

Social Networking and Health

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ABSTRACT

The rise of social networking has revolutionised how people communicate on a daily basis. In a world where more people are connecting to the internet, social networking services create an immediate communication link between users. Social networking sites provide multiple services which include emailing, instant messaging, uploading files, gaming and finding friends. Just as social networking has become a more popular method of communication in recent years, the ways in which people look after our health has also changed. People do not just rely singly on medical expert's views anymore. They actively search for information on their own accord through the internet. Social Networking gives users both the option to gather, provide and comment on information. This research paper looks into if and how social networking can be successfully used within the health arena.

Keywords: Communication, Health, Healthcare, Internet, Messaging, Social Networking

1. INTRODUCTION

Social Networking is the use of dedicated websites and applications to communicate with other users, or to find people with similar interests to one's own (Hawkin, 2009). Social Networking is an increasing popular method of communication and has brought about a fundamental change in how people interact in today's society. With advances in internet services i.e. broadband, more and more people are able to access the internet than ever before. With portable devices such as smart phones becoming more technically advanced, users are no longer confined to using social networking sites on a computer. People can therefore access their social networking site anytime, anywhere and

this has aided the growth of social networking in recent years. This research paper will look at three social networking websites and how they could be used within the health arena. The websites that will be reviewed are Facebook, Twitter and MedHelp. MedHelp unlike the other two Social Networking Services is a dedicated social network for health related issues.

Healthcare is maintaining and/or improving the physical and mental condition of a patient through the provision of medical services. In the last decade with advances made in medicine and healthcare, people are expected to live longer and lead more active lives. People are becoming more knowledgeable in how to have a better quality of life, for example what foods they should consume and how much exercise

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they need to undertake on a daily basis. How we get this information to help us live longer has changed. As a society in the twenty first century we are forever searching for new information. Information has become more readily available and through social networking websites user's views are always in close proximity to new information. When it comes to information regarding health, people are no different. We gather information on staying fit and healthy, on what to do when our health deteriorates and during recovery after illness. The sources of this information includes healthcare professionals, family members and in recent years the internet, including social networking sites. With the current recession in the UK and across the world, the health arena has been forced to cut down spending in order to save money. This research paper will look to see if social networking can help resolve the issues this sector faces and the effects if a solution cannot be found. We examine how social networking techniques can be implemented in the Health arena. We will look at the latest attempts to integrate social networking into healthcare. The positive aspects of these attempts and equally the negative impacts will be scrutinised. This in-depth analysis will look at social networking from users within the health arena both medical staff and patients. Ultimately it is these users who can determine whether or not the health arena can use social networking to their and the organisations advantage.

2. THE NEW ERA OF HEALTHCARE

Almost everyone at some point in their life will need some type of healthcare treatment. We all expect and deserve to receive the very best treatment for ourselves and our loved ones. Whether this health treatment is from a general practitioner, nurse, surgeon or any other medical expert we want to be cared for have someone else cared for in the best possible way. Unfortunately there are current threats to the healthcare system which could reduce the

quality of healthcare people will receive in the future. Since the United Kingdom fell into recession officially in January 2009 the government has been cutting funds from education, transport and various other services (Telegraph, 2009). Unfortunately the healthcare sector has also had to find ways to reduce its spending in order to save money. To save money organisations such as the NHS have been forced to cut jobs from all areas of the health sector. According to an article by Rosa Prince a political correspondent for the telegraph (Moss, n.d.), more than 50,000 doctors, nurses, midwives and other NHS staff are due to lose their jobs due to the most comprehensive survey of health cuts since the government came to power. David Prentis general secretary of the union trade union proclaims that with fewer nurses on wards due to these cuts, the return to long waiting lists and a rise in cancelled operations will result. Patient care will be an early casualty he warns. Now more than ever it is important that methods can be put in place to save money for the health sector while still maintaining the highest quality of healthcare for patients. In the UK the population is predicted to increase to 70 million by the year 2027 according to an article from the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). The number aged over 85 is expected to more than double over the next 25 years from 1.4 million in 2010 to 1.9 million by 2020 increasing to 3.5 million by 2035. The number of people aged 90 and above is set to triple, while the number of people aged 95 and above is expected to quadruple both by the year 2035. At a time where the health sector is trying to cut down on spending, there should be an emphasis on expanding the health sector for the forecasted increase in the number of older aged people and the types of healthcare treatment that they will need. Many Healthcare services are therefore faced with the problem of reducing spending while increasing resources in the next 20 years to cope with more patients. Methods must therefore be found and implemented into the health arena and social networking techniques could be beneficial to the current and future issues that affect health

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