

## Social Media and SNS: Applications in Health Promotion

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### Abstract

Social media is emerging today as a fast growing tool to reach out to people. The Social Networking sites (SNS) offer cost-effective platforms to be in touch with large population. This paper reviews the discrepancy that exists in accessibility and usage of social media and its interconnected applications and the numerous benefits these applications can be put to use and points out to the intrinsic challenges in the way of efficient communication.

**Keywords:** Social Media; Social Networking Sites (SNS); Communication; Digital Divide; Health Promotion.

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### Background

Today the media plays an important role in being the efficient and effective communication tool for informing multiple aspects of individuals' life including their access to health information. Conventionally, public health organizations used print, audio, video and social marketing frameworks to propagate important health messages to the public. However the entire scenario change with the advent of electronic media in the last few decades in the forefront of communication, and public health communiqué has developed to echo this. With the dawn of the new era, in the wake of the "Web 2.0" phenomenon, communication policies for public health are also changing to match the increasingly significant and rapidly growing social media revolution.

The advancement of social media has essentially changed how individuals interrelate in our society, engaging record numbers of people both online and otherwise. New media generally consist of interactive, computerized, networked information and communication. Social media, nevertheless, is new media with a social focus, where information is

collective with the idea of networking. Social Networking Sites like MySpace, Twitter Facebook, LinkedIn and others allow individuals to instantly communicate with large networks of friends, contacts and colleagues.

Social media is a voice for the health information to consumers, while allowing consumers to contribute and respond to advice that was traditionally only issued by providers [1]. There has been an increase in the use of social media globally, including in health care contexts [2-9]. When focusing on social media for health communication, it is helpful to first outline the broad characteristics of social media. Kaplan and Haenlein [10] defined social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allows the creation and exchange of user generated content" [11].

### Introduction

Today the Internet has become an integral part of our lives. In a report released by the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) and market research firm IMRB International. The number of Internet users has grown from ten million in 1993, to approximately forty million in 1995, to more than 670 million in 2002.

In India the number of Internet users is expected to reach 402 million by December, a 49% jump over the last year, thus making India home to the largest online user base after China. The report further adds that

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while internet in India took more than a decade to move from 10 million to 100 million and 3 years from 100 to 200 million, it took only a year to move from 300 to 400 million users. Today, 40 million Indians are online every day, spending 40-45 hours over the Internet per month. India is the second largest market for social networking giants such as LinkedIn and Facebook and about 58,000 new users get connected on to a social network every day.

### *Social Media and Healthcare*

One of the big challenges that healthcare worldwide is experiencing is the change in the customer's perception and view about healthcare services with the inception of the modern day digital medium. Prior, customers relied on advertisements and word-of-mouth assessment to identify healthcare facilities and get specialty treatments. Today, digitally-savvy customers have information at their fingertips with easy access to expert forums and peer groups for quick appraisal and information about illnesses and diseases.

Patients today use social media to research and to make health decisions. These decisions include the selection of hospitals their doctor, and even courses of treatment for their family, their parents and themselves. More than connectivity social media is also used to share experiences with both rare and common disease and health issues. Not only are they 'information consumers', they are 'knowledge sharers' as well. Every customer today has the capability to persuade a large group of peers within and outside their networks. In short, social media is a platform where the patients, public, and healthcare professionals can communicate about health issues and possibly improve health outcomes.

This advent of transparent, real time social media communications platforms allow open and honest dialogue and presents a wealth of opportunities for the industry to capitalize on positive patient sentiment and build a trusted support community to actively engage with.

- More than 40% of consumers say that information found via social media affects the way they deal with their health.
- 18 to 24 year olds are more than 2x as likely as 45 to 54 year olds to use social media for health-related discussions.
- 90% of respondents from 18 to 24 years of age said they would trust medical information shared by others on their social media networks.
- 19% of smartphone owners have at least one

health app on their phone. Exercise, diet, and weight apps are the most popular types.

- From a recent study, 54% of patients are very comfortable with their providers seeking advice from online communities to better treat their conditions.
- 30% of adults are likely to share information about their health on social media sites with other patients, 47% with doctors, 43% with hospitals, 38% with a health insurance company and 32% with a drug company.
- The most accessed online resources for health related information are: 56% searched WebMD, 31% on Wikipedia, 29% on health magazine websites, 17% used Facebook, 15% used YouTube, 13% used a blog or multiple blogs, 12% used patient communities, 6% used Twitter and 27% used none of the above.
- Parents are more likely to seek medical answers online, 22% use Facebook and 20% use YouTube. Of non-parents, 14% use Facebook and 12% use YouTube to search for health care related topics.

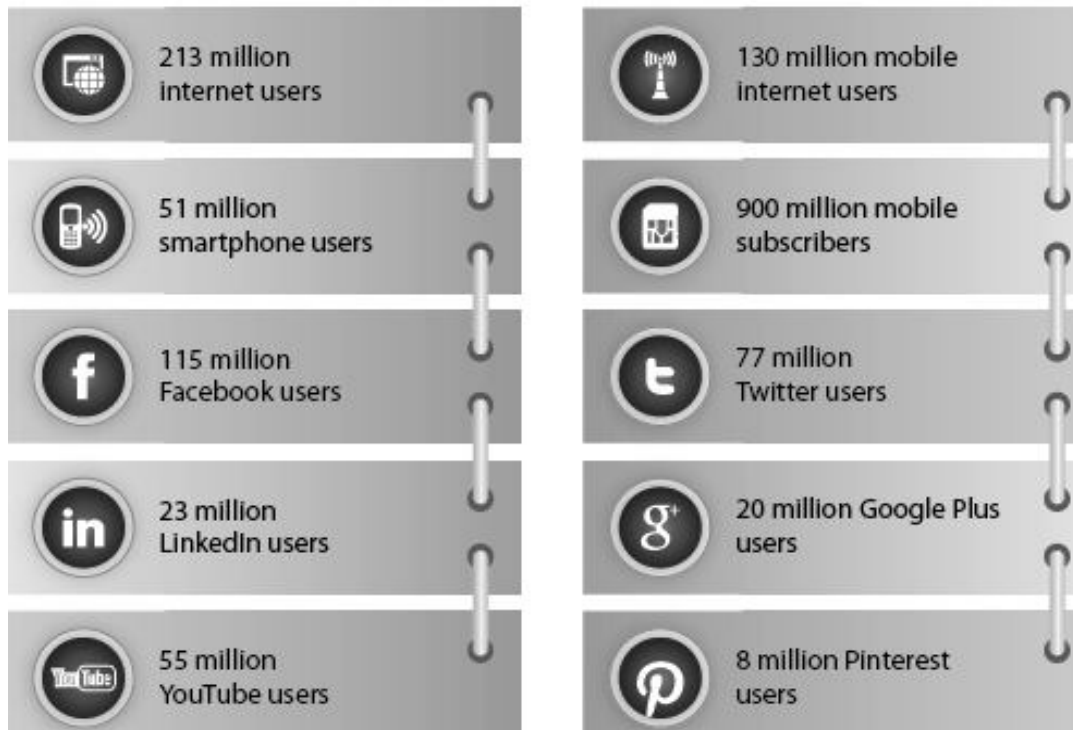
None of the Indian sites are accessible for oral health education in true sense. Though some form of oral health information is available on IDA website, not of much interactive education is absent. Most of the websites on oral health in India are more of marketing purpose for individual dental clinics rather than oral health education. Some of the oral networking sites from which oral health education can be channelized are Facebook, Orkut, Skype, Twitter, Youtube, LinkedIn, Wyn, Yahoo, Flickr etc and also through individual websites.

### *Uses of Social Networking for Oral Health Education*

Health care professionals have a responsibility to create educational content to be shared across social media that will help truthfully update consumers about health related issues and outshine misleading information. The social networking sites in healthcare offer [16-20]:

1. The chance to bring the voice of the dentists to millions of people, giving them the most reliable and trustworthy oral health information to attain ideal oral health.
2. Patients can ask questions pertaining to fitness and exercise, cancer, and mental health, among other areas.
3. The social networking sites also link the public and improve the recognition and importance of the dentist as the authority on oral health and care.

## Why is Social Media a Goldmine?



## Social Media Trends 2014



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4. Conducting research on social media sites requires cautious attention to confidentiality consent and security.
5. Dental address offers a platform for oral health and health professionals to share knowledge and treatment procedures for systemic diseases related to diseases of the mouth.
6. Emotional support of patient in every step.
7. Web-based program can contribute to the child health promotion as well as can provide the staff with the understanding on the child health information
8. The social networking sites targets high-risk population through tailored Internet outreach via online forums chat rooms, and social networking sites.

Globally, healthcare organizations are formulating strategies to control social media to their advantage. Often, customer queries are met with a canned response or no response at all leading to negative sentiments about the brand. Healthcare campaigns considered around service-based social strategy, needs to be structured to address specific stages of strategy requirements during its execution.

### Conclusion

The past few decades have witnessed a dramatic increase in consumers looking for health information online. Mobile phones, in particular SMS, internet (networking sites) offer health promoters an exciting opportunity to engage personally with a huge number of individuals at low cost. The key elements such as language, message style, and broadcast schedule are directly relevant to future studies using SMS for health promotion, as well as for future health promotion involvement in other mediums that require short formats, such as social networking sites. There is scope to broaden the use of social networking in oral health education that would hold dentists and dental students in the social construction of knowledge. The time has come for dentists to embrace social networking, because if they don't, they will risk losing an invaluable tool of viral proportions. Oral health promotion programmes using digital media have great potential to cost-effectively and lastly meet the complex needs of diverse and often underserved populations living with or at high risk of oral diseases.

The popular six global trends that healthcare organizations can leverage to plan an effective social media strategy [14]:

1. Google Plus (G+) is gaining prominence with both customers and marketers and is expected to grow. G+ offers two significant advantages. First, it can be integrated to an existing website and content so that the Ads rank higher in search results. Second, +Post ads allows G+ content to be taken to all Google affiliate sites thereby providing access to a larger audience base.
2. LinkedIn has fortified its position as the strongest network for professionals and has also positioned itself as a thought leadership forum making it a B2B marketer's utopia. Brands are now redirecting their efforts from microsites / communities to LinkedIn to grow their community interactions with a targeted customer base.
3. Brands are now moving away from textual content towards videos and images are creating interest in platforms like Pinterest, Instagram and Tumblr. Healthcare institutions can leverage this trend to showcase their infrastructural capabilities, amongst other things.
4. Ads will no longer be enough to create the desired impression; hence native advertising has redefined how brands advertise to their customers. 'Context is the king' and hence ads will increasingly become as contextual as possible, talking about what is being sold or communicated.
5. Hashtags (for example - #HealthCare) are gaining prominence as they help gain more eyeballs and create a unique identity for brands. Healthcare organizations should create unique hashtags that can be used across social networks. This will help create a more uniform digital experience for patients / customers.
6. E-Marketer expects the global Smartphone users count to go up to 1.75 billion by the end of this year. More and more users today are consuming data via mobile phones compared to native desktop platforms. Hence, healthcare organizations should look at creating content tailored for the mobile platform.

As a regulated industry, many healthcare organizations have avoided the use of social media, and have even tried to squelch its use by their employees. However, some healthcare providers are beginning to realize that there are opportunities to serve the public, patients and physicians, all while building awareness and enhancing their brand. Irrespective of the size, social media provides healthcare organizations an opportunity to engage with their customers at a more personal level – a limited capability in traditional marketing channels.

Today, there are over 60 million Indians using some of the top social networks and the numbers are only expected to grow [4]. It is therefore important for healthcare organizations to listen and monitor what is said about them on social media, derive insights from social conversations and use them to realign their existing digital strategy.

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