

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE COMMUNICATION OF PUBLIC HEALTH INFORMATION: A COMPARATIVE STUDY FROM PANDEMIC TO POST-PANDEMIC

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Background: Social media play a key role in modern health promotion strategies, enabling more effective communication, education and engagement of the public. The role of social media in providing accurate and timely information from health experts during the COVID-19 pandemic was crucial for public health protection, highlighting the need for effective communication strategies in crisis situations and their long-term sustainability.

Methods and Objectives: This study evaluates the effectiveness of the Institute of Public Health of Šabac in using social media for public health communication during the COVID-19 pandemic and compares it with post-pandemic usage in 2023 to assess the sustainability of social media as a public health tool.

Results: During the observed period, there was a notable decline in social media interactions across various platforms. On Facebook, the number of interactions dropped by approximately 70% from 2021 to 2023 (from 2,335 to 705), and by about 48% compared to 2022 (from 1,352 to 705). Twitter saw a decrease of around 67% in interactions from 2021 to 2023 (from 1,104 to 366), and a decline of approximately 44% compared to 2022 (from 654 to 366). Similarly, Instagram interactions fell by about 60% from 2021 to 2023 (from 896 to 354), and by roughly 47% compared to 2022 (from 667 to 354).

Conclusions: Despite the observed decline in social media usage for public health communication post-pandemic, social media remains a vital channel for informing the population about public health issues by health institutions. The significant engagement during the pandemic underscores its potential as an effective tool for health communication.

Keywords: social media, COVID-19 pandemic, Institute of Public Health, post-pandemic usage, health communication strategies