How college students access nutrition information: a study on social media and health literacy

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Introduction

The transition to college during a young adult’s life can result in behavior change that impacts health for a lifetime.1-3 Behavior change witnessed in college students include an increase in processed, energy dense foods, a decrease in nutrient dense foods and an increase in sedentary behavior.4-6

College students spend a large quantity of time on the internet with one of the most common activities being health information research.4-7 Historically, college students have used ineffective search strategies when searching for health information. Students have been found to favor Google over medical portals or university libraries, use only websites found on the first page of a search engine and report misunderstanding of medical jargon.8-10

Using social media as a health resource can exacerbate these issues with student’s search strategies. The information published on social media does not undergo any formal review process and due to social media’s popularity and interactive nature, information can spread quickly to a large audience even if it is inaccurate.7

Understanding how students utilize social media for nutrition education can help nutrition professionals educate students on how to assess information found on social media accurately. In addition, it can inform nutrition professionals on how to best utilize this avenue to reach their desired audience.

Method

The purpose of this study was to investigate how college students use social media to obtain nutrition information, their perceived confidence in obtaining nutrition information, and what criteria are used to determine the credibility.

Specifically, this study identified the different social media outlets accessed, investigated how the outlets are used and investigated how credibility is assessed by students attending two universities: a large, culturally diverse public university in Southern California (University One) and mid-sized, private, Catholic university in Northern Indiana (University Two).

Participants were selected by convenience sampling from the population of students at University One enrolled in an Introduction Psychology course, and University Two students enrolled in three different business courses. Male and female students of all years of enrollment and all majors were sampled. Inclusion criteria included current enrollment as of Spring 2018.

Exclusion criteria were individuals who are not currently enrolled in the university as students, including non-student employees and staff members or individuals under the age of 18

University One students were enrolled in the online student subject pool facilitated using Sona Systems software or the SONA program.

University Two students were recruited via flyers in their classrooms.

The survey was completed electronically using Survey Monkey’s online survey platform

The comparison for all outcome variables was done using a chi-square analysis. If the frequency of the determinant was n less than five, a Fisher’s exact test was used. The significance level was set at p < 0.05

Descriptive Findings:
The study was comprised of 83 students. The sample consisted of 32 males (38.5%) and 38 females (45.7%); thirteen subjects did not identify their gender. Subjects ranged in age from 18 to 26 years, with 70% (n=49) of the students identifying their age range as between 20-23 years. Seventy-one percent (n=50) of students identified as Caucasian.

Students reported using Instagram most frequently to access nutrition information (41.9%). Facebook was the second-most prevalent platform used (22.9%), and Pinterest was third (20.3%). It was found that most students (90.4%) did not use Snapchat for nutrition information.

Figure 1 and Figure 2 display the types of nutrition information researched and the professionals college students trust for nutrition information.

Relationships Tested Findings:
• Female students were significantly more likely to use Instagram, x²= 5.224, p=0.022, and Pinterest, p=0.002, to access nutrition information than male students. (Table Ia and Table Ib)

• Females were significantly more likely to perceive the quality of the article’s photos as important than males, x²= 4.953, p=0.026. (Table II)

• There was no significant relationship between enrollment year and students preferred social media platform to access nutrition information, the criteria used to determined credibility or the student’s perceived confidence levels in determining credible information

• After the initial data analysis, possible trends were seen in the descriptive data and a second analysis was run.

Second Data Analysis Findings:
• Female students were significantly more likely to search social media for healthy recipes, x²= 11.044, p=0.001, and weight loss information, x²= 7.675, p=0.006. (Table III)

• Female students were significantly more likely to trust a chef, x²= 6.863, p=0.009 and food bloggers, p<0.001 than males when searching for nutrition information. (Table IVA and IVb)

• Female students tended to be more drawn to visual platforms such as Instagram and Pinterest and placed a higher emphasis on the aesthetics of articles such as photograph quality. Females were also more likely to search for weight loss and healthy cooking recipes than males.

• This can possibly be related to the “body-focused” or appearance-focused health goals prevalent in the female experience.11 Female nutrition-related literature is also often focused on weight-control behaviors instead of overall health, which can help explain the tendencies of the female students to search for weight loss information. It was found that students are more likely to search for broad nutrition topics such as general nutrition tips, weight loss, and healthy recipes.

• Students were found to determine both credible and non-credible professionals as trustworthy with registered dietitians, nutritionists, medical doctors, personal trainers, and chefs as most trustworthy.

Conclusion

Application and Future Research

• Dietitians and other health professionals can use this information to better connect to their audience by using forum the students are utilizing and providing information the students are interested in.

• Future research is needed to expand on how students use social media for nutrition/health information. This future research would benefit from a larger and more culturally diverse subject pool and a more detailed focus on the implications of social media as a nutrition resource.

References


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Introduction

First…
Introduction…
The page size of this poster template is 56x42” in landscape (horizontal) format. Do not change this page size.

Bear in mind you do not need to fill up the whole space allocated. Do not make your poster bigger than necessary just to fill that given size.

Method

Tips for making a successful poster…

• Re-write your paper into poster format ie. Simplify everything, avoid data overload. Reduce the amount of text to the bare essentials.
• Headings of more than 6 words should be in upper and lower case, not all capitals.
• Never do whole sentences in capitals or underline to stress your point, use bold characters instead.
• When laying out your poster leave breathing space around you text. Don’t overcrowd your poster.
• Try using photographs or coloured graphs. Avoid long numerical tables.
• Spell check and get someone else to proof-read.

Figure 1. A photograph or drawing of organism, chemical structure, or whatever. Don’t use graphics from the web (they look terrible when printed).

Figure 2. Be sure to separate figures from other figures by generous use of white space. When figures are too cramped, viewers get confused about which figure to read first and which legend goes with which figure.

Figure 3. Avoid keys that force readers to labor through complicated (give example).

Figure 4. Use connector lines and arrows to visually guide viewers through your results. Making logical points this way is much, much better than making it in the text section. These lines can help viewers read your poster even when you’re not present.

Aim

How to use this poster template…

Simply highlight this text and replace it by typing in your own text, or copy and paste your text from a MS Word document or a PowerPoint slide presentation.

The sub-title text boxes can be moved up or down depending on how big or small your ‘Introduction’, ‘Aim’, ‘Method’, ‘Results’ and ‘Conclusion’ are. You can change the sections to suit your specific research project.

The body text/font size should be between 24 and 32 points. Palatino or Times is equivalent. Your main text is easier to read if you use a “serif” font such as Palatino or Times (i.e., people have done experiments and found this to be the case). Use a non-serif font for your title and section headings.

Keep body text left-aligned, do not justify text.

The colour of the text, title and poster background can be changed to the colour of your choice.

TIP! To use an image as a background, go to “Design” -> “Background Styles” -> “Format Background”

Figure 5a and 5b. Make sure legends have enough detail to fully explain to the viewer what the results are. Note that for posters it is good to put some “Materials and methods” information within the figure legends or onto the figures themselves—it allows the text be shorter and gives viewers a sense of the experiment even if they have skipped directly to the figures. Don’t be tempted to reduce font size in figure legends, axes labels, etc.—your viewers are probably more interested in reading your figures and legends!

Results

Importing / inserting files…

Images such as photographs, graphs, diagrams, logos, etc, can be added to the poster.

To insert scanned images into your poster, go through the menus as follows: Insert / Picture / From File… then find the file on your computer, select it, and press OK.

The best type of image files to insert are JPEG or TIFF. JPEG is the preferred format.

Figure 3. A photograph or drawing of organism, chemical structure, or whatever. Don’t use graphics from the web (they look terrible when printed).

Figure 4. Use connector lines and arrows to visually guide viewers through your results. Making logical points this way is much, much better than making it in the text section. These lines can help viewers read your poster even when you’re not present.

Conclusion

You can, of course, start your conclusions in column #3 if your results section is “data light.”

Conclusions should not be mere reminders of your results. Instead, you want to guide the reader through what you have concluded from the results. What is the broader significance? Would anyone be mildly surprised? Why should anyone care? This section should refer back, explicitly, to the “burning issue” mentioned in the introduction. If you didn’t mention a burning issue in the introduction, go back and fix that — your poster should have made a good case for why this experiment was worthwhile.

Acknowledgements

Just highlight this text and replace with your own text. Replace this with your text.

For more information

Please contact email@csulb.edu. More information on this and related projects can be obtained at http://www.swarthmore.edu/NatSci/cpurrin1/posteradvice.htm.