Reviewer's report

Title: Dissemination: researchers should do what? A systematic review of conceptual planning frameworks.

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Reviewer: Neale Smith

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Generally, the manuscript is well- and clearly-written. The findings certainly appear to have face validity.

It would seem to me that the strength of the arguments here depends upon readers' acceptance of the authors' attribution when a dissemination framework is "implicit". It is considered to be so in about half of the identified cases. Perhaps there could be more detail provided as to how the authors came to their conclusion. This is particularly important since, as the authors note, the frameworks which they did identify – persuasive communication, diffusion of innovation, social marketing – are all “inter-linked” and have many commonalities. I would imagine, for instance, that the authors might have looked at the references used in an article to help place the dissemination theory it might draw upon. Again, for the article to work, readers really need to be convinced that the attribution of “implicit frameworks” is solid and will hold up to scrutiny.

For instance, looking at Table 2, I note in row 1 (Winkler) and row 3 (Lomas) in the comments column the authors note how the first draws upon Rogers’, and the latter refers to DOI and social marketing. This suggests that the authors don’t find these mentions weighty enough to say that these frameworks are based upon a combination of sources, which is a claim they make for others (see e.g., column 3 in the rows related to Herie, or Greenhalgh). So how did the authors draw the line that puts Winkler and Lomas on one side (single dominant theoretical influence) and Herie and Greenhalgh on the other (multiple frameworks combined)?

Similarly in Table 2 (on page 18), the row on Carpenter puts mention of Lavis' approach in column 3; the row on Zarinpoush also refers to Lavis' work, but in the comments column (column 4). That suggests in some way that the Lavis’ contribution is a more explicit or more substantive source for Carpenter than it is for Zarinpoush. If that is how the authors intend the table to be understood they should make this more explicit; if not, then they should standardize the sorts of material which is included in column 3 versus column 4.

In addition, I would make the following – relatively minor – points:

• I would like to see a definition or bit of description, possibly a reference, for what the authors mean by “narrative review” (p. 3) and “narrative synthesis” (abstract and page 5)
• In Results (first paragraph) the authors note that they found 22 frameworks, reported in 32 articles. Clearly they have only reviewed 22 articles. I’d like to see that choice explained more clearly. Did they choose only the first appearance? Only the most recent? Is it certain that the publications not reviewed do not add any additional information useful for determining the underlying dissemination framework?

• Diffusion of Innovation paragraph (page 6): I believe the last of the eight references should be #31 rather than #37?

• Discussion: This could be developed a bit further. In particular, I’d like to see the authors reflect upon what it might mean that these three dissemination frameworks (PCM, DOI, social marketing) are the main ones being reported. They correctly note the criticisms which have been raised about the linear nature of much communications theory. Would there be valuable insights to be gained from frameworks that drew upon other literatures (for instance based upon economic and political sciences)?

• Might it not be the case that the problem is in reporting of frameworks, rather than lack of use by researchers of an underlying framework for their dissemination efforts?

• On page 9 the authors note “What impact the application of any of these frameworks has on the dissemination … of research is currently lacking.” Were any of the studies they included an evaluation of dissemination?

• Figure 1: I am not sure is “study” is the right word to use here?

• There are a small number of typos (e.g, missing words) that should be corrected

**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 interests.