

A REVIEW ON SOCIAL MEDIA USE IN HEALTH PRACTICE BY HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS

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Abstract

The innovation of the Internet has revolutionized communication dynamics in the health sector. It has brought rapid creation and dissemination of health messages among healthcare professionals and patients. The social media, a sub-set of the Internet facility, since its emergence, a number of healthcare practitioners employ this technology for health-related purposes. Hence, this study was carried out to examine literature on the use of social media in health practice by healthcare professionals. The study focused on the reasons and challenges of social media use for health practice. The study adopted Social Media Engagement Theory and Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) as the theoretical framework. Qualitative approach was used. Finding revealed that the healthcare professionals employed social media for health research, knowledge sharing, booking appointments with patients, interrogating government health policies and programmes, among others. The study further found that the use of social media for health practice was challenged by misinformation, privacy concerns, time, etc. The study recommended among others that the government and social media owners should prevent the dissemination of unconfirmed health messages. Verified sources of health information should be promoted, while those that are not credible should be identified and portray as dangerous or not safe.

Keywords: Social Media, Healthcare, Professionals, Review, Use

Introduction

Social Media Use in Health Practice by healthcare Professionals: A Review of Literature

The invention of the Internet, which essentially aims at connecting people globally to create and share information through the means of videos, words, graphics, audio and audio-visuals, dates back to 1983 (McLean, 2022). A document from Asianet Satellite Communications (2025), explains that currently the Internet has become inevitable in the daily life of humans; this communication facility makes life easier for man. It assists humanity with facts and figures and is important in knowledge sharing. Today, Internet communication platform has been able to connect over 4.89 billion people, professionals and non-professional alike worldwide (Kemp, 2024 cited in Addo & Antwi, 2024).

For instance, in the United States of America (USA), data indicates that there are 327.18 million people who make use of the Internet to generate, obtain and distribute messages regarding different issues (Digital, the United States of America, 2025; Statista, 2025). Data in Canada reveals that more than 37.8 million of its population are Internet users (Statista, 2025). Similarly, World Bank (2024) report shows that as of 2024, out of Russia's total population of 143.8 million, 103.4 million people utilize the Internet to access and disseminate various information.

In South Africa, a similar pattern emerged. The country boasts of 45.34 million Internet users, accounting for 70.6% of the nation's population (Data Reportal, 2024). Today, the Internet facility has become essential information platform in South Africa. Online media has brought in a new period of opportunities for citizens, healthcare providers, health organisations, ministries, departments and agencies (Gambo & Musonda, 2022).

The creation of social networking platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, Instagram and the likes as a sub-set of the Internet has greatly enhanced interactive health communication, and collaboration among users (Benetoli, Chen & Aslani, 2018). Health institutions and practitioners usually take advantage of the wide reach of media social interaction characteristics to link with many professional colleagues and organizations close and far from them (Busl et al, 2021). Today, healthcare providers can attend health conferences, symposia and workshops via social media (Elkheir, et al., 2021). For example, Fiammenghi et al (2024), asserts that in spite of some challenges such as privacy concerns about patients' information, lack of credibility, misinformation, inaccurate medical advices, among others, medical professionals in Italy have continued to utilize this digital communication platform to enhance their practice. Espino-Gauchi et al (2020) concur that most if not all health practitioners in Mexico have adopted and domesticated social media in carrying out their constitutional responsibility to both the government and the public. Loss and von Uslar (2021) agree that since the innovation of the social media communication sites, health workers in Germany have employed it to disseminate health messages with the intention to educate and enlighten the people about various diseases and to stay updated.

In the same vein, health professionals, organizations, educators and students in China have been engaging with the public, conducting researches, organizing and attending conferences through the instrument of social media. A study by Zhou, Zhang and Su (2020) found that 97% of medical

doctors in China made use of Wechat, and 23% of the members of the public had consulted a social media platform known as Toutiao to get health information. This data describes a turning point in the high use of social media platform for communication between doctors and patients in China. The situation is the same in Japan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Kenya and Ghana (Sugawara, Murakami & Narimatsu, 2020; Alderaibi & Bugis, 2023; The Peninsula, 2021; Onger et al, 2021; Wambugu, Kailemia & Mulu, 2024; Gamor, et al, 2023).

Internet penetration in Nigeria stood at 103 million users in 2024 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2024), and for over a decade now, the rapid expansion of the Internet facility has transformed health communication in Nigeria. Osaji (2023) posits that the Internet is one of the health communication game changers in Nigeria's healthcare industry; it is used to collect health data, process and share with members of the public to enable them take informed health decisions. Elechi et al (2024) remark that Internet communication has presented Nigeria with the opportunity to connect with regional and local health organisations, individuals and communities with a view to assisting in addressing various healthcare issues confronting the country.

As in other climes, health professionals in Nigeria are leveraging on the opportunities and potentials of social media to widen the scope of their activities. According to Ikpi, Undelikwo and Ubi (2022), health workers in Nigeria have adopted and are utilizing social networking sites like Facebook, WhatsApp, X, YouTube, Instagram and the likes to educate patients and the general public, consult and connect with colleagues and health organizations across the world and to advance and update their knowledge.

From the foregoing, it is clear that social media has turn out to be an important communication initiative, especially in the healthcare industry, and studies have been conducted to confirm it. However, further studies are needed to add to what other scholars have done. Therefore, this study reviewed literature on the uses of social media for enhanced service delivery by health practitioners.

The Role of Social Media in Healthcare Practice

In an increasingly digitized world, social media platforms have become indispensable for communication, information dissemination, and engagement of the public with health messages by healthcare practitioners. The transformative impact of social media on health communication has been profound; this offers dynamic tools for raising public awareness and promoting policy compliance of not only government, but interaction between and among health workers with their patients, colleagues and the public at large. Social media has also been useful in health research and sourcing and dissemination of emergency health messages and other health information.

Social media, as a subset of internet communication, plays an essential role in enhancing public knowledge and fostering compliance with health information from healthcare practitioners. Omolola (2019) describes social media as a transformative tool for communication, information dissemination, and public engagement. Similarly, Omotayo and Orimolade (2020) emphasise its evolution into a dynamic vehicle for sharing knowledge on social, economic, and political, and health issues. Regarding health, social media has enabled health professionals to network, exchange insights, and involve the public in discussions about health issues. Rukavina et al (2021) note the steady growth in social media adoption, illustrating its significant role in modern health

communication practices. The integration of social media into daily health practitioners' communication further underscores its versatility and appeal. Soubra, Hasan and Shaarani, (2022) highlight its role as a hub for interaction and engagement, fostering unprecedented connectivity among users. Srimarut and Techasatian, (2019) argue that the upward trajectory of global social media usage reflects its efficiency as a tool for real-time health information dissemination. Health organisations and healthcare personnel worldwide have increasingly adopted social media to provide timely responses to public health concerns and to disseminate critical information (Mohammed et al (2021). Stellefson et al (2020) observe that the rapid expansion of social media over the last two decades has revolutionized the way health workers spread health information, breaking geographical barriers and establishing a virtual space for health workers in governments' institutions, private organizations, to exchange views and updates, communicate among themselves and with the patients.

Moreover, social media offers resources that amplify the scalability and impact of healthcare practitioners' activities. Its network-building features allow healthcare professionals and their patients to interact and share information, perspectives, and experiences, it foster collective identities that can drive public involvement in national health programmes (Shaw et al, 2017).). This digital engagement complements traditional methods of disseminating health messages, creating opportunities for healthcare providers to support the public with health information so that they can continue to stay healthy (Saxena, 2020). Incorporating these digital tools into its communication strategies enables the healthcare professionals and government to strengthen its efforts in promoting widespread compliance with health policies and programmes that drive national growth and development (Oladapo, Opele & Adeoye, 2021).

Social media has become a powerful force, revolutionizing all aspects of health practice (Naslund, et al, 2020). Its affordability and wide reach make it an effective tool for encouraging public participation and driving initiatives in all areas, including health (Majali, et al, 2021). Skarzauskiene, Stokaite and Maciuliene (2015) reaffirm that currently, health practice seems to depend largely on new communication devices and platforms, leading to professional development and wide reach of people with health messages. This implies that the use of online communication platforms like Facebook, X, WhatsApp, YouTube, Instagram, TikTok and the likes have the capabilities and potentials to increase health institutions and health professionals' service delivery, thus creation the avenue for dissemination of health content to patients by healthcare providers, as well as seeking for health information by patients. Pedersen et al (2024) further contend that social networking platforms have been embraced by healthcare providers and patients alike to share useful health information.

Additionally, Fayoyin (2016), states that digital communication tools such as social media have become imperative for educating and enlightening the public for improved health practice. Similarly, Sunday, Inobemhe and Santas (2021), concur that online communication platforms have enabled the gathering of health information and surveillance of different ailments, provide avenue for telling the public where to get the needed treatment and care within the shortest possible time. Social media, as further argue by Korp (2006), referenced in Lucas, Abayomi and Nyachesa (2023), support health education by providing avenue to healthcare practitioners and health organizations to create and disseminate health content. It can also be used to train health workers, monitor health situations, and apply to tack ailments and examining patients as well as providing

counseling support. Ekezie and Bosah (2021), affirm in a study that social media, due to their open and wide reach characteristics, can be used to spread health messages to thousands of people within few minutes. These communication platforms, these scholars argue, facilitate interactivity communication, and promote sharing of health information in various formats like videos, graphics and words. + Digitalis (2022), outlines the benefits of social media usage in health practice to include building of easy relationship between patients and healthcare giver; it is less expensive to connect with patients and vice versa; and social media platforms assist in showcasing the achievements of healthcare practitioners and organizations. Addo and Antwi (2024), state that social media is used by healthcare professionals to create and share relationship with their clients and patients, used for career advancement and as a point of reference.

Laranjo et al (2015), equally contend that social networking sites like Facebook, X, WhatsApp, TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, among others, are important platforms of communication currently as they facilitate the sourcing, creation and spread of health information to people via the World Wide Web. These online communication tools are helpful for offering health policy advice to governments, assessing medical professionals in conducting research and for public health engagement (Liikkanen et al, 2024). Espino-Gaucin et al (2020), corroborate that social media communication platforms have had significant impact on healthcare professionals' career advancement. This implies that social media has proven to be one of the leading digital communication sites that enhance knowledge sharing and distribution of health content, training, research and professional practice. Carroll, Bruno, and von Tschudi, (2016), state that social networking sites have become crucial communication platforms for those working in the health sector world-wide. These tools are being deployed to create health advocacy and counseling groups. Osaji (2023), further posits that Internet facilities are among the health communication game changers in Nigeria's healthcare industry. It is used to collect health data; process and share with members of the public to enable them take informed health decisions.

Issues Associated with the Use of Social Media for Healthcare Practice

In spite of the various advantages outlined earlier, health professionals and members of the public who use the social media do encounter many challenges when trying to access and share medical information on the various social media platforms. The barriers include circulation of fake information on social media and how to determine which information is true and which one lacks credibility, privacy and secrecy challenges, in addition to general lack of awareness among users concerning the potential risks associated with sharing and disseminating health information on digital communication platforms (Hunter et al, 2018). Also, social media due to its open nature, comes with the challenge and risk of posting and receiving inaccurate medical messages and incorrect health advice from people who disguise as health practitioners on social media; thereby experiencing negative health outcomes, developing unhealthy health attitudes; there is also the dangers of self-medication due to information obtained on social media and circulation of too much information to handle (Kubheka, Carter & Mwaura, 2020).

Besides, dissemination and availability of social media like Facebook, X, WhatsApp, YouTube and the likes, may contribute to sick people's hesitance in seeking consultations with medical practitioners (Gelinas et al, 2017). Ghalavand et al (2020) conclude in research that the main issues with the use of social media for healthcare are medical personnel's unwillingness to connect with the people via these digital instruments, paying no attention to health norms and ethics, issues

around privacy of users and the inability to control fake and unsubstantiated medical messages circulated on social media as well as the inability to handle negative comments made on social media concerning health by unscrupulous elements. Whiting and Pritchard (2017) concur that distribution of fake contents on social media which is capable of misleading the people is one the major barriers with the associated with social media. Shrikant (2023) supports that health contents spread on online platforms such as social media can leave a lasting first impression on a patient because such posts can reveal detailed information about a person's medical history to the public. Digitalis Medical (2022) further outlines these challenges to include insufficient time to engage with patients, the quality of information obtained from social media are sometime low, some organizations restrict their health workers from discussing health issues with patients on social media, lack of patient confidentiality and privacy, disruption, disturbance and lack of knowledge of potential risks. Alsughayr (2015), further contends that the main setback with health messages accessed on social media and other online communication tools is the accurate nature of some of the information, correctness and soundness of the messages as well as difficulty in verifying the information. Pirraglia and Kravitz (2012), cited in Lucas (2024), state that most of the individuals who disseminate health information on social networking platforms conceal their identities or are identified by incomplete information. Ikpi et al. (2022), see the barrier of social media application in health practice in relation to patient-health worker social media relationship abuse. These scholars assert that there are issues because when healthcare providers and patients mostly communicate on social media platforms for healthcare, it may lead to unclear boundaries in their relationships. Addo and Antwi (2024), find the challenges associated with the use of social media by healthcare providers to include lack privacy and unreliable messages, too much information to handle, risk of disclosing patients' information, inaccurate health information, distraction and high cost of purchasing data, as well as poor internet connectivity.

Empirical Review

Ghahramani, de Courten and Prokofieva study (2022), review the importance of using social media for health communication by healthcare professionals. The research notes that Social Cognitive Theory and Tran Theoretical Model is mostly employed as the framework in the articles. From the articles reviewed, the study finds that social media platforms such as Facebook and YouTube were the most used by healthcare providers to educate and enlighten the public about various diseases. The finding further indicates that X and Instagram are mostly used to observe changes in health attitude of the people. Additionally, the study establishes that though social media has become imperative in health education, it is characterized by circulation of unsubstantiated information. The investigation thus suggests the need for health educators to properly scrutinize any health message online before disseminating such to the public.

In the same vein, the thrust of Majali, et al (2021), research is to identify conceptual framework for social media adoption by Malaysian healthcare practitioners as a health platform promoter in Malaysia. The study examines social media from the perspectives of it uses to deliver health messages to clients and the public by healthcare providers at the lowest costs due to the timely characteristics of the social media. The study uses the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), as the theoretical framework. The findings show that social media is highly used by healthcare professionals in Malaysia. It has become useful for disseminating preventive, treatment and other health messages in the country. The research provides significant insights into the impacts of the current global practice in healthcare where social media has become important

in health discourse for governments, individuals, private and non-governmental health institutions across the world. It recommends the continuous use of the social media for health awareness campaigns by not only the healthcare practitioners, but by other relevant bodies and authorities to educate and enlighten Malaysians about various health conditions in the country.

In a related development, social media and its use in health promotion is the focus of Levac and Sullivan (2016), study. The study establishes that social media's role in promoting good health habits is connected to the source of the messages the people are circulating among themselves. This implies that, those who participated in the research preferred to get health information from social networking sites. Furthermore, the study provides that social media holds significant potentials for health workers to use it to reach out to the public with various health information as well as to educate the people. Social media is useful for interaction between and among health professionals across the globe and to conduct research.

Also, Tarabishi, Elguindy and Manie (n.d), research on the importance of using social media to raise health consciousness of youth in universities. The study discusses the rationale behind the employment of social media for health activities. The research finds that the higher the level of reliance on social media as a source of information, the greater the exposure to social media sites related to the health messages. The relationship between both studies stem from the fact that the two investigations. Additionally, Elkheir et al (2021), investigates the experience of populations in Saudi Arabia regarding the use of social media for health-related issues. The results indicate that in Saudi Arabia, there is high employment of social media for health-related purposes among the public and healthcare professionals. The study concludes that social media deployment for health-related practice is on the increase in the country. It recommends that educating and enlightening the people through the use of social media should continue to be intensified in the country.

Also, Oladapo, Opele and Adeoye (2021), analyze the implications of the use of social media for sharing COVID-19 messages among healthcare practitioners in Nigeria, as it concerns medical librarians. The study discusses the types, degree, importance and challenges of the application of social media in medical practice. It utilizes the Social Learning Theory. Result of the study indicates that most of the respondents acknowledge that social media is important in getting novel ideas and skills. The finding also reveals certain constraints. These include personality/individual attitudes towards to use of newer technologies and poor network connection. However, the finding underscores the imperativeness of incorporating social media communication innovation into health organizations communication strategies, This, no doubt has significantly increased the reach of many patients with different health conditions, especially COVID-19.

Moreover, Oyediran et al (2024), conduct a study on the impact of social networking media by nurses in Nigeria. The research obtains data on the commonly used social media platforms, factors that determine the use of social media, level of use, benefits and disadvantages. Southern part of Nigeria is the study's area. It finds that the participants use social media to access and spread health-information. The finding further indicates that WhatsApp and Facebook are mostly used. Also, social media facilitates the sharing of information across long distances with ease. Other results reveal that is used to spread unsubstantiated information and to intrude into people health privacy. The study advocates for checking and cross-checking of health messages shared on social

media. Also, it calls for training of nurses to be able to navigate the use of social media for their practice, as well as nurses should always verify the messages they get from social media platforms before circulation. The findings emphasize the significance of targeted training initiatives and enlightenment to help address the issues of fake information circulating on social media regarding health.

In a corresponding study, Fayoyin (2016), assesses the employment of social media for communicating health issues in Africa. The study concentrates specifically on the approaches used, the results and lessons learned through the use of social media in health-related discipline. The research is supported by the Theory of Change. The findings of the study show that social media present great opportunities for transforming and reshaping health communication narratives in Africa. The study further establishes that the use social media technology for health communication in Africa will eliminate some of the shortcomings of conventional and traditional methods of spreading information. This is because social media helps to provide context, interaction, and use of mixed and multimedia platforms. The study, thus advocates for caution in the use of social media for health-related issues due to the high rate of fake and unsubstantiated information on these new communication technologies. Fayoyin findings underline the critical importance of integrating digital communication tools to address the challenges of disseminating health information in the African sub-region. This implies that, African leaders should take advantage of this communication technology to improve health service delivery across the continent.

Also, Odiboh, et al (2022), conduct a perception study on patients and healthcare information on social media in Lagos State primary healthcare centres. It obtains data from 221 participants in three health institutions in Yaba. The study finds that the respondents utilise social media to access information regarding ailments such as common cold, tiredness, hypertension, and other diseases. The study however, establishes that the health information of the respondents' access from social media contain some misleading messages. The study finding therefore, implies that the adoption and use of social media for health-related activities is increasing among patients in various communities not only in Lagos State, but in Nigeria, and in other climes.

Eguavoen (2017), explores the perception of health professionals in Ibadan concerning the use of social media for sharing health information. The study collects data from health workers in general hospitals. The finding indicates that the health workers positively utilize social media in their practice. The study also finds that there is no significant relationship between the health professionals' views and the use of social media for disseminating and sharing health messages in the general hospitals. The study recommends that specific social media platform be created for sharing of information among the health workers. Also, health workers who are having the intention to use social media should ensure that they use it professionally.

Ikpi and Undelikwo (2019), carry out a study among students of University of Calabar concerning the use of social media and their health lifestyle. The study examines purposely the degree and influences to which the students use X, WhatsApp and Facebook regarding the modification of their health lifestyle. Findings indicate that the information which the respondents get from X, WhatsApp and Facebook extensively influenced their health lifestyles such as the way they eat and consume alcohol, sexual behaviour, taking of cigarette, drug use and engagement in fitness

activities. These findings therefore draw attention to the value of using social media for promoting good health habits. The study suggests that government of Nigeria through the various ministries, departments and agencies responsible for health issues should create more awareness among students and the entire population on the health benefits accruing from use of social media.

Theoretical Framework

The study was situated within the frameworks of the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) and Social Media Engagement Theory.

Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT)

The Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), was proposed by Viswanath Venkatesh, Michael G. Morris, Gordon B. Davis and Fred D. Davis 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 assumptions, namely: Performance expectancy (how much a person believes the technology will perform well); effort expectancy (how easy a person thinks it will be to use the technology); social influence (how much a person thinks others around them will use the technology); behavioural intention (a person's likelihood of using the technology); facilitating conditions (how much a person thinks the environment supports their use of the technology); and moderators (factors like age, gender and experience that can affect the impact of the other assumptions (Williams, Rana & Dwivedi, 2015; Venkatesh et al, 2003; Permana, Sayidah & Adi, 2024). The strengths of this theory include its broad applicability (it has been used to study the acceptance of a wide range of technologies, such as social media, artificial intelligence, the internet of things, and electric vehicles); user-centre (this theory emphasizes the understanding users' model, performances and contexts); dynamic (the theory recognises that technology acceptance and use are ongoing processes); and relatively simple (the theory has limited number of assumptions and moderating variables, making it relatively simple to understand and apply).

From the foregoing, the aspects of UTAUT that are 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 at which an individual perceives that important others believe he or she should use the new system. This theory is thus considered pertinent in this study due to the fact that an individual chooses to adopt a technology in doing his or her job because the technology is of importance to achieving results. In this case, health professionals use social media applications to reach out to the public with health-related information as well as get more information on how their discipline is practiced via social media technology. This theory has also proved its efficacy as captured in studies such as that of Venkatesh et al (2003), who 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. Therefore, UTAUT was significant to this study.

However, UTAUT is criticized 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). This implies that, UTAUT limitations include that the theory may not account for some important relationships; and that it may not also account for individual characteristics, such as attitude concerning use of communication technology like social media. Another shortcoming of the theory is that it may not account for cost and other structural factors that influence adoption.

Social Media Engagement Theory

The Social Media Engagement Theory was developed by Di Gangi, P. M. and Wasko, M. M. in 2016. The focal point of the theory dwells on explaining how individuals utilise social media applications like Facebook, WhatsApp, X, Instagram, YouTube and the likes to link up with others through the content they create, access and share. This implies that the theory allows people to engage with each other through the comment, likes and re-posting of information provided by social media platforms (Koo, 2020). Di Gangi and Wasko (2016) further argue that Social Media Engagement Theory represents a new communication technique where value is created and co-created by users contributing, retrieving, and exploring content with other users via various social media platforms. The Social Media Engagement Theory states that social media provides for two-ways communication, in which unlike the traditional methods of communication, social media paves way for real-time and quick reactions from the audience and exchange of views by the recipients of information and the sender.

Further, the Social Media Engagement Theory demonstrates the impact of new communication technology like social media highlighting its importance in facilitating social interactions among users across the world. Undoubtedly, the innovation of social media communication technology provides an exceptional users experience that enables them to connect, create and share messages in new ways that were never before possible. The Social Media Engagement Theory therefore explains that social connectivity and interface among people is an experience that fosters personal relationships among those who use social media. It serves as a clear means of sharing ideas through communication, thus, providing links to friends, organizations, associates and family members. The theory also defines the possible advantages and cost implications of engaging through the social media space.

Another important aspect of this theory is its power of influence. Social media followers and users tend to get involved in contents that are shared by influential people in the society. The posts disseminated by these influential individuals like Aproko Doctor tend to resonates with followers of that influential person and they seem to have confidence in such content (Koo, 2020). Social Media Management Theory further discusses the different factors that tend to affect people's use of social media. The theory identified such factors as the kind of the social media platform, either Facebook, TikTok, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, Instagram, X; the kind of information or messages that are disseminated, the personality of the individual who shared the content, the relationship of the person who disseminated the content and the attitude of the user (Lichtenstein & Williamson, 2017).

The key features of the theory include:

1. **Social Interactions:** This encompasses variables such as personalization, access to social resources, critical mass, risk and transparency. Social interactions according to the theory show the degree of personalization of the interactions among social media users. This enables the social media users to pay attention to topics that interests them. This means they sieve messages on social media platforms, and do away with the ones that are not relevant to their personal interests. The theory further explains that getting *access* to social resources refers to the ease with which information, skilled individuals, and other social media users can be accessed. Di Gangi and Wasko (2016) also buttress that *risk* of engagement on social media refers to the possible threats or harm such as identity theft that those use social media can experience when they disseminate information or when they are interacting. While transparency is concerned with the level of balancing information among social media users.
2. **Technical Features:** This contributes to the understanding of how the characteristics of various social media platforms shape users interactions and experience. The technical characteristics include completeness, flexibility, evolvability, and integration. Completeness is primarily concerned with users' views or perceptions regarding their capabilities to engage at the desired level of specificity on social media. Since there are different categories of social media users, this theory explains that technical features of a social media platform should be designed to manage a variety of audience. Di Gangi and Wasko (2016) define Flexibility as a feature of the technical aspect of Social Media Engagement Theory to mean the extent to which social media users experience existing functionalities in new ways. This implies that when those who make use of social media communication platforms are given flexibility, they are more likely to have positive experiences and view the system as both important and meeting their needs. Evolvability implies the rate at which social media platforms like Facebook, X, WhatsApp, TikTok, Instagram and the likes constantly change with a view to meeting the users' everyday needs. For example, WhatsApp platform has continued to evolve given users different features of usage. Integration, according to Social Media Engagement Theory of Di Gangi and Wasko (2016) means the level to which different elements (multimedia) are combined to disseminate information. Social media users can use video, text, audio, graphics and other communication elements to spread across information. This therefore increases the ease with which users can access content from different entry points and limits the development of barriers that could detract from feelings of user engagement.
3. **User Engagement:** As explained earlier, engagement as a component of the Social Media Engagement Theory refers to the degree of use of social media platforms by a user. It is compartmentalized into two: Individual involvement and personal meaning. Intense or less involvement in social media messages or it use generally is an important factor of engagement. The theory argues that, the higher the degree of being involved in social media communication, the more a user feels belonged and glued to interactions on these platforms and vice versa. The personal meaning refers to how important social media platform are to the users.
4. **Control Variables:** Di Gangi and Wasko (2016) contend that certain factors such as age, gender, education, habit and expertise influence and determine how people use social media for personal and professional practice.

The theory finds relevance in health communication. The Social Media Management Theory explains the rationale behind healthcare professionals' propensity to network and build community, provides them with the avenue to interact, increase their knowledge base and dialogue with their patients and colleagues, and using social media to raise public awareness and consciousness on health issues. Consequently, Social Media Management Theory is found suitable in this research due to the fact that it helps to explain how healthcare practitioners are utilizing social media platforms to network, connect with their in-patients and out-patients and to deepen their knowledge, as well as disseminate health information to enable the public take informed health decisions.

However, the Social Media Engagement Theory has been criticized for its lack of comprehensive explanation as regards user's behaviour when using social media (Davis et al, 2024). Mishnick and Wise (2024) support that the theory lacks the ability to predict the specific outcomes of the use of social media by people. It does not holistically take into account cultural variables as it concerns the adoption and application of social media by individuals. See-Pui (2017) argues that Social Media Engagement Theory is mainly a Western cultural idea and its use in other cultures, territories, nations and regions may be limited. Another shortcoming of this theory is its limited ability to measure the degree of engagement. This implies that, while the theory provides the guide for understanding engagement, there are still arguments and counter-arguments regarding the agreed-methods that can be used to measure the level of engagement and ascertaining the effectiveness of social media use, for instance, for health purposes. Lastly, the theory is criticised for concentrating only on the positive parts of the application of social media for interactions. It is silent on the negative effects that social media poses to people's mental health, for example.

Discussion of Findings

The finding indicated that healthcare givers find social media useful in their practice because it gives them the opportunities to create and share health information among themselves, social media communication platforms are important because they use it to debate government health policies and programmes. The health practitioners do this through social media groups that they belong to. Further, social media is helpful for promoting good health practices, as well as educating and engaging with members of the public, social media is a good communication avenue to relate with people who are ill, educate and enlighten them on what to do immediately. Additionally, the reasons for the use of social media for health-related engagements include using of social media to disseminate and mobilize members of the public towards tackling any health emergency issue, social media is important to health practitioners in terms of research as it provides the avenue to connect, work together on a research project, source for donors, funders, as well as sharing their research outcomes, and social media offers them as individuals and their organizations the opportunity to promote their individual/organizational services.

Other findings were that social media is a good means for advancement of knowledge, networking, career development and collaborations, social media is also useful to the respondents because they use it to get messages from the public regarding their experiences and perceptions on health issues in their communities, and the made of use social media to fix appointment with clients and patients, as well as to prescribe treatment. This is in tandem with Kaplan and Haenlein's (2010) position that social media enables real-time exchange of information with a wide range of people, providing a

platform for instant distribution of messages. These findings align with that of Ternenge (2020), which revealed that medical have utilised social media for health information sharing.

This further affirms Soubra, Hasan and Shaarani's (2022) submission that social media serves as an effective platforms for healthcare workers to connect and reach people with health information with minimal effort, vitally changing the landscape of health communication. This finding also indicated a clear acknowledgment among participant of the imperativeness of social media in shaping their health activities. It could equally be deduced that the ability of social media to foster individuals and communities engagement continues to spread across disciplines with the health industry one of the biggest beneficiaries. In other words, social media has become an essential tool in today's health communication, significantly influencing health outcomes.

The foregoing findings also justify the adoption of Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), which the performance expectation aspect of it defines 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 at which an individual perceives that important others believe he or she should use the new system. Further, the Social Media Engagement Theory used in the study supports these findings by demonstrating the impact of new communication technology like social media highlighting its importance in facilitating social interactions among users across the world. Undoubtedly, the innovation of social media communication technology provides an exceptional users experience that enables healthcare professionals to connect, create and share messages in new ways that were never before possible.

Further, finding showed the challenges of the use of social media in health practice by healthcare professional. These challenges range from the use of social media to share incomplete or informal or misleading health messages, and that sometimes these health messages cannot be traced to a source. This finding resonates with the assertion of Kubheka, Carter and Mwaura (2020) that due to the open nature of social media platform, it usually comes with the challenge and risk of posting and receiving inaccurate medical messages and incorrect health advice from people who disguise as health practitioners on social media. The study found another challenge to be damage to professional image because unethical and unprofessional content can be disseminated on social media. This could spoil the character of clinical workers and the organizations they represent. Additionally, data indicated that the use of social media by healthcare practitioners for health-related activities could lead to intrusion into patient's privacy, violation of the patient-healthcare practitioner borderline, and possible law suit due to leakage of patient's health history as a result of the uncontrolled nature of social media. Others were time constants to attend to volume of health messages disseminated on social media and request made by patients on social media.

Previous studies have noted the concerns with the use of social media for health learning and practice by healthcare workers. For instance, the investigation by Ghalavand et al (2020) concludes that the main issues with the use of social media for healthcare engagement are violation of patient's privacy and the inability to control fake and unsubstantiated medical messages circulated on social media as well as the inability to handle negative comments made on social media concerning health by unscrupulous elements. These results are also consistent with that of Shrikant (2023), who opines that health contents spread on online platforms such as social media can leave a lasting first impression on a patient because such posts can reveal detailed information about a

person's medical history to the public. Equally in consonant with the results of this study is the finding of (Hunter et al (2018), who affirms that making of health posts on social media platforms by medical personnel could be copied by acquaintances and shared without the health practitioners' knowledge or permission.

This finding also agrees with the study of Addo and Antwi (2024), who observe that social media comes with too much information to handle and there is also risk of disclosing patients' information, inaccurate health information, distraction and high cost of purchasing data, as well as poor internet connectivity. Adomi, Egbaivwie and Ogugua (n.d), in addition, note that the obstacles to the use of Internet-related facilities for health activities in developing countries to include high cost of having access to the Internet services and poor network in some instances.

Conclusion

The crux of the study has been on a review on social media use in health practice by healthcare professionals. From the analysis of data, the investigation provided significant depth into social media use by healthcare professionals, stressing the important role of different factors like age and gender in shaping behavioural intention and usage social media applications for practice. The study offered useful implications for health workers, the government and its relevant ministries and agencies, giving strategies to improve health practitioners-patient and the public health communication and engagement through social media. Furthermore, social networking sites offered an intricate and many-sided role in healthcare delivery. Whereas social media represented major platform and opportunities for healthcare professionals to link up with colleagues across the globe, getting quick access to health information, and overcoming setbacks to care, social media also raised issues to concerning the spread of unverified messages, intrusion into patients' health privacy and the possibility for harmful experiences.

Therefore, the study concluded that social media is a powerful communication platform for healthcare practitioners to update their knowledge, conduct research, spread health messages, share health resources, provoke discussions and debates on health issues with a view to promoting positive attitudes towards health. In addition, healthcare practitioners in the studied health organizations utilized social media to a very large extent for enhanced service delivery. Also, while age is a significant factor in determining the use of social media in health practice, gender and income did not affect the application of social media for health engagement.

Recommendations

1. The government and those who own social media companies should prevent the dissemination of unconfirmed health messages. Verified sources of health information should be promoted, while those that are not credible should be identified and portray as dangerous or not safe.
2. Healthcare professionals should continue to take advantage of the social media platforms to improve health reach in the country.

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