
Abstract

Using a Private Facebook Group to Engage Low-Income Families With Young Children With Evidence-Based Nutrition and Dental Health Information

Rama Kattan, MS; Kate Killion, MPH, RD; Valerie Duffy, PhD, RD; Molly E Waring, PhD

Department of Allied Health Sciences, University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT, United States

Corresponding Author:

Rama Kattan, MS

Department of Allied Health Sciences

University of Connecticut

358 Mansfield Rd, Unit 1101

Storrs, CT, 06269

United States

Phone: 1 8604861446

Email: ramakattan@gmail.com

Abstract

Background: Low-income children in the United States have high rates of obesity and dental caries. Social media may be an efficient and accessible tool to engage individuals in relevant evidence-based nutrition and dental information and motivate healthier behaviors. Previous research on social media-delivered behavioral interventions suggests that engagement may vary by post type.

Objective: The aim of this study is to assess (1) engagement with moderator posts in a private Facebook group for caregivers of children aged 1-6 years from low-income communities by type of post, and (2) the proportion of caregivers who engaged with moderator posts within a sample 2-week period.

Methods: We enrolled 67 low-income caregivers of children aged 1-6 years from Connecticut in a private Facebook group. A moderator posted 5 posts per week that included evidence-based information to promote healthy diet and dental health in young children. Posts were polls, informational posts, healthy recipes, and open-ended questions. Informational posts focused on responsive feeding, healthier snacks, sugar-sweetened beverages, teeth brushing, and flossing. Polls solicited caregivers' interest in particular topics, which was used to guide future posts, and were intended to engage caregivers. Information provided was consistent with the 2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans and post format was informed by the Information Motivation Behavior model. Facebook analytics provided interactions (replies, reactions, poll votes) and impressions on moderator posts from September 2021 to February 2022. We calculated the proportion of caregivers who engaged with moderator posts over a sample 2-week period (February 21 to March 4, 2022).

Results: Over 5 months, the moderator posted 110 posts. Polls (n=27) attracted the most engagement, with a median of 5 interactions (IQR 3-7, range 0-13) and a median of 24 impressions (IQR 22-27, range 20-41) per post. Informational posts (n=38) received a median of 1.5 interactions (IQR 1-3, range 0-5) and a median of 22 impressions (IQR 20-25, range 10-42) per post. Posts sharing recipes (n=28) had similar engagement with a median of 1 interaction (IQR 1-2, range 0-6) and a median of 21 impressions (IQR 18-24, range 11-32) per post. Posts with open-ended questions (n=17) had the lowest level of engagement with a median of 0.5 interactions (IQR 0-0.5, range 0-6) and a median of 19 impressions (IQR 17.5-24, range 16-27) per post. During the 2-week sampling period (n=10 posts), 58% of caregivers interacted with at least one moderator post.

Conclusions: Nearly 6 in 10 caregivers engaged in the group, and nonengaging caregivers may have benefited from involvement despite lack of visible engagement. Polls may be a more effective strategy to engage caregivers around child nutrition and dental health than informational posts or posts that ask caregivers open-ended questions about their experiences. Future research should use feedback from caregivers on posts with low engagement to revise posts to better engage caregivers.

Conflicts of Interest: None declared.

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KEYWORDS

Facebook; child nutrition; dental health; engagement

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