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Popular Article

Role of social media as Extension Information Delivery Tool during pandemic

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Introduction

In wake of COVID-19 pandemic, social media has emerged out as important extension tool for farmers and various communities to be connected and updated with information even while physically separated from institutions.

During the 1918 flu pandemic, which the CDC estimates infected a third of the world's population, people didn't have the same sources of communication we now have in the 21st century to quickly share news and information. For context, a public health report on Minneapolis's response to the 1918 flu shows that critical information regarding the virus was primarily shared via postal workers, Boy Scouts, and teachers. With the advent of social media in the 21st century, not only are we learning the latest news updates, but we're also using platforms like Facebook and Twitter to provide personal and business updates. For businesses, this means leveraging social media to support employees and customers like never before. For the government, it means doing its best to efficiently share factual and up-to-date information.



Taking a look at how individuals, businesses, and government agencies have been sharing information and interacting with others on social media in the past few weeks, **here are four primary roles that social platforms are playing during the COVID-19 outbreak:**

1. A source of information (and misinformation)

Never have we had more real time information available at our fingertips in the face of a worldwide event. Such information can help keep us safe, providing us with a better understanding of what is occurring and how it might impact us and those we love. Yet, social media can also spread falsehoods, including miracle preventative measures, false claims about the implementation of martial law, conspiracy theories, and more.

Finding trusted sources of information regarding COVID-19 is extremely important.

2. An influence on public response to the outbreak

Billions of people are free to publicly share their opinions on COVID-19 across various social platforms. In the past few weeks, we've seen individuals, organizations, and businesses use social media to spread awareness of COVID-19, as well as the public actions that can be taken.

Here are a few of the most distinct ways social media has influenced the public since the virus reached epidemic and pandemic levels:

3. A marketing platform

The COVID-19 outbreak presents a defining moment for many brands in how they choose to market their product.

Unfortunately, we're going to see people who are selling snake oil-type products (think essential oils claiming to provide immunity). Some businesses will prey on mass hysteria, especially businesses putting extra dollars behind social media ads, selling products like hand sanitizer and facemasks (despite frequent claims from health organizations that facemasks are *not* effective if you don't have the disease).

Image via Search Engine Land

Popular hashtags popping up related to social distancing and quarantining include #socialdistancing, #quarantineandchill, and #mypandemicsurvivalplan.

Socially responsible product marketing

Despite the uptick in alarmist-focused media spend, there are many businesses providing powerful and empathetic responses to COVID-19. The main responsibility of brands right now is to



provide for the safety and well being of their employees and customers. That said, there are certain business models that lend themselves particularly well to providing relief for many people during this time.

Streaming services, for instance, are providing entertainment for those bored at home. Markets and restaurants with delivery services are able to safely provide groceries and meals to those unable to venture out. Online courses are being offered for free and at reduced prices. All in all, we're seeing many businesses do the best they can to ease the fear and discomfort being experienced by so many.

4. A powerful way to bring positivity to a scary time

No platform is perfect. But where there has been misinformation and fear on social media, there's also been an abundance of vital, lifesaving information, connection with others, and global unity. The ability to share experiences with family and friends helps to combat both literal and emotional isolation while also reminding us that we're all in this together.

Conclusion

COVID-19 has put many people in challenging situations. Communities are rallying together to support organizations and individuals by sharing fundraisers with large audiences on social media. This is the first time any living generation has experienced a pandemic of this scale, and we're just beginning to understand social media's ultimate role. In years to come, It will serve as an incredibly precise case study in the ways the public and businesses alike respond to such an unprecedented global event, and how those responses on a public platform influence not just the actions of individuals, but of corporations and governments.

References:

1. www.manage.gov.in

