Using smartphones to foster social support by virtual strangers to promote healthy eating: A randomized controlled trial

Jennifer Inauen
Columbia University, USA
Eawag, Switzerland

Raising awareness and changing behaviour to promote healthy lifestyles and prevent cancer – from theory to practice
Intention-behavior gap
Many people have „good“ intentions but fail to enact them
(Orbell & Sheeran, 1998; Sheeran, 2002)

Social support
“... a set of processes through which another person helps individuals engage in effective self-regulation”
(Fitzsimons & Finkel, 2010, p. 103)
Can smartphone-based support groups promote healthy eating?
Summary

**Target behavior**: Eating more fruits and vegetables or eating fewer unhealthy snacks

**Target population**: Young adults living in Switzerland

**Intervention**: Daily social support in smartphone chat groups for seven days vs. control group

**Outcome measures**: Daily servings of fruits and vegetables and unhealthy snacks
Study design

Randomization:
- Support
- Eating goal

Intervention:
- Support each other
- Confederate: standardized daily message, respond supportively

Days: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13

Days:

T1

T2

T3

1-month follow-up

2-month follow-up

Intervention

Daily Diary
Results

Intervention effects on healthy eating

Fruits and Vegetables (servings per day)
F&V Goal Group ($n = 97$)

Unhealthy Snacks (servings per day)
Snack Goal Group ($n = 106$)
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Contact: ji2230@columbia.edu

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