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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Social media as an educational platform against stigma

Dear Editor,

We read with interest the article by Li et al. (2018) and commend the authors for analyzing stigma and suicide literacy in responses to suicides broadcast on social media, specifically on Weibo. Their study showed that 11% of the analyzed posts contained misinformation about suicide, and 18–35% of posts endorsed stigmatizing views such as “people who have thoughts about suicide should not tell others about it.” The authors suggest that implications of this study include the achievement of increasing suicide literacy using the same media that user's express their views (Li et al., 2018). To expand upon the study, we provide evidence that shows effective targeting of educational media towards the appropriate subpopulations on various internet platforms. For example, a Facebook campaign to raise awareness and knowledge on hypertension in the Chinese community was successful in recruiting a cohort of participants in an older age bracket typical of developing cardiovascular diseases; the advertisement was most effective in the 65 years or older group with a click-through rate of 14.71% (Dunn & Woo, 2018). For psychoeducational videos related to schizophrenia uploaded on YouTube, the targeted age group of 34 years and below comprised about half of the total views and had a 14.4% longer average view duration compared with the overall average (Lam, Tsiang, & Woo, 2017). These studies in combination suggest that there is huge potential to disseminate psychoeducational materials toward targeted populations on various social media platforms. Future prospective studies should be designed to determine how to effectively promote educational materials regarding suicide literacy for Chinese users on Weibo and other social media. Of course, as evidenced by this study itself, social media poses potential dangers as well; there are clear limitations to the use of social media for dissemination of information, and misuse can easily perpetuate stigmatizing views in an echo chamber environment.

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DISCLOSURES

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