

A Guide for Nutrition and Health Professionals to Improve Their Ability to Identify and Use Credible, Science-Based Resources on the Internet

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Abstract

The purpose of this research project was to create a guide for nutrition and health professionals to improve their ability to identify and use credible, science-based resources on the Internet. Specifically, a Qualtrics questionnaire assessed the experience and knowledge of nutrition and health professionals that assisted in the selection of the Nutrition and Health Professional Review Committee (NHPRC). A pre-questionnaire was sent to NHPRC members assessing how they determined if a website or resource on the Internet was credible and science-based. Their post-evaluation of the final guide was comprised of eight rating components. Response categories suggested that the NHPRC members used different techniques to determine credibility of Internet information. Overall, they supported development of a guide.

Background / Introduction

Nutrition and Health Communications

- The Health Communicator's Social Media Toolkit* was published to disseminate health and safety information in a timelier manner, expand outreach to broader and more diverse audiences, increase access and the potential impact of important messages, engage with the public and empower people to make safer and healthier decisions (CDC, 2011, p.1).

- Social media has transformed the practice of dietetics and has opened new avenues for communicating food and nutrition information, such as virtual nutrition counseling, patient education, peer-to-peer support, and public health campaigns (Helm & Jones, 2016).

Misinformation

- Misinformation can potentially lead to public confusion, frustration, indifference, information overload, or resistance to evidence-based health recommendations among the public (Arora et al., 2008; Nagler, 2014).

- If used appropriately, sharing content on the Internet or via social media can benefit patients, consumers, and practitioners (Helm & Jones, 2016).

Ethics and Responsibilities of the Professional

- Failing to effectively and ethically use social media can reflect poorly on the individual practitioner and the profession. All practitioners should ensure that their social media presence complies with their profession's specific principles (Helm and Jones, 2016).

Objectives

Objective 1: To help nutrition and health professionals improve the overall quality and credibility of the content they post and share on the Internet.

Objective 2: To ensure that nutrition and health professionals will avoid posting any misinformation about nutrition and health and will use credible, science-based resources within their content.

Methods

Sample (n= 8)

4 Registered Dietitians/Nutritionists and 4 health professionals

Table 1: Criteria for membership in NHPRC and participation in this research study.

Nutrition and Health Professional Review Committee Selection Criteria
Work experience in health or nutrition-related field for at least 3 years
Provide record of developing communications materials aimed at nutrition and health professionals and consumers
Demonstrate interest in the topics of nutrition and health trends, news, policy updates and the nutrition and health community
Demonstrate knowledge of ethical responsibilities for sharing or educating consumers and patients via the Internet
Demonstrate ability to identify credible, science-based resources on the Internet

Procedure Steps

1. Contacted organizations and individuals via email
2. Sent Selection Questionnaire - Qualtrics
3. Selected NHPRC members
4. Sent Pre-Questionnaire - Qualtrics
5. Developed first draft and final draft of guide
6. Requested Final Evaluation – Qualtrics

Measures

- Committee Selection Questionnaire - 12 questions
- Pre-Questionnaire - 5 questions
- Post-Questionnaire - 8 questions

Data Analysis

- SPSS Statistics Version 24

Results

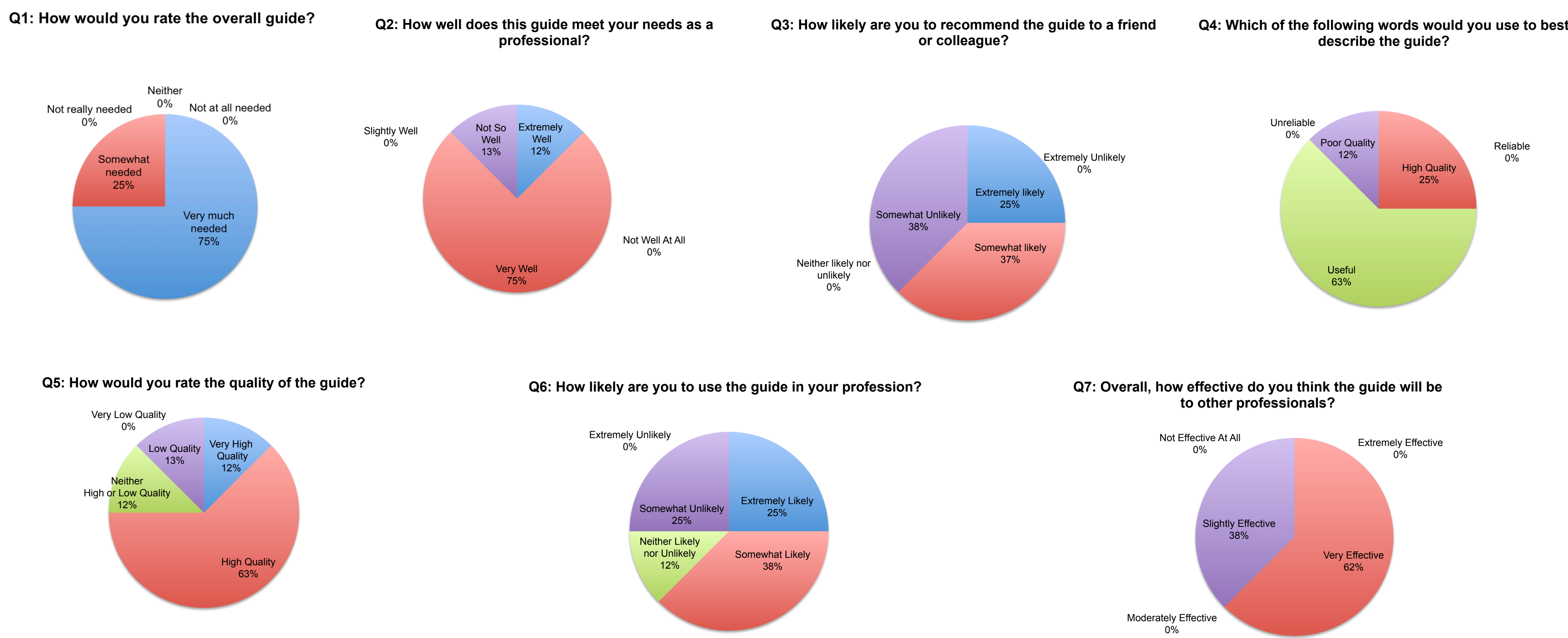


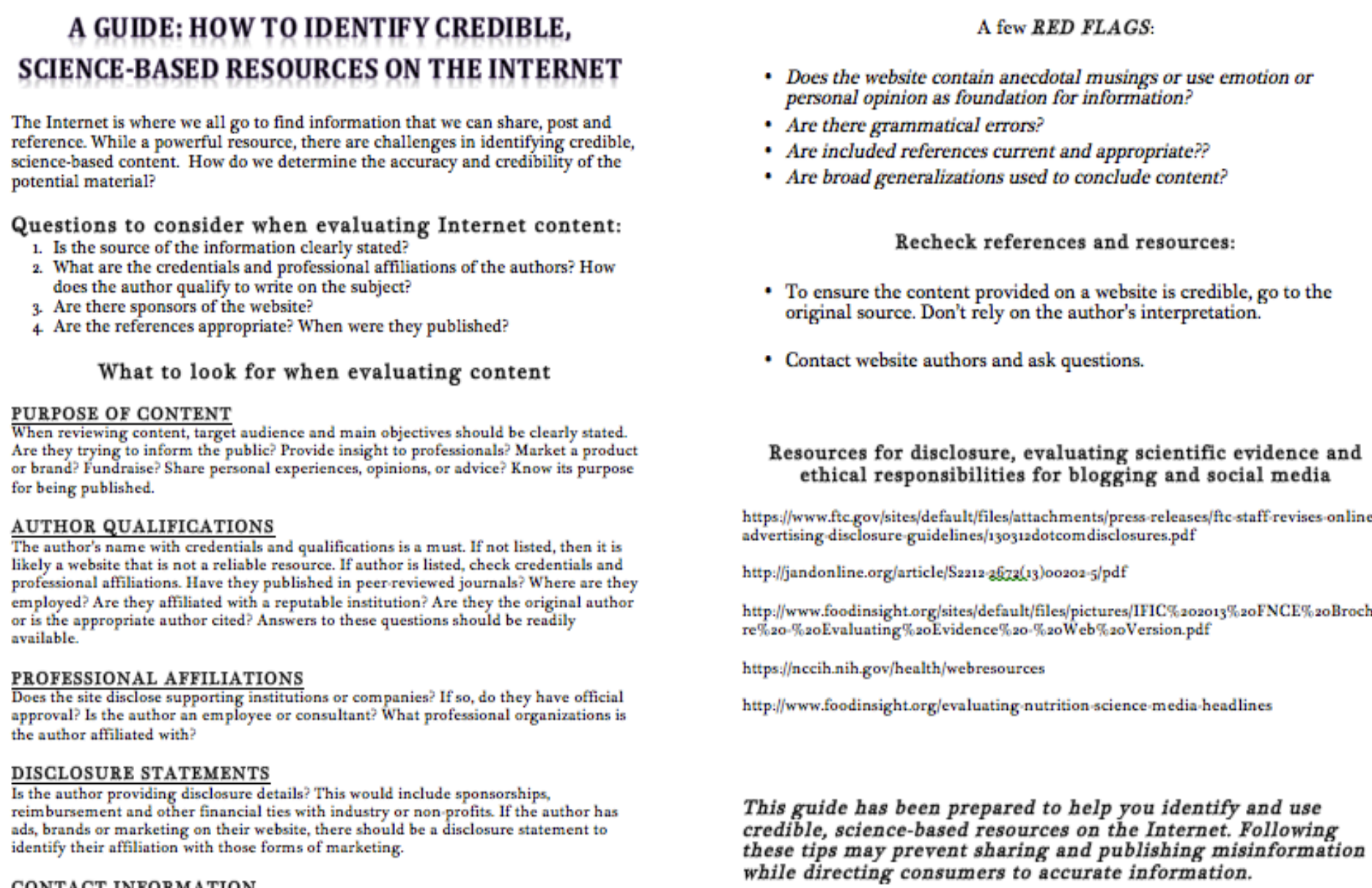
Table 2: NHPRC Responses to Question 8.

Evaluation Item	Excerpt of Single Response, n=4
Do you have any comments, questions or concerns regarding the guide?	<p>“I will use the guide... now I am better able to pick and chose websites that are reliable.”</p> <p>“Excellent resource... for colleagues to use with clients...teaching them to identify credible studies quoted in the media.”</p> <p>“Who really is the audience? A "professional" should know most of the points presented in this guide...would benefit more from an elaboration of the points discussed in the links provided.”</p> <p>“Its practical use...great reminder for keeping up standards as a professional..."standard professional practice" sharing it with colleagues would be socially inappropriate...this is a hand out I would give my students.”</p>

Discussion

- Created a guide using existing guides, toolkits available on the Internet and literature.
- Final evaluation results showed that the majority of the NHPRC thought the guide was very much needed, useful and high quality.
- NHPRC's feedback reflected their years of work experience, use of and involvement in research and ability to identify credible, science-based resources on the Internet,
- Newer NHPRC members had more feedback reflecting their recent educational experience with research and identifying resources,
- Some members felt the final guide did not meet the expectations; more of a reminder or review but was beneficial to both professionals and students.

Figure 1: The Final Guide



Conclusion

A responsibility of a professional is to educate the public on nutrition and health-related information within their scope of practice. Overall, the NHPRC thought the guide included useful tips and red flags when searching the Internet.

Challenges:

- Limited research on how consumers interpret website content and what is considered a credible, science-based resource.
- Limited number of health professional with social media presence or use the Internet as reference for clients.

Future Research:

- For comparison, recruit professionals in other fields and evaluate how they determine credibility on the Internet.

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References

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