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## Benefits and limitations of social media in health communication

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### Abstract

Social media is a kind of new media which provides information about every corner of the world. It has comprised the whole world and gave a term name "Global village. These days, every business, Celebrity and Individual is on Social Media because of the large coverage of Social Networking sites. Our eating habits to wearing style, all is influenced by Social Media sites or application. In this context, health is very important topic which should be cover by Social media to aware and inform people about health problems with authentic manner. This paper has tried to know the role of Social Media and its limitation in the way of health communication. This manuscript has covered many social networking sites, web portals and websites and their style of covering health news.

**Keywords:** Social media, health communication, health information, web portals, social networking sites

### Introduction

There is a continuous increase in the use of social media globally including in healthcare contexts. When focusing on social media for health communication, it is useful for everyone in every manner. Kaplan and Heinlein defined social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the conceptual and technical foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-created content". He suggested that social media can be classified as two components: media-related and social dimensions. Media-related components bring about different types of social media to synchronize face-to-face communication and they reduce ambiguity and uncertainty. The social dimension is based on Goffman's notion of self-presentation, whereby individuals' interactions aim to try to control the effects of others. Social media provides users with opportunities to generate, share, receive and comment on social content. Although the terms "social media" and "social networking" are often used interchangeably and some overlap, they are not really the same. Social media acts as a communication channel that sends a message, which includes asking for something. Social networking is two-way and direct communication that involves sharing of information between multiple parties. Social media can be classified in many ways to reflect a diverse range of social media platforms, such as collaborative projects (eg, Wikipedia), content communities (eg, YouTube), social networking sites (eg, Facebook) and virtual games.

In this paper, social media for health communication refers to the general public, patients and health professionals who communicate about health issues using social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. Currently, there is a lack of information about the use, benefits, and limitations of social media from primary research to health communication between the general public, patients, and health professionals.

The purpose of this paper is to review the current published literature to identify the uses, benefits, and limitations of social media for health communication between the general public, patients, and health professionals and to provide recommendations for future gaps in the literature. It is important to establish whether social media improves health communication practices.

### Methodology

This review paper used a systematic approach to retrieve related research studies. The review included all study designs to identify the best evidence available to address the research

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objective. The literature search was conducted on February 7, 2017 using the following 10 electronic databases: CSA Illumina, Cochrane Library, Communication Abstracts, EBSCO Host Kinhal, ISI Web of Knowledge and Web of Science. The search was performed using the following defined search terms: "social media" or "social network" or "social networking" or "Web 2.0" or "Facebook" or "Twitter" or "MySpace" and "health".

All communications within the inclusion criteria (1) were the primary focus on interaction and uses of social media, (2) about health issues between the general public and / or patients and / or health professionals, and / or including social media boundaries for benefits and / or health communication.

Exclusion criteria was: (1) Studies were not in English, (2) Literature review, dissertation research, review paper, report, conference paper or abstract, letter (to editor), commentator and feature article, (3) Study only on web 1.0 (i.e, traditional Internet access).

### Results

Study samples included blog / forum discussions, in which participants were the general public, patients, and / or health professionals. There was a wide range of health topics, but most frequently reported on sexual health diabetes Flu / H1N1 and mental health issues such as stress or depression.

**Table 3:** Uses of social media for health communication among the general public, patients, and health professionals.

Uses of social media for health communication	Social media user General Public	Patients	Health Professionals
Provide health information on a range of conditions	✓	✓	✓
Provide answers to medical questions	✓	✓	✓
Facilitate dialogue between patients to patients, and patients and health professionals		✓	✓
Collect data on patient experiences and opinions		✓	✓
Used for health intervention, health promotion and health education	✓	✓	✓
Reduce stigma		✓	✓
Provide online consultations		✓	✓

**Table 4:** Benefits of using social media for health communication for the general public, patients, and health professionals.

Benefits of social media for health communication	Social media user General Public	Patients	Health Professionals
Increase interactions with others	✓	✓	✓
More available, shared, and tailored information	✓	✓	✓
Increase accessibility & widening access	✓	✓	✓
Peer/social/emotional support	✓	✓	✓
Public health surveillance	✓	✓	✓
Potential to influence health policy	✓	✓	✓

**Table 5:** Limitations of social media for health communication among the general public, patients, and health professionals.

Limitations of social media for health communication	Social media user General Public	Patients	Health Professionals
Lack of reliability	✓	✓	✓
Quality concerns	✓	✓	✓
Lack of confidentiality & privacy	✓	✓	✓
Often unaware of the risks of disclosing personal information online	✓	✓	
Risks associated with communicating harmful or incorrect advice using social media	✓	✓	
Information overload	✓	✓	
Not sure how to correctly apply information found online to their personal health situation	✓	✓	
Certain social media technologies may be more effective in behavior change than others	✓		
Adverse health consequences	✓		
Negative health behaviors	✓		
Social media may act as a deterrent for patients from visiting health professionals		✓	✓
Currently may not often use social media to communicate to patients			✓

### Conclusion

Social media brings a new dimension to health care, offering a platform used by the public, patients and health professionals to communicate about health issues with the potential for potential improvements in health outcomes. Although there are benefits to using social media for health communication, there is a need to monitor information for quality and reliability, and maintain the privacy and confidentiality of users. Social media is a powerful tool that provides collaboration between users and a social interaction mechanism for many individuals. With the increasing use of social media, there will be more opportunities in healthcare.

Research into the application of social media for the purposes of health communication is a wide field because the increase in general use of social media requires that health communication researchers match the pace of development. More robust research is needed to establish whether social media improves health communication practices in both short and long terms.

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