

Sociable Scholarship and Its Impact on Public Interest in Medical Information in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Although social media are commonly used among medical-related public figures and organisations, their utilisation among other agents of social change such as medical scholars and practitioners is often overlooked. Sociable scholarship, which refers to public engagement on social media among scholars and practitioners, is vital to facilitate the change in public health. Current study aims to investigate the trend of sociable scholarship among medical scholars and practitioners specifically on Facebook and its impact on public interest in medical information specifically in Malaysia. Secondary data were obtained and analysed using content analysis. The findings revealed that there is a positive trend of sociable scholarship among medical scholars and practitioners in Malaysia. It was also shown that among medical information that gained the public interest were kidney-health and illegal health products. These findings were further discussed and presented with possible explanations. The current study provides a glimpse of this phenomena by using Facebook as a data-source. To gain better understanding on sociable scholarship, it is suggested to use other sources and extend to other population in future research.

Keywords: *social change, strategy, social media, sociable scholarship, medical information.*

INTRODUCTION

Utilisation of social media acts as an effective tool and mechanism in social change strategy at various levels and fields. This includes its role in reshaping the state of public health in a society. Although social media are commonly used among medical-related public figures and organisations, its utilisation among other agents of social change such as medical scholars and practitioners often overlooked. Sociable scholarship, as introduced by Pausé and Russell (2016) refers to public engagement on social media among scholars. In the case relating to public health, sociable scholarship includes both medical scholars and practitioners as the role overlaps and intertwined. As stated by Hautz, Hautz, Feufel, and Spies (2016; 7), “the role of the doctor (practitioner) as a scholar is grounded in a set of globally accepted research methodologies, study designs, teaching formats, publication standards, and means of evaluating scholarship.” Their engagement on social media is considered as vital to facilitate the change in public health, especially in terms of providing the public access to accountable information and giving insights on the latest development in medical field.

Therefore, this research aims to study the trend of sociable scholarship among medical scholars and practitioners as well as its impact on public interest in medical information specifically in Malaysia. Sociable scholarship is indicated by the number of followers for each scholar and practitioner on Facebook.

The topic of focus and approach for each scholar or practitioner is included to identify which medical information accessible to public. The number of followers within two consecutive months was included as it indicated the pattern of change in the public interest. The highest number of changes among followers and the related topic of focus indicated the most prominent medical information.

This paper is divided into five parts. The first part is background, in which will discuss (a) general strategies in social change, (b) how social media acts as a tool and mechanism in social change strategy, (c) current utilisation of social media in public health sector, and (d) sociable scholarship in general and in public health sector. The second part is method, followed by findings, discussion and conclusion in third, fourth and fifth respectively.

Strategies in Social Change

Strategy is often associated with planned social change and development. It is vital in helping to create, accelerate, manage and guide changes in different contexts either in micro, intermediate or macro level (Vago, 1999). Social change strategies appear in various forms such as facilitation, re-education, persuasion and power (Zaltman & Duncan, as cited in Vago, 1999). According to Chin and Benne (as cited in Vago, 1999; 339), it includes “conscious utilisation and application of knowledge through empirical rational, normative-reductive and power-coercive”. Mohamed and Baqutayan (2011) suggested that social change is assisted by “the process of acquiring knowledge”. While some portray these strategies as arbitrary, often they overlap (Vago, 1999; Willis, 2017). This overlapping of strategies can appear in operational term such as the usage of tools and tactics.

Social Media and Social Change

Previous literature recognised social media as an effective tool and mechanism in social change strategy (Baluev & Kaminchenko, 2015; Oh, Eom & Rao, 2015). Social media, such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, refers to online networking platforms (A. Rahman, Hj Hassan, Osman, & Waheed, 2017). Due to its chatting and sharing features, knowledge, ideologies, and information are easily accessible. In fact, its reachability and coverage surpass both electronic and printed media (Ayub, Manickam, Hamzah, Suanda & Mohd Yusoff, 2017). This leads to the utilisation of social media as a social change strategy in various forms such as revolution (Buettner & Buettner, 2016; Oh, Eom, & Rao, 2015), social movement (Ibahrine, 2013) and political change (Muniandy & Muniandy, 2013).

Social Media and Public Health

Apart from revolution, social movement and political change, utilisation of social media also contributes to the change in public health sector. A study by Jamri, Ismail, Ahmad and Singh (2017) investigated the media and communication usage in public health awareness campaigns in Malaysia. Through mixed methods research synthesis, it was found that social media can be used as an intervention to create awareness on public health issues, specifically in publicising information, developing awareness and reshaping the society’s perceptions and attitudes on health. However, this study focuses on the public without indicating specific targets.

This work was further refined by Ayub, Manickam, Hamzah, Suanda and Mohd Yusoff (2017) which illustrated the utilisation of social media in creating awareness on medical health specifically

among youth. Content analysis revealed that the usage of social media among medical-related organisations and public figures indicate a positive and increasing trend, shown by the steady growth of followers, subscribers and likes. However, this study only focuses on medical-related organisations and public figures, excluding the involvement of other parties such as medical scholars and practitioners.

Sociable Scholarship

Although social media are commonly used among public figures and organisations, their utilisation among other agents of social change such as scholars and practitioners often overlooked. Public engagement on social media among scholars and academicians, introduced as sociable scholarship by Pausé and Russell (2016), is growing in certain sectors. This may root from traditional perspective on scholarship (McClain & Neeley, 2015).

Previously, traditional scholarship circulated around the task of reading, lecturing and understanding the literature (Borgman, 2009; Pausé & Russell, 2016). Most works were publicised through conferences, journal publications and books (Onyancha, 2015). In modern scholarship, this task extends to contributing to the community in wider and more practical prospect. With myriad online databases and scholars-networking platforms, knowledge becomes more immediate and accessible (Borgman, 2009).

However in most cases, the knowledge only circulates among those who are privileged and in academic field (Hancock, 2007; Pausé & Russell, 2016). On the other hand, public often rely on social media as a source of knowledge and information regardless its accountability and reliability due to its easy access and more personalised engagement (Borgman, 2009; A. Rahman, Hj Hassan, Osman, & Waheed, 2017).

Despite, there are some sectors such as public health is promoting sociable scholarship within certain circumstances (Ventola, 2014). This means that medical scholars and practitioners engage with the public on social media to certain extend, without crossing the lines of policy and work ethics. Although some argue for its vague boundaries, there are benefits in sociable scholarship for both agent of social change (scholars and practitioners) and the target society (Pausé & Russell, 2016; Ventola, 2014).

A study was conducted by Pausé and Russell (2016; 19) revealed that sociable scholarship encourages scholars to “confront the reality of people’s lives and deal with lay people’s questions and insights regarding a work”. This was supported by Puustinen and Edwards (2012) who tweeted their work when it became available online. Surprisingly, the article was shared 135 times over social media and downloaded for 861 times within 24 hours. This indicates a demand from the public for accountable information as well as insights on the current and updated research in a simple and engaging manner.

However, studies related to sociable scholarship and social change is still limited (A. Rahman, Hj Hassan, Osman & Waheed, 2017). Therefore, the current study aims to investigate the trend of sociable scholarship among medical scholars and practitioners specifically on Facebook and its impact on public interest in medical information specifically in Malaysia.

METHODS

The study employed content analysis to investigate further into sociable scholarship among medical academicians and practitioners and its impact on public interest in medical information specifically in Malaysia. This study is specified to Facebook only as Internet Users Survey 2017 done by Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) revealed that 80 percent Malaysians are avid internet users with 97.3 percent of them owned Facebook account. This indicates the suitability of choosing Facebook compared to other social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram and WeChat.

Sociable scholarship is measured by the number of followers for each scholar and practitioner on Facebook. The scholars and practitioners are obtained from a list of Muslim medical practitioners and scholars compiled and shared by two medical public figures, Imelda Balchin and Mohd Fadhli Mohd Fauzi on Facebook. Thirty-one medical scholars and practitioners of various specialisations, consisted of 20 males and 11 females, were chosen based on the accessibility of data. Although the size of a unit analysis has never been established in content analysis (Bengtsson, 2016), the number of sample size was chosen for adequacy based on the previous literature (Mason, 2010).

The topic of focus and approach for the scholars or practitioners are included to identify the type of medical information accessible to public. This data was obtained from the publicly accessible topics posted within the past twelve months for each medical scholar or practitioner on Facebook. The number of followers within two consecutive months (March and April 2018) was included to identify the pattern of the public interest in medical information and the existence of change. The higher number of changes among followers and the related topic of focus indicated the most prominent medical information.

RESULT

Result of content analysis as in Table 1 revealed a positive trend of sociable scholarship among medical scholars and practitioners ($n = 31$) in Malaysia. On average, medical scholars and practitioners had 36, 360 and 37,304 followers in March and April respectively, with four reached more than 100,000 followers in April. The result also showed various types of information provided by scholars and practitioners on Facebook. This variety was portrayed either in myth-busting, promoting or combating certain medical issues, based on specialisation of each individuals.

It was also revealed that there is a positive trend of public interest on medical information indicated by the increasing growth in number of followers ($\bar{x} = 966$). It was shown that the public is most interested in medical information specifically kidney-health and illegal health products, as indicated by the amount of change exceeding 5,000 followers.

Table 1: The sociable scholarship among medical scholars and practitioners in Malaysia.

Scholar/ Practitioner	Followers			Approach and Topic of Focus	URL
	March 2018	April 2018	Change		
Rafidah Abdullah	161, 118	166, 162	5, 044	Promoting renal (kidney) health. Issues related to food and against illegal product.	https://www.facebook.com/rafidah72
Erna Nadia	102, 065	103, 494	1, 429	Medical myth busting on <i>jamu</i> . Combatting usage of illegal product.	https://www.facebook.com/dr.t0iek
Kamarul Ariffin Nor Sadan	99, 593	100, 276	683	Promoting good practices in medical institutions.	https://www.facebook.com/chaku
Rusyainie Ramli	95, 996	101, 844	5, 848	Medical myth busting. Combatting usage of illegal health product.	https://www.facebook.com/rusyainie.ramli
Abdul Rahman Abdul Kadir	69, 409	69,001	408	Medical myth busting.	https://www.facebook.com/rahman.kadir.3
Mahyuddin Mohamed	64, 434	64, 957	523	Promoting issues related to orthopedic and musculoskeletal.	https://www.facebook.com/drmahyuddin
Sakinah Sulong	60, 219	61, 984	1, 765	Combatting issues related to anti-vaccine groups.	https://www.facebook.com/sakinah.sulong
Hana Hadzrami	49, 076	49, 198	122	Combatting usage of illegal health product.	https://www.facebook.com/HanaHadzrami
Suhazeli Abdullah	46, 551	46, 742	191	Medical myth busting. Promoting public health with Islamic input.	https://www.facebook.com/suhazeli.abdullah
Khairul Hafidz Alkhair	30, 042	30, 123	81	Promoting healthy lifestyle.	https://www.facebook.com/khairulhafidz.alkhair
Dziehan Mustapa	29, 488	29, 784	296	Medical myth busting.	https://www.facebook.com/mohd.dziehan

Ahmad Zakimi Abdullah	28,028	31,106	3,078	Promoting good practices in emergency unit. Combatting usage of illegal health product.	https://www.facebook.com/ahmadzakimiabdullah
Iqbal Rosali	25,270	27,897	2,627	Promoting dental health.	https://www.facebook.com/iQbaLroSaLi
Che Puteh Osman	24,112	24,907	789	Medical myth busting related to <i>jamu</i> and herbs.	https://www.facebook.com/cheputeh.osman
Bel Nawhen	22,668	23,447	779	Combatting abuse of medical-staffs. Combatting usage of illegal health product.	https://www.facebook.com/belnawhen
Ammar Kamar	22,643	22,718	75	Promoting Home Visit and elderly medication. Combatting usage of illegal health product.	https://www.facebook.com/ammkar.kamar
Mohammad Aswady	21,619	25,282	3,663	Medical myth busting in pharmaceutical issues	https://www.facebook.com/WadyFarmasi
Afiq Rahim	21,441	21,509	68	Promoting medical-related research. Medical myth busting.	https://www.facebook.com/drafiqrahim
Nurilyani Bujang	20,638	20,754	116	Promoting herbal medicines and anaesthesia.	https://www.facebook.com/nurilyani.bujang
Amirul Amzar	20,377	20,478	101	Medical myth busting. Combatting usage of illegal health product.	https://www.facebook.com/ArmShakugan
Ahmad Firdaus	19,212	19,370	158	Medical myth busting.	https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=686007591
RuQayyah Muhd	18,922	19,076	154	Promoting issues related to dietary and consumption.	https://www.facebook.com/ladyqay
Muhammad Izzat	17,010	18,297	1,287	Promoting issues related to maternal health.	https://www.facebook.com/drmuhammadizzat
Fahmi Hassan	16,832	17,031	199	Combatting misuse of health product, medical facts and drugs.	https://www.facebook.com/fahmiabad

Azlindarita Aisyah Mohd Abdullah	14,669	14,972	303	Promoting optical (eye) health.	https://www.facebook.com/azlindarita
Muhsin Zaidi	6,455	6,516	61	Promoting issues related to psychological health (depression and suicide)	https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100011003677267
Ahmad Faidhi Mohd Zaini	4,786	4,796	10	Promoting public health in Islamic input.	https://www.facebook.com/faidhizaini
Nur Jalila Mohd Ariffin	4,620	4,758	38	Medical myth-busting regarding medicine intake.	https://www.facebook.com/nur.j.ariffin
Ahmad Rostam Md Zin	4,151	4,172	21	Promoting issues related to mental health.	https://www.facebook.com/amrmardhiah
Fadly Khairie	3,736	3,760	24	Promoting healthy lifestyle.	https://www.facebook.com/fadlykh
Ahmed Bin Kamarulzaman	1,995	2,010	15	Medical myth busting.	https://www.facebook.com/AhmedKamarulzaman

DISCUSSION

This study aims to investigate the sociable scholarship among medical scholars and practitioners specifically on Facebook and their impact on public interest in medical information specifically in Malaysia. Overall, the findings revealed an increasing trend of sociable scholarship among medical scholars and practitioners on Facebook. This is aligned with previous study done by Ayub, Manickam, Hamzah, Suanda, and Mohd Yusoff (2017), which reveals an increasing trend of social media engagement among social change agents namely medical-related public figures and organisations. This indicates that medical scholars and practitioners' role as social agents are just as important.

The current findings revealed medical scholars and practitioners focus on diverse topics which include myth-busting, promoting or combating certain medical issues. This indicated the use of various approach in promoting social change such as facilitation, re-education and persuasion. This was supported by the work of Zaltman and Duncan, as cited by Vago (1999) also sohamed and Baqutayan (2011).

The study also revealed that there was a positive trend of public interest on medical information indicated by the increasing number of followers. This means that the public accepted and was influenced by this emerging phenomenon of sociable scholarship among medical scholars and practitioners on Facebook. This was also aligned with findings of Jamri, Ismail, Ahmad and Singh's (2017) which revealed that the usage of social media was a suitable intervention tool to create awareness on public health issues.

The finding also has shown that the public was most interested in medical information specifically kidney-health and illegal health products, as indicated by the amount of change exceeding the mean. This was aligned with the study by Pausé and Russell (2016) which revealed that sociable scholarship encouraged scholars to confront the reality of people's lives. This also reflected the possibility that people were aware of this issue, and that the discussion of about it has already becoming a norm of a society. This was also indicated by Chin & Benne (as cited in Vago, 1999) as normative-reeducation, one of the strategies in social change.

However, this study only provides a glimpse of the phenomena of sociable scholarship using Facebook as a data-source, thus does not provide empirical evidence of any direct correlational or causal relationship. Furthermore, the emphasis of the Muslim medical practitioners and scholars only in this study, was thus could not be extrapolated to another context. As the data was measured using followers on Facebook, it excluded the degree of engagement and the non-Facebook users. Therefore, for future research, it is suggested to extend and further investigate other aspects, population and measures of change related to sociable scholarship.

CONCLUSION

Despite of the limitations, this study has provided a basic idea on sociable scholarship among medical scholars and practitioners and how it impacts the public interest on medical information. Utilisation of social media acts as an effective tool and mechanism in social change strategy at various levels and fields, including health sector. The involvement of various social change agents such as public figures, organisations, scholars and practitioners act as essential catalysts in promoting social change. In conclusion, social change is not a magical process that could occur without any strategies and process, thus require various efforts from social agents.

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