

Cancer Survivorship in the Digital Era: Special Reference to Facebook Health Groups

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Abstract:

Purpose

Cancer patients often need emotional and social support. Online social media platforms have a significant role in connecting cancer survivors for motivating and supporting cancer-affected people seeking help online. This study aims to investigate the role of social media platforms such as Facebook in enhancing the collaboration between them as well as medical professionals and groups in Facebook are also considered in this study.

Methods

This study follows a qualitative approach and utilizes both primary and secondary data for a better understanding of the role of Facebook. This study conducts interviews with doctors and cancer specialists.

Results

The results of this study show that more than 70% of the participants are agree with the significant role of Facebook and other social media in the collaboration with cancer patients. The results also depict the role of several groups and communities in Facebook are helping cancer patients get motivation and knowledge related to the deadly disease.

Conclusions

The results conclude that Facebook and other social media platforms are emerging in this situation and people affected by cancer are collaborating with cancer survivors for motivation and many cancer specialists are also there who provide knowledge related to cancer.

Keywords - social media, Facebook, Cancer support groups.

1. Introduction

Social media has had far-reaching effects on people's daily lives that no one could have predicted. In 2021, there were more than 4 billion social media users worldwide, accounting for more than half of the world's population. The usage of social media, including in health care settings, is on the rise. These platforms are being used by patients and health professionals to discuss and seek information about a variety of health conditions. Due to the general increasing use of social media,

doctors have begun to think about how it can help them achieve better health results. Social media networks are a useful tool for educating patients and raising public awareness about a variety of diseases and health hazards. The impact and utility of social media were witnessed during the sudden onset of a perilous crisis such as Covid 19, which shook the set facets of our society.

In this study, a qualitative analysis is followed for the interpretation of the outcomes from the interviews and the previous studies. This study also follows a qualitative research method that focuses on the topic in depth. The data in this study is collected using both primary and secondary methods. Primary data is collected from the interviews and secondary data such as previous studies and recent journals are also taken into consideration. The participants in the interview conducted in this study are doctors Surgical oncologists, gynecologists, and other professionals. They are asked questions about cancer and the role of social media in collaboration with patients.

With over one billion Facebook users and an estimated 92 percent of adults on social networking sites utilizing Facebook, it's becoming more vital than ever to scientifically study the possibility of delivering health communication treatments through this existing technology platform.

Thanks to advancements in timely identification, medical diagnostics, and therapy, an increasing number of people are surviving cancer. Even for the most aggressive forms of cancer, survival rates are improving globally. “Over half of persons in Spain are still living 5 years after diagnosis, and the projected number of prevalent Cancer cases at 5 years is over 500,000” (Chirlaque, 2018). “In India, the 5-year survival rate is 76% of the people aged below 50 years” (Balasubramaniam, et al., 2021). Long-term cancer recovery deserves to be provided more consideration in light of these trends. As a result of their cancer therapy, cancer survivors may develop other illnesses. Some are temporary, while others might become chronic and have a substantial impact on one's standard of living. “Cancer survivors may also be at higher risk of a second illness if the risk factors involved with first cancer persist” (Abramson, Keefe, & Chou, 2015). There is mounting evidence that treatments promoting a healthy diet, regular exercise, and weight maintenance can mitigate some of the negative impacts of cancer and cancer therapy. These practices, when combined with quitting smoking, minimize the chance of cancer recurrence as well as other health problems like "cardiovascular disease", "diabetes", and other malignancies (Peisch, 2017). Many health-related uses of social media have been documented, ranging from the World Health Organization's (WHO) use of Twitter during the influenza A (H1N1) pandemic, when it had over 11,700 followers, to health professionals posting information about their medical care (Masri, 2019). (Masri, 2019).

Digital networks have become a successful and cost-effective approach for public health practitioners to communicate with the public about health issues, communicate effectively amid health crises or epidemics, and respond to public reporting of a specific health problem (Zhou, 2018). Social media encompasses a wide range of channels and methods for conveying messages. A few years back, this meant a simple post or video, but it has since expanded to include the possibilities of likes, reactions, and comments, all of which help to boost the engagement of those publications. Today's publishing options are limitless, with articles, clips, surveys, query boxes, and video content that, unlike traditional techniques like broadcast media or billboards, allow for immediate interaction with the public (Manca, 2020). “Dermatologists can now engage in the spread of trustworthy healthcare information, virtual communities, and enthusiasm thanks to the

growing presence of social media in Cancer” (Sedrak, 2017). Oncologists are increasingly embracing social networks to publish journal papers, promote professional ideas, and disseminate work-related information, which enables them to improve patient quantity through promotions and "word-of-mouth marketing.

2. Cancer Awareness and Facebook

With over 2.74 billion monthly active users and the most monthly minutes spent per visitor, Facebook is the most popular social media site on the planet (Iwaki, 2021). With hundreds of professional associations and patient-centered groups having large audiences on Facebook, oncology is a popular area for knowledge dissemination. “Educational pieces received the highest amount of public involvement when it came to oncology content, followed by informational postings, media stories, and scholarly publications” (Falisi, 2017). Cancer awareness on Facebook pages has a lot of potential. The Cancer Foundation and the "Melanoma Research Alliance", for example, have over 65,082 and 59,991 followers, accordingly (De La Garza, Maymone, & Vashi, 2021). This might indicate that Facebook users are more interested in content with an educational purpose. According to recent studies, two-thirds of cancer-related Facebook posts focus on sharing personal stories and encouraging others, comparable to a social support group (Zhou, 2018).

A young woman shared a photo of herself on Facebook after getting treatment for skin cancer on her face, in which she urged viewers to avoid tanning beds and excessive sun exposure, as per a study. After being shared 50,000 times on Facebook, this post went viral and was covered by the news media (Tang & Park, 2017). Soon after, online searches for skin cancer information hit near-record highs if there are data figures add them, demonstrating the power of social media messages to increase public engagement with prevention content as well as an opportunity for patients to spread skin cancer awareness by sharing their reflections, experiences, and regrets from previous behaviors (Falisi, 2017).

The intentions of cancer patients in using social media platforms like Facebook

Social media sites are becoming the only platform where people are sharing their experiences and stories and other people can easily interact with other people. “Most of the people using social media sites like Facebook are seeking motivations and also Facebook can be very helpful in gaining knowledge from appropriate pages and groups of Cancer awareness” (Rajabion, Nazari, Bandarchi, Farashiani, & Haddad, 2019). People also found online health specialists during the covid-19 pandemic. With the help of social media, cancer patients can contact doctors through groups or pages. According to a study, people are spending more time on social media sites and cancer patients are also seeking mental support and guidance in social media such as Facebook (Yibai & Wang, 2018).

2.1 Facebook Influencer and Blogs

Influencers are people who have a large social media following and are utilized in social media marketing campaigns that rely on their endorsements and product mentions. Influencer marketing works because social influencers have a high level of trust with their followers, and

recommendations from them serve as confirmation of the reliability and quality of the products they promote (Delgado-López & Corrales-García, 2018). “Sharecare, a "cancer influencer," is currently one of the most prominent influencers on Facebook, with a large following” (Brewer, 2021). Oncologists are among the most active social media users, with some even being acknowledged as social media influencers. As per a Research Center survey of 3,000 People, one out of every four people diagnosed with a chronic illness like cancer sought information online from others who had the same diagnosis (Balasubramaniam, et al., 2021) (Waters, 2021). Patients with cancer were found to visit cancer media sources more frequently than knowledge-based sites offered by cancer centers, clinics, or healthcare organizations, according to the study (Lazard, 2021).

Reading a patient's blog on Facebook can also help health care clinicians develop patient-provider relationships, track treatment efficacy, and meet a patient's unique needs. “Additional ways that medical facilities can make the information-sharing process easier include integrating password-protected online journals to help patients communicate with others who have the same condition and to seamlessly exchange information with members of the patient's care team, as per a research paper” (Sedrak, 2017). Another study looked into why people utilize the Internet for health-related purposes. Patients go online for five major reasons, according to the researchers: knowledge, encouragement, relationships, interaction, and online healthcare (Rajabion, Nazari, Bandarchi, Farashiani, & Haddad, 2019). Even though health care providers are unlikely to be aware of a patient's blog, a research report points to the useful information that cancer blogs can bring to oncologists and other doctors regarding treatment impacts on patients (Zhou, 2018).

The researchers recommend creating an online archive of cancer patient blogs that other patients can use when looking for information on cancer diagnoses and treatment options (Katz, 2019). A recent study looked at the psychosocial impacts of medical postings, such as coping, separation, and encouragement, on health outcomes” (Chew, 2020). The researchers found that blogging about disease builds connections with others and offers bloggers a sense of purpose by sharing experiences that can help others experiencing a similar diagnosis after conducting an online survey with a snowball sample of 240 primarily well-educated women (Tsai, Crawford, & Strong, 2018). The authors discovered that sickness blogs provided a means to reflect on the experience, legitimize suffering, feel connected, and find meaning in illness and life through written narratives. People shared their illness blogs with their medical team, even though the majority (89 %) shared them with friends and family (Oliveira & Cunha, 2021).

The primary data which is collected in this study by taking interviews stated the importance of social media platforms in spreading awareness of cancer. People who are suffering from cancer can get help and motivation regarding their health problems. According to the responses of the participants, it can be said that social media platforms such as Facebook are a significant platform for spreading cancer awareness. Influencers and bloggers post related to cancer awareness and provide mental support to the people suffering from cancer. From the analysis of the responses, it is clear that cancer-affected people are getting help from online platforms regarding their treatment as well as they also get mental support.

2.2 Facebook Inspirational and Knowledge-based posts and Cancer Patients

Facebook is one such platform that provides cancer patients and survivors with a lot of information and support. “The inspirational posts of the Facebook pages and groups are helping people to gain mental support and motivation” (Delgado-López & Corrales-García, 2018). There are many pages on Facebook sharing information-based posts about cancer and these posts are also essential in spreading awareness. Social media like Facebook is also used for donations and charities. “The largest cancer awareness and research charity "CRUK" has raised more than 13 million dollars in a week with the help of Facebook and Twitter” (Tsagakis&Papatriantafyllou, 2020). This foundation asked women to post selfies on social media without wearing any makeup and urging for donations. These types of successful pages are an example of the usefulness of social media platforms.

2.3 Platform for Cancer patients and Collaboration

Users can build individual accounts and engage with others on social networking sites, also known as social media. “Online social networking services offer a novel and potentially convenient approach for users to communicate and form and maintain relationships with others” (Zhou, 2018). On virtual communities of their choosing, these sites' design and interactive nature may make them more appealing to children. These are more useful than mass emails. “Users on social media have been linked to bridging social capital, where they supply useful information has exchanged knowledge or new perspectives with one another, and In health care, it has been used to transmit health information” (Abramson, Keefe, & Chou, 2015).

Highlight accessible local resources and provide information on them Attend instructional activities and get feedback from coworkers. The utilization of online physician communities has proved successful for educational reasons, patient consultation, as well as for discussing professional issues. In one study of physicians, one-fourth of people said they utilized social media daily to research medical information (Shastry, Sanjay, & Kumar, 2021).

2.3.1 Groups for collaboration and suggestions from oncologists

As indicated by the interest expressed in the program by external groups including a major academic medical education department, a university-affiliated health center, and a hospital infection prevention and control team, there is a tremendous demand for improved communication methods in today's health care setting (Abramson, Keefe, & Chou, 2015). However, given the participants' concerns about the increased value, privacy, and security of using the Facebook platform, future studies should look into more innovative and cost-effective approaches to improve interaction among collaborating health professionals (Sedrak, 2017). Only-for-providers social networking platforms have a lot of potential. "Many health specialists are available on social media platforms through pages and groups and communicating with them is very easy to discuss any issues related to cancer” (Shastry, Sanjay, & Kumar, 2021). This increases the scope for people to get in touch with suitable doctors for their treatments.

The collaboration of cancer patients on the social media platform is mostly done through several groups. People can also discuss their treatment and also can seek mental support through groups of social media such as Facebook. These groups are also divided according to the types of cancers.

People affected with particular cancer can search for the groups that are related to their type of cancer. There is a huge number of groups based on women cancer survivors which are elaborated in the next part.

2.3.2 Women cancer survivor groups

There are several groups of women cancer survivors and they are motivating other people through their posts and making videos. "PRERNA" is a Cancer Support Organization that assists and motivates cancer patients (ADGPI - Indian army, 2017). Delivering Rejuvenating Mental Relief Now & Forever is what the name 'PRERNA' stands for. On November 21, 2002, it was launched at "Army Hospital (Research & Referral)" to provide the necessary social and emotional support to cancer patients, including children and their caregivers, through counseling sessions led by qualified volunteers. The "Breast cancer support group of India" is also another Facebook platform where people can meet and collaborate especially women (Stellefson, Michael, Paige, Apperson, & Spratt, 2019). "Indian cancer society" is another Facebook group where several posts and sharing are based on breast cancer. Several information-based posts can be found in this group (Scanfeld D, 2010). There has only been one research of the use of Facebook for health goals that we are aware of. Farmer et al looked into non-communicable disease support groups and discovered a large number of malignant neoplasm-related patient and caregiver support groups (Farmer AD, 2009).

3. Methodology

3.1 Approach methodology

The purpose of this study is to look into the interpreted advantages of utilizing social networking sites during cancer recovery, hence qualitative data will be collected. Qualitative research focuses on a subject's "depth" instead of "breadth," and is less interested in establishing averages than in comprehending occurrences. Qualitative research has been critical in increasing our knowledge of health and illness during the last few decades because qualitative approaches allow researchers to acquire a more in-depth perspective of a participant's experience. The participants in this study were chosen from a random sample of people who replied to an offer to share their stories via semi-structured, and interviews.

3.2 Data collection

In this article, both primary and secondary data are collected. Primary data collection is done by conducting interviews of medical professionals and persons related to cancer institutes. The primary data collection provides an actual brief of the role of social media and their perception about social media platforms in spreading awareness and utilizes these platforms for many aspects relevant to cancer. The secondary data is collected through several previous studies and journals. The collected data from the primary collection is gathered and stored safely and the data is not shared without any permission. The secondary data which is collected through several studies are obtained from prior studies and authenticated sites.

3.3 Participants sampling

The interview in the primary data collection is taken and most of the participants of the interview are related to cancer. The first person is a surgical oncologist, one of them is the unit head of Daya memorial hospital. They all give a brief on their perception of social media platforms and their role in collaboration with cancer patients. A gynecologist has also been asked about the importance of social media in communication with patients and its role in spreading awareness about cancer. Assistant professor neurology of ILBS hospital is also interviewed about the evaluation of social media to be the platform for communication-related to health. A psychologist of the international author researcher mental health camps was also a participant in the interview and also asked relevant questions.

4. Result

The outcomes of the interviews which were conducted on several specialists provide a practical view of the utilization of social media for health-related communications. The health specialists agreed that several inspirational posts and videos are very much mentally supportive for cancer patients.

Questions	Responses	Remarks
The role of Facebook in collaboration is essential	Above 70% agreed	Facebook and other social media apps are being utilized by medical professionals for collaboration
Role of Facebook groups in the collaboration	More than 60% of participants agreed	Groups related to cancer patients are very much important in providing motivation and knowledge
Role of bloggers and influencers in supporting cancer patients	More than 75% of people agreed	Influencers such as cancer survivors and family members of cancer survivors are helping people who are seeking mental support
Online treatments and knowledge sharing	More than 65% people agreed	The use of social media for providing basic treatments and providing basic knowledge is very much essential.

Table 1: Analyzing the responses in the interview

In the case of traditional counseling methods, the doctors also include that social media and its role in mental support is also important for cancer patients. Several clips and videos shared by cancer warriors and survivors are also very much supportive of the people having cancer.

5. Conclusion

It's critical to acknowledge that social media has become a more essential and accessible source of information for the general people. The Oncological community may be able to use these platforms to promote safer health practices and deliver targeted health information to the most vulnerable individuals. Understanding and studying the optimal manner of communication on many platforms is crucial in today's modern culture. The primary data which is collected through interviews with doctors and oncologists have concluded that the role of Facebook in spreading cancer awareness is significant. The groups and pages related to cancer awareness are contributing towards the patients of cancer in several ways. In this pandemic, people are unable to go to hospitals and health care centers. Online social media platforms are providing the opportunity to interact with health specialists. The responses conclude that online media platforms such as Facebook have the potential in providing facilities to cancer patients mentally as well as knowledgeable content are spreading awareness.

From the overall conclusion of the study, it can be stated that several bloggers and groups of Facebook are emerging and populating among cancer patients who seek help through online platforms. The secondary findings of the study also conclude that the scholars agreed with the significant role of Facebook and other social media in promoting cancer awareness, additionally, patients also get emotional strength and support from the surviving stories of cancer patients.

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