

Women have substantially less influence on Twitter than men in academic medicine: study

October 14 2019



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Women who are health policy or health services researchers face a significant disparity in social media influence compared to their male

peers, according to a new study from researchers in the Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania. Although the average number of tweets among all researchers tend to be consistent, women trail behind men in follower counts, regardless of how active they are on Twitter. The findings, which hold implications for larger questions around gender disparities in academic medicine, are published today in *JAMA Internal Medicine*.

"By giving women an accessible and seemingly equitable platform on which to present themselves, some hoped that [social media](#) would help level the playing field in [academic medicine](#)," said senior author, Rachel M. Werner, MD, Ph.D., a professor of General Internal Medicine at Penn Medicine, and the executive director of Penn's Leonard Davis Institute of Health Economics. "However, our study clearly shows that unfortunately women's voices are less influential, even on Twitter, which suggests social media may in fact have the opposite effect."

Social media platforms like Twitter are commonly used in academic [medicine](#) to promote research and gain visibility among peer networks. Twitter specifically is used frequently among [health policy](#) and health services researchers to connect with healthcare decision-makers and increase academic influence, recognition, and promotion.

In the new study, researchers identified [twitter users](#) from a sample pool of more than 3,148 speakers and coauthors of research presented at AcademyHealth's 2018 Annual Research Meeting, the largest academic meeting for health services research. Nearly one-third of the pool—which included individuals with an MD, Ph.D., or equivalent and who worked as an independent non-trainee-level researcher in the United States—were found to be active on Twitter. Using Twitter's Application Program Interface, the team extracted metrics on [twitter](#) use for each individual.

Results showed that while the women followed a similar number of people and posted a similar number of tweets per year as their male colleagues, tweets posted by women generated 45 percent fewer average likes and 48 percent fewer retweets per year compared to men, and their accounts also accumulated half as many followers. Disparities were most pronounced among those with full professorships.

Despite what the authors say are "disappointing" findings, one promising aspect of the results was the difference between the varying generations of researchers. The study found that "...differences in influence on Twitter were less pronounced among junior researchers, suggesting greater gender parity among younger cohorts." The result could be a sign of an upcoming shift in gender differences and disparities in academic medicine as baby boomers are replaced by millennials. Although this may inspire hope, the results of the study still call into question the value of these platforms and whether or not they reinforce [gender disparities](#) or serve as a tool to help end them.

Provided by Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania

Citation: Women have substantially less influence on Twitter than men in academic medicine: study (2019, October 14) retrieved 20 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2019-10-women-substantially-twitter-men-academic.html>

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