

The ‘social’ side of Chinese health care

Cindy Chiu, Chris Ip, and Ari Silverman

Most Chinese physicians participate actively in social media, and many hospitals have picked up on the trend—but drug manufacturers are just beginning to do so.

The tidal wave of social media in China is rapidly changing how individuals behave—including doctors.¹ More than 50 percent of them use social media regularly (exhibit), according to a recent survey.² Some leading ones have hundreds of thousands of followers. Oncologists and physicians who treat chronic diseases are among the doctors with the largest followings.

Hospitals have picked up on this trend, and for good reason. Seventeen percent of Chinese patients use the Internet as a source of information to select hospitals. For people under 25 years old, it’s 28 percent.³ Leading institutions, such as Peking Union Medical College Hospital, have created social-media accounts for their medical staffs, and some require physicians to use social media when communicating with patients. Even the government is testing the power of social media to

enhance health care’s reach and quality. But pharmaceutical companies have done more to take advantage of digital channels in Western markets than in China, where only a few use social media to engage with, listen to, or better understand the needs of physicians and patients.

For more on this research, download the full report, *Healthcare in China: ‘Entering uncharted waters,’* on mckinsey.com. 

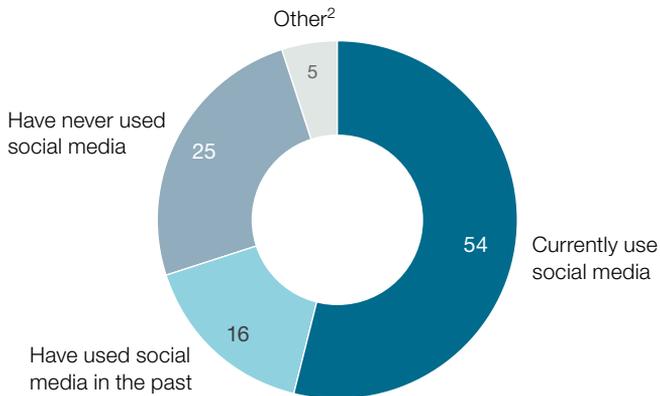
¹ See Cindy Chiu, Chris Ip, and Ari Silverman, “Understanding social media in China,” *McKinsey Quarterly*, 2012 Number 2, mckinsey.com.

² Social-media usage figures are from a survey conducted by DXY, a McKinsey survey partner in China and one of the largest online communities for physicians in the world, with more than 3.2 million members.

³ Internet usage figures are from a McKinsey survey of 1,098 patients about their experiences with China’s hospitals.

Nearly three-fourths of surveyed Chinese physicians have used social media.

Use of social media,¹ % of physicians (n = 2,056)



¹Use encompasses professional purposes (eg, disseminating medical, scientific, and technology- and drug-related information) and personal interests (eg, sports, finance). Most social-media engagement involves microblogs, which contain less text and have smaller file sizes than traditional blogs do.

²Includes 1% who have never heard of social media and 4% who did not reply to question.

Source: 2012 DXY survey of 2,056 Chinese physicians

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