Social Media and Reproductive Health Issues Among Healthcare Practitioners In Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study set out to assess the use of social media to create awareness on reproductive health by Jos-based healthcare practitioners. The objectives of the study were to assess the use of social media for awareness creation on reproductive health by Jos-based healthcare practitioners and to investigate the extent of social media use by the healthcare practitioners to create awareness on reproductive health. Other include to ascertain the kind of reproductive health messages the healthcare practitioners access and disseminate through the social media and to find out challenges hindering the use of social media for reproductive health awareness by the healthcare practitioners. The Technology Acceptance Model and Information Overload Theory supported the study. The study employed survey method for obtaining data, while questionnaire was used as an instrument to elicit data from a sample size of 33. The study found among others that social media has become imperative in health discourse, especially as it concerns sharing health information on reproductive health by health professionals. It was concluded that social media has become important in educating the public regarding reproductive health issues. The study recommended among others that health professionals should continue to use the social media to educate and enlighten the public concerning reproductive health.

Keywords: Social Media, Reproductive Health, Healthcare Pactitioners

Introduction

Social media are new forms of media that involve interactive participation. Apuke (2016) affirms that social media have expanded the horizon of communication and made the world smaller and the communication process more rapid. As a new media, social media is a powerful tool for communicating rapidly without intermediary gatekeepers to spread new ideas (Schwab, 2015). Technological changes have facilitated this direction and it represents a prerequisite for changing society (Tarabishi, Eguindy & Manie, 2021). It is a way for people to interact, communicate, and share information. The users, a term used to describe the people that use these sites, create a profile page where they can upload messages, videos, and blogs and link their pages to their friends' pages, creating a social network. Users may also form groups based on common interests and ask their friends to join these groups. This process creates a haven for viral information (Uittenhout, 2017), which can be leveraged to spread positive health behaviour messages. Social media, or social networking, is a configuration of people connected through interactive links that form online communities (Welch et al, 2016).

Since the innovation of this social networking platform, professionals in the health sector across the world have adopted and used it to expand the scope of their practice (Omolola, 2019; Omotayo & Orimolade, 2020; Richter, Muhlestein & Wilks, 2014; Rukavina et al, 2021; Soubra, Hasan & Shaarani, 2022; Srimarut & Techasatian, 2019).

According to the World Health Organisation (2023), health workers are people whose job is to project and improve the health of their communities. 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 (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2021). This 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. It could further means that they are individuals who perform duties in healthcare or social care settings, including hospitals, and clinics, among others.

Reproductive health is a critical aspect of overall well-being, encompassing sexual health, family planning, pregnancy, childbirth, and postnatal care. Knowledge gaps and misconceptions regarding reproductive health persist in many communities in Nigeria, including Jos, the Capital of Plateau State. This can lead to unintended pregnancies, unsafe abortions, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and preventable maternal and child mortality. Healthcare practitioners can leverage on the social media communication technology to reach people leaving in Jos with reproductive health

messages. Owolabi, et al. (2020) highlighted high rates of unintended pregnancies in Nigeria, potentially linked to limited access to accurate family planning information. As highlighted by Adesunkanmi, et al. (2020), unsafe abortions remain a significant public health concern in Nigeria, often due to a lack of awareness about safe alternatives. Adeoye, et al. (2020) also suggests a high prevalence of sexually transmitted infections in Nigeria, potentially exacerbated by inadequate knowledge about safe sexual practices.

Many researchers have made efforts to create health awareness campaigns on social media, while others discussed the consequences of limited health awareness. Elkheir et al (2021) investigated the experience of populations in Saudi Arabia regarding the use of social media for health-related issues. Mohammed et al (2021) assessed utilisation of social networking sites for health purposes among health educators and students in Saudi Arabia. Mahmound and Husein (2022) researched the topic the influence of the employment of social media on undergraduate orthopaedics and traumatology education in Sudan. Eguavoen (2017) explored the perception of health professionals in Ibadan concerning the use of social media for sharing health information.

Despite the efforts of these researchers, much still needs to be done in this regard. A specific study focusing on social media and reproductive health issues among healthcare practitioners in Jos, Nigeria is lacking. The nature of reproductive health information shared by healthcare practitioners on social media and its perceived effectiveness in addressing residents' awareness remains an interesting area to explore. This is the gap that this study intends to bridge.

Objectives of the Study

- i. Explore the extent of social media use by the healthcare practitioners in Jos to create awareness on reproductive health;
- ii. Determine the kind of reproductive health messages the healthcare practitioners access and disseminate through the social media;
- iii. Find out challenges hindering the use of social media for reproductive health awareness by the healthcare practitioners.

Review of Empirical Literature on the Purpose and Challenges Associated with the Use of Social Media for Healthcare Practice.

Scholars across the world have conducted studies on social media and healthcare practice. Nakiwala and Kakooza (2020) assessed the barriers and solutions

concerning the use of Facebook for sharing health information. The investigation was conducted in Uganda. The research collected data from respondents through the indepth interview method. Data from the study indicated that Facebook remains an important health communication site. Facebook gives the opportunity to the respondents to create and share health messages. It was further found that there were certain barriers with the application of Facebook in health communication. These include shortage of finance, insufficient knowledge in the use of Facebook by some of the respondents. The research recommended that efforts should be made to address the challenges hindering the use of social media in health education and enlightenment.

Furthermore, an investigation by Gamor et al (2023) revealed that nurses have embraced the application of social media for enhanced service delivery. The scholars further contended that despite the important of social media to nurses, it is challenged by dissemination of incorrect messages, leads to a lot of intrusion into patients' privacy and too much information to handle. Similarly, Omotayo and Orimolade (2020) interrogated the application of social media by medical doctors. It focused on using social media for better service delivery, connection and research. Finding showed that health experts often use social media to share knowledge and experiences among themselves. The study further revealed some setbacks with the use of social media in health engagements to include issues of credibility of information received on social media, late reply of messages, inadequate facilities and pride among some of the respondents. In their investigation on the use of online media for medical prescriptions among healthcare professionals in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, Edem, Usiere and Obot (2024) established that people living Akwa Ibom State have come to appreciate health information they access on social networking sites Edem et al result suggests the significance of the application of digital platforms in health practice because this has closed the limitations of traditional and conventional ways of communicating health matters.

In addition, the thrust of Oladapo, Opele and Adeoye (2021) study was on the use of social media applications for health practice among medical professionals in Nigeria. The discourse collected data from medical librarians. The study established the continued importance of social media among healthcare workers. The impact of social media is felt in knowledge sharing, discovering of new ideas and skills advancement. Data from the study, however, indicated that the use of social media for health-related practice is confronted with certain drawbacks. These are personality/individual dispositions towards the adoption and application of modern communication facilities in health engagements and poor network coverage in Nigeria. Nevertheless, the result underscores the import of integrating social media networking sites like WhatsApp, Facebook, X, Instagram, LinkedIn, to mention but a few into health institutions

communication approaches, as this will widen the scope of health professionals-patients health practice and seeking behaviour. Likewise, Oyediran et al (2024) through an investigation regarding the importance of social media on nursing practice in Nigeria. The study demonstrated that health practitioners, especially nurses have taken advantage of social media platforms to access and spread health-information with a view to educating members of the public on different health issues.

Methodology

The study employed the survey method. The survey is considered important due to the arguments put forward by scholars such as Barbie (2001, p. 259) who emphasises the value and importance of survey when he notes that "survey is probably the best research method available to the social scientist interested in collecting original data for the purpose of describing a population too large to be observed directly. The study also made use of the survey design due to the fact that it is predominantly used to get a general idea of the views and perceptions of respondents on a subject of investigation.

The population of the study were doctors and nurses in Our Lady of Apples (OLA) Hospital Jos; Dadin Kowa Primary Health Centre, Jos; Fertile Ground Hospital, Jos and Bukuru Express Primary Health Centre. The total population for the study was 33. Random sampling was applied. The administration of the research instrument was done on a face-to-face basis by the researcher. Secondary information was collected from books, journals, newspapers, Internet and other documented materials. Data collected from the field were presented using tables, figures, frequencies, percentages and mean deviation of five-point likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Undecided (U), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD), which the criterion mean was put at 3 point and above is accepted result, while 2 point and below is rejected result were used to present the data. Analysis was done through the use of inferential and descriptive statistics.

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on The Technology Acceptance Model and Information Overload Theory.

The Technology Acceptance Model

The Technology Acceptance Model is a globally known and accepted theoretical framework, which was developed by Fred Davis in 1986, and its main tenet is to explain the purpose and how new technologies are accepted and used by individuals. The model, which relates to the new information communication systems, has been modified over time by researchers. The model further explains that the main reason of the

adoption, recognition, acceptance and application of technology is based on how important or useful such a technology is to the individuals, in addition to their perception and how easy to make use of such a technology. That is, the user's perception on the amount of works he or she believes it will take to learn and apply the technology effectively and efficiently. This implies that both interior and outside factors determine the extent of the acceptance and use of technology by humans. The interior factors could be the user's past or prior knowledge and experience as well as attitudes regarding the technology. The external components include the worth, quality effectiveness of teaching, training and support, the architecture of the system, and the perceived alignment, agreement or compatibility of the technology with the user's requirements, tastes or preferences.

Those who proposed the model and scholars across board have carried out extensive research to validate the essential tenets of the model and to ascertain its applicability in studies (For examples, Omokanye et al, 2023); Oriogu, Subair & Oriogu-Ogbuiyi, 2017); Dahiru, 2019); Lucas, 2024); Atsbeha & Wodaje, 2024). Researchers have again and again established that how important, effective and efficient a technology is to a user goes a long way to determine the users' acceptance and usage of such technology. The Technology Acceptance Model has been found relevant in studies relating to e-banking, online teaching, voting on digital communication platforms and e-health, to mention but a few. This implies that TAM has been used by researchers to assess studies focusing on the use of social media and other digital communication technologies to by healthcare workers to sensitise the public reproductive health issues.

In relation to the thrust of this study, the Technology Acceptance Model is found suitable to evaluate the utilisation of social media as a new communication platform by medical professionals in Jos. In other words, TAM is adopted to have an understanding of the acceptance, purpose and use of various social media platforms in health practice. The perceived important aspect of TAM can be to understand how healthcare providers in Jos view social media tools as they relate to their capabilities to provide useful health reproductive health information. When healthcare practitioners have the confidence or believe that social media can assist them with health messages, connect them with their colleagues world-wide, assist them in research and reaching out to their patients, they are more likely to use it. Thus, TAM is considered appropriate for this study.

Information Overload Theory

This is a theory propounded by Bertram Gross, in 1964. The theory directly addresses issues related to the utilisation of new communication technologies like social media. The main concept regarding this theory is the fact that individuals who use new communication platforms cannot process all the messages they get online and this does

make it hard to comprehend the information and take decisions or actions. This is known as infobesity, information pollution, infoxication, information anxiety, data smog, and online communication platforms fatigue. This is created by the increased use of information and communication technologies (Arnold, Goldschmitt & Rigotti, 2023). The theory holds that human brain can only hold about seven units of information in working memory. Graf and Antoni (2020) contend that too much of information or information overload happens when the quantum of messages that the receive gets exceeds the working memory of such a person.

As it relates to health communication, the theory highlights the potential for overwhelming and bombarding social media users with too much health message or information, which most times are from sources that are credible, creating confusion among the consumers, and sometimes leading to taking health decisions that are harmful. Addo and Antwi (2024) state that the large amount of different health messages that are posted on social media are capable of creating confusion and misdiagnosis, as different people and sources keep sharing information that give conflicting advice.

Furthermore, the assumptions of the theory in the context of the use of social media in creating and disseminating health information stem from accessibility, having the time to read through the quantum of information and the volume of information usually available on social media. The brain behind this theory argues that social media networking sites enable people to get access to large volume of health information easily, which can quickly become overwhelming for those who use social media to discern the credibility of those who distribute such contents. The theory also states that use of social media creates the room for lack of quality control. Any person can post health information on social media due to its open characteristics, creating room for a mix of accurate and inaccurate messages or content, often times containing fake information or unsubstantiated content.

In line with the context of this research, the Information Overload Theory assumes a significant signpost because it fits into the explanation of the challenges of the uses of social media by health practitioners in reproductive health practice. This implies that Information Overload Theory is used to have an understanding of the limitations or barriers to the application of social networking communication platforms, particularly as it relate to health.

The purpose of Using Two Theories

The first theory specifically relates to one of the major objectives of the study - assess the purpose of the use of social media for reproductive health engagements. The second theory addresses the aspect of the study that talks about the challenges associated with the utilisation of social media in reproductive health practice by healthcare professionals.

Data Presentation

A total of 33 copies of questionnaire were distributed of which 29 were returned and found valid for analysis. Percentage representation is shown in the Figure below:

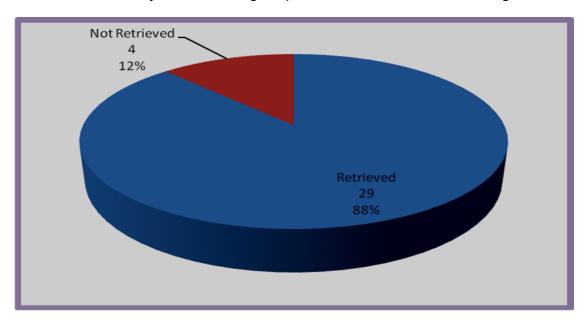


Figure 1: Analysis of Response Rate

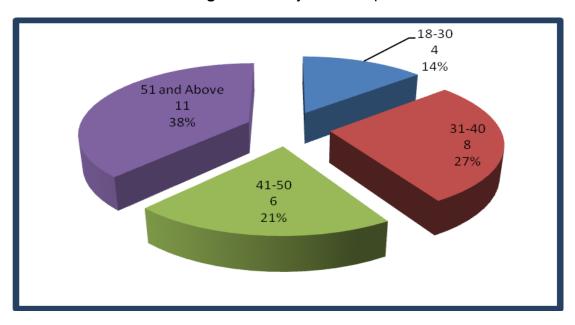


Figure 2: Respondents' Age

Information in Figure 2 reveals the age distribution of the respondents. Finding shows that 11 of the respondents representing 38% were 50 and above years; 8 respondents accounting for 27% fell within the age bracket of 31-40; 6 of the participants representing 21% were 41-50 years; while 4 respondents, accounting for 14% were between 18-30 years. From the foregoing, it can be observed that the respondents were old enough to comprehend the issues under investigation and to contribute meaningfully to the overall aim and objectives of the research.

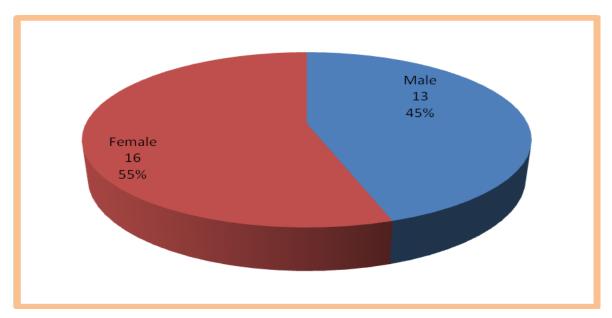


Figure 3: Gender Distribution of Respondents

Figure 3 reveals that, 55% of the respondents were female, while 45% were male. The discrepancies in the ratio of male and female did not in any way affect the findings but rather points to the random distribution of the questionnaire within the sample population.

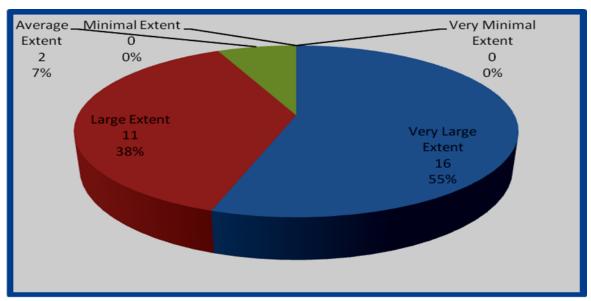


Figure 4: Extent of the Use Social Media for Health Awareness Creation Regarding Reproductive Health

It could thus be deduced that health practitioners have recognised the important role that social media plays in their discipline, as it enables them to reach out the public with important health messages with speed and ease.

Table 1: Kinds of Reproductive Health Messages the Respondents Access and Disseminate on Social Media

Option	SA	Α	U	D	SD	Total	Mean Rating	Decision
Messages on menstruation and menstrual hygiene	18	11	0	0	0	29	4.6	Accepted
Information on fertility issues	9	20	0	0	0	29	4.3	Accepted
Messages to educate and enlighten the people on cervical cancer and screening	16	13	0	0	0	29	4.5	Accepted
Information regarding pregnancy	8	21	0	0	0	29	4.5	Accepted
Messages on sexually transmissible infections	20	9	0	0	0	29	4.6	Accepted
Information on chronic health	13	16	0	0	0	29	4.4	Accepted

problems such as endometriosis and polycystic ovary syndrome								
Messages on menopause	26	3	0	0	0	29	4.8	Accepted
Information to enlighten the population regarding unplanned pregnancy	19	10	0	0	0	29	4.6	Accepted
Messages on abortion	23	6	0	0	0	29	4.7	Accepted
Messages on the public right to healthy and respectable relationships, health services that are inclusive, safe and appropriate, access to accurate information, effective and affordable methods of reproductive health matters	21	8	0	0	0	29	4.7	Accepted
Messages on regular health checks	18	11	0	0	0	29	4.6	Accepted
Messages on vaccination	20	9	0	0	0	29	4.7	Accepted
Information on birth control	15	14	0	0	0	29	4.5	Accepted
Information on breast cancer screening	18	11	0	0	0	29	4.6	Accepted

The result is an indication that social media is used to spread reproductive health information.

 Table 2: Challenges to the Use of Social Media for Reproductive Health Awareness

Option	SA	Α	U	D	SD	Total	Mean Rating	Decision
Constraints of electricity supply in the country	18	7	3	1	0	29	4.4	Accepted

The patients do not usually trust the reproductive health information we share to them on social media because of high circulation of fake reproductive health information on social media	16	11	2	0	0	29	4.4	Accepted
Fear of revealing patient reproductive health history on social media by patients	14	15	0	0	0	29	4.4	Accepted
There is usually no enough time to engage with people on social media to share reproductive health tips with them	15	9	5	0	0	29	4.3	Accepted
Challenges associated with poor networks in Nigeria and high cost of purchasing data	10	16	2	1	0	29	4.1	Accepted

The results in the Table above indicate that all the options put forward to the respondents were accepted. It could therefore be deduced that social media in Nigeria may not have been fully deployed for reproductive health promotion due to the challenges presented in the Table.

The study also found that social media is used to a large extent by the health professionals to create awareness concerning reproductive health (see Figure 4 above). This result aligns with Oyediran et al (2024) who established health practitioners have taken advantage of social media platforms to access and spread health-information with a view to educating members of the public on different health issues. Nakiwala and Kakooza (2020) found in their study that healthcare professionals heavily rely on social media for various health-related activities. It could be therefore be deduced that social media has become imperative in health discourse, especially as it concerns sharing and receiving health information on reproductive health by health professionals and patients. It could thus be deduced that health practitioners have recognised the important role that social media plays in their discipline, as it enables them to reach out the public with important health messages with speed and ease.

The study further found that the healthcare professionals disseminate reproductive health messages on social media such as menstrual and fertility issues, cervical cancer and screening, regarding pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, menopause. Others are information concerning unplanned pregnancy and breast cancer screening. The result is therefore an indication that social media has become important in health communication especially as it concerns getting access and spreading information regarding reproductive health by healthcare practitioners. The findings also justify the adoption of The Technology Acceptance Model, as explained earlier.

The study further revealed the challenges of using social media by health professionals for reproductive health issues. These barriers include, too many information on social media, the fear of revealing patient reproductive health history on social media by patients. Others are network issues and the financial resources to buy data, as well as challenges of inadequate electricity in Nigeria. It could therefore be deduced that social media in Nigeria may not have been fully deployed for reproductive health promotion due to some challenges. Gamor et al (2023) earlier finding states that the use of social media in health engagements is characterised by inaccurate information, distraction, privacy and confidentiality concerns, and addition in terms of usage. Also, Oladapo, Opele and Adeoye (2021) equally corroborated in a study that certain constraints personality/individual attitudes towards to use of newer technologies and poor network connection affect the application of social media in health practice. The justifies the application of the Information Overload Theory, which states that individuals who use new communication platforms cannot process all the messages they get online and this does make it hard to comprehend the information and take decisions or actions.

Conclusion

The concern of the study has been on the application of social media by healthcare professionals for reproductive health issues. From the findings, the study concludes that social media represents a complex phenomenon. It offers multiple functions in line with reproductive health education, support and enlightenment. While the use of social media underscores the importance of connecting with colleagues, for research, and finding the best approaches to take care of patients with reproductive health complications, it comes with a lot of challenges. These include misinformation and privacy issues.

Recommendations

- 1. Enhancing infrastructure, including electricity and network connectivity, is crucial for the successful use of social media for health awareness creation about reproductive health by healthcare practitioners in Jos.
- 2. Health professionals in Jos should consistently validate health information shared on social media before reposting or referencing such content, ensuring accuracy and reliability.
- 3. Health professionals in Jos should continue to use the social media to educate and enlighten the public concerning reproductive health.
- 4. Training initiatives for healthcare practitioners in Jos in partnership with NGOs, or locally designed awareness campaigns to address misinformation of health issues on social media is important.

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