

Information Professionals' Use of Social Networking Sites in the time of Medical Emergency

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ABSTRACT

Aim: To explore the most used Web 2.0 tools for health information during COVID-19, to identify the most used social media tool for health information during COVID-19 and to explore the type of health information explored on social networking sites

Method: The present study specifically explored the librarians' approach to using social networking sites for the provision of information services. The present study measured librarians' use of social networking sites to provide health information quantitatively. For this purpose, a structured questionnaire was used to survey librarians of university libraries in Punjab.

Results: The results of the study validated that information professionals are keen and active in using social media for seeking out health information and also rely on more personal networks like WhatsApp. They searched for COVID-19-related information mostly other than fetching out general information. For this reason, we mostly relied on discussion groups, not random information-seeking. This shows their level of committed indulgence in these social media platforms, and they used their information literacy skills to seek health information.

Conclusion: University librarians are an essential and vital element of any university, and they should be investigated in order to improve their services and resources to meet the demands of their users and researchers.

Keywords: Health Information Seeking; Health resources, Social Networking Site; Covid-19

INTRODUCTION

There is a shortage of professional security guards to monitor information content on social media platforms. For today's consumers, information has become a popular issue. Groups and individuals create highly interactive platforms using mobile and web-based technologies to exchange, co-produce, discuss, and alter user-generated content. They have a large and extensive impact on communication between enterprises, organizations, communities, and individuals. Users of social media platforms, as opposed to traditional media outlets, become content creators rather than content evaluators¹. According to the authors^{2,3} Obtaining information about COVID-19 from four different forms of digital media has been a key indicator in encouraging individuals to pay attention. Whether it is directly or indirectly access to COVID-19-related material in the microsoft network, social live streaming service, and online media, in particular, was closely tied to preventative measures. Using COVID-19 information on social media, MSN, and SLSS during an infectious disease pandemic could generate significant concern and, as a result, drive preventive behavior^{4,5}.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, people have been seeking health information to limit the risk of contracting the virus and engage in risk-preventive behaviors^{6,7}. Information professionals use social media for various reasons, including disseminating health information, professional networking, and facilitating health-related research⁸. Studies have shown that over 60% of health information consumers seek health information online at least on a weekly basis, and more than a quarter of them search for health information several times a day^{10,11}. Due to the wide spread use of social media platforms for health information, this area calls for research on more advanced strategies to use social media for health information seeking to reach out to the vulnerable population. By finding the importance and ways of utilizing social networking sites, they can be better incorporated into the library environment to spread awareness among the masses.

This research provides new avenues for resources to look at new ways or modes of communication with users. In order to get meaningful and generalized results, extensive research in Pakistan can be undertaken employing financial and human resources on a large sample size.

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METHODOLOGY

The present study uses a quantitative lens to measure the use of social networking sites through a survey. A questionnaire for the survey was used. Purely public sector universities located on the HEC website are under the administrative control of the Higher Education Commission. Names of universities are available in the list given on the website of the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan, where there are 141 public sector universities. A purposeful sampling technique was used for data collection from the population. The purpose of the study was to find out the perceptions of university librarians about the trustworthiness and credibility of Web 2.0 tools. So only central library professionals working in public-sector universities in Pakistan was targeted. To meet the criteria, researcher used purposive sampling technique.

Pilot Testing: It's important to double-check the tool's authenticity and dependability before using it to collect actual data. The study instruments were checked for reliability and validity before they were used to gather data. Thirty-two people were chosen, representing 27.58% of the total study population, who were not included in the final analysis. Cronbach's alpha was applied to the data collected using SPSS version IBM-28. Reliability Statistics Cronbach's alpha was .84, which is an acceptable range.

For the collection of data, researchers distributed the questionnaire via email, social websites, and phone calls to answer the questionnaire, especially in Balochistan and Gilgit. The researcher also visited libraries, and questionnaires were distributed. The response rate of the questionnaires was 82%.

RESULTS

Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics in which respondents were asked about their most used web 2.0 tools, priority to some specific social media platform, breadth of usage by measuring the daily time duration, and type of activities in which information professionals indulge to seek out health information.

Demographics: The first part of the questionnaire inquired about demographic information, which included gender, educational level, age, area, and daily use duration of social media. Table 1 depicts that almost 71% males and 29% females participated in the study, belonging to different areas of Pakistan. 59% of responses were from the province of Punjab, which is the largest populated area in Pakistan. As far as the age of the respondents is concerned, they were divided into five groups.

Table 1: Descriptive decomposition

	Frequency	%
Duration of daily usage of media apps		
Up to 1 hour	11	9.48
1-2 hours	53	45.69
3-4 hours	35	30.17
5-6 hours	11	9.48
7-8 hours	4	3.45
9 and above	2	1.72
Highest Education		
Masters	53	45.69
MPhil	57	49.14
PHD	6	5.17
Province/Location of University		
Islamabad	20	17.24
Punjab	69	59.48
Sindh	8	6.9
Baluchistan	2	1.72
KPK	16	13.79
Gilgit Baltistan	1	0.86

The important question is how to measure the usage of social media in hours. The data shows that almost 53% of the respondents are using social media for one to two hours, and 35% are using it for three to four hours. This shows the indulgence of information professionals on social media platforms. Through their presence on these platforms, they continuously encounter information of all kinds, which may have an effect on their information-seeking process.

To Explore the most Used Web 2.0 Tools for Health Information Seeking during COVID-19: In this section, the most used web 2.0 tools during COVID-19 were explored. The researcher asked the respondent to prioritize different social media platforms for health information seeking. We also measured their daily usage in terms of the number of hours and duration of using these platforms to understand their level of indulgence. Different priority levels were asked in the questionnaire. The table below shows the results regarding the most popular Web 2.0 tools.

Table 2: Most Web 2.0 tools used during COVID-19

Level of Priority	Facebook	WhatsApp	Instagram	Twitter	YouTube	Blogs
Not Priority	6.03 %	2.59 %	16.38 %	18.97 %	5.17 %	18.97 %
Low Priority	12.07 %	9.48 %	17.24 %	14.66 %	9.48 %	30.17 %
Medium priority	35.34 %	17.24 %	39.66 %	25.26 %	25 %	6.03 %
High priority	27.59 %	40.52 %	20.69 %	23.28 %	35.34 %	25 %
Essential	18.97 %	30.17 %	6.03 %	17.24 %	25 %	6.84 %

Table 2 shows that it is surprising to know that WhatsApp is considered the essential platform to seek health information. This might be due to the fact that on WhatsApp we encounter only that information from the groups we are a part of. So, there are a number of official WhatsApp groups that are sharing authentic information. Facebook comes next in line, and blogs are the third-most prioritized platform for health information.

Above-mentioned graphs 1 and 2 showed that 25% of respondents have been using social networking sites for three to four years, 24% have been using them for more than nine years, and 23% have been using them for up to two years. From the above data, it can be concluded that usage of social media is increasing among information professionals, and more professionals are getting inclined towards the use of social media for health information. In order to check their activeness on social media regarding checking notifications, respondents were asked whether they check social media with every notification at different times of the day. Data revealed that 85% of the respondents do not check social media with every beep. Instead, they use it at their convenience and do not always remain ready to check notifications.

Type of information accessed on social media during pandemic: In this section, information professionals were asked to share the type of information most accessed by them during COVID-19. The results showed that 35% of respondents searched for COVID-19-related news, 12% were interested in searching for medications, and 13% wanted to seek out precautionary measures.

Figure 1 Duration of use of Web 2.0 tools

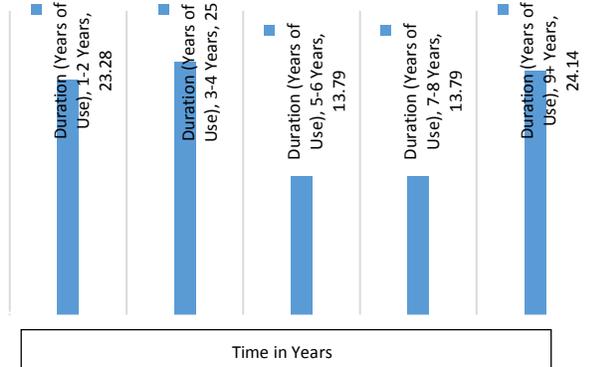


Figure 2: Notification Checking

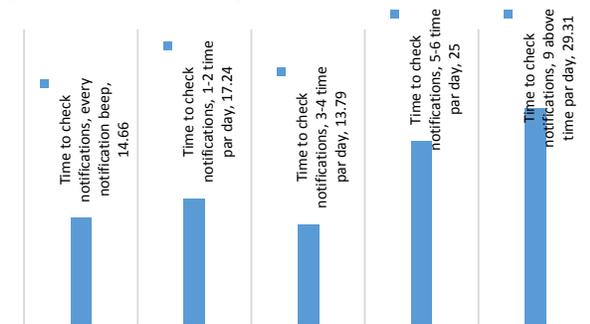


Table 3: Information accessed during COVID 19

Type of Information	Freq.	Percent
COVID 19 and related news	41	35.34 %
Information regarding precautionary measures	13	11.21%
Information regarding COVID 19 medication	14	12.07%
General Information	48	41.38%
Total	116	100%

Preferred forums to search for health information (during the last year): In Table 4, The most commonly used forums for health information seeking by professionals were discussion groups on different social media platforms (47%), but interestingly, almost 44% responded that no specific platform could be preferred. They take information on the basis of their self-perception.

Table 4. Seeking health Information source

	Freq.	Percent
Chat room	10	8.62%
Discussion groups	55	47.41%
None	51	43.97%
Total	116	100%

DISCUSSION

As internet usage and users grow, new market prospects for the broadcast of news and information are swiftly replacing established organizations. In reality, since the Internet's inception, the number of people reading online news has exploded^{12,13}. As a result, online media is expanding its market, and the Internet has evolved into a new form of communication and a medium for information dissemination. Despite their expanding significance, internet information sources continue to be regarded as unique and viewed with distrust^{14,15}. As a result, the positioning of online news sources in the social media spectrum is an important occasion, and conceptions of legitimacy are crucial to their success. This study examines the behavior of librarians' Web 2.0 tools to find health information until In COVID-19, librarians should be able to review credible and trustworthy relevant information as the largest front-line provider. Studies show younger age, fewer professional experiences, and lower rank are positive predictors of SNS use in health communication and education. Young people intend to use SNSs more than older ones, highlighting need for future research on SNS-competent student influence on health communication¹⁶⁻¹⁹.

As social networking sites (SNSs) grow, health professionals need to understand their secure and appropriate use. Formal training is needed, and the American Medical Association recommends separating personal and professional information online. However, guidance on faculty-student or faculty-trainee interactions is often inadequate, making it difficult to maintain appropriate boundaries²⁰.

Concerns about stigma and reputational impact on SNS use are related to e-professionalism, which reflects traditional professionalism through digital media. It's crucial for professional identity formation, integrity, and patient privacy. However, limited discussion exists, suggesting e-professionalism should be included in health professionals' education and policy training^{21,22}.

In contrast with our findings another study confirmed that people use different formal and informal sources to health information for Covid-19 including social media platforms such as YouTube being the most used platform,¹ but as far as information professionals are concerned in our study the most preferred platform is WhatsApp. Literature do not suggest us about the most used social media platforms for health information by information professionals. However, studies suggest that professionals prefer online question and answer sessions than to just scroll down health information²³⁻²⁵.

CONCLUSION

Libraries have a significant task in disseminating information during the COVID-19 pandemic. They were able to overcome the challenge by combining various resources and abilities. University librarians are an essential and vital element of any university, and they should be investigated in order to improve their services and resources to meet the demands of their users and researchers.

This research provides new avenues for resources to look at new ways or modes of communication with users. In order to get meaningful and generalized results, extensive research in Pakistan can be undertaken employing financial and human resources on a large sample size.

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- All authors agree to be responsible for all aspects of their research work.

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