MEDIA RELEASE

Can Demographics Identify Frequent Social Network Users? Probably not.

Canadian Cancer Society and Evolution Health study find that Superusers of smoking cessation support groups are a rare breed

Toronto, July 18, 2012 – They are embedded in every fabric of our online existence and we can count on hearing from them every day: those who are always posting on Facebook, have the most connections on LinkedIn, are always rating restaurants on Yelp, or are consistently giving travel advice on TripAdvisor.

They have the potential to influence our decisions, change our behaviors, and connect us with others. In healthcare social networks, where people are struggling with addictions or mental health issues, these influencers can make tremendous impacts on the lives of others. But who are Superusers?

A recent study published in the Journal of Medical Internet Research (JMIR) has shown that demographics alone cannot explain why some become Superusers of healthcare support groups.

"Our research has repeatedly shown that Superusers play extremely valuable roles in supporting others," says Trevor van Mierlo, the study's lead author and CEO of Evolution Health. "Methods that attract and retain Superusers should be high on any social marketer's checklist. In our study we were surprised to find that there are little, if any, statistically significant similarities among Superuser demographic characteristics."

Marketers frequently use Google AdWords or Microsoft adCenter to attract new clients, and choosing demographic profiles is a key component to the ad serving process.

"When successful quitters have an anonymous forum, to share their experiences and tips to remain smoke-free, they provide great support to smokers going through the quitting process," says Sharon Lee, co-author and Senior Project Manager of the Canadian Cancer Society's Smokers' Helpline Online. "The results of this study clearly show us the importance of Superusers, and will drive our strategies to retain them."

"There may be psychological factors that can help explain the Superuser phenomenon, and we are in the process of conducting further studies to investigate this," says van Mierlo. "Perhaps science can't explain this and quite simply, there is something very special about those who are willing to give so much of their valuable time to help others."

To read the peer-reviewed study visit the JMIR at: http://www.jmir.org/2012/3/e66/

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