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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

Prepared by:
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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.

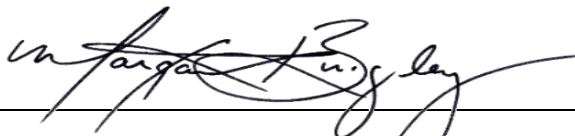
The following provides an overview of the research methodology used: Youth were divided into two segments, those aged 13 to 15 years old and those aged 16 to 17 years old. In each of St. John's, Sudbury, Vancouver, Winnipeg, Calgary, and Quebec City, one focus group was conducted with each audience segment.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

