

Quitting smoking easier for social media users

September 26 2013

Smoking is a major public health problem, killing approximately 443,000 people every year in the United States. Quitting smoking can have a profound effect on a person's health, but it is also one of the hardest addictions to kick. A recent paper published in the *Journal of Communication* found that people who engage in health specific social networking sites found it easier to quit smoking.

Joe Phua, University of Georgia, examined health-based [social networking sites](#) that focus on helping members to quit smoking. He found that as participation on these sites increased, members began to build a sense of community on the sites. Specifically, they started to identify more strongly with other members, receive and give more social support, found common ground from smoking behaviors and built a sense of trust.

As a result of the increased [social connectedness](#) associated with participating on the sites, these members ultimately become more likely, and found it easier, to quit smoking. They also maintain abstinence for a longer period of time, because of their increased sense of self-efficacy to abstain from smoking during tempting situations (e.g. when out drinking, when stressed, when sad, etc.).

Past research has examined the use of social media for [quitting smoking](#). However, these are mainly intervention studies that focused on the various features on the sites to increase engagement. There have been no studies that specifically looked at how various forms of social

interconnectedness on these sites can help people to quit smoking. These findings show that on health-based social networking sites, members can build strong social [interconnectedness](#) with other people who have the same health issue.

This can help users to achieve their [health goals](#) in a shorter amount of time, without having to go through more traditional, offline support groups and services. These offline groups are often much more expensive and require a lot more effort to use, especially for people who live in rural areas and have to travel long distances to attend offline smoking cessation programs.

"This study helps further the notion that social networking sites and other forms of social media can help people to improve their health conditions," said Phua. "These can be used as a standalone way to improve chronic health conditions, or as part of a holistic treatment plan that includes both professional offline help and online social media sites."

More information: "Participating in Health Issue-Specific Social Networking Sites to Quit Smoking: How Does Online Social Interconnectedness Influence Smoking Cessation Self-Efficacy," by Joe Phua. *Journal of Communication*.

Provided by International Communication Association

Citation: Quitting smoking easier for social media users (2013, September 26) retrieved 4 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2013-09-easier-social-media-users.html>

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