

Health Communication and the Diabetes Narratives of Key Social Media Influencers in the UK

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Abstract : Health communication is essential in promoting healthy lifestyles, managing disease conditions, and eventually reducing health disparities. The key elements of successful health communication always include the development of communication strategies to engage people in thinking about their health, inform them about healthy choices, persuade them to adopt safe and healthy behaviours, and eventually achieve public health objectives. The use of 'Narrative' is recognised as a kind of health communication strategy to enhance personal and public health due to its potential persuasive effect in motivating and supporting individuals change their beliefs and behaviours by inviting them into a narrative world, breaking down their cognitive and emotional resistance and enhance their acceptance of the ideas portrayed in narratives. Meanwhile, the popularity of social media has provided a novel means of communication for both healthcare stakeholders, and a special group of active social media users (influencers) have started playing a pivotal role in providing health 'solutions'. Such individuals are often referred to as 'influencers' because of their central position in the online communication system and the persuasive effect their actions may have on audiences. They may have established a positive rapport with their audience, earned trust and credibility in a specific area, and thus, their audience considers the information they delivered to be authentic and influential. To our best knowledge, to date, there is no published research that examines the effect of diabetes narratives presented by social media influencers and their impacts on health-related outcomes. The primary aim of this study is to investigate the diabetes narratives presented by social media influencers in the UK because of the new dimension they bring to health communication and the potential impact they may have on audiences' health outcomes. This study is situated within the interpretivist and narrative paradigms. A mixed methodology combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches has been adopted. Qualitative data has been derived to provide a better understanding of influencers' personal experiences and how they construct meanings and make sense of their world, while quantitative data has been accumulated to identify key social media influencers in the UK and measure the impact of diabetes narratives on audiences. Twitter has been chosen as the social media platform to initially identify key influencers. Two groups of participants are the top 10 key social media influencers in the UK and 100 audiences of each influencer, which means a total of 1000 audiences have been invited. This paper is going to discuss, first of all, the background of the research under the context of health communication; Secondly, the necessity and contribution of this research; then, the major research questions being explored; and finally, the methods to be used.

Keywords : diabetes, health communication, narratives, social media influencers

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