Author’s response to reviews

Title: Acceptability and potential impact of delivering sexual health promotion information through social media and dating apps to MSM in England: A qualitative study

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Author’s response to reviews:

Dear Marie-Victoire Cosson, Lloyd A. Goldsamt and Reviewer 2,

Thank you for your constructive feedback and the opportunity to revise this manuscript titled “Acceptability and potential impact of delivering sexual health promotion information through social media and dating apps to MSM in England: A qualitative study”, ID: PUBH-D-19-00793, for publication as an original article in BMC Public Health.

We have provided a point-by-point description of the revisions made alongside each comment below. All changes are highlighted in yellow in the main text. The comments from the reviewers
have helped us to improve our manuscript and we hope the responses and revisions are sufficient to make our manuscript suitable for publication in your journal.

We look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

Kind regards,

Joanna Kesten, On behalf of all the study authors

REVIEWER 1

Lloyd A. Goldsamt (Reviewer 1): This paper presents data from a qualitative study of the provision of sexual health information to MSM via social media and dating apps. The qualitative sampling and analytic methods are acceptable, and the findings presented are interesting and relevant to the research question. The paper does, however, require some additional methodological details in order to fully understand the methods and results of the study.

REVIEWER 1.1. Most importantly, there is insufficient information provided regarding the coding and analysis of data. As written, it appears that a single author (JK) did all of the coding, and that the study team discussed the codes and coding, although it is also stated that two coders (PW and JK) discussed the coding independently of the study team. This does not appear to be a valid method of coding qualitative data. The authors should describe who coded the transcripts (after the primary codes were developed), how many people coded each transcript, the reliability of the coding, and how disagreements were resolved.

AUTHOR’S RESPONSE 1.1. Thank you for your comment. We have clarified in the manuscript (lines 157-163, page 7) that JK coded the transcripts, the wider study team reviewed the initial codes after 6 interviews, PW reviewed and helped refine the coding framework after 15 interviews had been coded and reviewed a sample of transcripts in detail. PW and JK discussed JK’s coding and interpretation of the data and resolved discrepancies through discussion. The latter enhanced the credibility of the analysis by helping to widen the perspective of the main researcher (JK). Although we agree that double coding can help enhance the confirmability of qualitative findings - it is not essential. RATS guidance refers to an independent analyst
‘reviewing the data and contesting the themes’ which is in line with our approach. In addition, double coding is not described by the Braun and Clarke thematic analysis method we adopted.

REVIEWER 1.2. There is also some confusion about the sampling. The authors describe the recruitment sources for 40 respondents, and the reason that interviews were not conducted with 15 of these respondents. However, it is also important to know which sources the actual data came from, especially since there are both social media (Facebook) and dating app (Scruff, Grindr) sources of recruitment. The issue of the different types of recruitment sources may also merit some discussion, as it seems likely that the two types of sources may differ in the types of respondents they provide. If the findings were not source-dependent, the authors should state this.

AUTHOR’S RESPONSE 1.2. Thank you for this comment. We agree that it is useful context to provide the recruitment source for the interview participants. This information has been added to the Results section (lines 176-178, page 8) and Table 1. We have also confirmed that the findings were not source dependent (lines 179-180, page 8).

REVIEWER 1.3. Finally, there are several instances in the paper where the authors present additional interpretations of data without examples of the actual narrative data. This occurs at the end of section 1 (Uses and impacts of sexual health information) and the end of section 3 (Attitudes toward sexual health information provision via dating apps). The paper would be stronger if data supporting these conclusions is included.

AUTHOR’S RESPONSE 1.3. Thank you for highlighting this. We have added quotes to support and illustrate our interpretation at the end of both these sections (lines 221-235, pages 10-11 and lines 333-344, page 15-16).

REVIEWER 2

PEER REVIEWER ASSESSMENTS:

OBJECTIVE - Full research articles: is there a clear objective that addresses a testable research question(s) (brief or other article types: is there a clear objective)?

Yes - there is a clear objective
DESIGN - Is the current approach (including controls and analysis protocols) appropriate for the objective?

No - there are minor issues

EXECUTION - Are the experiments and analyses performed with technical rigor to allow confidence in the results?

No - there are minor issues

STATISTICS - Is the use of statistics in the manuscript appropriate?

N/A - there are no statistics in this study

INTERPRETATION - Is the current interpretation/discussion of the results reasonable and not overstated?

No - there are minor issues

OVERALL MANUSCRIPT POTENTIAL - Is the current version of this work technically sound? If not, can revisions be made to make the work technically sound?

Probably - with minor revisions

PEER REVIEWER COMMENTS:

REVIEWER 2.1. I do not have any significant issue with this paper. That said, it appears to me that it may not provide any particularly major contribution to the store of knowledge in this area? Ie, it's not apparent how much of an addition it is truly making, at the end of day in terms of practical utility and so on, to the published studies cited (e.g., refs 14-18). In conclusion, I have no objection to the publishing of this paper, and leave it completely up to the journal editors whether or not it is worthy of publication, but in my view it would not be egregious to deny said publication.

AUTHOR’S RESPONSE 2.1. Thank you for your feedback. The major contribution of this paper is qualitative evidence from England supporting the use of dating apps and social media for sexual health promotion aimed at reducing STIs among MSM. There is a lack of qualitative
evidence exploring the acceptability and potential impact of sexual health information delivery through social media and dating apps. We describe in the Background section that this evidence is needed to inform and prioritise future interventions to reverse the trend in STIs in MSM (lines 109-113, pages 5-6). This work is important because acceptability is recognised as a requirement for intervention effectiveness and it is important not to waste resources on public health campaigns which are unacceptable. By using an in-depth qualitative approach, our research has also added new insights to the literature regarding the nuanced responses to sexual health information on dating apps and social media (e.g. potential negative effects such as anxiety from information sharing on social media and hindering the experience of using dating apps).

We now emphasise the contribution this work makes in the discussion (Please see ‘Summary of findings’ and ‘Strengths and limitations’) and reference Sekhon et al. in the introduction (lines 111-112, pages 5-6) to emphasise the importance of intervention acceptability in relation to effectiveness.

REQUESTED REVISIONS:

REVIEWER 2.2. My main concern has already been stated (re overall utility of publishing the paper); otherwise, re some much more minor issues: the number of subjects who had achieved a University degree is missing.

AUTHOR’S RESPONSE 2.2. Thank you for spotting this omission. We have inserted the number of participants with a first or higher level degree (lines 175-176, page 8).

REVIEWER 2.3. Also, this sentence is not entirely clear: "...information encouraging STI testing is unlikely to influence the behaviour of people who test regularly."

AUTHOR’S RESPONSE 2.3. We have reworded this sentence to improve its clarity on lines 217-218, page 10: “information encouraging STI testing is unlikely to result in more frequent testing among those who already test regularly.”

REVIEWER 2.4. Finally, is this statement supposed to be "sarcastic" (on behalf of the respondent)?: "Literally I need a pop up that comes up every five minutes just saying 'be safe'!!"

AUTHOR’S RESPONSE 2.4. No, we do not believe this comment was intended to be sarcastic although we accept that the participant was likely to be over-exaggerating the frequency of reminders about safe sexual practices that they would like.