

Public Abstract

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Title:Why People Share News About Vaccinations on Facebook: A Uses and Gratifications Approach

Facebook, the world's largest social network, is now a significant source of news and information for U.S. adults. The primary way users access news on Facebook is via links to stories shared by others in their network, including friends, family and even media organizations. Users share links about stories on myriad topics, but one topic that is of particular interest to public health researchers is the focus of this study – childhood vaccinations.

This research employs an online survey of 202 Facebook users to understand why people share links to news stories about vaccinations on Facebook, and whether it is related to an individual's vaccination beliefs. The results showed that people shared such links to meet their needs to feel empowered, to gain status, to socialize, to be entertained and to store information. Almost all respondents said they were supportive of vaccines, but among those who felt the strongest in favor of childhood vaccinations, the data analysis found an identification with a need to feel a sense of agency. Essentially, Facebook users who were strongly supportive of childhood vaccines were found to share news stories to feel empowered to have their say. The results have implications for media and health research, by offering a greater understanding of why people share vaccination information on social media, with an eye toward influencing this behavior.