

USING SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS TO **AMPLIFY** PUBLIC HEALTH MESSAGES

An Examination of Tenets and Best Practices
for Communicating with Key Audiences



Ogilvy Washington &
The Center for Social Impact Communication at Georgetown University

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For nearly two decades, Ogilvy Washington has been at the forefront of social marketing—advancing personal and public health and safety as well as social issues via communications and public education initiatives aimed at sparking positive behavior change. Within the public health sphere, Ogilvy has developed numerous campaigns to successfully raise awareness, educate and prompt action regarding some of today's largest and most complex health issues, ranging from AIDS to obesity, substance abuse to cancer, pandemic flu to cardiovascular health—the list is extensive. In the U.S. alone, Ogilvy's achievements in social marketing included providing landmark support for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's *America Responds to AIDS* campaign, including the National AIDS Mailing (lauded by *PR Week* as one of the top 20 campaigns of the 20th century); and raising awareness and prompting action on women's heart disease for the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute through *The Heart Truth*® and its iconic Red Dress (recognized by *The Holmes Report* as one of the top five campaigns of the past decade). Ogilvy is also a leader in the application of digital influence and social media engagement to improve personal and public health. We develop word of mouth and digital marketing strategies using proprietary technology and methodologies rooted in how people get information in the digital realm. From identifying and engaging influencers, to activating networks to engage in issues of national, community, and personal significance, to creating online communities for knowledge exchange—we create online experiences that increase personal knowledge and drive advocacy and action.

For more information on Ogilvy, visit www.ogilvypr.com and our group blog, Social Marketing exCHANGE, at <http://smexchange.ogilvypr.com/>.



The Center for Social Impact Communication at Georgetown University understands the importance of communications as an agent for positive change, and aims to educate and train students who will lead communication and social responsibility initiatives for nonprofits, corporations and governments. The Center is an initiative within the School of Continuing Studies' Masters for Professional Studies in Public Relations and Corporate Communications program. The Center's vision is to create leadership opportunities for communicators who want to use their skills for positive social impact. Its goal is to educate graduate level students through a curriculum designed to strengthen the social sector, promote corporate social responsibility, and build innovative cross sector partnerships. The Center also shares knowledge with the field as part of their commitment to advance the practice of social impact communications.

For more information on the Center for Social Impact Communication, visit scs.georgetown.edu/csic/.

About the Social Marketing Fellowship

In 2010, Ogilvy Washington and the Center for Social Impact Communication at Georgetown University established a Social Marketing Fellowship to enable a graduate-level student in the Masters of Professional Studies in Public Relations and Corporate Communications program to examine a broad range of topics in public health social marketing, the first of which is social media best practices in public health social marketing. *Using Social Media Platforms to Amplify Public Health Messages* is the first white paper developed under this Fellowship.

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Methodology

Using Social Media Platforms to Amplify Public Health Messages was informed by a review of the publicly-available public health and social marketing literature, strategies and tactics employed by public health campaigns that have successfully utilized social media to affect audience attitudes, behaviors and/or awareness of an issue, and one-on-one interviews with public health, social marketing and social media subject-matter experts across the country.

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Introduction.

Social support and strong social networks make important contributions to our health. They provide emotional and practical resources, and make us feel cared for, loved, esteemed and valued.¹ Consequently, social marketers have long relied on these networks as channels to raise awareness of public health-related issues, facilitate behavior change, and ultimately help people live healthier, safer lives.

Today's social networks have grown beyond brick and mortar communities and are now thriving online through social media applications such as Facebook and Twitter. These digital platforms are being used to aid suicide prevention efforts, communicate the risks of heart disease, and facilitate dialogue among members of the public health provider community.

Social media applications are also being used to promote offline elements of social marketing campaigns. By integrating social media tactics into broader social marketing efforts, marketers are extending messaging and reach far beyond traditional expectations.

WHAT DO WE MEAN WHEN WE SAY, "ONLINE"?

In the 21st century, the term "online" can potentially have different meanings. In this paper, the term refers to a connection with a digital communications channel via a computer, mobile or smartphone device.

The past three years in particular have marked a turning point in the way Americans obtain public health information via the Internet. Today one-third of adults access social media related to health, and nearly 80 percent of online physicians use social media channels to create, consume, or share medical content.^{2,3,4} Internet users who look for public health information online are more likely than non-health seekers to create or work on their own blog, read someone else's blog, use a social networking site, and use status update services.⁴ Thus, being an "e-patient" has become a leading indicator of other forms of social media engagement.⁴

This rapid evolution into digital information sharing presents a significant opportunity for social marketers and public health communicators alike. Case in point, with the broadening of traditional social networks across the Web, millions of consumers now have access to reliable public health information and interventions in real-time.

In the following sections, we will examine how to leverage the opportunities social media provides by identifying tenets and best practices for public health-driven social media, as well as provide insights into how to reach and engage key consumer and provider audiences.

Public health: The science of protecting, improving and promoting health through the organized efforts and informed choices of societies, organizations, public and private, communities, and individuals.

Social marketing: The application of consumer marketing principles to the promotion of ideas, issues and practices to create awareness, and change attitudes, intentions and behaviors regarding social and personal issues. This may include public safety, violence reduction, environmental sustainability, health and wellbeing, and disease prevention initiatives. The discipline encompasses individual behaviors as well as the social and physical determinants of those behaviors, and may be used to change attitudes/intentions around perception of risk and social norms, as well as provide skills needed to carry out a specific behavior or gain access to a product or service. The focus of this paper is public health social marketing.

Social media: A communications channel that can be integrated into a larger social marketing campaign, and includes all of the various activities that combine technology and social interaction between people. This can take many different forms including Internet forums, message boards, texting via mobile devices, blogs, social networks such as Facebook and MySpace, wikis, podcasts, pictures, and video. Social media is less about the actual technology, and more about the way it enables individuals to interact online.

Social media has the innate ability to communicate information in real time, as well as link groups of people together around common issues. Accordingly, today's most effective public health-driven social marketing campaigns use or incorporate social media technologies to amplify awareness, and impact attitudes and health behaviors.

E-patients: Individuals who look for information about public health topics online, including specific diseases or medical procedures, exercise or fitness, and health insurance.⁴ Sixty percent of e-patients access social media related to health.⁴

1. Social Media and the Public Health Social Marketing Environment

Social marketers consistently rely on strong, formative research with target audiences to establish the potential reach and influence of their messages. But like commercial marketers, social marketers have remained limited in their ability to engage consumers through traditional, one-directional mass media channels. Case in point, mass media public service announcements have long been the communications channel of choice within the social marketing community, preventing marketers from targeting niche audiences of providers and consumers.

Today, two-way conversations about social issues are taking place through a variety of digital communications channels including social media. Public health social marketing campaigns can now deliver more targeted messaging to a greater range of audiences, and receive feedback from those audiences in real-time. Accordingly, as greater numbers of Americans begin relying on social media platforms to fulfill both personal and public health goals, social marketers must work together to ensure that these individuals receive the most honest, accurate information possible.

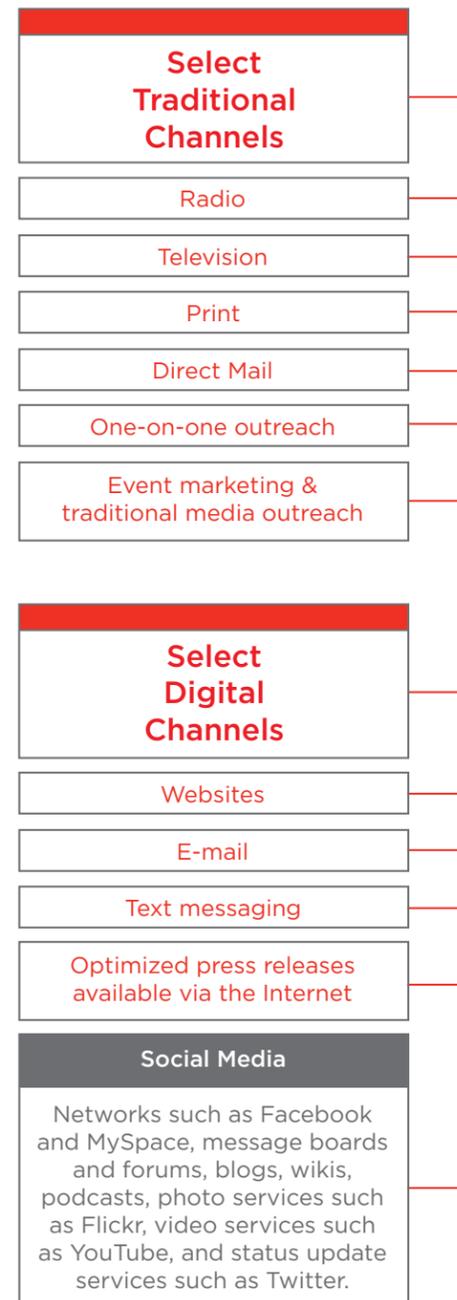
Let's examine a few basic tenets of the larger social media environment, in order to better understand how social marketers can deliver more powerful public health messages via social media channels.

1.1 Tenets of Communications Planning for the Larger Social Media Environment

Social media practitioners, much like public health communicators, abide by a handful of basic principles that help guide their work and organize their communications planning process, including: Establishing digital goals, objectives, and strategies, segmenting and prioritizing audiences online, optimizing content by "listening", and evaluating.

The following tenets mirror traditional communications and social marketing practices and approaches, with a few refinements specific to the larger social media environment. These universal guideposts are considered essential elements in any digital communications or social media campaign, regardless of the campaign's topic or intent.

UNDERSTANDING TRADITIONAL VERSUS DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS CHANNELS



■ **Establish digital goals, objectives, and strategies.**
Too many marketers jump on the social media bandwagon simply because it's "the next big thing," without establishing a sound set of goals, objectives and strategies to organize efforts and keep a clear focus on meeting the target audience's needs.

Digital goals should remain aligned with, and ladder back to, broader organizational goals to ensure that they have a meaningful impact on the fundamental attitude and/or behavior you wish to influence and change. After overall digital goals are established, asking questions such as, "am I trying to create buzz around a particular issue or topic or sustained word of mouth?" or "am I trying to drive audience members to a specific online resource?" will help put specific digital objectives in place.

Developing digital strategies mirrors the process for developing strategies offline. For example, your digital strategy is not what you are going to do, but *how* you aim to do it. It is the best "road" to accomplishing your digital goals, and is informed by a combination of experience, audience analyses, formative research, and strong digital objectives.

Establishing digital goals, objectives, and strategies also ensures that you are able to measure your success later.

■ **Segment and prioritize your audiences online.**
Social marketers and public health communicators who are tasked with a developing broad-reaching intervention for a large population often choose "the general public" as their target audience. But this approach ignores one of the most basic tenets of communications planning – segmenting and prioritizing audiences improves reach, enhances relevance, and helps put your resources to the best possible use.

Digital segmentation involves analyzing your intended audience and identifying distinct, manageable sub-groups with similar needs, attitudes or behaviors in regards to the Internet and social media. This includes establishing how and where audiences obtain information regarding the issue in question, and gaining knowledge from multiple sources about audiences' preferred social media networks, how often they use those networks, and for what purpose.

HOW CAN SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS DELIVER PUBLIC HEALTH MESSAGING AND CONTENT?

Public health information can travel via social media channels in several different directions. Here are four key ways in which public health information is delivered and received today:

Consumer to Consumer
<p style="text-align: center; color: #e67e22;">EXAMPLE</p> <p>"Mommy bloggers" may interact and share advice about parenting with their peers through a digital platform.</p>
Provider to Provider
<p style="text-align: center; color: #e67e22;">EXAMPLE</p> <p>Nurses can connect and share stories through nursing blogs or social media networks created exclusively for nurses.</p>
Institution to Provider
<p style="text-align: center; color: #e67e22;">EXAMPLE</p> <p>The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) may position advertisement or blog post on Sermo, a social network designed exclusively for licensed physicians.</p>
Institution to Consumer
<p style="text-align: center; color: #e67e22;">EXAMPLE</p> <p>Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) may post information about drunk driving prevention on its Facebook page.</p>

Learning more about what an audience does online in relation to a particular social issue is a critical step towards ensuring that the intended audience's needs and behaviors are recognized and accounted for.

Segmenting and prioritizing audiences also ensures that the measurement and evaluation process occurs more efficiently and effectively.

■ **Optimize content by “listening.”** Behind every successful social marketing message is a myriad of research into what the message should say, as well as where, when and how the target audience will receive and process the message. In the online space, this information can be captured by “listening” to issue-specific conversations online, as well as proactively soliciting feedback from target audiences.

The “listening” approach determines if a campaign's audiences are actively engaged in seeking and processing information about the target issue, through a blog or social network for example. By listening to conversations about the issue online, social marketers can establish if the topic is being discussed in the way they'd hoped, uncover any misperceptions and identify opportunities for engaging with the audience in meaningful ways. Information gleaned from this approach can help shape and inform digital strategies.

Another unique aspect of “listening” online is the ability to find and correct misinformation. Inaccurate content is rampant on the Web, and can be potentially hazardous when the topic is public health. Fortunately, social media platforms make it relatively easy for social marketers and public health communicators to correct misinformation in real-time. For example, if a blogger promotes the merits of a non-FDA-approved “alternative weight loss product” in a post, an obesity prevention campaign could comment on the post with more accurate information on weight loss interventions, or contact the blogger about revising the post.

Conversely, soliciting feedback involves proactively seeking opinions from target audiences regarding the campaign's key issue or message, often through online surveys or discussion groups. The responses garnered from this approach have significant implications for future message content and placement – vital elements in evolving a social marketing campaign's messages. Audiences should be notified when their feedback is translated into content improvement, and encouraged to comment on content changes.

CONVERSATION IMPACT: HOW CAN SOCIAL MEDIA BE MEASURED AND EVALUATED?

Evaluating the impact of conversations held via social media channels, when these channels are key elements in a social marketing campaign, is critical to measurement of goals and objectives. Similar to traditional process evaluation metrics, social media metrics measure the extent to which target audiences are exposed to a particular message, develop a positive opinion on an issue, and then engage around a program and/or take action regarding that issue.

For example, social media metrics may include share of voice in a given category, volume of online conversation, and search visibility (for relevant keywords). Information for these metrics can be garnered by surveying audiences who have been exposed to the campaign's messaging, and by listening to and monitoring online conversations relevant to the topic or issue of interest. The evaluation of social media channels is similar to traditional measurement activities in another key way as well – both should produce actionable data for optimization down the road. In other words, it's important to track metrics that will enable you to optimize your campaign.

Social media metrics are more efficient than traditional process measures in their ability to gauge opinion indicators such as sentiment, and action indicators such as sharing/advocacy and self-reported behavior change, in real-time. Self-reporting can also be made easier through platforms such as Twitter which, for example, enable individuals to “tweet” changes in their health status or behaviors.

For additional information on social media measurement visit: <http://blog.ogilvypr.com/category/measurement/>.

Enabling real-time feedback and input is one of the key benefits social media channels can provide, and will ensure that your social marketing campaign is optimized and tailored to the intended audiences' needs in real-time, increasing the likelihood that your intervention will be successful.

■ **Evaluate, evaluate, evaluate.** Social marketers routinely evaluate the efficacy and reach of communications channels used to disseminate messaging during the course of a campaign. Evaluating the social media component of a social marketing campaign is equally critical, and can be particularly challenging. As with evaluation of traditional communications channels, the social media evaluation process begins with setting a benchmark and ends with measuring outcomes against that benchmark. Benchmarks are established by first creating a digital “situation analysis” of the issue in question, including what competitors are doing in the digital space, and how target audiences are discussing the issue via digital and social media channels.

Ogilvy has established a proprietary approach to measuring social media initiatives, *Conversation Impact*, which segments and incorporates metrics into three key categories: Reach/Awareness, Preference, and Action. These metrics evaluate messaging reach and pull-through, awareness, preference, advocacy and behavior change. Common “reach” and “awareness” metrics under this approach include: How many members does a message board have? How many followers does a campaign have on Twitter? How many unique monthly visitors are attracted to a particular blog post? What percentage of conversations around your message or issue are on topic? To what extent do online conversations around our topic reflect our messaging? “Preference” metrics include, for example, sentiment of online conversation and fan counts.

“Advocacy” and “action” metrics can include the number of individuals who share a message with friends or download a weight loss application or widget from a campaign website. Self-reports of engaging in a specific behavior as a result of being influenced by a campaign's messaging

is also considered an “advocacy” and “action” metric, and can be measured using a specially developed application to allow such reporting.

Despite gains made in measuring social media's inherent value, skepticism regarding particular metrics remains, primarily because social media is still a somewhat novel vehicle for messaging. Current metrics realistically serve as a proxy for stronger, yet-to-be-identified measurements.

1.2 Best Practices for Implementing Public Health-driven Social Media

Now that we have identified the basic tenets of communications planning for the larger social media environment, let's examine six “best practices” for implementation. The following approaches are rooted in behaviorally-based social marketing theories that aid communicators in raising awareness of public health-related issues or influencing/changing specific health behaviors.

■ **Abide by the “one click” rule whenever possible.** Audiences will always ask, “how does this information affect me?” Be prepared to answer this question, and offer your audience a sense of the information's value and impact, “one click” or less away from your landing site. Providing your audiences with the most valuable and actionable information (as well as the consequences of not taking action) one click or less away from your landing site will increase the likelihood that they will follow your recommendations.

For example, if you want your target audience to sign an online petition on bullying prevention, it's important to ensure that the petition is posted directly on, or one click away from, your campaign's Facebook page or website homepage.

Also, no matter what the perceived value of the information you're sharing, do not assume your audience will follow you from one digital platform to another. Demonstrate the value of the information you're providing across *all* of the digital platforms in your campaign, not just a few. For example, the information on your Facebook page, while optimized for that

particular social media platform, should not appear less comprehensive than the information available through a campaign website.

■ **Develop a constant stream of compelling digital content.**

Information online evolves in real-time at a significantly more rapid pace than traditional communications channels, and social marketers and public health communicators must be prepared to respond to this flow of information at the same pace as their audiences are consuming it.

When messaging and interventions are delivered via social media channels, social markers and public health communicators must deliver a *constant* stream of diverse, compelling digital content to facilitate dialogue and keep audiences and influencers engaged. Content can be made more persuasive and compelling, for example, by supplementing text-based copy with tagged photos or interactive video, or by adding a mobile application or component. This requires significant resources, preparation, and a strong commitment to updating content as circumstances evolve on and offline. For example, if a breast cancer research organization publishes a blog on the latest cancer research, the blog's followers will expect a new blog post within days (or hours) of new research being publicly released.

This approach to content development and delivery will ensure that your audiences and influencers follow the campaign's messaging, and add you to their list of trusted sources for up-to-the-minute information on your particular public health issue.

■ **Enable people to show their involvement in a visible way.** Enabling people to talk openly about social issues such as those related to public health, and prompting their peers to do the same, can empower individuals to change their behaviors for the better.

Public health social marketing campaigns that utilize social media to enable audiences to demonstrate and share information about how an issue affects their lives, including what actions they've taken towards improvement or understanding of their situation, are likely to have a greater impact than campaigns that do not. This is accomplished in part through "cognitive dissonance," or the concept that enabling individuals to publicly commit to a behavior incentivizes them to re-commit to that behavior again and again in order

**REAL-WORLD BEST PRACTICES:
ENABLING PEOPLE TO SHOW
THEIR INVOLVEMENT IN A
VISIBLE WAY.**

In 2002, the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) launched *The Heart Truth*[®], a national campaign to increase awareness among women about their risk of heart disease, and encourage them to take action against their personal risk factors. The campaign's core audience is women ages 40 to 60 years.

The social media component of the campaign began in 2007. Specific social media tools which enable women to become more involved and engaged in the campaign include the following:

- National Wear Red Day[®] countdown widgets/gadgets
- *The Heart Truth*[®] profile on Del.icio.us.com
- *The Heart Truth*[®] photo gallery on Flickr
- *The Heart Truth*[®] Facebook fan page

In 2009, NHLBI launched the "Healthy Action Community" page on *The Heart Truth*[®] website to enable women to more easily demonstrate their commitment to *The Heart Truth*[®] and advance the campaign's messages via word of mouth. This page links *The Heart Truth*[®] Facebook fan page and Flickr feed, and includes heart healthy "badges" for visitors to post on their blog or social media profile.

As a result of enabling their core audience to actively demonstrate their involvement in *The Heart Truth*[®] campaign online, the campaign's Facebook fan page membership experienced a 447 percent increase in fans from February 2008, and the Flickr stream registered 175 additional tagged photos from what was posted in February 2008.

For more information on *The Heart Truth*[®], visit: www.HeartTruth.gov.



to avoid the stress associated with acting in a manner that conflicts with their stated beliefs.⁵ For example, if a Facebook user shares the statement "I follow a heart-healthy diet because heart disease runs in my family" via his or her Facebook page, the user will likely be incentivized to continue to follow the diet because it has been shared with a broad network of "friends." The user's Facebook "friends" may then read the post and offer words of encouragement, and/or ask for more information on the elements of the diet plan. Both reactions reinforce the user's heart-healthy behavior.

It is important to remember that enabling people to demonstrate involvement in a public health issue requires connecting them with the digital tools to do so. If providers or consumers find that they cannot easily access or share information via a social media application, they'll likely move elsewhere. For example, if you encourage a target audience to upload videos to your campaign's blog, it's important to provide them with a basic video uploading tool, as well as straightforward instructions on how to utilize the tool.

■ **Collaborate with influencers online.** Applying social marketing techniques to a public health challenge often involves collaborating with outside partners or institutions, whether because of budget limitations, the size and scope of the effort, or to communicate with an audience that does not access mass media channels for public health information. The same is true of public health-driven social media. Engaging with an influential blogger, for example, who is willing to be an advocate for your public health campaign may enable you to better reach and influence that blogger's followers. By remaining open to collaborating with organizations and key opinion leaders who share your mission and digital goals, you can leverage their network of partners.

It's important to note that collaborations must remain transparent. Engaging in mutually beneficial partnerships is ethical to the extent that your audiences understand the nature of the relationship.

■ **Align efforts with public health providers offline.**

Despite the ability to provide public health information in real-time, social media is most impactful when combined with resources offline such as physicians, community health workers or licensed counselors. Most Americans still turn to an offline professional

**REAL-WORLD BEST PRACTICES:
ALIGNING EFFORTS WITH
PROVIDERS OFFLINE.**

In 2006, the San Francisco Department of Public Health (SFDPH) and Internet Sexuality Information Services, Inc. (ISIS) partnered to develop "SEXINFO," a confidential text messaging service that provides teens with basic facts about sexual health and relationships, as well as referrals to youth-oriented clinics and social services offline.

The service can be accessed by texting "SEXINFO" to a 5-digit number from any wireless phone. Teens can also text single digits for more tailored information. For example, by texting "5," teens can receive a text message for a free STD checkup with a health care provider in the San Francisco area. A website – sextextsf.org – also provides sample texts.

The SEXINFO program does more than just connect "texting teens" with providers offline. The program relies on a consortium of community organizations, including high school health programs, clinic staff and health agencies to assist with identifying culturally appropriate local referral services.

The initial goal of the program was to decrease sexually transmitted infections (STI) rates among adolescents in the San Francisco area. And by directly providing teens with a referral for an in-person consultation with a health care provider – as opposed to simply texting sexual health messages – the service has made strides towards accomplishing this goal. A preliminary evaluation of the program found that 4,500 inquiries were sent in the first 25 weeks of the SEXINFO launch; over half led to information and referrals. Messages related to condom breakage, STIs, and pregnancy were the most common.

For more information about the SEXINFO program, visit www.sexinfosf.org.

Sources: The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 2008; The San Francisco City Clinic, 2008

when they need answers about their personal health, and social media technologies should build on this trust, not diminish it.

For example, a Facebook page geared towards HIV/AIDS prevention could provide links to locations of testing and treatment facilities in local communities. This integrated online/offline approach to public health-driven social media builds credibility and ensures that the intended audience receives the best information and care possible.

■ **Ensure that transparency and authenticity remain paramount.** Transparency and authenticity will always be “best practices” in the provision of public health information. Case in point, public health leaders such as the National Institutes of Health recently reaffirmed their policies regarding transparency and conflicts of interest in an effort to bolster confidence in the authenticity of public health communications and research.⁶ It’s important that this focus on transparency and authenticity be applied to the social media environment as well.

For example, if a medical device manufacturer hires a physician to author a blog on diabetes management, the physician should disclose his or her relationship with the manufacturer within the post. Likewise, if a suicide prevention campaign hosts a Facebook page and plans to remove “pro-suicide” comments from the page’s “wall,” administrators should clearly post the campaign’s comment removal policies, as well as the rationale behind those policies.

Ultimately, authenticating public health-driven social media efforts will increase the likelihood that information is trusted, properly utilized by its intended audience, and passed on through online word-of-mouth.

2. Applying Best Practices in Communicating with Audiences

Establishing best practices for communicating with audiences via social media is only valuable if these practices are interpreted and applied correctly. In the following sections we will examine several important segments of consumers and health care providers; each presents a unique set of challenges and

REAL-WORLD BEST PRACTICES: REMAINING TRANSPARENT AND AUTHENTIC ONLINE.

In 2007, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) launched a national campaign to better inform Americans about the threat of pandemic flu. The campaign focused on four key sectors: Business, health care, faith-based and community.

An analysis of social media conversations within the “flublogia” community revealed that Americans were interested in engaging with government leaders, in a transparent and authentic way, to learn more about preparing for a potential pandemic. In response to this analysis, the first blog ever hosted by a Cabinet Secretary, The Pandemic Flu Leadership Blog, was created.

Over a five-week period, HHS Secretary Michael O. Leavitt, along with other leaders within HHS and the public health community, blogged about what Americans could do to prepare for a flu epidemic. Each blog post reflected HHS’ commitment to an open and honest dialogue with the flublogia community and the public, and comments were welcomed and encouraged by all who visited the blog. Blog posts were timed to lead up to and follow a one-day Leadership Forum in Washington, DC in which leaders from the four target sectors were invited to attend and collaborate.

By authenticating their social media efforts, and ensuring that public health information was delivered in a transparent manner, the Pandemic Flu Leadership Blog generated nearly 1,700 comments, and achieved nearly 20,000 unique visitors and over 130,000 page views. More than 100 blogs posted about and linked to the Leadership Blog, amplifying the online dialogue. In addition, the blog was ranked #2 on Google for the search term “pandemic flu,” positioning the blog as a critical public health resource and Secretary Leavitt as an important authority on the topic of pandemic flu.

To read the Pandemic Flu Leadership Blog, visit: <http://blog.pandemicflu.gov/index.html>.

opportunities for public health-focused social marketers. In addition to outlining trends in these segments’ use and adoption of social media platforms, we also provide insights into how they are best reached and influenced via social media channels.

2.1 Key Consumer Segments

Similar to commercial marketers, social marketers have historically utilized a variety of static, one-way communications channels—such as print, radio and television—to influence consumers’ awareness, attitudes and behaviors regarding public health issues.⁵ Today, marketers have a unique opportunity to leverage the exponential growth in social media adoption among consumers and amplify public health messages in novel ways.

For the purposes of outlining best practices in reaching and influencing consumers, we have identified four segments of interest to public health communicators and social marketers: Parents, mid-life women, seniors, and emerging majorities. Some, for example, comprise the approximately 40 percent of Americans who are not e-patients, and are therefore harder to reach and influence via social media channels.⁴ Others, such as mid-life women, serve as public health gatekeepers and possible influencers of hard-to-reach audiences.

2.1.1 Parents

Parents frequently rely on other parents’ advice and experiences when making decisions regarding their children’s health and wellbeing. Through social media networks moms and dads can proactively obtain limitless information on issues ranging from car safety seats to sunscreen, and from diaper rash to juvenile diabetes, all in real-time. This information is available from a variety of online sources, including parenting message boards and blogs, corporate and government-sponsored social media sites, and online support groups.

Moms in particular use social media to manage and monitor children’s issues, and typically play an influential role in decisions that affect their family’s safety, health and wellbeing.^{7,8}

In 2008 there were nearly 36 million moms online; this number is expected to grow to nearly 40 million by 2012.⁹ According to a 2009 survey by the parenting

WHERE DO MOTHERS GO FOR INFORMATION ON PARENTING?

A 2009 survey by BlogHer and Compass Partners indicates that a significant portion of women rely on social networks and blogs for information on parenting and pregnancy.

Topic (% of women who rely on source for topic)	Blogs	Social Networks
Politics and News	59.5	37.3
Technology/Gadgets	61.0	39.0
Cars	41.3	26.8
Business/Career/Personal Finance	52.7	35.6
Green	57.1	39.5
Health/Wellness	46.3	33.6
Pregnancy/Baby	55.2	43.1
Arts and Crafts	48.6	38.6
Home & Garden	46.4	37.0
Food	44.4	39.4
Travel	53.4	47.7
Parenting	49.4	46.1
Sports	46.3	43.8
Social Activism	65.2	61.4
Recipes/Cooking	44.4	42.1

Source: BlogHer and Compass Partners, 2009.



community BabyCenter, 63 percent of moms use social media regularly.¹⁰ Forty-four percent of moms reported using social media for word-of-mouth recommendations on brands and products, and 73 percent reported finding “trustworthy information about products and services through online communities” focused on issues such as parenting. The BabyCenter survey also revealed that moms use different social networks for different purposes. For example, moms reported relying on larger social networks for socializing and entertainment, and “mom-centric” communities to garner information and advice on parenting. Children’s health issues are overwhelmingly the leading topic of interest within these online communities, followed by advice regarding childhood development.¹⁰

Less is known about the social media behaviors of dads, however, a myriad of new organizations, websites and blogs indicate that the “daddy blogger” era is now upon us.^{11,12}

Parents are also using social media to connect with their own children. In a recent survey by Retrevo, 48 percent of parents who were on Facebook revealed that they are “friends” with their children; parents with teenage children were the most likely to be friends with their kids.¹³ Given that parents are important intermediary influencers of their children’s attitudes and behaviors, this data suggests that social media platforms may be a viable channel for parents to share information about public health issues with their children.

WHAT ABOUT THE NEARLY 70 MILLION DADS IN THE U.S.?

Research on parents’ public health-related social media behaviors has largely focused on moms, given that women often serve as the gatekeepers of a family’s wellbeing. But “a present-and-accounted-for dad” is also associated with healthier and happier children. Thus, it’s important to understand dads’ online behaviors, as well as moms’.

According to the Pew Research Center, men and women are equally likely to have a profile on a social network, suggesting that dads are just as likely to use social media technologies as moms. Pew also reports that once online, women and men are equally as likely “to post their own health experiences or to access the resources created by other people.” Likewise, there is no significant difference in women and men’s use of social networking services for public health queries and updates, or the impact of those inquiries.

Gender differences do begin to emerge when the type of information sought online is examined. For example, men are significantly less likely than women to look online for weight loss information, information about physicians and health care professionals, and information about prescription medications.

While gender-based social media research cannot definitively tell us what dads are doing online, it can give us an idea. As the era of the “daddy blogger” begins, perhaps we will see more research on dads’ social media behaviors.

Sources: Pew Research Center, 2009; *TIME*, 2010.

INSIGHTS ON PARENTS FOR PUBLIC HEALTH-RELATED SOCIAL MEDIA OUTREACH

■ Facilitate peer-to-peer information sharing.

“Parental peers” are perhaps the most trusted source of information on children’s issues for other parents, and social media platforms enable moms and dads to share experiences and expertise with individuals who were previously out of reach.¹⁴ In fact, one of the principal reasons moms and dads use social media is to seek out and learn from advice and information shared by other parents. Thus, enabling peer-to-peer networking and information sharing should be a key component of any social media campaign targeted towards parents.

■ Help busy moms and dads track public health information.

The realities of modern parenting are often defined by a demanding schedule filled with school, doctor’s appointments, sports practice or daycare. This hurried lifestyle often leaves moms and dads feeling exhausted, with little free time to dedicate to their family’s wellbeing. Consequently, social media tools that enable parents to easily monitor public health information and goals can be invaluable. For example, adding a hashtag such as “#childweightloss” to Twitter updates from a childhood obesity reduction campaign can enable busy parents to search for the campaign’s official messaging and weight loss recommendations online. Similarly, enabling a parent to track their child’s weight across time using a digital body mass index tool, allows the parent to monitor their child’s progress against a weight loss goal, as well as see what remains to be done.

These tools are a great way to garner support for a public health issue, while enabling parents to keep track of information and personal progress across time.

■ Remember that not all social networks are the same.

Research suggests that parents surf between social media platforms depending on the type of information they are seeking. Mass social media networks such as Facebook appear to be more popular for socializing, whereas smaller online communities are being used as sources of advice and information about parenting.

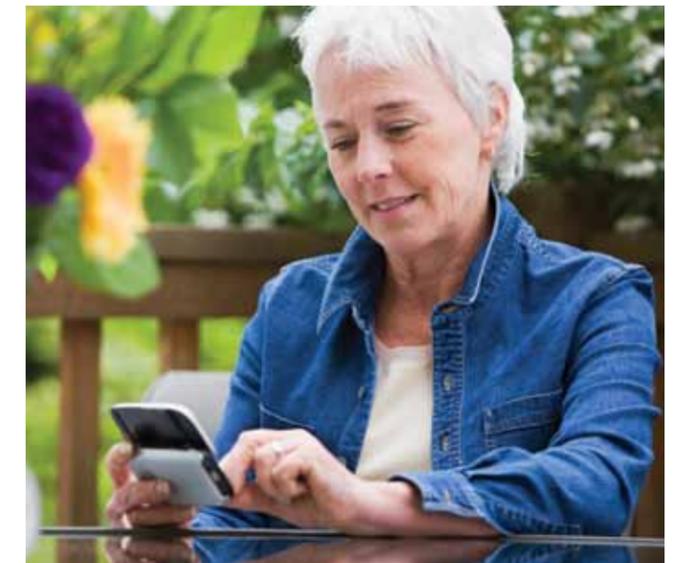
In view of this research, the type of social media platform used to communicate health-related messaging and its function should always be considered when parents are the target audience.

2.1.2 Mid-life women

Women are the principal health care decision-makers in two-thirds of American households, and during their 40s, 50s and 60s, often become the primary safety, health, and wellness gatekeeper for their families, including their children, spouse, or elderly parents or relatives.⁸

Beginning in their early 40s through their late 60s, women also experience several changes that can have a profound impact on their day-to-day lives. Menopause begins during these years, as does the need for annual diagnostic testing for conditions such as breast cancer and heart disease.

According to a 2009 survey by BlogHer, of the 42 million U.S. women who go online weekly to engage in some type of social media activity, approximately 13 million are between the ages of 44 and 62 years.¹⁵ A 2009 study by ShesConnected reported that women over 40 years of age account for over half (53 percent) of core female social media users in the U.S.¹⁶



Large networks such as MySpace and Facebook are the most popular social media activity among women of all ages, followed by blogs, message boards and forums and status updating through platforms such as Twitter.¹⁵

In 2009 the fastest growing segment of Facebook users was women over age 55; Facebook use among women age 45 to 54 also grew rapidly during this period.¹⁷

What are women doing on social media networks? Research suggests that women primarily use platforms like Facebook to “make connections and share items from their personal lives,” as well as seek out information about “real people experiencing similar conflicts.”¹⁸

When asked “which topics do you like to read about and/or post comments about online?” the BlogHer survey revealed that 42 percent of women who participate in social networks name “health and wellness” as a topic of interest. In fact, women ranked “health and wellness” as the fourth most-popular topic of interest overall.¹⁵

This finding aligns with women’s roles as health care and wellness gatekeepers within their families.



INSIGHTS ON MID-LIFE WOMEN FOR PUBLIC HEALTH-RELATED SOCIAL MEDIA OUTREACH

■ **Leverage their role as gatekeepers for their families.** Given that mid-life women are often responsible for the wellbeing and safety of a diverse network of individuals – ranging from teenage children to elderly relatives – they need quick access to a broad array of public health information online. Social media technologies can provide this access, and accordingly, should be marketed to mid-life women as one of the fastest and most efficient means of finding answers to public health-related questions. Social media technology can also provide valuable support networks for women interested in sharing their experiences online, and learning from others.

■ **Blend wellness issues with other topics of interest.** While safety, health and wellness may not be at the top of mid-life women’s interests online, when blended with more popular categories such as family or entertainment, these issues can potentially become more appealing.

Social media technologies present an excellent platform for this type of topic melding. For example, a fashion blogger could easily incorporate content regarding breast cancer screening by encouraging readers to wear pink during the month of October – National Breast Cancer Awareness Month. This type of content can be shared easily among readers within their own social networks.

■ **Balance public health information with lifestyle solutions.** Mid-life women are interested in more than just static information – they are also actively seeking actionable lifestyle or “wellness” solutions. For example, when searching for information about the risks of diabetes, women may also seek out tips on how to maintain a diabetic food plan, or where to purchase sugar-free products. Thus, when communicating with mid-life women about public health-related issues via social media, it’s important to offer an equal balance of information regarding wellness, prevention, and positive lifestyle modification.

2.1.3 Seniors

Seniors are among the fastest-growing and most important consumer segments for public health messaging and interventions. Many of today’s most significant social marketing initiatives focus on communicating with older Americans, and with the “baby boomer” generation now entering their 60s and 70s, this target audience will only continue to expand.

A person’s age can tell us a great deal about their digital behavior, and seniors are no exception. They have long been one of the most challenging consumer segments to reach online and through social media channels. This is largely attributed to the very low rate of Internet and social media usage among adults over 65 years. Many seniors simply rely on more traditional communications platforms, such as newspapers and television, to obtain information. For this reason, social marketers often rely on “word of mouth marketing” to communicate with seniors. This essentially means that marketers build active, mutually beneficial consumer-to-consumer and consumer-to-marketer communications that motivate seniors to discuss an issue, and make it easier for those discussions to take place.¹⁹

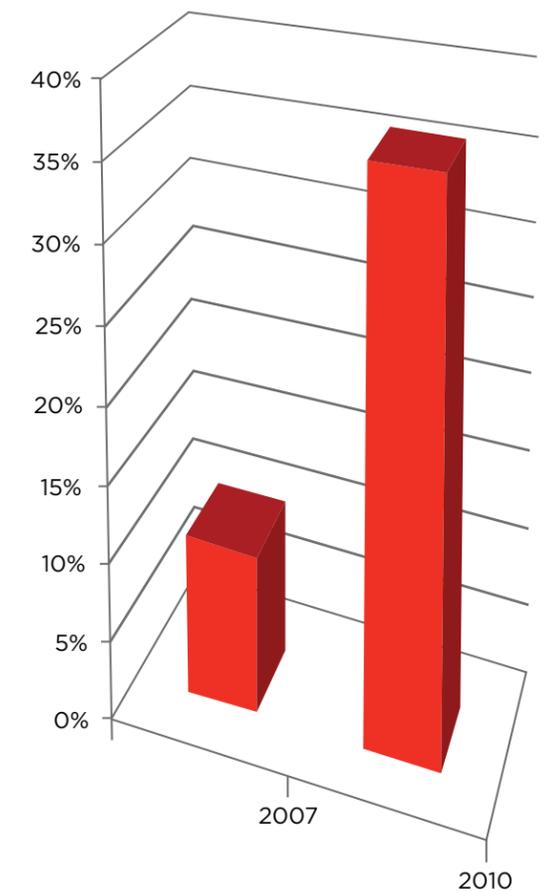
But 2009 marked a significant shift in the number of seniors using social media. Research from e-Marketer indicates that the number of Internet users between the ages of 63 and 75 who maintain a profile on a social network grew from 10 percent in 2007 to 36 percent in 2009.²⁰ This data suggests that seniors are one of the fastest-growing groups of social media users in the U.S.

Nearly all seniors who maintain a social network profile do so on Facebook (90 percent).²⁰ Only 17 percent utilize Twitter.²⁰ As we age, our social networks offline begin to deteriorate and connections made online have the potential to help fill the gap.²¹ Seniors’ adoption of platforms such as Facebook suggests that they may be using social media to fill the void created by the loss of friends or a spouse.

Despite the gains made in the last three years, seniors are still significantly less likely than younger Americans to go online and utilize social media in general, as well as utilize social media and the Internet to access health information. The Pew Internet & American Life Project reports that only 7 percent of the total adult Internet-using population is age 64-72, and only 4 percent of this population is over the age of 73.²² Seniors’ Internet usage

SENIORS ON SOCIAL NETWORKS

The percentage of Internet users age 63 to 75 years who maintain a profile on a social network grew significantly between 2007 and 2010 (from 10 percent to 36 percent, respectively).



Source: Pew Research Center, 2009

also decreases with age. While 56 percent of seniors age 65-69 are online, only 45 percent age 70-75 years and 27 percent age 76+ years are online.²²

Further, of the 61 percent of American adults who go online for health information, only 27 percent are 65 years and older.⁴ Seniors are also significantly less likely to access user-generated content related to health when compared with adults ages 18 to 49 years, and e-patients ages 30-64 are more likely than older e-patients to have tagged health-related content online.⁴

INSIGHTS ON SENIORS FOR PUBLIC HEALTH-RELATED SOCIAL MEDIA OUTREACH

■ **Consider starting offline.** Most seniors still rely on traditional media networks such as newspapers and television to obtain information. And while this is slowly changing, seniors still need encouragement offline to begin looking for content online. For example, incorporating links to social media networks and interactive websites, within the confines of traditional advertising platforms, may encourage senior consumers to engage in a social media campaign. Adoption may be lower than other consumer segments, but can still be impactful.

■ **Look to influencers and intervening audiences.** Many seniors rely on a network of caregivers to manage their personal health. This network can include adult children, grandchildren or local health care providers, and these individuals are among seniors' most trusted sources of information regarding how, when and where to obtain care. This network can also be leveraged to encourage more seniors, via word of mouth techniques, to use social media to obtain public health-related information online. Doctors can encourage senior patients to "log on" and learn more about medications. Children and grandchildren can teach parents and grandparents how to use social media networks to interact with fellow seniors. All of these digital interventions can have a profound impact on seniors' adoption of social media technologies.



■ **Watch for growth in social media adoption.** Medicare-eligible consumers should no longer be considered "unreachable" via social media channels. Seniors' social media usage grew significantly between 2007 and 2009, and research suggests that more growth is likely on the way. Social marketers and public health communicators should take note of this trend, and watch for other social media trends among Americans 65 and older.

2.1.4 Emerging Majorities

The social media environment is becoming increasingly ethnically and socio-economically diverse. Emerging majorities such as African Americans and Hispanics, who are often wrongly associated with a "digital divide" or a gap in Internet access and use caused by a variety of socioeconomic and cultural factors, are one of the fastest growing and most dynamic users of social media technologies. The emergence of smartphone technology, combined with less expensive computers and greater public Internet access has fueled this growth. According to the Pew Internet & American Life Project, African Americans are now the fastest-growing and most active users of the mobile

Internet.²³ Among handheld device users, both African Americans and Hispanics are more likely to go online using their handheld device than Whites (48 percent and 47 percent versus 28 percent, respectively).²³

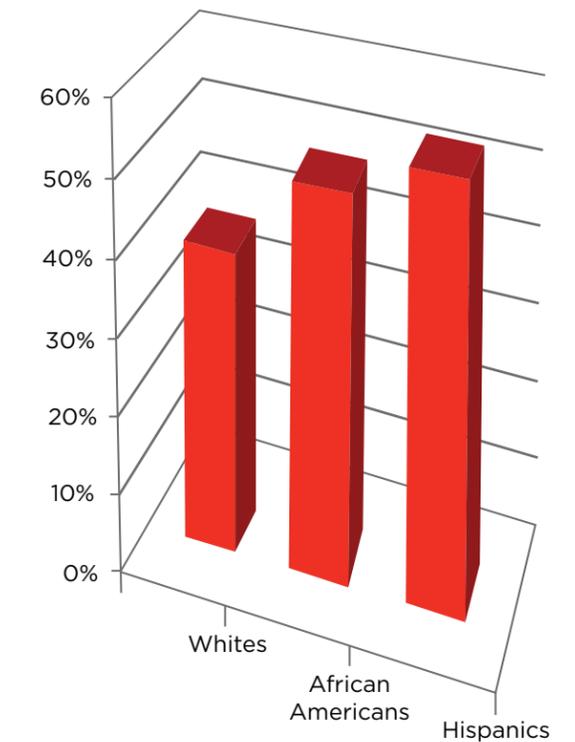
Research also indicates that emerging majorities are using social media technologies in greater numbers than Whites. A recent study by the Pew Internet & American Life Project revealed that Whites are less likely than African Americans or Hispanics to have a profile on a social networking site (31 percent versus 43 percent and 48 percent, respectively), suggesting that social media may be a highly effective means to reach emerging majority audiences.²⁴ Whites are also less likely to use status update services, such as Twitter – only 19 percent of Whites use these services whereas 26 percent of African Americans do so.²⁵

In regards to health, African American and Hispanic e-patients are more likely than Whites to report that their last online health session had a major impact (26% and 16% versus 11%, respectively).⁴ Yet African Americans and Hispanics are less likely than Whites to research a medical problem online, search for information for prescription drugs and look for information about doctors or health professionals.⁴

Unfortunately, the growth in emerging majorities' use of social media technologies has not resulted in improved access to care among these populations. This may be due in part to a lack of comprehensive health insurance.²⁶ In 2009, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services labeled uninsurance an "important contributor" to disparities in health care, and subsequent studies by the Kaiser Family Foundation have reported that emerging majorities such as African Americans and Hispanics are less likely than Whites to be insured.^{26,27} Accordingly, specific emerging majorities are more likely to have less access to health care and experience poorer health outcomes compared with Whites, making it all the more critical to reach this consumer segment with effective public health-specific messaging.

EMERGING MAJORITIES' AND SOCIAL MEDIA

African Americans and Hispanics now outpace Whites in their use of social media. Only 31 percent of Whites online have a profile on a social networking site, whereas 43 percent of African Americans and 48 percent of Hispanics online do.



Source: Pew Research Center, 2009



INSIGHTS ON EMERGING MAJORITIES FOR PUBLIC HEALTH-RELATED SOCIAL MEDIA OUTREACH

■ **Don't fear the digital divide.** Specific emerging majority populations are now more likely to use social media technologies than Whites, indicating that social marketers and public health communicators should not avoid approaching these populations using Web 2.0 technology. Research has revealed that African American and Hispanic e-patients are more likely to be impacted by health information online, suggesting that communicating with these audiences via social media may in fact be as effective as communications offline.

■ **Ensure that all tools are mobile Web compliant.** Given that emerging majorities frequently rely on mobile devices to access the Internet, it is important to ensure that public health-driven social media efforts targeted towards these audiences be accessible using a mobile device. This often means that social marketers must rely on text-based messaging, and avoid more dynamic tools that take longer for cellular networks to download.

Status update services such as Twitter make ideal text-based channels for social media messaging via mobile technology, and should be considered as a key platform for reaching emerging majority audiences.

■ **Focus on easily implementable health care solutions.** Despite growth in the use of social media technologies, emerging majority families still suffer from poorer health outcomes and face lesser access to health care services than Whites. This may be attributed in part to the financial hardships many of these families experience, combined with the growing costs of health care. For these reasons, public health messaging to emerging majority audiences should provide clear, low-cost solutions or recommendations regarding the issue at hand. Messaging and tools cannot be perceived as creating an additional burden for these communities.

2.2 Health Care Providers

In an industry where compensation is often tied to the number of patients treated, health care providers are discovering that social media is one of the most efficient and least costly information-sharing resources available. More and more, providers are driven towards delivering more personalized, better-informed care, and have started using social media technologies to do so. Yet, barriers to social media adoption among these individuals remain. When it comes to patient-to-provider interactions via social media, providers often hesitate to engage because of their medical training, which stresses the importance of privacy and maintaining a "professional distance."²⁸ Many providers also feel that engaging with patients via social media blurs the line between a HIPAA violation and good-faith information sharing.

But it is engagement between fellow providers that is often most vital to effective social marketing and public health interventions. Thus, it is important to understand why many physicians still perceive reliance on peer-to-peer social media resources as ultimately unproductive. It is equally critical to identify why providers often still question the premise that adoption of social media technologies

will ultimately benefit patient health outcomes. These public health professionals are awaiting stronger evidence from marketers of social media's inherent value.

So how can we overcome these barriers around physicians' perception of social media?

The answer may lie in the "diffusions of innovation" theory, which asserts that people do not embrace ideas just because they are novel or are promoted through mass media.⁵ Health care providers, like consumers, are influenced by the actions of their influential peers. Thus, if more key opinion leaders in the public health community can be persuaded to leverage social media platforms, greater numbers of providers will "follow suit."

2.2.1 Primary Care Physicians

Primary care physicians are one of the linchpins of the American public health system. They are often the first point of contact for information-seeking consumers, and for that reason, are an important audience for public health-focused social marketing campaigns.



Historically, physicians have been wary of engaging in social media. But as younger, more Web-savvy generations of doctors begin practicing medicine the medical community has seen a shift in primary care physicians' level of social media engagement. Several recent surveys have documented this trend.

According to a Manhattan Research survey published in 2009, 60 percent of U.S. physicians are either actively using social media networks or are interested in doing so.²⁹ Nearly 90 percent of online U.S. physicians say the Internet is essential to their professional practice, and a 2008 survey by Forrester Research indicated that 76 percent of online physicians "used one form of social media or another to create, consume, or share medical content."^{3,30}

Physicians' engagement in social media does not occur frequently, however. Less than 50 percent of online physicians report that they create, consume or share medical content on a monthly basis, supporting the assertion that many providers still perceive frequent or daily use of social media as ineffectual. When physicians do use social media for professional purposes, it predominantly occurs via peer-to-peer networks. In 2008, 73 percent of specialists online – including primary care physicians – reported using physician portals to find information or stay updated on clinical matters and treatments.³ A 2010 study by Nicholson Kovac of new media use among physicians reported 88 percent have visited Facebook and 16 percent indicate they are using or have visited Twitter.³¹

Exclusive physician-targeted social media networks such as Sermo, SocialMD and Ozmosis are now providing physicians with a safe, secure environment in which to share ideas. These networks have attracted tens of thousands of members – Sermo alone had over 100,000 members in 2009. Part of their appeal is the assurance that only licensed physicians may become members and share content. This "walled garden" approach bolsters physician's confidence in the reliability and accuracy of the networks' content and sources.

What are physicians discussing on these networks? Most online specialists connect via the Internet to improve their practice and business, or find or share cases, information on prescription drugs or treatments, and research.³

Research presented by Joel Selzer, Co-Founder and CEO of Ozmosis, suggests that physicians are focused on asking and answering questions, networking with peers, consulting on clinical cases, discussing product efficacy, reviewing public health alerts and consuming continuing medical education and educational videos.³²

These findings suggest that key medical opinion leaders and informed peers remain two of the key influencers of physicians' behavior and clinical practices.

INSIGHTS ON PRIMARY CARE PHYSICIANS FOR PUBLIC HEALTH-FOCUSED SOCIAL MEDIA OUTREACH

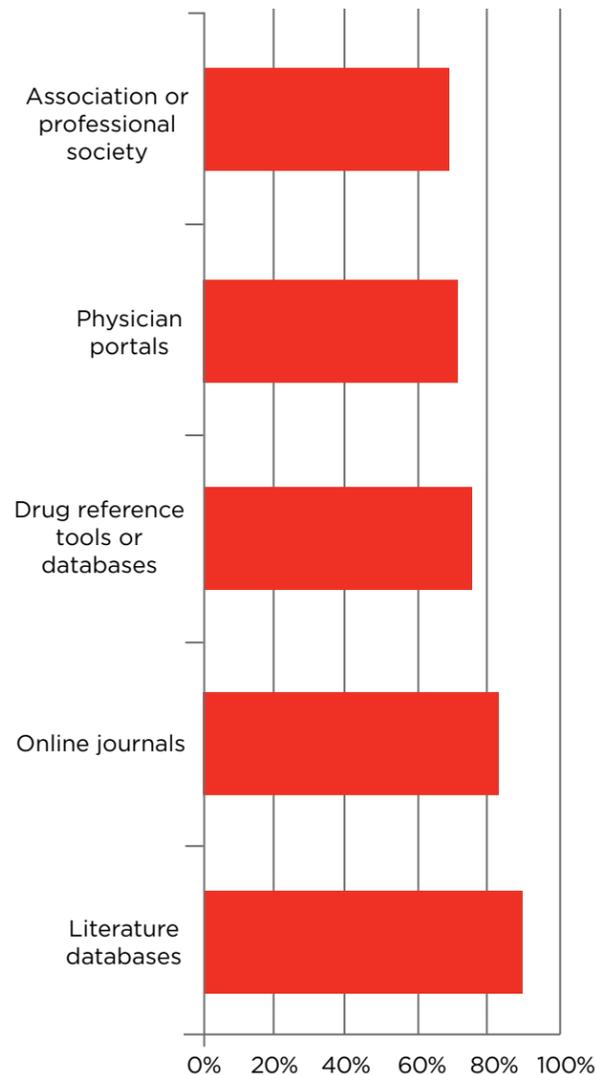
■ **Authenticate your evidence online.** Primary care physicians value the information that is available to them online, but want to know where it comes from and who they are communicating with. Thus it's important to include evidentiary information when delivering a particular finding or set of public health recommendations to primary care physicians via a social media channel. It may also be critically important to require that physicians submit some type of professional identification before participating in a peer-to-peer social media network or online conversation.

Dating and sourcing the information you provide can be accomplished relatively easily using digital tactics. For example, hyperlinking to an original source or a journal abstract is a great way to include a reference without adding additional content. This is also a key opportunity for government-sponsored websites, if the information is easy to find and access.

■ **Keep it simple (or risk losing your audience).** Time is a precious commodity among primary care physicians, who are often tasked with treating patients back-to-back throughout the workday. Consequently, these providers must be able to incorporate social media applications into their day-to-day lives simply and efficiently. Time or labor-intensive applications will likely be ignored in favor of tools that are more easily utilized.

PHYSICIANS' PREFERRED CLINICAL AND TREATMENT RESOURCES ONLINE

A 2008 Forrester Research survey indicates that physicians are now relying on the digital equivalent of traditional communications channels for clinical and treatment information.



Source: Forrester Research, 2008

One way to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of social media applications targeted towards providers is to include a tool for users to seek help if they need additional information or assistance online. Offering a digital "help desk," for example, is a great way for physicians to learn how to navigate your social media application in real-time, without the added time and complication of contacting you directly.

■ Look to digital champions and ambassadors.

Like many of us, physicians tend to rely on networks of trusted peers and well-established public health institutions for clinical and treatment information. Social learning theory supports this notion, and tells us that "champions" play a significant role in encouraging positive behavior.⁵

A like-minded key opinion leader or institution on the front lines of a public health issue can often become a digital "ambassador" for a campaign's social media messaging, given his or her ability to disseminate trusted content to large networks of peers on and offline. These networks can in turn become important information pipelines during a campaign or a public health crisis. Digital ambassadors can also provide insights on how to reach and influence specific groups of consumers and providers.

It's important to note that any relationship with public health professionals within the context of a social marketing campaign should remain transparent and authentic to ensure the credibility of the campaign and its messaging remains intact.

2.2.2 Nurses

Nurses are often the first point of contact for consumers seeking health care and, like primary care physicians, they have historically been skeptical of social media's potential to improve patient care. Yet nurses are often more willing to engage in patient-to-provider interactions via social media platforms. As nurse blogs such as Codeblog and Emergiblog and nursing communities such as AllNurses and NurseConnect have grown, more and more nurses are beginning to share online.



Patient-to-nurse interactions via social media channels occur in many ways. For example, approximately three out of four U.S. nurses recommend health websites to patients.³³ Nurses are also utilizing micro-blogging and status update services to communicate with patients, as well as one another. In a 2010 survey, 11 percent of nurses reported using Twitter and 77 percent reported visiting Facebook.³⁴

Regarding exclusively peer-to-peer engagement, a reported 65 percent of nurses plan to engage in social media in the future for professional development reasons.³⁴ Nursing blogs drive a significant portion of this engagement – most nurses report using blogs for education and professional development.³⁴ Also, nearly 25 percent of nurses report visiting the professional development network LinkedIn.

INSIGHTS ON NURSES FOR PUBLIC HEALTH-FOCUSED SOCIAL MEDIA OUTREACH

■ **Name your sources.** Like physicians, nurses value information available online and through social media networks, but want to know where it comes from. Information shared via social media channels that is not thoroughly referenced or sourced is not likely to be used by nurses in a clinical setting offline. Enabling nurses to provide information on their background or clinical training before sharing public health recommendations with patients or peers can also be important. For example, disclosing if a nurse is a "registered nurse" or a "certified nurse practitioner," may add to the credibility of the information shared.

■ **Manage but don't control dialogue.** When it comes to social media, nurses value insights and feedback from patients and fellow nurses alike. Thus, social media communities and tools designed for nurses should enable everyone to learn and share, provided that the information given remains transparent. Attempts at controlling the conversation may drive nurses away, and diminish the value of the social media application.

■ **Create a climate that facilitates education and personal information sharing.** Nursing is a very personal profession, and nurses often create patient composites – a mash-up of several similar patient experiences into a single patient – when discussing their experiences online. Other nurses can learn from these composites and share them with each other.

But nurses are also interested in connecting with one another and sharing stories about their day-to-day lives. Ideally, a social media network geared towards nurses should enable them to do both.

2.2.3 Health Systems and Hospitals

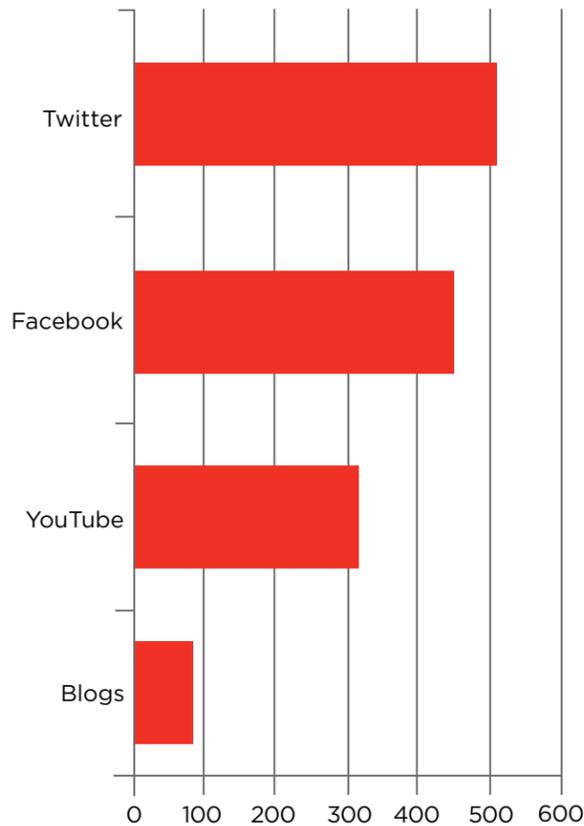
Health care systems and hospitals are a critical audience for social marketers and public health communicators. They house patients on their journey towards wellness and often serve as trusted authorities for public health information.

The number of hospitals adopting social media technologies has skyrocketed in recent years.³⁵ Social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter are now being used in customer service, media relations, and provider recruitment efforts. For example, the Mayo Clinic in Minneapolis has created a Facebook Fan Page and Twitter feed dedicated to helping people find a job at the Clinic. Job seekers can see status updates on new openings, or post comments or questions about working at one of the Clinic's facilities.

Ed Bennett, Director of Web Strategy at the University of Maryland Medical System, has estimated that the social media adoption rate among hospitals in the U.S. is approximately 53 percent.³⁶ The rate of adoption is heavily skewed to larger hospitals, but this may change as more facilities gain a better understanding of the low-cost benefits social media applications can provide. Patients are also responding to hospitals' efforts. Nearly one-quarter of e-patients already consult rankings or reviews online of hospitals or other medical facilities.⁴ Still only four percent post a review of a hospital online.⁴

WHAT SOCIAL MEDIA NETWORKS DO HOSPITALS PREFER?

Hospitals' use of social media platforms grew exponentially between 2009 and 2010. Among a sample of 660 hospitals in the U.S. who utilize social media, 507 utilize Twitter, 459 utilize Facebook, 308 utilize YouTube, and 85 utilize blogs.



Sources: Ogilvy, 2010; Ed Bennett.org, 2010

AUDIENCE INSIGHTS ON HEALTH SYSTEMS AND HOSPITALS FOR PUBLIC HEALTH-FOCUSED SOCIAL MEDIA OUTREACH

■ Turn providers into advocates.

Research has demonstrated that a growing number of Americans are seeking information online about where to obtain health care. Accordingly, a hospital's affiliated providers should be given social media tools to communicate with potential patients about the type of care they can expect to receive at a particular facility, as well as convey reliable public health information to members of the hospital's community. Physicians and nurses can become a hospital's strongest advocates through social media platforms such as blogs and podcasts, all of which can be made available through a hospital's website.

■ Communicate intentions and expectations.

Health care facilities that utilize social media should clearly communicate their social media policies and procedures to their leadership, staff and patients. This may be done in writing or via the hospital's website or blog, if one exists. Clearly displaying social media policies eliminates confusion regarding the intent of a hospital's social media efforts, and helps mitigate potential risks.

■ **Look to social media in a crisis.** Given that social media technology can enable two-way communications in real-time, it can be a valuable tool for a hospital during a public health crisis. More specifically, social media platforms can be used to recruit medical volunteers to a disaster site, rapidly convey critical information to a community, and align response efforts on the ground. After the crisis has subsided, the goodwill created by these types of social media-based response efforts can result in a hospital becoming a more trusted source of public health information among its constituents.

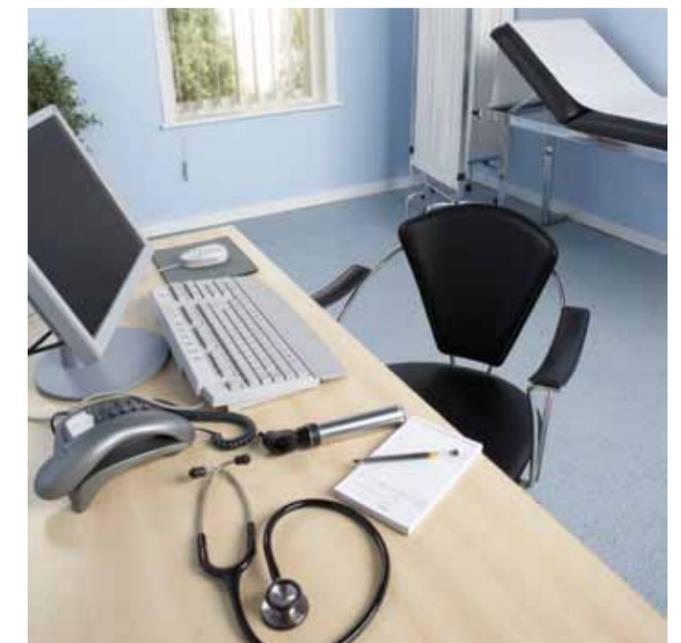
3. Summary Conclusions

Social marketing is rooted in the belief that greater audience engagement translates into more powerful solutions and interventions.⁵ Social networks help facilitate engagement, and with the advent of social media networks online, people's participation in social marketing interventions is now greater than ever.

Public health programs have leveraged this growth, and are successfully adopting platforms such as Facebook and YouTube to influence and change people's behaviors for the better.³⁷ Feeling that we have the right information to live healthier, more fulfilling lives is empowering, and social media can fuel that sense of empowerment.

But not all of us are "e-patients" connected to a vast social network of public health information online.

If social marketing is truly about protecting and improving the wellbeing of others, we must identify ways to reach and engage those who are not actively seeking public health information through the Web. Perhaps giving providers and consumers an equal share of voice in the development of public health messaging and interventions will help us overcome this challenge. Social marketers will undoubtedly be using social media technologies to seek and find the answer.



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