

Determinants of Youth Engagement with Health Information on Social Media Platforms in United Arab Emirates

Authors : Niyi Awofeso, Yunes Gaber, Moyosola Bamidele

Abstract : Since most social media platforms are accessible anytime and anywhere where Internet connections and smartphones are available, the invisibility of the reader raises questions about accuracy, appropriateness and comprehensibility of social media communication. Furthermore, the identity and motives of individuals and organizations who post articles on social media sites are not always transparent. In the health sector, through socially networked platforms constitute a common source of health-related information, given their purported wealth of information. Nevertheless, fake blogs and sponsored postings for marketing 'natural cures' pervade most commonly used social media platforms, thus complicating readers' abilities to access and understand trustworthy health-related information. This purposive sampling study of 120 participants aged 18-35 year in UAE was conducted between September and December 2017, and explored commonly used social media platforms, frequency of use of social media for accessing health related information, and approaches for assessing the trustworthiness of health information on social media platforms. Results indicate that WhatsApp (95%), Instagram (87%) and Youtube (82%) were the most commonly used social media platforms among respondents. Majority of respondents (81%) indicated that they regularly access social media to get health-associated information. More than half of respondents (55%) with non-chronic health status relied on unsolicited messages to obtain health-related information. Doctors' health blogs (21%) and social media sites of international healthcare organizations (20%) constitute the most trusted source of health information among respondents, with UAE government health agencies' social media accounts trusted by 15% of respondents. Cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, and hypertension were the most commonly searched topics on social media (29%), followed by nutrition (20%) and skin care (16%). Majority of respondents (41%) rely on reliability of hits on Google search engines, 22% check for health information only from 'reliable' social media sites, while 8% utilize 'logic' to ascertain reliability of health information. As social media has rapidly become an integral part of the health landscape, it is important that health care policy makers, healthcare providers and social media companies collaborate to promote the positive aspects of social media for young people, whilst mitigating the potential negatives. Utilizing popular social media platforms for posting reader-friendly health information will achieve high coverage. Improving youth digital literacy will facilitate easier access to trustworthy information on the internet.

Keywords : social media, United Arab Emirates, youth engagement, digital literacy

Conference Title : ICPHPH 2019 : International Conference on Public Health Policies and Hygiene

Conference Location : Bali, Indonesia

Conference Dates : January 14-15, 2019