

## Executive Summary:

### Use of Social Media for Recruitment in Clinical Trials

## Background

The US Food and Drug Association (FDA) requires that researchers conduct clinical trials to test medical therapies. Recruiting participants for clinical trials is vital because researchers must reach a minimum number of participants to examine the study data.

Meeting recruitment is a major challenge for researchers, and the consequences of delayed recruitment are costly. Delays or cancellations happen in up to 60% of clinical trials, this slows the progress of research and exposes participants to risks for no benefit (Gelinas et al., 2017). Researchers are using social media to overcome recruitment challenges.

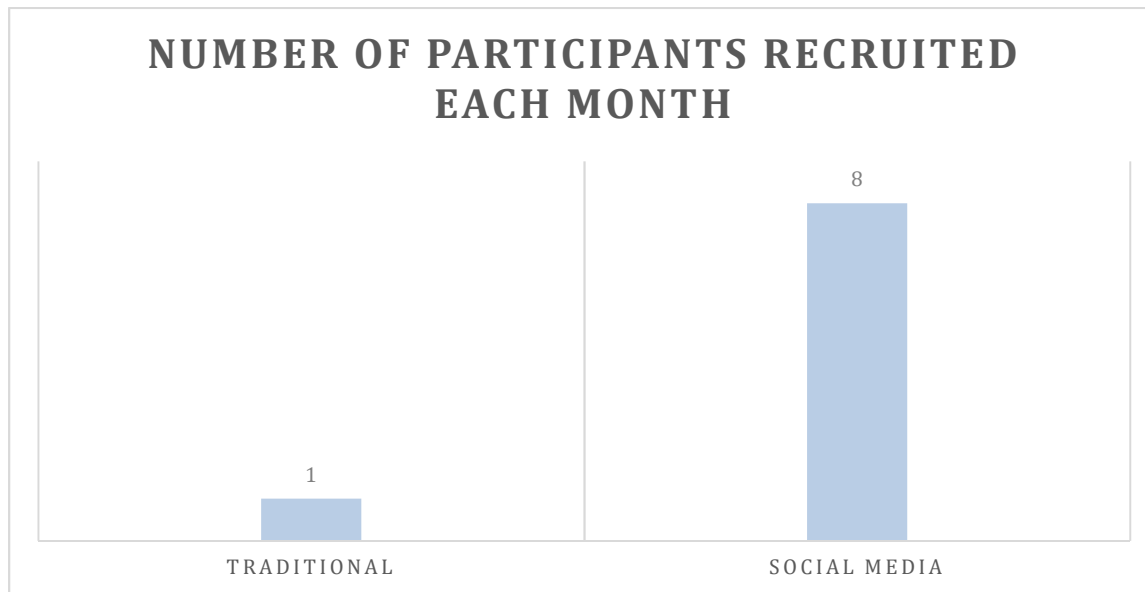
### *Why use Social Media for Recruitment?*

Traditional recruitment methods have yielded low participation rates (Khatri et al., 2015). Table 1 lists traditional and social media methods for recruitment.

**Table 1.** Methods for traditional and social media recruitment (Khatri et al., 2015).

Traditional Recruitment	Social Media Recruitment
Newspaper	Social Media ads on Facebook
Radio ads	Dedicated study Facebook pages
TV ads	Dedicated Twitter accounts
Print ads posted in the investigator's local area	Dedicated YouTube channel

The use of social media for recruitment in clinical trials is increasing, and likely to continue to grow (Gelinas et al., 2017). Data collected by Richiardi et. al proves that social media can lead to faster recruitment. Figure 1 compares the number of participants recruited each month using traditional and social media (Richiardi, Pivetta, & Merletti, 2012).

**Figure 1.** Comparison of enrollment rate using social media. Data from (Richiardi et al., 2012).

Social media is beneficial for overcoming low participation; however, there are some drawbacks. Table 2 displays some benefits and drawbacks of using social media for recruitment.

**Table 2.** Benefits and downsides of using social media for recruitment (Gelinas et al., 2017)

Benefits	Downsides
Able to reach patients with rare diseases	Requires participants have access to social media
Broaden reach beyond the investigator site	May insert bias against participants who do not use social media
Able to quickly meet recruitment goals	May lead to a younger demographic
Opportunity to recruit participants who may not have participated via traditional methods	Requires researchers have knowledge of social media groups related to their study

### ***Ethical considerations***

Ethical considerations for using social media for recruitment primarily relate to participant privacy and researcher transparency (Gelinas et al., 2017). Researchers have recently begun using social media for recruitment. Therefore, Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) and government agencies have not created ethical guidelines for how to use social media for recruitment.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Social Media is a beneficial tool for recruitment, in some cases researchers have spent more money advertising on social media than with traditional means. In these instances, the additional cost for using social media justifies the fact that social media advertising also increases awareness and membership for study specific Facebook pages (Richiardi, Pivetta, & Merletti, 2012).

Researchers should use social media together with traditional recruitment methods. Using both methods allows the study team to capture a wide audience and avoids bias against participants who may not use social media.

Researchers should use social media responsibly, Figure 2 shows recommendations for addressing ethical concerns about participant privacy and researcher transparency.

**Figure 2.** Recommendations for how to address primary ethical concerns

Privacy	Transparency
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Do not disclose private information</li><li>• Keep sensitive information confidential</li><li>• Handle personal information responsibly</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Be upfront about how you will use participant information</li><li>• Be open about the study, and the risks and benefits</li></ul>

## Works cited

Gelinas, L., Pierce, R., Winkler, S., Cohen, I. G., Lynch, H. F., & Bierer, B. E. (2017). Using Social Media as a Research Recruitment Tool: Ethical Issues and Recommendations. *The American Journal of Bioethics*, 17(3), 3–14.

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Khatri, C., Chapman, S. J., Glasbey, J., Kelly, M., Nepogodiev, D., Bhangu, A., ... Committee, on behalf of the Stars. (2015). Social Media and Internet Driven Study Recruitment: Evaluating a New Model for Promoting Collaborator Engagement and Participation. *PLOS ONE*, 10(3), e0118899. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0118899>

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