Using Facebook to promote the uptake of colorectal cancer screening

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Background

• Colorectal cancer (CRC) is one of the most common cancers with almost 25,000 new cases and 10,000 deaths in Canada in 2021

• Screening is important for early detection and prevention of disease

• Despite having a provincial organized screening program (ColonCancerCheck), screening participation in Ontario is still suboptimal

• Innovative approaches to increase participation are needed
Overdue for CRC screening

> 2 million people!

Ontario Health (Cancer Care Ontario); 2021
Social media

• Some evidence regarding the specific use of social media for cancer screening exists

• ↑ use of social media  ↓ use of traditional mass media

• Users can actively engage with content

• $-$$$
Social media use

- Screen-age individuals are spending time online!
- Canadians 55+

| Platform | 2017 | 2020 |
|----------|------|------|
| Facebook | 75%  | 76%  |
| YouTube  | 41%  | 43%  |
| Instagram| 17%  | 28%  |
| LinkedIn | 43%  | 40%  |
| Twitter  | 27%  | 27%  |
| Pinterest| 30%  | 30%  |

Gruzd, Jacobson, Mai & Dubois; 2017
Gruzd & Mai; 2020
Objective

• Develop social media messages promoting CRC screening uptake

• Identify messages preferred by screen-age Facebook users
Methods

• Qualitative descriptive study with Facebook users aged 50-74 in Ontario
Methods – Drafting messages

Health Belief Model

- Perceived susceptibility
- Perceived severity
- Perceived benefits
- Perceived barriers
- Self-efficacy
- Cues to action
Methods – Recruitment & analysis

- 6 focus groups (3 in-person and 3 virtual)
- Geographic variation within the province
- Recruitment – random digit dialing (inclusive of cell phones and land lines)
- Focus groups were audio-recorded and transcribed
- Magnitude coding → in-vivo coding → recommendation

Saldana, 2009
Results

• N=45 participants (56% Female)
• 47% used Facebook daily; almost all (98%) used it at least once a week
• 53% had never screened for CRC

| Age       | N (%) |
|-----------|-------|
| 50–54     | 9 (20.0) |
| 55–59     | 13 (28.9) |
| 60–64     | 13 (28.9) |
| 65–69     | 7 (15.6) |
| 70–74     | 3 (6.6) |

| Highest level of education completed | N (%) |
|-------------------------------------|-------|
| High school                         | 25 (55.6) |
| College/University                  | 18 (40) |
| Graduate school                     | 2 (4.4) |

| Annual household income before taxes | N (%) |
|--------------------------------------|-------|
| <$25,000                             | 9 (20) |
| $25,000–<$50,000                     | 13 (28.9) |
| $50,000–<$100,000                    | 15 (33.3) |
| ≥$100,000                            | 7 (15.6) |

| Employment status                    | N (%) |
|--------------------------------------|-------|
| Full-time                            | 16 (35.6) |
| Part-time                            | 10 (22.2) |
| Unemployed                           | 4 (8.9) |
| Retired                              | 15 (33.3) |
| Message                                                                 | Behavioural construct     | Recommendation                   |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Did you know your risk of colon cancer increases after 50?             | Perceived susceptibility  | Consider using this message (with revisions) |
| You could have colon cancer right now – and have no clue.              | Perceived susceptibility  | Consider using this message      |
| 9 out of 10 people can be cured when colon cancer is found early.       | Perceived benefits        | Consider using this message      |
| Getting checked for colon cancer is easy and can be done in the privacy of your own home. | Perceived barriers        | Strongly consider using this message |
| Don’t flush it away. Test your poop for colon cancer today. It’s easy and can be done at home. | Perceived barriers        | Proceed with caution             |
| Colon cancer kills 9,000+ Canadians every year. Don’t be one of them.  | Perceived severity        | Proceed with caution             |
| Are you 50-74 years old? Healthcare providers recommend you get checked for colon cancer every 2 years. | Cues to action            | Consider using this message      |
Results

Messages that were well received were:

- Credible
- Educational
- Positive/reassuring tone

- awareness and prompt questions

“I was reading [the message] about getting tested every two years. I didn’t know that. Every two years it said.” FP3, FG1

 “[This message] alleviates some of my concerns. It’s not the most comfortable thing to think about and this is sort of suggesting that ‘it’s easy and can be done at home.’ And I feel less concerned about that.” MP21, FG6

“I think it’s optimistic. It makes you feel a little bit better. It tends to be more positive and hopeful. This one makes you feel better.” FP10, FG2
Results

Messages that were not always well received:

- Humorous
- Distasteful
- Fearful/negative tone

Audience segmentation
Mixed-appeal messages

“I think for some people [this message] would put you in a depression. Some people may be scared and wouldn’t go for check-up. It may be very scary.” MP6, FG3

“Crap and poop and toilets and flushing. It disgusts me.” MP14, FG5

“...the scare tactics [of this message]…it’s too alarming and it’s not personal enough.” FP14, FG2
Discussion

• “Stand out” on social media
• How to frame cancer screening as “lighter content”
• Credibility on Facebook
• Limitations: one platform only, Ontario only, increased vs. average risk of disease
• Next steps: pairing with images, split testing and pragmatic RCT on Facebook

“Colon cancer kills 9,000…I can see the ‘kills,’ the ‘9,000,’ the ‘Canadians.’ I understand it’s urgent and I’ll very quickly keep scrolling through so I can find something else that will kill me too.” MP21, FG6
