Assessing the Adoption and Use of Social Media for Health Practice among Healthcare Professionals in Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Background: The use of social media for personal and organisational communication has grown exponentially in the past few years. For health practitioners, social media has become significant in advancing their practice.

Objectives: The study's crux is to explore the perspectives of health practitioners in Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria, regarding the adoption and use of social media in their field.

Methodology: The researchers adopted a qualitative approach in this study. 20 interviews were conducted while a structured interview guide was used as the instrument for data collection. Data was presented using the narrative format.

Results: Social media is a valuable tool for sharing knowledge, building professional connections, and fostering personal growth. Additionally, it can be utilised to advocate for health-related matters, stay informed on the latest developments, maintain communication

with patients and conduct research. Findings also indicate that the use of social media for health awareness and practice is challenged by time, breach of patient confidentiality, abuse of practitioner-patient relationships, lack of clear social media policy framework, poor network, shortage of power supply, high cost of data and modern communication facilities.

Unique Contribution: The study establishes that health practitioners in Jos, Plateau State Nigeria appreciate the usefulness of social media to their practice. The respondents, however, identified some challenges in the use of social media for professional engagements.

Conclusion: The study concludes that social media is significant to health practitioners in enhancing their services; it is also constrained by poor infrastructural facilities and breach of patient confidentiality, among others.

Recommendation: Those in charge of health institutions in Nigeria should organise workshops and seminars to improve understanding, skills and utilisation of social media in the country's healthcare settings. The government is also required to provide basic infrastructure and policies that support the use of social media for health practice in the country.

Keywords: Adoption; Health; Professionals; Medical practice; Social media; Use

Introduction

For some years now, remarkable progress has been made in communication technology. The majority of nations and territories today have complete global connectivity due to the rapid advancement of technological knowledge. With only a click or finger swipe, one may instantly connect with thousands of individuals worldwide, obtain knowledge, impact others, and spread novel discoveries and concepts. One such innovation in the communication industry is social media. Laranjo et al. (2015) argue that social media platforms serve as an essential means of communication, facilitating the creation and dissemination of messages to individuals worldwide via the World Wide Web, and it is useful for offering health policy advice to governments (Bou-Karroum et al., 2017). For instance, according to research from the Pew Research Centre (2022), 82% of individuals in the United States of America (USA) utilise Internet resources to obtain information on a variety of topics. Ferman-katz and Matsa (2022) found that 51% of American people regularly obtain their news from internet-connected devices, a percentage that had previously stood at 60% in 2020. This suggests that the most popular way to get information on different issues in the United States these days is through digital media.

Moreover, data in 2024 in India indicates that more than 820 million are active Internet users, and the country's population represents one of the fastest-growing people in social media use (Roy, 2024). About 115 million Russians use social media for a variety of purposes, and eight out of ten of them use these platforms as their main source of news (Statista, 2023). Furthermore, statistics from South Africa show that around 43.48.00 million people live there and that 25.80 million of them use social media regularly (South African Population, 2023). Thus, it is crucial to emphasise that social media tools provide both groups and individuals

with the ability to exchange information on various matters and shape their perspectives accordingly. Overtime, it has emerged as one of the most popular platforms for global communication.

In health, social media is employed to spread knowledge about various ailments (Almaiman et al, 2015). In the view of Dubey et al (2016), social media platforms also serve as information channels for sharing health-related information and perspectives. According to Mohammed et al. (2021), health educators and students in Saudi Arabia have been utilising social media to disseminate health-related information in an effort to inform and increase awareness of various health conditions among those in their immediate vicinity. Goldstein et al (2013) agree that individuals and healthcare professionals are increasingly turning to social media platforms and websites for health-related information and assistance. Also, according to Kubheka (2017) editorial, South African nurses and other health professionals are embracing the use of social media to network with organisations and professionals worldwide and to support health education.

Nigeria has many active social media users who utilise the platform to share and disseminate information on various topics, including health. According to Statista's report in January 2023, there were 31.6 million active social media users in the country. For example, a study carried out by Oladapo et al. (2021) indicates that health practitioners in Nigeria actively engage with social media to share health-related information.

Previous research conducted in other locations has demonstrated that health professionals utilise social media platforms to share and disseminate health information, leading to improved outcomes in the field of healthcare (Shaw et al., 2017). Additionally, the effective utilisation of social media tools has significantly mitigated challenges encountered in physical medical settings (Hazzam & Lahrech, 2018). Alkhateeb et al. (2011) found that pharmacists have extensively employed social media tools to enhance their professional outcomes.

The foregoing shows that social media platforms have significantly changed the communication paradigm within various professions, including health. Utilising these tools, medical professionals can effectively generate and distribute health messages much faster than traditional medical formations. This practice ultimately contributes to the attainment of enhanced and expedited outcomes.

Despite the extensive research conducted by scholars such as Lapointe et al. (2014), Mohammed et al. (2021), Ghahramani et al. (2022), and Tarabishi et al. (2021) and others in the field of social media and health awareness campaigns, there is still much work to do in this area. For instance, Lapointe et al. (2014) study focused on the collaborative use of social media to create health awareness, while Mohammed et al. (2021) examined the utilisation of social media for health awareness among health educators and students in Saudi Arabia. Ghahramani et al. (2022) explored the potential of social media in health promotion beyond creating awareness through an integrative review. Tarabishi et al. (2021) dwelled on the role of social media in enhancing health awareness among university youth. However,

this study aimed to bridge the gap in knowledge by investigating the adoption and use of social media for health practice among healthcare practitioners in Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives are to:

i.   Explore the motivations behind healthcare practitioners' utilisation of social media for health purposes.

ii. Identify the factors hindering social media use for health practice among healthcare professional

Conceptual Clarifications

Social Media

Social media are online resources and technologies facilitating participation, collaboration and information sharing (Newson et al., 2008, cited in Igbashangev et al., 2023). This implies that social media is a vast array of web-based and mobile services that enable users to engage in online discussions, add original content, and become part of online communities. In the view of Dollarhide (2023), social media encompasses a wide range of internet-based and mobile services such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, and YouTube, among others, that enable users to engage in online exchange, contribute, or participate in online communities. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define social media as a collection of internet-based applications that build upon the principles and technology of Web 2.0, facilitating the creation and exchange of user-generated content. Lutkevich and Wigmore (2023) support this notion, stating that social media is a comprehensive term encompassing software tools enabling the creation and sharing of user-generated content. Manning (2014) defines social media as an online platform where individuals with shared interests can convene to share thoughts, comments, and opinions. Manning further characterises social media as a novel realm of unpaid media generated by individuals and companies on the internet. Nations (2021) refers to social media as the era of instantaneous communication among friends, families, associates and other like minds.

Healthcare Practitioners

Health workers are people whose job is to protect and improve the health of their communities (World Health Organisation, 2023). This implies that they are people who are paid to look after the health of others. Thus, healthcare workers contribute significantly to the healthcare systems (Caring Support, 2023). PubMed Central (2024) explains that health professionals are trained individuals who deliver care and services to the sick and ailing either directly as doctors and nurses or indirectly as aides, helpers, laboratory technicians, or even medical waste handlers. Laughlin et al. (2021) concur that health practitioners are people who work in hospitals, clinics, and other designated areas, providing health services to people who are sick or giving advice on how to live a healthy lifestyle. They are individuals

who perform duties in healthcare or social care settings, including hospitals, clinics, among others (Health Protection Surveillance Centre, 2023).

Health Awareness and its Significance

Health awareness involves disseminating information to individuals in order to influence their behaviour, such as getting vaccinated, ensuring the vaccination of their family members and pets, practising regular hand washing, engaging in safe sex, and adopting proper food hygiene practices (National Institute for Communication Disease, 2023). It is defined as the general understanding and knowledge about health, healthcare services, health needs, various ailments, and their preventive measures (IGI Global, 2023). In essence, health awareness encompasses knowledge about the health conditions affecting both humans and animals, as well as strategies for preventing, managing, and treating such diseases. As stated by the Communication Strategic Group (2023), health awareness serves as a means to educate individuals and communities about the risks and systems associated with complex health issues. This implies that health awareness serves as a standard by which people learn to act in a manner that promotes, maintains, or restores good health.

Knowing one's health status is crucial for the smooth functioning of society. Health Communication Group (2023) opines that health practitioners can utilise health awareness to update the public about various health conditions. By promoting health awareness, diseases can be minimised, controlled, and prevented. This signifies that individuals are empowered to take charge of their health. Tsai et al. (2021) further support the notion that increasing health awareness in health promotion is an effective and less stigmatised approach to encourage help-seeking behaviours and enhance overall well-being. Moreover, it is essential as it contributes to extending life, as emphasised by Birmingham City School of Health Sciences (2023).

Social Media and Health Awareness

The dissemination of health information has been greatly influenced by online communication platforms, including social media, according to Stellefson et al. (2020). Randeree (2009) supports this claim, stating that social media is now utilised to discuss health issues outside healthcare professionals' workplaces. Social media provides an efficient, user-friendly approach to attracting a large audience and engaging with health-related messages, as noted by Jane et al. (2018). Sick individuals and their families use social media platforms to share their experiences, findings, and tutorials with others who have similar health complications, creating forums for knowledge discovery and discussion (Randeree, 2009). Plactkett (2020) argues that social media interventions in spreading health-related information may lead to earlier detection of ailments and change human behaviour by providing social support and emphasising the cost of health matters. Similarly, Greene et al. (2010) found that Facebook communities devoted to diabetes management include spontaneous input of diabetes management techniques and responses to the information requested by other users. Social media has enormous potential to exchange information

related to health behaviours, prevention, treatment, management, and care of diseases (Alanzi & Al-Yami, 2019; Smith & Denali, 2014).

Health educators utilise social media platforms to establish support groups, advance health equity among disadvantaged populations, communicate with partners, and rectify misinformation. Furthermore, social media is now being employed to address health-related issues beyond the confines of healthcare professionals' workplaces, and it is one of the cheapest ways to reach out to many people (Campbell et al., 2016). This medium offers efficient, widespread, and user-friendly methods to attract many participants and exhibit a certain level of involvement with health-related messages (Jane et al., 2018). Additionally, social media serves as a valuable source of information on public health topics (White & Dorman, 2001; Welch, et al, 2016).

Several studies have demonstrated the positive impact of social media on public health solutions (Al-Dmour et al., 2020). This impact is reflected in people's attitude towards maintaining health habits, as advanced by research conducted by Appel et al. (2020), Naslund et al. (2020), and Webb et al. (2010). Notably, there are over 620 Facebook groups dedicated to breast cancer, with a total membership of 1 090 397. Of these groups, 46.7% were created to support patients and caregivers (Bender et al., 2011). Initial evidence suggests that social media messages can effectively promote health behaviour change (Maher et al., 2016). Health promotion campaigns that utilise social media can increase awareness of health issues and encourage open discussion among social media users (Al-Dmour et al., 2020).

Furthermore, a narrative review of social media and its effect on public health was the subject of research by Gaidane and Kanchan (n.d.). The methodology used involved looking through databases and websites for current information on social media and raising health awareness, as well as searching relevant literature. According to the study, social media is a new tool that people can use to improve public health. It also affects the patient-physician relationship, public confidence in the system, and the possibility of legal action. Additionally, social media poses challenges for several health-related fields, inclusion health interventions, behaviour modification and promotion, disease outbreak surveillance, and health research, to mention but a few.

In the same vein, the main focus of the study by Ghahramani et al. (2022) was an integrative review of the potential of social media in health promotion beyond raising awareness. The original papers published between January 2010 and April 2022, as well as the qualitative research strategy review, were consulted by the researchers. Out of all the papers evaluated, 10(55.5%) used quantitative methods, five (27.7%) used mixed methods, and three (16.6%) used qualitative methods, according to the study. The research also found that the most popular social media sites influencing people's attitudes toward health were Facebook and YouTube. Also, more people were using Instagram and Twitter to get health-related information.

Similarly, Saxena (2020), who investigated the "role of social media in health communication and its impact on society", established that sharing healthcare information on social media sites increases publicity. The study, which adopted the survey research method further, found

that disseminating health-related messages on social media is done without much effort, but, still, it is not reliable.

Also, Kubheka et al. (2020) assessed "Social Media Health Promotion in South Africa: Opportunities and Challenges". Secondary sources were utilised to collect data for the study. The results indicated that, in South Africa, social media has the potential to be a useful instrument for health awareness creation. Due to its low cost, capacity for virtual communities, and ease of use, which removes geographical barriers, social media was also discovered to offer the chance to scale health promotion programmes. Findings, in addition, showed that social media enables real-time communication between different administrative levels and health sector stakeholders in the country, as well as enables information to travel quickly and far, regardless of how reliable the source of information may be. The study, therefore, recommended that socio-economic factors unique to each nation in South Africa should be considered as they may have unforeseen consequences regarding the digital divide, data costs, and disparities in health literacy.

Correspondingly, a study titled "Social Media Use as Health Awareness Tool: A Study among Healthcare Practitioners" was carried out by Majali et al. (2021). The main goal of the research was to find a conceptual framework for social media adoption by Malaysian health practitioners as a means of promoting health platforms in Malaysia. The unified theory of acceptance and use of technology (UTAUT) was applied in the study, and a qualitative research methodology was used to gather information. The results demonstrated that healthcare practitioners in Malaysia use social media for health issues on a large scale. The researchers, thus, suggested that other relevant bodies and authorities, in addition to healthcare professionals, should also regularly use social media for health awareness campaigns to inform the public about the range of health issues that exist in the country.

Challenges to the Use of Social Media for Health Awareness: An Overview

Despite the numerous benefits mentioned above, social media users face a number of difficulties, including lack of trustworthiness, privacy and confidentiality issues, patients' and users' ignorance of the potential risks of disclosing health information, incorrect medical advice, unfavourable health outcomes, unhealthy health attitudes, and too much information to deal with (Naseri & Shwikhtaheri, 2015). Furthermore, social media can make patients reluctant to see medical professionals (Grajales et al., 2014). In their study, Ghalavand et al. (2020) established the primary obstacles to health knowledge management on social media are physicians' reluctance to engage with the public, disregard for medical ethics, users' privacy concerns, and inability to handle negative comments. Peck (2014) asserts that posting unprofessional material on social media that has the potential to mislead users is a significant risk connected with using these platforms. Bernhardt et al. (2014) corroborate that social media content can leave a lasting first impression by revealing detailed information about a person's personality, values and priorities.

Also, information from Digitalis Medical (2022) identified these obstacles to include: Responding to negative reviews on social media platforms, managing social media content, Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) compliance, cyber-bullying

and reputational damage. Others are time-consuming, low-quality information, organisational policies, saturation, lack of patient confidentiality and privacy, distraction and ignorance of potential risks (Digitalis Medical, 2022). Moorhead et al. (2013) further contend that the primary drawback of health information obtained from social media and other online platforms is its poor quality and dependability. The people who circulate health-related messages on social media sites are often unknown or are identified by limited information (Pirraglia & Kravitz, 2012). Ikpi et al. (2022) view this challenge regarding patient-caregiver social media relationship abuse. They opine that there is concern that if health practitioners and patients heavily rely on social media for care, it may lead to blurred boundaries in their relationships.

Theoretical Underpinning

The study is guided by the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), formulated by Venkatesh, Michael, Gordon and Fred in 2003. The theory suggests that the actual use of technology is determined by behavioural intention. The perceived likelihood of adopting the technology is dependent on the direct effect of four key constructs, namely performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, and facilitating conditions that influence the intention to use new technology. However, of relevance to this study are the *performance expectations* and *social influence*. The *performance expectation* is defined as the degree to which an individual believes that using the system will help him or her attain gains in job performance, while *social influence* refers to the level in which an individual perceives that important others believe he or she should use the new system.

However, UTAUT is criticised for concerns about the theory reaching its limits without sufficient replication and potential misspecifications in its applications. Additionally, there are observations that while important variables have been included in UTAUT, the theory lacks faithful replication of its original specification, hindering a true assessment of its effects. Critics argue that the theory may not be as robust as perceived due to these issues, limiting opportunities for new knowledge creation in the field of technology adoption (Blut et al., 2022 & Samartha et al., 2022). Despite the criticism of the theory, this theory is considered significant in this study due to the fact that an individual chooses to adopt technology in doing his or her job because technology is important to achieving results. In this case, health professionals use social media technology to reach out to the public with health-related information as well as get more information on how their discipline is practised via social media technology. UTAUT was applied by Venkatesh et al. (2003) in a study that found that it accounted for 70% of the variance in behavioural intention to use (BI) and about 50% in actual use. Majali et al (2021) equally found UTAUT is relevant in a study on social media and health awareness in Malaysia.

Methodology

The study adopted the qualitative research methodology. Phandari (2020) defines qualitative research as gathering and evaluating non-numerical data to comprehend ideas, viewpoints, or experiences. It is used to gather detailed information about a research issue. Further, an in-depth interview was used. An in-depth interview is a face-to-face method of questioning an

interviewee to get answers. It is a qualitative research method where a few respondents are interviewed in-depth one-on-one to learn about their viewpoints on a specific phenomenon (Boyce, 2006). This implies that an in-depth interview deals with a small number of people, but it is a valuable method for gathering detailed and high-quality data.

The study population consisted of doctors, nurses, and pharmacists, who were selected randomly across healthcare facilities in Jos, the capital of Plateau State, Nigeria. A total of 20 interviews were conducted. The argument of few mummers in qualitative studies such as interviews is advanced by scholars such as Sandelowski, Voils and Knafl (2009) cited in Vasileiou et al. (2018), and Morse (2000), who advocated that the more usable data are collected from each person, the fewer participants are needed. This stresses the point of saturation in qualitative data collection. The interview guide was used as an instrument of data collection. Further, each interviewee was allotted a time frame of about 15-20 minutes to answer the questions during the interview session.

Additionally, the study data presentation and analysis method was the narrative approach. This technique, which focuses on using people's stories and experiences to address research objectives, is applied to analyse content from various sources, including respondents' interviews (Valcheva, 2017). Accordingly, the narrative method of data analysis was deemed appropriate for this study since it entails reformulating the stories that interviewees have shared while considering the unique circumstances of each case and the experiences of each interviewee.

Concerning ethical consideration, due to the aim of the study, the researchers approached the participants and obtained their approval assuring them the data collected would be used according to international best practice.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Twenty participants were selected for this study, out of which four declined citing tight schedules as reason. The data presentation is done according to the research objectives.

Research Objective One: Explore the Motivations Behind their Utilisation of Social Media for Health Purposes. The participants acknowledged the fact that social media has become significant in medical practice. The participants disclosed that they use various social media platforms such as blog, X, Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube, among others. They use social media to build relationships with patients, connect with colleagues within and outside the country, research and self-improvement at a very cheap The participants also acknowledged that social media use social media to educate and enlighten health seekers and to criticise government health policies and programmes. But his is not without its challenges. For instance, one of the respondents opines that:

"The use of social media to access information on health issues is very cheap, and it offers a lot of opportunities for us, the health practitioners. We reach out to many patients through social media platforms with our health messages, offer opportunities to educate and enlighten, and promote our practice, among other benefits".

Another participant corroborates the above statement by stating that:

"Social media is a good avenue for self-improvement. For example, when the guidelines for the prevention of COVID-19 came out, health professionals and bodies started tweeting and posting them on social media. This gave me knowledge of these preventive measures. Social media platforms are great initiatives, assisting in keeping in touch with what health leaders across the world are doing".

Another participant further affirms that:

"In a physical setting, sometimes I can only attend to between 18-20 patients daily, but the social media has bridged that numerical gap. Through the potentials of the social media, I do reach out to thousands of patients daily. If I had treatment information for patients, I can just go to m WhatsApp, X or Facebook and post it there and many patients benefits from such information".

The above responses are in line with what most of the respondents said. Most of them submitted that social media has made health practice easier.

When another respondent was asked the benefits of social media to his profession, the participant responded that:

"It seems presently, everybody uses the social media for information. So, as a medical personnel, I search for information concerning my field on social media. I go to World Health Organisation and other reputable health institutions social media handles and update my knowledge".

Additionally, "There is this connection between you the health practitioner and your patients. Social media gives you the opportunity to maintain relationships with your patients always. There are some of your patients that you see them once in a month, once in a year. But you can keep in touch with them through social media".

Probing further, another respondent submits that:

"Social media should be used by everyone in my opinion. This is the current mode of communication and getting information on your field. In addition to interacting with patients in the wards and theatres, I make use of social media tools to reach out to members of my communities with health messages".

One more participant avers that:

"As a health practitioner, you are also an educator. I use social media to enlighten and to voice my opinion on health policies and programmes of Nigerian government. I love to talk to authorities on the right policies and programmes to make concerning health. Social media is presently the best tool of communication. You can be anywhere and your voice is heard everywhere".

In all, it could be deduced from the views expressed by the participants above that social media serves as a valuable tool for sharing knowledge, building professional connections, and fostering personal growth. Additionally, it can be utilised to advocate for health-related matters, stay informed on the latest developments, maintain communication with patients and to conduct research.

Research Objective Two: Identify the factors hindering social media use in health practice among healthcare professionals. The participants recognised that the application of social media in health practice is not without challenges. The respondents identified these challenges as including insufficient time, a lot of misinformation on social media, insufficient knowledge to use social media, the risk of violating the confidentiality of the patients, and legal disputes.

Excerpts from the interviewees further corroborate that:

"Time is a big constraint. Also, navigating the various social media platforms is a serious challenge. Even though many people know how to make use of social media nowadays, it's different when you do not know how to use it carefully and effectively to convey health messages to avoid legal or medical issues. Having the time to read a lot of medical posts on social media is a big time challenge".

Another interviewee submits that:

"I heavily rely on social media for many personal advantages that contribute to my professional advancement. Nevertheless, I am usually being careful in utilising it for patients-related issues due to the risk of violating the confidentiality of the patients, which a major unethical practice in the field of medicine. Unauthorised disclosure of a patient's identity or medical history is capable of attraction legal action. As a medical practitioner, I see internet-related tools as tools that easily facilitate breaches of patient secrecy, and I don't want to fall victim of any circumstance".

Also, a participant maintains that:

"It requires a lot of skills to know how to use the constantly evolving social media platforms. They come with a lot of rules and etiquette. Knowing how to write and post the right information is a big time challenge. Challenges such as posting something that should not have done so. The point I am making here is that it is possible to retract a statement you have made, however, once something is out there for retweeting or repurposing, it cannot be undone".

Another interviewee posits that:

"I am an old medical practitioner. I find it very difficult to make use of social media. I don't know how to use it effectively. I really need institutional support in terms of training".

Another respondent concurs that:

"The major challenge of using social media to me is that most of my patients do not have access to Internet-enabled communication facilities. For those in the urban areas, I easily get them through social media, but the ones in rural communities I hardly reach them via social media".

Another participant opines that:

"Based on my interactions with some sick people who have consulted me on my social media platforms, it became clear to me that engaging extensively with patients on social media could lead to unprofessional conduct, particularly in this present day that many people struggle to be professional in communication. Some patients tend to make personal request via the social media and if you are not careful, you could cross the medical communication ethical boundaries".

Another respondent captures the constraint thus:

"Engaging with patients on social media can be both intriguing and risky for the medial personnel. The risk lies in the fact that once the medical practitioner stop the conversation with a patient on social media, he or she does not know what next the patient will do with such information shared between them on social media. If the patient misrepresents the information, which leads to negative outcomes, you the medical person could be in for trouble. That is why I try as much as possible to minimise the information I share or discuss with patients on social media".

Another participant highlights that:

"There is no clear regulatory framework in the Nigerian healthcare industry as to the use of social media for health practice. As a result, many of us rely on personal discretion rather than established laws. There are also the issues of poor network, shortage of electricity, high cost of data and Internet-enabled communication tools. They are very expensive. These are really acting as serious barriers to the use of social media in my practice".

Therefore, it could be inferred from the data on the challenges above that social media use by health practitioners is confronted with man constraints. Thus, some of the respondents observe rstraint in it use for their practice.

Discussion of Findings

The study sought to investigate the reasons for the adoption and use of social media among health practitioners. The researcher put forward a number of questions to the respondents. Findings revealed that social media offers cheap and easy avenues to reach out to a large number of patients. This finding is consistent with that of Campbell et al. (2016), who established that one of the least expensive ways to connect with many people across the world with your medical messages is through social media. The study also established the use of social media for self-development, building relationships with patients and other colleagues, and correcting wrong health information. This finding is in line with an earlier

one by Almaiman et al. (2015). These authors found that X was helping physicians in Saudi Arabia to advance their medical knowledge as well as use it to enhance clinical practice. The finding of the study here also justifies the adoption of the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT). *The performance expectation aspect of this theory explains the degree to which an individual believes that using a* system such as social media will help him or her attain gains in job performance. It was also found that health practitioners use social media to discuss health policies and government programmes. This data supports that of Bou-Karroum et al. (2017), who reported that the use of social media was influencing governments' health policies. This finding implies that consistent use of social media by health practitioners could be regarded as being responsible for people's understanding of health matters, especially in a country like Nigeria. The implication of this result could also be that the knowledge of health professionals in Nigeria concerning their discipline is enhanced via constant and sustained utilisation of social media. It further inferred that the study contributes to knowledge because the findings are helpful to the research community, medical practitioners and the public by understanding how social media is useful in health education and enlightenment.

The study further sought out the challenges to using social media for health awareness and practice among the respondents. The study established that the time factor was a monumental challenge. The respondents also acknowledged the breaching of patients' confidentiality due to the openness of social media as a challenge. This finding agrees with Ghalavand et al. (2020) that reluctance to engage with the public, disregard for medical ethics, users' privacy concerns, and inability to handle negative comments are reasons health professionals restrain their use of social media in their practice.

Another finding indicated the misuse of the patient-healthcare provider relationship. An excerpt from one of the participants supports this: "Based on my interactions with some sick people who have consulted me on my social media platforms, it became clear to me that engaging extensively with patients on social media could lead to unprofessional conduct, particularly in this present day that many people struggle to be professional in communication. Some patients tend to make personal requests via social media, and if you are not careful, you could cross the medical communication ethical boundaries". Ikpi et al. (2022) established in their study that if media practitioners permit themselves to use social media extensively in attending to their patients, the patients or the health professionals may be inclined to sour such a relationship.

Other findings revealed the barriers to include the spread of unsubstantiated medical messages on social media, lack of clear policy and regulatory mechanisms for the use of social media for health practice in Nigeria, regulations, inadequate network coverage, limited access to electricity, expensive data rates and costly internet communication devices. This result is in tandem with that of Pirraglia and Kravitz (2012), who stated that since most of the people who disseminate information on social media are unknown, the information is most often misleading. Kolawole and Isawumi (2018) also corroborated the finding of this study that there are currently no established policies or guidelines governing the use of social media in medical practice within Nigeria.

Conclusion

The focus of the study has been on the adoption and use of social media for health practice among health professionals in Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria. From the findings, the study concluded that social media is useful in terms of knowledge exchange, networking, professional growth and development. Other benefits include promoting health issues, getting new updates, keeping in touch with patients, and using it for research. Conclusion is also drawn that the use of social media for health awareness and practice is challenged by time, beach of patient confidentiality, abuse of practitioner-patient relationships, lack of clear social media policy framework, poor network, shortage of power supply, high cost of data and modern communication facilities.

Recommendations

From the conclusions made, the study suggests that:

1. Those in charge of health institutions in Nigeria should organise workshops and seminars to improve understanding, skills and utilisation of social media in the country's healthcare settings.

2. Government is also required to provide basis infrastructure and policies that support the use of social media for health practice in the country.

Limitations of the Study

The study was limited, given the fact that its focused only on health practitioners in Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria. Also, the study concentrated only on social media, ignoring the mainstream media. Another limitation is that only one research method was employed.

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