Nutrition-related information on Instagram: A content analysis of posts by popular Australian accounts

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Social media has become an increasingly popular source of information about nutrition and may influence individuals' food choices in both positive and negative ways.[1] Instagram is the third most popular social media platform in Australia, and nutrition is one of the most frequently discussed health topics on Instagram.[2] However, little is known about the content of nutrition-related information published by popular Instagram accounts. The aim of this exploratory study was to examine the content of food and nutrition-related posts from popular Australian Instagram accounts. Australian Instagram accounts with over 100,000 followers, that primarily posted about nutrition were identified. All posts from included accounts, excluding stories, from September 2020–September 2021 were extracted through a third-party social media analytics company. All posts were screened to identify posts containing nutrition-related information. The captions of included posts were analysed using Leximancer, a software that uses machine learning to perform content analysis on textual data, to identify key concepts and themes. Instagram posts from each theme identified with Leximancer were read by the authors to develop an agreed upon description and select illustrative quotes that represented each theme. Sixty-one Instagram accounts were identified, leading to a sample of 10,964 Instagram posts. The mean engagement (number of likes plus number of comments) of the included posts was 1,854, and the mean number of followers for the included accounts was 279,505. Preliminary results reveal five overarching themes in the Instagram content. In decreasing order of prominence in the sample, the themes were: 1) recipes and meal ideas; 2) food, nutrients and supplements and associated health outcomes; 3) nutrition's role in achieving physical appearance and body weight related goals; 4) food literacy and 5) cooking and exercising at home. Notably, supplements were discussed throughout posts in all five themes, and marketing of food products, supplements and online meal plans occurred throughout the sample. Nutrition topics related to dietary supplements, recipes and cooking, nutrition's role in promoting health and achieving physical fitness goals are popular on Instagram. These findings are preliminary, and the final stages of analysis will involve authors undertaking further reading of posts from each theme to ensure that the descriptions of themes are comprehensive. The prominence and popularity of cooking and healthy eating content on Instagram indicates that social media may be a useful setting for wide-reaching nutrition promotion campaigns to improve food literacy and healthy eating. Future research should examine the quality and accuracy of current nutrition information on Instagram and how consumers use social media content to inform their food and nutrition literacy.

References

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