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Ethical use of social media as a recruitment tool

Building the Conversation

From this month we will start including posts about the ethical design of human research. Our intent is not to present these ideas as the definitive or only way to approach a particular challenge/need but instead as prompts to get us all - participants, researchers, reviewers, regulators, administrators and other stakeholders - discussing useful and helpful approaches to the design, research ethics review and conduct of human research.

There are numerous reasons why social media can appear an attractive way to reach potential participants – it may be free or at least relatively inexpensive, it is increasingly

ubiquitous across a range of Australian age groups (Sensis, 2017), and can be a powerful way to build an ongoing connection with a cohort of potential participants.

A recent issue of *The American Journal of Bioethics* focussed on the ethics of using social media as research platforms. An article by Luke Galinas and his colleagues (Galinas et al., 2017) noted the lack of resources and regulatory guidance in the United States on the use of social media as a recruitment tool. They concluded that this was a significant problem since, for all its benefits, use of social media is not without ethical and practical challenges and traps. Fortunately, these are not insurmountable. Galinas' article explored how biomedical researchers might respond in the United States by attending to the issues of researcher transparency and respect for the privacy of participants; in this blog post, we provide advice for Australian researchers and reviewers in an effort to stimulate further discussion between them.

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