



Clinical Methods

Facebook targeted advertisement for research recruitment: A primer for nurse researchers



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ABSTRACT

Recruiting participants for research studies can be challenging and costly. Innovative recruitment methods are needed. Facebook targeted advertisement offers a low-cost alternative to traditional methods that has been successfully used in research study recruitment. This primer offers nurse researchers a method utilizing social media as a recruitment tool and details Facebook targeted advertisement for research recruitment.

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1. Introduction

Recruiting participants for research studies can be challenging and innovative recruitment methods are essential. Facebook targeted advertisement offers a low cost alternative to traditional methods such as newspaper advertisement and recruitment flyer placement in high-traffic areas. These methods can be costly from both a financial and personnel perspective.

Facebook targeted advertisement offers the researcher the ability to market a recruitment campaign of advertisements via an online social media platform in which the researcher can target recruitment ads by age, location, and keywords. This strategy of targeted advertisement has the potential to engage different populations of key interest to researchers while maintaining a sense of privacy for the individual. This paper demonstrates how Facebook targeted advertisement can be used as a recruitment tool for research studies. Facebook targeted advertisement has been supported as an effective, low-cost recruitment method (Arcia, 2014; Carter-Harris, Bartlett Ellis, Warrick, & Rawl, 2016; Carter-Harris, Slaven, Monahan, & Rawl, 2016; Frandsen, Walters, & Ferguson, 2014) and has practical implications for nurse researchers. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to introduce Facebook targeted advertisement to nurse researchers in search of an innovative method to reach their study population. A brief overview is discussed followed by a data source using the author's recent psychometric study and a methodological discussion about Facebook targeted advertisement outlining how this recruitment method can be employed by the researcher.

Facebook has previously been established as a successful recruitment tool in health-related research including recruitment into descriptive studies (Arcia, 2014; Carter-Harris, Bartlett Ellis, et al., 2016; Carter-Harris, Slaven, et al., 2016; Frandsen et al., 2014; Ramo & Prochaska, 2012; Ramo, Hall, & Prochaska, 2010) as well as randomized controlled trials (Brief et al., 2013; Rogers, Griffin, Wykle, & Fitzpatrick, 2009). As of November 2015, Facebook is the leading social network worldwide with more than one billion active registered users far surpassing Instagram and Twitter (Facebook Reports First Quarter, 2015). Because of Facebook's popularity, it represents a promising channel to reach potential research study participants.

2. Data source

Facebook targeted advertisement was employed in a recent study to test the psychometric properties of four newly developed scales to measure lung cancer screening health beliefs (Carter-Harris, Bartlett Ellis, et al., 2016; Carter-Harris, Slaven, et al., 2016). The overall aim of the psychometric study was to establish construct validity and internal consistency reliability of the four scales. The study involved 497 individuals who met the criteria for lung cancer screening per the United States Preventive Services Task Force guidelines: aged 55 to 77 years, current or former smoker who had quit within the past 15 years, and a 30-pack year tobacco smoking history. In addition, individuals diagnosed with lung cancer were excluded from the study. Facebook targeted advertisement was used as the primary recruitment method and will be discussed in detail from a practical standpoint as method. The results detailing the feasibility of the recruitment methods used are published elsewhere (Carter-Harris, Bartlett Ellis, et al., 2016; Carter-Harris, Slaven, et al., 2016).

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3. Method

The following will first introduce common key terminology specific to Facebook followed by an outline of specific steps to employ Facebook targeted advertisement as a research study recruitment tool.

A *homepage* is the main webpage that an individual sees each time they log into their personal Facebook account. The homepage contains groups an individual has joined, newsfeed preferences, games and applications, portal to access private messages, search box, settings, the newsfeed specific to the individual user, as well as advertisements in the right-hand column of the desktop. A *newsfeed* is a list of stories that are constantly updating and displayed in the middle of the Facebook user's homepage. The newsfeed constantly updates Facebook friend status updates, photos, videos, links, application activity, and likes from people, pages and groups followed by the Facebook user. Facebook can be accessed via a computer desktop application or via a mobile application using a tablet or smartphone device. Facebook uses different types of advertisements specific to the platform the user is accessing (i.e., desktop versus mobile). For desktop Facebook users, advertisements can appear either in the right hand column next to the newsfeed on the Facebook user's homepage or in the middle of the constantly updating newsfeed in the middle of the Facebook user's homepage. For mobile Facebook users, advertisements only appear in the middle of the Facebook user's newsfeed.

Important key terminology related to Facebook targeted advertisement includes: (1) *impression*; (2) *click to website*; and (3) *audience network*. An *impression* refers to a 'view' and represents the first time the ad is served to someone in either their desktop newsfeed, mobile newsfeed, or as a right hand column ad (*Glossary of Ad Terms, n.d.*). A *click to website* refers to a unique Facebook user clicking the weblink embedded in the Facebook ad that is redirected to the website linked to the advertisement (*Glossary of Ad Terms, n.d.*). An *audience network* refers to a collection of mobile applications that Facebook partners with to offer the advertiser (i.e., researcher) the ability to extend the reach of their advertisement into multiple mobile applications outside of Facebook (*Glossary of Ad Terms, n.d.*).

Steps to create a Facebook Targeted Advertisement to recruit research participants:

- (1) **Create Ad.** Using the drop-down arrow in the upper right hand corner of the page next to the lock icon, select *Create Ads* from the Facebook homepage.
- (2) **Choose Your Campaign Objective.** For the purpose of research study recruitment, *Send People to your Website* and *Promote your Page* are most successful.
 - (a) *Send People to your Website* will link people to an external website. If performing a survey study, this campaign objective works well because it allows the researcher to link the external survey platform website to the advertisement campaign sending potential participants directly to the online survey. Using the survey platform, a screening survey can be built and embedded prior to the study survey to screen for inclusion and exclusion criteria in order to capture appropriate individuals for the study. To decrease the possibility of erroneous surveys, it is important to design the Facebook targeted advertisement to create interest in the topic but not reveal too much about the population the study is trying to recruit. For example, in the psychometric study about lung cancer screening health beliefs, the Facebook targeted advertisement was designed as a 'lung health' study without revealing the target age or smoking status. When potential participants were redirected to the survey website, participants were not aware of the 55 to 77 year age or smoking history inclusion criteria of interest decreasing the potential for fraudulent participants. If a screening question was answered incorrectly, a message was presented informing the individual they did not qualify for the study and thanking

them for their time. Survey settings did not allow for re-entry to the screening survey from the same IP address.

- (b) The campaign objective of *Promote your Page* allows the researcher to promote a Facebook group page to which the researcher wishes individuals to be redirected. Once redirected to the Facebook group page, the researcher can provide additional information about the study for which they are recruiting.

Please note that both *Send People to your Website* and *Promote your Page* require the researcher to indicate a name for the ad campaign at this point of ad creation. The name can be anything chosen by the researcher creating the ad campaign.

- (3) **Set Audience.** This is where the ability to 'target' the Facebook advertisement occurs by allowing the researcher to set key information about Facebook users the researcher would like to see the ad. For example, the researcher can target by location with the choice of: (1) everyone in this location; (2) people who live in this location; (3) people recently in this location; or (4) people traveling in this location. The ad can then be narrowed to target by country, state or province, city, and/or zip code. The ad can also be set to target by age, gender, or language. In addition, Facebook settings allow detailed targeting based upon other demographic variables such as relationship status, education level, ethnic affinity, work industry, financial income, home ownership, home type, household composition, parents, political affiliation, and key life events. In addition, keywords to target by interests, behaviors, and Facebook page connections that may be of interest to the target population can be employed. As an example from the author's psychometric study with lung cancer screening-eligible current and former smokers, the ad used detailed targeting by interest using keywords "smoking", "tobacco", "tobacco smoking", "cigarettes", "cigarette smoking" and "smoking cessation" to increase the chances of reaching the target population via Facebook targeted advertisement.
- (4) **Set Placement.** *Placement* allows the researcher to choose where the ad will be shown on Facebook. Current choices include: (1) mobile newsfeed; (2) Instagram; (3) audience network; (4) desktop newsfeed; and (5) desktop right-hand column. All five choices are checked as the default. Uncheck any that do not fit your needs. Please note that Instagram is an online, mobile photo and video-sharing social networking service launched in 2010 and acquired by Facebook in 2012 (*Stern, 2012*). The ad can further target type of mobile device (i.e., Android devices only versus iOS devices only).
- (5) **Set Your Budget and Schedule.** Facebook targeted advertisement offers a *daily limit* or a *lifetime limit* budget. With *daily budget*, the amount entered is the maximum spent each day of the ad campaign; whereas with *lifetime budget*, the amount entered is the maximum spent over the course of the advertisement campaign in total. The *ad schedule* is then set to either run continuously starting from the day the ad parameters are set or specific start and end date parameters can be chosen. Additional parameters to be set at this point include: (1) optimization for ad delivery; (2) bid amount; (3) when you get charged; and (4) ad scheduling.
 - (a) *Optimization for ad delivery* offers three settings:
 - (i) *link clicks to your website* is recommended by Facebook and the default choice;
 - (ii) *impression* delivers ads to people as many times as possible (i.e., one person may see the ad multiple times); and
 - (iii) *daily unique reach* delivers ads to people once per day (i.e., one person sees the ad once daily).
 - (b) *Bid amount* offers both automatic and manual bids. Because there are multiple advertisers on Facebook trying to reach

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