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Impact of Facebook ads for sexual health promotion via an educational web app: A case study

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ABSTRACT

Background: We present a case study of a public health campaign, including social media, and aiming at maximizing the use of web app on sexual health.

Objective: To analyze the impact of a Facebook fan page, Facebook advertisements, and posters to maximize the number of visits to the educational web app.

Methods: The campaign is assessed for 1 year, using data tracked through Facebook statistics and Google Analytics.

Results: The site had 3670 visits (10.1 visitors/day, 95%CI 8.7-11.4). During the one-month Facebook Ads campaign, the site received 1263 visits (42.1 visitors/day, 95%CI 37.3-46.9), multiplying by over four the average number of visitors/day. 34.4% of all the participants were recruited during the one-month Facebook ads campaign.

Conclusions: Facebook advertisements seem to be a good tool to promote an educational web app on sexual health targeting youth, and to reach a huge number of users rapidly and at a low cost.

Keywords: sexual health; adolescent health; disease prevention; health communication; health promotion

Background

Introduction

The World Health Organization has underlined the importance of addressing sexually transmitted infections (STIs) (Organization 2010). Viral STIs such as HIV and Hepatitis B have a prevalence of about 37 million and 240 million cases worldwide, respectively (Organization 2012). Genital chlamydia, gonorrhea, trichomoniasis and syphilis represent the main curable STIs in the world, with nearly 500 million new cases in 2008 (Organization 2012). Many of these patients remain contagious for decades, hence, preventive measures are essential.

Computer-based interventions for sexual health promotion represent an excellent resource for education, as they have demonstrated to have a significant effect on users by improving their knowledge, and increasing safety in their sex behaviour (Noar, Black et al. 2009, Bailey, Murray et al. 2012). With over a billion and a half active users worldwide as of September 2016 (The Statistics Portal 2016), Facebook (FB) might represent a relevant environment for public health promotion (Paton, Bamidis et al. 2011, Gabarron and Fernández-Luque 2012, Neiger, Thackeray et al. 2012, Miron-Shatz, Hansen et al. 2013), including for sexual health promotion (Dunne, McIntosh et al. 2014). The computer-based technologies' effect on health promotion and health education might be even more relevant in developed countries, such as Norway, where a national survey performed in 2011 showed that 100% of youth aged 16-24 used the Internet every day, or almost every day, and that they connected to the Internet mainly for social networking purposes (Statistics Norway 2016).

Related work

Conversations on sexual health and sexually transmitted infections already take place among online social media users (Gabarron, Serrano et al. 2014), but there are relatively few publications on the use of different social media for sexual health promotion (Bailey, Murray et al. 2010, Gold, Pedrana et al. 2011, Bailey, Murray et al. 2012, Guse, Levine et al. 2012, Dunne, McIntosh et al. 2014, Schnall, Travers et al. 2014, Yonker, Zan et al. 2015, Gabarron and Wynn 2016). Qualitative

studies show that social media consumers are open for sexual health education and promotion through these media (Byron, Albury et al. 2013, Nicholas, Bailey et al. 2013, Lim, Vella et al. 2014, Pfeiffer, Kleeb et al. 2014).

In a recent review it was identified fifteen research studies on sexual health promotion using Facebook interventions for targeting youth (Gabarron and Wynn 2016). Most of these studies using Facebook for promoting sexual health among people aged 16-26 distribute general sexual health contents (Hedge and Donald 2011, Bull, Levine et al. 2012, Gold, Pedrana et al. 2012, Mustanski 2013, Nguyen, Gold et al. 2013, Pedrana, Hellard et al. 2013, Anderson and Samplin-Salgado 2014, Friedman, Bozniak et al. 2014, Klingler 2014, Prior, Salmon et al. 2014, Dowshen, Lee et al. 2015, Fuller and Carter 2015), while only three studies focus on a specific sexually transmitted infection, namely chlamydia (Jones, Baldwin et al. 2012, Syred, Naidoo et al. 2014), and human papillomavirus (Patel, Stern et al. 2014).

Four of the studies that used Facebook for promoting sexual health among young people have reported a behaviour change, such as a 25% more condom use (Jones, Baldwin et al. 2012) or a higher tendency to use condoms (Bull, Levine et al. 2012); increases in the knowledge of sexual health (Fuller and Carter 2015), a 128% increase in the number of patients presenting for STIs testing (Friedman, Bozniak et al. 2014), and even a 54% reduction in the number of positive chlamydia cases among 15-17 years-olds (Jones, Baldwin et al. 2012). Interestingly, in two of these four studies, Facebook was the only media used for the sexual health promotion (Bull, Levine et al. 2012, Jones, Baldwin et al. 2012), while in the other two studies, Facebook was used as a resource for supporting other sexual health promoting channels (Friedman, Bozniak et al. 2014, Fuller and Carter 2015).

So far, it seems that social media have been used for public sexual health promotion targeting youth in different ways, and also to recruit youth for sexual health related research (Ahmed, Jayasinghe et al. 2013, Nicholas, Bailey et al. 2013, Hernandez-Romieu, Sullivan et al. 2014, Stratton, Spencer et al. 2015). We present a case study of a Norwegian public health campaign using social media, and aiming at maximizing the use of a web app on sexual health. In our case, the selected social media

channel was Facebook, due to its popularity when the study was carried out (Statistics Norway 2016).

Objective

The objective of the present study is to analyze the impact of a Facebook fan page, a Facebook advertisement campaign, and posters to maximize the use of a public health educational web app promoting sexual health for youth. The impact of the promotion is assessed using data tracked through two sources, the Facebook statistics dashboard and Google Analytics.

Methods

At the end of 2012, a game-style web app on sexual health was developed for a Norwegian public hospital (Gabarron, Serrano et al. 2012). The web app includes interactive game-like functions to learn about STIs, text and photographs on anatomy, physiology, contraception, and behavioral issues related to sexual health, instructional videos, and a symptom checker (Gabarron, Serrano et al. 2012, Gabarron, Schopf et al. 2013, Gabarron, Serrano et al. 2014). The site was built on social constructivist learning theory (Gergen 1999), by providing information on sexual health that allows the users to compare that information to their previous knowledge, modify their ideas, and continue learning. All its content was developed by doctors and nurses experienced in teaching at schools. Most of the web app content is in the Norwegian language, and it also includes some educational videos in Swedish and English. In 2013, a strategy to promote the web app among youth was planned and carried out jointly with communication experts at the public university hospital (Gabarron, Serrano et al. 2012). The strategy included three elements: 1) Appealing and funny posters with QR codes linking to the web app. The QR codes are images that codify URLs. After taking a photo most smartphones are able to transform the image into a link. Therefore, when a user takes a photo of the poster with a cell phone, the phone will redirect to the website. Two different posters with QR codes were distributed to all the 44 secondary schools, 43 public libraries, and 37

health stations for youth in North Norway; 2) The web app was also promoted through a Facebook fan page, created on the 13th February 2013, and posting 1 or 2 times per week; and 3) A Facebook advertisement campaign promoting the fan page (Pay-per-like) was carried out during a period of one month. The Facebook ads campaign was set up to be displayed among all the Facebook users aged 13-25 years, from all the villages from the two northernmost counties in Norway (Troms and Finnmark), and we selected to spend up to 3000 NOK (approximately 386 USD) in a one-month period. The Facebook ads campaign included a message in Norwegian meaning “Visit the virtual cinema and watch the movie to see what happens in the body when you come”, and included a drawing of a young female doctor, the url of the web site, and a button inviting to “like” the Facebook fan page (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Facebook advertisement (English meaning: “Visit the virtual cinema and watch the movie to see what happens in the body when you come”)



The advertisements were approved by Facebook, and the campaign started on the 4th April, 2013 and finished on the 3rd May, 2013. To assess the impact of both the Facebook fan page and the Facebook advertisements on the sjekkdeg.no visits rates, we used data provided by the Facebook statistics dashboard and also by the web analytic tool Google Analytics.

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