

Supporting Cessation for Pregnant Smoking Women by Improving Quality of Online Discussions



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Purpose

Smoking during pregnancy not only affects infant and maternal health, it also can cause highly emotional and sometimes aggressive debates. As smoking pregnant women are aware of the outrage their habit can initiate, we assume that many of them prefer the anonymity of online media to discuss their addiction, to find information about cessation or just to talk with like-minded.

Methods

To get a sufficient data base to answer our questions we implemented a mixed qualitative and quantitative research approach. In a first step, to better understand media usage and expectations of smoking pregnant women, we set up an online survey and, in a second step, we analyzed various online discussion boards regarding their content, thread length, and accuracy. Furthermore we analyzed 66 Facebook groups related to smoking and pregnancy.

In order to reach our target group, the online survey was spread in online discussion boards. 105 women participated in the survey. 46 of them smoked during pregnancy.

We explore:

- Are there differences how the requests of pregnant smoking women are handled throughout different online media?
- Are pregnant smoking women using online media regarding their smoking habit and what are their intents?
- Is it possible to identify leverage points for improving online media?

We analyzed 3 threads, in 3 different Austrian forums (.at) having a focus on topics related to babies and young children, parenthood and/or medical topics. All three threads were started by smoking pregnant women portraying their smoking habits during pregnancy. They asked openly for help or for other smoking pregnant women to tell their personal stories and experiences. The threads consisted of 10, 141 and 163 reply postings.

We investigated in how far the online community of Facebook is concerned with smoking during pregnancy. In order to select representative groups we aimed to acquire data from German speaking groups. Since such groups are not commonly represented on Facebook we extended the scope of our research by including English speaking groups.

Results

Survey

Media Usage – Technologies

48,8% use PCs on a daily basis
2,3% often use PCs
47,7% watch TV on a daily basis
25% often watch TV
81,8% use smartphones daily
11,4% use smartphones often

Media Usage – Contents

86,96% social media
78,26% entertainment
71,74% news
60,87% knowledge
41,30% health topics

Intention to stop/reduce smoking

34,48% wish to quit
19,57% do not wish to quit
43,48% wish to reduce
13,04% do not wish to reduce

Pregnant smoking women are using mobile technologies more frequently than media channels like a stationary PC or TV.

→ Mobile applications and portable tangible interfaces could be used as a channel to reach out target group.

Entertainment and social interactions are major points of interest of our participants.

→ A combination of social interaction and entertainment related contents could be utilized in order to achieve serious effects in our target group.

The majority of pregnant women who smoked during pregnancy wish to quit or at least reduce their nicotine intake.

→ The recognized need for change might raise the acceptance among our target group for medial solutions.

Online Discussion Boards

We took a qualitative approach in analyzing the reactions posted within threads created by pregnant smoking women. We analyzed the major points creating and keeping the discussions alive and in how far they connect to the initial request of the original posting.

Similarities and Differences between Forums

- Replies within the medically oriented forum are mostly encouraging or there are direct reactions to the thread creator's intend.
- Reactions in the parenthood and baby oriented forums are covering a more extensive variety of answers regarding a greater spectrum of topics, emerging during the discussion.

Overall it can be said that smoking pregnant women might get sufficient answers regarding their initial request but cannot count on the fact that the topic gets discussed in a neutral fashion because it tends to get heavily emotional. The threads might also just drift off into remotely related topics. Some postings are off-topic. Attention is paid to the role of the partner and the social surrounding in general.

"Have a look at in which situation you think you need a cigarette. Can you do something else in such situations?" - User

"When I see a pregnant woman smoking, I almost cannot hold back. I would want to slap the cigarette out of her hand [...]. No offense, but I also think they have to be punished." - User

"[...] I would even be for cutting the KBG for smokers and that they have to be continuously monitored." - User

"To be precise, smoking is always stupid. Also when not pregnant. But what is forgotten sometimes is the addiction and psychological aspects. No smoker will be convinced to stop smoking just because some non- or ex-smokers beat them around the head with harsh criticism." - User

"I find it great that you want to quit." - User

Facebook

As described above there are few German Facebook groups that focus on smoking in pregnancy. However, there are existing groups in the English community. We analyzed 66 Facebook groups that are related to smoking in pregnancy, 12 of them need permission before joining.

We categorized these existing groups according to their respective group name and description into seven categories. Groups that ...

- state that smoking in pregnancy is fine.
- are explicitly against it and also show aggressive behavior.
- want to make smoking during pregnancy illegal.
- are against smoking in pregnancy but communicate it in a neutral way.
- want to help smoking pregnant women.
- cannot be taken seriously.
- depict smoking in pregnancy as being sexually attractive.

After reviewing 66 Facebook groups and their postings, we conclude that discussions in Facebook groups related to smoking in pregnancy are more likely talking or judging about smoking pregnant women than offering advice or help.

Discussion & Conclusion

We conclude that the culture of online discussion can vary heavily. As a main reason we suppose the (non-)existence of a professional moderator who monitors an online discussion. However, we found that smoking pregnant women use online discussions for information gathering, exchange of thoughts and medical advice. Facebook groups on the other hand are less appropriate for seeking advice or help due to the nature of today's unmoderated online discussions and its inappropriate insulting speech. To support smoke cessation in this highly stigmatized segment we propose the professional, unbiased, unprejudiced support of online discussion boards.

We hypothesize that online media, in order to be a resourceful space of respect, should either be moderated or be restricted to pregnant smoking women sharing the same struggle and interest in order to serve as space of exchange.

In order to provide smoking pregnant women with a more constructive medial environment, we further propose to extend approaches beyond the limits of traditional online media and provide new innovative ways which are especially tailored for this target group. Such solutions could reach from smartphone applications to tangible interfaces or standalone devices.