

THE ROLES OF SOCIAL MEDIA TOOLS IN PROMOTING HEALTH STATUS OF THE
CITIZENS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Especially in underdeveloped nations like Nigeria, social media platforms have revolutionized the field of health communication by providing creative means of enhancing public health. This essay examines how important it is to promote Nigerian residents' health by utilizing networks like Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Twitter. Social media plays a vital role in the nation's healthcare system due to the quick distribution of health information, the encouragement of illness preventive tactics, and the availability of telemedicine services. Social media has also become a medium for peer-to-peer assistance, public health initiatives, and real-time interaction between the public and medical experts. These digital technologies have empowered communities in both urban and rural areas by bridging gaps in health literacy and access to treatment, from battling health misinformation to expanding access to medical services. But issues like false information spreading and uneven access to modern technology continue to exist. In addition to stressing social media's potential as a long-term means of promoting public health in Nigeria, this research critically evaluates its advantages and disadvantages.

KEYWORDS: Social Media, Health Status, Citizens and Nigeria.

Introduction

Nigeria is not an exception to how social media's explosive growth has changed how people access, share, and interact with health information worldwide. Social media platforms are essential for bridging the knowledge gap in a nation where socioeconomic reasons, regional differences, and infrastructure problems can make it difficult to receive healthcare services. With over 33 million active social media users in Nigeria as of 2023, platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, and Instagram have emerged as vital instruments for disseminating health information, promoting public health campaigns, and encouraging citizen participation in health discussions (Bello et al., 2019). It has been demonstrated that these digital resources are useful for teaching the public about illness management, disease prevention, and the significance of getting medical attention as soon as possible.

The promotion of health awareness campaigns is one of social media's most important functions in Nigeria. However, currently non-governmental organizations

(NGOs), public health organizations', and medical professionals use these platforms to raise public awareness of important health concerns including diet, cleanliness, and vaccination policies, as well as maternal health and immunization. Social media's immediate nature and broad audience make it possible to share health alerts in real time, which is especially important during epidemics or other situations involving the public's health. For example, social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp were used to spread information regarding mask use, social distancing procedures, and the advantages of vaccination during the COVID-19 pandemic. This information was crucial in preventing disinformation and enhancing public safety.

Furthermore, peer-to-peer communication among Nigerians about health techniques, treatment alternatives, and health concerns has been made possible in large part by social media platforms. As users exchange information, guidance, and experiences, the community becomes more knowledgeable and health-conscious. These kinds of interactions have shown to be crucial in the fight against health disinformation, which is pervasive in many developing nations. By enabling citizens to verify information through reputable health accounts and public figures, social media helps counteract false claims and promote evidence-based health practices (Adetokunbo & Oladunni, 2021).

Social media has not only raised awareness and encouraged peer participation, but it has also allowed Nigerian healthcare practitioners to offer telemedicine and online consultations. In rural areas where healthcare facilities are scarce, platforms like WhatsApp have been used by doctors to consult with patients remotely, thus broadening access to healthcare and improving health outcomes (Bello et al., 2019). When it comes to treating chronic illnesses, mental health issues, and other problems that call for ongoing patient monitoring, this digital transition is very helpful. Nonetheless, social media technologies will probably become even more important in improving Nigerians' health condition as the nation's digital environment develops.

Concept of Social Media

The collection of interactive online tools called social media makes it easier for people to create, create, and share user-generated content individually or in groups. They are a feature of daily life that is becoming more and more prevalent. Dollarhide (2024) defined Social media as a variety of technologies that facilitate the sharing of ideas and information among their users. It is referred as the digital technology that facilitates the exchange of ideas and information through online communities and networks, including text and images. User-generated material on social media platforms is common and encourages interaction through likes, shares, comments, and discussions. Globally, there are around 5 billion users of social media. A study by Akpan, James & Nwokoro (2022), explained that brand awareness of a product can be set of activities carried out on outdoor advertising through social media platforms to promote consumer engagement and influence sales.

While social media is criticized for spreading hate speech and misinformation, it is also praised for aiding in the development of communities. Additionally, social media plays a bigger and bigger role in the marketing strategies of many businesses. The most popular social media sites in the world are We Chat, WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and WhatsApp. It is also a type of communication where users may

communicate more with one another by using certain media platforms. Wolf, Sims & Yang (2018), however defined social media as websites which allow profile creation and visibility of relationships between users. Social media refers to web-based programs that offer features for connections, groups, profiles, and discourse. Some have referred to social media as social media sites, or as a collection of information technologies that enable networking and interactions.

Given how much time individuals spend on social media websites and applications every day; it should come as no surprise that social media plays a significant part in the marketing efforts of many businesses. Social media may be thought of as interactive platforms that let people and groups share, co-create, debate, and alter user-generated content such as text, photos, videos, audio files, and games using online and mobile technology. Social media is a type of online mass media communication where people exchange ideas, information, and other content, including videos, using websites for social networking and microblogging. Additionally, they are collections of Web 2.0-based programs that facilitate the production and sharing of user-generated content while expanding on its theoretical and technological underpinnings. Indeed, many have mastered the social media landscape successfully, showing the potential of these applications to yield impressive results. Kaplan (2018)

A variety of online environments where people may engage with friends, coworkers, strangers, information, visual material, and more is also referred to as social media. However, through online communities, people may develop, share, and exchange ideas and information using social media. Depending on the user, this tool can be utilized in a variety of ways. Given the importance of social media in influencing public opinion, terms like "social media" have gained prominence in public discourse and mass communication studies. Examples of these platforms include Facebook, Twitter, and blogs. Real-time one-to-one and many-to-many interactions are now possible because to this change in the way health communication messaging is distributed. Ohiagu & Okorie (2014) affirmed that, social media are online communications that use special techniques that involve participation, conversation, sharing, collaboration and linkage.

Online communities that people utilise to communicate with like-minded others are referred to as social media. Social media users share and upload a variety of media content, such as photos, blog entries, videos, direct and group messages, podcasts, newsletters, music, and connections to other websites. Social media is used for a variety of purposes, including sharing news, political, and cultural items; tweeting, blogging, and posting comments; uploading images and videos; and messaging other users. Social media is a ubiquitous aspect of daily existence. It gives users a simple method to interact and establish connections with others without physically meeting in person. Social media is a ubiquitous aspect of our lives that is all around us.

Concept of health

Being in a condition of health allows one to express their full potential within their living environment and to perform successfully on a physical, mental, social, and spiritual level. Oleribe, Ukwedeh & Burstow (2018) affirmed that, Health is an amorphous word that lacks a single definition. Since one cannot reach one's full potential or that of society in the absence of excellent health, health is really wealth.

Health is a condition of total physical, mental, and social well-being and is not only the absence of illness or infirmity. It encompasses all aspects of emotional, mental, and physical well-being. An aid to daily existence rather than the goal of life. Good health emphasizes both physical abilities and social and personal resources. Accordingly, one's health serves as a tool rather than an aim in and of itself to support one's role in larger society. One may live a complete life with meaning and purpose if they follow a healthy lifestyle.

Health is the body's capacity to adjust to unexpected dangers and conditions. The term "health" has several definitions that have been used to diverse contexts over time. In general, it denotes to being in good bodily and mental health, particularly when it is connected to the body's regular functioning and is free from illness, pain, including mental agony, or damage. Promoting healthy behaviors like consistent exercise and enough sleep, as well as minimizing or avoiding unhealthy settings or activities like smoking or excessive stress, can help people stay healthier. Alslman & Muayyad (2015) defined health as the holistic: a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity. Wellness is perceived as a lived reality, a cyclical process of being and evolving.

However, the state of being sound or entire in terms of both mental and physical functioning is called health. Physical, psychological, interpersonal, and social elements are all included. An individual's perceived state of existence is their level of well-being. A person's subjective representation of their composite assessment of their somatic sense of self, how they are feeling, and their functional competence is referred to as their state of health; how one is doing. The judgement that follows materializes as a subjective perception of varying degrees of health or disease. A state of mind, body, and spirit when a person is free from disease is called health. In a similar vein, wellness is an active condition that includes leading a lifestyle that supports mental, emotional, and physical well-being. Being in good health goes beyond simply not being sick or disabled to include social and mental well-being as well as the capacity to lead a fulfilling life on both a social and financial level.

Types of Social Media

Social media platforms may be divided into many categories according to their uses and objectives. Israel (2023), mentioned that not all social media platforms are created equal and if an individual want to be successful on social, he or she will need to prioritize. These are the most popular social networking platforms:

➤ Social Networking Sites

These social media sites aim to facilitate interpersonal connections, community development, and relationship building. Users interact with material from friends and connections, exchange updates, and establish profiles. Social networking sites also serve a variety of purposes, including marketing, professional networking, and fostering personal connections. The algorithms that are powered by data enhance user engagement by presenting pertinent material that is derived from prior interactions. Facebook, Twitter (X), Instagram, LinkedIn, Tiktok, and WhatsApp are a few examples.

➤ **Blogging Platforms**

Users of these websites can exchange quick updates or postings, frequently in real time. The content's brevity promotes instant communication and sharing. News distribution and real-time communication are two areas where blogging systems thrive. They are effective tools for crisis management and digital marketing as they are widely utilized for opinion sharing, political conversation, and brand involvement. Facebook, Word Press, Tumblr, Medium, and Twitter (X) are a few examples.

➤ **Media Sharing Networks**

These platforms encourage artistic expression by concentrating on the sharing of visual or video content. Users have the ability to remark, like, and share pictures and videos, frequently utilizing multimedia to convey thoughts. Visual storytelling is a powerful tool for media sharing networks. They are especially helpful for efforts aimed at younger audiences, influencer marketing, and branding. The visual-first strategy encourages creativity and improves user engagement. Vimeo, Snapchat, Tiktok, YouTube, and Instagram are a few examples.

➤ **Discussion Forums**

These online forums allow users to debate certain subjects and exchange expertise, advice, and queries. Discussion boards rely on user-generated material and are rich in information. They work wonders for community development and in-depth exploration of specialized subjects. These platforms are essential to content marketing because they provide companies and individuals the chance to become authorities in a certain industry. Reddit, Quora, Digg, and Clubhouse are a few examples.

➤ **Content Curation and Bookmarking Sites**

User-generated links to articles, photos, and other material are saved, arranged, and shared. According to user interests, these systems assist in finding fresh material. However, websites that curate content make customized suggestions using algorithms. For the creative industries in particular, they are great resources for organizing research, identifying trends, and increasing awareness in specialized fields. Flipboard, Pocket, Feedly, Pinterest, and Stumble Upon are a few examples.

➤ **Instant Messaging Platforms**

These are real-time communication systems that allow users to share media files, audio, video, and text. Additionally, some include broadcasting capabilities and group conversations. With end-to-end encryption and the ability to make voice and video calls, instant messaging applications serve as the foundation of real-time communication. Because these platforms are convenient and safe, businesses are adopting them more and more for internal communication and customer support. Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp, and Telegram are a few examples.

➤ **Social Media for Collaboration and Work**

Through the provision of communication, project management, and file sharing capabilities, these platforms help to foster cooperation inside organizations. In professional settings, collaborative platforms increase productivity by streamlining

process. They facilitate smooth team collaboration, connect with other company tools, and are perfect for remote work. Examples consist of Microsoft Teams and Slack.

➤ **Review and Opinion Sites**

In order to assist others in making wise judgements, users share their thoughts and evaluations regarding goods, services, and experiences. Review websites have a significant impact on customer choice and brand perception. High-quality, in-depth reviews are essential for consumer feedback loops and trust-building since algorithms prioritize them. Yelp, TripAdvisor, Open Table, and Google My Business are a few examples.

➤ **Virtual Worlds and Online Gaming Communities**

Users interact with others in virtual environments and game worlds by creating avatars. These platforms blend entertainment and social networking. Virtual worlds and online gaming communities, which frequently make use of cutting-edge technology like augmented and virtual reality, combine social engagement with immersive experiences. They are the next wave of social media interaction, drawing in younger viewers and encouraging innovation led by the community. Examples are Roblox, Second Life, and Fortnite.

➤ **Video hosting platforms**

Video hosting platforms, such as YouTube, TikTok, Snapchat, Vimeo, and Instagram, offer independent filmmakers, journalists, and other creators an easy way for their audience to watch videos on the go. Brands can use sponsored ads to reach new consumers, ask influencers to use and promote their products, or create their own original video content.

➤ **Decentralized social networks**

They are employed for community engagement, brand awareness raising, and discussion monitoring. Among them are Bluesky and Mastodon.

➤ **Social shopping networks:**

Through these networks, users may identify trends, discuss amazing discoveries, make purchases, and follow their preferred businesses. They concentrate on e-commerce, which is interesting and enjoyable due to the social component. These social shopping platforms are perfect for expanding your brand's visibility and increasing sales to a larger market. Instagram, Poshmark, Etsy, Facebook, and WhatsApp are a few of them.

The Roles of Social Media in Promoting Health Status of the Citizens in Nigeria

Social media has become a potent weapon in the 21st century that may affect many industries, including health. The increasing use of social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Twitter in Nigeria has changed how people obtain and share health information in addition to changing how they interact. The significant roles that social media plays in improving Nigerian citizen's health status are listed below:

➤ **Health Awareness and Education**

In Nigeria, where access to traditional media and healthcare services is restricted in rural regions, social media platforms play a critical role in the dissemination of health-related information. The World Health Organization (WHO) emphasizes that health literacy is crucial for promoting healthier lifestyles and enhancing public understanding of health issues (WHO, 2020). Social media, on the other hand, fills the vacuum by providing forums for medical experts, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the government to inform the public on a range of health-related issues, such as cleanliness, nutrition, and sexual health. During the COVID-19 pandemic, for instance initiatives like "#WearAMask" emphasized the significance of taking personal protective measures to slow the virus's spread. Influencers on social media, medical experts, and celebrities were crucial in encouraging people to follow safety precautions. As a result, social media has shown to be an effective tool for increasing Nigerians' knowledge of health issues and for promoting preventative healthcare practices.

➤ **Disease Prevention and Control**

Social media has a key role in controlling and preventing illness. Social media sites assist in warning the public about possible epidemics and preventative actions by spreading information in real-time. During the Ebola outbreak in West Africa, including Nigeria, social media served as a critical tool for the dissemination of health warnings and preventive strategies (Obadare & Olatunji, 2020). The Nigerian Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) uses social media sites like Facebook and Twitter to promptly announce health alerts about epidemics and other public health issues. By utilizing hashtags like "#EndEbola" and "#StopCOVID19," social media served as a platform for public education and engagement while also encouraging preventative measures like social distance and vaccination drives. These digital tactics have been successful in raising public awareness of health emergencies and showing the role of social media in Nigeria's public health management.

➤ **Mental Health Advocacy**

Nigerians still face a great deal of stigma associated with mental health problems, in part because of ingrained cultural beliefs and restricted access to mental health care. But social media has given advocates for mental health a forum, which has helped to eliminate stigmas and advance mental health. Social media is a tool used by many mental health activists and organizations in Nigeria to spread awareness of mental health issues including anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). On the other hand, Twitter efforts for mental health, such the "#MentalHealthAwareness" hashtag, have aided in conversations on the value of getting professional assistance and the necessity of society accepting mental health issues. The number of persons seeking internet counselling and treatment has increased as a result of these initiatives. As a result, social media in Nigeria provides an efficient forum for mental health advocacy, encouraging communication and dismantling the taboo around mental illness.

➤ **Access to Healthcare Services**

In Nigeria, social media is essential for providing residents with access to healthcare services. It has played a major role in the rise in popularity of telemedicine in recent

years. In order to deliver remote consultations, healthcare practitioners use Facebook and WhatsApp. This makes healthcare more accessible, particularly in underdeveloped and rural areas. According to studies, social media has made it easier for patients and healthcare professionals to communicate, leading to a spike in the use of telemedicine platforms in Nigeria. Many residents now have better health outcomes since they can access healthcare more easily through social media platforms, eliminating the need for them to go far for care. Additionally, virtual health lectures are provided by experts to the public, educating them about prevalent diseases, their symptoms, and potential remedies, using platforms like YouTube and Instagram.

➤ **Community Engagement and Support**

Social media encourages community involvement by allowing users to share their personal experiences and take part in health-related conversations. The popularity of online health communities has grown, enabling people to create support groups where they can talk about common health issues and provide encouragement. These virtual communities foster a sense of camaraderie, especially for people living with long-term conditions like diabetes, cancer, or HIV/AIDS. For instance, Facebook groups devoted to certain medical issues offer a forum for Nigerians to interact, pose queries, and exchange coping mechanisms. Such peer support is vital for individuals managing long-term illnesses, as it reduces feelings of isolation and empowers patients to take charge of their health (Oluwaseun, 2021). Social media helps those who are impacted emotionally and psychologically through these interactions, in addition to improving health awareness.

➤ **Government Initiatives and Public Health Campaigns**

Nigerian government organizations have included social media into national health campaigns after seeing the value of these platforms for public health. The NCDC, for example, uses Twitter to regularly update citizens on public health issues, from infectious disease outbreaks to vaccination drives (Ogunniyi & Olagunju, 2021). These organizations can reach a wider range of people using social media, which helps spread the word about public health issues throughout society. Furthermore, government organizations may get real-time public input via social media's interactive features, which helps them better customize health treatments. For example, social media channels were utilized to combat vaccine reluctance during the COVID-19 immunization campaign by debunking myths and disinformation that were spreading online. This proactive strategy raised vaccination rates, proving the effectiveness of social media in advancing public health goals.

➤ **Addressing Misinformation and Fake News**

Social media has advantages, but it can also be a double-edged sword since it frequently acts as a haven for false information, particularly in times of medical emergency. False health claims have the potential to cause widespread fear and encourage risky behavior. Social media can, however, also present a solution since authorities and health professionals may utilize these channels to dispel rumors and give correct information. For example, false information about vaccination safety and possible treatments for COVID-19 disseminated quickly on social media during the epidemic. To combat these misleading narratives, the Nigerian government and health organizations used fact-checking techniques and started social media public education initiatives. Social media

is becoming a more trustworthy medium for health communication because to the measures put in place by sites like Facebook and Twitter to flag or remove postings that include misleading health information.

Conclusion

Social media tools have emerged as transformative agents in promoting the health status of Nigerian citizens, offering a powerful means of health communication and service delivery. These platforms have facilitated rapid spreading of vital health information, enabled widespread public health campaigns, and provided a space for peer-to-peer engagement and telemedicine services. Through platforms like Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and Instagram, health professionals and government agencies can reach diverse audiences, addressing both preventive health measures and acute health crises. Social media has proven especially effective in raising awareness about disease prevention, improving health literacy, and bridging healthcare gaps between urban and rural areas. However, while the impact of social media on health promotion in Nigeria is significant, challenges such as misinformation, unequal access to digital tools, and concerns about data privacy must be addressed to fully harness its potential. Moving forward, leveraging social media as a sustainable public health strategy will require coordinated efforts from the government, healthcare providers, and technology platforms. By tackling these challenges, social media can continue to evolve as a critical tool for improving the health outcomes of Nigerian citizens, fostering a healthier, more informed society.

Recommendations

1. Government and healthcare organizations should use social media to launch targeted health literacy programs, ensuring citizens understand critical health issues and preventive measures.
2. Implementing fact-checking mechanisms on social media platforms to swiftly identify and counter false health information to help reduce the spread of harmful health-related rumors.
3. Citizens should increase the use of social media tools for remote consultations, especially in rural areas, to enhance access to healthcare and reduce the burden on physical health facilities.
4. It is advised that the public foster collaborations between the government, social media companies, and healthcare providers to create innovative digital health solutions and promote healthier lifestyles.

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