

# SAĞLIK İLETİŞİMİNDE DEĞİŞİM VE YENİ YÖNELİMLER

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## Öz

Sağlık iletişimi sosyolojik açıdan ele alındığında sağlık çalışanlarının birbirleriyle iletişimi, hasta-sağlık çalışanı iletişimi, hasta-hasta iletişimi ve hasta yakınlarının birbirleriyle iletişimi gibi farklı gruplar açısından ele alınabilir. Sağlık okur-yazarlığının sağlanmasında ve etkili sağlık enformasyonunun geniş kitlelere iletilmesinde birincil araç iletişimdir. Etkili sağlık iletişimi, sağlık sorunları, riskleri, çözümleri konusunda farkındalığı artırır; bireylerin tutumlarını etkiler ve güçlendirir. Sağlığın geliştirilmesi amacıyla, toplumda sağlıklı yaşam alışkanlıklarının oluşturulması, benimsenmesi konusunda tüm kitle iletişim araçları sağlık eğitimi kapsamında kullanılır. İletişim teknolojilerindeki baş döndürücü gelişmeler/değişimler, toplumun sağlık sorunları ile ilgili daha fazla bilgi ve destek edinme yollarını çeşitlendirmiş, zenginleştirmiştir. İnternet alanında monoloğtan diyaloga geçiş, tek yönlü enformasyon iletiminden dinamik, çok yönlü etkileşimli ve tartışmaların da yer aldığı sürece evrilmesine neden olmuş ve sadece tüketen değil üreten kullanıcıların da yer aldığı dönemi başlatmıştır. Bu gelişme, sosyal ağları kullananlara katılımcı olma imkanı sağlarken aynı zamanda sağlık enformasyonunun kontrolünü de zorlaştırmıştır. Medyanın olumlu sağlık davranışı geliştirme olanakları ve kapasitesi ile olumsuz davranış oluşturma potansiyelinin birlikte var olması paradoksal bir durum da oluşturmaktadır. Yeni medya araçlarını kullanarak hastalıklar ve tedavi yöntemleri hakkında bilgi toplamaya çalışan bireyler bazen yanlış bilgiler ile yola çıkarak sağlıklarını tehlikeye atabilmektedir. Bunun yanında online platformlarda forumlar vasıtasıyla yukarıda söz edilen farklı gruplar arasındaki iletişim hasta- hasta iletişimi açısından dikkate değer bir yeni forma bürünmektedir. Bu çalışmanın amacı, online platformlarda sağlık iletişimine yönelik yapılacak çalışmalara literatür çerçevesinde katkı sağlamaktır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Sağlık İletişimi, Sağlık sosyolojisi, Sosyal Medya, Yeni Medya, Türkiye.

## Changes and New Trends in Health Communication

### Abstract

Health communication can be considered in terms of different groups such as communication of healthcare professionals with each other, patient-healthcare worker communication, patient-patient communication and patient relatives communication with each other. Communication is the primary tool in ensuring health literacy and disseminating effective health information to the wider audience. Effective health communication raises awareness about health problems, risks and solutions; influences and strengthens individuals' attitudes. All mass media are used within the scope of health education to develop and adopt healthy living habits in society in order to improve health. The dizzying developments and changes in communication technologies have diversified and enriched the ways to obtain more information and support about health problems. The transition from monologue to dialogue in the internet field has caused the transformation from one-way information transmission to dynamic, multi-faceted interactive and discussions. Thus, the period began in which not only consuming but also producing users took part. While this has improved those who use social networks, it has also made it difficult to control health

information. The coexistence of the media's potential to generate negative behavior as well as the possibilities and capacity to develop positive health behaviors also constitutes a paradoxical situation. Individuals who try to collect information about diseases and treatment methods by using new media tools sometimes risk their health with false information. In addition, the communication between the different groups mentioned above through forums on online platforms takes on a remarkable new form in terms of patient-patient communication. In this context, the aim of the study is to discuss the transformation of patient-patient communication on online platforms within the framework of the literature.

**Keywords:** Health Communication, Health Sociology, Social Media, New Media, Turkey.

## Introduction

The World Health Organization defined the definition of health in 1948 as “not only the absence of illness or disability, but a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being”. This definition is important in terms of revealing a new perspective on the concept of health. In the past, health was associated with “illness” and had a negative definition, but it evolved into a positive definition by including the social and spiritual side in the definition of health. With positive definition, the concept of health got rid of the limitation of medical science and its relationship with social sciences has also strengthened. The understanding that the improvement of health status is not possible only with the treatment of diseases and the understanding that health is realized with the contribution of biological factors and social and environmental factors has matured.

According to studies on the determinants of health status, the determinants are generally accepted under four groups; human biology, healthcare, environment and lifestyle. According to the results of the social determinants of health studies conducted by the University of Wisconsin, Public Health Institute in America, health-related lifestyle habits affect health status by 30%, health services contribute 20%, physical environment 10% and socioeconomic factors 40%. (<https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/explore-health-rankings/measures-data-sources/county-health-rankings-model>. Date of access: 10 April 2021).

Among these factors, lifestyle is of great importance in two respects. The first of these is that it affects the health status with a high rate, the second is that this area is under the control of the individual, and it is not possible to intervene from outside. Lifestyle is a set of behaviors that can only be changed by the individual's own acceptance, motivation and will, and are under the control of the individual. Therefore, the individual needs to be persuaded to show the desired health behavior, and it is extremely important to prepare this persuasion process with careful and effective strategies.

As a result of the increase in chronic diseases in the world and the development of awareness about the effect of environmental and social factors on health status, the concept of health promotion has emerged and strategies have been developed in this direction. The individual's access to accurate and reliable resources is an important factor in activities carried out within the scope of health promotion. For this reason, today the concepts of information literacy and health literacy have come to the fore (Mendi, 2015: 276). Health literacy is defined as the capacity to obtain, produce and understand basic health-related information and services required to make correct / appropriate health-related decisions. Health literacy is an outcome of health promotion efforts and plays a vital role in meeting public health goals (Çınarlı, 2019: 243-244). Health literacy is an extremely important phenomenon in terms of achieving effective health communication and thus achieving the goal of developing health behavior. The definition of health education, according to Smith (1979), is as follows: “Health education in its broadest sense is the sum of all factors that jointly determine the knowledge, beliefs and behaviors related to the development, protection and improvement of the health of individuals and societies” (Cited in Çınarlı, 2019: 59). It is important that individuals have access to the right health information they need in order to make ideal health decisions. In this context, it is important that decision-makers in the field of health effectively use social media tools that are accepted by the society and provide versatile use, along with traditional methods for information transfer.

Considering that communication in general is at the center of every social event that concerns people, it is clear that health status, health education, health literacy and all similar issues are a part of a healthy society and social life. In this context, the concept of health communication, which is a subtitle of communication, comes to the fore.

### **1.1. Health Communication**

Health communication has become an important discipline all over the world in recent years. In the United States of America, within the scope of “Healthy People 2010” targets, the topic of health communication was included for the first time, and the increasing importance of this issue was emphasized. The subject of “Health Communication and Health Information Technologies” was also included within the scope of the “Healthy People 2020” project.

Under this heading, besides the goals to strengthen the communication between the patient and the healthcare personnel; Increasing the number of individuals using the Internet, increasing the proportion of quality web sites related to health, increasing the rate of individuals seeking online health information with easy access to health information, and increasing the rate of crisis and emergency risk messages aimed at protecting public health were included (Mendi, 2015: 277).

One of the reasons of increasing health expenditures in almost all countries and Turkey in recent years is the unnecessary use of health services over the need, and the fact that effective health communication practices provide the opportunity to control health expenditures reveals the importance of this discipline from another aspect. According to Çınarlı (2019), health communication is the most effective discipline that can be used to close the information gap in society, and the primary strategy of health communication campaigns is the selection of the right tools and messages. Health communication also has an important role to save the patient from one-way communication, two-way communication resulting from information asymmetry between patient and physician and passive position in this communication.

The field of health communication has a wide range from improving the quality of life and health of individuals to the preparation of national and universal health programs and the establishment of health policies. Effective implementation of health communication, on the other hand, increases awareness about health risks and solutions, provides motivation to reduce health risks, contributes to getting help from those in similar situations, affects or strengthens attitudes, increases the use of appropriate healthcare services and reduces the demand / use of inappropriate healthcare services. In summary, it is possible to define health communication as a versatile and multidisciplinary approach used to reach different target audiences and to share health-related information (Çınarlı, 2019: 51-52).

### **1.2 Health Communication, New Media and New Trends**

The concept of health communication stands out as a subtitle of communication. In this context, to say that health communication is a type of communication that includes studies on health problems, aims to improve and develop health on a regional and national basis, and uses mass media such as media, social marketing, advertising, public relations and newspapers, magazines, television, radio, internet. is possible (Gündüz Hoşgör, 2014: 74). Internet usage has increased rapidly both in Turkey and in the world in recent years. The Internet has also become the most important reference source for those looking for health information. With the advances in communication technologies, the transition of the Internet from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 has enabled a new model that enables more dynamic and interactive online discussions, enabling users to become not only consumers but also producers and consumers (Çınarlı, 2019: 157). Online tools allow them to share user-focused and consumer-controlled information and provide an inexpensive way to reach large audience groups over long or close distances. One of the most important features of social media is that it provides a suitable environment for healthy information exchange between different socio-demographic groups (Gencer et al., 2019: 44). With the availability of such opportunities, social media has started to be used extensively to obtain online health information and the interest is rapidly increasing. Through social media, also known as the participatory internet, individuals with certain diseases can share their disease experiences and treatment options among patient communities from wherever they are, and have the opportunity to communicate with physicians and obtain detailed information about their diseases.

As Gündüz Hoşgör stated, “In this century, when the internet has become widespread with technological developments, it has become available to households and even managed to enter into pockets, the increase and spread of health messages thanks to the internet is no longer a strange situation. For example persons; They can have an idea by researching the current problems and diseases diagnosed with regard to a condition that concerns their health on the internet. Whether in private or public health institutions, it is possible to investigate which physicians to go to and be examined. Internet environments; It is important in terms of bringing the patient and the

physician together and providing a conversation that can be the subject of communication. The appearance and use of the internet as the most preferred health communication tool of recent times is also noteworthy. (Gündüz Hoşgör, 2014: 56)

From this point of view, it is possible to say that studies linking health communication with media and new media have increased in recent years. According to the study of Ayaz and Ayaz, who examined the theses on this subject with the method of content analysis, the aims of the theses are to determine whether the media is informative, to reveal the relationship of health communication with the internet and information technologies, to determine the influence of the media, the commercialization of the media in the field of health or the power of the media in the field of health. It can be listed as determining the effect of the advertisement or the attitude towards the advertisement. On the other hand, it is stated that the number of theses related to the internet has increased and the number of theses that try to reveal the relationship between health communication and internet and the importance of information technologies in health communication have also increased. (Ayaz and Ayaz, 2017: 164-165).

Social media tools have made it easier for healthcare professionals to share views and information with each other. Social networks such as Sermo, Doximity and QuantiaMD have been developed in order to enable physicians to share their knowledge and experiences with each other. Through these networks, physicians can obtain opinions from each other in difficult and complex situations. According to a study conducted with the participation of patients in family medicine offices in the state of Southern Utah in the USA to evaluate the social media usage preferences of the patients; 56% of the patients stated that they wanted physicians to use social media, and 83% of the patients stated that they used at least one of the social media tools (Mendi, 2015: 281).

Social media provides important facilities to health education activities by enabling communication and cooperation in creating health-related behavioral changes. Social support provided by the use of social media also has a positive effect on the health and well-being of individuals. It has been observed that 40% of individuals with health problems use the Facebook network for social support, and this online support increases the level of self-efficacy in health. According to the results of the systematic review study conducted by Moorhead et al. (2013); 98 investigated studies have shown that social media provides an environment that allows sharing, commenting and discussing health information on issues such as diabetes, influenza, and mental health. It has been determined that the most discussed tools in the studies are Facebook, Blogs, Twitter and Youtube. In addition, data collected on social media provide potential epidemiological resources for predicting outbreaks; It is known that a group of researchers used Twitter data to determine trends in the spread of flu (cited in Mendi, 2015: 281-282).

New media provide users with the opportunity to participate and reach large masses, providing unique environments for health promotion activities. As a result of these opportunities, it is seen that the number of people looking for health information in online resources has increased. According to the “Pew Research Center” 2013 data, 35% of adults in the USA use the internet at least once to solve their own or someone else’s health problem; 72% of the users stated that they used the internet to search for information about any health issue in the previous year (Mendi, 2015: 282). In addition to the individual use of social media, it is also possible to use it institutionally. Hospitals, other health institutions, health-related NGOs and professional organizations share functions such as providing health information, spreading health campaigns, helping patients or healthy people through social media (Çınarlı, 2019: 165). In the United States of America, the “The Heart Truth” campaign has been organized in digital environment in order to increase women’s awareness of heart diseases, which are among the leading causes of death in women, to enable them to identify their risks individually and to encourage them to meet with the doctor. The red dress was used as a symbol to emphasize that heart diseases are also important for women. Within the scope of the campaign, the most active and effective blogs were determined and the campaign was announced in 66 blogs in 2010. The number of users of the created Twitter account exceeded 3000 in February 2011, social activities and conferences were organized to bring women and “bloggers” together; During these meetings, the use of Twitter was ensured and it was determined that many tweets were posted. In addition to these applications, a Facebook account was created, Flickr was actively used, and it was observed that 144 videos were uploaded to YouTube by users who were not affiliated with the campaign (Mendi, 2015: 284).

The use of social media by public institutions in Turkey has started to become widespread in recent years. With the 2015-2018 Information Society Strategy and Action Plan prepared by the Ministry of Development, it is aimed to make effective use of mobile technologies and social media opportunities in the provision of public services, to make e-government applications more effective with social media applications, and to ensure the presentation of public services on mobile environments. Ministry of Health joined Facebook and Twitter on 12.04.2012. Since Facebook and Twitter are more frequently used social media tools, a separate unit has been

established within the Ministry. Through the Facebook account of the Ministry of Health, topics, announcements and activities within its field of activity are shared and users can follow the latest developments in the field of health with the information provided. For example, it is seen that beneficial results can be obtained by ensuring the participation of the public through informative posts on smoking cessation campaigns and the fight against obesity. On its Twitter account, the Ministry also provides an instant sharing opportunity by responding one-to-one to citizens' questions on health-related issues on Twitter. As another example, within the scope of the activity named "Calculate Your Body Mass Index", citizens who convey their height and weight from their social media account are notified of their body mass indexes and thus, citizens are informed about weight control. Moreover, through this activity, the duty of the Ministry to provide preventive health services is also carried out in the social media environment. Twitter enables public institutions to be aware of the positive or negative comments, complaints and requests of citizens about a subject more quickly, and provides the institutions the opportunity to respond to the questions of the citizens faster (Erkek, 2016: 144-146).

Considering the Covid-19 pandemic period, it should be considered that health communication differs from other periods. During this period, the use of social media and the desire to receive news also increased. In Turkey, a quantitative research was carried out on social media with the participation of 520 social media users in order to measure the impact of the epidemic in the middle of 2020 and the relationship between change and post-traumatic growth with various socio-demographic variables. According to the results, the Covid-19 pandemic has increased people's curiosity and desire to hear. 59.1% of the participants stated that their desire to use social media and 75.8% of them stated that they wanted to follow the news (Karataş, 2020: 8-10). The fact that this research can be carried out through a communication channel is an important example in terms of expanding the usage areas of social media and providing various opportunities.

The coexistence of the media's opportunities and capacity to develop positive health behaviors and the potential to create negative behaviors creates a paradoxical situation (Çınarlı, 2019: 190). In addition to the advantages of using the internet in health communication, such as wide information capacity, interpersonal communication opportunities and social support, there are also disadvantages such as cost, inequalities in access, use of medical language, reliability and transience of information, excessive information, and risk-promoting messages (Avcı and Avcı, 2014: 185).

In summary, health communication in many countries, including Turkey, is evolving into a different form through the communication channels provided by technology. Individuals have the opportunity to carry out detailed researches on the condition of the patient as a health care provider or a relative of a patient. The point that needs to be discussed especially here is the risk created by information that can be used in relation to health, as well as in other matters, without being relational and systematic. Because some disease symptoms may be indicators that do not prevent some people from being a healthy individual. Structural, genetic and individual factors may need to be taken into consideration. If the information flow, which is interpreted as doctor's advice without taking these into account, becomes harmful to health, this communication can lead to unexpected negative consequences. At this point, trying to prevent information exchange on health issues will not be a solution. However, it should be noted that if one of the parties in the exchange of information is a doctor, their responsibilities further increase.

## Conclusion

New media offers serious opportunities and facilities to create appropriate health behavior targeted within the scope of health promotion. The opportunities offered by the new media have started to be used intensively by those seeking health information and health-related service providers, especially due to the fact that they reach large masses, provide speed and mutual interaction. In this respect, it can be said that health communication studies associated with new media are increasing day by day. Particular emphasis in this study is that health communication, including new media channels, where information is spreading rapidly, is beginning to change shape. New media tools are used for health communication both individually and for public institutions. However, the presence of inaccurate, incomplete, erroneous and out-of-date information in communication channels also has the potential to make decisions that negatively affect the health of individuals and to develop inappropriate health behaviors.

With the fact that new media and the internet will be more reference sources in the field of health in the future, increasing the health literacy level of the society in distinguishing correct information from wrong information appears as the most important topic and at the same time the most important responsibility. Another point that should be emphasized is that it is a topic worth researching, especially when the patient-patient relations

come with technological possibilities. Because it is possible to say that these channels, where information is spread in a risky, sometimes uncontrolled manner, carry more risks in the field of health. On the other hand, the use of new media as one of the new forms of health communication is also important in terms of new forms of organization.

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