

Chapter 2

The Role of Social Media for Knowledge Dissemination in Medical Tourism: A Case of India

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ABSTRACT

The use of social media for information dissemination for education, environmental movement, natural disasters, emergency, election campaign, grass root movements, non-profit organisations, public health communication, and marketing for health promotion, e-governance, and political revolutions is well known. The economic significance of the health and medical tourism sector in the global healthcare business should not be underestimated. Internet is playing a leading role as a platform for the dissemination of medical tourism business information. In this century, more and more actual and potential tourists are accessing the internet and social media applications to find and disseminate factual information regarding medical tourism facilitators, destinations, super-speciality hospitals, specialist doctors and nurses, quality and accreditation, accommodation facility, cost, waiting period for surgery and sharing their positive and negative experiences to inform potential medical tourists. Healthcare providers and medical tourists acquire information, create, collaborate, communicate and disseminate healthcare and medical tourism related information through the Word-of-Social-Media (WoSM) tools such as FaceBook, Flickr, Twitter, Blogs, Forums, YouTube patient testimonials, Google Plus, LinkedIn, Photo and video sharing, Alexa and mobile applications. Therefore social media has a great potential as an information source and a knowledge dissemination tool for tourism industry to network and create clusters locally and globally, to exploit new innovative technologies for interaction and collaboration between the healthcare providers as well as the medical tourists. The main contribution of this chapter is to explore and discuss the role and use of social media applications for knowledge dissemination by hospitals and the medical tourists in the global business of medical tourism in India.

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INTRODUCTION

The current and potential impact of networking through social media tools on the global healthcare industry is significant. Travelling abroad for medical treatment, popularly also known as medical tourism is a growing phenomenon. High healthcare domestic cost, long waiting period for surgery, uninsured or under-insured and non-availability of treatment due to regulation, in developed countries are the key factors driving medical travel/ tourism overseas. Potential medical tourists as patients are gathering information from various sources before they make a decision to travel abroad for medical treatment and surgery. With the adoption and growth of internet, Health 2.0 and e-Health is specially playing a key role in the dissemination of medical travel information through its various social media tools, where healthcare providers and medical tourists as patients develop and create User-Generated-Content (UGC) information communities with similar interest on the internet. The main contribution of this chapter is to explore and discuss the role of social media for knowledge dissemination in the growing global business of medical tourism in general and in context of Indian hospitals in particular. There is an increasing need for online medical tourism and health related information, which demonstrates the use of social media tools to create, communicate and inform the medical tourists.

The use of social media for information dissemination for public education, environmental movement (Vance, Howe, & Dellavale, 2009), natural disasters, emergency knowledge management and information systems (Yates & Paquette, 2010; Turoff, VandeWalle, & Hiltz, 2010; Jaeger, Schneidemann, Fleischmann, Preece, Qu, & Wu, 2007), election campaign, grass root movements (Palen, Hiltz, & Liu, 2007), non-profit organisations (Waters, Burnett, Lamm, & Lucas, 2009), public health communication, promotion and behavioural change (Korda & Itani, 2013; Thackeray, Neiger, Smith, & VanWagenen, 2012), social marketing for health promotion (Thackeray, Neiger, Hanson & McKenzie, 2008), sharing the wisdom and knowledge of the elderly with the youth in India (Bandyopadhyay, Shaw, Banergee, & Nag, 2013), crisis messages communicated via social media by the businesses, for example; recall of food or faulty cars, e-governance (Freberg, 2012), and for political revolutions (Wulf, Misaki, Atam, Randall & Rohde, 2013) is well known. The economic significance of the health and medical tourism sector in the global healthcare business should not be underestimated. Global medical tourism market is growing at the rate of 25% per year (Howard, 2015), and internet is playing a leading role as a platform for the dissemination of medical tourism business information (Lunt, Hardey, & Mannion, 2010; Speier, 2011; Medhekar & Newby, 2012). Potential medical tourists' as patients also carry out internet searches for information which will guide them to make decision to travel abroad for medical surgery (Runnels & Carrera, 2012).

Medical tourism is a provision of 'cost effective' private medical care in collaboration with the tourism industry and private corporate hospitals (Brotman, 2010) like Apollo and Fortis group in India. It involves international trade or cross-border travel for global healthcare goods and services (Smith, Chanda, & Tangcharoensathien, 2009; Matoo & Rathindran, 2006) whether for diagnostic treatment, complex surgery, surrogacy, cosmetic surgery or for alternative therapies such as Ayurveda, Homeopathy, Naturopathy and Yoga. It needs partnership between the two service sectors of the economy namely; tourism and medicine (Bookman & Bookman, 2007; Medhekar & Ali, 2012). More and more actual and potential tourists are accessing the internet and social media tools to find, produce and disseminate factual information (Pan, MacLaurin, & Crotts, 2007) regarding medical tourism facilitators, destinations, super-speciality hospitals, specialist doctors and nurses, quality and accreditation, accommodation

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