



Editorial

Leveraging social media and digital technology to market and meet the needs of neurosurgery patients

Matthew T. Neal, Mark K. Lyons

Department of Neurosurgery, Mayo Clinic, Phoenix, Arizona, United States.

E-mail: *Matthew Neal - matthew.neal@mayo.edu; Mark K. Lyons - lyons.mark2@mayo.edu



*Corresponding author:

Matthew T. Neal,
Department of Neurosurgery,
Mayo Clinic, Phoenix, Arizona,
United States.

matthew.neal@mayo.edu

Received : 05 January 2021

Accepted : 09 January 2021

Published : 28 January 2021

DOI

10.25259/SNI_8_2021

Quick Response Code:



ABSTRACT

The digital era has arrived in healthcare. Health-care consumers, including neurosurgery patients, are increasingly using social media and other digital technologies to meet their health-care needs. In this work, we describe an illustrative case from Mayo Clinic where interlacing social media strategies are leveraged to educate and engage patients. These strategies not only provide a valuable service to patients but they also reinforce the brand and serve as a marketing tool. Other digital technologies such as health-care apps and telemedicine are also adaptations that help meet the needs of the current neurosurgical patient. Similar to consumer trends in other service industries, these technologies provide patients with greater autonomy, convenience, and personalization. The digital era in health care presents an exciting opportunity for health-care organizations and providers to innovate, evolve, and improve the health of our patients.

Keywords: Digital health care, Health-care marketing, Neurosurgery, Social media, Telemedicine

INTRODUCTION

In health care, the digital era has arrived. To market effectively in health care, we must recognize the behaviors, needs, and expectations of health-care consumers which have changed. How we interface with patients has changed and will continue to evolve. For neurosurgeons, effective marketing is important because it translates into better delivery of neurosurgical care and improved lives for our patients.

In this work, we highlight the substantial growth of online utilization and health-care consumers' reliance on technology. The pervasiveness of social media in health care is emphasized. We discuss strategies for health-care organizations, neurosurgery departments, and neurosurgical providers to take the lead and engage patients with social media and other technologies.

THE ARRIVAL OF THE DIGITAL ERA

In the past decade, the use of digital technology has expanded dramatically throughout the world. As of July 2020, the numbers of unique mobile phone users, internet users, and social media users in the world were 5.15, 4.57, and 3.96 billion people, respectively. These respective numbers accounted for 66, 59, and 51% of the world's population. The year 2020 marked the 1st time that more than half of the world's population used social media.^[5] The growth of social media in the

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial-Share Alike 4.0 License, which allows others to remix, tweak, and build upon the work non-commercially, as long as the author is credited and the new creations are licensed under the identical terms.

©2020 Published by Scientific Scholar on behalf of Surgical Neurology International

United States (U.S.) has been pronounced. In 2005, 5% of adults in the U.S. used at least one social media platform, and this percentage increased to 72% in 2019. Use of social media is most prevalent among younger adults in the U.S., as 90% of 18–29-year-old individuals use social media.^[5]

THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON THE HEALTH-CARE POPULATION

One area where social media has gained substantial influence is health care. In health care, patients use social media for education, support, and decision-making related to health care. According to a Mediabistro study, 40% of Americans use information from social media to make decisions about their health.^[4] Patients, especially younger adults, are willing to share personal information or experiences on social media. In fact, more than 80% of patients aged 18–24 years old say that they would share health information on social media. Social media is also viewed as a source of trusted information, as about 90% of adults state that they would trust the information found on social media. Social media also influences where patients seek medical care. Forty-one percent of Americans say that they would use social media to make a decision about doctor, hospital, or medical facility.^[2]

OPPORTUNITIES FOR PATIENT ENGAGEMENT WITH DIGITAL AND SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS: MAYO CLINIC AS AN ILLUSTRATIVE CASE

One pioneering, health-care organization that has exploited social media and digital marketing is Mayo Clinic. The organization registered its domain name in 1997 and has continued to grow its digital footprint. Mayo Clinic spends about two-thirds of its entire marketing budget on digital marketing. Many health-care organizations have an opportunity to incorporate Mayo Clinic's strategies by expanding their digital marketing, services, and patient engagement. At present, only about 1500 hospitals in the US (26% of hospitals) have a social media presence.^[6]

Online educational resources provided by Mayo Clinic represent one strategy for patient engagement. By providing an accessible and extensive online library of educational resources, Mayo Clinic is oftentimes able to make timely first contact with patients, families, and providers seeking health-care information. The content, which is often validated by a Mayo Clinic physician, generates goodwill and reinforces the brand as one that is trustworthy and dependable.^[1]

In addition to online educational content, Mayo Clinic engages and empowers social media followers by initiating conversations and encouraging patients to share stories. Sharing patient stories on blogs creates communities or “villages” of patients across the world. These communities can help patients,

even ones with rare conditions, feel supported, connected, and valued. When Mayo Clinic helps build these communities, comfort and familiarity with the brand are reinforced.^[1]

Another deliberate and potent digital marketing strategy used by Mayo Clinic is the synergistic integration of various social media platforms. For example, a Mayo Clinic educational article may have a link to a Mayo Clinic patient story blog with an embedded YouTube Video containing Mayo Clinic content. Various channels seamlessly integrate with one another and allow connection with a wide range of potential health-care consumers.^[1]

ADDITIONAL OPPORTUNITIES TO MEET DIGITAL NEEDS OF PATIENTS

In addition to social media, there are more digital opportunities for health-care organizations and providers to innovate and adapt to the changing behaviors of health-care consumers. Global mobile internet access has surpassed desktop use. In 2013, mobile phone usage accounted for 16% of online traffic, and the figure rose to 52% in 2018.^[3]

To align with this trend, many organizations use health-care apps, accessible on mobile devices. Fifty percent of Americans use their cell phone to look up health information, and 19% have at least one health app on their phone.^[2] The apps have many benefits including convenience and greater patient autonomy. The patients have 24/7 access to self-service tools allowing appointment scheduling, messaging to provider teams, reviewing medical records, etc. Apps and health-care portals also allow personalized healthcare delivery. Reminders about appointments and health maintenance activities can be tailored for individual patients. Increased self-service capabilities and investment in personalization are recognized customer service trends in other industries.^[8]

Another trend in customer service is live streaming video, and health-care providers are meeting this demand with virtual telemedicine visits. During the COVID-19 pandemic, telemedicine became a necessity to provide ongoing neurosurgical care safely. The rapid integration of telemedicine provided an opportunity to showcase its benefits. Our experience with telemedicine in the neurosurgery clinic demonstrated high satisfaction rates for greater than 92% of patients. High satisfaction rates with telemedicine have been attributed to convenience, accessibility, and reduced travel and wait times.^[7] Despite growth in artificial intelligence and automation in health care, live interaction between providers and neurosurgery patients is required at times. In many cases, virtual interaction can obviate the need for in-person care.

CONCLUSION

The needs and behaviors of patients have changed in the current, digital era. Most patients, including neurosurgical

patients, have shifted from offline to online for their health-care needs. Using social media to engage and educate, health-care organizations can meet patients where they are and effectively build brand. The current digital environment provides an exciting opportunity to integrate marketing with enhanced delivery of neurosurgical care.

REFERENCES

1. 5 Key Things that Make Mayo Clinic a Marketing Machine; 2020. Available from: <https://www.bloomcreative.com/5-key-things-that-make-mayo-clinic-a-marketing-machine>. [Last accessed on 2020 Dec 23].
2. Healthcare Infographic; 2020. Available from: <https://www.demicooper.com/?project=social-mobile-use-in-healthcare>. [Last accessed on 2020 Dec 23].
3. Berry J. Internet Access Evolution: The Shift from Desktop to Mobile; 2020. Available from: <https://www.trendintech.com/2020/01/07/internet-access-evolution-the-shift-from-desktop-to-mobile>. [Last accessed on 2020 Dec 23].
4. Bottomley E. Social Media in Health Care: Stories from the Front Lines; 2020. Available from: <https://www.hootsuite.com/webinars/social-media-in-health-care>. [Last accessed on 2020 Dec 23].
5. Kemp S; 2020. Available from: <https://www.wearesocial.com/blog/2020/07/digital-use-around-the-world-in-july-2020>. [Last accessed on 2020 Jul 21].
6. Laan S. Healthcare Industry Building Trust Through Social Media; 2020. Available from: <https://www.infographicsarchive.com/infographic-healthcare-industry-building-trust-through-social-media>. [Last accessed on 2020 Dec 23].
7. Richards AE, Curley K, Christel L, Zhang N, Kouloumberis P, Kalani MA, *et al*. Patient satisfaction with telehealth in neurosurgery outpatient clinic during COVID-19 pandemic. *Interdiscip Neurosurg* 2021;23:101017.
8. Vishnoi L. 11 Customer Service Trends that Will Drive Success in 2020; 2020. Available from: <https://www.acquire.io/blog/customer-service-trends-2020>. [Last accessed on 2020 Dec 23].

How to cite this article: Neal MT, Lyons MK. Leveraging social media and digital technology to market and meet the needs of neurosurgery patients. *Surg Neurol Int* 2021;12:35.