Social Media and Healthcare Technology Minitrack

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Abstract

The Social Media and Healthcare Technology mini-track addresses the emerging and increasingly broad range of social media use within healthcare. Papers in the track provide insight into diverse methodological, conceptual, and research design issues including: intervention development best practices; online engagement; rating systems and customer satisfaction; and innovative uses of social media to understand issues in physical and mental health, dementia, and bullying.

1. Introduction

Social media is changing the way healthcare organizations, consumers, and practitioners interact. Initially, many healthcare organizations avoided the use of social media, and even restricted their employees from using it. However, increasingly healthcare providers and organizations are realizing that social media provides specific opportunities to serve the public, patients and physicians, while also building awareness and enhancing their brand. Consumers are increasingly using social media to understand medical conditions and make health decisions, including selecting a doctor, researching courses of treatment, and finding communities composed of those with similar diagnoses. Physicians have also begun using social media to network professionally with colleagues and to share medical knowledge, both within the medical community and with patients. Clinicians and researchers have begun using social media to design and implement behavioral interventions for a variety of health conditions.

The objective of this mini-track is to present current research examining the uses of social media in the delivery, receipt of, and communication about health information. The seven papers in the track include studies that: (1) analyze systems for physician ratings and customer satisfaction, (2) identify best practices for behavioral health interventions delivered on social media, and 3) seek to understand how social media is used in the context of mental health and dementia.

The papers by Kordzadeh and by Albarrak & Li address online ratings. While some research has shown that online and social media ratings are a trusted source of information for consumers, there is concern that these data can be biased or do not take into account important factors such as accessibility. These papers provide frameworks for understanding and evaluating rating systems.

Social media is increasingly used to deliver health behavior interventions, yet there is a paucity of models for understanding how content delivered through social media influences health behavior change. Two papers in the minitrack directly address health behavior interventions. The work by S. Pagoto et al investigates how engagement is relevant within a Facebook-delivered weight loss group. The Ranney et al paper models best practices for formative research in an adolescent cyberbullying intervention delivered via text messages.

Three papers address issues related to mental health. Chen et al use natural language processing and machine learning classifiers to identify mental health conditions. Carey et al investigate the use of social media by depressed and suicidal youth, including whether public and private social media data are relevant for researchers and clinicians. Finally, Tsoi et al consider whether social media can be used a tool to look for people with dementia who become lost.

A relevant question for discussion will be: what is social media? And what is social media research? These papers consider data that come from a variety of familiar social media platforms: Facebook, SMS texts and Twitter, as well as Yelp and healthcare organization websites. Whose data is this, and under what circumstances can, and should, it be used for research? Relatedly, just because we CAN analyze social media data, SHOULD we, or perhaps, HOW SHOULD we do so?

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The papers in this track represent a variety of voices relevant for the discussion of social media and healthcare. Authors include medical doctors, health behavior scientists and big data researchers. This variety of perspectives is relevant to moving forward and better understanding of this increasingly relevant research field.