

# SSI POV: Online

## Social Media

- As part of its commitment to provide robust, diverse, representative online sample, SSI continues to engage social media users within the online sample frame.
- This document highlights the methodological considerations for engaging people in this way as part of an online sample.

### Characteristics of Social Media

All “Social Media” is characterized by two factors:

- The content is user-generated.
- Users have the ability to communicate with others.

### Methodological Considerations

That the content is user-generated presents no methodological issues.

The ability to communicate with one another however, in theory, violates one of the underlying principles of random sampling—the samples be independent of one another. In theory, any person taking a survey from any one social media site could report back to others about its content and the answers he or she gave, thus potentially biasing the response of anyone else from that site. It’s unlikely that this would happen to any great extent in real life, but the more a social media source focuses on one-to-many communication, the more “dangerous” it becomes. Sites like Twitter would not be safe for snowball type word-of-mouth recruitment.

All communities represent a source of bias per se because they all have something in common. This bias may never become apparent—or it may impact survey data in unexpected ways. One example might be a charity like the St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital in the US. People who become fans or friends of their Facebook page are likely to share the values of St. Jude’s and concur with its stated mission: “To advance cures, and means of prevention, for pediatric catastrophic diseases through research and treatment...no child is denied treatment based on race, religion or a family’s ability to pay.”

These shared values may make no difference when the subject matter of the research is Coke vs. Pepsi but may make a real difference if participants were asked to rank priorities in healthcare research budgets (pediatric diseases would be expected to rank high). Additional subtle biases may also arise from a shared vision of not denying treatment based on ability to pay, impacting opinions on healthcare.

*(continued)*

# SSI POV: Online

---

## **Benefits of Multiple, Diverse Sourcing**

The narrower the appeal of the community, and/or the smaller it is, the greater the risk of introducing bias. It is vital therefore that many communities from many walks of life are included in the frame. It is also vital that no single community can provide a majority of participants to any one survey.

The SSI Dynamix™ system incorporates social media users from multiple sources. There are few issues with sourcing from Social Media Communities that cannot be solved by the use of Dynamix and the wide range of communities existing within it.