

Major Role of Social Media in Encouraging Public Interaction with Health Awareness: A Case Study of Successful Saudi Diabetes Campaign

Authors : Budur Almutairi

Abstract : Introduction: There is an alarming increase in the number of diabetic patients in Saudi Arabia during the last twenty years. The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that the country ranks seventh in the world for the rate of diabetes. It is also estimated that around 7 million of the population are diabetic and almost around 3 million have pre-diabetes. The prevalence is more in urban area than in rural and more in women than in men and it is closely associated with the parallel rise in obesity rates. Diabetes is found to be contributing to the increasing mortality, morbidity and vascular complications and becoming a significant cause of medical complications and even death. The trends shown by the numbers are worrying as the prevalence is steadily doubling every two decades and particularly in Saudi Arabia, this could soon reach 50% in those over 50 years of age. The economic growth and prosperity have shown notable changes in the lifestyle of the people. Most importantly, along with an increased consumption of fast foods and sugar-rich carbonated soft drinks, eating habits became less healthy and the level of physical activity is decreased. The simultaneous technological advancement and the introduction of new mechanical devices like, elevators, escalators, remotes and vehicles pushed people to a situation of leading a more sedentary life. This study is attempting to evaluate the success of the campaign that introduced through popular social media in the country. Methodology: The Ministry of Health (MoH) has initiated a novel method of campaign activity to generate discussion among public about diabetes. There were mythical monsters introduced through popular social media with disguised messages about the condition of diabetes has generated widespread discussions about the disease among the general public. The characters that started appearing in social media About 600 retweets of the original post was testimonial for the success of the Twitter campaign. The second most successful form of campaign was a video that adopted a very popular approach of using Dark Comedy in which, the diabetes was represented through a twisted negative character that talks about his meticulous plans of how he is going to take the common people into his clutches. This fictional character gained more popularity when introduced into twitter and people started interacting with him raising various questions and challenging his anti-social activities. Major findings: The video generated more than 3,200,000 views ranking 9th in You Tube's most popular video in Saudi Arabia and was shared 7000 times in a single week. Also, the hashtag got over 4,500,000 impressions and over one million visits. Conclusion: Diabetes mellitus in Saudi Arabia is emerging as an epidemic of massive proportions, threatening to negate the benefits of modernization and economic revival. It is highly possible that healthy practices connected with the prevention and management of DM can easily be implemented in a manner that does not conflict with the cultural milieu of Saudi Arabia.

Keywords : campaign, diabetes, Saudi, social media

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