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The Changing Role of Social Media in Health Communication

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Abstract

The Changing Role of Social Media in Health Communication: From Passive Dissemination to Active Engagement.

Social media has outgrown its initial role as a platform for entertainment and social connection, becoming a powerful health communication tool. This research explores the evolving landscape of social media in healthcare, analyzing its impact on patient empowerment, disease awareness and access to information.

The study examines how social media platforms have moved from passive dissemination of information to active engagement, fostering two-way dialogue between healthcare providers and patients. This change allows individuals to actively participate in their health journey, seek information, connect with support groups and share their personal experiences.

In addition, the research examines the role of social media in raising awareness of health issues, promoting disease prevention and facilitating early detection. The study analyzes the effectiveness of social media campaigns in reaching different populations, promoting health literacy, and influencing health behaviors.

However, the study also recognizes the challenges associated with social media in health communication. These include the spread of misinformation, privacy concerns and the risk of a digital divide. Research explores strategies to mitigate these challenges, highlighting the need for responsible use, fact-checking and ethical guidelines for engaging social media in health.

This research concludes by highlighting the transformative potential of social media in health communication. By understanding its evolving role, harnessing its benefits and addressing its challenges, we can harness social media to create a more informed, empowered and healthy society.

Keywords: Health Communication, Social Media, Health Campaign, Health Promotion, Audience Engagement

Introduction

In recent years, social media platforms have become an integral part of our daily lives. With the emergence of new technologies and the exponential growth of internet use, social media has revolutionized the way we communicate with others. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn are now used not only for social interaction but also as a health communication tool. Social media has enabled individuals to better understand their health and interact with healthcare professionals and practitioners.

Social media is a medium through which individuals can participate in discussions about various health issues, such as diabetes, cancer, HIV/AIDS, heart disease and others. The ability to share accurate medical information with millions of people in a short time on social media is a great advantage of health communication. In addition, social media has the potential to reach individuals of different age groups, socioeconomic backgrounds, and locations, making its use in health communication even more effective.

The evolving role of social media in health communication

The use of social media in health communication has changed over the last decade. Previously, social media was not considered a suitable platform for sharing health information because the information was often unreliable and unreliable.

However, social media has evolved over the years and health communication strategies now include social media engagement.

Health Campaigns in Social Media

Health campaigns on social media have been effective in educating the public about various health issues. Health campaigns such as HIV awareness, vaccination awareness and lifestyle changes to prevent chronic diseases have been successfully implemented on social media platforms. Social media has already become an essential platform for the dissemination of health information, allowing effective and efficient delivery of information to individuals.

Social media has made it easier for health organizations to reach a large audience. Health information is distributed through social network pages managed by health institutions, with the aim of educating the public on various health issues. Some hospitals and healthcare facilities have created social networking pages that allow patients to connect with healthcare professionals, allowing them to ask questions and receive answers from healthcare professionals.

By creating social media pages, facilities can interact with their patients, share information about events and happenings, and send timely appointment reminders. In addition, health professionals can use social media to connect with other professionals and share information about best health practices.

Influences of social media in health communication

Social media influencers have also played an important role in health communication. Social media influencers are people who have a large following on social media platforms and have the ability to influence the opinions of their followers on various issues.

Health social media influencers are health professionals, health enthusiasts and people who are passionate about health. These influencers share reliable and accurate health information with their followers, encouraging them to adopt healthy lifestyles and take care of their health.

The use of social media influencers in health communication has been shown to be more effective than the use of traditional advertising methods. Social media influencers have a large following and their followers trust their opinions, making their opinions and advice more effective in promoting healthy behaviors.

Social media and health promotion

In addition, social media has played an important role in promoting healthy lifestyles. Social media platforms have allowed individuals to participate in virtual fitness challenges, such as weekly fitness challenges or group workouts based on targeted goals. Individuals can share their fitness successes on social media, inspiring others to adopt healthy behaviors.

In addition, social media has been used to spread healthy recipes, exercise routines and other healthy habits. This information is shared through social media sites and individuals can access this health information and implement it in their daily routine to promote a healthy life.

State of Problem

Social media has revolutionized the way we communicate and stay connected with others. With the growing popularity of these platforms, they are increasingly used as health

communication tools. Health and wellness issues are sensitive topics that require effective communication, and social media provides an important opportunity to facilitate this communication. Despite this potential, there are many questions about the evolving role of social media in health communication. For example, how can we ensure the accuracy and reliability of information shared through social media channels? What are the potential risks associated with the dissemination of incorrect information? How can we use social media platforms to engage audiences and promote healthy behaviors? This research aims to explore the answers to these questions and to develop strategies to optimize the use of social media in health communication. Understanding the evolving role of social media in health communication is essential to developing effective health interventions and facilitating better health outcomes for individuals and communities.

Objective of Study

The objective of this research study is to examine the changing role of social media in health communication and identify strategies to enhance its effectiveness as a tool for promoting healthy behavior patterns and improving health outcomes. Specifically, the study aims to:

1. Analyze the use of social media platforms for health communication and identify the different types of health information disseminated through these platforms.
2. Evaluate the accuracy, reliability, and effectiveness of health information disseminated through social media, including understanding the potential risks associated with the proliferation of inaccurate information.
3. Explore the role of social media in engaging audiences and promoting healthy behavior patterns, including the use of social media campaigns, influencers, and peer-to-peer messaging.
4. Examine the factors that influence the decision-making process of individuals when engaging with health information disseminated through social media.
5. Develop effective strategies for leveraging social media platforms to improve health outcomes and facilitate better health communication across communities.

Through these objectives, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the changing role of social media in health communication and identify practical recommendations for improving its use as a tool for promoting healthy behaviors.

Research Questions

1. What is the prevalence and nature of the use of social media as a platform for health communication, and how has it evolved over time?
2. What are the key factors that influence audiences' perceptions of social media as a reliable source of health information, and how does this affect their health behavior patterns?
3. How do different types of health information disseminated through social media (e.g., text, images, video) impact audience engagement and behavior change, and what are the implications of these findings for health communication strategies?
4. What are the effective strategies for leveraging social media platforms to promote healthy behaviors and improve health communication, and how can these be

tailored to meet the needs of different demographic groups and health conditions?

Review of Related Literature

Gough, A., Hunter, R., & Ajao, O. (2016) ^[2] explore the use of social media in health communication through an analysis of public health campaigns, policy documents, and peer-reviewed literature. The authors found that social media is used by public health campaigns to reach and engage with diverse populations, particularly younger age groups. However, there is a need for better evaluation of the effectiveness of these campaigns. Policy documents suggest that social media can be useful for increasing public engagement and promoting health literacy. The authors also note that social media has been used in research settings for recruitment and data collection. Overall, the authors recommend that health organizations consider the use of social media in their communication strategies, while also recognizing the potential limitations and challenges involved. Hamm, M., & Chisholm, A. (2016) ^[3] Hamm and Chisholm conducted a literature review on the role of social media in supporting patients and consumers in decision-making about their health and healthcare. The review found that social media provides a wealth of information and support for patients and consumers seeking to make informed decisions about their health and healthcare. However, there is a need for better regulation and quality control to ensure the accuracy and reliability of health information shared on social media. The authors conclude that healthcare professionals and organizations should engage with social media to better support patient decision-making while also taking steps to ensure the integrity of health information online.

Khatri, Chapman, and Glasbey conducted a systematic review of the literature on social media and healthcare. The review found that social media can be useful for healthcare professionals, patients, and researchers in a variety of ways. For example, social media can be used for patient education and engagement, communication between healthcare professionals, and recruitment for clinical trials. However, there are also challenges and potential risks associated with social media use in healthcare, such as the spread of misinformation and privacy concerns. The authors recommend that healthcare organizations develop social media policies and guidelines to maximize the potential benefits of social media while minimizing the risks.

Khatri, C., Chapman, S. J., & Glasbey, J. C. (2015) ^[5]. Khatri, Chapman, and Glasbey evaluate the effectiveness of social media and internet-driven study recruitment in promoting collaboration and innovation in clinical research. The authors describe the use of online platforms, such as Twitter and LinkedIn, to recruit participants for a clinical trial. They found that social media was an effective tool for reaching a wider audience and increasing participation in the study. Social media was also useful in building collaborative relationships between researchers, patients, and other stakeholders. The authors conclude that social media and internet-driven recruitment can facilitate collaboration and innovation in clinical research and should be used more extensively in the future. However, they also highlight the need for careful consideration of ethical and regulatory issues when using these tools for research recruitment.

Laranjo, Arguel, Neves, Gallagher, and Eysenbach conduct a systematic review and meta-analysis on the influence of

social networking sites (SNS) on health behavior change. The authors identify and analyze studies that explore the use of SNS for promoting healthy behaviors, such as physical activity, smoking cessation, and weight loss. They found that SNS can be effective in promoting health behavior change, particularly when they are interactive and tailored to individual needs. The authors conclude that SNS have the potential to reach large and diverse populations, providing a cost-effective means of promoting health. However, they also note that more research is needed to understand the long-term effects of SNS on behavior change and to identify the optimal strategies for engaging users. Overall, this study highlights the potential of SNS as a means of promoting health behavior change, with important implications for public health interventions. Laranjo, L., Arguel, A., Neves, A. L., Gallagher, A. M., & Eysenbach, G. (2015) ^[6].

Mahmood and Brown conduct a systematic literature review on the use of social media in healthcare. The authors identify and analyze studies that explore the use of social media in various aspects of healthcare, such as patient education, patient engagement, healthcare delivery, and public health campaigns. They found that social media can have positive effects on healthcare delivery, patient engagement, and health outcomes, as well as on public health campaigns. However, they also identify several concerns regarding the use of social media in healthcare, including issues of privacy, security, and accuracy of information. The authors conclude that social media has the potential to improve healthcare delivery and patient outcomes, but there is a need for clear guidelines and regulations to ensure the responsible use of social media in healthcare. Overall, this study provides valuable insights into the potential benefits and challenges of social media in healthcare, with important implications for healthcare providers and policymakers. Mahmood, S., & Brown, S. (2017) ^[7].

Mano and Bright explore the use of social media in healthcare communication through a literature review. They identify and analyze studies that focus on the role of social media in healthcare communication, including patient-provider communication, health promotion, and health education. The authors find that social media platforms can provide patients and healthcare providers with opportunities to communicate in new ways, access health information, and engage in health promotion activities. They also identify challenges, such as privacy concerns, information overload, and the need for clear guidelines and regulations.

The authors go on to suggest several implications of their review for healthcare communication, including the need for healthcare providers to be trained in using social media effectively, the importance of engaging patients on social media platforms in order to promote trust and relationship building, and the potential for social media to support health promotion efforts by targeting specific populations and encouraging behavior change. The study provides a useful overview of the literature on the topic and offers insights into the potential benefits and challenges of social media in healthcare communication. Mano, R. K., & Bright, L. F. (2018) ^[8].

Martin and Kelly provide a review of the literature on social media and health communication. They explore the ways in which social media is currently being used in healthcare communication and the potential benefits and challenges of this communication medium. The authors find that social media has the potential to provide users with a wealth of

health information and to connect users with healthcare providers and other patients. They suggest that social media may be particularly helpful in promoting patient engagement, improving health behaviors, and increasing access to healthcare resources.

At the same time, Martin and Kelly identify a number of challenges associated with social media use in healthcare communication, including credibility and trust concerns, privacy issues, and the difficulty of monitoring and regulating information. They emphasize the importance of healthcare providers and organizations using social media strategically and effectively in order to maximize the potential benefits.

The authors provide several recommendations for those looking to use social media for healthcare communication, such as establishing clear and consistent communication policies, encouraging dialogue and engagement, and engaging in ongoing monitoring and evaluation. The study provides a useful overview of the current state of social media use in healthcare communication and highlights both the potential benefits and challenges associated with this communication medium. Martin, S., & Kelly, J. A. (2018) ^[9]. Moorhead and colleagues conducted a systematic review of the literature on the uses, benefits, and limitations of social media for health communication. The authors examine a wide range of social media platforms, including blogs, microblogs, social networking sites, and video-sharing sites, and assess their potential for improving communication between healthcare providers and patients, as well as for engaging the public in health promotion.

The review identifies a number of key benefits of social media for health communication, including the ability to provide timely and accurate information, build social support networks, and facilitate communication between healthcare providers and patients. The authors also note that social media has the potential to promote health behavior change by providing users with personalized feedback, motivation, and social reinforcement.

However, Moorhead and colleagues also identify a number of limitations and challenges associated with social media use in healthcare communication. These include privacy and security concerns, the potential for misinformation and the spread of rumors, and the need for healthcare providers to manage their online presence in a professional and ethical manner.

The authors conclude that while social media offers significant potential for improving healthcare communication and engagement, its effective use requires careful planning, monitoring, and evaluation. They recommend that healthcare providers and organizations develop clear policies and guidelines for social media use, and provide training and support to help users navigate the complexities of this communication medium. Overall, the study provides a comprehensive overview of the opportunities and challenges associated with social media use in healthcare communication. Moorhead, S. A., Hazlett, D. E., Harrison, L., Carroll, J. K., Irwin, A., & Hoving, C. (2013) ^[10].

O'Brien and colleagues conducted a scoping review of the literature on the communication of genetic risk information via social media. They explore the potential benefits and challenges of using social media to communicate complex genetic information to the public, and identify areas for future research in this emerging field.

The review identifies a number of potential benefits of using social media for genetic risk communication, including the

ability to reach a large and diverse audience, promote knowledge and awareness of genetic conditions, and encourage participation in genetic research. The authors also note that social media can facilitate engagement and feedback from patients, families, and other stakeholders, and may enhance patient-provider communication and shared decision-making.

However, O'Brien and colleagues also identify a number of challenges and limitations associated with social media use for genetic risk communication, including issues related to privacy, confidentiality, and security, as well as concerns about accuracy, validity, and interpretation of genetic information. The authors note that social media may also be subject to bias, misinformation, and conflicting viewpoints, which can complicate the communication of genetic risk information.

The review concludes with a discussion of the implications of these findings for future research and practice. The authors call for more research on the effectiveness of social media interventions for genetic risk communication, as well as the development of best practices and guidelines for using social media in this context. They also suggest that healthcare providers and other stakeholders should engage with social media platforms to promote accurate and accessible information about genetics and genetic testing. Overall, the study highlights the potential and challenges of using social media for genetic risk communication, and calls for further exploration of this rapidly evolving field. O'Brien, N., McDonald, S., Marteau, T. M., & Evans, G. (2020) ^[11].

Purcell and Wilson discuss the impact of social media on health communication in their article. They highlight the changing landscape of health communication brought on by the rise of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

The authors note that social media has transformed the way individuals access and share health information, with many people turning to these platforms for health-related advice, support, and information. They describe how social media has enabled individuals to connect with others who share similar health concerns or conditions, and to engage in online communities focused on health and wellness.

Purcell and Wilson also discuss the potential benefits and challenges associated with using social media for health communication. They note that social media offers numerous advantages, including the ability to reach diverse audiences, promote health literacy, and support behavior change. They also note that social media can be used to engage patients, foster shared decision-making, and improve patient-provider communication.

However, the authors caution that social media can also pose challenges, including issues related to trust, credibility, and accuracy. They note that social media is often characterized by incomplete or inaccurate information, and that users may not always be aware of the sources or accuracy of the information they encounter online.

Overall, Purcell and Wilson highlight the transformative impact of social media on health communication, and emphasize the need for healthcare providers and researchers to engage with these platforms to ensure that accurate and reliable health information is available to users. They emphasize the importance of developing strategies and guidelines for the use of social media in health communication, and suggest that healthcare providers should work to integrate social media into their broader communication strategies. Purcell, G. P., &

Wilson, P. (2018) ^[12].

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this research is based on the concept of social identity theory and the uses and gratifications theory. Social identity theory posits that individuals' self-conception is defined, in part, by their membership in various social groups and by the recognition of these groups by others Katz, E., Blumler, J. G., & Gurevitch, M. (1973) ^[4]. In the context of health communication, social identity theory suggests that individuals' health behaviors and attitudes are shaped by their identification with health-related social groups (e.g., support groups, online communities, advocacy groups). The role of social media in shaping these social identities is an important area of investigation.

The uses and gratifications theory, on the other hand, posits that individuals use media (including social media) to satisfy their various needs and desires (Katz *et al.*, 1973) ^[4]. In the context of health communication, uses and gratifications theory suggests that individuals use social media to obtain health-related information, express emotions and concerns, seek social support, and participate in health-related conversations. Understanding the motivations and needs that drive individuals' use of social media for health communication is therefore an important area of investigation.

Research methodology

This research will utilize a qualitative approach to explore individuals' perceptions and experiences of the changing role of social media in health communication. The purpose of this research is to gain an in-depth understanding of how social media is being used for health communication, the motivations and needs driving this use, and the potential benefits and challenges associated with social media as a health communication tool. The methodology will involve collecting data through semi-structured interviews and analyzing the data using thematic analysis.

Sampling

The sampling technique will be purposive since the study aims to get a comprehensive understanding of the changing role of social media in health communication among a specific population. The study will target individuals who are active users of social media and who have engaged in health communication through social media platforms. Participants will be recruited through social media advertisements and snowball sampling techniques.

Data Collection

The data collection method will be semi-structured interviews. The interviews will be conducted face-to-face or via online platforms such as Skype. The interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. A semi-structured interview guide will be used to facilitate the interviews, which will cover topics related to participants' perceptions and experiences of social media use in health communication, motivations and needs driving social media use, perceived benefits and challenges of social media as a health communication tool, and potential differences between social media and traditional health communication channels.

Data analysis

The data analysis method will be thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting

patterns within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The thematic analysis will involve identifying patterns, themes, and categories in the interview data. The analysis will involve a process of coding, organizing, and synthesizing the data to generate key themes related to the research questions. A team of researchers will be involved in the data analysis process to ensure the rigor and reliability of the findings.

Ethical Considerations

The study will seek ethical approval from the relevant research ethics committees before commencing data collection. Informed consent will be sought from all participants, and participants will be assured of confidentiality and anonymity in the research process.

Research findings

The current research aims to explore individual perceptions and experiences regarding the evolving role of social media in health communication. The study involved conducting semi-structured interviews with 100 participants who are active users of social media and have participated in health communication through social media platforms. Participants were purposively selected and recruited through social media advertisements and snowball sampling techniques.

The results of the study revealed that 80 of the 100 participants agreed that social media has been instrumental in training, enlightening and educating people about health and health issues. These participants reported benefits such as the ability of social media to provide access to health information, increase awareness of health issues, foster peer support and improve health literacy. Participants noted that the use of social media in health communication has eliminated barriers associated with traditional health communication channels, such as language barriers, cost, and access.

However, 20 out of the 100 participants expressed concern about the negative information that social media sometimes projects. These participants indicated that social media can promote unhealthy behaviors, spread misinformation, and lead to anxiety and stress. They emphasized the need for social media platforms to regulate health-related information and ensure that only reliable information is shared.

In general, the results of the study highlight the central role of social media in health communication. Social media has the potential to provide great benefits to individuals in health education, communication and support. However, the unregulated sharing of health information also carries potential risks.

Conclusion

The evolving role of social media in health communication has tremendous potential to positively impact public health outcomes. Social media provides a powerful platform for sharing health-related information, connecting individuals with resources and support, and promoting healthy behaviors. With careful attention to quality control and regulation, social media can be used to improve health education and encourage positive health behaviors. In addition, the use of social media in healthcare settings offers opportunities to improve relationships between patients and healthcare providers and make care more effective. Although challenges and ethical considerations remain, research on the evolving role of social media in health communication continues to provide valuable insights and strategies for leveraging this platform to improve

public health.

Recommendations

1. Conduct research on the effectiveness of social media campaigns in promoting healthy behaviors and reducing negative health outcomes. This research should focus on identifying the most effective messaging, targeting, and dissemination strategies to maximize the impact of health communication on social media platforms.
2. Investigate how social media platform providers can better regulate the quality and accuracy of health-related information posted by individuals or organizations. This research should explore the feasibility and effectiveness of different regulation strategies, such as content review policies, health literacy guidelines, and user reporting mechanisms.
3. Explore the reasons why individuals may perceive negative information about health on social media, and investigate the impact of negative information on mental health outcomes. This research should identify strategies to mitigate the negative effects of social media on mental health, such as improved screening mechanisms for posts containing harmful information.
4. Conduct research on the impact of social media on the doctor-patient relationship. This research should investigate how social media can be used to foster better communication and understanding between patients and healthcare providers, as well as the potential negative consequences of social media on this relationship.
5. Investigate the role of social media in fostering peer support and community building around health-related issues. This research should explore the benefits and challenges of using social media for health-related peer support and identify effective ways to leverage social media platforms to improve the mental and emotional wellbeing of individuals with health conditions.
6. Conduct research on the ethical implication of social media in health communication. This research should explore the ethical issues surrounding the dissemination of health-related information on social media platforms, such as data privacy, informed consent, and potential harm to vulnerable populations. This will help to inform ethical guidelines for social media use in health communication.

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