

Social Media: A New Approach to Weight Loss

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Background/Literature Review

U.S. response to Obesity Epidemic is not working

The primary response to the obesity epidemic in the U.S. has been stigma related to weight or blaming people who are obese for being obese, and this response is not working. This attitude even causes a lot of harm which means that **there needs to be a new approach to the obesity epidemic** (Brewis, SturtzSreetharan, & Wutich, 2018; Hobbes, 2018; Knopf, 2018).

Social Media could be the New Approach

Social media could be just the approach since it is widely used, it can be used to reach populations experiencing obesity, and it can likely be used to help individuals experiencing obesity.

Social Media and Weight Loss Studies

- Social media used for weight loss purposes has been found to provide users with social support (both informational and emotional) (Ballantine & Stephenson, 2011).
- Using social media for weight loss purposes in general has been associated with increased weight loss, and being highly embedded within an online weight loss community is associated with greater weight loss (Pappa et al., 2017; Poncela-Casasnovas et al., 2015; Turner-McGrievy & Tate, 2013).
- More specifically, the social media platform Instagram can be used to help with adherence to one's physical activity level (Al-Eisa et al., 2016).
- Instagram can also be used for food/physical activity tracking, and this too supports the health goals of healthy eating and living and the social goals of obtaining and giving emotional support (both of which promote weight loss) (Chung et al., 2017).
- There have been clusters of Instagram users found that post food photos (C1) and activity photos (C3), and some of these users likely used them for posting about diet and exercise (Hu, Manikonda, & Kambhampati, 2014).

Objectives

- To investigate how social media might help individuals - that are experiencing obesity, using the ketogenic diet, and chronicling their weight loss journeys on Instagram - with their weight loss through three spheres of influence found within the socioecological model (intrapersonal, interpersonal, and community).
- Also to determine whether these spheres of influence exist among this population on Instagram.

Socioecological Model Overview

Definition: When it comes to health "individuals influence and are influenced by their families, social networks, the organizations in which they participate (workplaces, schools, religious organizations), the communities of which they are part, and the society in which they live" (Institute of Medicine, 2001, p. 26)



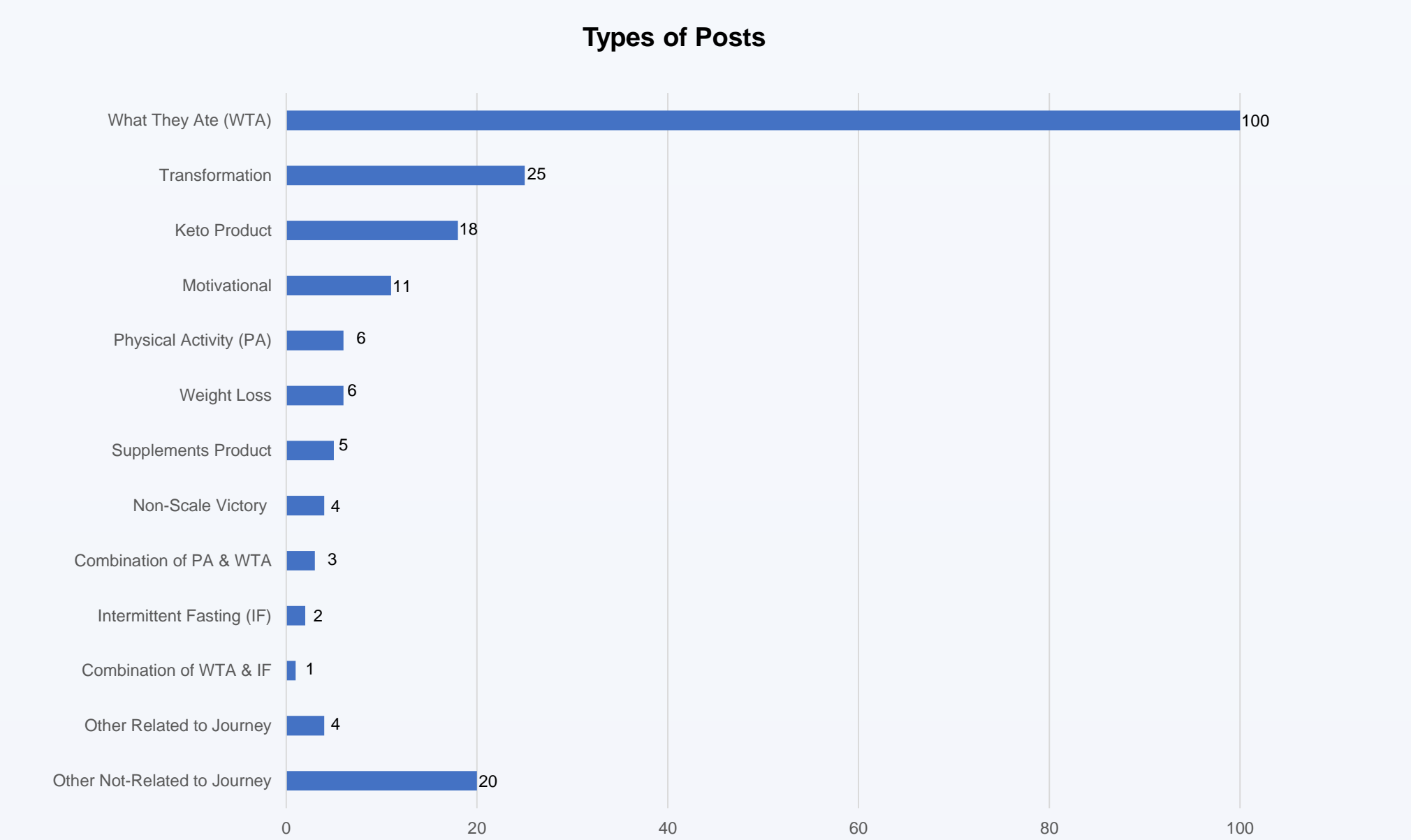
(Cottrell, Girvan, McKenzie, & Seabert, 2015, p. 99-100)

Methods

- An observational study of individuals that were experiencing obesity, using the ketogenic diet, and chronicling their weight loss journeys on Instagram (study population) was conducted.
- Content analysis of individual Instagram posts from the study participants for the months of August 2019 and September 2019 was used to determine how social media can help with weight loss through the three spheres of influence and whether these spheres existed among this population (since data collection occurred in October of 2019, retrospective data collection was also utilized).
- The study consisted of 5 total participants: 3 male and 2 female.
- A sample of participants from the population of keto Instagram users were found by searching "keto" and then other characters such as periods, underscores, and letters of the alphabet.
- Within this study, a keto Instagram user was defined as any person with "keto" in their username since many people who use Instagram for keto diet and/or weight loss purposes have keto in their username
- For each participant, for each post from August 2019 and September 2019 the following information was collected: type of post which would fall within the sphere of intrapersonal; total number of likes, total number of comments, and comment type within the sphere of interpersonal; and total keto likes and keto comments within the sphere of community.

Results

The **intrapersonal sphere** was found to exist among this population because of self accountability posts like what they ate and physical activity – which helps this population with their weight loss journeys.

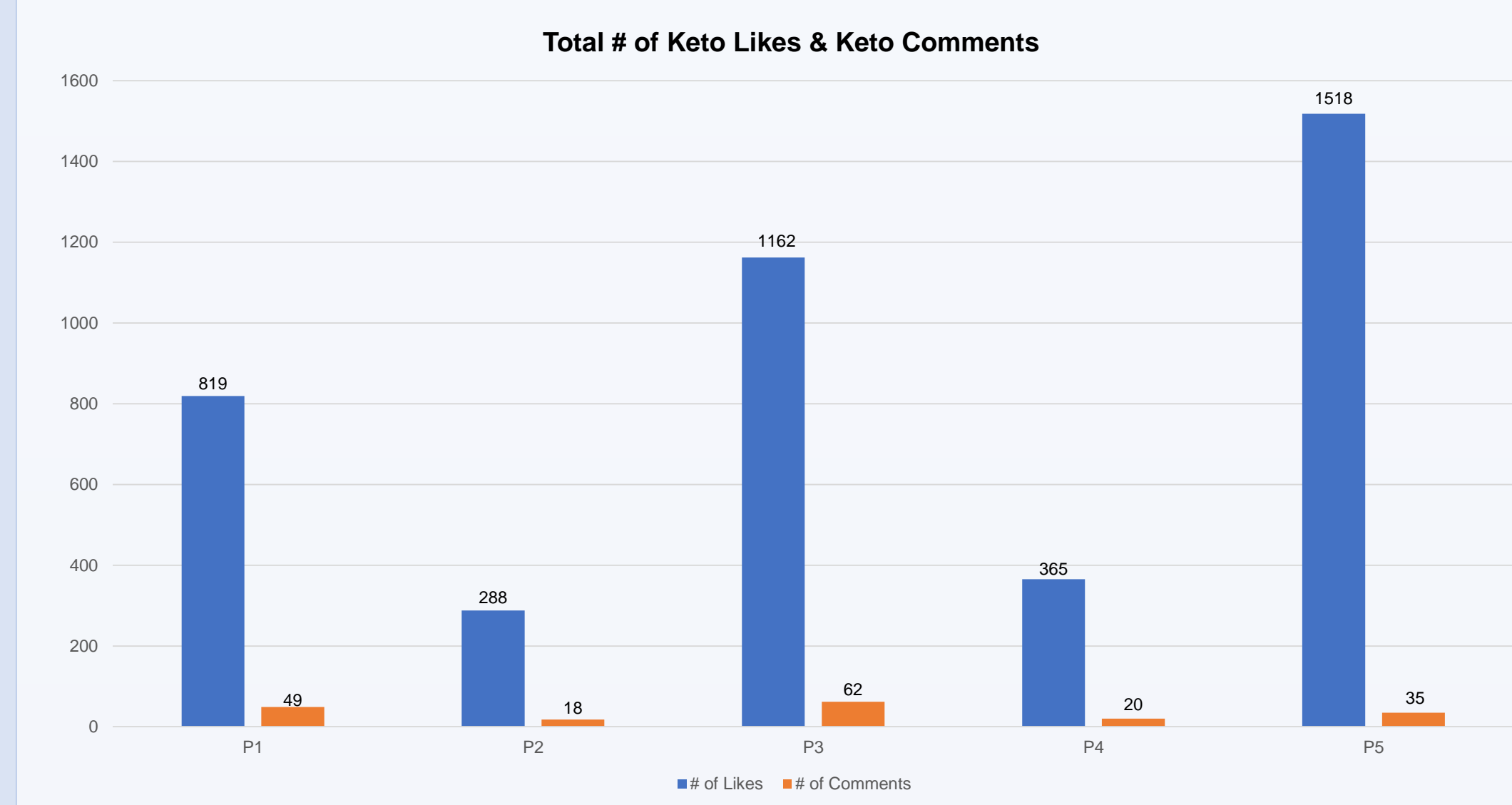


The **interpersonal sphere** was found to exist among this population through total number of likes and comments (more specifically, positive comments as evident in the table below) – which helps this population with their weight loss journeys by providing emotional support.



Results Continued

The **community sphere** was found to exist among this population through the total number of keto likes and keto comments (which means they were made by other keto Instagramers), and this helps this population with their weight loss journeys through interaction between similar persons.



Conclusion

- Thus, among this population there were three spheres of influence found: intrapersonal, interpersonal, and community, and these spheres help this population through self-accountability (types of posts), emotional support (likes, comments, and comment types), and interaction between similar persons (keto likes and comments), respectively.
- This study shows that social media can be a positive tool for weight loss.

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