Exploring Health Communication in Social Media: A Comparative Review

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Abstract. With the advent of internet, a new platform of Information Communication and Technology in health is becoming a popular trend to satisfy the craving of health consciousness people seeking health related information. Researchers published health related papers and articles while patients, their friends and families share the experiences through social media such as facebook, twitters, blogs. People can seek readily available health related information effortlessly by the convenience of their fingers tip. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to review health communication for the past four years (2013-2016) and to identify the channels of communication used of health communication in social media. Eight papers were selected in this study related to health communication and promotion. The papers were reviewed based on their elements, methods and approaches used by researchers in their study. There are also several differences outcome in these papers. It can be concluded that social media play a main role in disseminating information and improve knowledge to the masses on health communication as people find information on health through the easiest internet channel.

1. Introduction

As Information Communication and Technology (ICT) revolutionize information distribution in each and every day of our lives, equivalently many new health technologies frontiers are discovered and becomes a breakthrough. Without doubt, healthcare has become one of the most important elements in our society. Advance in new researches, acquired knowledge and breakthrough in illness treatments, curing and prevention give way for the opportunity to the development of healthcare. According to [1], the implementation of ICT for health communication is vital for cost-effective, appropriate and individually tailored health care.

[2] reported that based on the US Harris Survey, there were 93% respondents believe online information on health, 85% health information ease to read and good quality of health information is 82%. This shows that people will use online social communities or social media as a platform to improve their knowledge on health and dissemination information on health. Furthermore, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are some of the elements in social media that have created a new era in health communication [3].
2. Related Literature

Previous studies focus on health communication and the use of ICT in implementation of healthcare among respondents. Therefore, this paper will analyze eight articles associated to health communication on social media for the past four years (2013-2016). The related research was selected based on the communication channel used in health communication.

2.1. New Technology

The use of mobile communication technologies in daily use for health communication is different between communities and depends on cultural characteristics and demographic. The survey on the use of mobile technologies and social media has been done to support provider-patient communication in an urban Latino community. From 130 respondents, [4] found that facebook/myspace was the most frequently used of social media by parents and youth but not for health communication. Furthermore, parents were more interested in receiving email and text messages on health.

While in China, rabies is a serious health problem whereby health education on rabies is needed. The purpose of the study by [5] are to compare and measure the effect on knowledge of rabies. A total of 350 randomly selected villages were allocated in using Short Messaging Service through handphone (SMS) and rabies health information sessions (IS). The results showed that Short Messaging Service is one of the medium in promoting public health to respondents.

2.2. Health Communication

[6] done research to improve the knowledge of health communication focus on the implications for a planned ICT supported interactive health channel. A qualitative research with multi-methods was done using content analysis. From the data analysis, two themes emerged was communicating health and environment for health communication. The results showed that health communication is an essential element of health promotion practice.

2.3. Tweeting as Health Communication

[7] analyzed the use of Twitter in disseminating information related to health, building relationships among participants and encourage them to improve their health. The study involved American Heart Association, American Cancer Society, and American Diabetes Association. The researcher has identified 1,583 tweets in examining with the organisations’ use of twitter by using content analysis. [7] argument relies on Twitter’s interactive features, message functions and topics related. Furthermore, the researcher points out that majority of the tweets were related to organization-related topics and personal health-related tweets represented a small portion of the sample.

2.4. Social Media

Social media is one of the important tools in disseminating information on health. During analysing the accounts, the researcher found that 66.7% had Facebook accounts, 80.4% twitter accounts while 50.9% You-Tube accounts. However, the researcher emphasis on Facebook pages of 34 State Health Departments that was done over a 200 day period using NVivo10 to analyse through manual coding. [8] noted that content provided on Facebook and health conditions affect their populations. However other research done by [9] analyzed message features predictive of user engagement on diabetes related Facebook pages. The results showed that specific features predicted different forms of engagement.

2.5. Online blogs

The aim of [10] paper is to analyzed the use of online doctor blogs or patients would increase the patient to seek out treatment. There were 278 respondents involved in this survey who discussed information on health with doctors through blogs and using structural equation model analysis. The findings showed that there were a positive effect between health communication, situated learning and health knowledge involvement.
3. Findings

Based on the above discussion, Table 1 described the summaries of health communication and social media. Papers that have been reviewed discussed more on social media as a channel in disseminating information on health.

| No | Author (Year) | Title (Journal) | Principle | User Context (Number of Respondents) | Communication Channel (Strategy) |
|----|---------------|-----------------|-----------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1  | Amina Jama Mahmud et al (2013) | Health communication in primary health care - A case study of ICT development for health promotion. | • Health communication  
• Health promotion  
• E-health  
• Information Communication Technology  
• Primary health care | A total of 251 respondents involved by using participatory observation in informal interviews. | • Interpersonal  
• Group  
• ICT mediated health communication |
| 2  | Lee, Y. C et al (2014) | The effects of situated learning and health knowledge involvement on health communications. | • Situated learning  
• Health knowledge involvement  
• Health communication | There were 278 adults participated in online communication using doctor blogs discussed on medical information with doctors. | • Online platform of blogs |
| 3  | Smaldone, A. et al (2015) | Adolescent and parent use of new technologies for health communication: A study in an urban Latino community. | • Health communication  
• Social media technology | There were 142 youths and parents seek information on health by using technology. | • Twitter, Facebook/Myspace, Instant Messaging  
• Videoconference (Skype/OOvoo) |
| 4  | Rus, H.M et al (2016) | Health communication in social media: Message features predicting user engagement on diabetes-related Facebook pages. | • Social media  
• Facebook  
• Health communication | Content analysis of 500 Facebook posts. | • Facebook |
| 5  | Jha, A. et al (2016) | The use of social media by state health departments in the US: Analyzing health communication through Facebook. | • Social media  
• Health communication  
• State health department  
• Facebook | There were 2,597 Facebook posts during 200 day study period were coded. | • Facebook |
| 6  | Wu, H. et al (2016) | Community-based interventions to enhance knowledge, protective attitudes and health education | • Health education  
• Intervention study | Selected villagers of 350 respondents were randomly allocated into three | • Short message service via mobile phone (SMS) |
|   | behaviors towards canine rabies: Results from a health communication intervention study in Guangxi, China. | intervention (SMS, IS and SMS+IS) | Rabies education information session (IS) • Combination of the two (SMS+IS) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 7 | Park, H. et al (2016) Tweeting as Health Communication: Health Organizations’ Use of Twitter for Health Promotion and Public Engagement | • Health Organization • Social media | A total of 16 twitter accounts is being associated with the organizations using content analysis. • Twitter |
| 8 | Kreslake, J.M. et al (2016) Developing effective communication materials on the health effects of climate change for vulnerable groups: A mixed method study. | • Climate change • Global warming • Health impacts • Health disparities • Health literacy • Health communication • Chronic disease management | There were 122 respondents were recruited from online community bulletin boards in selected metropolitan areas using non probability purposive sampling design. • Online survey assessed within-subject changes in knowledge, beliefs and behavioral intentions |

4. Conclusions

Noted that the above table summarizes health communication papers reviewed and relevant social media they employed. Thus, this paper focuses on sharing and exchanging health related knowledge using Information Communication and Technology as a communication channel. Most of the research done in this paper, use social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Skype, Instant Messaging, Myspace and Short Message Service (SMS) via mobile phone as a platform.

In conclusion, with daily improvement of technology, promoting health information through social media is becoming a new trend as people naturally seek information through the easiest, effortlessly and cheapest mean of getting information.

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