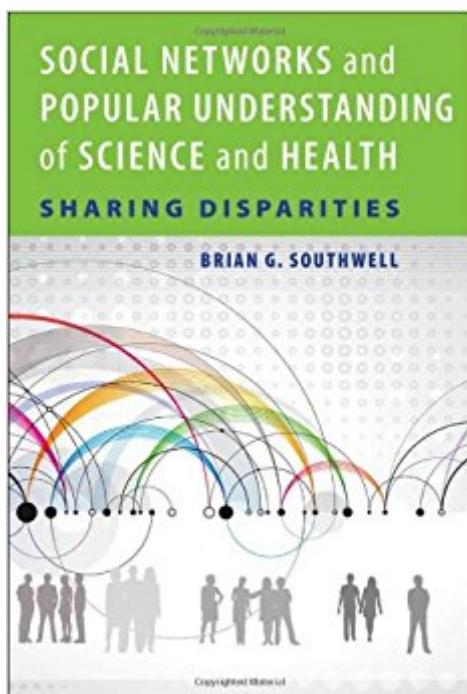


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# Social Networks And Popular Understanding Of Science And Health: Sharing Disparities



## Synopsis

Using social media and peer-to-peer networks to teach people about science and health may seem like an obvious strategy. Yet recent research suggests that systematic reliance on social networks may be a recipe for inequity. People are not consistently inclined to share information with others around them, and many people are constrained by factors outside of their immediate control. Ironically, the highly social nature of humankind complicates the extent to which we can live in a society united solely by electronic media. Stretching well beyond social media, this book documents disparate tendencies in the ways people learn and share information about health and science. By reviewing a wide array of existing research—ranging from a survey of New Orleans residents in the weeks after Hurricane Katrina to analysis of Twitter posts related to H1N1 to a physician-led communication campaign explaining the benefits of vaginal birth—Brian G. Southwell explains why some types of information are more likely to be shared than others and how some people never get exposed to seemingly widely available information. This book will appeal to social science students and citizens interested in the role of social networks in information diffusion and yet it also serves as a cautionary tale for communication practitioners and policymakers interested in leveraging social ties as an inexpensive method to spread information.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Southwell masterfully crosses levels of analysis and integrates research on engagement with science and health information...[T]he book transcends the obvious critique of the technical access

argument to focus on ... very practical communication-based solutions to address disparity. (Michelle Shumate, Health Communication)"Southwell's thoughtful and empirically-based critique of how social media may actually exacerbate inequalities makes a significant contribution to the literature but also has profound implications for policy and practice." (K. "Vish" Viswanath, Harvard School of Public Health and the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute)"Southwell's book upends the assumption that we are all connected in this age of information, pointing to the glaring differences among the haves and the have-nots. Those who do not have ready access to critical information are disadvantaged, and thus the rending disparities are made worse; the chasm deepens. Southwell presents a concise, well-researched argument for the various influences on information sharing and argues that we must confront the great myth of the internet age: that there is now a level playing field for everyone." (Julie Barroso, School of Nursing, Duke University)"It took years for us to get over the assumption that the whole world is watching. Now, Southwell is helping us get over the 'small world' assumption—that we're all equally networked. This book gathers dozens of studies on how, when, where, and why information does and doesn't travel, and what we know about overcoming the resultant inequalities." (Elihu Katz, University of Pennsylvania and Hebrew University of Jerusalem)"An absorbing book... Southwell eloquently explains what few will have realized: that the explosion of opportunities to share knowledge through social media appears to exacerbate disparities in public understanding of health and science, rather than level the field. He challenges us to think more deeply about strategies for public communication that would prevent those most socio-economically disadvantaged from being left even further behind." (Melanie Wakefield, Director, Centre for Behavioural Research in Cancer, Cancer Council Victoria, Melbourne, Australia)"Southwell is a leading expert on communication about science and health. This book is necessary reading for anyone interested in human survival and well-being and how communication through mass media and via social networks affects both." (James Druckman, Northwestern University, and former editor of Public Opinion Quarterly)"Southwell provides critical frameworks and findings regarding health and social media. Digitally enabled by social media tools, peer-to-peer connections can amplify voices by shaping health content and user experiences." (Fay Cobb Payton, North Carolina State University, and Founder and Director of My Health Impact Network)"Southwell has made major contributions to our understanding of the roles that social processes play in driving the diffusion and impact of science- and health-related information. Concise and empirically grounded, Social Networks and Popular Understanding of Science and Health cautions against widespread reliance on peer-to-peer sharing strategies to disseminate vital information. In doing so, it challenges all of

usÃ¢â€šâ€œ scientists, educators, and policy-makersÃ¢â€šâ€œ to think more critically and creatively about the potential for our communication efforts to increase disparities in access to information that can help people live healthier lives in a healthier world." (Science)"Readers of Social Networks and Popular Understanding of Science and Health: Sharing Disparities are likely to come away better informed and inspired." (Michelle Shumate Health Communication)

Brian G. Southwell is a senior research scientist at RTI International, a nonprofit research institute headquartered in Research Triangle Park, North Carolina. He also holds faculty appointments at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Duke University.

This book reviews the basic knowledge in social network and uses health and epidemiology as example. People in public relation or marketing can also learn from the examples and using epidemiology as a metaphor to PR crisis situation.

Interesting book on social media and social disparities.

Social Networks and Popular Understanding of Science and Health is a rare book in that it is both interesting and useful. Southwell argues against prevailing assumptions concerning health information and new media, demonstrating through careful case studies that disparities in knowledge and information sharing are conditioned by multiple social and psychological variables. Such contexts are too often ignored, with deleterious consequences for both the theory and practice of science and health communication. Despite being an outsider to the field, I found the book to be an excellent and enlightening read, advancing and nuancing my understanding of both health communication and new/networked media. Clearly written, it would be useful for adoption in undergraduate or graduate courses, and is one of those rare academic texts that will be directly useful for health communication practitioners as well.

I've been in the healthcare marketing industry for over 10 years. This is a real look at the digital health and wellness marketing landscape.I would even call it a clinical view of what is going on and how sociology impacts social media among groups, in relation to health news exchange, (i.e., is it effective, why? why no?). Overall, an excellent book to have as a reference. Southwell's academic writing style was a pleasure to read and honestly exactly what this category needed.

This book is a great read and covers much of the major research in social networks. It is analytical and engagingly written. I would recommend it to anyone interested in the social context of health and science communication.

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