Using Social Media to Enhance Study Recruitment: How Facebook and Twitter May Engage Vulnerable Populations

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INTRODUCTION

- According to the United Nations Specialized Agency for Information and Communication Technologies, 40.6% of the world population currently uses the internet.
- As of 2015, 1.01 billion users accessed Facebook everyday, and 320 million people were on Twitter.
- Over half of lower-income and/or ethnic/racial minority populations currently use social media.
- We explored the effectiveness of using social media platforms to recruit middle-aged adults of lower-socioeconomic status to a randomized controlled trial testing the work and health-related outcomes of the Chronic Disease Self-management Program.

To date, 65 people have liked the SMART Life Facebook page.

After rolling-out a two-day targeted Facebook advertisement; the study team saw the following results:
- 1,539 people saw the Facebook ad, including 1,051 females and 484 males.
- 1,414 of these individuals lived in North Carolina.
- The sample reached included 461 people between 35-44 years old, 695 between 45-54 years old, and 473 55+ years old.
- The campaign cost $52.68 and resulted in 35 page likes.

The SMART Life Twitter page has 11 followers and 3 likes:
- The majority of followers are events and business owners from the target communities.
- The team follows 46 businesses, media outlets, and leaders from the target communities.
- We re-tweet posts from those we follow.
- We also tweet at our partners to both build relationships and catch the eyes of their many followers.
- The team has posted a total of 28 tweets, including a mix of text only, text with website link, and text and image messages.

After consulting with experts in social media advertising, 7 people representing diverse gender and racial groups identified “social media” as the place they first heard about the SMART Life Study.

Of these 7 respondents, 3 learned of the study through a Facebook advertisement, and 3 viewed the study Facebook page.

In comparison, over 650 respondents first learned about the study through their workplace, the majority through a listserv message.

Social media did not prove to be an effective tool when recruiting lower-income, middle-aged adults to the SMART Life Study.

Further studies are needed to assess the results of additional social media recruitment efforts.