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# Effective use of social media platforms for promotion of mental health awareness

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## Abstract:

**BACKGROUND:** Social media platforms are progressively developing as a rich source of mass communication. Increasing mental health awareness with the help of social media can be a good initiative to reach out to a large number of people in a short time frame. This study was conducted to understand the usefulness of social media platforms for health promotion.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS:** It was a qualitative study to evaluate the effectiveness of social media platforms in hosting health promotion campaigns in the field of mental health, which was observed over 5 months from May to September 2019 to reach more people for effective information dissemination. The campaigns were as follows (1) The Buddies for Suicide Prevention: an online campaign to create awareness about suicide prevention. The campaign included script writing, slogan writing, poster making, and short films making, organized for the general public who were interested to take part; (2) The #Iquitobacco was a 21-day campaign with an idea of tobacco cessation in the community, conducted among social media viewers who were willing to participate; and (3) #Migrainethepainfultruth was yet another campaign conducted among the social media viewers who were interested to participate. All the campaigns were conducted using two famous social media platforms commonly used by young adults. Descriptive statistics such as frequency and proportions were computed for the number of likes and shares.

**RESULTS:** The Facebook and Instagram posts concerning all the campaigns brought about a considerable amount of reach to the targeted population. After the campaigns, the page reached to around 10.3 k people (both fans and nonfans).

**CONCLUSIONS:** Use of social media to conduct mental health campaigns is an effective initiative as one can reach out to several people over a short time period. There is an increasing trend in the awareness of mental health with the effective use of digital media as a platform for disseminating information.

## Keywords:

Health promotion, mental health, social media

## Introduction

Mental health is important in every phase of life, from childhood to adulthood. As it is usual for everyone to go through various milestones and turmoil, mental health is important to stay stable and balanced.<sup>[1]</sup>

Mental health is the fifth greatest contributor to the global burden of diseases. Stigma

contributes to the huge burden of mental morbidity. More than 80% of people with mental illness had not received treatment despite the presence of illness for more than 12 months.<sup>[2]</sup>

Mental health literacy is the knowledge and understanding concerning mental health disorders, which helps in recognition, management, and prevention. People have much confusion regarding mental health information, which causes hindrances in

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mental health awareness. Mental health awareness programs encourage help-seeking behaviors. Mental health interventions which provide supportive interactions help foster well-being among people.<sup>[3]</sup>

One of the various alternatives to address mental health stigma is through mental health awareness campaigns. Awareness positively impacts mental health outcomes. Mental health awareness can bring a positive view of mental health among people. Conventional media including newspapers have access to evidence-based data from reliable sources and are the cornerstones to spread mental health awareness. Government programs such as national and district mental health programs are on their way to becoming the vehicle for delivering mental health as a part of integrated primary care at the cutting edge of the public health-care system.<sup>[4]</sup>

Social media is a predominant element where human beings are involved.<sup>[5]</sup> It is a space to connect people with common interests. Social networking sites such as Facebook offer opportunities to understand public awareness and provide information access regarding mental health.<sup>[6]</sup> More than 2.1 billion people use Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, or Messenger every day on an average.<sup>[7]</sup>

With the continuous expansion of technology and other factors influencing social media, it is emerging as a powerful tool in spreading awareness and education of various socially relevant concepts and conducting activities, online courses, and classes more effectively than the face-to-face direct communication. Websites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, collectively termed social media, facilitate many-to-many communication instead of the traditional personal one-to-one communication and one-to-many communication. Social media, over 10 years, have actively worked as a catalyst in changing the dynamics of communication and work culture. A radical shift came with the acceptance and wider usage of social media with the origin of Facebook in 2004. International data suggest that 83% of 18-29-year-old people use social networking sites.<sup>[8]</sup>

Assuring provision for promoting a mentally healthy lifestyle and understanding mental health is necessary, and social media could be a cost-effective alternative to deliver mental health awareness.<sup>[9]</sup>

To understand the information needs of various segments of the population, effective health promotion messages need to be developed using communication channels, and social media could be exploited for the same.<sup>[10]</sup> Social networking enables people to connect more, so more health information could be exchanged. Surfing through social media platforms reinforce and

provide relaxation. They can play a valuable role in certain campaigns which aim behavioral change.<sup>[11]</sup> Because social media platforms play a major role in mental health promotion, this study was planned to understand the usefulness of these platforms to host mental health campaigns.

## Materials and Methods

It was a qualitative study to evaluate the effectiveness of social media platform in hosting three health promotion campaigns in the field of mental health, which was observed over five months from May to September 2019 to reach more people for effective information dissemination. The campaigns were as follows (1) The Buddies for Suicide Prevention, an online campaign to create awareness about suicide prevention. The campaign included script writing, slogan writing, poster making, and short films making, organized for the general public who were interested to take part; (2) The #Iquit tobacoo was a 21-day campaign with an idea of tobacco cessation in the community conducted among our social media viewers who were willing to participate; and (3) #Migrainethepainfultruth was yet another campaign conducted among the social media viewers interested to participate. All the campaigns were conducted using two famous social media platforms commonly used by young adults. Descriptive statistics such as frequency and proportions were computed for the number of likes and shares. This study was approved by the institutional ethics committee (no. NIMHANS/EC [BEH. SC. DIV.]/16 MEETING/2018).

### #Iquit tobacoo – 21-day tobacco cessation campaign

This campaign was launched on the eve of the World No Tobacco day 2019. It began by asking the stakeholders a question on what would they like to do to raise awareness about the harmful effects of tobacco and to support anyone trying to quit. And later, a cooperative effort from the stakeholders was encouraged for the same and continued as a follow-up challenge for 21 days. The campaign asked the stakeholders to follow the 21-day challenge if they wish to quit tobacco and lead a healthy life. Each day, a different task was published, therefore, it had 21 different tasks over the 21 days. Meanwhile, we also collected the feedback from the participants about how they felt about the tasks and how they complete certain tasks. The tasks included in the campaign were listing the reasons why one want to quit smoking, fix a quit date, finding a hobby, learning a new skill, talk to someone close to you about your achievements, and reward yourself. The 21-day challenge posts were published on the highlights session of the Instagram page. At the end of the challenge, a video on the importance of smoking cessation was released, which had a message to the public on the harmful effects of smoking.

## Buddies for Suicide Prevention

The "Buddies for Suicide Prevention," an online contest, was conducted for 4 months from June to September 2019 on the theme "Action for suicide prevention." The campaign was promoted through Instagram and Facebook. It included four categories of competitions namely Post-it: poster-making competition, Inscribe 2.0: slogan-writing competition, Script O: script-writing competition, and Minutes matter: short film contest. This online contest was intended to engage the public to join hands for working toward suicide prevention.

## #Migrainethepainfultruth

The campaign #Migrainethepainfultruth was an online campaign launched on Instagram and Facebook on the eve of the World Brain Day in July 2019 with the theme on migraine. It was an interactive campaign with an initial quiz session on the symptoms of migraine, followed by a poll where the viewers were asked to give their opinion as yes or no about some migraine myths and misconceptions. Each day, a myth was posted, and the related facts were shared on the next day. The poll results were shared every day. On the last day, all the mysteries were broken, and the posts were shared on creating awareness about migraine attack, its stages, symptoms, and management. A video developed by various resource persons on spreading awareness about migraine was posted in the end. This campaign #Migrainethepainfultruth was a cooperative effort to break the stigma around migraine.

## Results

Given below is an analysis of the effectiveness of the above-stated three online campaigns on three various realms of mental health education. It also says how it influenced the public in promoting their mental health. The results are discussed under three headings which include (1) The potential of utilizing social media for effective mental health promotion, (2) usage of different modes of intervention through online campaigns; and (3) the comparison between the different social media platforms for their effectiveness.

### The potential of utilizing social media for effective mental health promotion

The three campaigns focused on various public health concerns, which were launched and promoted through the prominent social media platforms. The campaigns were an attempt to utilize social media effectively to reach out to more people, therefore eradicating stigma and educating people.

Here, the social media pages, Facebook and Instagram, kept engaged through three different campaigns for 5 months where people have positively reacted to the

campaign and shared the same to others to be a part of the campaign. The viewers were encouraged to follow the campaign by posting certain initial questions and posts to generate curiosity and seek their attention. All these campaigns catered the needs of 200–2000 people. These campaigns were liked by 200 people, of whom 9 people shared the posts and 20 people visited the profile page of mental health education. During the previous year, the number of followers was 2000; after addition of these three campaigns, it crossed 3000. The campaigns' reach showed a progressively increasing trend over the years. The #Iquittoacco campaign was a great challenge which reached more than 200 people and received more than a hundred impressions. The campaign Buddy for Suicide Prevention was an attempt to encourage people to participate in the competition, which, in turn, bring about awareness on the importance of suicide prevention into the limelight. The post earned 32 likes and 9 people shared the same and reached 2058 people. The #Migrainethepainfultruth campaign engaged the viewers for more than 1 week, reached more than 120 people, and received more than 150 impressions.

### Usage of different modes of intervention through online campaigns

All the online campaigns had used different modes of intervention. According to the objectives of the campaigns, different communication strategies were adopted. The first campaign #Iquittoacco was an online challenge where the viewers were asked to take up a challenge, wherein they could take up an initiative to quit tobacco by actively engaging in certain activities. As the campaign aimed at addressing a public health concern that is eradicating something deadly from the society, it needed a lot of effort. It reached more than 200 people and received more than a hundred impressions. The Buddy for Suicide Prevention campaign was an online competition which engaged the creative young minds. The online competition was successful, reaching more than 2000 people. Mostly, participants were young adults and received around 25 total entries under various categories of contests. The participants were enthusiastic to work toward the theme "Action for suicide prevention." Through this, the mental health education page reached out to a large number of young people to raise awareness of suicide prevention in the society. The #Migrainethepainfultruth was an online campaign purely focused on eradicating the stigma toward migraine. The campaign reached more than 100 people, and around 6 people shared the posts. Among the three campaigns, the "Buddy for Suicide Prevention" created the highest impact among the public followed by the #Iquittoacco campaign.

### The comparison between the different social media platforms for their effectiveness

The Facebook page of mental health education was

started in January 2016 and the Instagram page on September 2017, intending to promote the health and well-being of individuals and communities in the area of mental health and neurological sciences. The Facebook page of "Mental Health education" has 3285 followers. A total of 3205 people like the page. The Instagram page has 516 followers. However, the user friendliness of the Facebook page of Mental Health Education helped to reach more people. Most followers of both Facebook and Instagram pages belong to the 25–34 years' age group. The maximum followers of both the Instagram and Facebook pages are females, around 71% for Instagram and 62% for Facebook. The Facebook page also has international followers from the UK and the USA. On the whole, the Mental Health Education Facebook page is performing better than the Instagram page.

## Discussion

Social media is emerging as a powerful tool with the continuous expansion of technology and other factors, in spreading awareness and education of various socially relevant concepts. Mental health can be promoted through campaigns on social media. As the social media platforms are available 24 h of a day and 7 days of a week, the content will always be available for the users whenever they want. According to social modeling, an individual's behavior and actions are affected by others' actions. Hence, the social media post sparks an interest in someone who follows his/her close one's activities.<sup>[12]</sup> According to a study conducted in 2011, 22% of teenagers log on to their favorite social media site more than ten times a day and more than half of the adolescents log on to the social media sites more than once a day, and most of this generation's emotional and social development is happening in the Internet and cellphones. The social media platforms are providing them a variety of benefits such as socialization and communication, enhanced learning opportunities, and accessing health information.<sup>[13]</sup> People with the common interest will create a particular group, and their friends are likely to join the group or page where the positive health behavior is promoted.<sup>[7]</sup>

A study focused on adolescents' and young adults' use of social media for health, and its implications say that one-quarter of the participants believe that social media can provide them with useful information. Moreover, people with self-perceived poor health are more likely to share health information online.<sup>[14]</sup> Social media provides teens a place to learn, practice, and rehearse the skills of self-representation and self-disclosure.<sup>[15]</sup>

### Advantages of social media in mental health promotion

Social media platforms help to avail better social

engagement and support in low-resource settings. Other advantages include low cost, high scalability, self-tracking, and tailored feedback functionalities. Social media connects people from long distances, even people from rural areas, and makes mental health promotion feasible.<sup>[16]</sup> Social media campaigns are more cost-effective compared to mass media campaigns.<sup>[11]</sup>

Adolescents say that social media is advantageous to learn the issues that may affect their mental health. Social media publishes thought-provoking material which influences adolescents to search for information on positive health behavior.<sup>[17]</sup> The World Lung Foundation launched a social media campaign to make a measurable change to tobacco control policies in low- and middle-income countries. As part of this study, they promoted the participants to do personalized cigarette pack warning using their digital photograph on Facebook.<sup>[11]</sup> During a multidisease campaign, a public health campaign was conducted for HIV testing in rural Uganda which could not reach people of younger age assures that every public health campaign cannot reach every unit of the population.<sup>[18]</sup>

### Challenges in utilizing social media for health promotion

Even though social media provides services, it has drawbacks also. Social media campaigns cannot be the sole solution for changing behaviors. Hence, promoting mental health is challenging in social media pages. Older adults and adolescents manage social media maturely. However, the concern is regarding younger adolescents' social media usage.

People's behavioral change achieved through mental health promotion remains unnoticed for a long time as the result is intangible; this could be one important challenge of mental health promotion on social media.<sup>[19]</sup>

The other challenge is the authenticity of data published in social media pages.<sup>[7]</sup> Studies suggest that worldwide mental health promotion needs are to be coordinated and should be using an active platform to deliver knowledge. As many unverified and mystical data are being published in the web pages, the viewers are misled. Moreover, the readers have no filter to screen the data source's credibility. To confirm data credibility, accurate appropriate evaluation methods are to be developed.<sup>[16]</sup>

The other area of concern in using social media is that the information shared on social media is visible and available to anybody interested in it. This may make the respondents vulnerable and people may lose their privacy.<sup>[20]</sup> The other barriers such as illiteracy can also cause hindrance in access to the proper data at the correct time.<sup>[7]</sup>

Promoting mental health with a clear goal is important keeping in mind that a lot of campaign promotional strategies are available in social media. Certain communication strategies work differently for different demographic groups. Hence, to have a target population is significant before planning a mental health campaign. Making the campaign interactive will promote it better.<sup>[5]</sup>

As social media technologies are developed recently, their evaluation methods are in the early stages of development. Health organizations should inevitably incorporate social media into their communication strategies to reach people from different age groups and backgrounds.<sup>[7]</sup>

A well-known limitation of the social media campaign is the lesser commitment and efforts needed to be part of a campaign. There is no direct relation between the shares, likes, and engagement shown in the social media pages with the actual behavioral change. The social media campaigns require a strong theoretical base for effective focus and outcome.<sup>[11]</sup>

In this contemporary world, social media play an indispensable role in everyone's life, hence social media platforms should be an effective alternative to promote mental health. Conducting three mental health campaigns over a period of 5 months was cost-effective and result-generating. This study helped to assess people's awareness regarding mental health and could definitely be utilized as an effective method for health promotion.

### **Limitations of our study**

One of the limitations of this particular study is that it did not collect feedback from social media regarding the effectiveness of the campaigns. As the campaigns were completely online the behavioral change could not be assessed, the effort was lesser from the users. This study did not conduct any follow-up study to evaluate the efficacy of these campaigns.

One of the major limitations of this study is that feedback regarding campaigns effectiveness was not collected from the viewers and no follow-up was done to assess the outcome of behavioral change. All the three campaigns were different with respect to the target audience and the comparison of outcomes was questionable.

### **Conclusions**

Using social media platforms to conduct mental health campaigns is an effective initiative as one can reach out to many people over a short time frame. With the help of technology, participants could virtually be a part of the campaign easily. There is an increasing trend in mental

health awareness by effectively using digital media as an information dissemination platform.

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### **Conflicts of interest**

There are no conflicts of interest.

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