An Investigation of the Application of New Media and Its Impact on Taiwan Health Communication

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ABSTRACT

Along with the rise of social networks and mobile media, health communication models also change with each passing day. Compared to traditional media, are the new media more effective to achieve the dissemination of health knowledge, or help people and patients to implement lifestyle adjustments? With the shift in modern lifestyles, social media have revolutionized health communication. The means and channels for health communication are now very diversified. In order to assess the influence of social media in health communication, this study analyzed the "1922 Prevention Expert", a campaign launched by Taiwan's Centers for Disease Control. In this study, the researchers collected data through interviews and a survey to investigate the use and outcomes of social media in health communication and explores how to use social media well in health communication.

Keywords: Facebook, Health Communication, Health Improvement, Social Media, Social Networking

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Research Background and Motive

Owing to the rapid advances in and popularity of mass media, the applications of new media have become more and more important. Based on historical contexts, people can clearly understand how radio broadcast affected print media and television. As mass communication steps into the 21st century, accelerated technological advancements have brought about massive changes. The Internet has extensive applications, and displays ample evidence of the new media revolution. Therefore, computers and Internet will once again change the face of communication, from its form to its content. The

sprouting of the Internet, multimedia, satellite broadcasting and broadband in our society can be traced back to the mid-1990sInternet. Voice communication devices have also changed, from the old telegraph to landlines, followed by mobile phones and free Internet calls. The rise of personal entertainment (mp3 players and mobile phones) and personal Internet space (blogs and tweeting) show the shift in the way messages are moving and communicated across the world.

According to a survey on the use of broadband in Taiwan by Taiwan's Network Information Center, 16.95 million people had access to broadband in 2011, an increase of 730,000 people as compared to 2010's 16.22 million (Taiwan Network Information Center, 2011). The ever increasing number of Internet users shows the dependency of the modern generation on the Internet. This in turn spurs companies and corporate groups to invest resources into developing the Internet as a marketing platform and using mass communication media (e.g. official websites, official blogs etc.), for branding and customer communication. On the whole, communication has already developed from one-way to interactive, from mass to niche; the means and concepts of communication are evolving. As new media has gained users, it is now more than just a communication tool but also an important player influencing society. By many, it is viewed as the source for sharing knowledge, information, viewpoints, public opinion, emotions, and even rumors.

With the help of technological advancements, Social Networking Sites (SNS) are the new wave sweeping through the virtual world. SNS are basically web-based services, providing the means for users to build open or partially open personal information and a recommendation system linked to trust so as to share this information within a personal network (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). SNS provide users with a platform through which to interact over the Internet via instant messaging, forums etc. The interaction results in socialization and acts as a media; thus it is named social media. One of the most popular social media is Facebook.

According to one online survey, Facebook had the most hits in the United States in 2010, surpassing even Google; it is also the most searched for keyword. Since June 2008, after Facebook launched its Chinese version, users increased immediately through the second half of 2009, a sharp incline in its membership. As of December 2011, Facebook users in Taiwan stood at 11.6 million, a staggering 71.92% of its total Internet population and 50.38% of Taiwan's overall population (Socialbakers, 2011). Statistics from InsightXplorer (2009) show a growth of 23.6% in Internet usage time from 2010 to 2011. Facebook accounted for most of the Internet usage time (27.01%) followed by Yahoo! (20.68%), Youtube (4.29%), Wretch (3.59%) and Google (2.58%). Facebook has shown a steady increase in Internet usage time, going from 17.77% in 2010 to 27.01% in 2011 (InsightXplorer, 2009). These statistics illustrate the changeover in mass media, especially the rise of social media websites.

As medicine and hygiene are fundamental to one's personal safety and health, the media being one of the most important sources of medical information has raised concern amongst public health and communication scholars. Many domestic and international research studies have shown that public health education through mass media has effectively changed health behaviors, lowering health risks and even death rates. Governments all over the world have worked the use of mass media into their annual budgets as a form of communication for health and disease information, thus raising awareness among people in order to achieve disease prevention and health promotion.

Along with the changing mass communication environment, health communications have become more dynamic. Information channels are more diverse and complicated than before, thereby increasing the difficulty in managing these channels. The benefits of media are that it is fast, effective and has wide coverage in terms of communication. In addition, the ability to use both the traditional media and new media well will be critical in achieving a high level of effective health communication. In

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