Social Media Use in the Dietetics Profession

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Introduction

The use of social media platforms has been on the rise among businesses and professionals for many years now. The field of healthcare has not been immune to the societal shifts driving the increases in professionals on social media, particularly because it has become an expanding outlet for the marketing and promotion of healthcare.

However, even though there are more registered dietitian nutritionists (RDNs) on social media than in the recent past, RDNs continue to express concern over utilizing social media as a professional tool.

Procedures

- Study was approved by the Commission on Dietetic Registration (CDR) and Institutional Review Board of Concordia College
- The CDR supplied a list of 5,000 randomly selected email addresses of RDNs in the United States
- An invitation to participate was sent via email with an anonymous link that redirected participants to a web-based questionnaire the researcher constructed using Qualtrics
- Participation was voluntary and responses remained confidential
- Data analyses included descriptive statistics, correlations, and one-way analyses of variance

Results

- Of the 746 initial responses, 77 were discounted for incompleteness, leaving a final sample of 669 (13.3% response rate)
- Majority of RDNs believe social media has a place in the promotion and marketing of nutrition information
- Majority of RDNs feel an obligation to combat nutrition misinformation

Significant Findings

- Majority of RDNs like and use social media
- Acceptance of social media negatively correlated to years practicing
- Clinical RDNs least likely to see value in social media
- Top three facilitators of social media use amongst RDNs: connecting with professionals, providing accurate nutrition information, and promotion of self or the field of dietetics
- Top three barriers to social media usage amongst RDNs: lack of knowledge, fear of saying the wrong thing, and lack of confidence
- Majority of RDNs believe social media has a place in the promotion and marketing of nutrition information
- Over 75% of participants did not consider RDNs the primary source of nutrition information online
- Fewer than half of RDNs indicated having access to resources to navigate social media
- The majority of RDNs feel an obligation to combat nutrition misinformation

Conclusions

Both general and professional use of social media is facilitated by RDNs. While clinical RDNs were not as likely to see value in social media as a professional tool, RDNs in other practice areas were interested in the promotion and marketing possibilities. This indicates social media products or services would better suit RDNs in non-clinical settings.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to the Commission on Dietetic Registration for their information and potential.

References


Goals

1. Understand if, how, and why dietitians are utilizing social media professionally.
2. Analyze RDNs’ experiences on social media in their career.
3. Collect quantitative data representative of the attitudes and beliefs held by RDNs about social media.
4. Determine type of product or service RDNs feel they would benefit from having.

Objectives

1. Assess current use of social media among RDNs.
2. Uncover specific needs and concerns about use of social media among RDNs.
3. Record priorities RDNs hold regarding promotion, marketing, professionalism, and misinformation.
4. Evaluate social media use amongst RDNs.

Figure 1

Facilitators of social media use amongst RDNs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facilitators</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Connecting w/ clients</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecting w/ professionals</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotion of self or field of dietetics</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing accurate nutrition info</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2

Barriers of social media use amongst RDNs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barriers</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do not know how</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Should only use in professional lives</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of knowledge</td>
<td>214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of saying the wrong thing</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of confidence</td>
<td>183</td>
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<tr>
<td>Legal/Ethical</td>
<td>26</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cost</td>
<td>22</td>
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<tr>
<td>Privacy</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employer</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unnecessary or no desire</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Goals for Using Social Media

- Promotion of Dietetics
- Addressing Misinformation
- Creating professional social media presence