



LEVERAGING SOCIAL MEDIA LISTENING IN THE PATIENT ECOSYSTEM

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NOW PEOPLE WHO DON'T KNOW EACH OTHER ARE WILLING TO GO ONLINE TO SHARE THEIR STORIES, EXPRESS THEIR FEELINGS AND UNBURDEN THEMSELVES – ALL THE WHILE LOOKING FOR INFORMATION, SHARED EXPERIENCES, ADVICE, EMPATHY AND SUPPORT.

Fostering a healthy dialogue between pharma and its consumers starts with understanding the person behind the patient. Our job is to ensure we hear and understand the stories of people and make them matter.

At Kantar Health, we're delivering unique insights about the Patient Ecosystem – how a condition affects individuals, how socio-cultural factors shape their experiences, and what roles patient advocates and support groups play in patients' lives. This deep and personal understanding lays the groundwork for identifying "touchpoints", where brands intersect with consumers and where we can create interventions that can effect positive change and improve patient outcomes.

Today, patients are more empowered and focused on their health and wellness than ever before. An aging population wants more from healthcare companies and their providers than previous generations, and younger healthcare consumers are expecting to participate in their healthcare decisions by bringing an informed point of view and questioning their healthcare providers. While the digital age has revolutionized consumer access to health and wellness information, it has also provided us with powerful platforms for understanding our customers, including the burgeoning use of social media for capturing candid peer-to-peer conversations.

There's an old adage that states, "A burden shared is a burden halved." At every stage of the patient or caregiver journey, there are so many unknowns and fears that there's a critical and urgent need to share personal information with others who are walking in similar shoes. In the 10-plus years since Facebook changed the way we communicate, there has been a huge shift in the way we process healthcare information. Social media has greatly reduced social barriers. Now people who don't know each other are willing to go online to share their stories, express their feelings and unburden themselves – all the while looking for information, shared experiences, advice, empathy and support.

SML REVEALS AUTHENTIC CONVERSATIONS

One of the methods of research that we use to understand these authentic peer-to-peer conversations is social media listening (SML). In our recent landmark **Patient Ecosystem study of Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)**, we used SML in what we call qualitative research at scale. This requires an art of “listening” that gathers and interprets tens of thousands of posts and threads.

Social media has become the stage for the global IBS conversation, with more than 82,000 posts in the United States and almost 23,000 posts in the UK over the past year alone. It’s no coincidence that IBS often presents in women between the ages of 20 and 30 years old, which matches the most active and socially connected demographic (based on Kantar TNS Connected Life 2016).

We sorted these posts into categories and subtopics and used them to answer questions such as:

- + What are sufferers’ key questions and concerns?
- + What are sufferers’ coping strategies?
- + Where are sufferers getting information online and offline?

What we found was an ecosystem fraught with confusion, embarrassment, belittlement and loneliness; and a condition that has a long, difficult and fearful path to diagnosis, with symptoms often overlapping with serious conditions such as colon cancer and ulcerative colitis. Once these conditions are ruled out, there is no definitive test for IBS, so the diagnosis becomes one of exclusion, making sufferers feel dismissed or ignored as they go on to realize they are no closer to relief because today’s treatments aren’t sufficient.

Peer support is essential in the face of a critical view of what the healthcare system can provide in terms of answers about IBS or effective treatment. Sufferers often turn to social media in search of a second opinion from peers and for answers or a solution that doctors haven’t offered.

Exploring posts, which sometimes come from sites you wouldn’t typically think of for posts about medical conditions, e.g. TripAdvisor, add to the understanding of lifestyle impacts of IBS that make it difficult to plan vacations, go abroad, go out to eat or do new things. While there’s an openness to share about IBS on social media, it’s also apparent that there’s an embarrassment that keeps this condition under wraps in sufferers’ day-to-day lives. It’s “not a pretty condition”, so sufferers often find ways to keep their condition hidden or cover with “trendy food allergies”.

In all, a lack of information outside of the social media universe and personal feelings of frustration have led these socially connected patients to turn to one another for support and comfort – opening up a crucial online system of peer-to-peer support and patient advocacy. Patients have said:

“SINCE I FIRST NERVOUSLY POSTED ON MY BLOG ABOUT MY BATTLES WITH IBS I HAVE RECEIVED A HUGE AMOUNT OF MESSAGES FROM FELLOW SUFFERERS SEEKING ADVICE AND TIPS ON MANAGING WHAT CAN BE A VERY DEBILITATING AND ISOLATING CONDITION.”

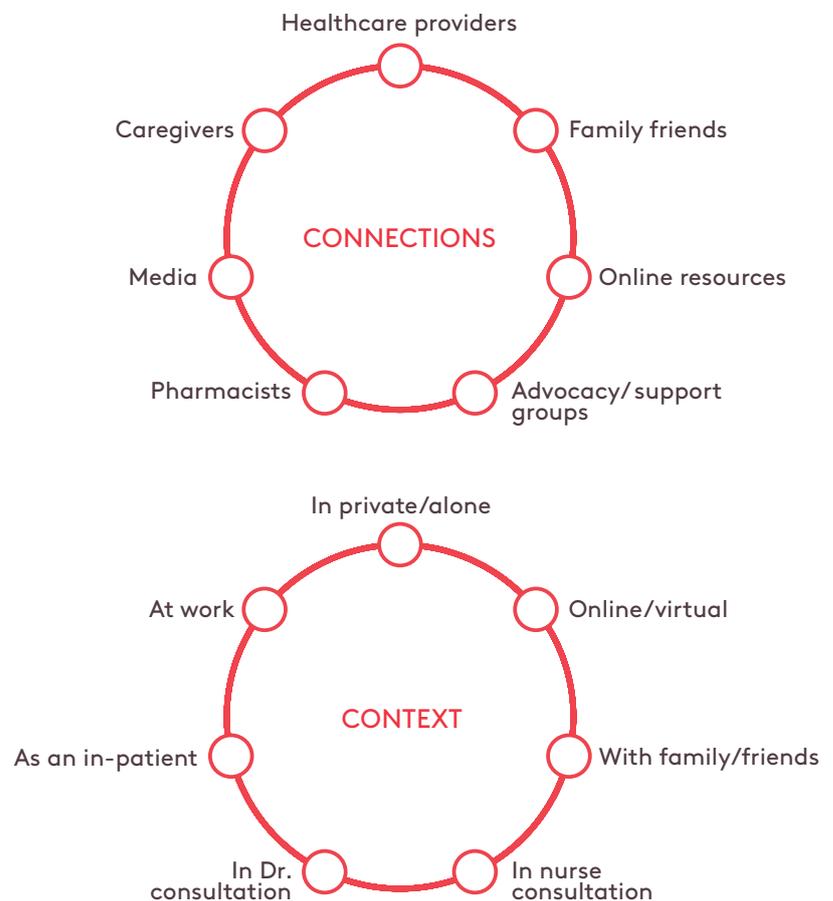
“I THOUGHT I WAS EDUCATING PEOPLE WITHOUT IBS, BUT I ENDED UP EDUCATING PEOPLE WITH IBS.”

ACHIEVING BETTER OUTCOMES

By extensively examining the patient’s perspective, we’ve come to understand that we can be part of the conversation that helps people with IBS achieve better outcomes. In listening to the uncontaminated conversations people are having with each other, we can identify the key influencers they talk

about spontaneously and the contexts in which their condition most significantly impacts on day-to-day living; from these rich insights we are able to identify clear pointers to drive business strategies and interventions to break the negative cycle of patient experience.

FIGURE 1: OUR COMPREHENSIVE EXPLORATION OF PATIENTS EXPERIENCE INCLUDES A DEEP DIVE INTO THE INFLUENCES OF SOCIAL CONNECTIONS AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONTEXT



We can also leverage the power of patient advocates and bloggers and can target specific social media sites to listen to conversations and provide information and support; we can adopt appropriate language to frame the condition in a positive light; we can challenge the

dismissive, belittling narrative and we can educate healthcare providers about the significant impact of IBS on daily life.

For more information about Kantar Health’s SML expertise, please visit <http://www.kantarhealth.com/patient-ecosystems-edge-of-insight>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Sheila Mott heads the Business Insights group of the Marketing Insights practice at Kantar Health. Ms. Mott has 30 years of experience in the pharmaceutical and healthcare industry in both client and consultancy roles. She brings experience from pharmaceutical market research management, field sales and product management to developing global strategic action plans from both qualitative and quantitative data for clients evaluating and optimizing early stage product opportunities, developing brand/portfolio strategies and other commercial programs.

As the head of Business Insights, she leads a team of experts who are focused on analyzing data and developing clear, concise, data driven, strategic storytelling to answer business issues for client's that include the world's top pharmaceutical, biotech and medical device companies.

SPECIAL THANKS

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

Please contact info@kantarhealth.com, or visit us at www.kantarhealth.com.

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