

Research Article

Our Potential and Challenges of Social Media in Promoting Women's Health

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24321/2395.3810.202002>

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How to cite this article:

Pandey N. Our Potential and Challenges of Social Media in Promoting Women's Health. *J Adv Res Jrrnl Mass Comm* 2020; 7(1): 4-7.

Date of Submission: 2020-05-21

Date of Acceptance: 2020-05-28

A B S T R A C T

Women's health is a matter of concern for very countries. The advancement in the field of internet and emergence of social media has affected communication process to a great extent. As social media has advantage over traditional media because of web based applications, it can be used to promote health communication especially women's health which is neglected over the time. The present article attempts to find out the potential and challenges of social media for using as a tool to promote and aware the public on women's health.

Keywords: Social Media, Women, Health, Potential, Challenges, Internet

Introduction

With the launch of social network sites like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube between 1997 and 2006, they have attracted millions of users from around the world with a diverse variety of interest. They had been incorporated into their daily activities. Most of the sites help to the diverse audiences interact with each other based on common interests and activities. They bring about major improvements in contact between organizations, societies and individuals. Social media varies in most of the respects from conventional media, including quality; frequency, accessibility, immediacy and longevity. There are many effects which result from the use of the Internet. The social network has the ability to enhance women's health through health awareness and promotion in developed countries. There is a strong opportunity to use social media sites such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter and so on to support their health because of high penetration rate of social media in India.

Women's Health Condition in India

The concerns around women's health is affected by interrelated biological, social and cultural influences. It is

widely believed that women should be willing to survive longer than men and not necessarily have a good standard of life. Profound research revealed that during the life cycle, women are more sickly and disabled than men. Women have been reported to be particularly vulnerable, where adequate maternity treatment is not available. Due to some extensive biological factors which are concerned, women become more likely to be physically susceptible to developing Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), like the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), than men are. An early marriage and child birth may be some authentic aspects for the large disparity in socio-economic status that prevails in the society since the ancient period.

Women in India face significant gender discrimination on behalf of various grounds and are consequently more likely to encounter disadvantages in their lives, especially in the healthcare sector. Malnutrition, lack of proper hygiene and disease management all are huge leadings to the scarcity of women's healthcare services in India. Hence there are some essential health problems or issues affecting the women largely which should be require to tackle the situations.

Immunization: Vaccinations are one of the most successful methods for avoiding the adverse impacts of severe yet

preventable diseases in the short and long term effects. Its value cannot be overly emphasized. According to the UNICEF, India has 7.4 million unimmunized babies-which is the highest numbers in the nation. Unfortunately, class often plays a part in whether or not children are immunized, with girls have been getting less vaccinations than boys allegedly.

Malnutrition: India is considered to be the developed nations of the world with the highest level of undernourished children. This is especially bad in situations where income disparity is rife, with impoverished people unable to get proper water or food. Being undernourished renders us more vulnerable to infectious diseases and may have devastating effects in certain situations such as pneumonia and tuberculosis. Acquiring less nutrition also impacts the wellbeing of babies and maternal health.

Maternal Healthcare: Low socio-economic conditions in India hinder significant numbers of women's access to sufficient healthcare, resulting in poor health condition may arise for their children as well as the capacity of the mother to lead complete, healthy lives at home, in community or even in the economy. Maternal mortality tends to be large in many countries owing to deprivation, outdated traditions and beliefs, and lack of access to adequate proper medical treatment.

Menstrual Hygiene: It is shocking and worrying, despite billions of people, that only a limited number of women in India have exposure to safe healthcare when it comes to menstrual healthcare. Culturally, the menstrual cycle is often synonymous with uncleanness by a significant majority of the populace, and people are still prohibited to go to holy sites or even eat food during their cycles. It is typically a taboo topic that makes things much complicated for the young girls and women to come out of the revolving circle of misunderstandings. Even today, millions of women in India, depend on unhygienic methods such as cotton, leaves or husks which results in infections, rashes and discomfort. They are not so much curious or interested to buy sanitary pads because of their unaffordable prices.

The Diversity and Abundance of Media Options

When health practitioners with a particular message decide to reach among the public, they may pick from several resources and platforms to accomplish them as the target group. Mass media is a common medium for targeting a wide audience and attempting to change their health habits by behaviour management and shaping them with positive attitude. Health promotion and communication practices should represent desired types, platforms, and environments to meet the intended audiences efficiently (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2000). This ensures that the needs of information from the audience should acquire the channels in which the health information

is delivered for effective communication. The Internet (World Wide Web), television, and newspapers are different forms of mainstream media and the selected medium will suit the channel favored by the target audience when initiating a health initiative. Specific media decisions are not necessarily made consciously and may be influenced by an inner urge or instinct, including repetitive and often addictive media preferences and more popular forms of media are also utilized for health information (Hartman, 2009).

Health practitioners can utilize the popularity of mass media as an option to direct communicate with physicians through providing knowledge through such networks. Mass media having a wide presence thanks to their success but appear to be less successful at transforming perceptions and behavior. Mass media are less successful in transmitting messages to the receiving end as they neglect either meaningful human communication or stronger social influence (Cassell, Jackson, & Cheuvront, 1998). However, the media richness of internet has significantly improved due to the exponential growth and accessibility of web-based applications. Interactive apps on websites such as chat focused on real-time text or even face-to-face video communication have increased the media richness and its potential to reach wider audience. This mix method may be really more effective not in general marketing, but also in health communication where richer media can be more convincing for individuals making them more inclined to implement the messages. In this way complex health messages that require more comprehensive assistance may be distributed via mass media to promote behaviour change. There is required to combine effectiveness with capacity for targeting non-attained individuals (Metzler, Sanders, Rusby, & Crowley, 2012). A case in point to this growing media richness in websites is found in social networking.

Potential of Internet and Social Media in Health Communication

The Internet has always provided a simple and accessible medium of knowledge and details on a number of topics. More than 50% of Netherlands people visit the Internet over the period of three months span to access health information (Central Bureau Statistiek, 2011). The internet is most commonly used resource for reassurance in the case of health records, collect information while experiencing a health condition or before and during a doctor's appointment (Andreassen, et al., 2007). Prior to this wide internet acceptance, citizens accessed health details from their personal or attached the environment. People use web-based search engines that allow quick access to the interested topic-related web pages from all over the world (Eysenbach 2002). Besides static websites,

the move towards more interactive social networking platforms is underway and often recognized as the “new media.” Social networking turns the internet into a more interactive digital correspondence from a centralized source of health knowledge. The transition from traditional communication to modern forms of connectivity is linked to the area of e-health (electronic health). Social networking is an internet based application which use UGC (User Generated Content) that aims at generating and sharing content created by users (Kaplan & Haenlein, Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media, 2009). Examples of applications where UGC is created are forums, wikis (encyclopaedia), weblogs and social network sites. Social networking is pervasive. The use of the Internet is growing significantly giving a wide scope for UGC (Kaplan & Haenlein 2009; Pew Internet 2012). The e-health field encompasses the combination of communication, health, and social media. Eysenbach defined e-health as “an intersection of medical informatics, public health and business, referring to health services and information delivered or enhanced through the internet and related technologies. In a broader sense, the term characterizes a technical development but also a state-of-mind, a way of thinking, an attitude, a commitment to improve health care locally, regionally and worldwide by using information and communication technology” (Eysenbach, What is e-health?, 2001). According to this concept, the change from static health content on blogs to engage on health-related issues across social media and networks is the central part of e-health.

Health practitioners are influenced by incorrect information in their work in any field as their expert opinion can vary from the evidence an individual gathers on a health issue. The health care professional should react by partnering with the public to collect and evaluate knowledge discrepancies or direct individuals to credible websites with health details and attempt to improve Internet health literacy (McMullan, 2006). Using information based on relevant user experiences not only boost knowledge consistency but can also facilitate the communication between experts and public who are in need of information.

The personal uses in health communication identified for social networking include emotional help, inspiration, communication and counselling. But it is seen that people don't really utilize social media or social networking platforms for such things, touching just a limited amount of all people searching for health knowledge via social media (Newman, Lauterbach, Munson, Resnick, & Morris, “It's not that I don't have problems, I'm just not putting them on Facebook”: Challenges and Opportunities in Using Online Social Networks for Health, 2011). In the case of health issues impacting the general public or wider communities, knowledge exchange may touch multiple individuals during a short period of time.

Since people are investing more and more time on social networking they are usage to all kinds of issues are being addressed on these networks. Social media in this way will encourage people to explore and interact about various health topics. Through the usage of social media, through posing questions or inserting details regarding some queries, the public may communicate with and connect with the details presented. This tailoring of knowledge makes unique details accessible to users as and when they want it. The experience of the experts can be reached and discussed more effectively because of this direct interaction. The richness in health engagement has the ability to enhance healthcare.

Challenges of Social Media in Health Communication

For the reader the authenticity of knowledge is critical in health communication. Readers need to know about what the source of the knowledge is and whether it is based on scientific proof. Static websites sometimes lack references to sources of knowledge and render it difficult for individuals to understand the knowledge. This makes space for conflicts of interest for companies, organizations or people who can easily publish information online (Risk & Dzenowagis 2001). Lack of information accuracy is much more critical when it comes to issues such as health and wellbeing for people (Youngh, 2011). Social media decentralizes information sources allowing the quality of information on these platforms even more uncertain (Schein, Wilson, & Keelan, 2011). Those conflicts of interest and other forms of disinformation have an effect on health communication on social media (Youngh, 2011). On social media wrong information can easily reach the public and have a negative effect on individuals' health decisions (ComBat, 2010).

Social Media Tactics That can be used to Promote Women's Health

Promote Healthcare-Specific Networks to aware on women's health: Patients have a plethora of health and medical knowledge at their disposal in this Internet era. For example, a fast Google search for menstrual health can produces millions of outcomes. In certain situations, the best way is to deal with health problems is through sharing experiences and suggestions person-to-person on a website. This patient-powered network would leverage social media's immense scope to link target audiences with each other and with credible, competent health systems. Women can discuss modes of treatment, benefit from each other and openly express their encounters on various medical problems and health systems on these social networks and platforms.

Live Tweet to educate on women's health: Educating people on health is a key factor for healthcare organizations to

interact on social networking sites. They would like to update the public on innovative research and advice to remain healthy. Frequent posting on social media, including live-tweeting, provides various resources for awareness and interaction will promotes and serves as a forum to highlight the women's health issues and how to deal with it.

Include hashtags to engage in conversations on women's health: It is recommended to use related hashtags on women's health topics such as reproductive health, menstrual healthcare before and after pregnancy, nutrition, anemia, sexual health etc. to bring the best out of social media communication activities. Hashtags first became popular on Twitter, launched for easier user discovery and awareness monitoring as a way to connect up discussions and comment on related topics. Most media networks still utilize hashtags – like Facebook, Snapchat, LinkedIn, among others. It can be smartly used to engage people and to share their experiences and knowledge on women's health. Hashtags give both patients and doctors the opportunity to streamline their search through an entire social network site for the constant flow and exploration of health knowledge. Healthcare organizations should use a hashtags database to identify common hashtags on events, disorders, studies and other broad topics. This knowledge can be used to encourage social posts that show what patients are looking for at the moment.

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