

POR Registration Number: 075-17
PSPC Contract Number: HT372-174180
Contract Award Date: January 10, 2018
Delivery Date: March 2018
Contracted Cost: \$87,371.60

Social Media Focus Groups with Youth

Final Report

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Prepared for:
Health Canada

Ce rapport est aussi disponible en français.

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Executive Summary

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Background and Objectives

The Government of Canada is increasingly using social media to communicate with Canadians of all ages, though use of Government social media channels and tactics are not as effective with the 13-17-year-old age group as they are for those aged 18 and over. As more requests are made to communicate directly with youth on a variety of topics, Health Canada is interested in learning more about youth and their opinions and habits regarding health information on social media, particularly as it relates to government communications. As part of its investigation, Health Canada commissioned Corporate Research Associates Inc. to conduct qualitative research to better understand how Canadian youth access health information online and use social media. Findings will inform future social media planning for this target audience.

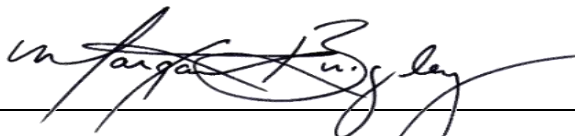
The following provides an overview of the research methodology used: Youth were divided into two segments, those aged 13 to 15 years old and those aged 16 to 17 years old. In each of St. John's, Sudbury, Vancouver, Winnipeg, Calgary, and Quebec City, one focus group was conducted with each audience segment. Discussions in Quebec City were conducted in French, while groups in all other locations were conducted in English.

Caution must be exercised when interpreting the results from this study, as qualitative research is directional only. Results cannot be attributed to the overall population under study, with any degree of confidence.

Political Neutrality Certification

I hereby certify as a Representative of Corporate Research Associates Inc. that the deliverables fully comply with the Government of Canada political neutrality requirements outlined in the ***Directive on the Management of Communications***. Specifically, the deliverables do not include information on electoral voting intentions, political party preferences, standings with the electorate or ratings of the performance of a political party or its leaders.

Signed _____



Margaret Brigley, President & COO | Corporate Research Associates
Date: March 9, 2018



Key Findings and Conclusions

Findings from the *Social Media Focus Groups with Youth* suggest that there is clearly an opportunity to align health-related information geared to youth with key social media platforms. Youth are largely dependent on smartphones as their primary communication device and for the most part, smartphones are not shared with others. Regardless of age, youth rely on social media as a communication tool to connect with others, (primarily friends and family), or as a source of entertainment to fill time. Youth spend considerable time online, with usage time increasing notably with age. That said, it is important to note that youth do not readily identify the extent of time they are active online, rather they simply consider themselves to be always accessible to others through their device.

Youth use a wide range of social media platforms, most notably YouTube, Instagram and Snapchat. Facebook, and Facebook Messenger are perceived to be more of an older person's social media platform, and something that is used more so by parents. However, youth reported using Facebook Messenger. Usage of these main social media platforms varies by platform, but all are used for not for seeking information, but for entertainment and personal communication. YouTube is used primarily for entertainment purposes, Instagram for sharing / reviewing stories across a larger audience, and Snapchat for sharing images among a more closed or personal network.

Social media is generally not used as an active information-seeking tool. As outlined, it is more often a channel of personal communication and entertainment. That said, through various social media platforms youth passively receive information on a regular basis, particularly on topics of interest or relevance to them personally.

Ads on social media are considered an annoyance to most youth and something that they try to avoid. Most do not use an ad blocker, but rather simply skip or ignore the ad whenever possible. Youth are aware that they are actively marketed by companies and accordingly, many resent the constant influx of ads, based on any recent search they may have made, when scrolling for information. That said, youth also recognize that all ads are not created equally, and believe it is both acceptable and appropriate to have informational ads that are educating them on something of importance or personal relevance. They also appear to recall some of the most impactful advertisements, suggesting that they are more receptive to them than they suggest.

If youth have a question they primarily turn to Google or Wikipedia to find an answer, although as a matter of course they check multiple links from their general search to validate any information online. Findings show, that while youth do not regularly profess to look for health-related information, they do have a wide range of health-related questions. While they typically turn to family, a health professional, friends or online whenever they need health related information, an online search is the preferred source when the question may be more personal or embarrassing in nature. Across age groups and locations, youth consistently concurred that there is no single reliable source of information that they can depend on relating to health information, though many indicated parents, trusted adults or medical professionals are trusted.



Findings show there is clearly an opportunity for government to align health-related information for youth on key social media platforms. While youth profess to have a general lack of understanding of government, they consider it – particularly Health Canada- to be a reliable and trustworthy resource.

Youth prefer to have easy access to information when they choose to have it and want to be able to access information in a self-directed fashion. They do not want to feel as if they are being ‘force fed’ information, but rather that they are choosing to learn about something that has personal relevance to them. Through the various social media platforms, the introduction of helpful tools to access important and relevant information is strongly endorsed and welcomed by youth. They want to be able to easily find information when they want it, in a format that is of interest and appealing to them.

Youth clearly articulated how they would like the government to share relevant, health information with them. Most notably, they would like to have a ‘go-to’ youth-centric site available where they can access information at their leisure. Such a site would be designed with youth in mind, being visual (e.g. including video), topic-relevant, bright and inclusive of text that is brief, relatable (e.g. by showing real stories) and easy to understand. Ideally, they would also like an interactive ability on the site where they can ask questions and get quick, easy to understand answers in a timely fashion, such as through an interactive chat feature.

When considering what type of social media might be best suited for sharing health-related information to youth, findings suggest that a digital strategy must be developed across multiple platforms, with inclusion of pointed ads on YouTube, stories on Instagram, and a Discover feed on Snapchat that would allow youth to access information when they choose. Facebook is also an important platform that cannot be ignored, particularly given its increased usage among parents and parents’ role as a key influence for most youth. Further, the development of various apps that promote pointed, health-related information and direct youth to the appropriate site is both warranted and desired.

Finally, the use of traditional communications strategies (e.g. in-school assemblies, traditional media), cannot be ignored, particularly in the promotion of any digital strategy for youth.



Introduction

The Government of Canada is increasingly using social media to communicate with Canadians of all ages, though use of Government social media channels and tactics are not as effective with the 13-17-year-old age group as they are for those aged 18 and over. As more requests are made to communicate directly with youth on a variety of topics, Health Canada was interested in learning more about youth and their opinions and habits regarding health information on social media, particularly in relation to government communications. Qualitative research was undertaken to investigate channel, tactics, tools and tone to inform the Department's future social media planning for this target audience. Findings will inform future social media planning for this target audience.

Specific research objectives included:

- Determining if, and where, youth search for health information online;
- Understanding what type of health information is being sought by youth;
- Uncovering what is considered by youth to be credible sources for information
- Learning patterns of social media used by youth; and
- Exploring receptiveness of youth to receiving health information on social media as it relates to the Government.

This report presents a high level executive summary and description of the detailed methodology used, the detailed findings of the focus group discussions, and a series of recommendations stemming from the research findings. The working documents are appended to the report, including the recruitment screener and the moderator's guide.



Research Methodology

Target Audiences

The target audience of this study was teenagers aged 13 to 17 years old who use social media at least once a week.

Research Approach

A qualitative approach was used to reach the audience, as described below:

A total of twelve (12), in-person focus groups were conducted, specifically two in each of the following cities: St. John's (February 12, 2018), Sudbury (February 15, 2018), Vancouver (February 20, 2018), Winnipeg (February 20, 2018), Calgary (February 21, 2018), and Quebec City (February 22, 2018). In each market, one group included youth aged 13-15 years old while a second group included those aged 16-17 years old. Each group included a mix of gender, ages, household socio-economic conditions (based on Statistics Canada's LICO), household type/family situation, and cultural backgrounds (where relevant). Discussions in Quebec City were conducted in French, while groups in all other locations were conducted in English. Of note, in both Vancouver and Quebec, recruiters had concerns on meeting the quota of half of the respondents per group falling within the low income cut-off thresholds, as per Stats Canada. As such, income levels were adjusted upwards (household income of \$30,000 was raised to \$40,000, \$40,000 was raised to \$50,000 and \$50,000 was raised to \$75,000. See screener at the end of this document for more detail). This adjustment was followed in Quebec as well.

Youth in households where an adult works or has worked in sensitive occupations were excluded from the study, specifically targeting the following industries: marketing, market research, public relations, advertising, media, and IT. Further, Health Canada employees were excluded from the study.

In each group, a total of twelve individuals were recruited by phone, totalling 144 recruits. Six recruiters were used (one for each market) for ease of local recruited. However, all recruited was overseen by a central recruitment manager from CRA to ensure a consistent approach. Participants in Sudbury, Vancouver, Winnipeg and Calgary were recruited from the recruiter/facilities' panel. Participants in Quebec were recruited from both the recruiter/facility's panel and RDD. Participants in St. John's were recruited through a combination of RDD and panel, where all numbers used were checked against CRA's Do Not Call list. Across locations, all participants added to the MRIA's Qualitative Research Registry.

Given the ages of youth involved in the study, the recruiters spoke first to a parent or guardian before speaking to the participant to garner verbal consent to participate. In addition, the recruiters emailed Consent Forms to the parent/guardian with instruction to either return via email or to bring along a signed copy with the participant on arrival for the group. An additional confirmation call was done in advance of the groups to ensure participation. At the groups, all participants were asked for identification to verify their identity and consent forms were collected.



Across locations, 135 participants actually attended the discussions. Those who took part in the discussion each received a compensation of \$100 (in Vancouver) or \$85 (all other groups), as per market requirements. Group discussions each lasted approximately 2 hours.

Context of Qualitative Research

Qualitative discussions are intended as moderator-directed, informal, non-threatening discussions with participants whose characteristics, habits and attitudes are considered relevant to the topic of discussion. The primary benefits of individual or group qualitative discussions are that they allow for in-depth probing with qualifying participants on behavioural habits, usage patterns, perceptions and attitudes related to the subject matter. This type of discussion allows for flexibility in exploring other areas that may be pertinent to the investigation. Qualitative research allows for more complete understanding of the segment in that the thoughts or feelings are expressed in the participants' "own language" and at their "own levels of passion." Qualitative techniques are used in marketing research as a means of developing insight and direction, rather than collecting quantitatively precise data or absolute measures. As such, results are directional only and cannot be projected to the overall population under study.



Detailed Analysis

The following section provides an overview of the findings from the focus groups conducted. Where appropriate, differences in opinions are outlined by each of the key audiences under study.

Online Sources of Information

Online Communication Devices

Youth are primarily dependent on smartphones for ongoing communication, socialization and entertainment.

Groups began with a general discussion on youth's usage of various communication tools and social media applications. Participants were first asked which communication devices (*smartphone, tablet, home computer, school tablet / computer*) they used with some frequency and which device(s) they used most commonly.

Across age groups and locations, **smartphones** are youth's most commonly-used communication tool and one that they are largely dependent on. Indeed, most youth carry their smartphone with them at all times. This reliance on smartphones is consistent regardless of the time of day or location. Most, in fact, keep their smartphones close 24-hours a day, seven days a week, typically taking their smartphone to bed with them at night (left on the night table while sleeping). Some younger participants indicated that their parents require them to charge their phones in a different room overnight, as a means to ensure they are not using the device throughout the night. Most youth, however, prefer to keep it close as they rely on their phone to provide their morning alarm, for music in the late evening, or to stay in touch with others.

In most instances, a smartphone is a device that is not shared with others. Across age groups, some differences in this regard were evident with a few younger participants in most locations reportedly sharing their device with their parents. That said, this sharing was generally a matter of necessity, not choice, whereby their parents demanded or required regular access to their smartphones. In those instances, youth had no choice but to comply with the request given that it is their parents who are paying for the phone and its ongoing service.

Interestingly, while most do not share their smartphone with others, a few youth in some locations reportedly have given open access to their phones to friends, particularly those who do not have a phone themselves.

As mentioned, findings suggest that parents clearly have a greater level of control over younger participants' smartphones, although that is typically not the case with the older group. Indeed, many younger youth reported that parents have access to their phones from time-to-time to check what they are doing or saying online. In many instances, those aged 13-15 years indicated that their parents know



their phone password. This again is out of necessity, not choice, with a failure to comply with their parent's request potentially meaning that they might lose their phone. Importantly, this sense of control was described as more perceived than actual by many youth, with some suggesting that they simply delete their search or texting history on a regular basis, or change passwords if needed, to appease their parents. Across locations participants consistently commented that parents are much less phone savvy than they are, and accordingly, it was not difficult to change their actions to satisfy their parent's needs.

Regular use of **home computers or home tablets** was also prevalent among youth, although to a much lesser extent than smartphones. Interestingly, the few who identified their tablet as their most frequently used device typically indicated they no longer have a smartphone (lost, broken, or taken from them) and accordingly, primarily relied on their tablet for ongoing communication. This further underscored that smartphones are the preferred communication device.

In most cases, regardless of age and location, **home computers or tablets** are frequently shared with other family members. Across locations, most older participants indicated that home computers are the preferred device when accessing more detailed information online that is easier to view on larger screens (e.g. when completing or researching homework or streaming videos).

Comparatively, the use of **school computers or school tablets** was less frequent across locations. Youth were notably less apt to use such devices, likely because they either bring their own personal or family device to school or use a home device to complete online searches at home on a larger screen.

When considering the use of communication devices in school, participants consistently discussed the changing acceptance of smartphones in school. Across locations, younger participants were notably more likely to indicate that in junior high or middle school they are typically told to shut off or put phones away in class, or risk losing their phone. Some proudly shared that they typically ignore such directives and professed to have become quite skillful at using their smartphone during class without the teacher noticing.

By contrast, older participants indicated that most of their high school teachers have moved from considering smartphones as a menace in the class to being an effective learning tool. While there was notable variance by teacher, class and school, a trend was clearly evident in most locations that smartphones are increasingly more likely to be embraced by teachers, rather than feared or disliked.

“They moved from becoming a problem in the class to an effective tool that can be helpful in class.”

In multiple locations, participants consistently cited French class a frequent example where they were encouraged to regularly use their phones for ongoing translation needs.

“I don't know the last time I turned to a dictionary. You just do the translation on your phone and the teacher encourages that.”



Online Access

Youth spend considerable time online each day and, while they may not always be active online, they are constantly accessible through their device.

Nearly all youth who took part in the focus groups are active on social media and spend significant time on their smartphone or other device each day. Interestingly, across groups, youth did not readily distinguish between time 'online' and time by platform. Rather, they see their time on their device as ongoing or constant, whereby they are always accessible to others.

"I don't think of it as time online – I'm just always with my phone."

"I may not be active online all the time, but I'm always reachable."

When considering how much time youth spend online each day, the time varied greatly across groups with a minimum of two hours and a maximum of 12+ hours being mentioned. The younger audience typically spend shorter periods of time on their device, which is perhaps not surprising given that they are often more exposed to scrutiny than the older youth, through school or parents. By contrast, older youth spend considerably longer hours on a device.

Across age groups, social media is primarily seen as a method of staying in touch with others or socializing with friends and family, and for entertainment. When asked what they do on their device, responses included a wide range of activities with listening to music, watching videos, staying in touch with others (primarily texting), gaming, or simply scrolling through information most often mentioned. When scrolling through various social media platforms, youth primarily look at postings, videos and photos that might be of interest. Some described it as 'mindless entertainment' where, as mentioned, they scroll through information as a habit or simply to fill time, looking for interesting quick tidbits of information or images, that may or may not be aligned to their interests.

A number of older participants described social media usage as a coping mechanism for social anxiety (e.g. when they want to avoid conversation, or are in an awkward setting, they'll turn to their phones to 'take them away').

"It's like when we were waiting for the group to start tonight. We didn't know each other, so we all were in the [waiting] room on our phones. That way you don't have to talk to someone else."

"At family events when you really don't want to talk to someone, it's easiest just to take out your phone and avoid the awkward conversation."



Social Media

Social media is primarily a communication tool that keeps youth connected and entertained, rather than an information-seeking tool.

As avid social media users, youth are clearly dependent on various social media platforms to communicate with others. Social media is generally considered a communication tool that keeps them connected – not an information-seeking tool. In fact, findings suggest social media is a passive information source or youth, not primarily used to seek out information, but more so for entertainment purposes and connection with friends.

When considering this distinguishing characteristic, it is important to understand that youth consistently professed that they do not typically seek out information on social media. In fact, across locations, youth indicated that as a matter of course they do not typically post questions to their friends on social media, particularly questions of a serious nature. Youth attributed not posting questions related to health on social media to not wanting to look stupid, wanting to keep some topics of interest private, and not expecting their friends to know something that they did not know. This underscores the fact that it is primarily friends who they are communicating with on social media.

“I’d look dumb if I posted a serious question on social media. Why would I do that? If I don’t know it, my friends won’t!”

Further, posting a question on social media lacked the timeliness youth have come to expect when they are looking for information.

“It’s more like instant response. You Google it, you can just click and you know the answer. If you ask your friends and they answer two hours later, it’s like ‘I needed it two hours ago.’”

Social Media Platforms

Across age groups, social media platforms most regularly used by youth include YouTube, Instagram, and Snapchat.

Participants were provided with a listing of various social media platforms and asked to indicate (individually) which platforms they used with some regularity. Across locations, youth use a wide range of different social media platforms, but to varying degrees. Across age groups, youth most regularly use **YouTube**, **Instagram**, and **Snapchat**, and to a lesser extent Facebook Messenger. Of note, Facebook was uniformly considered to be a platform that is more common among older people (namely their parents), and not something is a relevant to them personally.

Use of these main social media platforms varied slightly. YouTube was a regular platform visited for watching videos on any topics of interest for general interest, humor, or information. Some turn to



YouTube regularly as a ‘how to’ resource where they are able to watch how something is or could be done.

“If I need to know how to do something – anything – I’ll just go on YouTube. There’s always a video showing you how.”

“Occasionally I use it to educate myself, especially with YouTube videos, there are some good ones.”

By contrast, Instagram and Snapchat were both used extensively as a more social communications tool, by sharing images with others or simply looking at images or pictures of topics of interest. Instagram was used effectively for storytelling and youth appreciated that different social media platforms provide for different degrees of sharing more personal information.

“I find that Snapchat is the least ‘social media-y’. You make an account and you follow people, which is the basis of social media, but if you think of Tumblr, Instagram or Twitter, or even Facebook, anyone can look you up just by your name and they can scroll through your feed and look at everything you’ve posted, but no one can scroll through your Snapchat and look through everything you said. You only send it to one person.”

Further, different platforms provide for wider, less familiar audiences and some youth indicated that the content they share would be adjusted accordingly.

“In my opinion, Snapchat would be the picture equivalent of iMessage. I’m not taking a picture on Snapchat and everyone that follows me can see it, it’s just who I choose to see it. Like sending a text, I send a good morning text to someone, not everyone can see that. If I send a Snapchat to someone, only that one person can see it and then it’s gone. I think that’s a more personal thing. When I go on Instagram and I post a picture, I’d be fine with anyone seeing this. I don’t have the same content on Snapchat that I do on Instagram.”

While participants considered Snapchat to be a more social and personal platform, participants in multiple locations indicated that Snapchat does include Discover channels that allows viewers to subscribe to or choose to review more topical news or stories within the platform, without compromising their personal network.

Other social media applications were used to a much lesser extent, including Twitter, GooglePlus, and Pinterest. Few reported using other listed social media platforms, namely Kik, Tumblr or LinkedIn, with these being most prevalent (although still uncommon) among older youth.

Across groups, memes were regularly used by youth as a source of humor and entertainment between friends. While memes were not considered something to be taken seriously, some youth recognized that they can be manipulative and misinterpreted.



“They are just silliness. A bit of fun - nothing to be taken too seriously.”

“Tide pods is a good example of a great meme gone bad.”

A wide range of other social media platforms were listed by a limited number of participants, including Skype, Reddit, VSO, Discord, Hangouts, and AskFM (Quebec only). Netflix was also listed by many as another social media platform used to watch shows or movies.

In Calgary, almost all participants cited having two separate accounts on Instagram or Snapchat, whereby one account was a ‘spam account’ where participants indicated posting ‘anything’ – silly, fun, whatever – to people they knew, whereas their ‘real’ account had a larger following and was set up to ‘impress others’ or be a little more formal / aspirational.

When asked who they follow on social media, across locations and age groups, youth primarily follow **friends** and to a lesser extent **family** on various social media platforms. When considering parental influence, it is interesting to note that participants consistently indicated that they often followed family members or parents on only selected platforms. In essence, many choose which platform they would like their parents to see their posted content.

Aside from friends and family members, topics or posts of interest determine who youth follow. Accordingly, some follow celebrities, with athletes, actors / actresses and musical artists being most often mentioned. A limited number cited other types of celebrities by name, such as the Kardashians.

Companies are often followed indirectly by youth, with clothing, footwear or make-up companies most often mentioned. Indeed, if they have an interest in a specific type of product they may follow a company to find out about new products or promotions. Only a few older youth reportedly follow news media and no one indicated that they follow any government department or agency.

For the most part, youth indicated that they do not actively seek out followers or follow someone based on the number of followers a person might have. However, across locations and in most older groups, a few participants suggested that having a large number of followers boosts self-esteem for some youth and could influence some youth’s behaviour.

“I like to be popular. Yes, I want to have lots of followers – that makes me look popular.”

Some indicated that if a site has a large number of followers it could indicate strong content, which in turn could include further followers.



Social Media and Advertisements

Social media advertisements are a significant annoyance for youth and avoided whenever possible.

Across locations, youth consistently expressed frustration with the high volume of advertisements on social media and, in most instances, consider them a significant annoyance. Youth are clearly cynical of ads, and work to avoid or ignore them whenever possible. Whenever possible, youth opt to click out or skip ads, and when not possible, they simply ignore them and wait for them to pass.

In each location, youth openly discussed how the frequency of ads has increased notably in recent years, and they perceive it has aggressively invaded their space online.

“There are so many ads now. Things used to be easier to scroll through in chronological order [especially on Facebook], but with all the ads now it’s hard to follow through in sequence. Ads have changed things.”

Participants were somewhat frustrated by the fact that they are openly ‘preyed upon’ by companies, based on their search patterns and site visitation. They recognize the direct link between their online activity and resent that someone seems to be always watching. A wide range of ad types were referenced, often aligning with a topic or visuals they may have viewed online.

“I like looking at cat photos or cat videos. Then suddenly I have ads popping up all the time for cat food and kitty litter! I don’t even have a cat!”

“I get lots of shoe ads all the time just because I like looking at shoes.”

As mentioned, most indicated that they avoid ads whenever possible by skipping the ad or ignoring it. Some reportedly will click on ads for follow-up if the ad is aligned with their interests (e.g. a clothing brand, special offers), but this is not a common practice for most.

Most youth do not use an ad blocker for their smartphone and those who do have typically downloaded free versions. A number of youth commented that they are more inclined to have an ad blocker on their tablet or home computer than their smartphone. It was mentioned that some of the ad blockers do not work properly on all social media platforms.

While youth expressed clear frustration with advertisements on social media, they consistently acknowledged that all ads are not created equally. In particular, informational ads, or ads that share factual and important information and are not trying to sell something, were considered both appropriate and acceptable on social media. Further, youth are far more tolerant of ads on YouTube, as they are seen as financially support video bloggers (vloggers) they follow.

When considering public service or public education ads, youth recalled a limited number of ads on social media across locations, with specific mention of ads from Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), or on topics such as ‘don’t drive while high’, and fentanyl ads. Of note, mention of fentanyl ads or text



campaign was very common across both age groups in Sudbury, reflective of the Province of Ontario's recent campaign in that regard.

"Everyone saw the fentanyl ads. My mom saw it too and forwarded it to me."

Other ads were mentioned to varying degree in other locations, including ads on topics such as smoking cessation, texting while driving, and Bell's 'Let's Talk' / 'Cause pour la Cause'.

While youth recall having seen limited health-related ads on social media, they consistently reported that they seldom share or post these within their network, unless they see a direct benefit for the recipient. Even then, some indicated that they would not post them too broadly if they dealt with a sensitive issue but would most likely share it with the appropriate individual directly, to avoid embarrassment for the person it was intended for.

Information Sources and Credibility

Google is the primary 'go to' information source for youth online, and repetition of information across links generally lends credibility on a topic.

When looking for information online, youth primarily turn to search engines, with Google mentioned most often. Wikipedia is also a commonly-used source of information that is deemed trustworthy to some extent, although some older youth recognized that it is possible to edit Wikipedia, which made some question its reliability. A number of older youth in Calgary and Winnipeg also cited Snapchat Discover as a source of information they subscribe to on selected topics.

As mentioned, youth are highly skeptical of the reliability of information on social media, and most recognize that they are being targeted by companies through direct marketing efforts. Some believe many youth are unaware of the full extent to which they are targeted based on their social media / internet searches.

With limited trust in the accuracy of information available online, youth consistently indicated that they tend to look at a number of different links in any search. Typically, they would look at two or three different links on the first page of their search results to validate information. If the information is repeated across sources it is generally deemed to be credible or trustworthy. In addition, it was felt that if a link has a credible domain name (e.g. '.gov', '.org') it was more likely to be valid or trustworthy.

For youth, ideal online information is visual, brief, and catchy. Text (albeit brief) is also appreciated, primarily because they can read it on their own time. While many prefer videos (namely YouTube), there was a preference for shorter videos, and youth often do not pay close attention to advertisements.



Health Information Sources

When looking for health information youth first conduct a general Google search, and then speak to trusted sources.

Most youth professed that they do not regularly look for health-related information. That said, if looking for general health information, or if they had a specific health query, most indicated that they would likely first turn to the Internet for a general Google search. Other online sources typically mentioned included WebMD or Wikipedia.

“If I have a question, I’ll Google it. Then, depending on what I find, I’ll talk to someone.”

“I use WebMD if I have a symptom that I want to know more about.”

Following that, youth would rely on a number of trusted sources, with personal contacts being most often mentioned. Indeed, parents, a health professional (doctor, pharmacist, nurse), close family members, trusted friends or adults, and teachers or other school resources, were cited as important resources in time of a health need.

“My sister is a nurse. If I have any health issues or questions, I’m going to talk to her.”

Many youth believe that there is no one reliable and reputable information resource for health information for youth.

In most locations, both age groups demonstrated a general lack of awareness and familiarity of government’s roles, and accordingly, some expressed cynicism towards government. Participants commonly confused politics and government. This unawareness and cynicism was most evident in Sudbury.

Despite a blatant lack of familiarity with government and its role, when asked who might be considered a reliable source, across locations Health Canada was consistently named. Indeed, government was considered a reliable and trustworthy resource for health-related information, primarily because unlike businesses, it would not be trying to sell something. Youth felt that government would have youth’s best interests at heart when considering their health.



Health Information Online

Health Information Needs

Youth have wide-ranging health information needs, particularly related to mental health, illness identification, nutrition, sexual health / sexuality, drugs and skincare.

Despite the fact the youth indicated that they don't often look for health-related information, when asked to outline what types of questions youth may have on health-related topics, participants readily identified a wide range of topics. In fact, while many participants were reluctant to list detailed questions, they easily outlined broad topic areas and responses were very consistent across groups. Most notably, key topics of interest included **mental health, nutrition / exercise, sexual health, drugs / alcohol, common symptoms / illnesses**, and **skincare**.

The following outlines the types of questions or issues discussed for each broad topic of interest.

Mental Health: Key questions relating to mental health often included: how to identify signs of depression, how to deal with anxiety, how to cope with stress. Youth consistently reported that they look for such coping mechanisms during times of stress at school, most notably during exam periods.

“How to deal with anxiety and stress?”

Youth were also particularly concerned with how to help friends suffering from mental health issues, associated with depression, addiction, cutting, or an undesirable home environment. Other questions related to identifying the risk of developing a mental illness when there is family history of a disease, how to control emotions (i.e. anger management), and how to manage eating disorders.

Nutrition / Exercise: Desired information relating to nutrition and exercise most often related to maintaining good health. For instance, youth wanted to know which foods are healthy, how much water, sugar or type of food should be consumed in a day, workout ideas and how much daily exercise is needed.

“What food is for a healthy diet – what should I avoid?”

“You see so much about fad diets, like that you should never eat bananas. Are bananas bad for you?”

“How does [a specific type of food] affect my body?”

Other interests were more in relation to body image. Interestingly, boys were more likely to ask questions related to gaining weight or gain muscle, while girls were more likely to focus on how



to lose weight, or how to maintain a good figure. Further, younger males queried such things as what the average height or weight was for their age, and when they would likely have a growth spurt.

“How to lose/gain weight quickly?”

Sexual Health / Sexuality: Across groups, participants in both age groups (though most notably in the older age group) were especially keen to get answers to questions related to their sexual health or sexuality. Sexual health questions most prominently centered on sexually behaviour, including STDs/STIs and contraception. From a sexual development perspective, youth also want to know what is considered normal and what is not. Similarly, youth expressed interest in accessing information regarding consent, abortion, pregnancy and puberty. Having the ability to ask questions about periods or urinary track infections were also suggested.

“If I have a UTI does cranberry juice really work?”

Information about gender identification, confusion about one’s sexuality and LGBTQ were also indicated. Finally, the desire for relationship advice was mentioned among group participants, regarding both healthy romantic relationships as well as healthy friendships.

Drugs / Alcohol: Across locations, the upcoming legalization of marijuana is clearly top of mind and a topic of considerable interest to youth. Youth are especially interested to learn about potential side effects related to marijuana use and whether it is addictive. More specifically, participants were interested in safety generally, safe amounts, as well as what impact use of marijuana would have both in the short and medium term. Some questioned where it will be purchased and how it might interact with alcohol use.

“I guess if it’s going to be legal it can’t be that bad? I’d like to know what kind of effect it would have on me, and what the side effects might be.”

“Is weed really addictive?”

“Pot is moving from a criminal offence to a socially acceptable activity. How do we know what is safe?”

Perhaps unsurprisingly, youth were interested in the side effects and long-term effects of drug and alcohol use in general. Other key topics of interest surrounding drugs and alcohol included prescription drug abuse, drug and alcohol addiction and cigarettes.

Physical Health / Common Symptoms / Diseases: Youth are especially interested in self-diagnosis of potential illnesses caused by unusual symptoms. In fact, most reported that online searches of general symptoms they experience is the most common search of health-related information performed.



“What are the symptoms of [disease, sickness]?”

“If I have [description of symptom], what do I have?”

Youth would like information about potential treatments or remedies (including natural remedies) for not only the self-diagnosed illnesses but also for the flu, common cold and headaches.

“How to stop/cure my [description of ailment]?”

Other general questions included how much sleep they should get in a night, what they should do if they can't sleep, how much screen time is safe and what are the effects of too much screen time. Youth also expressed interest in receiving information about vaccines, medications and first aid.

“How long is a healthy ‘on-device’ time?”

“Is staring at a screen too long bad for your eyes?”

“How does loss of sleep affect our health?”

Skincare: Interest in skincare was prominent among both girls and boys, namely solutions for acne.

“Skincare – how to cure acne?”

Additionally, desire for product recommendations was noted and youth showed marked concern in choosing what is put on their skin.

As outlined, youth clearly have many health-related questions. Importantly, across age groups and locations, participants do not readily identify a place to get such information other than through Google searches, speaking to a doctor or family member. As discussed, most reported that when looking for health-related information online, they mainly use a search engine.

Sensitive or embarrassing topics are often searched online before turning to family and close friends, with the search history typically deleted after reviewing information.



Health Information and the Government

Youth consider it both appropriate and beneficial for government to develop health-related information targeted for youth and believe such information would fill an information void.

Findings suggest that youth consider it to be both appropriate and beneficial for government to share targeted information with teenagers. In fact, it was deemed something that would fill a current void for some. Youth support government sharing health information with them online and on social media with some caveats regarding which platforms, as well as in what format the information is presented.

To finish group discussions, participants were asked to record individually what they believe the Government should do to ensure that youth receive important health-related information. When completing this exercise, a number of consistent themes emerged across age groups and locations. In particular, youth highlighted the importance of developing a distinctly youth-specific website as a 'go to' information source for youth, supported by a wide range of digital media applications. The following outlines the various themes suggested:

Youth Website:

Participants offered clear direction on what government should do to communicate health-related information to teenagers online. Most notably, they would like an online location for such information. Indeed, youth want tools in place that allow them to access information at their will, rather than having information forced upon them. It was consistently suggested that a ***succinct, youth-centric and high quality website*** be developed where youth can get accurate, clear, health-related information, and have access to links for more information, if desired.

"It wouldn't be the normal government website. One I would want to go to and be able to understand."

"It would be more accessible rather than just searching and seeing multiple websites."

"That way, you have a source that you know you can trust."

Such a site would be different from traditional government websites in that it would be designed with youth in mind and would be visually attractive, colourful, easy to navigate, with content geared to youth's needs.

"Create an official government website with information about the most important and current health questions."

"Je créerais un site où les jeunes pourraient aller parler de leurs inquiétudes." (I would create a site where youth could go and talk about their concerns.)

Ideally such a site would be interactive in design, providing youth with the opportunity to pose questions to an 'expert', engage in active conversation, and receive timely responses.



“Make a website where real people can have full conversations with people so they can understand it more better.”

“Q&A, with questions like I ask – and government answers I can understand.”

That said, a few youth believed that an interactive tool would be easily abused, whereby youth would ask such a large volume of questions, across a wide range of topics, that it would easily become unmanageable.

“It would be abused. If they opened the door that anyone could ask them a question, it would just get demolished.”

Health App

Participants consistently suggested that a health app specifically for youth be developed that would include frequently asked questions or facts and would be interactive, allowing them to seek out key questions of interest.

“Have an app for important things. A monthly update, like these are the top five things, and you can open one if you want to learn more.”

“Implement an app that would allow teens to research health information relevant to their area.”

“Create an app, kids are constantly using apps. Make one where we can find information.”

“If it’s an app, people are downloading the app because they want to use it for those purposes.”

Social Media

Youth believe that any website or app would need to be supported by (rather than leading) a strong social media presence across key platforms. In essence, a digital media campaign would highlight key relevant information and push them to the site / app. Further, content should be eye-catching, visual and perhaps include pertinent text to provoke interest.

“It would be more accessible rather than just searching and seeing multiple websites.”

“Publier du contenu plus humoristique, sous forme de vidéos, de GIFS, de Memes et de streams en live afin d’intéresser l’auditoire cible.” (Publish more humorous content in the form of videos, GIFS, memes and live streams in order to interest the target audience)

“When I see a picture, I keep scrolling. But if I see a picture with words on it, I’m going to stop and see what it says.”

While it is clear social media has an important role to play in the dissemination of health-related information to youth, not all platforms are considered to be appropriate by youth for such a purpose.



Some youth, for instance, discussed how certain platforms were not age appropriate, while others reflected on how the content and format is most important.

“It depends on what kind of audience you’re looking for. A lot of younger people are on Snapchat and Instagram and more of an older [adult] audience is on Facebook.”

“For a younger audience, like little kids, I think they would retain something that’s in their feed.”

“Je viserais des réseaux sociaux qui sont les plus pertinents et touchent le plus de jeunes possible.” (I would aim for social media sites that are most pertinent and would reach as many youth as possible.)

“It depends how you shove it on people. If they started a page on mental health as a broad spectrum and you could follow it and look through it and they would give you sources and stuff, that’s one thing because you’re choosing to look at it, but it would be another if the government just spammed your feed with commercials.”

“I don’t think it should be like news...I don’t think it should be like that. I think it should be if it’s something really important, because if it’s just like something like, ‘oh, this is going on in Canada today’, then I’d just be like... But if it’s a serious problem with teens and our age, like drugs are going around like this and you need to watch out for it or something like that, then I’d be like, ‘thank you’.”

When asked to consider the various social media platforms they used and select which platforms might be appropriate or preferred methods for the government to share youth health-related information, findings suggest that a varied strategy would best align with youth’s needs. Consistent with youth’s social media usage patterns, **YouTube** was most often selected as the preferred social media communication channel, being mentioned by most participants regardless of age group.

“I’d like to see them implement accounts on more platforms than just one. That way, if someone doesn’t use one app, they have an account they can follow.”

“Create a YouTube channel with videos related to pertinent topics that have fast and informative videos to keep the person entertained.”

Interestingly in written exercises, **Facebook** was the second most preferred social media platform for government sharing of health-related information, with more than half of all participants believing this would be an effective way to reach youth through information to their parents. This is contrary to many youth’s own social media behaviours as youth were more likely to suggest the government use Facebook than they were to use Facebook themselves. This also reflects that some consider Facebook a tool used by their parents more than youth, and could prove effective given that parents are a key source of information on health-related issues.

“Make a Facebook page dedicated solely to answering teenagers’ questions regarding sexual/mental/physical health.”



“Créer une page Facebook concernant la santé pour que les jeunes s'abonnent et aient leur post sur la santé sur leur flux d'actualité.” (Create a Facebook page about health that youth can subscribe to and have health posts on their news feed.)

“I also said Facebook because my mom’s usually in it and if she sees something that’s interesting or relevant, she usually sends it.”

Instagram was selected as an appropriate social media communications channel by about half of participants, and one especially conducive to telling stories. **Snapchat**, although most frequently mentioned by youth as the social media platform used most often, did not generate the same approval for government use as did YouTube, Facebook and Instagram. As Snapchat is considered to be a far more personal platform, some youth are opposed to a government presence within this particular platform. The idea of the government sending pop-up advertisements through Snapchat was thought to be an intrusion of personal space, regardless of the content.

“If I’m looking through stories and there’s ads in between the stories, I didn’t really ask for that. That’s like there’s ads if I was texting someone, in my opinion. In this Discovery thing, then that’s fine, because you’re choosing to watch that.”

“It would be kind of like one of those books, 1984, when they’re forcing stuff on you. I want to be able to choose what I want to see.”

That said, there is an opportunity for the government to provide health-related information to youth via the Snapchat Discover feed.

“Snapchat Discover Page containing the health information and Snapchat polls.”

“I use Snapchat the most and they have the Discover thing in there, the BuzzFeed one and the one that’s for news and there’s like a health one, which is like foods, and I watch those. So I’d like to see it on Snapchat because that’s where I normally go to watch it.”

“I picked Snapchat. It’s the main social media for most teenagers.”

“I’d love it if there was a government Discover thing on Snapchat because then I’d...even for just news related, because, let’s say the new drugs circulating around the city, just so I’m aware of it. I think it would be good if they put it on social media.”

While other social media platforms were mentioned less often by youth, they remain appealing to some.

“I said Twitter because most of the news I see now is on Twitter because it’s easier to get reach to people.”

Across groups and locations, youth concurred that memes would not be an appropriate social media format for government to use to share health-related information to youth.

“Definitely not – I don’t see how that would make sense.”



When considering the use of social media as a communications strategy, youth identified the need for any posted content to include a link where further information may be accessed (i.e. a youth-centric website).

“Require social media to display information or links to information often.”

Further, when considering the various social media formats that the government could share information online, youth consistently highlighted the importance of including pictures, but having them supported by impactful, relevant text.

“When I see a picture, I keep scrolling. But if I see a picture with words on it, I’m going to stop and see what it says.”

Traditional communication channels

Finally, in addition to a strong support of digital presence more traditional communication methods were suggested by youth. In-person presentations at school assemblies, posters, brochures or theatre ads were often mentioned. With regards to presentations at school, focus group participants were of the opinion this is simply common sense as students are already at school and attendance is mandatory so such assemblies, therefore they will have no choice but to see/hear what is being presented to them.

“Implement meetings at schools with an expert on the subject and make a presentation.”

“Also, you could go to our schools and tell us these things. We have to be there, would have to pay attention.”

“Offrir plus de services dans les écoles.” (Offer more services in schools.)

Further, a toll-free health hotline for youth was suggested as a place they could call with outstanding health questions.

“Helpline, accessible to youth with health questions or application in which you can find out what you need to know or ask questions.”

“Create a peer or a hotline with an individual with experience in order to help and educate the person calling.”

“Offer comprehensive 24/7 support to answer health questions either by phone or text.”



Conclusions

The following conclusions are derived from the analysis of findings:

- ***Youth are primarily dependent on smartphones for ongoing communication, socialization and entertainment.***

Smartphones are clearly most relied upon by youth to access the internet, and one they are dependent on nearly all the time. For the most part, youth report exclusive use of their smartphone, notably among 16-17 years-olds. Frequent use is also impacted by the increased acceptance of smartphones in classrooms, and its use to assist with school work. To a lesser extent, youth use shared devices such as home computers or home tablets, notably for more involved internet uses that are best done using a larger screen. School tablets or computers are seldom relied upon for internet access, other than in the context of school requirements.

- ***Youth spend considerable time online each day and, while they may not always be active online, they are constantly accessible through their device.***

The notion of 'being online' is foreign to most youth who consider themselves always connected. The length of time spent online ranged from 2 to 12+ hours daily, with older youth reporting longer usage than those younger. The use of smartphone in classroom as a teaching aid appears more prevalent among older youth than among those 13-15 years old. Usage of social media is prevalent among youth of all ages, notably to stay in touch or socialize and for entertainment. They scan social media while paying closer attention to what is of personal interest to them. At times, scrolling through social media is considered a form of 'mindless entertainment' to pass time. Interestingly, some older youth consider social media a stress-management mechanism at times, helping them to cope with social anxiety.

- ***Social media is not an information-seeking tool, but is rather primarily a communication tool that keeps youth connected and entertained.***

Youth rely on various social media platforms to stay connected, entertained, and informed. Social media is not considered an information-seeking tool, and youth rarely post questions online in their search for information for fear of looking stupid, limited privacy, lack of an immediate response, and not expecting to find answers from their connections.

- ***Across age groups, social media platforms most regularly used by youth include YouTube, Instagram, and Snapchat.***

Although youth are heavy users of a variety of social media platforms, they primarily use YouTube for entertainment and information, as well as Instagram and Snapchat for socialization and entertainment. To a lesser extent, youth use Facebook Messenger to stay in touch. Messenger and Snapchat are tools most used for personal interactions, compared with YouTube or Instagram which have broader audiences. In Calgary, most cited having two accounts on Instagram or Snapchat, one that is more privately shared with



close relationships and another that has a more widespread reach. Some like the use of Snapchat Discover channels, which allows for subscription to topics of interest, without compromising the personal nature of their network. Other social media are less used, but still relevant to some, including Twitter, GooglePlus, and Pinterest. Memes are used extensively by youth as a source of humour and entertainment.

Friends and, to a lesser extent family, are the most common types of followers on social media, though youth sometimes have multiple accounts to ensure one remains 'public' and widely available within their networks, with the other account remaining more private. In addition, based on topics of interest, youth sometimes follow celebrities, actors/actresses, athletes, and musical artists. Companies are also selected if they provide an opportunity to access promotional offers, or the ability to stay abreast of fashion trends. Only a few in the older group follow news media, and no one indicated they follow government departments or agencies. The number of followers seldom determine who youth follow on social media, although having a large number of followers boost some youth's self-esteem.

- ***Social media advertisements are a significant annoyance for youth and avoided whenever possible.***

Youth are cynical and critical of advertisements on social media and avoid or ignore them whenever possible. Targeted marketing based on online usage patterns are well recognized by youth, and a practice they resent. Use of ad blocker software is uncommon for smartphones, although free versions are used by a few. That said, youth concurred that all social media ads are not created equal, and they are generally more accepting of public awareness or education ads designed to inform, rather than sell. These ads, particularly if the creative attracts attention and the topic is relevant, are also memorable to youth, though they are unlikely to share them within their network. That is, they are passively engaged and not shared. Of note, some youth are more tolerant of ads on YouTube, as they are seen as financially supporting video bloggers.

- ***Google is the primary 'go to' online information source for youth, and repetition of information across links generally lends credibility on a topic.***

Search engines are the primary source of online information for youth, notably Google. Wikipedia was also commonly cited as being relied upon, though its editable nature raises questions regarding the information's reliability. Social media is seldom used as a source of information, or a means to ask questions. To assess the trustworthiness of information found on the internet, youth generally cross-reference between three and five online sources or rely on sites with credible domain names (e.g., '.gov' or '.org'). In terms of format, youth prefer ads that are visual with a catchy creative, and limited text. Short, impactful videos are also well liked.

- ***When looking for health information youth first conduct a general Google search, and then speak to trusted sources.***

Although youth professed not looking for health information often, Google was identified as their likely primary source of online information (with WebMD and Wikipedia also mentioned), which would then be counter-verified through discussions with a trusted person (parent, health professional, relative, friend,



school resource). Nonetheless, youth consistently identified the lack of reliable single source of health information specific to their age group, although they would trust information from Health Canada.

- ***Youth have wide-ranging health information needs, particularly related to mental health, illness identification, nutrition, sexual health / sexuality, drugs and skincare.***

Youth are most interested in health information that relate to the following topics:

- **Mental health:** identifying signs of depression and dealing with stress and anxiety. This information is of interest for youth personally and to help their friends. Information on the risk of developing mental illnesses was also of interest, as well as how to control emotions and manage eating disorders.
 - **Nutrition/Exercise:** youth identified topics related to weight control, identifying healthy foods, fad diets, water consumption, and health effects of sugar. In terms of exercise-related topics, workout ideas, and the amount of exercise required were of interest. Body image topics were also of interest, including weight loss and muscle gain. Boys were most interested in topics related to weight or muscle gain, while girls were more likely to focus on how to lose weight, or how to maintain a good figure. Further, younger males queried such things as what the average height or weight was for their age, and when they would likely have a growth spurt.
 - **Sexual health:** sexual behaviours, sexual development, STDs/STIs and contraception were commonly cited by youth as topics of interest, notably among the older age group. Topics related to consent, abortion, pregnancy and puberty also held some appeal. To a lesser extent, gender identification and LGBTQ-related questions were mentioned. Healthy relationships (romantic or friendship) was also identified.
 - **Drugs/Alcohol:** marijuana use, including potential side effects, was top-of-mind across locations. Prescription drug abuse, drug and alcohol addiction and cigarettes were also of interest.
 - **Common symptoms and illnesses:** looking up symptoms to identify illnesses or diseases was commonly cited as a topic of interest. Information on required amounts of sleep, appropriate screen time, and the effect of too much screen time were also cited, as well as information about vaccines, medications and first aid.
 - **Skincare:** Acne is a top-of-mind concern among youth.
- ***Youth consider it both appropriate and beneficial for government to develop health-related information targeted for youth and believe such information would fill an information void.***

Youth want to be able to access information in a self-directed fashion. That is, they want to be able to easily find information when they want it, in a format that is of interest and appealing to them. As such, developing a youth-specific website that provides trusted health-related information was desired across audiences and locations. To be of interest, such as website needs to be designed with youth in mind in terms of content, information format, tools, design, level of language, and interactive nature. Similarly, a youth-centric app would provide an easily accessible source of trusted health information when needed by



youth, on the device they most often rely upon (smartphone). Of note, these kinds of tools were seen as most successful if they are interactive and regularly updated with new content to keep youth's interest.

At the same time, a social media campaign was considered an important component to support a website or app, to highlight relevant information and inform youth of the existence of the digital tools. Not all social media platforms are considered appropriate, with YouTube being preferred. Instagram stories, more so than sponsored ads, were seen as effective means of informing youth, while a Snapchat Discover feed was considered the best approach for this particular platform. Facebook was also recommended, but more so to reach parents who serve as a common source of health-related information for youth.

To complement a digital campaign, youth recommend that any strategy be supported by ads or initiatives using traditional communications channels, including presentations at school assemblies, posters, brochures or theatre ads. Further, a toll-free information line was recommended by a few, whereby youth would have the ability to ask health questions and get an immediate response.



Direction

As Health Canada moves forward with the development of its communications strategy for youth, and contemplates its youth social media strategy, research findings suggest the following:

1. *Development of a youth-centric website for health-related information should be considered.*

Youth are especially interested in an official government website that is easily accessible and provides reliable information. Unlike online search results obtained from a general search engine, where youth are required to verify multiple search results as a form of fact-checking, information obtained from this particular website will be guaranteed as accurate and, therefore, deemed trustworthy. It is imperative that information be relevant to youth specifically and consequently be written in language that is at an appropriate level for this demographic. Further, to be effective, such a site would be visually attractive, with concise and factual information that is easy to understand. Consideration should also be given to building a site that is interactive, whereby youth have the opportunity to pose questions with personalized and timely responses.

2. *Development of a youth-specific health app should be considered.*

Given youth's high usage of their mobile device, and their desire to access a single source of trusted information on health matters, consideration should be given to develop a health-specific app that provides easy access to health-related information available from government. Such an app would provide pointed information on topics that are both of interest and particular relevance to them (e.g. top risks of marijuana for youth or how to identify and cope with anxiety / stress)

3. *Social media must play a critical role in any youth communications strategy.*

Social media will be an essential component of any youth communications strategy, primarily in generating awareness and promotion of a youth website and app. That said, it is crucial to select the appropriate social media platform. Youth most commonly indicated they would like to see the government post health related content on **YouTube**, and **Instagram (e.g. sharing stories of personal relevance)**. While **Snapchat** was primarily reported as the social media platform used most often, youth consider this social media platform more personal than the others and therefore would find pop-up ads from the government to be invasive, regardless of the topic. It would, however, be appropriate for health-related information from the government to be posted on the Snapchat Discover feed. This would allow youth to access information at their leisure, rather than being sent information directly in a personal channel. Of note, youth highlighted the need for content posted on social media to be linked back to its original information source (i.e. a youth-centric website). Although not frequently used by youth, Facebook was also commonly suggested, as it could be effective in reaching parents who would then share information with their children.



4. *Inclusion of traditional communication channels should also be considered as part of a youth campaign.*

Despite the popularity of social media and online technologies, youth are clearly still supportive of traditional communication channels. There is a notable opinion that providing health information at school, whether in the form of a class presentation or a school assembly, is optimal for reaching this audience group. Focus group participants were quick to point out that since they are already at school and are required to be in attendance for presentations and assemblies, this offered a good place to promote the information. Further, youth suggested that a hotline should be considered where they can call someone and speak to an individual directly.



Appendix A:

Recruitment Screener

Social Media Focus Groups with Youth Screener – FINAL

Parent Name: _____

Child's Name: _____

Tel. (H): _____ Alt Tel.: _____

Group 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

FOCUS GROUPS:

St. John's, NL (ENGLISH)			
Date:	Monday February 12, 2018	Location:	MQO Research
Time:	Group 1 – 5:00 pm – Youth Aged 13-15 Group 2 – 7:00pm – Youth Aged 16-17		55 Duckworth Street
Sudbury, ON (ENGLISH)			
Date:	Thursday February 15, 2018	Location:	Oraclepoll Research
Time:	Group 3 – 5:00 pm – Youth Aged 13-15 Group 4 – 7:00pm – Youth Aged 16-17		130 Elm Street
Vancouver, BC (ENGLISH)			
Date:	Tuesday February 20, 2018	Location:	Vancouver Focus
Time:	Group 5 – 5:00 pm – Youth Aged 13-15 Group 6 – 7:00pm – Youth Aged 16-17		1080 Howe Street Suite 503
Winnipeg, MB (ENGLISH)			
Date:	Tuesday February 20, 2018	Location:	NRG Research
Time:	Group 11 – 5:00 pm – Youth Aged 13-15 Group 12 – 7:00pm – Youth Aged 16-17		213 Notre Dame Avenue Suite 804
Calgary, AB (ENGLISH)			
Date:	Wednesday February 21, 2018	Location:	Qualitative Coordination
Time:	Group 9 – 5:00 pm – Youth Aged 13-15 Group 10 – 7:00pm – Youth Aged 16-17		120, 707 – 10 Avenue SW
Quebec City, QC (FRENCH)			
Date:	Thursday February 22, 2018	Location:	SOM Quebec
Time:	Group 7 – 5:00 pm – Youth Aged 13-15 Group 8 – 7:00pm – Youth Aged 16-17		3340, rue de La Perade 3 rd Floor

Specification Summary

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ten (10) English focus groups with youth, namely two in each of St. John's, Sudbury, Vancouver, Calgary, and Winnipeg • Two (2) French focus groups with youth in Quebec City • In each market, one group will include youth aged 13-15 • In each market, one group will include youth aged 16-17 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equal mix of gender and age in each group • Mix of cultural background (where possible), mix of family type, mix of household income, mix of technology ownership in each group • All selected individuals use social media on a regular basis • Recruit 12 participants per group • Incentive: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ \$85 per participant in St. John's, Sudbury, Calgary, Quebec City and Winnipeg ○ \$100 per participant in Vancouver |
|--|---|

Hello/Bonjour, my name is _____ and I am with Corporate Research Associates, a market research company. We are conducting a study on behalf of the Government of Canada, specifically for Health

Canada, and we are looking for people to take part in a small group discussion. We would like to speak with a parent or guardian of a child aged 13-17 regarding group discussions we are conducting with youth. Would that be you? **IF NO, ASK TO SPEAK WITH SOMEONE ELSE AND REPEAT INTRO**

Would you prefer that I continue in English or in French? Préférez-vous continuer en français ou en anglais? **[IF FRENCH, CONTINUE IN FRENCH OR ARRANGE CALL BACK WITH FRENCH INTERVIEWER: Nous vous rappellerons pour mener cette entrevue de recherche en français. Merci. Au revoir.**

The purpose of the study and the small group discussions is to hear young people's views on **social media**. Youth that are selected would take part in a small group discussion that includes up to 10 youth their age. The focus group discussion would last 2 hours and would be facilitated by a professional moderator. The focus group will be held on **[DATE]** at **[TIME]** at an office location in the city. Each participant will receive **[\$85/\$100]** after the focus group in appreciation for their time.

May I ask you a few quick questions to see if your child is the type of participant we are looking for to take part in this small group discussion? This will take about 6 or 7 minutes. Thank you.

The information you provide will remain completely anonymous and confidential and you are free to opt out at any time. Note that your child's and your personal information are collected, used, retained and disclosed by **[NAME OR RECRUITER]** and Corporate Research Associates in accordance with the applicable provincial privacy legislation or the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act (PIPEDA).

THANK & TERMINATE WHERE REQUIRED IN THE SCREENER: Unfortunately, we will not be able to include your child in this study. We already have enough participants who have a similar profile to theirs. Thank you for your time today.

1. To begin, are you or anyone in your household currently employed or have ever been employed in any of the following?

Marketing/Market Research	1
Public relations	2
Advertising.....	3
Media (TV, Radio, Newspaper).....	4
IT sector	5
Health Canada	6

IF YES TO ANY OF THE ABOVE, THANK AND TERMINATE

2. To confirm, are you the parent or guardian of a child age 13 to 17 years old living with you all or most of the time?

Yes..... **1 CONTINUE**
 No..... **2 THANK AND TERMINATE**

3. How old is your child living with you all or most of the time?

[RECORD]: _____

AGE QUOTAS:
GROUPS 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11: RECRUIT (4) age 13; (4) age 14; (4) age 15
GROUPS 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12: RECRUIT (6) age 16; (6) age 17
NOTE TO RECRUITER: RECRUIT ONLY 1 CHILD PER FAMILY/HOUSEHOLD

4. Is your child who would be participating in the focus group...?

- | | | |
|----------------------------|---|---------------------------|
| Male..... | 1 | } RECRUIT EVEN MIX |
| Female; or..... | 2 | |
| Other | 3 | |
| | | CONSIDER |
| VOLUNTEERED | | |
| Prefer not to answer | 4 | CONSIDER |

5. To make sure that we speak to people from various backgrounds, what is your child’s ethnic background? **[DO NOT READ]**

- | | | |
|---|----|---|
| Caucasian | 1 | } Recruit 3-5 non-Caucasians per group in Vancouver, Calgary, Winnipeg
Recruit for 1-5 non-Caucasians in St. John’s, Quebec City and Sudbury |
| Chinese..... | 2 | |
| South Asian (i.e. East Indian, Pakistani, etc)..... | 3 | |
| Black..... | 4 | |
| Filipino..... | 5 | |
| Latin American | 6 | |
| Southeast Asian (i.e. Vietnamese, etc) | 7 | |
| Arab..... | 8 | |
| West Asian (i.e. Iranian, Afghan, etc) | 9 | |
| Korean..... | 10 | |
| Japanese..... | 11 | |
| Aboriginal (First Nations, Métis, or Inuit) | 12 | |
| Other (please specify)..... | 13 | |
| I’d prefer not to say | 14 | |

6. Which of the following best describes your current household situation?

- | | | |
|--|---|------------------------------------|
| Both the child’s parents/guardians living together | 1 | } Recruit mix in each group |
| A single parent/guardian family | 2 | |
| A parent/guardian and his/her spouse who isn’t the child’s parent..... | 3 | |
| A multigenerational household | 4 | |
| Other (Specify: _____) | 5 | |

7. How many people, including yourself and your child, do you currently live all or most of the time?

[RECORD #]: _____ **[MIN 2 – self and child]**

8. Which of the following best describes your total household income before taxes in 2017?
Would you say...? **READ RESPONSES IN ORDER—CODE ONE ONLY**

Less than \$30,000	1	} Recruit mix in each group See quotas
At least \$30,000 but less than \$40,000	2	
At least \$40,000 but less than \$50,000	3	
At least \$50,000 but less than \$75,000	4	
At least \$75,000 but less than \$100,000	5	
\$100,000 or more	6	
VOLUNTEERED		
Refused	7	

SOCIO-ECONOMIC QUOTAS (ST.JOHN’S; SUDBURY; CALGARY; WINNIPEG):

RECRUIT HALF IN EACH GROUP WITH LOWER SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS:

- If 2 member households: HHI of UNDER \$30,000
- If 3-4 member households: HHI of UNDER \$40,000
- If 5+ member households: HHI of UNDER \$50,000

SOCIO-ECONOMIC QUOTAS (VANCOUVER, QUEBEC):

RECRUIT HALF IN EACH GROUP WITH LOWER SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS:

- If 2 member households: HHI of UNDER \$40,000
- If 3-4 member households: HHI of UNDER \$50,000
- If 5+ member households: HHI of UNDER \$75,000

Thank you for your responses. We would like to ask your child a few questions regarding his/her general use of the Internet and social media before inviting them to take part in the focus group discussion. Your child's participation in the focus group would be voluntary. She or he does not have to answer any question that feels uncomfortable. I'd also like to remind you that the focus group discussion is anonymous and that the information your child provides during the group discussion will not be linked with his or her name on any document.

9. Are you comfortable with your child taking part in this focus group if he or she qualifies?

Yes..... 1
No..... 2 **THANK AND TERMINATE**

[GROUPS 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11 ONLY] Before we speak to your child, if he/she is invited to participate in the discussion, we would need your written consent for their participation. You will need to bring a signed consent form when you drop off your child for the focus group. May we have your email address to send the consent form?

[RECORD EMAIL] _____

[Note to Recruiter: Once recorded, re-read back to confirm]

Finally, I would like to inform you that the discussion he/she would be taking part in will be recorded so that the focus group moderator can pay full attention during the discussion. What your child says during

the focus group is confidential. His/her last name will not be used during the focus group or included in any reports we write about the focus group.

10. May we speak with your child to ask a few additional questions about their social media use to see if they qualify to participate in our study?

Yes..... 1

No..... 2

**THANK AND TERMINATE OR
SCHEDULE CALL BACK**

Introduction for speaking to child:

Hello, my name is ____ and I am with Corporate Research Associates, a market research company. We are conducting a study on behalf of the Government of Canada, specifically for Health Canada, and we are looking for people age 13-17 to take part in a small group discussion regarding social media. We have just spoken to your **[parent/guardian]** who has given us permission to ask you a few questions to see if you qualify to participate. Each participant will receive \$85/\$100 after the focus group in appreciation for their time. May I ask you a few quick questions to see if you would qualify to participate?

To begin...

11. Which of the following social media do you use? **[READ LIST; CODE ALL THAT APPLY]**

Facebook..... 1

Twitter..... 2

Instagram..... 3

YouTube..... 4

Google+..... 5

LinkedIn..... 6

Pinterest..... 7

Tumblr..... 8

Snapchat..... 9

Other (Specify: _____) 10

Or none 11 **THANK & TERMINATE**

12. How often do you use any social media? Would you say**[READ]**?

[IF ASKED, SPECIFY THAT THIS IS ACROSS ALL SOCIAL MEDIA USED]

At least once per day 1

At least once per week 2

2-3 times per month 3 **THANK & TERMINATE**

At least once per month 4 **THANK & TERMINATE**

Less often..... 5 **THANK & TERMINATE**

13. Do you usually access social media on **[READ]**? **[CODE ALL THAT APPLY]**

A smartphone, tablet, or computer that only you use; or..... 1 **MIN 5 PER GROUP**

A smartphone, tablet or computer that is also used by others..... 2

VOLUNTEERED

None..... 7 **THANK & TERMINATE**

14. And finally, have you ever attended a small group discussion for which you received a sum of money?

Yes..... 1 **CONTINUE – Max of 5**
 No 2 **Go To Invitation**

15. What was the subject of the group? _____

16. When was the last time you attended a group discussion? _____

17. How many group discussions have you attended in the past 5 years? _____

**IF THEY HAVE BEEN TO A GROUP IN THE PAST 6 MONTHS - THANK & TERMINATE,
 IF THEY HAVE BEEN TO 3 OR MORE GROUPS IN THE PAST 5 YEARS - THANK & TERMINATE
 IF PARTICIPATED IN A PAST GROUP ON SOCIAL MEDIA – THANK & TERMINATE**

INVITATION

I would like to invite you to participate in a small group discussion, called a focus group. There would be 8 to 10 people your age together in a room and you would be sharing your opinions about using the Internet and social media in general. This will be a very casual discussion that would last about two hours. Each person taking part will receive **[\$85/\$100]** at the end of the focus group as a thank you for participating. Assuming we get your parent's permission, are you interested in taking part in this focus group?

Yes..... 1 **Continue**
 No 2 **Thank and Terminate**

Your participation in this focus group is completely voluntary. You will not have to answer questions that make you uncomfortable. There will be a professional focus group moderator that will guide the discussion.

The discussion will be video-taped to make sure that the moderator can pay full attention during the focus group, but still be able to look at the recordings later to remember what participants said. That said, the moderator and other participants would only know your first name, and not your last name or your address or phone number. Knowing this, are you comfortable with the discussion being video recorded?

Yes..... 1 **Continue**
 No 2 **Thank and Terminate**

The discussion will take place in a focus group room that is equipped with a one-way mirror for observation, allowing members from the research team to observe the discussion while it is happening. Some people may also be observing the discussion remotely [**SPECIFY ONLY IF ASKED:** via web streaming, through the use of a secure online portal]. This is very common with focus groups, and people who will be observing the discussion will only know your first name. Are you comfortable with the presence of observers?

Yes..... 1 **Continue**
 No 2 **Thank and Terminate**

You WILL be asked to read materials AND write out responses during the focus group. Is it possible for you to read and write in English (French) without assistance?

- Yes..... 1 **Continue**
 No 2 **Thank and Terminate**

You will be asked to share your opinions with other people your age during the focus group. How comfortable are doing that? Are you **[READ]** with this idea?

- Very comfortable 1 **Continue**
 Comfortable..... 2 **Continue**
 Not very comfortable 3 **Thank & Terminate**
 Not at all comfortable 4 **Thank & terminate**

It's very important that once you agree to participate in the focus group, that you make every effort to be there. Since the discussion will include only 10 people, having even one missing will make a difference. If you are no longer able to come to the focus group, please call ____ (collect) at ____ as soon as possible, or ask your parent to call us so we can try to find someone to replace you.

[GROUPS 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11 ONLY] We will be sending your [parent/guardian] a written consent form for your participation in the group. Your [parent/guardian] will need to have this form signed, and you will need to take it with you to the group. If you do not have this signed consent form with you, you will not be able to take part in the focus group and you will not receive the \$85/\$100 incentive.

Please also arrive at **[15 MINUTES BEFORE THE START TIME]** so we can start the focus group on time. If you are late, you will not be able to participant in the focus group and you will not receive the **[\$85/\$100]** incentive.

Attention Recruiters

1. Recruit 12 per group
2. CHECK QUOTAS
3. Ensure participant has a good speaking (overall responses) ability-If in doubt, DO NOT INVITE
4. Do not put names on profile sheet unless you have a firm commitment.
5. Repeat the date, time and location before hanging up.

Confirming – DAY BEFORE GROUP

1. Confirm in person with the participant the day prior to the group– do not leave a message
2. Confirm all key qualifying questions
3. Verify time location (ask if they are familiar)
4. Remind them to arrive 15 minutes before the start
5. **[GROUPS 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11 ONLY]** Remind them that they will need to have their signed parental consent form with them when they arrive to the facility
6. Ask them to bring reading glasses or anything else they need to read and/or take part in the discussion

Appendix B:

Moderator's Guide

HEALTH CANADA – YOUTH SOCIAL MEDIA RESEARCH
Moderator’s Guide – FINAL (February 13, 2018)

Research Goals (*Confidential – Not read to participants*)

- *Determine if, and where, youth search for health information online;*
- *Understand what type of health information is being sought by youth;*
- *Uncover what is considered by youth to be credible sources for information*
- *Learn patterns of social media use by youth; and*
- *Explore receptiveness of youth to receiving health information and social media as it relates to the Government.*

Introduction

10 minutes

- **Welcome:** Introduce self and function of a moderator (encourage participation/guide discussion)
- **Topic:** Discuss your use of the Internet and social media and health-related information
- **Sponsor:** Government of Canada
- **Length:** Discussion will last about two hours, without a break
- **Process:** All opinions are important; importance of respecting everyone’s different opinions; looking to understand agreement and disagreement; talk one at a time; interested in hearing from everyone
- **Logistic:** Audio/video taping; observation from Government of Canada (in-person or remote)
- **Confidentiality:** Participation is voluntary; comments are anonymous; I will not be asking you to share any personal identifiable information about you or others; no names in reports; Any information collected for this research will only be used for the purpose of the research
- **Participant Introduction:** first name; who lives in your home; and what the most recent movie was that you saw.

Online Sources of Information

45 minutes

I’d like to learn a little bit about your communication habits. To begin, I’d like to understand a little more about the communication tools you use. I’ve got an exercise sheet I’d like you to complete.

MODERATOR DISTRIBUTE EXERCISE SHEET TO EACH PARTICIPANT

[Exercise # 1] To begin, please check which of the communication tools listed you use regularly by placing an ‘x’ in the blue square. For each of those you checked, put an ‘x’ in the red circle if you share the tool with someone else. Finally, put a big circle around the tool you use most often.

[Exercise # 2] You’ll see a list of different social media. Please place an ‘x’ in the blue square for any that you use personally. I left some blank spaces at the end to include social media that are not listed. Then, circle the one you use most often. Don’t worry about the red circle for now.

Discuss, as a group, following the exercise:

There are lots of different ways you can communicate with people – in-person, verbally, electronically....
And there are different communication tools we can use to do so.

- **[FROM EXERCISE #1]** Of those listed in exercise #1, which ones do you use?
 - Which one do you use most often? Why? **REFER TO EXERCISE #1**

- **IF PHONE:** Do you typically bring your phone to bed with you at night?
- Would you consider yourselves to just be accessible online or do you actively do things online?
- Do you go online every day?
 - If so, how much time do you spend (probe for number of hours)?
 - What for? **PROBE FOR:** looking for information; asking questions
- When online, where do you generally turn to for information or to ask questions?
- If you are looking for information or have a question, would you look for the answer or ask the question on social media?
 - If so, on what platform (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat)?
 - Would you be more likely to ask your close friends or post the question for all of your followers to see?
 - Are you looking for a specific website / person (e.g. blogger)?
 - How do you find the information you are looking for?
- Which device do you use for social media?
- Which social media platform do you use? **REFER TO EXERCISE #2**
- How often do you use each social media platform?
- Who are you connected to (friends, family, celebrities, companies)?
 - Do you actively follow your connections on social media?
 - If so, which ones and why? **PROBE FOR:** celebrities; popular groups and pages; companies; government
 - Are you more likely to actively follow a connection or page / group that has a large number of followers?
 - How do you decide who you're going to follow?
- What do you do on social media, aside from just 'staying in touch'?
 - What kinds of things do you look for?
 - Do others have access to your phone / tablet?
 - Do your parents monitor what you do on your devices?
- Do you notice of ads on social media? Who are they usually from?
 - What types of ad stand out to you (videos, banners, interesting images)? Do you ever click on ads for more information?
 - Do you use an ad blocker?
- Have you come across "official" information from governments or companies on social media?
 - If so, about what? On what platforms have you seen it?
 - How do you feel about getting information that way?
 - If you have received information like this, did it influence you to take action offline?
- In general, what format do you prefer for information online: text, images, video, live-streaming, chats, blogs, memes, others? Why do you like these?

Health Information Online

60 minutes

I'd like to know what health information is important for you and others your age. I want you to come up with a list of questions you or others your age might have about health. It may not be something you've personally looked up, but maybe something you think others might...You will be working in smaller groups to do that. Each team will have a flip chart paper to write their responses. I will give you about 10 minutes to complete this exercise. Remember that all responses are good. It may not apply to you personally, but if you think it applies to others your age, jot it down. **[MODERATOR SPLIT THE**

GROUP IN 3-4 TEAMS – GIRLS AND BOYS SEPARATELY AND GIVE EACH A FLIP CHART PAPER AND MARKER.] Before we discuss, please circle which items you think are most common or important.

Let's have a look at the types of questions you came up with. **[AFTER THE EXERCISE, MODERATOR READS THE LISTS OUT LOUD AND LIST MAJOR THEMES ON FLIP CHART]**

Discuss, as a group:

- Do you actively seek health information online or on social media?
- Do you pay attention to health information if you happen to see it in your social media feeds?
- If you were looking for this information, where would you look? Why there?
- Who do you trust most to provide you with answers to those types of questions?
 - Do you trust official sources for health information (certified social media pages); sponsored ads; links shared by friends or followers?
 - Does the popularity of a source (number of followers) affect your level of trust?
 - Do you ever fact check information that you find online or on social media?
 - If information comes from something viral, are you more likely to trust it?
- Is this information you would look for online?
 - If so, where? How would you go about finding this information online?
 - If no, why not?
- Have you seen any of this information on social media?
 - If so, where? How was it presented?
- Have you shared this type of information with others on social media?
 - If so, what? To whom? Why did you share it?
 - If no, why not?
- There are some topics that can be embarrassing to look for, for any reasons. Where do you get your 'embarrassing health questions' answered?
- Do you want to hear from government on social media about these kinds of topics?
 - If no, who else would you trust online for this type of information?

[Exercise # 2] Go back to your exercise sheet and where there are social media listed, place a checkmark in the red circle if you'd like to see health information from government on those social media platforms.

Discuss, as a group:

- Which ones did you choose? Why those?
- Are there any that would be inappropriate for this type of information? Why?

[Exercise # 3] Before we finish, I'd like to get your recommendations for the government.

- How would you feel about government using social media to communicate with people your age?
- How would you feel about being able to reach out to government online or on social media? Would you find this helpful?

Now, imagine that you were the government and that you were asked to communicate all kinds of health-related information to teenagers online – information that is especially relevant to them. I'd like you to write down five things you would do to make sure that teenagers get the information you want

to give them. Then, circle which one action would be most effective. I'll give you a few minutes to do so.

[MODERATOR CHECKS WITH THE BACKROOM]

Discuss, as a group:

- As the government, what would be the one most important things you could do to ensure that teenagers get your information?
 - Of all those – which would be most effective? Why?
- Any final thoughts about today's topic?

Thanks & Closure:

That ends our discussion. Thank you for your time and comments. ***Direct them to the hostess to receive the incentive***

Appendix C:

Exercise Sheet



First Name: _____

#1 Communication

- A smartphone
- A tablet at home
- A tablet at school
- Home computer
- Computer at school

#2 Social Media

- | | | | | | | |
|--|--|--|---|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="radio"/> Instagram | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="radio"/> YouTube | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="radio"/> Snapchat | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="radio"/> Facebook | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="radio"/> Twitter | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="radio"/> Google Plus | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="radio"/> LinkedIn |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="radio"/> Tumblr | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="radio"/> Kik Messenger | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="radio"/> Pinterest | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="radio"/> WhatsApp | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="radio"/> Other:
_____ | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="radio"/> Other:
_____ | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="radio"/> Other:
_____ |

#3 If I were the government, I would...

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____
