

Chapter 25

Trends of Social Media Applications in Healthcare: A Managerial Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The twenty-first century has witnessed social media taking firm root into business and economic activity. It can no longer be considered as a tool for ‘social’ activity alone. Even governments have taken to it in order to open up communication channels with citizens and provide more effective services. The healthcare sector is a unique field where information sources and uses need to be handled with utmost care, as the risks extend not only to the healthcare provider, but more so to the recipient and others such as prospective recipients, the broader community, and regulators. Therefore, responsible use of social media in healthcare is critical, whether it be with respect to ‘customer’ relationship, marketing, education, recruitment or community building. This chapter scrutinizes relevant literature, which has been published in various disciplines, to provide significant insight into the question of how social media can improve healthcare administration. Practical implications and opportunities for further research are also highlighted.

INTRODUCTION

Use of social media has become an unavoidable trend over the last decade with three billion people predicted to own social media accounts in 2015 (Huang and Dunbar, 2013). Although it is a broad and evolving term, “social media” may be construed to represent internet-based technologies and social networking tools that allow individuals and communities to communicate, share and collaborate in a

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social dialogue through sharing information, ideas, personal messages, images, and other content in real time (Peck, 2014; Chauhan, 2012). These technologies and tools provide a variety of features that serve different user needs including social networking (e.g., Facebook, MySpace, Google Plus, Twitter), professional networking (e.g., LinkedIn), sharing media files like videos (e.g., YouTube, Flickr), producing content (e.g., Blogger, Twitter), aggregating information (e.g., Wikipedia) and virtual reality environments (e.g., Second Life).

This substantial growth reshapes the way organizations are functioning and operating. First, scholars have noted that social media increases the visibility of users' thoughts, choices, behaviors and knowledge to others in the same organization. Brown and Duguid (2001) demonstrated that people will ignore seeking information if they do not know which type of information is there for them to use, or perceive information as hard to access. Moreover, individuals may not have particular knowledge to understand other work domains (Cross et al. 2003). In this regard, social media enables ideas about work that were previously silent or hidden, become visible, interlinked, and searchable. Displaying text, video, audio and graphic content contributions, list of edits to entries, status updates, allowing comments and opinion expression, indexing entries by search engines, social tagging, display of number of people who bookmarked same content, pushing content to subscribers, showing others with similar entries, are examples of visibility mechanisms used in social media (Treem and Leonardi, 2012). This helps users know the type of people in the organization, e.g., competent or strategic, what they may know, and the status of ongoing activities in the organization.

Offering current knowledge that remains accessible, reviewable and recordable in the same original form of display is another way by which social media can reshape organizations. Persisting features can impact organizational actions due to sustaining knowledge over time, creating robust forms of communication as content can be reused and reanalyzed over time, and growing knowledge content within nearly limitless spaces. Examples of features that afford persistence include history of activity and discussion recorded, indexed entries and profiles, displaying recent activity, linking to past content of individuals on site, reversing chronological formats, cataloging history of bookmarking activity (Grudin and Poole, 2010; Mejova et al., 2011).

Social media have allowed organizations to exchange and integrate diverse knowledge internally and externally, and across traditional boundaries, with other organizations, customers and stakeholders, so that greater opportunities for excellence, employee mobility and specialization, outsourcing, managing costs, and globalization are created to change fundamental aspects of how organizations are managed. IBM, for example, has been transformed from a traditional organization to a virtual entity, with about 40% of employees working outside of physical IBM offices, and from a traditional computer manufacturer to a giant knowledge management player.

Among others, healthcare organizations started to realize the benefits of social media for primary stakeholders in healthcare, namely, healthcare providers and recipients. Healthcare providers can be identified as doctors, nurses, pharmacists, counselors, caregivers, support groups and academicians, while healthcare recipients are the patient and family members. A study by a global technology-enabled business solutions firm CSC (2012) identified social media best practices for healthcare organizations relating to marketing and brand management, recruitment, reputation management, customer relations, consumer/patient education, professional education, collaboration, creation of communities, wellness, patient and population monitoring, care management and coordination. Similarly, Panahi et al. (2014) specified a number of social media benefits for physicians ranging from staying connected, reaching out, networking and sharing knowledge, to engaging in continued medical education, benchmarking and

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