



REVIEW

Social media in travel medicine: A review



Dipti Patel*, Daiga Jermacane

National Travel Health Network and Centre, UCLH NHS Foundation Trust, 3rd Floor Central, 250 Euston Road, London, NW1 2PG, United Kingdom

Received 18 February 2015; received in revised form 3 March 2015; accepted 4 March 2015
Available online 12 March 2015

KEYWORDS

Social media;
Travel medicine;
Health information;
Social networking;
Web 2.0

Summary The use of social media is widespread and provides new opportunities for healthcare professionals and healthcare organisations to interact with patients, the public, policy makers, and each other. Social media offers the possibility of providing users with up-to-date information when, where, and how they want it, but it also brings with it some challenges.

With increasing use of social media, there is potential to change the way travel medicine is delivered; practitioners should consider how to exploit the benefits in their practice, and not be afraid to experiment. However they need to be cognizant of the potential pitfalls. The information exchanged requires careful application as it may not always achieve the desired outcome, it needs to be monitored for quality, accuracy, and reliability, and confidentiality and privacy must be maintained. Most importantly, as social media becomes more sophisticated and widely adopted in the healthcare arena, further evaluation and research is required to understand its impact and its application to travel medicine.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

This review is based on published information on social media use in healthcare from general and specialist journals, as well as the grey literature. Relevant papers were identified using Pubmed and Google scholar. The search was limited to English language papers, using the search terms: 'social media OR social networking sites OR social networking OR social media platforms' AND 'health OR health communication OR health services OR healthcare OR

travel health OR health professional use'. The reference sections of identified papers were also reviewed to identify further relevant studies.

The use of social media has increased substantially in the last decade; in 2005, only 8% of online US adults used social media, as of January 2014 this number had reached 74% [1]. The highest proportion of users are the millennial generation (those whose birth years range from the early 1980s to the early 2000s) [2], however use in the over 65 year olds has been increasing with almost a third of US nationals in this age group now using social media [1]. A similar pattern of social media use can be observed in the Netherlands [3] and the UK; with social media use in the UK having increased from 22% of internet users in 2007 to 59% in 2011; and almost universal use among 16–24 year olds

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: dipti.patel@uclh.nhs.uk (D. Patel).

[4]. As of 2014, more than 1.8 billion internet users (approximately 25% of people worldwide) had accessed social networks (often on multiple platforms); with 170 million located in the United States. It is estimated that this number will rise to 2.44 billion by 2018 [5].

This increase in use of social media means that how we communicate online has changed; instead of communicating in a top-down manner (Web 1.0) for example by providing information on web-pages where users cannot interact, providers of information are no longer detached from users, and are active participants in creating information and imparting knowledge (Web 2.0) [6,7]. Through blogs, Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter, we interact, share, produce, and exchange information; we communicate with both friends and colleagues, form new friendships, network professionally, and learn.

For health professionals, social media offers the same benefits, and as in wider society, they are using social media to build social and professional networks or relationships, educate, share information, and influence by engaging with the public, patients, and colleagues. Doctors in particular have been high adopters of social media, with its use now being the norm for younger doctors and medical students [8,9].

2. What is social media?

Social media is defined as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content” [6,7]. It is a means of interaction in which information and ideas are created, shared, and exchanged in virtual communities and networks, and includes a growing variety of internet-based websites and tools [10].

The conversation prism (Fig. 1) provides a visual map of the vast and dynamic social media landscape, and while the definition of social media is evolving rapidly, for the purposes of this paper it can be broadly categorised as follows:

- collaborative projects (e.g. Wikipedia)
- blogs and microblogs (e.g. Twitter)
- content communities, (e.g. YouTube)
- social networking sites (e.g. Facebook)
- virtual game-worlds (e.g. World of Warcraft)
- virtual social worlds (e.g. Second Life) [11–13].

The conversation prism provides an overview of social media platforms, and illustrates the diversity of their functionality and use. The most popular sites such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube (the ‘big four’), and Wikipedia are usually available in multiple languages, and enable connections with people across geographical, political and economic borders. An overview of some of the better known social media sites is provided in Table 1.

3. Health information, the internet and social media

Several studies have evaluated the role of the Internet for health information seeking [22] and show that an

expanding number of people use the Internet for accessing health information [23]. Seventy-two percent of Americans with internet access search online for health-care information, with the average US adult seeking online health information about 3 times per month [24]. Similarly in Europe over 75% of individuals think the Internet is a good way of researching health; with six out of ten Europeans going online when looking for health information [25].

While the majority of those searching for health information online use a search engine such as Google, Bing, or Yahoo to find their information, increasing numbers use sites that specialise in health information, such as WebMD or NHS choices [26,27]. While social media is not usually the first choice for seeking health information, as of 2012, English Wikipedia is considered the largest online reference site, and it is reported to be the most used online health-care resource globally [28,29].

More generally, up to 39% of those searching online for health related reasons use social media such as Facebook [3,30]; and a recent UK report rated Facebook as the fourth most popular source of health information [31].

In the USA, a survey of 1040 US adults found that approximately 33% were using sites like Facebook and Twitter to obtain health information and track and share symptoms, with over 80% of respondents aged 18–24 years stating that they would be likely to share health information through social media sites [32]. In this study, 42% of respondents stated that they had used social media to look up consumer reviews of medical treatments or doctors; 30% had supported a health cause through social media; 25% admitted to sharing their own health experiences on social media sites; and 20% had joined a health forum or online health community [32].

As a consequence of the information obtained, 45% stated they would seek a second opinion; for 41% the information would influence their choice of a doctor or healthcare facility, and for over 40%, the information would influence their management of a chronic condition, or their diet or exercise routines. For 34% the information would influence their decision to take certain medications [32].

Social media use by clinicians for personal use is widespread and mirrors use in the general public [9,33]. Use of social media for work-related purposes however is less common; doctor use tends to focus on reading articles, listening to experts, researching medical developments, consulting colleagues regarding patient issues, and professional networking [34]. In some cases doctors have also used physician only social networking sites to crowd-source answers to clinical questions [35].

Surprisingly, Wikipedia is highly used by clinicians as a source of reference materials, despite known shortcomings [8,9]. Online videos are also popular, with US doctors on average spending three hours per week watching online videos for professional purposes (with Medscape and YouTube cited as the most important sources) [2].

Health professional–patient interaction online, however, remains relatively rare. Only 5% of adults report receiving information, care, or support from health professionals online [36], and for clinicians, using social media to interact directly with the public or patients remains a concern due to the potential for negative repercussions

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/3392757>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/3392757>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)