Reviewer's report

Title: The use of social networking sites for sexual health promotion: identifying key strategies for successful user engagement

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Reviewer: Joseph Tucker

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BMC Public Health

This paper undertakes an analysis of social media platforms that are focused on sexual health. The general area is of great interest, but many technical parts of the paper are not clearly articulated. Major problems with terminology, outcomes, evaluation framework, introduction, and survey data are outlined below.

MAJOR COMMENTS

1) SNS term. The authors use the term “social networking sites” to describe Facebook and Twitter, but both of these are seeing their business move away from simple website use and towards mobile apps. Consider using the term “platform” or another term that is more accurate.

2) Outcomes unclear. The authors use many different terms (engagement, reach, success), but the metrics used are very simple ones. There are many ways to measure twitter influence using computer science tools. Suggest looking at the recent literature on this topic (PMID 24395983 and the co-edited volume called “Social Media Mining” from CUP) and making a note in the limitations section, possibly introducing more rigorous twitter metrics. In addition, suggest not using the general term “success” and instead using a term like online engagement.

3) Evaluation framework unclear. Why were the top ten profiles compared to the bottom two?

4) Introduction weak. The introduction is too long and could be more concise. The social marketing sentences are not clearly related to the overall aim.

5) Survey data weak. The authors report sending out a survey to 12 organizations and receiving data on only three Twitter accounts and two Facebook profiles. There would be the potential for substantial selection bias, making it difficult to interpret this data. Suggest removing all survey data.

6) Sexual health specificity unclear. It would seem that all of the metrics proposed are social media general and not specific to sexual health. This should be clarified in the methods.

MINOR COMMENTS

1) Figure 1 not needed. This could be supplementary material, but is not essential and is described in the text.

2) Pg 10, line lines 245 and 251 and elsewhere. This is an interpretation of
results and should properly be in the conclusion section, not the results. Suggest removing discussion parts from the results.

3) Pg 11, line 272. Definitions of short and long term?

4) Conclusion weak. Section 6 (lines 467-479) should relate more directly to the data presented in the paper.

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**Statistical review:** Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests’ below. If your reply is yes to any, please give details below.