

# Exploring the Usage of Social Media to Increase Awareness of End-of-Life Care for Korean American Communities: A Case Report

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Received: November 8, 2022    Accepted: February 21, 2023    Published: March 5, 2023

doi:10.5296/ijsw.v10i1.20780    URL: <https://doi.org/10.5296/ijsw.v10i1.20780>

## Abstract

**Summary:** Korean American older adults often lack understanding of end-of-life care, particularly advance care planning and hospice. Somang Society is a nonprofit organization in the U.S. serving Korean American older adults and their family caregivers to promote healthy aging, dignity in later life, and a meaningful death. We aimed to analyze education and outreach efforts of Somang Society to increase awareness among Korean Americans on the importance of end-of-life care. This case report assesses the metrics and performance analytics of Somang Society's YouTube channel and videos uploaded from January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019 to September 31<sup>th</sup>, 2021, as well as GIS data regarding their membership.

**Findings:** Findings of this report indicate that YouTube may be a feasible method to broaden outreach efforts to increase education and awareness on end-of-life care planning in the Korean American community. Particularly, a multi-messaging mobile application helped distribute useful information between Korean Americans.

**Applications:** Community-based organizations may leverage social media platforms to increase education and awareness efforts targeting underserved populations, including culturally and linguistically diverse groups.

**Keywords:** Digital technologies, advance care planning, dementia care, Korean older adults

## 1. Introduction

Koreans represent the fifth largest ethnic group, accounting for 9 million or 9% of Asians Americans (Budiman & Ruiz, 2021). However, Korean Americans often experience disparities in health resources and challenges in gaining knowledge and accessing existing resources (New American Economy Research Fund, 2021). In particular, the older populations of this ethnic group are considered a vulnerable group due to their lower levels of acculturation and limited English fluency, compared to younger Koreans who are likely to have a higher educational background and familiarity with the culture and systems in the U.S. (Jang et al., 2007). Such low levels of acculturation affect Korean American older adults' knowledge of health information and likelihood of engaging in end-of-life care planning, such as completing advanced directives, long-term care planning, and hospice care (Dobbs et al., 2015; Kwak & Salmon, 2007; Rhee & Jang, 2020).

Research highlights that these older adults are not only less likely to discuss their end-of-life care and treatment options with their family members (Kwak & Salmon, 2007), but also less likely to complete their living will (Ko & Berkman, 2012) or advanced directives (Ko & Lee, 2010). Also, there are a limited number of culturally and linguistically tailored resources available to Korean American older adults to provide guidance in their end-of-life care (Dobbs et al., 2015). The lack of knowledge on end-of-life care among Korean American older adults as well as few existing culturally tailored resources to address this deficiency suggests added importance to outreach this group to ensure that their wishes for end-of-life care, such as preference to die at home, are upheld (Kwak & Salmon, 2007). Researchers (e.g., Dobbs et al., 2015; Rhee & Jang, 2020) explain that cultural factors, such as time spent in the U.S. and levels of acculturation, English proficiency, and beliefs against speaking

about death are important considerations when helping Korean Americans complete advanced directives. Therefore, there is a need to provide culturally appropriate and accessible opportunities for Korean American older adults to increase their awareness of advanced directives (Dobbs et al., 2015; Rhee & Jang, 2020).

Furthermore, the absence or reluctance of end-of-life care among Korean Americans has evidenced a relationship with a lack of dementia education (Kwak & Haley, 2005). As dementia is a chronic disease which increasingly limits the capacity of individuals to be involved in their medical decision making and shared decision making occurring early in the disease trajectory, end-of-life care planning can be very critical for quality dementia care (Denning et al., 2019, Schultz et al., 2020). Yet, underrepresented ethnic groups may have greater stigma towards dementia which can influence comfort levels in discussing advance care planning or even death (Johnson et al., 2008). Such trends emphasize a need to increase Korean Americans' awareness of end-of-life care planning, as well as dementia education.

### *1.1 Partner Organization*

Somang Society, a nonprofit organization established in 2007, is located in Southern California in the U.S. and committed to promoting healthy aging, dignity in later life, and education on advance healthcare directives and long-term care planning among Korean American older adults and their family caregivers. They also facilitate support programs for people with dementia and bereavement counseling, and lead campaigns such as body donation. As experienced by many nonprofits and social service agencies, the COVID-19 pandemic limited Somang Society's reach and ability to promote awareness among this community and resulted in a pivot to adapt technology (e.g., Zoom, YouTube) to mitigate these barriers. This organization created their YouTube channel in June 2015 but focused efforts towards regularly managing the channel in early 2019. As the use of video conferencing and online-based education has increased, it was critical to examine how interactive technologies (i.e., social media) have been used in a social agency and the effectiveness of these methods on the population served (Budd et al., 2020). Therefore, in partnership with Somang Society, we aimed to assess their YouTube channel analytics and Geographic Information System (GIS) data. During the time of the study, the organization focused on education regarding end-of-life care, dementia education, and COVID-19 related information and resources. Therefore, we examined if and how YouTube played a role to potentially increase awareness of such topics. Not only does this case report provide a snapshot of this organization's efforts, but it also may inform strategies for other community organizations aiming to support the Korean American community or other hard-to-reach populations.

## **2. Methods**

We obtained data from the organization's YouTube channel analytics to examine metrics and performance reports from January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019 to September 31<sup>th</sup>, 2021. YouTube analytics provide information of videos published, the number of shares, views, and subscribers, and the average view duration. The analytics also provides specific information of the viewers' geographic areas, playback locations, sharing services, subscription sources, and subtitles. In

this case report, we present the overall social media usage of this organization by presenting subscription sources, video trends, and sharing services. Using a GIS, we constructed geodatabase for its members to illustrate the organization's outreach across the country.

This case report does not contribute to generalizable knowledge, and findings of this report focus on a single organization without benefits to individuals; thus, it received an exception determination from the University of Texas at Arlington Institutional Review Board.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1 Social Media Usage

**Subscription source.** Somang Society YouTube channel had 875 subscribers as of September 31<sup>st</sup>, 2021. Prior to 2019, the channel had 359 subscribers. The source that resulted in the most subscribers was the YouTube watch page (i.e., using the subscribe button on an individual video page) (66.4%), followed by YouTube search (i.e., using the subscribe button after searching for the channel) (24.3%).

**Video trends.** Out of 136 videos, 44 were published in 2019, 52 in 2020, and 40 from January through September in 2021. The majority of the videos were recorded in Korean, and subtitles were not used in 98.1% of the total views garnered (n = 106,150).

We categorized videos by end-of-life (e.g., end-of-life care planning, body donations, etc.), dementia (e.g., disease-related information, caregiving, etc.), COVID-19 (e.g., vaccinations, etc.), and general topics (e.g., the organization newsletters, holiday greetings, etc.). While 63 videos of general topics were published during the data period, 43 videos of end-of-life related topics, 19 videos of dementia, and 11 videos of COVID-19 were published. The average numbers of views as well as the shares per video were the greatest for end-of-life related topics. Specifically, three mostly viewed videos were two videos of a series regarding bereavement and one video about the COVID-19 vaccination. In addition, videos were viewed in various locations, including the U.S. (68.2%), South Korea (21.2%), and other countries (e.g., Canada, Ireland, Japan, etc.).

**Sharing service.** Somang Society YouTube videos received 1,740 shares during the collected data period. The videos were shared mostly via KakaoTalk (i.e., a multi-messaging mobile application) (67.5%) followed by copy to clipboard (15.6%), text message (2.4%), and Facebook (2.1%). The most popular playback location, or where the individual watched the video, was the YouTube watch page (i.e., individual video pages on YouTube.com) (96.6%), indicating that the videos were most likely viewed as they were shared by someone else.

#### 3.2 Interactive Mapping

Figure 1 presents the locations of Somang Society members in the U.S. Using a GIS, we constructed geodatabase for its members to illustrate the organization's outreach across the country. The majority of the members reside in Southern California (n=1,562), followed by New York (n=43), San Francisco Bay (n=34), Chicago and Sacramento (n=15), Phoenix (n=9), Seattle (n=8), as well as Houston, Philadelphia, Washington, and Atlanta (n=5). The organization had three or less members in 21 additional cities throughout the country,

including Hawaii, Dallas/Fort Worth, Cleveland, and Baltimore.

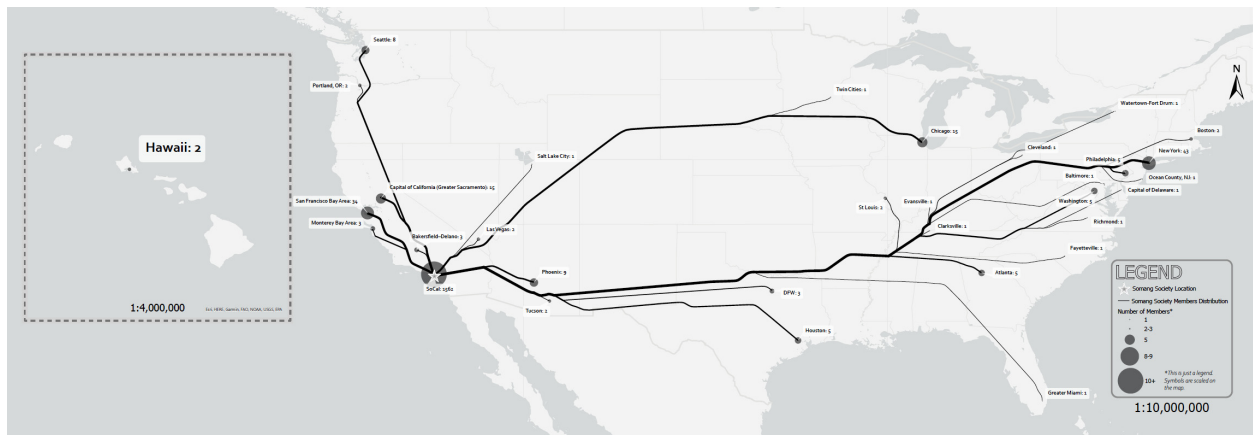


Figure 1. Somang Society Member Distribution

*Note.* The digital map is available on ArcGIS online (<https://arcg.is/1mrrn81>) or on Google Maps at <https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=1y1lRmPF8cB2hwRG1pRy0fy1C91csqeqFq&u sp=sharing>

#### 4. Discussion

Somang Organization outreaches Korean American older adults and their family caregivers to share awareness on healthy aging and end-of-life topics; an area of health literacy that has historically lacked culturally and linguistically tailored information. Korean Americans are less likely to complete advanced directives and to be aware of what end-of-life care provides (Dobbs et al., 2015; Park & Hendrix, 2018). Findings from this report suggest that the targeted group showed an interest in these topics as reflected in the most viewed and shared videos published by this organization. Somang reports in April 2022 that 14,638 Korean American older adults have filed a living will and advance healthcare directive. In addition, as a result of the organization’s campaign to increase the awareness of a meaningful death, among Korean Americans, 2,003 people have pledged to donate their body as of April 2022.

Metrics and performance reports from the Somang Society’s YouTube channel suggest several important points. First, the organization has the potential to impact people with different language backgrounds. Videos were viewed in countries outside of the U.S., including South Korea and others. Per the results, most of the videos were recorded in Korean; however, because YouTube offers the subtitle option, these videos could also benefit second-generation Korean Americans who have limited proficiency in Korean but share a similar cultural background.

Secondly, the analytic results revealed more individuals watched or shared videos over time and views increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. A trend reflected in the current literature stating that during COVID-19, more individuals watched videos online than in

previous years (Ramírez et al., 2020). Regardless of lifted social distancing mandates due to COVID-19, this method of service delivery has been shown to increase access for historically hard-to-reach populations, including ethnic minorities (Moorehead et al., 2013), and increase access to medical knowledge and the latest research in the field (Farsi, 2021). Therefore, nonprofits and social service agencies aiming to share educational information and expand their scope of impact beyond their local area may consider using YouTube videos and other social media platforms to achieve these objectives.

Lastly, playback location results revealed that KakaoTalk was the platform most often utilized when users found a particular video interesting and wanted to share with others. KakaoTalk is a free mobile messaging app available on mobile and desktop platforms and includes free calls and messages, as well as ability to share photos, videos, voice messages, location, and URL links. Lee et al. (2017) found that 62% of Asian family caregivers used social media applications and most caregivers of people with dementia used smartphones verses computers. Due to the popularity of this social media platform, several studies have successfully utilized KakaoTalk in their research efforts when targeting the Korean population or delivering interventions to this ethnic group (Choi et al., 2021; Fauth et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2020). With advantages of social media, organizations should build an online-based community for Korean aging communities to help them gain necessary knowledge and use KakaoTalk further to grow new relationships with those living without community-based supports.

## **5. Implications for Social Work**

Findings of this study suggest nonprofits and social services agencies may improve their scope of outreach for hard-to-reach populations by social media platforms. However, the use of social media to increase knowledge and awareness warrants ethical considerations and this is especially relevant to the field of social work, as we are guided by the NASW code of ethics. Namely, there is a need to ensure information shared across social media platforms is credible and provides accurate information (Liu et al., 2019; Stellefson et al., 2014). There is a prevalence of misinformation available through online technologies which may only continue with the growing use of online technologies, indicating a need to educate individuals on how to evaluate the credibility of information found online (Stellefson et al., 2014). Social workers may play an important role to address this need, advocate for vulnerable populations who have limited resources in the community and empower them in their ability to discern inaccurate online information. Furthermore, nonprofits should be responsible for the credibility of the information prior to sharing or publishing on social media.

In addition, GIS technologies represent a potential avenue for the organizations to identify their targeted populations in their service areas. Furthermore, GIS technologies provide population-level data which help the organization leaders understand the demographics in each neighborhood and improve outreach efforts (Wang et al., 2020). However, these technologies require technical knowledge. We suggest the organizations may mitigate costs and needs for technical expertise through community-academic partnerships and consider student intern programs to overcome this obstacle.

Our society is increasingly technology driven, which influences the field of social work.

However, there is little evidence reporting on how social media is implemented in practice, the effectiveness of this method, or how content is produced (Andersen et al, 2022). To enhance the effectiveness and implementation strategies for using technology in the field of social work, we encourage greater research to examine processes for delivering online information, strategies implemented to increase the scope and reach of information to targeted populations. Further studies may evaluate content, methodologies, and outcomes associated with the use of social media and other online technologies.

### **Details of Competing Interests and Other Declarations**

There are no competing interests to declare.

### **Acknowledgements**

We appreciate Somang Society, especially the founder of the organization, Ms. Boonja Yoo who provided support for the conduct of this case study.

### **Funding Acknowledgements**

This work was built upon work funded by Alzheimer's Association AARG-NTF-20-678171 (Lee, K.).

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