

USING SOCIAL NETWORKING TECHNOLOGIES FOR MIXED METHODS HIV PREVENTION RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

BACKGROUND Rapid growth in social networking usage, especially among at-risk populations, enables these technologies to be used as tools for mixed (qualitative and quantitative) methods HIV prevention research. We seek to analyze quantitative and qualitative data from a study-recruited social networking group to determine 1) participants willingness to use social networking technologies for HIV prevention research, 2) the topics and content discussed on social networking groups, and 3) the relationship between online discussions about HIV-related behaviors and actual HIV behavior change, among men who have sex with men (MSM).

METHODS Participants, primarily African American and Latino, were invited to join a “secret” Facebook group where participation was voluntary. Peer leaders, trained in HIV prevention, posted HIV-related content. Participant public group conversations were qualitatively and thematically analyzed. Multivariate quantitative methods tested associations between qualitative data, participants’ demographic information, and likelihood of requesting a home-based HIV testing kit.

RESULTS Latino and African-American participants (N=57) voluntarily used Facebook to discuss the following HIV-related topics (N=485 conversations): Prevention and Testing; Stigma; Knowledge; and Advocacy. Older participants more frequently discussed Prevention and Testing, Stigma, and Advocacy, and younger participants more frequently engaged in HIV Knowledge-related discussions. The proportion of messages related to Prevention and Testing and HIV Stigma increased during the course of the study. Results showed that participants posting about HIV Prevention and Testing (compared to those who did not) were significantly more likely to request an HIV testing kit (OR 11.14, $p = 0.001$).

CONCLUSIONS Social networking technologies are engaging platforms that can be used for increasing HIV prevention-related conversations behaviors. Data from these technologies can be analyzed used both qualitative and quantitative methods.