

Identify intelligent communication strategies in healthcare through social media

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Easy access to computers, global modernization efforts, and the general advancement of mobile technology all contribute to the increase in yearly internet users worldwide. Since 2005, it has become increasingly convenient for users to access the internet. This convenience of access, combined with the dynamics of the recent pandemic, is driving social media usage as a primary source of communication and means for staying current with the ever-changing world.

As of January 2021, there were 4.66 billion active internet users worldwide, or 59.5% of the global population. The trends related to social media usage follow a similar pattern, with 4.15 billion active mobile social media users (53% of the global population).

As more users engage in social media, the average user is spending more time on these platforms, too. On average, internet users spend 144 minutes per day on social media and messaging apps, which is an increase of more than half an hour since 2015.¹ Social media sites provide a variety of features to occupy this time, including social networks, blogs, wikis, and media sharing.

How healthcare professionals use social media

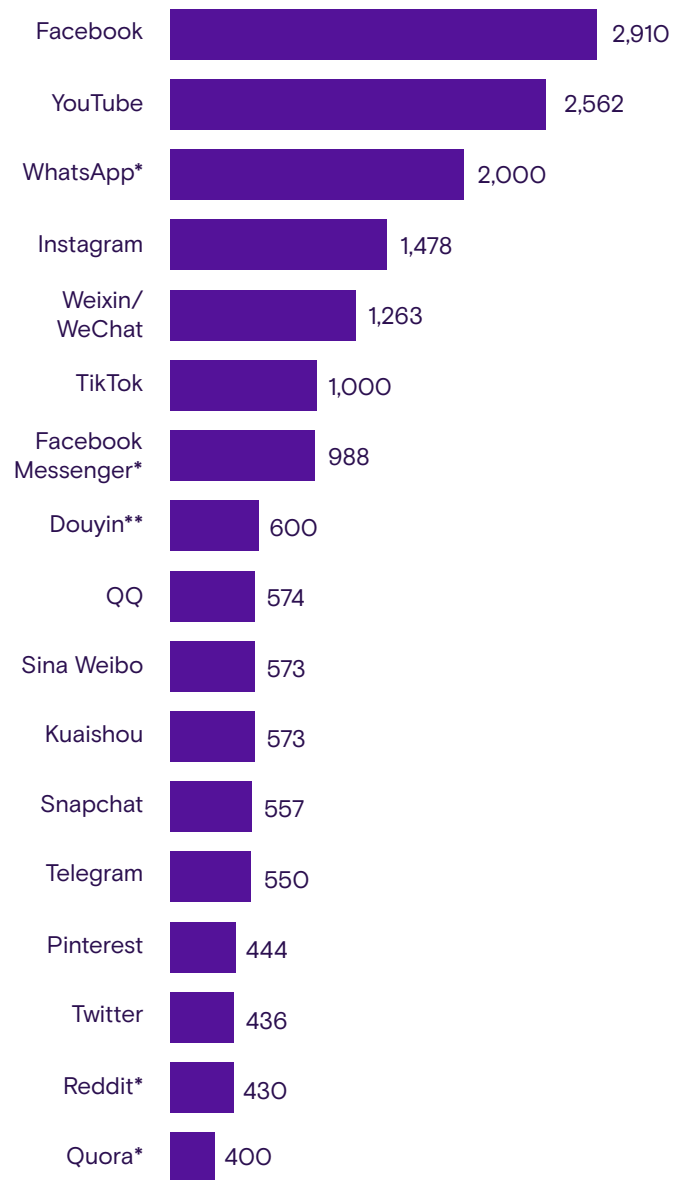
Healthcare professionals (HCPs) engage with social media much like any other user. They most often join online communities to read news articles related to their field of medicine, listen to experts, consult with colleagues, research medical developments, and build their professional network. HCPs rely on social media platforms to have their voice heard, whether by debating healthcare policy and practice issues, engaging with the public, educating and interacting with patients, or by simply providing health information to the community.

Early in 2014, a survey of more than 4,000 physicians conducted by the social media site QuantiaMD found that roughly 65% of physicians use social media for professional reasons.² These trends continue today, and coupled with the new dynamic created by over two years of global pandemic, they've made one thing clear: Effectively leveraging digital channels is now a core competency for life science organizations looking to engage with a larger population effectively.³

As the number of HCPs engaging in social media continues to grow, medically focused professional communities are developing, too. Specific to HCPs, networks such as Sermo, Doc2Doc, and Doximity are predominately private and protected from nonmembers.⁴ While they continue to increase in popularity among HCPs, social sites remain dominant as communication channels. Facebook is still the most popular site in the US, while LinkedIn is the most popular professional networking site worldwide.⁵

MOST POPULAR SOCIAL NETWORKS WORLDWIDE¹

As of January 2022, ranked by number of monthly active users, in millions



*Platforms have not published updated user figures in the past 12 months, figures may be out of date and less reliable

**Figure uses daily active users, so monthly active user number is likely higher

Life science companies adapt to the digital world

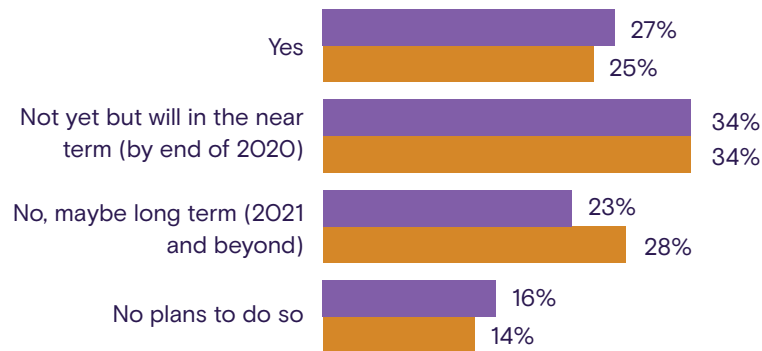
Life science companies are also evolving in the way they engage with HCPs in an increasingly digital world.⁶ Initiated by more than two years of virtual meetings due to the COVID-19 pandemic, companies are transitioning from traditional sales staffing to a digital strategy. Pfizer’s recent announcement to reduce its sales staff is a result of more physician offices and facilities opting for virtual interactions over face-to-face meetings.⁷ Amgen also eliminated approximately 500 sales positions in 2021 due to the shifting engagement model becoming the new normal.

Life science companies are devoting more time and resources to digital marketing strategies and engaging in digital channels. As a result, many organizations are seeking a digital spin on the key opinion leader (KOL), a traditional HCP profile that is essential to any commercial or medical strategy.

While the KOL has been an integral component of medical device and pharmaceutical companies’ strategies for years, the role is now being reimaged as the digital opinion leader (DOL).⁸

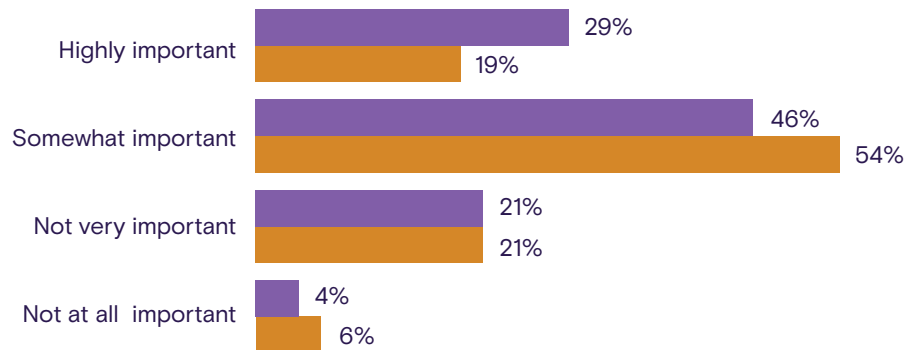
■ Global ■ USA

ARE YOU CURRENTLY USING SOCIAL MEDIA DATA FOR ANY SCIENTIFIC ENGAGEMENT?⁹



HOW IMPORTANT IS SOCIAL MEDIA TO YOUR ORGANIZATION'S STRATEGY FOR ENGAGING OPINION LEADERS?⁹

75% Global and 73% USA agreed that it was either “somewhat important” or “highly important”

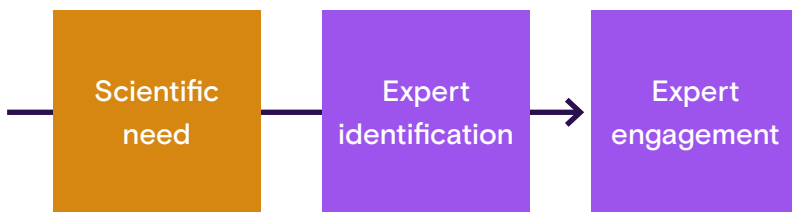


Defining the digital opinion leader

Unlike traditional KOLs, DOLs use multiple mediums to create and share content, thus establishing their presence, voice, and reach within a growing ecosystem. They are often early to communicate new information, leading conversations online and serving as a trusted

There are well-established, traditional measures of KOLs' expertise or thought leadership by which we can evaluate HCPs in the life science industry. One can build a profile of experience based on volume of publications in scholarly journals with impressive impact factors. Other

CLEARLY DEFINING YOUR ORGANIZATIONS NEED HELPS FOCUS EXPERT IDENTIFICATION AND ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES



factors include the volume of clinical trial activity in a therapeutic area, volume of scientific presentations delivered at large medical association meetings, or other data points such as grant funding or professional awards received. All

voice amongst their peers. They are also quick to cut through the noise and provide timely updates on the latest developments because they are unhindered by peer-review committees and stringent publishing guidelines. The role of the DOL, which was a novel part of thought leader identification activities only a year or two ago, is now ubiquitous. Although most agree that DOLs play an important role, what a DOL is and how to identify them are two topics of considerable debate.¹⁰

these data elements are easily quantifiable and, when summarized, can paint a clear picture of experience and expertise. Peer review, h-indexes, and impact factor scores underpin the veracity of their expertise and validate the identification of traditional KOLs based on who is producing the most impactful work.

Where should you look for DOLs?

Traditional methodologies align appropriate KOLs to engagement strategies and activities: validation of science/data, advice or consultation, leading clinical work, and disseminating clinical data from the podium, etc. The measurable impact of their work and the network of collaborative relationships they have cultivated over the course of their career brings a perceived badge of credibility and reach to traditional KOL engagement strategies and activities. Does that mean that traditional identification methodology for KOLs can apply to the identification of DOLs? The answer is partly.

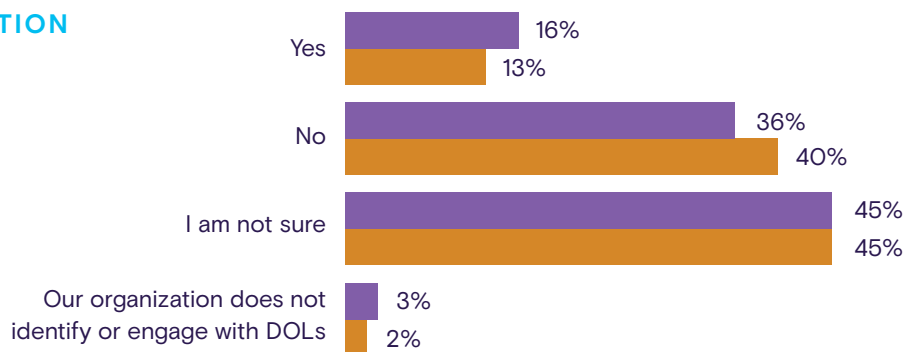
A traditional KOL with a professional social media presence may not be able to play the role of DOL. You may see a subset of your traditional opinion leaders who can also influence a network of their peers in digital or social channels. This

will, however, require additional validation of their influence in the channels you are looking to leverage. Conversely, a DOL may not have all the traditional measures of expertise that we expect to see in a KOL.

An engagement model focused on engaging with HCPs in an increasingly digital world requires identifying and partnering with HCPs who provide quantifiable expertise and thought leadership. Online influence does not always correlate with thought leadership. To get the right mix of experts, you must apply an identification methodology aligned to the channel and platform(s) you wish to engage, and then analyze the results. Both quantitative (reach, frequency of postings, and resonance) and qualitative aspects (relevance of content and audience) should align to the goals of your organization.

■ Global ■ USA

DOES YOUR ORGANIZATION HAVE A PROCESS FOR IDENTIFYING DOLs?⁹



Sphere of influence

A critical metric for identifying digital opinion leaders is their sphere of influence — do they have a large presence as an influencer on a social media platform with a high rate of engagement from their followers? For a platform like Twitter, the starting point for this metric is simply the number of credible followers the individual may have and retweets, likes, or shares of posts from these followers. Checking to ensure that their channels are genuine and reliable, with facts from trustworthy sources, is paramount. Additional details like the demographics of their followers, number of individuals vs. institutions/health system/advocacy groups, and regional/national/global network of followers all serve to further validate whether this expert aligns with your brand.

Focus

Equally important to sphere of influence is the DOL's professional focus. How focused are they on a given topic, therapeutic area or treatment? Or, alternatively, are they broadly focused with no clear “red thread” in their digital and social media presence? Learn more about the content HCPs share from their perspective, the peer following they seek, or their ability to reach a critical mass within their field of interest. DOLs will effectively take vast amounts of information and turn it into intelligent medical insights. They should appeal to the medical community as a source for perspective on timely advancements with therapies and medical device developments. Their expertise is important, as they are relied on to understand and communicate the science related to their area of specialty. Working closely with a medical device

or pharma company, a DOL's educational posts can lead to questions and comments, which leads to more education, questions, and comments that further inform the medical community and ultimately improve clinical education, awareness, and recognition for the company.

Reaction

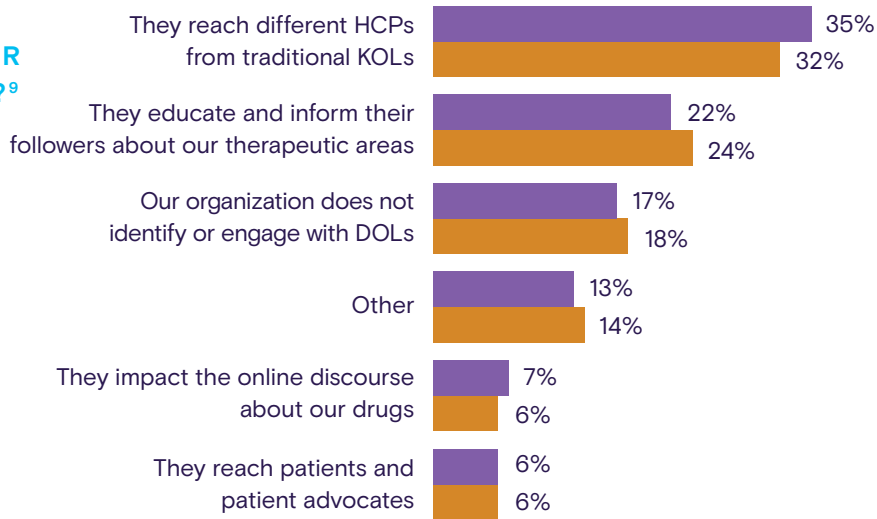
Once you have a DOL with a critical follower mass and who demonstrates a clear focus that aligns with your company goals, you next want to understand their followers' reactions. Do they read the DOL's content, respond, pass it along, or cite it — quite simply, does the DOL ignite their audience? Again, in a platform like Twitter, this is quantifiable through retweets, likes and replies to the initial tweet. These metrics, coupled with an analysis of who in their sphere of influence is taking action, can start to paint a picture of the depth of their influence.

Action

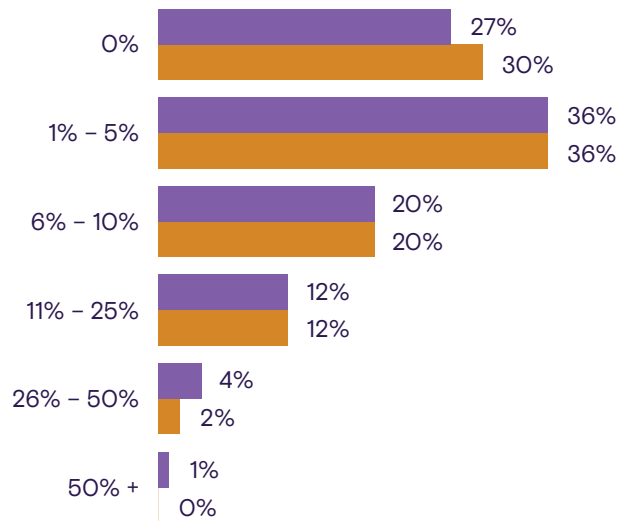
The true measure of influence really boils down to the DOL's ability to drive change and influence an audience. Change could take many forms: followers incorporating new clinical data into their thinking, shifting how they think about an existing treatment paradigm, seeking a diagnosis, or, in the case of health systems and hospitals, implementing new protocols, etc. Similar to traditional opinion leader identification methodologies, “action” or “change” directly linked to an OL often requires a fairly deep analysis, but determining the foundational criteria of sphere of influence, focus, and reaction stack the deck in your favor.

Global USA

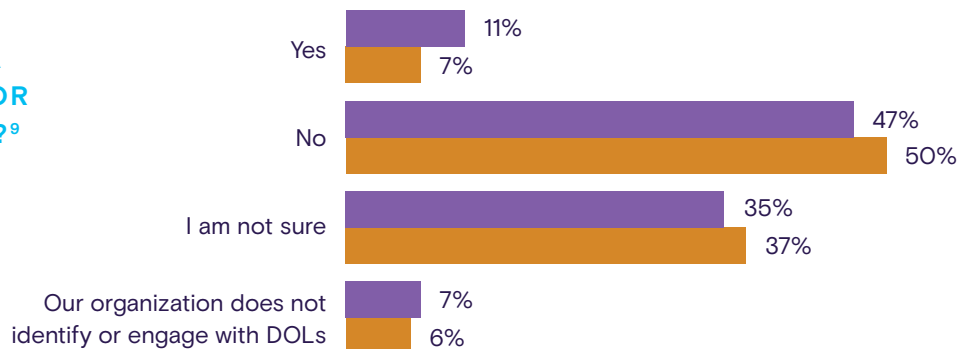
WHAT IS YOUR MAIN REASON FOR ENGAGING DOLS?⁹



WHAT PERCENTAGE OF YOUR KOL LIST ARE DOLS?⁹



DOES YOUR ORGANIZATION HAVE A SPECIFIC STRATEGY FOR ENGAGING WITH DOLS?⁹



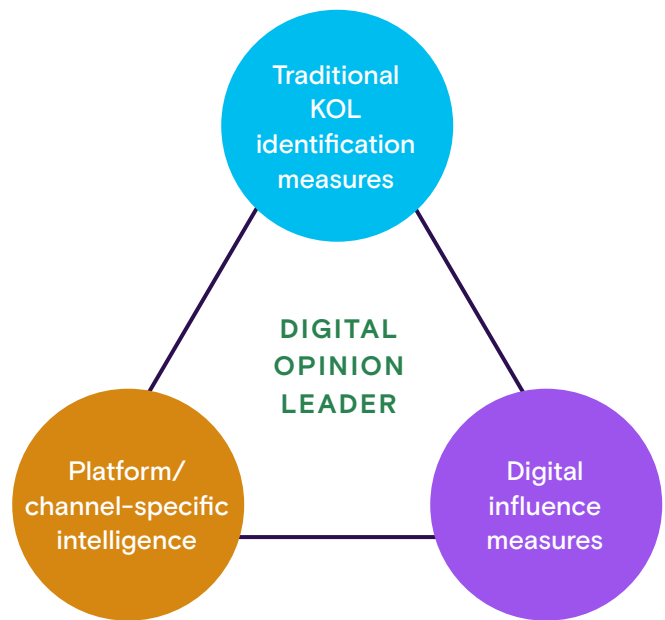
Conclusion

If you're seeking opinion leaders aligned to digital channels, you don't need to abandon all aspects of traditional KOL identification. Collaborative and cooperative scientific exchange still forms the hallmark of positive KOL interactions and share of voice, and DOLs are no different. They are typically the younger rising stars of tomorrow, engaging in the social world they were brought into. DOLs play a key role in share of influence, a measurement of how much a brand or product is talked about by key influencers within an industry, sector, or product category. It is an important metric to keep an eye on, as these influencers are shaping conversations, surveying competitive landscapes and defining the competitive advantages.

Identifying and engaging with DOLs can be complementary to your KOL strategy. It simply requires attention to a few additional facets to inform your overall strategy and decision-making. Consider this simple framework:

1. Use traditional identification metrics as your building blocks to establish credibility in your KOL pool.
2. Layer in digital influence measures as mentioned above — these help establish the candidate's fit for digital channels.
3. Gather intelligence from a specific platform or channel to identify new HCPs who are driving conversations relevant to you but don't have traditional measures of "impactful work."
4. Then, start to think about what you intend to do with this pool of experts/KOLs — is your goal to listen, engage, or a mix of both?

As you set out to build strategies in your organization that seek to incorporate these DOLs, it is imperative to apply the same "strategic lens" to this part of your plan as you would everything else. Identify the primary problem or opportunity you are trying to address. This is likely articulated quite clearly in your broader medical affairs or organizational strategy. Clearly defining the problem or opportunity (validation of your science, amplifying awareness of new clinical data, creating a dialogue regarding a shift in treatment paradigms) allows the DOL profile you should engage to begin to come into focus. From there you can hone the profile you should seek to identify and begin to assess their alignment with the criteria mentioned previously.



Automated processes, such as social listening tools developed for healthcare users, can also help to identify a relevant DOL who aligns with your company goals. By using social listening tools, you can identify and analyze a potential DOL's engagement rate and assess how it aligns with your brand and overall company ethos.

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