

Study shows health policy researchers lack confidence in social media for communication

June 6 2014

Though Twitter boasts 645 million users across the world, only 14 percent of health policy researchers reported using Twitter – and approximately 20 percent used blogs and Facebook – to communicate their research findings over the past year, according to a new study from the Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania. In contrast, sixty-five percent used traditional media channels, such as press releases or media interviews. While participants believed that social media can be an effective way to communicate research findings, many lacked the confidence to use it and felt their academic peers and institutions did not value it or respect it as much as traditional media and direct contact with policy makers. However, the authors note that when used effectively, social media channels could present a major opportunity for connecting with both policy makers and the general public. Full results of the study, one of the first of its kind, are published online today in the journal *Health Affairs*, and will be presented as a plenary session during this weekend's annual AcademyHealth conference in San Diego, CA.

The study, a survey of 215 health and health-policy researchers (primarily MDs and PhDs), comes as academic journals, public health agencies, and [health care](#) organizations increasingly use [social media](#) to communicate health-related information. It also comes at a time when the nation is embarking on major changes to the health care system – a time when [health policy research](#) evidence is increasingly important.

"Our study uncovered four central findings," explained lead author, David Grande, MD, MPA, assistant professor of Medicine at Penn Medicine. "First, most health policy researchers are not using social media to communicate their research results, which could be a significant missed opportunity to expose a larger audience to important health news and findings."

Results of the study also reveal that researchers worry about how their peers and home institutions perceive social media, and that many describe it as replete with opinion and 'junk' and are concerned about presenting their scientific results in such settings. However, Grande notes that participants became more confident about social media when given examples of how the channels could be used effectively. For example, many thought that they could not communicate anything beyond the 140-character limit on Twitter, despite the common practice of including links to more substantive content. Understanding how to use these tools, the authors say, could alleviate concerns about the information being superficially presented.

Finally, the study shows that junior faculty members are more positively predisposed than their senior colleagues about social media. This, Grande says, could be a result of greater familiarity with it from other aspects of their lives, or it might be because senior faculty members have greater access to policy makers owing to their stature and reputation. Regardless, the authors suggest there are considerable benefits to using the tools for research dissemination.

"Historically, there has been a significant communication gap between researchers, on the one hand, and [policy makers](#) and the public at large, on the other," said senior author Zachary Meisel, MD, assistant professor of Emergency Medicine at Penn. "Social media channels are promising tools for closing this gap, provided they are used appropriately and effectively. As a first step, medical schools and health care institutions

should help to educate researchers on how to properly use these channels to circulate their [research findings](#) and discuss implications."

Provided by University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine

Citation: Study shows health policy researchers lack confidence in social media for communication (2014, June 6) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-06-health-policy-lack-confidence-social.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.