

Do you want to get Healthier with Facebook?

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Abstract

Recent development in information and communication technologies has given positive impacts in the field of health communication. Sharing of information which is related to health becomes easier with the advent of new technologies such as social media networks because it helps promote interactive communication. There are a variety of social media sites can be accessed by users, such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Microblogs. Conventional health communication strategies that include putting up posters, distributing leaflets and delivering talks on health are inadequate in the fast moving era of modern society. In contrast to the conventional health communication, new technology is believed to be more interactive because it involves visual, audio and animation simultaneously, thus it is more accessible and interactive. This article discusses the usage of social media intervention namely Facebook and to realize its ability in assisting and providing health information that can create awareness among the public.

Keyword: Facebook, new media, health communication, health, motivation, behavioral changes

Introduction

Aspects of health are the most important aspect in the development of individuals, communities and nations. Optimal health is needed to establish the physical and mental health in perfect state. Health is an issue that is vital and healthy individuals can play an effective role in the development of society and the country (KKM, 2013). The majority of people agree health is an important factor in ensuring a good quality of life. Socio-political strategy today also see aspects of health as 'sustainable development' in the world and the country, it is something that is very valuable and precious to be undertaken in the desire to produce a healthy population and is crucial to achieving this goal (Ginman, et al., 2003).

Innumerable efforts have been made by the authorities such as the Ministry of Health Malaysia (MOH), the National Cancer Council (MAKNA), Malaysian Society of Hypertension (MSH) and medical practitioners to deliver health information for the purpose of creating awareness and changing attitudes to the general public. Conventional methods such as distributing leaflets, printed materials and popular poster seen to be less and less in the limelight. Thus, the authorities concerned shall consider the latest methods which are believed to deliver health information to the community in a more effective, inexpensive, simple and faster way.

In line with the development of the fastest growing in Malaysia, the use of information and communication technologies should also be addressed in parallel with the development of the mind and the power to search for information in the community. Social media, a phenomenon in which new media trends that is very popular nowadays. Social media refers to activities among consumers who collect online and share information using interactive media to facilitate the creation and sharing of content in the form of words, pictures, video and audio (Safko and Brake, 2009). Sterne (2010) categorized social media as follows: message rooms and forums, the spotlight and the opinion space, a series of social, blogs and microblogs, virtual bookmark and media partnerships.

Health communication is one of the branches in the field of communication. According to Thomas (2006), health communication refers to the use of science communication strategies to inform and influence the knowledge, attitudes and practices of individuals and communities in matters of health and health care. Thomas (2006) also noted this area is represented by the field of health communication and any elements that could be identified to improve individual and public health knowledge that will ultimately help in disease prevention and health promotion. Health communication when delivered effectively in the context of mediation media has the potential to be considered important to promote health to individuals, communities' populations (Ahmed & Bates, 2013).

Social networks in the website such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube provide a new dimension in building relations, make new friends, find and share information, as well as working cooperatively with others (Eysenbach, 2008). Social media consists of text, images, audio and video is a tool to promote, advertise and market a reasonably cheap. It is very helpful in building networks, spread information quickly (Salvation and Adzharuddin, 2014) and thereby promote public trust and confidence. According to Andreas and Haenlien (2009), there are six different types of social media that have collaborative projects (for example, Wikipedia), blogs and micro-blogging (for example, Twitter), content communities (for example, YouTube, Flickr), social networking sites (for example, Facebook, MySpace), virtual games (for example, Warcraft, Whyville) and the virtual social world (for example, Second Life).

According to House, Borycki and Kushniru (2014), patients can utilize social media where they can connect with others in the effort of sharing and exchange knowledge related to diseases. The study have also suggested the future of social media is convincing and can help local community to continue stay connected, sharing information, data collection, making appointments, prescription notification, health related information dissemination, getting around with elderly residents, increase participation, motivation, self-confidence and skills. Meanwhile, according to Korda and Itani (2011), social media may be an effective platform and extends coverage and interactive by allowing users according to their needs. Moreover, it is also seen to have its own potential in the health communications branch.

Social media turns out to be cheaper and dissemination of information overload can be done very quickly. It is rapidly increasing in the delivery of health promotion and capable of changing consumer attitudes. Social media moves so fast (Gupta, Tyagi, & Sharma, 2013), the platform is seen as able to be used in a variety of health conditions such as promoting vaccination for children, the consequences of smoking and consumption of alcohol at a young age, unhealthy sexual practices and healthy diet among teens. It is also beneficial to all age groups as an inexpensive medium. With the discovery of a variety of mobile application, users can get information anywhere, innovation potential for popular without having to carry a computer together. Social media has a great opportunity for health promotion to the public health community, allowing medical practitioners to communicate directly with the public about health-related issues and at the same time providing advice in reducing the adverse consequences of a health practice that is not correct.

Woolley and Peterson (2012) noted in their study that Facebook is useful in maintaining and promoting a healthy lifestyle in two ways. First, the content of the information posted, the message is to be told, motivate and remind the user to give emphasis on health behavior. Second, the post of users who look for health related information. In their study also noted Facebook may also be used to send messages and provide materials which can help health-oriented individuals from observation to prepare and ultimately take action. For individuals who already have health attitudes, Facebook can be an effective reference for reminders, tips and useful information to avoid repeated failure of health care.

Health Communication: Past and Present

In Malaysia, health awareness has started since the country's independence. The aim is important in educating the public on the importance of health care and health vulnerabilities to humans. This awareness is able to realize the government's aspiration towards the formation of a healthy nation and create a productive citizen which will eventually increase the country's productivity. At the beginning of the formation of Malaysia, the conventional methods in health communication practiced in disseminating health related information. Governments premises such as hospitals, clinics, offices and public places conventional methods such as posters, brochures and advertising use. Health communication is more focused on the awareness of the epidemic of disease due to sanitation failure which will cause diseases such as cholera, dengue, malaria, typhoid, polio, leprosy and so on.

In conjunction to the country's development and rapid advances in communication technology and information, conventional approach grasped increasingly unpopular and irrelevant in giving information related to health especially to generation X and generation Y. The approaches are limited, restricted in a specific location such as hospitals, clinics, pharmacies, schools and also premises which related to health care. The target is limited to patients and visitors to the place stated above and are not concentrated to the general public as a whole. Individuals aged 20 to 49 years late, which is the age group that is a lot of exposure to the advances in technology and communications edict see the conventional approaches are less effective and less for the submission received.

Generation X and Y prefer to get health information on their own initiative. Both of this generation prefers something rapid, easy and cheap. Demonstrating the development of facilities such as the internet and the device, then access to science knowledge is becoming increasingly easy and fast. Seeing the potential of the development of information and communication technologies, new media afford to be driving the spread of health-related information more easily, effectively involves a significantly lower cost. New media and devices are moving forward together in information technology and communications advancement. For example smartphones, tabs and laptops allow access to new media and social media such as Facebook. The majority of the second generation definitely has a social media account such as Facebook.

Based on previous research, social media refers to activities among users that gathered through online and share information using interactive media to facilitate the creation and sharing of content in the form of words, pictures, video and audio (Safko and Brake, 2009). Sterne (2010) categorized social media as follows: message and forum platform, highlights and opinion sharing, social networks, blogs and microblogs, virtual bookmarks and media sharing. According to Korda and Itani (2011), however, social media is one of the new media that can be an effective platform and extensive coverage as well as interactive that allows users to connect based on their desire (Adzharuddin, 2012; Adzharuddin, 2013). Furthermore, it is also seen as having its own potential in health communication branch. Social media moves so fast (Gupta, Tyagi, & Sharma, 2013), the platform is seen as able to be used in a variety of health conditions like to promote vaccination of children, the consequences of smoking and consumption of alcohol at a young age, unhealthy sexual practices and healthy diet among teens.

Facebook was introduced by Mark Zuckerberg in 2004, a student at Harvard University. Facebook is a social networking site that most people are using. According to Richter and Koch (2008) (cited in Mahmud and Omar, 2013), social networking sites are used to manage identities, finding experts, context, manage contacts and exchange of information. Facebook is a social networking site (SNS). Social networking site such as Facebook has become one of the most important social trends since it introduced to the public in 2006. It is available in 70 different languages making it widely used throughout the world (Caers, et al., 2013).

In health communication, Facebook is not only used by one person, it is also used by organizations and individuals to keep in touch with the world. For example the Ministry of Health Malaysia, National Cancer Society, the National Heart Institute, Childhood Cancer Support Group PPUKM The Gentle Birthing Group Malaysia, Malaysia Eczema, Our unvaccinated Healthy Babies, Everyday Health, Daily Health Tips, PreventDisease.com, Mayo Clinic, Dr. Mehmet Oz (Physician), Dr Suria khatun (Homeopathic Physicians), DrZulkifli Sharif (Muslim Physician), Dr Hamid Arshat (gynecologist), Dr Harlina Halizah Siraj (Specialist Gynaecology) and many more. The use of Facebook is meant to provide health-related information, spread the word and alert, give solutions and treatment of disease, interacting with patients and consumers, as well as help in reducing the risk of infection.

Facebook: Your Personal Doctor

As one of the popular social networking sites and become a trend nowadays, Facebook became the belief of many to relate to the world for the purpose of obtaining information, create and maintain a network with other people and socializing and entertainment. In its role to spread information, Facebook became the choice of many in search of information. It contains visual, audio and graphics to make it more attractive and effective as a platform of information sharing. In modern times, more people were concerns about health awareness, health care and getting rid of harmful diseases. Modern lifestyle such as lack of exercise, unhealthy diet, alcohol consumption and do not take care of exposing them to the threat of diseases such as hypertension, diabetes, heart attacks and other fatal diseases.

Aware of this threat, the public is beginning to find a solution and a way out in order to ensure improved health and well-optimal health living. Along with the advancement of information and communication technology, access to information on health is becoming increasingly easy and fast. Sophisticated devices such as smartphones and tablet with internet access invented to facilitate access to the information through Facebook. The tendency for people to find information through the use of Facebook is due to the trend of Facebook's own popular other features that make it easier and interactive to make an interaction with practitioners directly and personally. It is also portable and easy to access anywhere. In terms of information sharing, the sharing of health-related via Facebook appears to be more effective in terms of time, cost and effectiveness of health communication itself.

The following table shows the numbers of fan-page 'likes' on Facebook pages related to health:

Facebook Fanpage	No. of likes (people)	Focused topic	Coverage	Source
Ministry of Health, Malaysia (MOH)	185,997	General health	Malaysia	https://www.facebook.com/kementeriankesihatanmalaysia
National Cancer Council (MAKNA)	26,575	Cancer	Malaysia	https://www.facebook.com/maknacancer
National Institute of Cardiovascular (IJN)	6,496	Heart	Malaysia	https://www.facebook.com/IJN.Malaysia
Eczema Malaysia	2,426	Eczema	Malaysia	https://www.facebook.com/groups/eczemamalaysia/
Everyday Health	564,995	General health	International	https://www.facebook.com/everydayhealth
Daily Health Tips	237,608	General health	International	https://www.facebook.com/DailyHealthTips
Mayo Clinic	522,254	Heart	International	https://www.facebook.com/MayoClinic
PreventDisease.com	1,118,395	General health	International	https://www.facebook.com/PreventDisease
Dr Mehmet Oz	4,713,174	General health	International	https://www.facebook.com/droz
Dr. Harlina Haliza Siraj	19,483	Obstetrics & Gynaecology	Malaysia	https://www.facebook.com/harlinahalizah.siraj?fref=ts
Dr Suriyakhathun	9,244	Homeopathy	Malaysia	https://www.facebook.com/Dr.Suriyakhathun
Dr Zulkifli Sharif	163	Islamic medicine	Malaysia	https://www.facebook.com/drzul69
Dr Hamid Arshat	188,006	Obstetrics & Gynaecology	Malaysia	https://www.facebook.com/hamidarshat45

Table 1: Numbers of 'Likes' on Facebook Fan Pages Related to Health

Table 1 above gives a remarkable depiction of the use of Facebook as a platform to find health-related information. Based on the analysis of the page, there is a wealth of information in an attractive form presented in order to provide a clear health messages to consumers. Based on the content analysis that is provided on Facebook, the followings are information that can be obtained from the Facebook's pages:

- i. Profile of the medical practitioners
- ii. Point of view
- iii. Advice
- iv. Awareness campaign
- v. Preventive measures
- vi. Healthy lifestyle
- vii. Balanced diet
- viii. Health tips
- ix. Health-related partnership
- x. Interaction with experts

- xi. Informative video content
- xii. Info-graphic
- xiii. Audio-visual

This content enable user to obtain health-related information in a comprehensive yet fun approach. The latest information about health and get feedback from medical practitioners with interactive. Health communication method is proven to be more effective than the conventional method in which the service is quite limited and is not interactive. In addition, users also share problems, concerns and their curiosity with medical practitioners and other Facebook users. According to Sheldon (2008) and Ishii (2008) cited in Mahmud and Omar (2013), the use of Facebook among other motive is to maintain the relationship, taking the time, join virtual communities, entertaining, making friends and finding information. The motive of using Facebook was to coincide with the use of Facebook in the success of health communication by organizations, medical practitioners, patients and the public.

Health Communication: Information, Motivational and Behavioral Skills Model

Information, Motivation and Behavioral Skills Model – IMB Model (Fisher & Fisher, 1992) is a model used to describe the attitude of prevention; one must have information that can be easily translated into a form of action, are motivated to act and skills to shape attitudes. In another sense this model can be translated to: i) Information: related to preventive behavior might be useful to someone, ii) Motivation: personal attitudes, social support and perceptions of exposure and iii) Behavioral Skills: ability to objectively and self-efficacy significantly. This model is more adapted to the studies of HIV (J.Fisher and Fisher, 1996; J.Fisher, Fisher, Williams and Malloy, 1994; W.Fisher and Fisher, 1993; Misovich, Fisher & Fisher, 1996; Misovich, Fisher & Fisher, 1998; Murray, 2000, Williams et al., 1998), breast self-examination (Fisher et al., 2000) and motorcycle safety (Murray, 2000). This model serves to interpret purpose of information that can be translated into action that can motivate individuals and eventually able to made up their attitudes and behaviors.

In the context of health communication through social media such as Facebook, various health-related information is shared through the fan-pages which are administered by organizations and practitioners. This information is intended specifically to educate the public, to educate, empower and to spread the knowledge of health care concerns. This information is needed, especially for the less health-related knowledge and additional knowledge for those who are concerned about health. Through Facebook, this information can be accessed easily and it is constantly updated according to the quick passage of time. Providing examples of information related to nutrition and health care with the veracious methods can help in avoiding chronic diseases such as hypertension, diabetes, heart attack and impairment of internal organs.

Individuals receiving the information and definitely undoubtedly be more motivated and more positive. The information shared will be translated into a form of thinking that motivated the formation and shaping of positivity. This is certainly successful in reducing anxiety and able to handle fear, stress and negative thoughts if facing with any health problems. For instance, individuals who have cancer, based on the information available with regardsto cancer can be helpful in providing alternative healing methods and moral support to other individuals. Motivation is needed to keep the strength, especially to patients with chronic diseases such as cancer and heart disease, while motivation is also required to healthy individuals to remain positive and motivated to continue to maintaining their good health.

Information and motivation will form the behavior and attitudes towards health. Health information helps developing positive motivation and ultimately translated into a form of behavior and a positive attitude. Behavior and a positive attitude can be translated into a form of health care such as physical exercise, eating healthy foods, balanced diet and appropriate nutrition, positive thinking, managing stress properly and mental health concern. Individual will be aware of health care and taking necessary action like performing medical check-up on a regular basis and will start sharing health information with others. Behavior and attitude helps in evading from health problems and avoid dangerous diseases.

Potential of Social Media in Health Communication

Demonstrating the functional and effective role in information sharing, social media and Facebook in particular, can benefit more than just simply a platform for the dissemination of information. In a survey conducted by Timian et al., (2013), hospitals in New York are using Facebook to connect with patients and use it to get feedback satisfaction and quality of services supplied by the hospital.

Review by Timian, et al., (2013) indicated the basis for further studies on the discussion through social media in healthcare by exploring the function of Facebook as an evaluation tool for hospital services. Millions of Facebook users who are in the United States, social networks have developed an important network and tools to connect with a community of hospital.

The use of Facebook in health communication is relatively new in Malaysia, and its use has not been widespread. But there is a potential that can be explored. Facebook as a tool for health communication is reasonable. The health providers, medical practitioners and health can use Facebook to form a network of virtual communities in their organization. Direct contact with patients can be done without any limitation of time and place. Health advice, nutrition, health screening time, prescription schedule, taking medications, Follow-up with patients and various services can be implemented only at the fingertips. This can certainly save a lot of time and cost, while ensuring patient satisfaction and customer are always satisfying.

Not only communication in hospitals, social networks can be extended to include large virtual communities. Organizations and health practitioners can connect with the community in order to provide health education and provide advice and expertise. This virtual community can certainly help make a healthier society and concerned about health care.

The Future of Health Communication through Facebook in Malaysia

According to a report released by the Ministry of Health Malaysia, there are several types of infectious diseases whether communicable or non-communicable disease that most people suffer in Malaysia. Amongst them are the fatality factors and diseases reported in Malaysia by the Ministry of Health, Malaysia (2007):

- i. Heart Diseases and Diseases of Pulmonary Circulation Obesity
- ii. Septicaemia
- iii. Malignant Neoplasms
- iv. Cerebrovascular Diseases
- v. Pneumonia
- vi. Accident
- vii. Diseases of the Digestive System
- viii. Certain Conditions Originating in the Perinatal Period
- ix. Nephritis, Nephrotic Syndrome and Nephrosis
- x. Ill-Defined Conditions

(Source: *Yearly Report 2007, Ministry of Health, Malaysia*).

Strategic steps should be taken by strategic authorities in controlling and combating the disease continues to affect the lives of the public. Awareness should be applied by means of sharing knowledge related to health and education continuously and consistently. Development of information and communication technology should be useful in efforts to educate the public on the dangers of the disease. Malaysia aims to use the Internet will increase from 18 million users in 2012 to 25 million users by 2015 while the use of Facebook among Malaysians is a total of 17.5 million persons all (Malaysian Digital Association, 2013). This figure reflects in future there will be more individual using social media, especially Facebook in searching and knowledge sharing of information and knowledge.

This potential will lead Malaysia towards a country of highly knowledgeable and educated especially in the health field. Facebook will be used as a platform for finding information and interaction with large community and keep in touch. In the future, each Individual will at least have one health-related fan-page on Facebook to allow access on information related to health. Interaction with medical practitioner also allows the sharing of health-related problems and seeks medical advice. Virtual community is formed to be exceptionally large families and will eventually build up one big community that concern on healthcare one another.

Conclusion & Opinion

In conclusion, social media like Facebook will definitely offer variation and will change the landscape of information sharing and retrieval of knowledge, particularly with regard to health. Along with the advancement of information communication technology in Malaysia, the use of mobile phones is becoming a common thing and ownership of this technology is becoming increasingly easy and cheap.

Facebook has become a very popular trend and widely being used for various applications, especially in search of knowledge and current affairs. Individuals will become more open and more likely to increase the knowledge.

Meanwhile, the use of social media in health communication also helps in substituting conventional method which is limited health communication broadcast and less popular among the masses. The use of social media for health communication can help in providing a better understanding of the people related to health care and avoid the threat of diseases. Imagine health-related information can be easily obtained at the fingertips anytime and anywhere without having to meet the healthcare and practitioner personally. Along with the development of communications, changes in health communication from the conventional method to a very interactive manner certainly help in creating a society that care for health. The tendency to seek health information also will upsurge as it very easy, fast and exciting. Definitely this will help the society and eventually the country to build up healthy community with advance health knowledge and skills. This will guarantee the country development landscape in the results of good health and well-being citizens.

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