

Exploring the Viability of Using Online Social Media Advertising as a Recruitment Method for Smoking Cessation Clinical Trials

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BACKGROUND

- Clinical trials rely on recruiting representative samples to ensure generalisability of results.
- The Internet has become popular with researchers for not only online survey recruitment (e.g., Fenner et al., 2012) but also for experimental trials (e.g., Graham et al., 2012).
- Social media (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Google+) represent a relatively new online avenue for recruiting not only general population samples but also specific population cohorts.
- A major drawback for such services is their potential reach - Facebook:
 - >1 billion registered users
 - 12 million monthly users in Australia
- However, benefits of social media as a recruitment tool are undermined if they cannot be used to recruit representative samples.

The aim of the present study was to explore the viability of using social media as a recruitment tool in a clinical research trial.



Figure 1. Example of newspaper advert (Left) and Facebook adverts (Right).

METHODS

- Participants (n=266), who were recruited to take part in a multi-site randomized trial of a smoking cessation behavioural support program, were adult, long-term (>3 yrs) heavy smokers (>10 cigarettes per day) with a strong desire to quit.
- A mix of traditional strategies and social media advertising was used concurrently to recruit the sample:
 - Flyers were placed around two University of Tasmania campuses (Hobart and Launceston, Australia; approximately 26,000 students total) and surrounding shopping districts.
 - Advertisements in two Tasmanian newspapers (weekend readership approx. 96,000) at regular intervals (Figure 1).
 - Multiple paid Facebook advertisements, using different wording and logo combinations (Figure 1), targeting users aged >18 years living within 16km of either of the two study sites.

RESULTS & CONCLUSIONS

- Of the 266 participants enrolled, approximately half (138, 51.9%) were recruited through Facebook advertising, 96 (36.1%) through newspaper advertising, 17 (6.4%) by word of mouth, and 12 (4.5%) from seeing a flyer (3 [1.1%] were unknown).
 - We compared participants recruited via social media (n = 138; 51.9%) to those recruited via traditional strategies (n = 125, 47.0%).
- Participants recruited via social media were significantly younger, but no other significant demographic or smoking characteristic differences between the groups were found.
- The two subsamples were well matched in terms of their demographic and smoking characteristics, and the profile of the overall sample was similar to that of the target population of Tasmanian smokers in terms of age, gender, income, education and cigarette consumption.

Social media advertising appears to be a viable and convenient supplement to more traditional recruitment strategies when it comes to recruiting clinical study samples.

References

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