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## **Evaluation of the Gains of Integrating Social Media in Mental Health Care in Kenya**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper assessed the gains of integrating Social Media in mental health care in Kenya. The use of social media platforms to increase awareness on mental health problems is both convenient and cost effective, creating messages and engaging users can be tasking and time consuming, and a high level of consistency is required to ensure sustainability. Based on this, a team approach is necessary in running a successful awareness program. Moreover, the digital media space is very dynamic both in information and in its technical usage, hence it is pertinent that the team members remain updated on current topical issues in the country relevant to the different targeted age groups, and also maintain an element of technological know-how to ensure relevance. On the whole, the use of social media can play a key role in breaking the barriers of information sharing on mental health matters, allowing for greater engagement with care and services and reducing existing stigma that is related to lack of knowledge. In addition, social media use can be resourceful in offering a sense of community or support system to persons affected both directly and indirectly by mental health challenges.

Keywords: Social media, Mental, Health and Care

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Despite the growing concern on the negative mental health effects outlined in recent research, it remains unarguable that social media use has pervasively become a way of life for many [1]. Social media constitute a useful platform for increasing mental health awareness and improving social connectedness [2]. Current statistics reveal a growing trend in social media use following increased access to cheaper smart phone devices and Wi-Fi coverage [3]. In January 2020, the average global social media penetration stood at 49% with an estimated 3 billion social media users [4]. This translates to a 1 in 3 persons' use of social media in the world. Even though the sub-Saharan Africa region has the lowest social media use ratings, the continent registered a 12% (+25 million persons) annual growth in the year 2020, emphasizing the fact that trends in social media use are rising even in Africa. Hence, it is critical to identify ways of harnessing the power of social media in promoting mental health. Little information exists on such approaches in Africa despite the growing numbers of social media users in the region. This study examined the feasibility of harnessing social media in mental health practice.

#### **Social media platform**

According to, the establishment of digital relations department, which focuses on the use of social media to normalize and change the narrative surrounding mental health, is important in order to effectively drive the process. This kind of initiative has the capacity to make up for the scarcity of credible and accessible information within the community on mental health, which many attribute to the existing high stigma related to mental illness [12]. Given that majority of the audience on social media are young, it becomes expedient to view the social media

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as a useful tool for disseminating and demystifying mental illnesses as well as providing linkages to care for those in need [11].

#### **Formulation of a Digital media team**

The formulation of a digital media team to facilitate the dissemination of mental health information constitutes a step in the right direction. Such a digital media team can consist of key personnel such as a clinical psychologist, a psychiatrist and a digital strategist [5]. The psychologist can lead the digital relations department and will be responsible for forging partnerships between other organizations and mental healthcare unit on online platforms, while participating in driving the conversation on mental health on national and international awareness days as well as overseeing content that will go into the various platforms [6]. The content to be shared can be determined ahead of time and incorporated into a content calendar which remains flexible and can be altered based on the emerging needs in the population as perceived by the psychiatrist and psychologist [6]. The digital strategist will have the responsibility of developing digital posters, shooting and editing short videos, taking photos and posting on media platforms as advised [9]. The psychiatrist will be able to give feedback on the content posted online and guide the team on professional growth from his/her wealth of knowledge in mental health [7]. The social media content is primarily driven by the general public hence; the team can receive suggestions on specific topics of interest on the various platforms and hold polls to prioritize on key public health issues to be addressed. Chats and comments are not censored as unbiased opinion from the public often offers an opportunity for engaging more persons and dispelling existing myths. However, messages deemed insulting to a specific individual can be deleted.

#### **Twitter**

Twitter can be selected for its extensive reach capabilities as well as the provision to have real time interaction. The psychologist, the digital strategist together with the institutions chairman and senior consultant psychiatrists can develop a list of the most common mental illnesses managed at the facility namely; ADHD, depression, bipolar mood disorder, schizophrenia, anxiety disorders as well as substance use disorders [9]. Discussions can be held, outlining the signs and symptoms, myths surrounding the specific illness, as well as when, where and how to receive help. Furthermore, the topic areas can be selected based on current and most pressing issues including suggested topics from the community. Each tweet chat can run for an hour and should be led by two psychologist panelists of different gender to allow for gender representation [10]. For the conversation to reach as many people as possible, a number of direct messages should be sent to various mental health practitioners and organizations online, highlighting the topic, their role as a panelist, the time and duration as well the fact that their participation would be on a volunteer basis. Those who respond, can be looped in as panelists, and should be requested to share their bio and photo. Posters can then be created by the digital strategist to publicize the chat and share with the panelists who can also use them in their own social media platforms to inform their followers. The posters can also be circulated to the various heads of departments in the health facility to share with their team members, who can also share with others [6]. The live tweet chats should not be limited to the panelists only; instead panelists should help direct the conversation and address questions brought up by the attendees for the day. While the live chat ends at a specified time, the lead psychologists and digital strategists should look through the platform throughout the day to answer any questions that may come up from those who may have joined the conversation later. One limitation of twitter is existing word limit hence, for longer texts, Facebook is preferred [8].

#### **Facebook**

Facebook can be used to engage thousands of followers. Facebook's content is both pictorial and text. Hence it can take a cue from the twitter conversation. Within the week's duration, pictures, posters and relevant information can be posted on this platform daily to keep the conversation going and in line with the week's or month's theme. Any questions raised on the platform should be answered both in the textbox and through direct messaging [10]. This platform has the capacity to hold long videos; hence, the Facebook page can be used to post videos done by in house hospital psychologists and psychiatrists, where discussions on mental health issues are discussed, recorded and posted. The traffic on the Facebook platform usually has a wider reach extending to different countries, cities and localities. For this reason, Facebook platform should often be used to boost posts and send videos.

#### **The Use of Instagram**

Due to the visual focus of Instagram, it tends to be the least active platform. Despite this, it can still boast of a wider reach extending as far as foreign countries. Designed for a younger age group (18-24 yrs), this platform focuses on pictures, short videos, and Gifs uploads. Accordingly, posters on the theme of the month can be uploaded on this platform [3]. These posters should carry both graphical youth friendly images and simple wording that take the format of tips for example; 10 tips to cope with anxiety. Insta stories are another feature on Instagram that are very useful in receiving feedback from followers through set up polls. These statuses are short

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lived and only last for 24 hours before self-deleting hence, necessitating constant checking and responding to queries [12]. Consequently, Instagram can serve as a useful platform for raising reflective questions, sharing pictures of events held or sponsored by the hospital as well as conducting polls on what content people would like to see in relation to mental health.

#### The Use of Website

Traffic from other social media platforms can be redirected to the facility's website where users are able to access all information regarding the institution. Clients can be engaged through already set FAQs and queries and answered in real time. The website will certainly receive several visitors, both new visitors as well as returnees on monthly basis. It is most likely that they will be younger persons, from within and outside Kenya; and there might be a chance of a good gender representation. An additional feature which will boost the website's activities will be the hosting a monthly blog regarding mental health issues.

#### Implications for Mental Health Practice

While the use of social media platforms to increase awareness on mental health problems is both convenient and cost effective, creating messages and engaging users can be tasking and time consuming, and a high level of consistency is required to ensure sustainability. Based on this, a team approach is necessary in running a successful awareness program. Moreover, the digital media space is very dynamic both in information and in its technical usage, hence it is pertinent that the team members remain updated on current topical issues in the country relevant to the different targeted age groups, and also maintain an element of technological know-how to ensure relevance. On the whole, the use of social media can play a key role in breaking the barriers of information sharing on mental health matters, allowing for greater engagement with care and services and reducing existing stigma that is related to lack of knowledge. In addition, social media use can be resourceful in offering a sense of community or support system to persons affected both directly and indirectly by mental health challenges.

#### CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATION

The use of social media to send out messages is very important, and every detail needs to be analyzed and reanalyzed and then packaged into a format that is appealing for the audience in each of the various platforms. By and large, simple messaging, free from clinical jargon, works best for psycho-education. Furthermore, inclusion of persons from diverse demographic backgrounds including; gender, age and occupation in the planning and disseminating of mental health content through social media is crucial, to improve on content authenticity, relevance and reach.

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