



# Using Social Networking Sites in the Prevention of HIV: A Literature Review Following a Systematic Approach

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## Background

The Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) is a virus which attacks the immune system and causes gradual damage. After a prolonged exposure to HIV an individual may develop Acquired Immune Deficiency disease (AIDS). Recent statistics show that there are currently around 35 million people living with HIV around the world (World Health Organisation 2014). Presently there is no cure for HIV - this means there is a great need for a prevention strategy so that individuals do not contract the virus in the first place.

The use of social networking sites has become increasingly popular in the past decade, with over 1.3 billion active members on Facebook and over 500 million tweets being sent out a day. This shows that with the increasing popularity of social networking sites, there is a possibility they could be used for effective health promotion. Social networking sites seem to offer a practical solution to educating and reaching out to potentially vulnerable groups of people and, if used in the correct way, have the potential to reduce the number of cases.

## Methods

A literature review with a systematic approach was chosen as the best method of utilizing the current research and to form a conclusion about the usefulness of social networking sites in HIV prevention. Various databases were used in this literature review, consisting of both clinical data bases which would provide clinical research into the topic area and social science databases. The main databases used were ASSIA, Web of Science and Scopus.

The key words used in this search strategy were "HIV", "PREVENTION", "SOCIAL NETWORKING" and "SOCIAL MEDIA". To make the search more relevant to a certain area of practice and to fulfil the paper's outcomes, a set of exclusion and inclusion criteria were created. These specific criteria requirements were used for all the literature, which had to match the criteria in order to be used in this review. The inclusion criteria included; literature published after 2003, participants being 18+ and research performed in westernized societies.

## Themes

### Peer Leaders/Role Models

Peer leaders are people who have experience of HIV and can be put in the position of 'experts'. They are used to give health promotion advice to other users on the internet. It was found that the use of peer leaders and role models can be an effective way of communicating with people who are at high risk of HIV or who are living with HIV. The studies demonstrate that peer leaders can have a positive influence on HIV testing and HIV prevention.

### Real-Time Social Networking

This is when the use of chat rooms and instant messages are used to communicate with a community or individuals. It was found from the literature that the use of chat rooms and real time social networking can be useful tools in preventing HIV in high risk communities. They are an extremely quick way to communicate with online users and can provide relevant and up to date information.

## Implications for Nursing Practice

- Offers a new and effective way to deliver HIV health outreach and prevention.
- Allows health prevention and advice to be given in the individual's own home and easily accessible.
- Means that the nurse is able to offer help to more individuals on a daily basis as geographical barriers won't be an issue.
- Those who are at risk of or live with HIV can be identified, supported and given advice or treatment.
- By using peer mentors and real time social networking, the nurse can become a community advocate.

## Recommendations for Future Research

- For a much larger longitudinal study to be performed over the different MSM communities and other communities affected by HIV.
- A need for researchers to look into the effects social networks might have on the prevention and treatment other sexually transmitted infections or other health behaviours.



<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:3AIDS-ribbon.png>

## Reference

World Health Organisation (WHO) (2014) Global Summary of the AIDS Epidemic 2013 [online] Available at: [http://www.who.int/hiv/data/epi\\_core\\_dec2014.png?ua=1](http://www.who.int/hiv/data/epi_core_dec2014.png?ua=1) [Accessed on: 20/03/15]

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