

A Cross-National Comparison of Hospitals' Use of Social Media as a Venue for Service Innovation

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In recent years, **social media** has also reached the **healthcare industry** (Kordzadeh, 2016). Hospitals and other healthcare providers can use social media platforms such as Facebook to **drive service innovation**.

Theoretical Background

Social media platforms can be designed as **service platforms**. Service platforms are defined as a modular structure that includes intangible and tangible resources and facilitates the interaction of actors and resources. They serve as a **venue for service innovation** because the exchange of resources among many interacting actors can lead to innovative solutions (Lusch & Nambisan, 2015). Parker, van Alstyne, and Jiang (2017) used the term "platform ecosystem" when analyzing innovations. They showed how Apple, Google, and Microsoft use external ecosystems for service innovation and how the locus of value creation shifts from inside the organization to outside, often enabled by **platforms in ecosystems**.

When innovation is viewed as a platform, value is created through collaboration among multiple actors (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). The core of the platform view is the shift from resource control to **resource orchestration**, from internal optimization to **external interaction**, and from a focus on customer value to a focus on **ecosystem value** (Marshall W. van Alstyne, Geoffrey G. Parker, & Sangeet Paul Choudary, 2016). Thus, the platform view of innovation goes beyond individual innovations to facilitate a range of innovation efforts (Tronvoll & Edvardsson, 2020).

The question is how hospitals **configure and apply social media platforms** to orchestrate collaboration among multiple actors to achieve service innovation. In a study, we compared the Facebook presence of **German and U.S. hospitals**.

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Results of Comparison

Table 1 provides information on the selected hospitals and the data collected from each hospital's **self-hosted Facebook pages**.

Hospital name	Number of posts
Capio Mathilden Hospital Büdingen	53
Marien Hospital Papenburg Aschendorf gGmbH	71
Psychosomatische Klinik Windach	43
Schmerzklinik Kiel	67
Märkische Kliniken	255
Krankenhaus Maria Hilf GmbH	57
Klinikum Mittelbaden	58
Kliniken St. Elisabeth	136
Katholisches Klinikum Essen	518
	1,258
Mad River Community Hospital	84
Children's Hospital New Orleans	311
The Queen's Medical Center Hawaii	46
VA Central Iowa Health Care System	216
North Big Horn Hospital District Wyoming	127
Moses Taylor Hospital	13
Mercy Medical Center Baltimore	187
Holland Hospital Michigan	268
Greenview Regional Hospital Kentucky	369
	1,621

Table 1: Sample characteristics.

Hospitals shared a total of **2,879 posts** on their Facebook pages. Posts were analyzed using a coding system consisting of three main categories: **(1) call to action, (2) type of post, and (3) content of post**.

A key finding of the study is that **calls to action** prompting Facebook users to respond (e.g., sharing experiences) were hardly used in both countries. Of the total of 1,251 German posts studied, seven contained a call to action. Among the 1,621 U.S. posts, twelve did. Hospitals thus prefer **unidirectional communication** with different audiences on Facebook, leaving opportunities to share resources and promote service innovation untapped.

Regarding the **type of posts** (Figure 1), both countries differed significantly in the subcategories of event. Significant differences were also found in the **content of posts** (Figure 2): self-promotion, disease, third-party advertising, healthy lifestyle, and health policy).

Overall, the results suggest that **German hospitals** use Facebook primarily for **advertising and information purposes**, whereas **U.S. hospitals** entertain and educate their users about health topics.

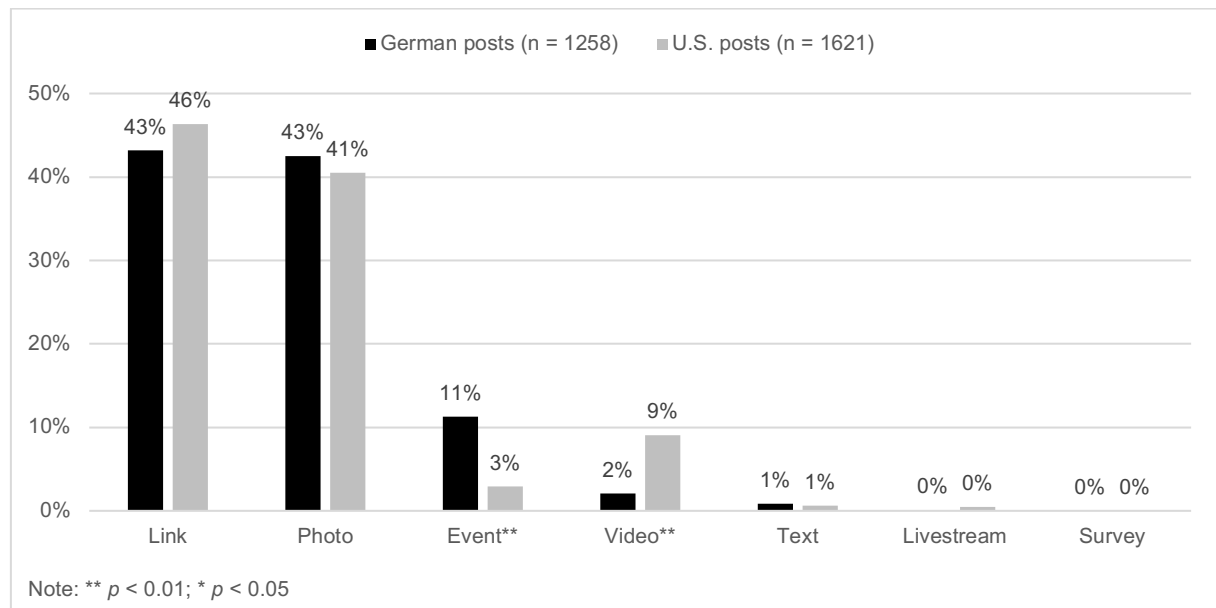


Figure 1: Frequency distribution of type of Facebook posts in percent.

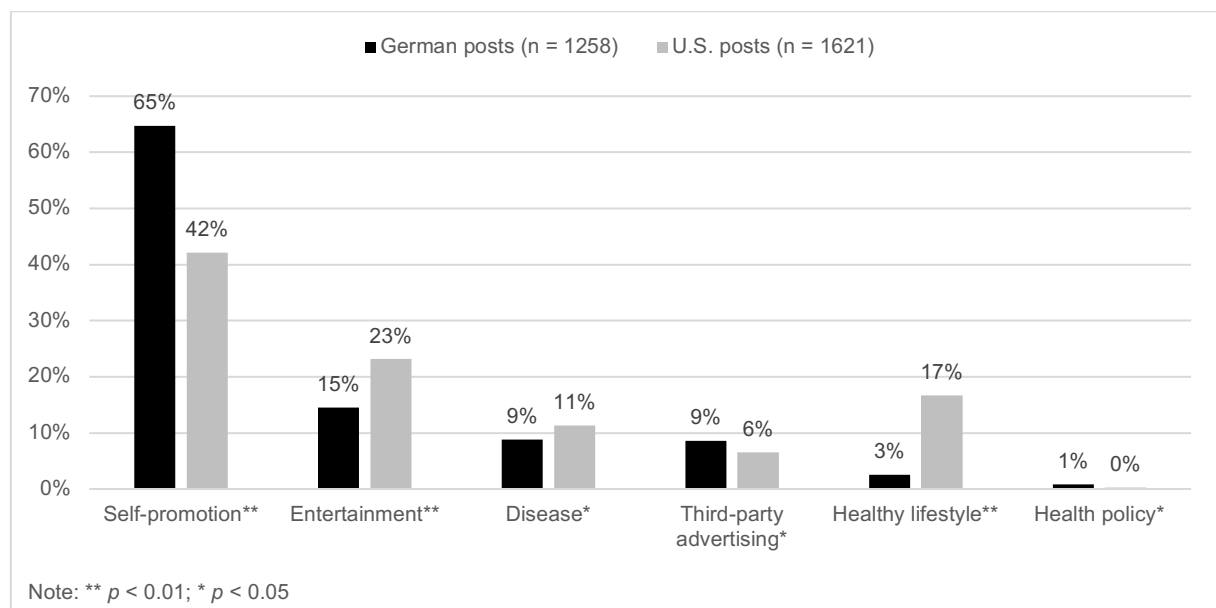


Figure 2: Frequency distribution of content of Facebook posts in percent.

To put it in a nutshell:

1. The use of **social media** can drive service innovation.
2. Social media platforms are **service platforms**.
3. Service platforms **facilitate the exchange of actors and resources** and therefore serve as a venue for service innovation.
4. A **platform perspective on innovation** emphasizes resource orchestration, external interaction, and ecosystem value.
5. Both German and U.S. hospitals use Facebook primarily for unidirectional communication, **leaving opportunities for service innovation untapped**.
6. While German hospitals primarily **inform and advertise**, U.S. hospitals **entertain and educate** about health topics.

References

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The following bachelor thesis was written in conjunction with this article: *Fitzgerald, L. (2018), "Nutzung von Facebook. Ein empirischer Vergleich deutscher und US-amerikanischer Krankenhäuser", unpublished bachelor thesis under the supervision of Ms. Bettina Kriegl, Ingolstadt University of Applied Sciences*. The objectives, the processing as well as the evaluation and interpretation of the results were conducted under the scientific guidance of the supervisor.