Reviewer's report

Title: Does additional support provided through e-mail or SMS in a Web-based Social Marketing program improve children's food consumption? A Randomized Controlled Trial

Version: 0 Date: 12 Jul 2017

Reviewer: Jonathan Blitstein

Reviewer's report:

The paper reports on a study that included various forms of electronic prompts to augment an online social marketing campaign aimed at promoting healthy eating in children. As the authors note, such campaigns have been shown to be effective. Additionally, electronic prompts have also been shown to be effective at increasing program participation, although not necessarily in the type of intervention being tested here. So, this paper stands to add to the research community's understanding of the difficult problem of motivating parents to participate in an online health campaign aimed at children.

I believe the paper has potential, but there are a number of critical elements that need to be explained in more detail before a thorough and complete assessment of the paper's value can be made.

1. The paper needs a much clearer set of statements regarding the research hypotheses. There are at least three hypotheses being tested and these should be articulated and address separately.

2. How does the study sample compare to the population of Ticino? Given the limited uptake of the program, the authors need to address selection of the sample.

3. Additional information on the social marketing campaign itself is needed to understand the program effects. For example, the paper (line 147) indicates that parents received tailored information. How was information tailored?

4. The authors need to provide data on individual's participation or interaction with the online SM campaign. Is there data in the number of times per week, numbers of weeks (of the 8 week intervention), number of minutes per interaction. In some way, information on the level of exposure to the campaign is needed.
5. Were a priori power calculations conducted? Given the lack of statistical significance, the authors must be able to support statistical conclusion validity and show that their findings are not the result of an under powered design.

6. The statistical models need to be described in greater detail. The MLMs in particular, need to be more clearly elaborated as these models convey the main findings of the study. How were pre- and post-program data used? Are these difference-in-difference models? Were the models adjusted by the inclusion of covariates?

7. Lines 244 and 245 refers to 'generalized linear models estimating the effect of the intervention.." The term 'generalized' usually refers to a logistic, ordinal logistic, or probit type of model (i.e., a generalization of the linear model). What exactly is being modeled and reported. It is not clear.

8. Additional consideration should be given to table preparation so that they can function without the aid of the surrounding text. In particular, table titles are brief and not clear enough to give the reader an understanding of their content.

I encourage the authors to consider the following suggestions. If these additions are made, I would be pleased to review the paper again.

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