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# USING SOCIAL MEDIA TO RECRUIT RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

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# PLAN

-  Define social media
-  Useful social media sites for recruiting research participants
-  Why use social media for recruitment into research?
-  Advantages and disadvantages of social media recruitment
-  Ethical considerations
-  Lessons from our studies

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# What is social media?

- Social media are internet-based applications that permit users to construct a public or semi-public profile and create and maintain a list of other users with whom they may share content and participate in social interactions and networking (Boyd & Ellison, 2008; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).



# Useful social media sites for recruiting research participants

- Facebook



- Instagram



- Twitter



- **LinkedIn** 

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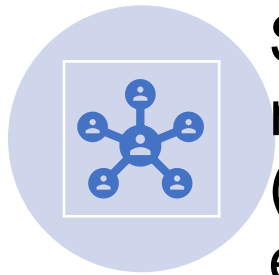
# Why use social media for recruitment into research



Recruiting sufficient number of participants remains a challenge.



Traditional methods can be costly and may not improve low participation rates (Fenner et al., 2012).



Studies show social media recruitment is effective (Frandsen et al., 2014; Akard et al., 2015; Goadsby, 2013).



Social media is emerging as a promising way to identify and recruit potential participants for human research (Gearhart, 2015).

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# Advantages and disadvantages of social media recruitment

## Advantages:

Helps to get message out there as far and wide as possible.

Social media (e.g Twitter, FB) is valuable in attracting participants - will reach more people than in email contacts or mailing lists.

Helps to recruit people that you don't have personal contact with (so they can have a choice).

Allows you to loosely target people in a particular area of interest.

Can see how many people have viewed or liked your post.

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## Disadvantages / biases:

Population on social media may not reflect the wider demographics of interest.

Some people don't usually engage with social media.

Some potential participants may not have a reliable internet access.

People outside the study region may respond.

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# Ethical considerations

Beneficence, respect for persons and justice:

- i) Respect for the privacy of social media users.
- ii) Investigator transparency is important.

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## Lessons from our recent studies

- Experiences of Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS) study – Akanuwe et al., 2020.
- Point of Care Ultrasound (POCUS) study – Akanuwe et al., 2022.

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# Experiences of Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS) study.

**Aim:** To explore the experiences of people with GBS, its care and achieving function or recovery.

**Design:** An interview study.

**Sampling:** Purposive sample.

**Recruitment:** via GAIN charity social media (Facebook) & website.

**Participants:** 16 GBS patients – data saturation reached.

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# Point of Care Ultrasound (POCUS) study



**Aim:** Explore views of POCUS practitioners for barriers and facilitators to a wider implementation POCUS in community settings in the UK.

**Design:** An interview study.

**Sampling:** Purposive sample.

**Recruitment:** Via social media (Twitter) and snowballing technique.

**Participants:** 16 practitioners (Paramedics, GPs, hospital emergency physicians/consultants) – data saturation reached.

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# Our positives and negative experiences

## Positives:

- Recruitment via Facebook & GAIN website for the GBS study helped to reach a rare study group/population of interest.
- Recruitment via Twitter & snowballing for POCUS study helped to reach potential participants during the pandemic.

## Negatives/challenges:

- Initial problems with University ethics, participants being NHS staff.
- People outside the study area also responded.
- Inclusion/diversity issues – couldn't reach some potential participants via social media e.g district nurses.

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## Negatives/challenges:

- Initial problems with University ethics - had discussion with ethics team and explained that participants NHS staff were not being recruited through NHS premises or facilities.
- People outside the study area also responded – meetings were arranged via Teams, and it was explained to their understanding.
- Problems of inclusion/diversity – snowballing as a backup helped.

## Conclusion

- Recruiting enough participants for research remains a challenge. Social media can help especially during pandemics.
- With a tight project time, can save time and other resources.
- But need to be ware of issues relating to:
  - ethics form
  - inclusion and diversity
  - snowball effect
  - Some people or groups don't usually engage with social media.
  - May recruit people who don't speak your language.
  - Some potential participants may not have reliable internet access.

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