Healthy Eating, Social Media and Lower Income Communities: A Research Review

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• **Purpose**: to support policy, systems, and environmental change approaches

  - Uncover digital channel/social media usage insights from the target audience

  - Identify actionable findings about content and materials that educators can apply

*Spanish-language groups conducted in Chicago and Miami*
Audiences Differentiated by Life Stage

- **Early**
  - Age 18-29
  - Non-married, no children

- **Mild**
  - Age 18-44
  - Children in the household

- **Later**
  - Age 45-75
  - Empty nesters, no children
Research Objectives

• Examine what and when SNAP-Eligible adults use different digital channels

• Identify any barriers to social media consumption

• Explore where nutritional information fits into the consumption of online materials.

• Explore reactions to different types of content

• Explore trusted sources and willingness to act on or share nutrition information.

• Explore how different formats of consumer nutrition materials impact its visibility, use, and shareability.
Key Findings

• Social media is *promising* as a way to engage SNAP-Eligible audiences.

• Respondents report some usage limitations

• While “health” is on the minds of some SNAP-Eligible adults, “healthy eating” and “nutrition” are *not* top-of-mind overall, nor do respondents notice these topics breaking through the social media clutter.

• The irony: “food” content feels omnipresent on social media, but respondents do not find the information they need (or want) to eat healthy.

• The biggest knowledge gap and related area of interest is around cost. “Budget” and “savings” are powerful motivators in these groups.
Key Findings (continued)

• The most engaging communication we tested featured nutritious food and implied healthy eating without being too “preachy.”

• Audiences believe healthy eating is doable when the directions are step-by-step.

• Effective social media content in this arena needs to be visual.

• The surround-sound effect is vital, especially with limited opportunities for content with expensive production value.

• In addition to being a trusted voice itself, USDA has many opportunities to amplify its message through community partners. You can also increase the likelihood of sharing on social media by promoting social connections, local bargains, and family-friendly ideas.
SNAP-Eligible Hispanics align in many ways with the broader audience. Distinctions in social media use and preferences are nuanced:

- Similar social media usage by platform and life stage. However, more limited use during work hours than the general audience.
- Phones are the primary device for all and even more so for Hispanic respondents.
- More likely to be “Active Sharers” than the general audience in order to remain connected with family and friends in their home countries.
- “Food” on social media is just as prevalent for this audience as it is for all SNAP-Eligible. Similarly, “healthy eating” “nutrition” are not breaking through the clutter.
- Greater interest in healthy eating among family and during special occasions than general audience. Budget is a main factor for all audiences.
- Hispanics had similar reactions to the stimuli.
- As with the general audience, USDA and SNAP have credibility among Hispanics, and Hispanic respondents are open to receiving “health” information from these sources.
**Implications**

1. Most individuals are passive participants. Identifying active users and/or trusted sources will help propel SNAP content “above the fray.”

2. Specificity helps and mentions of EBT matter. Both increased the likelihood that participants would share information.

3. A surround-sound approach with strategic messaging, thoughtful context, a specific call-to-action, and outreach tailored to life stage will maximize USDA’s likelihood of success.

4. Beware of “nutrition-speak.” The information you disseminate must be authentic, and from voices that audiences recognize.
Objective

Identify what and when SNAP-Eligible adults use digital channels.
How often do you use social media?
(voting dots exercise)

- **Facebook**: Daily
- **YouTube**: Daily
- **Instagram**: Daily
- **Pinterest**: Daily
- **Twitter**: Daily
- **Snapchat**: Daily

Never
Social Media Use by Audience

All audiences were active in social media, but platforms differed by life stage.

**Top Platforms by Life Stage**

Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram saw the most discussion across groups. Audiences mentioned Twitter, Snapchat, and Pinterest much less.
Social Media Use and Time of Day

Respondents used social media at all hours, but slowed down for work, school and socializing.

First thing in the morning was a **peak** time for use.

Social media use slowed somewhat during work/school hours.

Evenings meant **high use** again.

Respondents reported using social media throughout their day – from early morning until bedtime.
Objective

Uncover relevant usage parameters or boundaries to social media consumption.
Device Preference

Phones are the main device used to access social media among these audiences.

Laptops are a distant runner-up. Some use for work, some for screen time like YouTube.

A few respondents in every market used tablets.

A few Later Life Stage respondents, in multiple locations, mentioned not having a smart phone.
Limitations to Social Media

**TIME**
- Responsibilities at work and school cut into social media
- Parents have duties and tasks to attend to
- Nature of job sometimes limit the use of social media – we heard of this more among Spanish-speaking audiences
- Some respondents set their own time limits

**Connectivity**
- A few mention data plans running out
- Rural respondents report weak Wi-Fi signals

**Vision**
- Some seniors mention having vision issues that limit their use of social media and consumption of content
## Passive vs Active Users

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family and Friends</th>
<th>Topics of Interest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>“Active” Users (Post)</strong></td>
<td><strong>“Active” Users (Post)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping others up-to-date on daily lives (Spanish-speakers with family in home countries even more likely)</td>
<td>Some champion topics of interest: social justice, community pride, hobbies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some post more on weekends when not in daily routine</td>
<td>Across groups, a few post about Healthy eating (i.e. lifestyle) or participate in a Community (i.e. “Weight Watchers”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>“Passive” Users (Consume)</strong></td>
<td><strong>“Passive” Users (Consume)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeing what they’re up to</td>
<td>Respondents shared a wide variety of examples, ranging from interior decorating to animals to sports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing special moments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Younger audiences mention seeking more information about healthy eating/habits
Hooks to “Healthy” Eating

Food’s Role in Health:

• **Nutritional value** of food – how good or bad are foods really?
• Foods to *manage chronic health conditions* (diabetes, allergies, etc.)

How to Improve Eating Habits:

• Alternatives to foods they like (“swaps”)
• Healthy meal-prep suggestions
• Better habits on a busy schedule, while eating out, eating with family/during occasions among Hispanics
• Varieties of healthy foods
• Choosing in-season fruits and produce

Finding, Cost and Convenience:

• Affordable ways to eat healthy
• Saving money by reducing food waste
• Where to find affordable healthy ingredients
• Quick and easy foods to make

Claims, Myths, Fads:

• Real impact of fad diets and food trends
• Cutting through the misinformation
• What sources can they trust?
When Information-Seeking, Budgeting and Savings Transcend All Life Stages

However, life stage matters for other topics of interest

**Topics that Garner the Most Interest by Life Stage**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Early</th>
<th>Mid</th>
<th>Later</th>
<th>Total (21 groups)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Budgeting and Budget Saving</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grocery Shopping</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kitchen Skills</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meal Planning</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time-Saving Tips</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eating Out</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kids</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Waste</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ingredients and Recipes</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occasions</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Opportunity for SNAP Educators

- **HEALTHY EATING** is on the minds of these audiences to a degree; they know they need to eat healthy and have questions.
- **BUDGET AND COST SAVINGS** is the immediate barrier; audiences need information and encouragement to overcome cost obstacles.

“Healthy Eating on a Budget”!
“Save Money and Eat Healthy”!

... but they need a boost!
Objective

Explore reactions to different content.
# Lessons for SNAP Educators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lesson 1: Visual Appeal Is Key</th>
<th>Lesson 2: Simple Directions Work</th>
<th>Lesson 3: Don’t Overlook the Basics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Pictures are appealing</td>
<td>• Respondents gravitated towards stimuli with a simple call-to-action</td>
<td>• Respondents asked for details to make the information more actionable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Among videos, smooth production and the addition of music greatly increased interest</td>
<td>• Respondents are more willing when there are easy actions step-by-step</td>
<td>• Many in the target audience are still learning the basics of cooking and nutrition</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Facebook Post: Actionable, shareable, needs follow up

What works:
- Clear directions that are actionable
  - Go to the farmer’s market; use fruit as a snack
- Straightforward and concise language

What needs work:
- Nutrition-speak: “Healthy Eating Style,” “whole” fruit
- Needs more specificity: location, pricing, and hours
  - Some respondents across groups were unfamiliar with their local farmer’s markets
- Apples in the background are appealing—an action shot from the farmer’s market might be even better

What they want to share:
- Respondents say they would share EBT information the most with friends/family
  Later stage says likely to share
Objective

Explore trusted sources and willingness to act on or share nutrition information.
Trusted Sources

- USDA has partner opportunities nationally and locally with many sectors
- Later life stage respondents have the most to say about potential partners

### Food Assistance
- Food bank
- Churches
- Senior centers

### Health Education
- Nutritionists
- Community Gardens
- Doctors’ Offices
- School programs
- Hospitals

### Bargain Shopping
- Coupon sections
- Stores, Co-Op
- Grocery Apps
- Amazon

### Work Related
- Craig’s List
- City Gov
- Capacity Builders (NM)
- Civic Works (MD)

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### # mentions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community partners</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebrities</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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“Maybe if the advice came from a store or something recognized, like Mariano’s.”
Chicago Early, Spanish

“Civic Works – all my jobs, they all push the healthy eating.”
Baltimore Mid

“I honestly get more vegetables off the food banks than I do the store.”
Seattle Early

“My church has started on it. One of the things we focus on is high blood pressure ‘cause we have a lot of older people.”
Baltimore Mid

“At the hospital they have posters and classes you can take.”
Farmington Later

“I trust a lot of these co-ops that they advertise online.”
Baltimore Later
USDA as a Source

- Across groups, positive feedback about USDA outweighs any negative, and SNAP is a trusted source
- USDA and programs make effective messengers in their own right

"MyPlate" has some positive awareness, particularly with Early and Mid Life Stage audiences

USDA Programs
- "SNAP"
- "Link" (Chicago)
- "WIC"
- "EBT"
- "Food Stamps"

"I used to have a varying opinion of it, because I thought it was like government trying to control our eating portions and stuff, which is kind of stupid. But after I went to the nutritionist and changed my way of eating and stuff, I see it is more about the importance of the portions, and what we should eat and what we shouldn't eat.”
Chicago Mid

"Seeing it’s SNAP increases my interest, because it means I can be effective with my family.”
Phoenix Later

"It is good, reliable information from USDA. It is more interesting. Yes.”
Miami Later, Spanish

"SNAP is definitely a great outlet for those that are low income.”
Farmington Mid

"I think EBT, SNAP, and food banks are really good programs that should be expanded.”
Seattle Early

"SNAP is like a card, a credit card, it’s easier.”
Baltimore Early
Objective

Explore how consumer nutrition materials, in various formats, could be best seen, used, and potentially shared, given target audiences and their social media habits.
Implications for Communication

**Main message**: Budget is the universal motivator. Dial up the affordability message.

**Secondary message**: Health is a secondary motivator. Moderate “healthy” and “nutrition” in the message.

**Context**: Social means social. Dial up the people, relationship building, the actors.

**Call-to-action**: Directions need to be clear and step-by-step to nudge a change of course.

**Messenger**: Don’t rely on USDA’s social feed alone. Active and amplify Community Partners.

**Channels**: Create surround-sound starting in Facebook, and with all formats.
The Healthy Eating Re-Mix

Example to Illustrate:
Applying the findings to revise the Facebook post

- **Main message**
  - Dial up budget information in the headline
  - Revisit the background image (highlight savings or hyperlocal)
  - Publicize “affordable fresh fruits” at the market

- **Secondary message**
  - Revisit the background image (highlight savings or hyperlocal)
  - Promote as something you can DO with FAMILY and neighbors (fun!)

- **Context**
  - Promote as something you can DO with FAMILY and neighbors (fun!)
  - Visualize the experience step-by-step (show & tell where to go, who you’ll meet, how you’ll shop)

- **Call-to-action**
  - Cross-promote with local Churches, Community Gardens, Job Boards
  - Activate your “Active” social media users

- **Messenger**
  - Facebook ads; Facebook event; video from the market for Facebook and YouTube; pic enjoying fruit on Instagram; start chat for people at and after the market
## Verbatims: Potential Partners

### Food Assistance
- Churches
- Community gardens
- El Centro de la Raza
- Food banks
- Gather Baltimore
- Hungry Harvest
- Maryland Food Bank
- Meals on Wheels
- Salvation Army
- Senior center
- St. Mary’s Food Bank

### Health Education
- AARP
- American Health Association
- Boys and Girls Club
- Hospital
- Liberty Judy Center
- Library
- Prevention Research Center for Healthy Neighborhoods (PRCHN)
- Schools
- Super Moms
- Weight Watchers
- YMCA

### Bargain Shopping
- Aldi
- AmazonFresh
- Bloomfield’s
- Checkout51
- City Market
- Flip
- Food Lion
- Goya
- Groupon
- Harris Teeter
- Pillsbury
- Safeway
- Sam’s Club
- Smiths
- Trader Joe’s
- UberEats
- Value Village
- Walgreens
- Walmart
- Wegman’s
- Whole Foods

### Work Related
- American Legion
- Annie E. Casey Foundation
- Baltimore City Community College
- Capacity Builders Inc.
- Civic Works
- Craig’s List
- Gym
- Insurance company
- New Dawn
- Restaurant industry
Working Together
Start Simple with MyPlate
Questions?