, 2014; LaMendola, 2019; Shevellar, 2017), health social work (Dombo et al., 2014), adoption social work (Howard, 2012) and advocacy practice (Edwards & Hoefer, 2010; Sitter & Curnew, 2016). The relationship between social media and social work practice is rapidly developing and open to a plethora of possibilities as comprehensively cited here:

> … to communicate with clients, track progress, help families stay connected across distance, create psychoeducational resources, empower clients, engage agency stakeholders, develop virtual communities, support neighborhoods, enhance team collab-oration, create new programs with crowd funding, organize social action, advocate for policy change, or engage in ongoing professional development. (Robbins et al., 2016, p. 391)

Theory and knowledge

This last curriculum area advocates a critical eye on social media and the application of theory and indigenous knowledge to deepen social work analysis of the place of social media in society. The following comment summarises the key relationship between social work knowledge and social media, wherein the focus group participant refers to the *kete,* a traditional Māori symbol of "important stories, principles and practices that can guide us in our mahi and in our lives" (Eruera, 2012, p. 12):

> I think we can rely on our social work knowledge, the methods that we use, the philosophy and the practice, so we can go back to our social work theories and think about working with person-centred approach or think about strengths-based social work and apply that to our social media. … We have those tools there in our *kete* already, it's how we apply them, I guess, into a new way of working, to social media. (focus group)

There is a growing collection of Aotearoa New Zealand writing about social media from an indigenous perspective. There is exploration, for example, into how the identity of New Zealand Māori is affected by use of social networking sites, the role social media plays in the development of cultural identity (Muhamad-Brandner, 2010) and research about how *rangatahi Māori* (adolescent Māori) use social media (O'Carroll, 2013a). A further study by the same author examines the effectiveness of using social media to facilitate *whānau* (family) connections and communication. This study found that using social media for this purpose contributes to overall *whānau* well-being and simultaneously highlighted the complexity of online relationships and the skill needed to safely negotiate social networking sites. It also found that Māori use social media for a variety of different reasons, including to connect with other indigenous people around the world, to engage in *kaupapa whanaungatanga* (translated directly to mean connectedness around a common purpose) (O'Carroll, 2013b). Given social work's reliance on indigenous knowledge to inform practice in Aotearoa New Zealand, this is a limited but important contribution to social work education, and signals a fundamental responsibility for educators to promote learning about the unique approaches to social media by local and global indigenous populations (Toth, Smith, & Giroux, 2018).

Social media as a concept is a complex term with many layers of meaning. It is the subject of academic analysis, debate and scrutiny across disciplines, the outcomes of which are at times contested, depending on how both the terms *social* and *media* are defined and understood (Fuchs, 2017). There are many ways to be social, or to define sociality, and there are many forms of media. "Understanding social media critically means, among other things, to engage with the different forms of sociality on the Internet in the context of society" (Fuchs, 2017, p. 7). This has resulted in the development of various interpretive frameworks (boyd, 2011; Papacharissi, 2011), and a varied analysis of social media; for example,

that which promotes its democratic and collaborative features (Jenkins et al., 2009; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) and that which critiques the exploitive impact of major social media platforms, encompassing the concept of "digital capitalism" (Fuchs, 2017), and "communicative capitalism" (Dean, 2010).

The use of Castell's theory of the network society, for example, and related understandings of the power inherent in communication networks has been put forward as a way of guiding social workers in their critique of social media and technology, and in their relationship with it across all aspects of practice (Baker et al., 2014). Latour's Actor Network Theory has been applied to analyse the complex experience of engaging in online social networking (Ballantyne, 2015; McKendrick, 2014). Psychoanalytic theory has also been used to theorise the binary aspects of social media, using the concept of "splitting" to explain how social workers become vilified for their use of social media (Turner, 2016).

In addition, the concept of community of learning has been combined with that of *social presence*, a concept used to describe how genuine and immediate we are in our relationship with others when using mediated communication like online technology. It is suggested that the extent to which people achieve social presence influences the quality of human relationships (LaMendola, 2010; La Mendola et al., 2009). Bourdieu's field theory and its concepts of social capital and habitus have been applied to social media (Willig, Waltorp, & Hartley, 2015). The brief scholarship listed here is an example of how social work educators can encourage students to join their profession in analysing practice and applying cultural knowledge relevant to the ever-changing digital age, thus contributing to a much-needed social work perspective on the phenomenon.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Social media has imposed a significant task on the profession of social work; that is to "launch a conceptual re-evaluation of how the essential values of social work operate in a world where individuals and their environments have been reshaped by the live presence of technology" (Wolf & Goldkind, 2016, p. 3). The four intersecting curriculum areas in the earlier described framework, which largely represents the existing social work education curriculum in Aotearoa New Zealand, (SWRB, 2016), appear to provide reasonable scope for this re-evaluation; that is, learning about social media can be incorporated into already existing social work practice values, principles and theoretical frameworks.

The framework proposed in this article is very much limited by the unknown and is yet to be tested. Research which analyses the reality of introducing or reinforcing the curriculum content suggested earlier would offer insight into the benefits and challenges of doing so, as would further research about the impact this learning has on future practice. It is argued that, in a world infused with the transformative, turbulent effects of internet technology and social media, and characterised by "the rapidity of innovation, adoption, adaptation, and obsolescence" (Dean, 2010, p. 1), a much stronger social work *kete* (toolkit) is required, one which is woven by social workers with a keen critical eye, a strong sense of professional identity, and equipped with a full set of technical, interpersonal and ethical skills related to social media use.

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