Reviewer’s report

Title: A qualitative study of the coverage of influenza vaccination on Dutch news sites and social media websites

Version: 1 Date: 1 February 2013

Reviewer: Tanya Berry

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Major Compulsory Revisions

1. The idea to examine media for the months before, during, and after a flu epidemic is a very good idea. However, in the “data collection” section the authors need to specify what prompted the time parameters in the first place. What was the original purpose – did they hope there would be an epidemic or were they “lucky” one occurred. It also seems possible that this is a secondary data analysis or that they continually collect these data. More information is needed, regardless.

2. How many sites were examined in total? How many were classified as “news” and how many as “social media”? Was each site read in its entirety?

3. More detail on how the coding occurred is needed – what were the qualifications of the person who did the primary coding? Was there a secondary coder? Any test of inter-rater reliability?

4. The results could be streamlined and reorganized. One suggestion is to put the quotes in a table and the results could be reorganized under different headings. Much of it is very interesting, but after a few pages, it gets confusing. More information about how many articles, blogs, tweets, etc… under each theme would be helpful and help the reader understand the relevance of the themes.

5. Perhaps the biggest problem I had with the paper was with the definition of news sites and organizing the results by news sites compared to social media. The definition given on p. 7 is too general. I think the results are more nuanced than as presented. For example in reading through the results it seemed that the majority of the “uncertainty and mistrust” quotes came from the “fringe” sites rather than mainstream media (I don’t read Dutch so was unable to go to many of the sites and see for myself their nature). It seems that many of the tweets were from the mainstream media. Therefore, the overarching “news” and “social media” categories seem too broad. Major news media have twitter feeds and so many of the tweets analysed would not be different than the news media sites. On the other hand, the special groups “news sites” are very different than a major news outlet. Similarly, tweets from members of the general public are no different than casual comments. Finally, how were facebook posts selected – does clipit only capture facebook profiles that are open to the general public, so really it
depends on which privacy settings were used? In the face of these questions, I suggest the results be organized (this goes with comment 4) at a deeper level than that presented. Also, is readership on the sites available? For example if a major Dutch newspaper has thousands of hits on its articles, compared to a special group’s site, or a twitter user with only a few followers, the implications are very different. Also, is there information on the demographics of the followers of the sites? Of course, this is not possible for all of them, but perhaps for some of the major newspaper sites. The reorganization of the results should be reflected in the discussion

6. Limitations of this work are not mentioned.

7. In the discussion, it is stated that “anti-vaccination messages were put online twice as much as pro-vaccination message” but that is not stated in the results. This relates to the point 5 made above. Such information is valuable and could provide a richer platform for discussion.

Minor Essential Revisions
- define e-health websites (p. 3)
- top of p. 5 – I think the authors mean “investigating”, not “investing”
- p. 8 – please give an example of what is meant by content or posts that “only occurred once” do they mean the theme? The way it reads it sounds like posts on the same topic that were duplicates (e.g., through a retweet) were not used at all).
- were just the quotes translated for this manuscript? I assume the articles were all in Dutch.
- the relevance of the story about the MD who was in court was lost to me. The results could be written a little differently so that the story could be made clearer, and thus the implications of this story to Dutch society (relative to getting a flu vaccine) could be discussed.

Discretionary Revisions
- the research at the bottom of p. 5, by Betsch & Wicker outlines about 50% of the places where medical students access health information. It would be interesting to know what the other 50% are.
- how do they know a flu epidemic occurred in March 2012 – is this information based just on their own analysis or through the report of a Dutch health agency?

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a
statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interest.