

Effect of Social Media on Human Health

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Abstract

Social media is an internet-based tool. People not only share their ideas or information, but also do serious discussions regarding human health care on social media. It provides an interface for the interaction of users and the service providers. World-wide, there are several health care providers working on social media such as Skype, Whatsapp, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and personal Blogs. There are about 2.46 billion users of social media world-wide during 2017, it is estimated that ~12% rise will occur by 2019. Whereas, in India ~28% of the population is using internet, out of which ~10% are active on social media. There are many online websites providing information on health and let patients/public communicate with health experts online. The impact of our online habits may have effect on mental health and behavior activities that can have potential health care challenges. Nowadays, social media occupies an ever increasing path in both our daily lives and world. Thus, it is an urgent demand to develop a proper understanding about the long-term impacts of social media on human health. This concise review focuses on the positive and negative effects of social networking sites on human health.

Keywords: Human health; Internet; Social media; Online health care

Introduction

Nowadays social media is an essential part of our society. The online social media has caused intense transformation in the way people communicate and interact. There are several social networking platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, etc) available to connect peoples and share their ideas regarding health issues [1]. Social media affects on human health by a number of ways such as by getting health related information that might be helpful in cure of a disease. Whereas, random

advice on social networking sites for any disease without proper research can be harmful (Alex Di Renzo, October 27, 2016, Sysomos Blog). In this article, some positive and negative effects of social media on human health are discussed below.

Developments in the Field of Social Media for Human Health

The website health map (<http://healthmap.org>) developed by Dr John Brownstein and collaborators

(Children's Hospital Boston, USA) in 2006. It works on the principle of mining new websites, micro-blogs, government alerts, eye witness accounts, and other data sources for outbreak of infections reported globally and aggregate those cases on a global map. Brownstein's team launched an iPhone application called "Outbreaks Near Me". This application delivers health map directly to cell phone users. Their newest endeavor is the website called Flu Near You (<https://flunearyou.org/>), created in collaboration with the American Public Health Association, USA. In September 2008, Google launched Google Flu Trends (<http://www.google.org/flutrends/>) and later Google Dengue trends (<http://www.google.org/denguetrends/>). These tools use automated algorithms to discover influenza/dengue related search [2]. Dr John Brownian and his team conducted a study to assess the correlation of volume of cholera-related health map news media reports, Twitter postings, and government cholera cases reported during the first 100 days of the 2010 Haitian cholera outbreak. Dr Nicholas Christakis at Harvard Medical and James Fowler at US San Diego have come up with analysis on how social media such as Facebook can be used to predict the spread and progress of disease [2].

Brighter and Darker Sides of Social Media on Human Health

Undoubtly, Social media has provided access to opinions and information that can expand our knowledge. Nowadays, a number of medical practitioners are taking part in interaction with people through social networking sites and form their online communities and groups they listen to the patients and communicate with their peer to resolve the medical issues of the patient. Few studies have suggested that certain social networking platforms have made a positive impact on human health by providing opportunities for communication that would have not been possible otherwise. The social media posts and behaviors can also be useful in identifying or predicting depressed individuals. In a report it was discussed that social media helps in connecting different countries across the globe where more advanced specialists and treatment are available which can help in improving our knowledge concerned to the human health [2].

The increase in the use of social media among the individuals (especially 18-29 year old) motivated them for changing their behaviors and habits. One-third of medical faculties use Facebook and other social media for teaching, while about 50% of the faculties are planning to use social media in near future [3]. The infectious disease

surveillance plays an important role in management of public health that can be done through social media. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), USA and WHO are the two main organizations involved in the surveillance of epidemics, worldwide [2].

However, another view shows darker side of social media. According to recent reports, the more time you spend on social media, the more likely you are to suffer from mental illness [4]. The most important concerns are decreased self-esteem, eating disorders, anxiety, feelings of inferiority, declined focus in work, etc [4-6]. Now-a-days youngsters are growing up with this new technology, and are also based on social media for interacting people which makes less face-to-face human interaction and . Thereby, such virtual interactions do not teach healthy social skills, but it may facilitate inappropriate or damaging health information among individuals. Even lack of face to face interactions may also lead to loneliness, depression and other mental disorders. The social media may provide an opportunity to the destructive minds of the society to misuse the information related to the disease causing pathogens and its pathogenesis to develop bio-weapon against humanity. The managers at social media hub centers need to keep an eye on the contents being shared over these platforms and ensure the delivery of information to the right user. Therefore, we must take such challenges seriously for implementing proper use of social media.

Conclusion

During past 10 years, social media caused a great change in people connections. However, every new development has positive and negative impacts on society. Social media facilitates people in sharing their knowledge and communicating all over the world but it can be a serious problem if the information is mistaken, i.e. misguiding concepts about disease spread or cure. Such rumors are made viral on social media by non experts without proper information. Thus, it is important to manage misguiding information and correct delivery of health information by the health agencies and other authentic organizations among individuals.

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