



Research brief

Facebook or Twitter?: Effective recruitment strategies for family caregivers

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ABSTRACT

This brief details recent recruitment insights from a large all-online study of family caregivers that aimed to develop a measure to assess how family caregivers manage daily stresses. Online recruitment strategies included the use of Twitter and Facebook. Overall, 800 individuals responded to the recruitment strategy; 230 completed all study procedures. The most effective online recruitment strategy for targeting family caregivers was Facebook, yielding 86% of the sample. Future researchers may find the use of social media recruitment methods appealing because they are inexpensive, simple, and efficient methods for obtaining National samples.

An estimated 43.5 million adults are unpaid caregivers for family members at any given time in the world (National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP, 2015). Family members are informal caregivers who assist one or more persons with their activities of daily living (e.g. taking medications, transporting to doctors office) (National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP, 2015). Family caregivers are not only responsible for managing the care recipient's health but their own health as well. This added responsibility may elicit increased stress in the family caregivers (Empeño, Raming, Irwin, Nelesen, & Lloyd, 2011; Rahnema, Shahdadi, Bagheri, Moghadam, & Absalan, 2017), who are then more prone to mental illness (e.g. anxiety and depressive symptoms) (Marks, Lambert, & Choi, 2002; Pinquart & Sorensen, 2003), physical disability (e.g. heart disease) (Kim, Carver, Shaffer, Gansler, & Cannady, 2015; King, Oka, & Young, 1994; Shaw et al., 1999), decreased functional status (Center on Aging Society, 2005; Grunfeld, 2004), and poorer health maintenance (National Alliance for Caregiving & Evercare, 2006; Tanner Sanford, Johnson, & Townsend-Rocchiccioli, 2005). To cope with the stresses of caregiving, caregivers often rely on support groups via social media (Chou, Hunt, Beckjord, Moser, & Hease, 2009; Hamm, Chisholm, & Shulhun, 2013; Risson & Saini, 2016) and in particular, Twitter and/or Facebook (Gage-Bouchard, LaValley, Mollica, & Beaupin, 2017; Hamm et al., 2013; Hansen, 2017).

1. Purpose

The parent study from which this brief was derived aimed to test a psychometric measure of stress reduction strategies for family caregivers. The purpose of this brief is to report on findings using social

media to recruit participants for the parent study. The two online social media recruitment strategies were Twitter and Facebook. The target sample was between 200 and 400 caregivers. A large target sample range was selected because the main aim of the parent study was to psychometrically test a scale of 40-items. Based on well-established criteria, it is recommended that 5 to 10 participants be recruited per survey item (Hair Jr., Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998). Therefore, a sample of 400 participants would have been ideal to psychometrically test the instrument and 200 participants would have been acceptable to conduct factor analysis.

2. Methods

2.1. Sample

Eligibility for the parent study included: being in the caregiver role for at least six months, having the ability to read and write in English, and providing some sort of care to the care recipient at least three times per week. Parent caregivers of children and formal (i.e. paid) caregivers were excluded.

2.2. Procedures

Before any study procedures began, approval from the University Institutional Review Board (IRB) was obtained. All study procedures were completed online (i.e. eligibility screening, consent form, and data collection). The researchers used Qualtrics to collect data and relied on self-report of the eligibility criteria and all data provided. The researchers protected the integrity of the data by preventing individuals

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from “ballot box stuffing,” meaning Qualtrics would log IP addresses and flag similar data that appeared multiple times.

Before either social media profile was created, the study team created an electronic recruitment flyer with relevant study information including the purpose of the study, eligibility criteria, expected time commitment, and contact information. The study flyer appeared in every social media post on Twitter and Facebook. Potential participants clicked on a link to the Qualtrics survey from a social media website (e.g. Facebook, Twitter) and were then prompted to answer eligibility questions. If the potential participant met the eligibility criteria, they were then automatically forwarded to the online consent form. In order to obtain consent using an online format, written signature was waived per IRB approval and only two options remained for the potential participant to select from: 1) start survey, and 2) end survey. If the individual selected “start survey,” meaning they consented to take part in the study, they were electronically forwarded to the survey procedures consisting of 134 items including one open-ended response item. If the individual selected “end survey,” meaning they did not consent to be in the study, they were electronically forwarded out of Qualtrics and thanked for their time. As an incentive, study participants who completed all study procedures had the option of providing their email address for a raffle to win a \$25 gift card.

2.2.1. Twitter

A Twitter profile was created by the researchers using a profile picture of the Principal Investigator. Other relevant information appearing on the Twitter profile included the purpose of the study as well as web link to the Qualtrics survey. After the Twitter profile was established, the researchers began to “follow” (defined as subscribing to their profile updates) different profiles that listed an interest in caregiving. A variety of profiles were followed ranging from private bloggers to national caregiving organizations. Once the study Twitter profile began to acquire followers the researchers then began tweeting out various messages within the 140-character limit of a tweet. A sample tweet that may be sent out to the study's profile followers would follow this pattern: action, study name, action, hashtag, and study link. For example, “Help @CaregiverStudy. retweet/share with #caregivers to participate at qualtrics.com”. The researchers always included a hashtag in their tweets. The purpose of including a hashtag is to increase visibility by grouping similar topics together. For example, if a user searches within Twitter #caregiver, the study team's Twitter profile would be displayed.

2.2.2. Facebook

Unlike Twitter, the recruitment strategy used for Facebook was three fold: 1) the researchers posted on their own page for their subscribers to see, 2) the researchers posted on private Facebook support groups, 3) the researchers “boosted” or paid for their recruitment ad to be viewed by potentially eligible participants. First a Facebook profile page was created that included a logo of the study institution, purpose, contact information, and web link to the survey, respectively. The researchers posted “statuses” or updates about the study (e.g. number of participants to date) on the Facebook profile page and remind followers of the page to “like” and “share” the study information or recruitment flyer with their Facebook “friends” (i.e. subscribers).

The second recruitment strategy used by the researchers was posting the recruitment flyer on caregiver support groups within Facebook. The key words used to find the Facebook support groups were: care, carer, caregiver, and caretaker. The private Facebook caregiver support groups contacted (i.e. messaged via Facebook) were based out of any English-speaking country and aimed to serve caregivers of adults. The researchers contacted a variety of Facebook caregiver support groups including but not limited to: cancer, Parkinson's disease, bipolar disorder, dementia disorders, stroke, and multiple sclerosis. A member of the research team would always send a private Facebook message to an administrator of the Facebook group to ask permission to post the

recruitment flyer within the private support group Facebook page.

The final Facebook recruitment strategy used by the researchers was “boosting” or paying for the recruitment flyer to be seen by potentially eligible participants home page. The researchers were able to define within Facebook the target demographic (e.g. over 18 years old, caregiver). Potentially eligible individuals were then served the recruitment flyer as an advertisement on their home page. The researchers budgeted \$35 to complete a one-week trial of the paid advertisement. To be eligible to be served the advertisement on one's home page, the individual had to be between the ages of 18 and 65 and had to have an interest listed on their Facebook profile related to caregiving.

3. Data analysis

Data analytic tools within Facebook and Twitter only provide frequencies. Therefore, all data reported and analyzed are frequencies of the respective phenomena. Data analysis for Twitter was conducted by using Twitter Analytics, a free software embedded in Twitter that allows users to analyze monthly activity for a single Twitter profile. Twitter Analytics reports frequencies of the following: tweets by your profile, profile visits, Followers, and tweet impressions. Tweets are defined as the frequency of times your profile sends out a message to your subscribers (i.e. Followers). Profile visits are defined as the frequency of user clicks on the Twitter study profile. Followers are defined as the frequency of subscribers to the study Twitter profile. Tweet impressions are defined as the frequency of profiles shares or reactions to your tweet (e.g. retweet, favorite).

Data analysis for Facebook was conducted using Facebook Insights, a free tool embedded in Facebook that allows users to view advertisement metrics for an individual Facebook page. Like Twitter Analytics, Facebook Insights also reports frequencies. Unlike Twitter, Facebook only reports one metric: engagement. Engagement is comprised of the frequency of clicks and reactions to each post. Clicks refer to the frequency of other profiles clicking on either your profile or a web link you posted (i.e. study link). Reactions refer to the frequency of “likes” or “favorites” on a post by your profile. The frequency of engagement can be calculated for all Facebook profile posts including posts in private Facebook support groups and “boosted” or paid advertisements.

4. Results

By the completion of the study, 800 individuals from both Twitter and Facebook indicated an interest in the study by clicking on the study web link that forwarded users to the Qualtrics survey. Of the 800 individuals, 385 individuals met all eligibility criteria and signed the consent form. Of the 385 individuals who met all eligibility criteria, 230 individuals proceeded to complete all study procedures (i.e. entire survey). The researchers experienced 60% (385 signed consent/230 complete data) retention, which is average for online survey-based research (Hochheimer et al., 2016).

4.1. Twitter

Overall, the Twitter study profile accrued 292 profile followers and the researchers tweeted 252 times. The Twitter study profile amassed 672 profile visits and yielded 28,806 Tweet impressions. The average tweet impressions per month were 2400 impressions. For the purposes of overall study recruitment, the use of Twitter alone yielded 10 participants who completed all study procedures (i.e. consented, completed all questionnaires).

4.2. Facebook

The Facebook study profile had a range of monthly engagement however, the average amount of engagement per month of active recruitment was 1026. The most reliable method of engaging potential

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