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EXPERIENCE

Piloting social engagement on a federal agency—administered Facebook page

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: To evaluate the impact of a Federal drug information center initiating engagement with stakeholders on a Facebook Page administered by a Federal Agency.

Setting: The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Facebook page from July 21, 2014, to October 18, 2014.

Practice innovation: FDA's Division of Drug Information (DDI) in the Center for Drug Evaluation and Research (CDER) Office of Communications serves as a federal drug information center providing timely, accurate, and useful information on CDER initiatives and CDER-regulated products. We report a 90-day (July 21 to October 18, 2014) pilot during which DDI pharmacists monitored and moderated comments received on FDA's Facebook page to identify those warranting a reply. Once identified, DDI pharmacists replied within 2 business days.

Evaluation: Impact was measured by comparing the average number of Likes, Shares, and Reach for Facebook posts before and after the pilot. Additional metrics collected include the number of DDI replies provided to stakeholders' comments and the number of DDI replies provided on time (within 2 business days).

Results: During the pilot, DDI contributed 14 posts. On average, each post reached 23,582 more individuals (an increase of 187% compared with pre-pilot posts). On average, each post also received 463 more Likes (450% increase) and 130 more Shares (271% increase). DDI pharmacists replied to 3% (121/3,994) and hid 0.58% (23/3,994) of Facebook comments received during the 90-day period. All actions were taken within 2 business days.

Conclusion: Initiating social engagement had a positive impact on FDA's Facebook page.

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Engaging on Facebook presents a significant opportunity for federal agencies, such as the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), to advance their missions. FDA's Division of Drug Information (DDI) in the Center for Drug Evaluation and Research (CDER) Office of Communications serves as a federal drug information center providing timely, accurate, and useful information on CDER initiatives and CDER-regulated products.

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Replying to comments related to CDER initiatives and CDER-regulated products on FDA's Facebook page was a natural extension of DDI's existing operations.

In 2009, the president issued the "Memorandum on Transparency and Open Government," calling for the establishment of "a system of transparency, public participation, and collaboration."¹ The memorandum also called for the Director of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to issue an Open Government Directive that required a series of steps for executive departments and government agencies to implement.² OMB also issued a series of guidance documents to facilitate executive departments and government agencies to use social media to promote an open government.^{3,4}

One such agency charged with promoting an open government is the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). FDA sits within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and is responsible for protecting the public health by assuring the safety, effectiveness, quality, and security of many

Key Points**Background:**

- Engaging on Facebook presents a significant opportunity for federal agencies such as the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to advance their missions.
- FDA's Division of Drug Information (DDI) within the Center for Drug Evaluation and Research (CDER) serves as a federal drug information center providing timely, accurate, and useful information on CDER initiatives and CDER-regulated products.
- Replying to comments related to CDER initiatives and CDER-regulated products on FDA's Facebook page was a natural extension of DDI's existing operations.

Findings:

- DDI pharmacists identified 3% (121/3,994) of the Facebook comments received during the 90-day pilot as warranting a response. DDI pharmacists drafted replies to all 121 comments identified as warranting a reply.
- DDI pharmacists identified 0.58% (23/3,994) of the Facebook comments received during the 90-day pilot as warranting a hide.
- On average, each CDER Facebook post reached 23,582 more individuals (187% increase) than pre-pilot FDA posts.
- Compared with pre-pilot FDA posts, CDER's 14 Facebook posts had higher numbers of Likes and Shares, increasing by averages of 463 Likes and 130 Shares per post.

products including human drug products.⁵ FDA also provides the public with the information they need to safely use medicines, devices, and foods to improve their health.

Regarding drug products, FDA's Division of Drug Information (DDI) serves as the focal point for public inquiries.⁶ As a federal drug information center, DDI manages over 4400 telephone inquiries, 1500 e-mails, and 90 letters from customers every month. DDI customers include consumers, health care professionals, pharmaceutical industry, foreign regulators, insurance companies, academia, law enforcement, and other government agencies.

In 2008, DDI began exploring the use of Web-based technologies (i.e., social media) to expand the reach of its services to audiences who prefer receiving the latest drug information in a variety of media formats. In 2009, DDI launched CDER's Twitter handle (username), @FDA_Drug_Info.⁷ Now, 6 years later, DDI's Web-based services have expanded to include videos, audio podcasts, and several listservs (online mailing lists).

As of March 2015, Facebook had 936 million active daily users worldwide.⁸ Facebook presents a significant opportunity for federal agencies, such as FDA, to advance their missions. In October 2010, FDA took this opportunity and launched the official FDA Facebook page representing all Agency Centers,

including CDER. As of June 2015, FDA's Facebook page had more than 288,000 fans.⁹

Many patients already turn to Facebook for not only health information and communication, but also social support. Zhang et al. conducted a case study analyzing 1352 messages posted to an active Facebook diabetes group.¹⁰ Results revealed that users not only exchanged medical and lifestyle information, but they also cultivated relationships within the group.

However, Facebook is also a fast-paced communications platform with the potential for mistruths, rumors, and speculation. Two studies described health-related content found on Facebook. Greene et al. evaluated user comments from the 15 largest Facebook groups focused on diabetes management.¹¹ Approximately two-thirds of the 690 evaluated user comments included unsolicited sharing of diabetes management strategies. Buchanan and Beckett assessed the validity of the information found on the 10 largest vaccination-focused Facebook pages, groups, and places in each category (30 sites in total).¹² Author and member posts were assessed for validity by comparing for concordance with recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and FDA. Of author posts assessed, only 48% (22/46) were concordant with information provided by CDC and FDA. Of member posts, only 11% (6/56) were concordant with CDC and FDA recommendations. Therefore, an agency administering a Facebook page needs to be proactive to curtail negative comments, correct mistruths, and reinforce the message that it is engaged and committed to users.

Objectives

To evaluate the impact of initiating engagement with stakeholders on an FDA-administered Facebook Page.

Practice innovation

From July 21 to October 18, 2014, DDI pharmacists conducted a 90-day pilot engaging with stakeholders on FDA's Facebook Page. During the pilot, one DDI pharmacist monitored and moderated all comments received on CDER/DDI posts for 7 business days to discern which comments warranted action. Each day, the DDI pharmacist also monitored and moderated all comments received on the 7 most recently published posts regardless if they were CDER/DDI posts or posts made by other centers. Before the pilot, FDA did not regularly and consistently moderate or reply to comments received on FDA's Facebook Page.

It should be noted that DDI pharmacists did not have administrative rights to FDA's Facebook Page during the 90-day pilot. This meant DDI pharmacists could not directly hide or reply to comments on FDA's Facebook Page. DDI pharmacists also could not directly publish posts on the Page. Rather, all requested actions were sent to internal colleagues in FDA's Office of External Affairs (OEA), who administered the FDA Facebook Page at the agency level.

A Facebook comment action workflow was created to establish criteria for determining appropriate action, if any. Figure 1 illustrates the workflow used by DDI pharmacists to identify comments warranting action as well as the appropriate action to take (e.g., hide or reply). One criterion

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