Chapter 6

The Past, the Present, and the Future:
Examining the Role of the "Social" in Transforming Personal Healthcare Management of Chronic Disease

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines how the rapid diffusion of social media and Mobile Web is impacting personal healthcare management amongst those living with chronic disease. Despite a recent increase in research in this area (Moorhead, et al., 2013), evaluating the "social" still poses challenges to conventional notions of the "Internet empowered" patient and the best ways to support the management of chronic disease (Østbye, et al., 2005). The chapter argues that there is a need for advancing conceptual thinking on how health and IT are now interacting at the level of individual patients/citizens and how this is continuing to transform health professional-patient interactions (Glasgow, et al., 2008). By drawing on examples of e-health research, the chapter illustrates how notions of the "social" and "technology" have evolved over time from medically centred e-health through to patient-centred e-health. The chapter considers how this evolution may lead to a future focus on community-centred personal healthcare of chronic disease supported by "social" e-health tools, applications, and services that continue to blur the more conventional boundaries between health professionals, patients, and their social networks.

INTRODUCTION

The term social media covers a wide array of technologies, applications and services including social networking sites like Facebook, media-sharing platforms like YouTube, BitTorrent and Flickr, and an array of user content including Wikis, Blogs and micro-blogging services like Twitter. Despite some continuing definitional ambiguity in the literature, there is general agreement that social media involves interaction on-line around the generation, communication and exchange of user-generated content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Kietzmann et al, 2011). Simultaneously growth in the use of mobile devices (mobiles, tablets, laptops etc.) and mobile networks to access content on the internet has also expanded rapidly particularly during the last five years (Kelly, 2013). While

this trend is uneven globally, it is noticeable that some of the most rapid adopters of 'mobile web' are countries with rapidly developing economies including Brazil, Russia, India and China (BRICs). These countries are also increasingly aware of the need to address the changing healthcare challenges arising within their increasingly affluent populations (Bhaumik, 2013). The diversity of analysis on growth social media uptake is evident with graphs and tables presenting data according to social media types, user timelines, size, duration and by companies or industries. As an example Figure 1 presents social media penetration by country as at March 2013.

Combined, the near exponential growth in the adoption and use of social media and mobile web (Qualman, 2013) has, perhaps not surprisingly, led to the their deployment by a range of healthcare

Figure 1. Social media penetration (source@wearesocialsg)
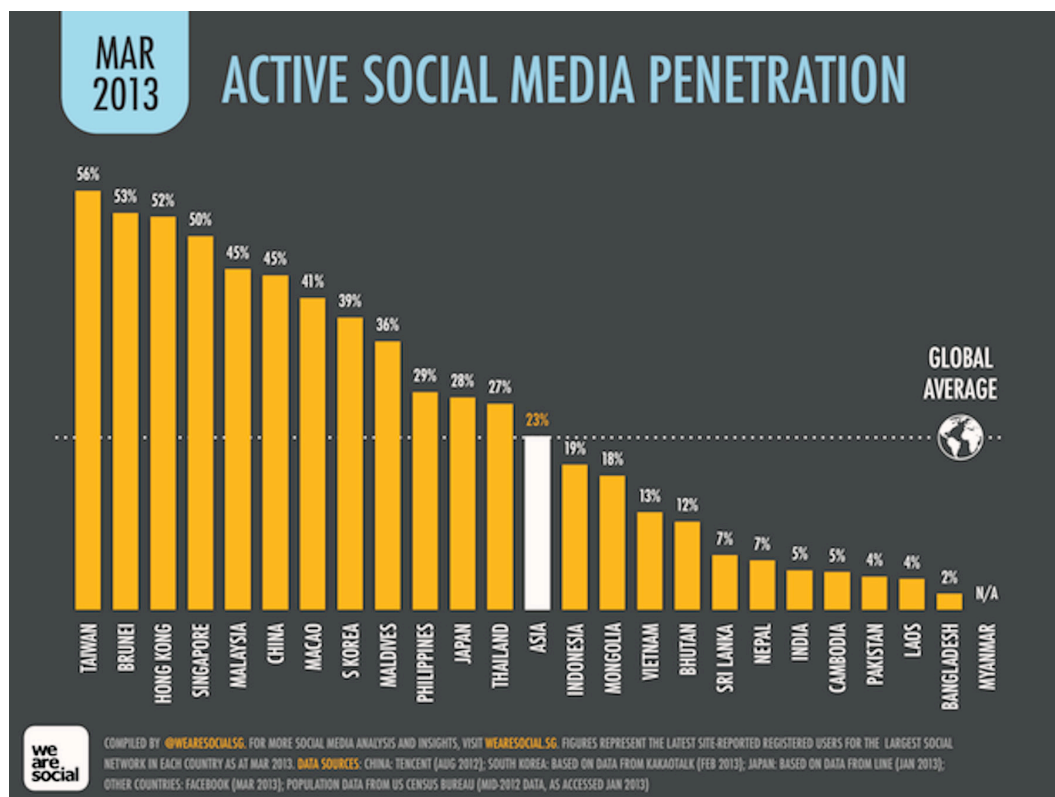
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