

Comparing Baby Boomers and Generation X Preventive Health Care Information Tendencies & Propensities: A Social Media Emphasis

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Abstract

For the US healthcare system to work more efficiently, there must be an increasing shift from symptomatic to preventive health care (PHC). Prevention must be the cornerstone of the healthcare system rather than the traditional reactive or symptomatic approach that currently prevails (BCC Research, 2009; Gagnon & Sabus, 2015). Preventive Health Care is care resulting from the awareness and efforts a person undertakes to enhance and preserve physical, mental, and emotional health for today and the future (Cangelosi & Markham, 1994). The transition to a PHC system means PHC information (PHCI) must be readily available. Prevention requires a fundamental change in the way individuals perceive and access the healthcare system, and the way healthcare is delivered. This study will address two of the broad aspects of cultural background (operationally defined in terms of cohort groups: Baby Boomers, Generation X, etc.) and ways PHCI is accessible and delivered (the emphasis in this study is on social media).

For the past five to ten years, the internet has been and continues to be rated as the single most important means of accessing PHCI (Cangelosi, Ranelli, & Kim, 2012). Although most health-related information acquired from the Web addresses symptomatic issues, the quest for PHCI is becoming increasingly more prevalent (Freudenheim, 2011). When one considers that almost 88% of the U.S. population is online, the power for delivering PHCI electronically cannot be underestimated (Internet World Stats, 2017). Traditional internet search and browsing have been greatly facilitated and expanded by social media. Social media (SM) is a vehicle for people to share ideas, content, thoughts, and relationships online. It differs from traditional print, audio and video media in that anyone can create, comment on, and add to SM content (Scott, 2013). Although early efforts to document the impact of SM have not been encouraging, the potential for SM to deliver PHCI cannot be overlooked (Cangelosi, Ranelli, & Kim, 2013).

Past studies have examined (1) the tendencies of health consumers to access and apply PHCI in their lives (Cangelosi,

Ranelli, & Markham 2009), (2) the various delivery systems for symptomatic issues (Cangelosi, Ranelli, & Kim, 2013), (3) attitudes toward PHCI delivered via SM (Cangelosi, Kim and Ranelli, 2015), and (4) social media and networking (SM&N) channels preferred by health consumers (Cangelosi, Ranelli, & Kim, 2018). Because individuals respond differently to health information, producers and distributors of PHCI must have a better understanding of what health consumers seek in using SM. This study will examine and compare how SM is being used to access PHCI by two US cohort groups, Baby Boomers and Generation X, that comprise over 47% of the US population, and represent two population segments with the greatest need for PHCI (Bureau of the Census, 2017).

The spread of SM use can widely be understood as a bottom up, consumer-driven process that is changing the demand for access to health information, including PHCI. Web 2.0 or the read-write web gave the ability to accommodate internet users desiring to use, create, share, edit, and interact with online content. This aspect of Web 2.0 made possible the development of SM sites (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). It is a departure from the traditional Web 1.0, which was read-only (one-way) content (Gagnon & Sabus, 2015). The use of SM in healthcare is widespread. At the end of 2012, 67% of American adults with Internet access had used some form of SM, and 59% had used the Internet to look for health-related information (Brenner, 2013; Fox & Duggan, 2013). In addition to the traditional SM platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, Americans use a number of SM platforms to connect and collaborate with others who have the same health issues or may want to participate in a research study (Ramo & Prochaska, 2012).

Health care expenses increase with age. HC spending more than doubles from the 44-65 to 65+ age categories, growing from \$8,370 per capita annually for the 44-64 group to \$18,424 for the 65+ group.

The 19-44 age group spends only half of what the 44-64 group spends. Coupled with the importance of SM for obtaining PHCI, the amount of money that preventive medicine can save, and given that health care spending increases with age, more than justifies the need to study Baby Boomer and Generation X tendencies and propensities toward PHCI. The Baby Boomer and Generation X consumers can be described as cohorts, or a group of people grouped together in history by a set of events. These events can be anything from technological changes, wars, political changes, etc., and many of the attitudes that persons in a cohort have in common are resistant to change over time, including health care attitudes. Hence, as cohort groups, Baby Boomers and Generation Xer's can be considered as groups for analysis (Berkowitz, 2017).

The goal of this study is to assess the importance of various SM platforms and sources as delivery systems to access PHCI by two cohort segments in the US, Baby Boomers and Generation X. The various SM sources are analyzed through different demographic groups that

have been researched earlier (Cangelosi, Ranelli, & Kim, 2015). The SM platform research questions that are addressed are as follows:

In the aggregate, how important are the various SM platforms as delivery systems of PHCI for Baby Boomers and Generation X?

Which of the various SM alternatives or combinations of alternatives are considered most important by Baby Boomers and Generation X?

Comparing Baby Boomers and Generation X concerning their SM propensities and tendencies toward acquiring and using PHCI.

Selected References from the W.I.P. manuscript (due to space limitations)

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Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers and Practitioners:

The marketing and distribution of PHCI is the key to helping the health consumer, especially Baby Boomers and Generation Xer's, to be aware of and gain access to health information. This information will save them money, prolong their lives and increase the quality of their lives. This research is but one step in developing marketing efficiencies in reaching the US cohort groups that it will impact the most in the upcoming years.

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