Chapter 7
Efficiency of Technology in Creating Social Networks for Mobilizing and Improving the Health of a Community

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ABSTRACT

A great deal of focus has been placed upon improving population health and providing for the well-being of communities across the nation. The advances of new media skills are vital to creating social networks for mobilizing and improving the health of a community. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the efficiency of Facebook in creating social networks to mobilize community improvement. This chapter discusses social networking group reach rates and the effectiveness of social networking in delivering health messages and improving community health knowledge. An Internet scan of a Facebook Support Group using quantitative outcomes is done. The group was followed for 2 years to track the following metric: weekly frequency of posting, the average number of followers, response time, and group engagement. Overall, this study shows positive outcomes in terms of reach, response time, and group engagement.

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

A great deal of focus has been placed upon improving population health and providing for well-being of communities across the nation. Major advances in the health of the American people have resulted from public health involvements designed to reduce significant forces to the health of communities (Abroms & Maibach, 2008). Zilberberg (2011) defines a social media as any Website that allows social collaboration. Social media is essentially defined by its ability to offer an collaborating environment for users, where discussion flows in multiple directions, and users are encouraged to contribute. A growing literature is emphasizing the role social networks play in health and how the appearance of social media provides new ways to form and involve networks (Cain & Policastri, 2011; Bennett & Glasgow, 2010). While effectiveness and profi-

ciency of media campaigns are well documented in the literature (Cain & Policastri, 2011; Bennett & Glasgow, 2010), social technology use such as Facebook use in health messaging remains an inexplicable topic with little evidence. For this reason, this paper is devoted on the efficiency of technology in creating social network for mobilizing and improving health of a community.

The advances of new media skills are vital in creating social network for mobilizing and improving health of a community. Social networking services foster learning through what Noar (2006) describes as a participating culture which is a culture that consists of a space that allows engagement, sharing, mentoring, and an opportunity for social interaction. The need for critical evaluation of efficiency of technology for poupulation health intervention is needed therefore this study evaluated efficiency of technology in creating social network for mobilizing and improving health of a community.

The expansion of social media has changed how individuals network in the community. Social technology has palyed major roles in informing multiple aspects of individuals' lives, including their access to health information (Schein, Wilson, & Keelan, 2010). Social technology like Facebook allows individuals to instantly connect with large networks of friends and colleagues. Facebook offers accessible sites to create social network to mobilize community improvement. The purpose of this study is to explore the efficiency of facebook in creating social network to mobilize community improvement. This paper will discuss social networking group reach rates and effectiveness of a social networking in delivering health messages and improving community health knowledge.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

A systematic review of the literature was conducted using an appropriate search approach and inclusion criteria of public health communications and the use of social media delivering health messages. Tian, Brimmer, Lin, Tumpey, and Reeves (2009) conducted a study on information seeking and social support in online health communities. They concluded that it is the information seeking effectiveness rather than the social support which affects patient's perceived empathy in online health communities. The online health information need to focus more on developing tools that will make information seeking more effective and efficient.

Social media have given social communications the speed and people around the world constantly use social-media platforms to seek and share information. Reports suggest that social media is an option that can be used to promote public health messages (Bennett& Glasgow, 2009; Bramlett & Harrison, 2012). Several explanations have been offered in the literatures that suggest that educating people through social media has been shown to be effective (Bennett & Glasgow, 2009; Schein, Wilson, & Keelan, 2010; Bramlett & Harrison, 2012). Vance, Howe, and Dellavalle (2009) examined how social media can be effectively used as a component of public health interventions focused on decreasing sexual risk taking among Latino youth. They found that 90.8% (355/391) of respondents had access to a mobile phone either through having their own or through borrowing or sharing one. Of those who had access to a mobile phone, 94.1% (334/355) used SMS, with 41.1% (113/275) sending and receiving more than 100 text messages per day. The authors perceived these as credible and essential methods of communication in the context of public health programs.

Bramlett and Harrison (2012) evaluated the use of social media for food safety education. Participants who spent more time on the Facebook page had greater improvements in food safety attitudes and practices. Results from the study revealed improvements in food safety attitudes, practices, and knowledge among the participants. Social media cater to the needs of the community who are engaged and desire to be more involved

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