USING INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACHES TO IDENTIFY KEY DIABETES-RELATED SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS IN THE UK

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Background: Health communication is essential in managing health conditions. Social media provides unprecedented opportunities for enhancing health communication for both healthcare providers and people with health conditions, including self-management of chronic conditions such as diabetes. Meanwhile, a special group of active social media users have started playing a pivotal role in providing health 'solutions'. Such individuals are often referred to as 'influencers' because of their 'central' position in the online communication system and the persuasive effect their actions and advice may have on audiences.

Work on social media influencers (SMIs) has gained much attention in a specific research field of "influencer marketing", which mainly focuses on emphasising the use of SMIs to promote or endorse brands' products and services in the business. Yet to date, a lack of evidence to guide the identification of health-related SMIs has been identified.

Aim: This article, therefore, presents a study of Twitter-based social network analysis to identify key diabetes-related SMIs in the UK to bridge the research gap that exists in terms of linking work on influencers in marketing to health communication.

Method: Multidisciplinary theories and methods in social media, communication and marketing have been adopted. The analysis is based on a dataset composed of all tweets including hashtags of the three events selected for this study: Diabetes UK Professional Conference 2022, Diabetes Week 2021, and Insulin Safety Week 2021. Following a two-step flow model of communication, the influential Twitter users and their statistical features in all three diabetes events based on in-degree and out-degree centrality measures by establishing their relationship in published Twitter content have been identified. Subsequently, statistical measures can be used for detecting the outliers to further unpack who are the 'abnormal' ones in creating and disseminating diabetes-related content.

Result: 67 key diabetes-related influencers in the UK have been identified and they play different roles in communicating diabetes on Twitter.

Conclusion: This study provides a more practical and promising approach for health-related SMIs identification in social networks based on communication theories and social networking approaches, in turn, allows for the optimisation of resources to develop effective online communication strategies in health communication interventions.