MRC-NIHR Trials Methodology Research Partnership: Webinar recording

**Using Social Media in Clinical Trials**

*Presented, on behalf of the UK Trials Managers’ Network, by Arabella Baker (University of Nottingham), Rachel Plachcinski (Independent PPI Consultant) and Thomas Oliver (Southampton Clinical Trials Unit)*

**17 April 2023**

The slides are available below.

For any queries, please contact [uktmn@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:uktmn@nottingham.ac.uk)

[https://youtu.be/Z1pBb0CQph4](https://youtu.be/Z1pBb0CQph4)
Social media as a recruitment tool in a dermatology clinical trial

Arabella Baker
Centre of Evidence Based Dermatology
University of Nottingham
Overview of the Eczema Monitoring Online (EMO) trial

**Aim:**

- To evaluate the effect of weekly patient-reported symptom monitoring on trial outcomes

**Trial configuration:**

- Online, parallel group, randomised controlled trial of eight weeks duration
- Methodological trial, comparing weekly patient-reported questionnaires (intervention) with questionnaires sent only at week 8 (control)

**Target population:**

- People with self-reported eczema diagnosis by a healthcare professional
EMO is a fully digital trial

All trial processes occurred online:

- Recruitment
- Eligibility screening
- Consenting
- Randomisation
- Data collection
- Follow-up
Recruitment strategy

• Need for an internet-based recruitment mode
• Social media can reach potential participants on the web

Important characteristics of our recruitment strategy:
• Comprehensive
• Simultaneous use of multiple platforms
• Broad reach
• Targeting specific audiences
• Increased diversity
• Unpaid posts
• Paid adverts
• Low cost
Identifying appropriate social media platforms

**Twitter:**
- 480 million active users
- 25-34 years old (most popular)
- 35-49 years old
- Eczema organisations are present
- Often used for recruitment

**Instagram:**
- 1.3 billion active users
- 90% are under 35 years old
- Many eczema communities
- Various content sharing methods

**Reddit:**
- 430 million active users
- 18-29 years old (64%)
- 30-49 years old (29%)
- Eczema specific forums
- Less known platform of recruitment
- Targeting specific geographical locations

**Facebook:**
- 2.9 billion active users
- 51 million users in the UK
- Between 35 and 65+ years
- Paid advertising
- Targeted adverts based on age, gender, location, interests, keywords
Selecting social media platform for paid advertising

Things to consider:

• User demographics
• Advert performance tracking
• Optimisation of adverts
• Flexibility to modify the advert
• Potential reach
• Cost
• Conversion rate
Advertising campaign begins

**Trial launch:** 14\textsuperscript{th} September 2021 (World Atopic Eczema Day)

**Target sample size:** 266 participants, recruited participants: 296

Approaches used for social media advertisement

**Phase I**

**Free advertising (unpaid method)**

- 14 September – 18 November 2021
- Regular posting of adverts
- Creating adverts for the target audience
- Tracking demographics
- Intermittent posting for 63 days

**Phase II**

**Paid Facebook adverts (paid method)**

- 28 December 2021 – 16 January 2022
- Advertising on Facebook and Instagram
- Boosting two existing posts to pilot the campaign
- Creating two targeted adverts
- Performance monitoring via Ads Manager
Adverts and boosted posts used in paid Facebook advertisements

Advert 1

- **Eczema Study**
  - Sponsored

Researchers at the University of Nottingham are looking for people with eczema to take part in a fully online research study.

This study is looking at how people manage their condition remotely.

Why join?
- Quick and easy to take part
- Helps to track eczema symptoms
- Chance of winning a £20 shopping voucher

xerte.nottingham.ac.uk
Eczema Research Study

Advert 2

- **Eczema Study**
  - Sponsored

Do you have eczema or know someone who does?
Take part in this fully online University of Nottingham study and help eczema research.

Why join?
- Quick and easy to take part
- Helps to track eczema symptoms
- Chance of winning a £20 shopping voucher

xerte.nottingham.ac.uk
EMO trial

Boosted post 1

- **Eczema Study**
  - Sponsored

Do you have eczema or know someone who does?
Take part in this University of Nottingham study and help eczema research.
Visit www.emostudy.org to find out more and sign up!

Boosted post 2

- **Eczema Study**
  - Sponsored

We are researchers at the University of Nottingham and conducting a fully online eczema research study.

If you or your child have been diagnosed with eczema come and join our study.

To find out more and sign up go to: www.emostudy.org

xerte.nottingham.ac.uk
EMO trial
## Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recruitment type</th>
<th>Number of expression of interest</th>
<th>Number of randomised participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Paid method</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>41 (14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>82 (28%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total of paid method</strong></td>
<td>179</td>
<td>123 (42%) in 16 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unpaid methods</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reddit</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>121 (41%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2 (1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total of unpaid methods</strong></td>
<td>173</td>
<td>136 (46%) in 63 days</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Performance of paid Facebook adverts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modality</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Reach</th>
<th>Link clicks</th>
<th>Cost per link click</th>
<th>Spend</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advert 1</td>
<td>16 days</td>
<td>93,630</td>
<td>1,128</td>
<td>£0.16</td>
<td>£176.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advert 2</td>
<td>6 days</td>
<td>33,035</td>
<td>353</td>
<td>£0.17</td>
<td>£59.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boosted post 1</td>
<td>13 days</td>
<td>24,637</td>
<td>306</td>
<td>£0.06</td>
<td>£18.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boosted post 2</td>
<td>2 days</td>
<td>3,068</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>£0.15</td>
<td>£5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>154,370</td>
<td>1,821</td>
<td>£0.14</td>
<td>£259.93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Baseline demographics and self-reported recruitment method

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Total, n (%)</th>
<th>Reddit</th>
<th>Facebook</th>
<th>Instagram</th>
<th>Twitter</th>
<th>Other*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age range (years), n (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-13</td>
<td>15 (4.9%)</td>
<td>2 (0.6%)</td>
<td>2 (0.6%)</td>
<td>1 (0.3%)</td>
<td>4 (1.4%)</td>
<td>6 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14-19</td>
<td>104 (35.1%)</td>
<td>14 (4.7%)</td>
<td>2 (0.7%)</td>
<td>81 (27.4%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7 (2.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>90 (30.4%)</td>
<td>67 (22.6%)</td>
<td>3 (1%)</td>
<td>4 (1.4%)</td>
<td>1 (0.3%)</td>
<td>15 (5.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>43 (15%)</td>
<td>30 (10.1%)</td>
<td>7 (2.4%)</td>
<td>2 (0.7%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4 (1.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>16 (5.4%)</td>
<td>5 (1.7%)</td>
<td>6 (2%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2 (0.7%)</td>
<td>3 (1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>13 (4.3%)</td>
<td>3 (1%)</td>
<td>9 (3%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1 (0.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-69</td>
<td>10 (3.3%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9 (3%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1 (0.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70-74</td>
<td>5 (1.6%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5 (1.6%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity, n (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>228 (77%)</td>
<td>92 (31.1%)</td>
<td>41 (13.9%)</td>
<td>57 (19.3%)</td>
<td>7 (2.3%)</td>
<td>31 (10.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>36 (12.1%)</td>
<td>19 (6.4%)</td>
<td>1 (0.3%)</td>
<td>13 (4.4%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3 (1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed background</td>
<td>15 (5.1%)</td>
<td>8 (2.7%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6 (2%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1 (0.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>13 (4.4%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11 (3.7%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2 (0.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another ethnic group</td>
<td>4 (1.4%)</td>
<td>2 (0.7%)</td>
<td>1 (0.3%)</td>
<td>1 (0.3%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender, n (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>77 (26%)</td>
<td>49 (16.6%)</td>
<td>11 (3.7%)</td>
<td>6 (2%)</td>
<td>2 (0.7%)</td>
<td>9 (3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>210 (71%)</td>
<td>69 (23.3%)</td>
<td>32 (10.8%)</td>
<td>76 (25.7%)</td>
<td>5 (1.7%)</td>
<td>28 (9.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3 (1%)</td>
<td>2 (0.7%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1 (0.3%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer not to say</td>
<td>6 (2%)</td>
<td>1 (0.3%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5 (1.7%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Includes: word of mouth, web search, participant recruitment website, NHS website, Mumsnet, poster and email.
Efficiency of our recruitment strategy

• Three months of intermittent advertising

• 400 expressions of interest

• 259 participants recruited

• Low cost

• Broad demographic reach

• Age range between 2 and 74 years old

• Good completion rate of follow-up

(paid method: 84% and unpaid methods: 82%)
Challenges

• Creating and managing adverts was time-consuming
• Each platform has specific requirements for the posts
• Regular posting in forums to ensure visibility
• Free advertising does not provide insights into the performance of the posts
• Moderator reviews and approves paid Facebook adverts – takes time
• Monitoring advert performance requires close attention
Summary

• Social media advertising has a large coverage
• Cost-effective, depending on the target audience
• Time-intensive to advertise
• Monitoring advert performance is crucial
• Use advert analytics to evaluate progress
• Amend recruitment strategy based on performance
• Can augment traditional recruitment methods
Thank you!

arabella.baker@nottingham.ac.uk
Bump2Baby: Using social media to improve involvement and engagement in maternity research
Reaching more parents
Principles behind Bump2Baby

• Easy – going to a place already occupied by parents
• Enjoyable – keep it friendly and chatty
• Respectful - sharing personal experiences as well as opinions
• Relevant – sharing new research in line with members’ interests
• ‘Behind the scenes’ – seeing projects in development and chatting to researchers about their work
• Showing impact – reporting back on impact of discussions and success (or otherwise) of bids
Methods

- Set up a page linked to a closed group
- Joining questions and group rules agreement required
- Drew up a post schedule
- Advertised through relevant organisations and boosted posts
- Admins: Rachel (independent), Eleanor, Sarah and Janine (Notts)

- Feed open to all
- Intention to share posts across both Facebook and Instagram
- Supported by Nottingham CTU team member
Questions, concerns, experiences about pain relief for babies in neonatal units? Join our Zoom chat tonight (Monday February 27 - link in comments) or let us know and we’ll ask and report back.

Just seen a big story in the news about misleading claims on infant formula. I’m still searching for the paper in the BMJ, in the meantime here’s a reminder about First Steps Nutrition Trust, a great little charity providing evidence-based information about feeding babies and toddlers, including a comprehensive guide to the different brands of formula available in the UK.

A Jewish man heading a department of obstetrics and gynecology in a Catholic hospital, he set out to question what was considered routine. "What was the evidence? Why do we do this? Who started this nonsense? How do we change it?"

A life well lived, and some great points we all need to bear in mind when developing and using evidence.
Impact

• 250 group members, 154 B2B page likes
• Greatest interaction is 10am and 10pm
• Most popular posts invite members to share personal stories
• Input used in four funded studies and six studies in development, covering study design, seeking consent, outcomes and data collection
• Helped recruit to various study-specific PPIE groups
• Members enjoy learning about research relevant to their interests, and shaping future research
Lessons learnt

• Getting to grips with Facebook tools and the algorithm
• Instagram needs a dedicated leader, preferably a parent or maternity activist
• Allocating time to build an audience
• Need to build linked resources such as a parent-friendly website, for example http://parentingsciencegang.org.uk/
• Building interaction around the demands on parents’ time
• An enjoyable time sink!
Thank you

• Rachel.Plachcinski@gmail.com

• https://www.facebook.com/bump2babyparentsvoicesinresearch

• https://www.facebook.com/groups/649895299057386
Using Social Media as a Recruitment Tool for Clinical Trials

Tom Oliver
Southampton Clinical Trials Unit
2023
UK Social Media Usage

- 53 million active social media users (77.9%) in the UK (2021)
- Social media engagement is a very cost-effective way of informing and recruiting potential trial participants

**Barriers**
- Concerns around use of patient’s online data
- Uncertainty over correct way to approach patients and rules for use.

**Preparation**
- Set out your social media intentions in your trial protocol and supporting documentation.
- Further guidance expected as social media recruitment becomes a more widely used tool.
Considerations

- **Patient Characteristics:**
  - Age
  - Gender
  - Condition-specific

- **Platform-Specific**
  - Total userbase vs. levels of engagement
  - One or multiple platforms
  - Cross posting to save time
  - Trial perception on given platform

Platform Summary

- **Facebook** – Older demographic; largest userbase
- **Instagram** – Younger demographic; mainly visual platform
- **Twitter** – Better reach for healthcare professionals; frequent posting required

**Details:** United Kingdom; 2020; 2,166 respondents; 16 years and older; those with a social media profile or account on any sites or apps; Computer-assisted personal interviews (CAPI)
Setting up your account

**Twitter**
- Similar to a personal account
- Use an easily identifiable account name
- Do not enter your personal information – ensure DOB is >18 years old

**Instagram**
- Set up as normal account then switch to a Business Account
- Enter pertinent business information relating to trials unit / trial itself
- Link to your trial’s Facebook account
- Targeted Ads and ‘insights’ available

**Facebook**
- Set up a Business Page under a normal (trial) account
- Business pages contains ‘About’ section; trial logos and cover photos; ‘Learn More’ button (to link patients to your website) - prior to publishing the page and going live.
- Other useful considerations are automatic message replies; FAQs (including links to PIS or how to contact the trial team); turning off Reviews.
Creating Content - Twitter

Know the algorithm
• Post frequently (at least once a week)
• Engage with tweets and the community
• Time of day
• Variety of media (GIFs, images, text, links, polls)
• Location
• Credibility
• Relevant hashtags

Content
• Split posts up into small, frequent bitesize pieces
• Professional language to engage with healthcare professionals, who can relay via retweets
• Behind the scenes posts (recruitment numbers; updates from sites; future plans)
• Use 1-2 relevant hashtags per post
• Media drives engagement:
  • Images – 150% more engagement
  • GIFs – 55% more engagement
  • Videos – 10x more engagement!
Creating Content - Instagram

**Know the algorithm**
- Post frequently
- Timely responses to messages and comments
- Interacting with other similar accounts / content
- Relationship of poster and viewer (have they interacted with your content before?)
- Relationship to current trending topics
- Interest (does the user typically interact with this type of content?)
- Length of video
- Relevant hashtags

**Content**
- Experiment with both attention-grabbing short posts and descriptive longer posts.
- Tailor hashtags for each post, and keep an eye on trending topics.
- Visual media is key but be aware of the 1min limit on videos.
- Stories: keep to short visual posts (10 second videos) with a punchy message.
- Aim language at appropriate age group – consider emojis be remain professional.
Creating Content - Facebook

Know the algorithm
• Post frequently
• Timely responses to messages and comments
• Sharing posts from other Pages
• Posts on Groups & other Pages
• Native video upload (i.e. direct video, not youtube)
• Time of day

Content
• Promote flagship media posts using Targeted Facebook Ads (*more later*)
• Use lay language but remain factual:
  • Avoid “If you suffer from ...” text or listing specific treatments
  • Consider use of disease statistics and “Learn more about research taking place at X...” text
• Contact established Facebook Groups relating to relevant conditions to understand the rules for posting on their pages
• Emphasise academic research – users can respond negatively to pharmaceutical posts
• Don’t be afraid to turn off comments!
Targeted Ads (Facebook)

Benefits
• Greatly increase the reach of your account
• Tailor ads to specific users and locations
• Can prove the most cost-effective route for recruitment
• Simpler than you may think!

Key factors:
• Audience
• Aim
• Budget
• Media
• Community Guidelines
• Visitor Interaction
• Insights and Analytics
Targeted Ads (Facebook)

**Audience**

- **Choose Age Range; Gender**
- **Choose Location**: where the ads will be shown. Maximum of 7 locations with radius of 1-80km.
  - Focusing ads in a small area vs. spreading over a larger area.
- **Detailed Targeting**: include or exclude audience based on the demographics; interests; behaviours
  - Can explore an audience with an interest in specific disease area.
  - Careful not to narrow down your population too much!
- Think both patients; and relatives of patients

**Aim**

- Aims include: Increasing traffic to website; Boosting video views; Brand awareness; etc
- Recommended to select increasing traffic to your trial website.
**Targeted Ads (Facebook)**

**Budget**
- Cost relates to how many users see your trial ads
- Run continuously or for a set time?
- Daily or total budget?
- Able to adapt budget for ongoing ad

**Media**
- Consider piloting small ad runs first to refine media and content
- ‘Boost’ existing flagship posts linking back to your trial website
- Short, snappy messages with simple graphics/GIFs to grab the public’s attention
  - Ad text can “pre-screen” patients but be careful not to overcomplicate – the pre-screening can happen on your website!
Community Guidelines

• Monitored by an AI
• Beware assuming individuals’ medical conditions or appearing to profit from health disasters
• Avoid reference to specific prescription drugs as could breach UK medicine advertisement laws
• Appeal, appeal, appeal!

Visitor Interaction

• Engage with inquisitive or positive comments
• Use misconceptions as an opportunity to educate, but be polite and friendly!
• Do not engage in negative comments – if necessary, remove comments and block users
• Turn off comments if negative engagement poses an issue!
Targeted Ads (Facebook)

Insights and Analytics

- View demographics seeing / interacting with your ads
- Review how successful certain ‘campaigns’ are
- Consider setting up Google Analytics on trial websites to track recruitment conversion rate
Success in SCTU trials

SAFA Trial – Female Acne

- Social media campaigns have greatly boosted recruitment in select SCTU trials
- Used to complement patient identification at site; or as dominant identification method in decentralised trials
- Costs comparable to PIC sites with greater return
- Did not appear to impact retention
- Resource is required to manage accounts

SG016 Home – COVID-19

- Screened versus recruited - before COVID
- Screened versus recruited - during COVID

Randomised patients by recruitment site
- 120 patients randomised
Take Home Points

• Choose which platform(s) suit your target demographic best and where to focus your efforts.

• Plan your strategy beforehand outlining what content ideas you want to post where, what images/quotes you need to request and collate, etc. and what audiences you wish to tailor targeted advertisements to.

• Decide on your budget, either daily or running total, for advertisements, how many ads you will run, how long for and where. Remember to keep an eye for negative feedback!

• Review analytics to tailor recruitment advertisements as the trial develops

• Remember to keep posting regularly at your peak times/days
Special thanks to Jess Boxall (CIRU) and Susi Renz (SCTU) for providing much of the information used in these slides

Thank you for listening!