HOPE

Using social media to engage African American young adults in an online intervention to prevent HIV and STIs

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Background

In Flint, Michigan, the rates of HIV and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) for African American residents aged 18-24 are among the highest in the state. HOPE, a community based participatory research (CBPR) project, combines in-home HOPE (HIV/STI Outreach, Promotion and Education) parties with an online social media component, aims to prevent HIV and STIs in African American young adults.

Using social media for HIV/STI prevention holds great promise. Yet, engaging young adults to discuss sexual health online presents many challenges. To encourage HOPE party participants to engage with the HOPE website and social media intervention to promote positive sexual health messages, a team of community partners, academic researchers and a community young adult advisory board planned and implemented a series of social media contests.

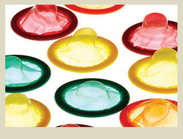
HOPE Intervention

The HOPE intervention consists of two components:

HOPE Parties, developed by YOUR Center in 2001, are gatherings that offer participants the opportunity to learn about HIV/STI prevention methods, assess their risk, participate in HIV testing, develop a risk reduction/safer sex behavior plan, and practice communication and decision making skills.

How it Works:

- Hosts and staff plan party
- Hosts invite 8-10 friends to their home
- Educator leads healthy sexuality activities
- Participants create a risk reduction plan



HOPE Online consists of an interactive website and social media sites informed by focus groups and young adults in the community. Features include peer blogs, expert advice, polls, Facebook and Twitter pages. The goals are to:

- Offer peer support
- Provide expert advice
- List local resources
- Exchange information

Social Media Contests

Contest #1:
Hit us Up-Earn Points-Get Prizes

Goal: Increase # of participants on Facebook, Twitter and HOPE website. Increase engagement on all sites.

Methods:

- 60-day text messaging and social media contest
- Mailed postcards to all previous HOPE party participants
- Contest was also promoted at parties, website, Facebook & Twitter
- Activity-based rewards: Tracked participant's activities, awarded points and provided incentives when participants reached milestones

Incentives: Participants who reached 50 points were mailed a $10 gift card. Two participants with the most points were awarded a $50 gift card.

Contest #2:
Bring Five Friends

Goal: Harness current HOPE Online participants' social networks to increase traffic to the website, Facebook and Twitter pages.

Methods:

- 30-day referral contest
- Sent text messages, emails, and direct messages through Facebook and Twitter asking participants to refer 5 friends to the site
- Participants submitted names of 5 friends via a Qualtrics survey
- Activity-based rewards: Participants were awarded points for each friend that liked or followed

Incentives: Participants who referred 5 friends received a $10 gift card.

Contest #3:
Combination

Goal: Increase followers and friends and harness current participants networks; Maintain momentum from previous contents. Reward activities AND referrals.

Methods:

- 28 day combined activity and referral contest
- Combined Contest #1 and #2
- Activity and Referral based rewards: Participants were awarded points for all activities on the site and for any new referrals

Incentives: Participants who reached 50 points were mailed a $10 gift card. One participant with the most points was awarded a $50 gift card.

Results

Social Media Sites:

- 35% increase in online participation,
- 15% of HOPE Party participants
- 62 unique Facebook users per month during contest period
- 10% of social media users were directed to our website
- Users 27 unique (22 Facebook, 12 text , 9 Twitter, & 7 website registrations)

HOPE Online:

Activity	Pre-Contest	Contest #1	Contest # 2 & # 3
Website visits	20	384	445
Website visits-Flint	3	80	97
Website visits via referral	2	37	13

Lessons Learned

1) Low investment, High return
- Small incentives
- Minimal staff time for implementation

2) Small following, High engagement
- Increase in quality of interaction
- Participants used multiple points of contact
- Meaningful engagement

3) Personalized contact
- Texting was the preferred method of contact
- Staff identified themselves to participants
- Google Voice

Next Steps

- Continued contact with participants and new social media outreach
- Discussion with youth advisory group about potential Photo Op to integrate HOPE Parties and HOPE Online

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