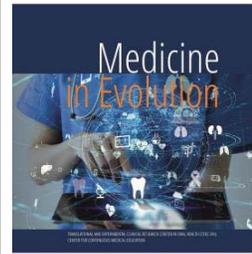


Evaluating the modern means of online socializing in the medical field: A study



Cosoroabă R.M.¹, Tănase A.D.¹, Todor L.^{2*}, Stana-Gag O.L.³, Lile I.E.³, Todor S.A.⁴, Popovici R.A.¹

¹*Department I, Faculty of Dental Medicine, Victor Babes University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Timisoara, Romania*

²*Department of Dental Medicine, Faculty of Medicine and Pharmacy, University of Oradea, Romania*

³*Faculty of Dental Medicine, Vasile Goldis Western University, Arad, Romania*

⁴*dentist doctor, private medical office, Oradea, Romania*

Correspondence to:

Name: Liana Todor

Address: Department of Dental Medicine, Faculty of Medicine and Pharmacy, University of Oradea, Romania, December 1st Square no.10, 410068 Oradea, Bihor County, Romania

Phone: +40 723517100

E-mail address: liana.todor@gmail.com

Abstract

Aim and purpose: The purpose of this study is to evaluate the social media interaction in the medical activity in the last decade.

Materials and methods: we conducted a retrospective observational study between January and March 2021, inquiring 24 doctors using semi-structured interviews.

Results: WhatsApp and Facebook social media platforms proved to be the most widely used among healthcare professionals.

Conclusions: The use of social media platforms for professional information has advantages and disadvantages, being a relatively new mean of obtaining relevant healthcare advice.

Keywords: social media interaction, medical activity, social media platforms

INTRODUCTION

Social networks - websites and other online tools called social networks - serve as a tool to connect people and organizations around topics of common interest [1-9]. Social platforms offer a great opportunity to interact quickly and sometimes in depth with many and diverse stakeholders, as people have the ability to communicate back and forth from anywhere in the world [10-19]. As more and more people receive their health news and information online, it is important to make sure that content delivered through online resources is accessible to a diverse target audience [19-29].

Aim and objectives

The aim of this paper was to make an assessment of the social-media interaction in the medical activity in the last decade.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

To carry out this paper we conducted a small retrospective observational study, of qualitative type conducted in January-March 2021. Using a qualitative survey project, 24 physicians were interviewed (using a semi-structured interview method) to achieve the objectives study. A qualitative survey is one of the most appropriate research methods for investigating exploratory questions.

The majority of participants were men (92%). This could be due to the snowball and conventional sampling used to recruit participants. No consistent data were found in the literature indicating major gender differences among physicians in adopting social networks. Most participants were also in the age groups 31-40 years (54%) and 41-50 years (29%). The high percentage of participants were from Timisoara (54%), followed by Resita (38%) and Lugoj (8%). Regarding the clinical specialty, the majority of participants were emergency physicians (58%) and general practitioners (21%). Other specialties were the participation of a general surgeon, a psychiatrist, a pediatrician, an orthopedic surgeon and an allergist.

RESULTS

According to the 24 doctors interviewed in the study, WhatsApp and Facebook were the two main socializing tools that attracted many doctors. Almost all the doctors who participated in the study used WhatsApp frequently and were involved in support groups on Facebook. The use of social networks is defined here as regularly using one or more social networking sites for creating and exchanging knowledge, engaging in discussions and comments with colleagues, for reading and updating (Figure1, Table1, Table2).

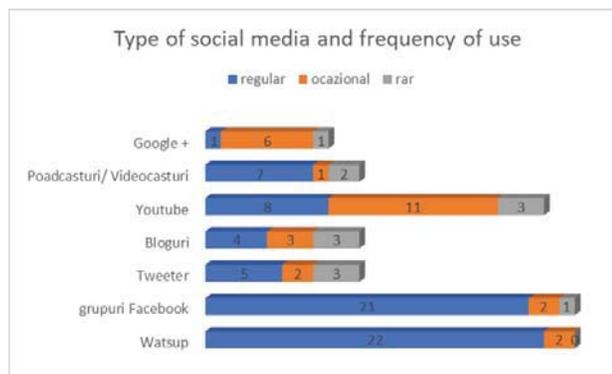


Figure 1. Frequency and type of social networks used by participants

Table 1. Reasons for the adoption of social media networks by doctors

Motives	Quotes from doctors
To stay connected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stay connected with colleagues through social media (S=23)
Expansion and group creation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> They can maintain contact with friends and colleagues who live far away (S=17)
Split of friend groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> During the pandemic they posted once a day at least, because of situations with patients that came up during this time (S=7) Access to information about new laws or medical discoveries (S=17)
Continuing the medical education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kept in touch with the latest discoveries and medical news (S=18) Watching videos of different techniques for perfecting the knowledge (S=5)
Branding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using community group pages for advertising, advice and sharing cases and building a personal brand (S=7) Information about protective habits against the covid (S=8) Tried to reach an audience (S=19)

Table 2. Challenges in the adoption of social media networks by doctors

Challenges	Examples
Maintaining doctor patient confidentiality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scared to overshare personal patient cases in order to not bother personal privacy (S=9) Biggest social media problems is one is never completely sure of the target reach (S=15)
Lack of active participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Doctors consider social media more of a marketing tool and less of an educational one (S=19) The active teaching role of doctors is poorly managed by them and the use of social media (S=11)
Lack of trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hard to accept knowledge and criticism by doctors I don't personally know or who are unknown internationally or nationally (S=8) Scared to share too much information on social media out of fear to be judged or blamed (S=10)
Finding time for social media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A matter of time, being a doctor covers most of the free time. (S=9)
Acceptance and support from the workplace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Legislative lax outlines make it confusing to post and share a lot of information (S=7) The notion of education through social media still not respected enough by patients or community. (S=4)
Information chaos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Too much information online, but hard to distinguish through the spam. (S=6) Youtube offers a lot of useful information but in order to reach the educative parts one has to sift through a lot of junk (S=5)

DISCUSSIONS

Social media is a new technology in healthcare. Healthcare managers are working to effectively utilize social media to engage patients. Through effective communication and marketing methods, we can use the internet to connect with patients. Patients are increasingly relying on information found online and using the Internet to gather information about healthcare and to connect with other patients. Others use these resources for research or to share experiences with healthcare providers. Patients are also looking for information through social media that helps select doctors, specialists and hospitals to make informed decisions to seek treatment [30-41]. The adoption of social networks has both benefits and risks for doctors [42-48]. Doctors and other health professionals are currently facing increasing challenges in adopting social networks for knowledge sharing [48-53].

CONCLUSIONS

The participants in the study considered that the future of social networks in the field of health is promising. It is currently underused and quite unregulated. However, it is still expanding and many major health organizations and professionals are looking closely at social media. Social networks can revolutionize medicine in terms of consultations, professional interactions and networks, the exchange of knowledge between organizations, the transformation of continuing health education and the democratization of healthcare, allowing more people (including patients, journalists, other clinical professionals or enthusiasts) to have a voice. and get involved in medical activities:

- The use of social networks by patients for health reasons is increasing.
- The future implies the need to use social media networks both in educating patients, for telemedicine, but also to continue the general training of health professionals for a better homogenization of the training of medical staff globally.

This study reflects the beneficial and potentially harmful effects of patients' use of social networks on health:

- The findings show that patients use social media primarily for social support, which is represented by informational support, emotional support, esteem support, and network support.
- They are extremely important for patients because they cover their emotional side and social comparison.
- The use of social networks by patients most often leads to the empowerment of the patient.
- Identified patients felt the need for subjective well-being, dependence on social networks, promotion and loss of privacy.
- The types of use of social networks by patients affect the relationship between professionals and healthcare by stimulating a more equal communication between the patient and the health professional, shorter relationships, harmonious relationships, suboptimal interactions between the patient and the health professional.

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