



A social media approach to inform youth about breast cancer and smoking: An exploratory descriptive study

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Summary Tobacco exposure during periods of breast development has been shown to increase risk of premenopausal breast cancer. An urgent need exists, therefore, to raise awareness among adolescent girls about this new evidence, and for adolescent girls and boys who smoke to understand how their smoking puts their female peers at risk for breast cancer. The purpose of this study was to develop two youth-informed, gender specific YouTube-style videos designed to raise awareness among adolescent girls and boys about tobacco exposure as a modifiable risk factor for breast cancer and to assess youths' responses to the videos and their potential for inclusion on social media platforms. Both videos consisted of a combination of moving text, novel images, animations, and youth-friendly music.

A brief questionnaire was used to gather feedback on two videos using a convenience sample of 135 youth in British Columbia, Canada. The overall positive responses by girls and boys to their respective videos and their reported interest in sharing these videos via social networking suggests that this approach holds potential for other types of health promotion messaging targeting youth. The videos offer a promising messaging strategy for raising awareness about tobacco exposure as a modifiable risk factor for breast cancer. Tailored, gender-specific messages for use on social media hold the potential for cost-effective, health promotion and cancer prevention initiatives targeting youth.

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Introduction

Evidence from recent systematic reviews and independent studies demonstrates a causal link between cigarette smoking at a young age and an increased risk for premenopausal breast cancer (Bjerkaas et al., 2013; Collishaw et al., 2009; Dossus et al., 2014; Gantz & Johnson, 2014; Johnson, 2005, 2012). In addition to active smoking, long-term exposure to second-hand smoke is also associated with an increased risk for breast cancer among never smokers (Collishaw et al., 2009; Reynolds et al., 2009). Physiological mechanisms that have been proposed to explain the link between exposure and increased breast cancer risk are based on research demonstrating that growing and differentiating mammary tissue, as occurs during puberty and pregnancy, is especially vulnerable to the carcinogens found in cigarette smoke (Innes & Byers, 2001; Lash & Aschengrau, 1999). There is, therefore, an urgent need for adolescent girls to know about this new evidence, and for adolescent girls and boys who smoke to understand how their smoking puts their female peers at risk for breast cancer. Although various tobacco control measures have contributed to reductions in tobacco use (Frieden, 2014), smoking among adolescents and exposure to second-hand smoke remains too common in Canada and other countries. In 2011, 11.8% of Canadian youth ages 15–19 were current smokers, and the highest rates of second-hand smoke exposure occurred among youth ages 12–19 (Canadian Partnership Against Cancer, 2012; Reid, Hammond, Burkhalter, Rynard, & Ahmed, 2013). Rates are similar in the United States, with 14% of high school students reporting current smoking, and in Australia where rates range from 4.1% (12–15 years old) to 12.9% (16–17 years old) (Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, 2013; White & Bariola, 2012). Some have argued that traditional, school-based print and mass media campaigns have become increasingly less effective in supporting smoking cessation efforts among adolescents, largely due to lack of tailored content and their inability to connect with students on a social level (Backinger, Fagan, Matthews, & Grana, 2003). As a result, new and innovative approaches to smoking prevention and cessation are needed. The aim of this study was twofold: (a) to develop youth-informed, gender-specific YouTube-style videos designed to raise awareness about tobacco exposure as a modifiable risk factor for breast cancer, and (b) to assess youths' responses to the videos and their potential for inclusion on social media platforms. The ultimate goal of the videos was to engage adolescent girls and boys at an early age in protecting themselves and others from tobacco exposure and thereby contribute to decreasing the incidence of breast cancer. For the purposes of this study, adolescents were defined as those individuals currently in a transitional stage of physical and psychological development generally occurring between the periods of puberty and legal adulthood (National Library of Medicine, 2008). Although family members and other adults who smoke may also present a second-hand smoke exposure risk to girls, this study focused solely on messaging youth as a first step to addressing this modifiable risk factor for breast cancer.

Literature review

Recent advances in information technology and access have heralded a new era in the dissemination of health information. In the past, radio, television, and print media (including posters, pamphlets, and magazines) were dominant techniques used in dissemination of preventive health messaging campaigns. While these outlets continue to play a role, they are now thought to be less effective in reaching the public as more and more health information is accessed online (Atkinson, Saperstein, & Pleis, 2009; Backinger et al., 2003; Fox, 2011; Koch-Wesser, Bradshaw, Gualtieri, & Gallagher, 2010; Pechman & Reibling, 2000). Indeed, the growth of the internet as a significant source for health information has been established, and has been achieved in large part by the advent of social media. Because social media is a "communication channel" that delivers messages, it provides easy and cost-effective opportunities for users to generate, share, receive and comment on digital content, in the form of words, pictures, videos, and/or audio (Moorhead et al., 2013). Engagement with online content has now become a participatory activity and anyone with access to the internet can now obtain information almost instantaneously and interact with online discussions and content (Chou, Prestin, Lyons, & Wen, 2013). This interaction mimics interpersonal communication and allows the Internet to act as a medium providing two-way audible and visual feedback that is inherent in the persuasive process (Cassell, Jackson, & Cheuvront, 1998). Moreover, although people of all demographics are currently adopting these technologies to varying degrees, social media is desirable for health promotion in that content can be customized and tailored to the needs and preferences of different audiences (e.g., the distribution of tailored content to matched recipients' socio-demographic profiles via advertising services like Google or Facebook ads) (Korda & Itani, 2013). Message development, therefore, should account for user characteristics and take into account target audience preferences for specific types of content and preferred technologies or tools (Korda & Itani, 2013). As youth are some of the most avid users of social media, the development and availability of tailored content for this age group provides an opportunity to extend health promotion efforts. Needed now is empirical evidence regarding the impact and usefulness of social media and the evaluation of internet-based interventions directed at disease prevention and health behaviour change to guide future initiatives.

Statistics Canada estimates that approximately 7 in 10 Canadians aged 16 and older currently search the internet for health information (Statistics Canada, 2009), with similar rates reported in the United States and the United Kingdom (Dutton & Blank, 2011; Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2013). This trend has been particularly significant among adolescents. Like many of their counterparts around the world, Canadian teens spend a significant amount of time online, with the majority of their time spent visiting websites like YouTube (79%) and other social networking sites (69%) (Ipsos Reid, 2012). Previous research has found that young people regularly identify the internet as an important resource for health information (Buhi, Daley, Fuhrmann, & Smith, 2009; Fergie, Hunt, & Hilton,

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