

Feel-good social media posts more likely to encourage healthy behaviour

Wednesday 13 June, 2018

Positive health-related social media posts that provide new information are more likely to be shared by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to encourage healthy behaviours, a study has found.

In a paper published recently in the journal *Health Promotion International*, a research team from Menzies School of Health Research (Menzies) found the Indigenous study participants used Facebook as a tool to extend their support networks and share information.

“Our findings show that contrary to popular belief, Facebook can be a supportive online environment which can result in offline support,” said study chief investigator, Dr Marita Hefler.

“We found Facebook posts generated offline interactions even though there was no visible connection online. Our findings show you can’t judge the reach of a Facebook post based on likes or comments.”

“These findings indicate approaches which build on the social capital generated by supportive online environments may be more likely to generate greater traction than confronting and emotion-inducing approaches used in mass media campaigns for some health topics such as smoking.”

Dr Hefler said Facebook is the most popular social media platform among Indigenous Australians, with many using social media multiple times a day. The most popular type of content was mental health, followed by food posts about healthy eating habits to manage conditions like type 2 diabetes.

“Most people have personal experience of mental health issues and were keen to use Facebook as a way to support others and we found food photos were less about bragging about a delicious dinner and more about sharing inspirational healthy eating ideas to manage chronic illness.”

The paper, titled ‘Social media and health information sharing among Australian Indigenous people’, was the first research paper from a National Health and Medical Research Council funded project.

The overall aim of the project is to consider how social media can be effectively used in tobacco control among Indigenous people in the Northern Territory.

The paper is available [here](#).

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Menzies School of Health Research

Menzies School of Health Research is one of Australia's leading medical research institutes dedicated to improving Indigenous, global and tropical health. Menzies has a history of over 30 years of scientific discovery and public health achievement. Menzies works at the frontline, joining with partners across the Asia-Pacific as well as Indigenous communities across northern and central Australia. Menzies collaborates to create new knowledge, grow local skills and find enduring solutions to problems that matter.