



The influence and usage of Digital Media for Health Communication among Women in Kerala

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Abstract

Digital media informs, entertain, educate and influence by feeding various content into our daily life. Among the various contents, health is the top most content in the digital media platforms because health is considered as primary wealth for every individual. This paper examines the influence and usage of digital media platforms for health communication among women in Kerala. This study mainly focuses on to understand the role of digital media for health awareness among women in Kerala. In today's context of COVID -19, digital media has been used as a primary tool for to know and transfer health related information to and by heterogeneous people at minimal cost. With the exposure of digital media women became more health conscious and they likely to be fit not only for them but also for the overall wellbeing of families. Most of the women will search and try home remedies from internet before going to consult doctor. Women like to search and watch health related information from different media platforms and they implement in their day to day life.

Keywords: Digital Media, Health Communication, Covid-19, Women's wellbeing.

Introduction

Health communication is the practice of information and awareness about health related knowledge to the common public. The earlier day's medical campaigns and street performances were given for health communication. Nowadays the digital platform especially social media have majority role in health communication. But all the information in digital media is real or fake that is the big question and concern. During Covid- 19 pandemic the entire country faced difficulty to control fake news on Covid- 19. The media has become an integral part of society, and the usage and influence of media has increased massively due to the transition from traditional media to digital media. Consumers are drawn to the content of digital platforms such as audio, video, and textual information rather than traditional media content. In India, the number of people using digital media is steadily increasing because of mobile phone technology and internet connectivity. A majority of people access digital media through their mobile phones, which helps to enhance the effectiveness of new media. One way forward is to understand mobile phones as media rather than merely as a new technology, thus allowing one to consider them as a vehicle for several kinds of communication (Buckingham 2007, viii).



Because of the innovations that digital media has brought to education, health, entertainment, journalism, publishing, public relations, politics, and business, it has had a significant impact on many people's lives. Digital media is always close to the hearts of ordinary people because the content can be shared, accessed, and modified easily. It is considered the replacement for the content associated with print media. Due to the enormous career opportunities within the industry, the experts utilise digital media as a huge hub for advertising and marketing in various fields.

Digital media plays a major role in health communication. There is a general belief in the health communication field that recent improvements in Internet technology, particularly the social media, have revolutionised communication patterns, including health-related communications. On the current scenario, media and healthcare is the right combo to transfer health awareness to the people. Social media can be used as the powerful source for either accurate and inaccurate health information.

People are turning to the internet for information on health and related topics due to a lack of information and understanding about health and fitness on a larger public platform. When we looked into the count of health apps and videos mushroomed in the recent years we can understand about the eagerness of people to know about health. Health is considered as the primary wealth for the people. The companies utilized the digital media as the tool for advertising and marketing of the health products and services.

"India specific apps such as Healthily me (specific India nutrition database) or My Health Saverz (medicine reminders for drugs prescribed by Indian Doctors), or Practo (booking appointments with Indian doctors) or Portea (home health services) are becoming more and more relevant tracking the trend in the market," Mr Albuquerque, Co-founder of HealthSaverz further added. With the help of digital media especially during the covid time there is a great market opportunity opened for health-related products like smartwatches, weighing machine, oximeter, fitness monitors etc. Google and you tube are the highest digital platforms used for searching health communication.

YouTube offers a variety of health-related information from reputable sources to help people stay informed and live their healthiest lives. When searching YouTube for a topic linked to a certain physical or mental health problem, we find a plethora of health-related content. The user can select preferred videos from a list of options based on their preferences. During COVID-19, videos such as symptoms, prevention, and treatment alternatives from many authoritative sources such as the World Health Organization and other medical institutions were available on these platforms, but there were also a lot of fraudulent videos generated by non-professionals. Users can obtain health-related information from these platforms; nevertheless, this information does not apply to everyone and is not medical advice. Furthermore, no media platforms will be held accountable for users' lives. Rather than going to a physician for illness, people will surf on Google, YouTube, or other platforms. This creates more anxiety disorders, which are called "Cyberchondria." Cyberchondria is a condition in

which a person obsessively searches the internet for health-related information, but instead of finding comfort for their worries, they diagnose themselves with a severe ailment and become even more concerned.

In the current scenario majority of the people experiencing the above disorder. Health education is very much important for the nations development. Community health educators collaborate with public health departments, schools, government agencies, and even local NGO to develop educational programmes and other resources to meet the needs of a community. Public health education examines the overall health of a community, attempting to identify health issues and trends within a population and working with stakeholders to develop solutions. Through the authorities of the respective states, the nation's Health Ministry analyses the nation's status in light of the scenario and issues instructions for public awareness to ensure the community's well-being. Through digital media platforms, assists in the transfer of information and making it available to the public at the appropriate time. Many areas of community wellness are influenced by health education, including:

- Chronic illness awareness and prevention
- Pandemic of COVID-19
- Health of women and children
- Injury and violence prevention

The Kerala model is nearly perfect due to the availability of primary health-care facilities, accessibility, and a high level of public knowledge and acceptability. Implementation of different national disease control and eradication programmes, as well as family welfare programmes such as universal vaccination and maternity and child health activities, has aided the state in lowering mortality rates and improving people's health. The maternal mortality rate has decreased, while women's life expectancy has increased to almost 73 years. Today, the infant mortality rate is as low as 16 percent, and maternal mortality is less than one percent, both of which are comparable to rates in affluent countries.

Public awareness is giving through posters and videos through various media platforms on the time of Nipah Virus and Covid 19 pandemic. There is a pioneer project started by Kerala government for health care which named E- Health. E-Health is supported by the Government of India and the Kerala Department of Health and Family Welfare, with the goal of providing a convenient centralised healthcare system to the state's residents.

Till now we have provided 13,10,90,000 dosages to the States and Union Territories. On one hand, we have states like Kerala where there is a zero wastage (of vaccine) and on the other hand, we have several other states where there is still is 8-9% of wastage."- Rajesh Bhushan, Union Health Secretary.

Technology and health is united for better functioning in Kerala. Facilities provided by the Kerala Health care system are Online Appointment booking at Government Hospitals, Telemedicine appointments, Covid-19 Vaccination management system, Death Information System and Communicable Diseases Management System

Kerala is India's state with the highest literacy rate. Obtaining knowledge is also a top priority for them. People from Kerala who have a high level of media literacy can acquire health information from a variety of sources, allowing them to become more informed and educated. When compared to other genders, women are more health conscious so they depend more on health information sources for their family wellbeing.

With the help of digital media platforms like WhatsApp, the JPHN, *Asha* workers and *Kudumbasree* workers started communicating with the public. Through this digital media platform, officials working under the health department ensure the public mental and physical health through enquiring in mobile phone.

The DMHP hired counsellors from the Department of Health Services in the early weeks of the pandemic. They required additional counsellors as the outbreak progressed. School counsellors, Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS) counsellors, and family counsellors were among the 1050 women enlisted. *Kudumbasree* hired 360 new community counsellors, the majority of whom were women. These certified counsellors were in charge of all helplines.

Patients admitted to the Covid-19 hospitals and Frontline Treatment Centres (FLTC) as well as those in quarantine received psychosocial support over the phone using these tools. Women, youth, and the elderly were given special concern. Only in cases where there was a high level of suffering was a detailed psychological intervention carried out. Wherever necessary, medications were also provided. Monitoring was carried out on a weekly basis for each case reported.

During the pandemic time, social distance should be maintained; the only solution for physical and mental health is digital platforms. Digital media is considered as a boon for transferring health communication. Women are also slightly more likely than men to download health and fitness applications (or publications on the subject). During the COVID-19 pandemic periods, women become largely dependent on digital media platforms for health communication.

Methodology

The influence and usage of Digital Media for Health Communication among Women in Kerala, the ultimate aim to understand the culture of digital media usage for health-related issues during the pandemic period among women in Kerala. Online survey methods and interview method for collect the expert opinion regarding health communication via digital platform.

Research Aims & Objectives

- The purpose of the study is to examine the usage and influence of digital media as a tool for health communication among women in the region of Kerala.
- To check whether the health information obtained from the digital media platforms is being used for the welfare of the family.
- To find out the intensity of depending on digital media for health issues before visiting doctor.
- To check how much the women from Kerala trust health information from the media.
- To analyse the role of digital media in the COVID-19 pandemic time.

- To find out which digital media platforms provide more health information.

Hypothesis

There is increasing the culture of usage of digital media for health communication among women.

Sampling methods

To evaluate the usage and influence of digital media for health communication among women in Kerala, as well as to determine the impact of digital media on their lives, the researcher used an online survey approach and expert interviews.

The population for this survey are those women's who have the habit of surfing internet and are of age groups between 25-45. Using convenience sampling method, 75 samples are surveyed. Women from the different fields like Government sector, business, private sector, house wife are selected for target study.

Tools for data collection: Primary data was collected by a questionnaire and structured interview was conducted with doctors in Kerala. The findings and conclusions have been drawn based on the online survey results and the expertise view on the topic.

Data analysis and interpretation

- It is found that 100 percentage of the population is depending digital media platforms for health related information.
- 53.8 percentage women utilising the platforms to find out the home remedy for illness. 23.1 percentage of are googling health symptoms. Rest percentages are depending for second opinion and for side effects medication.
- Its shows that pre visiting to the doctor most of the women are experimenting the home remedies, with help of digital media platforms which providing health related information.
- 69.2 percentages of women in Kerala depends internet for health related information before and after consulting doctor.
- 61.5 percentages of users consider physician as the perceived sources for health. 23.1 percentage of women are depending internet pre and after vising doctor for second opinion and to check the medication symptoms.
- 61.5 percentage women at least once in a month search health content.
- Majority of the respondents not tried self-treatment from the guidance from media content.
- 66.7 percentage of population searched health content during COVID -19 lockdown.
- It was found that 76.9 percentage of users believe the information from internet and social media.
- Both Google and YouTube are equally depending platforms forms for health communication.

Interview:

- The information from the digital platform may not be correct, it may give false information and leads to anxiety and fear. Example when we search symptom like headache there are lots of answers and results, from tumour to fatigue. It is an open source, so anybody can upload useless information regarding the health related issues. Better to consult with doctor and diagnosis the symptoms and go further steps.
- During the Covid-19 periods lots of misinformation regarding medicines and home remedies etc. which lead the people more panic and unhealthy. Even now the people have different opinion on vaccination and many of the people have dilemma on this issue.

Major Findings

The study found that the entire respondents who were used the digital media platform for searching health communication. That indicate the culture of digital media usage for health communication is booming, and it proved the hypothesis that 'There is increasing the culture of usage of digital media for health communication among women'. The respondents were mostly depend digital media for diagnosing the symptoms and home remedies. Majority of the respondents were access the internet seeking information before visit the doctor. The alarming findings that majority of the respondents believes that the all the information via social media and internet is real.

The expert opinions that the information via internet is not having credibility, there were lots of misinformation and it's not good way to treatment the disease.

Suggestions and recommendation of the Study

For health-related information, digital media is considered a secondary source after the doctor. As a result, we can see how much digital media has an impact on our mental and physical health.

The adoption of the Information Technology Act of 2000 would filter unsuitable content and fake news, as well as assist in identifying them so that they may be removed from online platforms, making the digital media safer place for everybody.

This is the most significant move done under this act, and it will serve as a signal for users, assisting them in classifying their information. However, irrespective act, there is a large amount of fraudulent health content available on digital media platforms. The government must take appropriate action to raise public awareness about fake health content from various sources available on the internet, as well as to ensure the content's credibility.

Conclusion

Women's daily lives are greatly influenced by digital media. Women rely on health apps such as pedometers, fitness apps, and calorie calculators from the time they wake up until they go



to bed. According to the findings of the study, digital media platforms such as Google and YouTube are commonly used to access health content. It is the user's choice whether or not to believe the content from digital media. The majority of people grab home remedies from social media sites and use them in their daily lives. After a physician, it is regarded as a source for a second opinion for health content. Digital media platforms are widely employed and for conveying awareness to the community throughout the period of Covid-19.

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