



National Collaborating Centre
for Determinants of Health

Centre de collaboration nationale
des déterminants de la santé

**PUBLIC
HEALTH
SPEAKS**

WHAT IS SOCIAL MEDIA, AND HOW CAN IT SUPPORT KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE KNOWLEDGE ON THE SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH?

“Social media represents a simultaneous return to the roots of health promotion and a paradigm shift in health communications. Social media tools may enhance public health efforts to engage the public, collaborate across sectors, and exert influence.”

(<http://nccdh.ca/blog/entry/SDH-social-media-blog3>)

The National Collaborating Centre for Determinants of Health hosted an online conversation in Health Equity Clicks online community (www.nccdh.ca/community) to explore how organizations are using social media to exchange knowledge related to the social determinants of health (SDOH) and health equity.

The conversation took place in November 2013, and was moderated by Pemma Muzumdar, Knowledge Broker, and guest contributor Cameron Norman.



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Conversation highlights

Participants indicated that their organizations used social media to exchange knowledge related to the social determinants of health and health equity to:

- Raise the visibility, accessibility, and transparency of SDOH issues and practice
- Share information and links to online resources such as reports and articles
- Expand their reach from their local context to a global audience at minimal cost both within their formal public health networks and beyond the 'usual suspects'
- Crowdfund answers to public health questions
- Adopt a user-centred approach to gain input for planning processes, policies, and/or services
- Participate in conversations (e.g., via Twitter chats), gain credibility as subject matter experts, and build local relationships that are critical to public health work
 - Engage businesses and local decision makers/politicians who are also participating in social media discussions
 - Connect with journalists who often use social media as a source for story ideas and contacts
- Build a quality following and promote an increased level of engagement:
 - Stay on a particular message for an extended period
 - Track user activities and follow up with relevant information/calls to action
 - Identify and connect with individuals to meet in person or who might contribute to other activities

- Connect social media users to in depth analysis of issues and opportunities for them to be part of solutions
- Share observations from practice that challenge attitudinal barriers to SDOH-related public policy work
- Keep a pulse on SDOH action locally, provincially, nationally, and internationally (e.g., by monitoring the #SDOH hashtag, and other social justice organizations and anti-poverty groups/networks)

Participants noted the following challenges when using social media for knowledge exchange:

- Using social media as a forum for meaningful engagement, contemplation, and reflection, rather than simply dissemination
- Understanding the role of social media for social and political change, i.e., as the impetus for change vs. the capacity to contribute to a real time understanding of events within or outside a region or country from diverse citizen-led perspectives (www.newyorker.com/reporting/2010/10/04/101004fa_fact_gladwell)
- Figuring out how best to use different social media tools (e.g., Twitter for short-burst messages and conversations to the world in an open system)
- Developing organizational processes and strategies for social media use
 - Distinguishing organizational positions from personal views (e.g., "My Tweets Are My Own")
- Finding evidence for the effective use of social media given the fast-paced nature of social media communication and the rapid evolution of tools

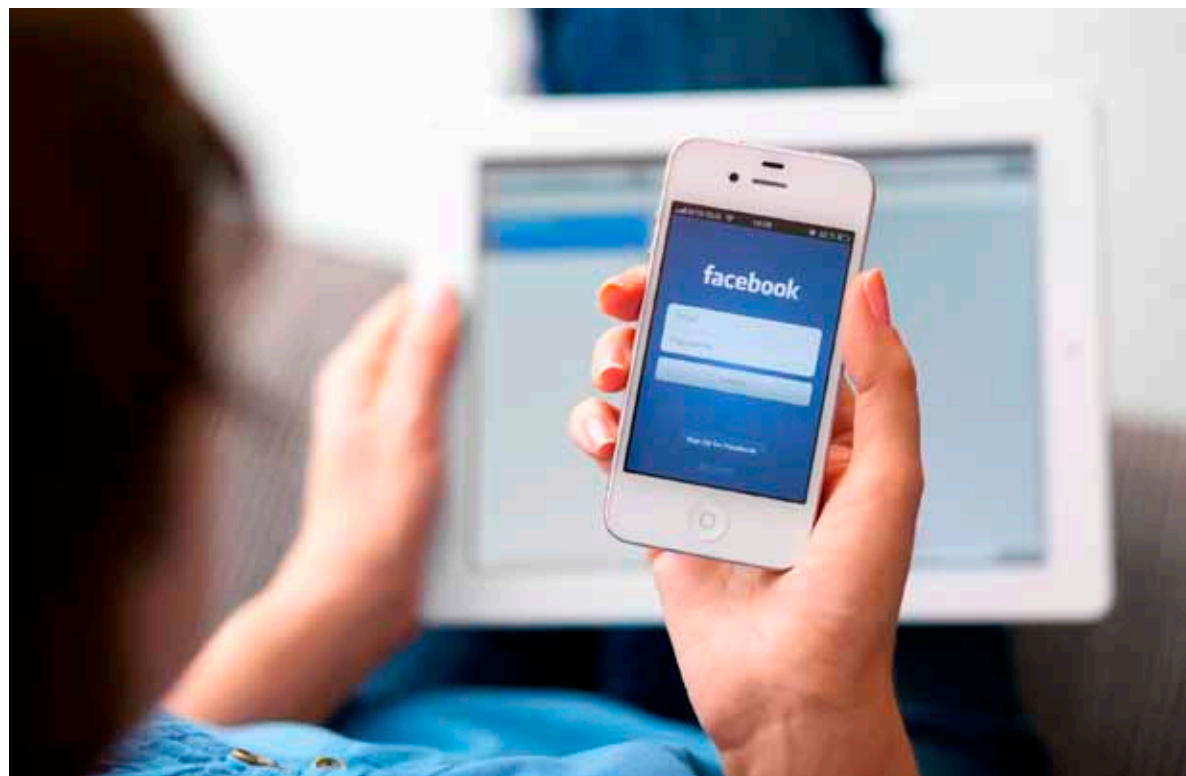
Practice examples

- During a presentation to municipal council about local health inequities, Sudbury and District Health Unit (@equitysdhu) joined the conversation with local journalists who were live-tweeting. The health unit directed people to related resources, and provided background information to the issues and possible solutions to the challenges being discussed.
- Upstream tracked the engagement of individual followers to see what information was meaningful to them and what issues compelled them to 'like' or 'share', so they could follow up with specific action items and campaigns, e.g., if someone shared posts about better cycling infrastructure, they invited them to help with an upcoming bike lanes campaign.
- Dr. Monica Dutt, Medical Officer of Health Cape Breton, used Twitter (@Monika_Dutt) to communicate on topics related to social justice and healthcare system policy. She has also found it useful to connect with and gain the credibility of local residents, obtain input from experts, and get messages out quickly during small emergencies.

- Avaaz was raised as an example of an organization that effectively uses mass social media and online petitions for advocacy. Keys to their success include: campaigns that are very specific to an issue; clear calls to action; reporting back on the outcome of activities which galvanized support for that campaign, and other work.

Questions to follow this conversation

- How can emergent social media approaches be used as a component of an evidence-informed practice to improve health equity?
- How can social media be used effectively to gain input during the planning process (in particular, from the people we aim to impact most directly)?
- How can social media be used to bring together diverse voices and forms of evidence (e.g., stories, art) to build a platform to co-create knowledge?



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Related Resources

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La version française est également disponible au : www.ccnds.ca sous le titre *La santé publique a la parole : les médias sociaux, qu'est-ce que c'est et comment peuvent-ils favoriser l'échange des connaissances sur les déterminants sociaux de la santé?*