

Social Media in Health Care: New Choices, New Risks

Poonam Gupta¹ and Mr. Amit Kumar²

¹Commerce, Dyal Singh Evening College, D. U. Lodhi Road, Delhi-110003

²Commerce, Dyal Singh Evening College, D.U. Lodhi Road, Delhi-110003

E-mail: ¹poonamguptadsc@gmail.com, ²amitkumar3575@gmail.com

Abstract—Social media includes online communication tools and networks which provide means of interactions and communications among people and organizations wherein they create, share, and update information and ideas. Social media is fast becoming an integral part in health care by connecting patients, medical professionals and healthcare institutions. It provides easy access and wider reach at reduced cost to the various participants in healthcare industry.

The present paper has made an attempt to enlist the new choices and benefits offered by social media to the three stake holders i.e. patients, professionals and providers in health care industry. Further, efforts have been made to identify and understand the new risks and threats posed by the use of social media.

It is found that patients are increasingly using social media to get instant information and solutions to their ailments, to interact with doctors, to seek second opinions, to interact with other patients and to get emotional support. Medical professionals are using social networks for research, to connect with peers, to educate, monitor and care patients and also for professional networking and self-promotion. Health institutions use social media as a platform for talent search, organization promotion, launch of new products and services, educating patients, creating public awareness and so on.

The most significant risk posed by social media is the accuracy and reliability of information. The use of social media brings the risks of privacy violation, frauds, ill effects of wrong information and information overload to the patients. Professionals find it time consuming and threat to their reputation. Health providers see it a public forum for criticisms which may injure their image. So a cautious use of social media has become a necessity today.

Keywords: Social Media, Health Care, Patients, Medical Professionals, Health Providers.

1. INTRODUCTION

The beginning of the 21st century has seen the rise of a new sun i.e. social media which has created a whole new world around it called as virtual world. This new world has provided an inexpensive rapid informal communication system which is channelizing hope, support, voice, opinion, market, technology and participation in every activity happening around the world.

This world of social media is evolving and enhancing every day. An increasing number of people and organizations now use web and social media to communicate, to obtain and provide information. The power of social media is based upon the premise of emotional connect. The outlets of social media provide means to express likes; dislikes share updates, create, participate and face new challenges.

Growing usage of Social media is creating unprecedented influences, impacts and benefits in each and every aspect of life. Health care is also one of them. Social media has revolutionised the healthcare by connecting and providing cost-effective and easy accessibility to information to the patients, medical professionals and health institutions. Social media has become voice of patients, tool to provide, promote and spread care for medical professionals, introduce, provide and market health care products and services for the health care providers/ institutions.

However, increasing use of social media is bringing new challenges risks and threats regarding accuracy and reliability of information, privacy of the patients, information overload, and ill effects of wrong credibility issues for the health organizations and so on.

Thus it is important to understand how social media is influencing and affecting life and functioning of various participants in healthcare industry. The present paper is an attempt in this regard. An effort has been made in the paper to identify the benefits and choices provided by social media to each stake holder i.e. patients, medical professionals and health provider organizations. The new threats and issues arising with the increasing use of social media in the health care industry have also been studied.

2. OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

- (i) To identify and Enlist the utility of social media in healthcare
- (ii) To identify and enlist the risks of social media in healthcare

3. OUTLETS OF SOCIAL MEDIA

There are large numbers of Social networking sites available on web. Some of the popular websites are:

Facebook: 900000000 are estimated monthly users of the Facebook. After registering one can exchange messages, photos, and videos. In the web era it has become a popular medium to share life, experiences, information, deals etc.

Twitter: Registered users on twitter can read and post messages, update their status, and unregistered users can read them. Tweets are publicly visible by default, but senders can restrict message delivery to just their followers. With 31, 00, 00,000 estimated monthly users, it is fast rising in demand as medium to connect with people & institutions.

Pinterest has 25, 00, 00,000 estimated unique monthly visitors. It is a pinboard for organizing and sharing things. Users can select an item, page or website etc and pin it on a pinboard.

YouTube is a video-sharing website which allows users to upload, view, and share videos. Available content includes video clips, TV clips, music videos, and other content such as video blogging, short original videos, and educational videos. Unregistered users can watch videos, and registered users can upload videos to their channels.

LinkedIn creates professional relationship. Users can invite anyone to join them whether a user or not. There are 25, 50, 00,000 estimated monthly users of LinkedIn.

Google+ has 12, 00, 00,000 estimated unique monthly visitors. It brings people together for many of Google's services.

So the data shows the vast scope of the use of the social media sites by patients, professionals and healthcare organizations.

4. UTILITY OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN HEALTHCARE

Social media has become the medium of choice for healthcare institutions, healthcare professionals and patients due to anytime, anywhere access to the relevant and desired information. Social media has unique capabilities to provide and practice healthcare communications. It makes interactions possible between the end users and services providers and professionals. They provide unbiased platforms sharing user generated content. The main benefits of the use of social media to various stakeholders in the healthcare are listed below:

4.1 Benefits to the patients

Social media vide its various services offers hope for better health outcomes to the patients. The patients look to social media sites & network to avail the following benefits.

- (i) To access general healthcare information.
- (ii) To interact with their doctors.
- (iii) To get instant information on their ailment.
- (iv) Interaction with other patients to make informed decisions.
- (v) To get evidence of the effectiveness of a treatment.
- (vi) To seek second opinions
- (vii) To get solutions at reduced costs
- (viii) To elicit emotional support from others.
- (ix) To obtain availability of latest knowledge in healthcare
- (x) To know about wide range of health providers.
- (xi) To receive financial support.

4.2 Benefits to healthcare professionals

Healthcare professionals such as doctors, nurses, pharmacists etc join online networks to research new medical developments, to consult colleagues regarding patient issues, to monitor the patients, etc. to improve health outcomes. They use social media for

- (i) **Professional networking:** professionals may participate in online communities and networks, listen to experts and communicate with colleagues on various medical issues.
- (ii) **Professional Education:** Social media can be used to create virtual classrooms to provide unique learning experience.
- (iii) **Patient care:** Professionals can use social media for monitoring and caring patients, encouraging behavioural changes and increasing compliance in taking medicines etc.
- (iv) **Patient Education:** Professionals may make videos, post information and participate in discussion forums to educate patients.
- (v) **A source of data for research:** Social media is a rich source of data for information on diseases, patients, treatments and so on which can be used by professionals for research and self development.
- (vi) **Online Consultancy and self promotion:** Social media is a medium to connect with patients and provide service and support. It can be used as a channel for self promotion through online consultancy.

4.3 Benefits to healthcare providers

Healthcare organization use social media to communicate their mission and vision, services offered, to promote wellness, to

educate, to know the experience of patients & so on. Some main uses & benefits of social media to health provider are: -

- (i) **Reduced costs:** Social media reduce the costs by reducing the overhead costs such as telephone bills, paper, advertising & so on.
- (ii) **Wider reach:** The reach of the hospitals is not restricted to geographical boundaries. A large number of inbound patients access information on internet on treatments these days.
- (iii) **Talent Search:** The new openings can be easily advertised on social media to get people of required specialized skill set.
- (iv) **Launch pad of services:** Knowledge about new products and services can be easily and widely spread using social media.
- (v) **Organisation promotion:** Social media can be used to enhance the image and visibility of a hospital or service provider.
- (vi) **Educating patients:** Social media can be used as a channel for patient information and education.
- (vii) **A source of data:** Social media platforms generate huge amounts of data which can be analyzed to assess the patient's requirements and introduce new products & services.
- (viii) **Awareness Creation:** Public awareness campaigns to provide health care information can be easily launched in social media.
- (ix) **Feedback:** Feedback from the users is a rich source of information which may help service providers to perform better, provide better services, and build a brand image.

5. RISKS IN THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

The most serious risk in the use of social media for healthcare is the accuracy & reliability of information. Social media can also become a major threat to the reputation and credibility of the medical professional & service providers. Some main risks which may arise with the use of social media are listed below:

5.1 For patients

- (i) Social media sites may provide inaccurate and incomplete information.
- (ii) Privacy of the patients may be breached if the confidential information is uploaded on the social media by professionals or service providers.
- (iii) Social media creates lack of security due to possibility of fraud & abuse.

- (iv) Availability of too much data may create information overload.
- (v) The patients may risk their lives due to ill effects of wrong advice received in the absence of actual physical observation by the doctor.

5.2 For Professionals

- (i) **Licensing violation:** It is important to know the licensing rules of different regions before providing the services.
- (ii) **Risk to credibility & reputation:** Social media trials may put the reputation of a professional on stake.
- (iii) **Time consuming:** Professionals often find it difficult to take out time for social media networking due to their busy schedules.
- (iv) **Damage to professional image:** Posting of unprofessional or personal content may create biased impressions which may damage the professional image of the professional.
- (v) **Breach of Patient Privacy:** Undesired breach of patient confidentiality may bring the risk of legal action.

5.3 For Institutions

- (i) **Licensing violation:** In case of unprofessional behaviour reports on social media, the license of the organization may get cancelled.
- (ii) **Risk to credibility & reputation:** Inappropriate use of social media may reduce the credibility and may damage the image.
- (iii) **Open public criticism:** Sometimes social media sites become the trial courts which may provide open platform for public criticism.
- (iv) **Extra time & cost consuming:** Now the time has come that the organization should take social media seriously which is time & cost consuming.
- (v) **Legal issues:** Breach of patient privacy, misrepresentation on social media may bring social complexities.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Social media is here to stay and transform patient-professional-provider relationships for the good of the people & society at large. It is changing the way people receive, process evaluate & use information. It underlines wide potential and scope for immense impacts on healthcare. However, it is required to use these sites wisely, prudently and carefully. Sound & useful guidelines should be created for health providers. Developing a social media policy is a necessity today so that healthcare organizations do not run the risk of losing public faith and patient's safety and security is ensured without breach of patient privacy.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- [1] www.kpmg.com/Global/en/healthcare/
- [2] [www.wipro.com/documents/.../impact-of-social media...](http://www.wipro.com/documents/.../impact-of-social-media...)
- [3] www.mckinsey.com/media/....service
- [4] library.ahima.org/xpedio.groups/public/documents
- [5] <http://www.ihealthbeat.org/perspectives>
- [6] <http://www.thelifestyleelf.net/>
- [7] <http://www.soravjain.com/uncategorized>
- [8] <http://elearning.scranton.edu/resource/business-leadership/top-5-ways-social-media-is-used-by-healthcare-professionals>
- [9] www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/NCBI/ Literature
- [10] www.hp.com/sbso/solutions/healthcare/