

The Impact of Social Media Usage on Healthcare Delivery among Nurses

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Abstract

Introduction: Social media platforms have become integral to communication and information exchange in various sectors, including healthcare. For nurses, these platforms provide opportunities for professional networking, accessing clinical updates, and improving patient care through shared knowledge. **Objective:** The study aimed to understand the use of social media and its impact on healthcare delivery among nurses at a specific hospital. **Methodology:** A mixed-method approach was adopted, combining both quantitative and qualitative data. A cross-sectional descriptive survey was conducted with 313 nurses from various clinical departments in a tertiary healthcare institution. Data collection involved structured questionnaires for quantitative analysis and focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs) for qualitative insights. Quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS version 22, and qualitative data was analyzed using thematic analysis with NVivo software. **Results:** The study found that Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter are the most commonly used platforms among nurses for exchanging health information. Key areas of focus included patient experiences, clinical updates, and best practices. Nurses reported that social media allowed them to quickly access up-to-date information and facilitated collaboration with peers. However, challenges such as concerns over patient privacy, the reliability of online information, and the absence of formal guidelines were noted. **Conclusion:** Social media has significant potential to enhance clinical decision-making and improve patient care among nurses in Ghana. However, barriers such as privacy concerns, unreliable internet access, and the absence of structured guidelines limit its full potential in professional practice. **Recommendations:** The Ministry of Health, in collaboration with health services, private agencies, and network providers, should also develop clear guidelines for social media use in clinical settings.

Keywords

Social Media, Internet, Social Networking Site, Health Information, Mobile Devices, Healthcare Delivery

1. Introduction

1.1. Background to the Study

As of 2024, there are 5.18 billion internet users globally, representing over 65% of the world's population, and 4.89 billion people actively use social media platforms [1]. This rapid digital expansion has significantly influenced healthcare communication, with social media becoming a key tool for healthcare professionals, including nurses, to share clinical updates, collaborate on patient care, and engage in professional development [2]. Nurses now use platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp for exchanging best practices, participating in discussions about patient care, and staying updated with the latest healthcare developments [3]. Given the critical role social media plays in modern healthcare, understanding how nurses-particularly those in resource-limited settings-leverage these platforms for professional purposes is crucial. This study aims to explore the impact of social media on nursing practice and healthcare delivery within these contexts.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Despite the rapid growth of social media in healthcare, there is a significant gap in understanding how nurses in resource-constrained settings leverage these platforms for professional development and patient care. While much of the existing literature focuses on general trends in social media use among healthcare professionals, it often overlooks the unique challenges that nurses face in developing countries, such as limited internet access and a lack of formal guidelines for appropriate use [4].

Two critical gaps remain underexplored in this context: First, the impact of social media on the collaborative decision-making process among nurses in remote healthcare settings has not been adequately investigated. This gap is particularly concerning given that effective communication is vital for enhancing patient care and outcomes in such environments [5]. Second, the specific role of social media in fostering professional identity and community among nurses in low-resource areas is yet to be explored. Understanding how these platforms contribute to building a sense of belonging and professional growth can provide insights into optimizing their use for nurse education and practice [6]. Again, while data shows that many nurses in Ghana use social media for patient education, outreach, professional development, and health promotion, there is limited research on what drives this usage. Therefore, this study focuses on understanding the factors motivating nurses to use social media.

Addressing these gaps is essential for developing strategies that harness social media's potential to improve healthcare delivery, facilitate professional networking, and enhance patient outcomes in settings where traditional resources may be limited. By focusing on these underexplored aspects, this study aims to provide actionable insights that can guide healthcare institutions and policymakers in leveraging social media effectively within nursing practice.

The study aims to address the following questions:

1. What health-related content do nurses search for on social media?
2. What are the potential benefits of social media use for registered nurses?
3. What are the potential risks associated with social media use by registered nurses?

1.3. Objectives of the Study

1. To determine the health-related content nurses search for on social media.
2. To identify the potential benefits of social media use for registered nurses.
3. To recognize the potential risks associated with social media use by registered nurses.

1.4. Significance of the Study

This study is notable as it fills a research gap in Ghanaian health education literature, contributing to the existing body of knowledge in nursing. Most research on social media use is conducted in developed countries with high internet penetration, making this study unique. It provides a foundation for further research into the health-related social media phenomenon among nurses in Ghana.

For the government, this study helps stakeholders and policymakers understand the health information needs of students, aiding in the development of health policies that ensure better access to healthcare and quality treatment. Health information is essential for addressing national health-related concerns and promoting growth.

2. Related Literature

2.1. The Concept of Social Media

In this study, social media is defined as the use of electronic communication platforms, such as YouTube, Facebook, WhatsApp, Snapchat, and Telegram, to network and share information. Social networking sites offer various features for users, including connecting with friends and colleagues, sharing hobbies, and enhancing teaching practices [7]. Popular platforms utilized globally, including by nurses, encompass Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube [8]-[10].

The use of social media by hospitals and medical personnel has significantly increased, transforming the dynamics between patients and healthcare organizations. Social media serves as a tool to discuss health issues, promote social collaboration, and engage stakeholders, thereby enhancing interpersonal relationships

and encouraging active participation in health-related matters [10] [11].

2.2. Examples of Social Media Platforms

Social networking is one of the most widely used categories of social media platforms, allowing users to share information and interact with loved ones [12]. Facebook, with over 2.96 billion active users, emphasizes connections between friends and family, while LinkedIn, with over 950 million users, focuses on professional networking (Meta, 2024; LinkedIn, 2024). Users on LinkedIn can showcase their achievements, job history, education, and skills, potentially leading to job opportunities [13].

Content sharing involves the exchange of documents, videos, and images. Platforms like YouTube and Instagram enable users to share diverse media formats. YouTube allows users to enjoy and upload videos and music, sharing them with friends and the global audience (YouTube, 2024). While YouTube supports comments, it lacks a dedicated discussion board for deeper interaction and community engagement [10].

Digital publishing permits professionals to share their knowledge and concepts freely. Blogging remains a preferred and contemporary method of web publication, enabling individuals to engage with their audience through posts and comments, fostering discussions [9] (Martinez & Dwyer, 2023). Microblogging platforms, like Twitter, allow users to share brief updates (280 characters or fewer) with followers, promoting the instant dissemination of ideas and information (Twitter, 2024). Twitter has over 450 million users, aiming to empower users to share ideas and information in real time (Twitter, 2024).

2.3. Social Media and Health Communication

Health organizations leverage social media to amplify messages from traditional media and engage consumers in content co-creation [14]. This strategy involves modifying communication techniques to include audience input, fostering collaboration, and building trust. Social media provides opportunities to integrate public health information into everyday online conversations and share useful tools for health promotion [15].

As social media becomes essential for reaching younger populations, who often abandon traditional media, it allows patients and caregivers to communicate, share experiences, and create support groups, enhancing the dissemination of health information [16]. Healthcare professionals utilize social media to share information, discuss policies, promote healthy lifestyles, and connect with various audiences, which can lead to improved health outcomes and professional networking [17].

Educational institutions emphasize the importance of teaching future medical professionals about social media in health communication. Social media platforms are increasingly utilized for spreading health information and engaging the public, particularly among youths and teenagers [18]. Despite its potential, there

is limited research on the effectiveness of social media in public health communication. Organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recognize its importance but often lack evidence on meaningful audience engagement through these platforms [19].

Moreover, social media's capability to monitor conversations and receive real-time feedback enhances research and surveillance in public health [20]. Effective health communication via social media involves listening to and addressing audience needs, building trust, and integrating these methods with traditional communication approaches [21]. Influencers play a crucial role in promoting health issues and persistently engaging with target audiences [22].

Social media empowers users to create and share content, encouraging participation and storytelling, which strengthens health communication efforts. By revolutionizing health communication, social media facilitates interaction, Knowledge sharing, and the achievement of common goals. It serves as a cost-effective platform for user expression and content distribution, offering numerous opportunities for public engagement in health communication [23].

Perceived Usefulness of Social Media

Perceived usefulness and ease of use are fundamental factors influencing the acceptance and use of technology, as described by the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) [24]. Perceived usefulness refers to the belief that using new technology will enhance performance. For nurses, this translates to recognizing social media as a tool that can improve nursing care and productivity, thereby positively impacting medical facility outcomes [25]. When nurses perceive social media as a means to enhance their professional practices, they are more likely to view it as a valuable and efficient tool for their work [26].

2.4. Potential Benefits of Social Media Use

2.4.1. A Point of Reference

A notable trend from the literature indicates that social media serves as a significant information source for registered nurses. Six out of nine studies reviewed underscore its utility, despite concerns about the reliability of information. For instance, Schroeder reported that nursing publications actively utilize Twitter to disseminate research findings and updates, facilitating real-time information sharing among nurses [27]. Furthermore, the integration of social media into various stages of the nursing process has been shown to enhance diagnostic competency and patient assessments [28]. Innovative practices, such as secure intranet wikis, have also emerged, allowing nurses to collaboratively create and refine evidence-based patient care resources [29].

2.4.2. Professional Development

Research by Vukušić *et al.* demonstrates that nurses globally leverage social media for both personal and professional growth, highlighting its dual role [30]. Notably, platforms like LinkedIn are pivotal for career advancement, enabling nurses to

network and access opportunities internationally. This online networking fosters a sense of community, ultimately improving job satisfaction, patient safety, and organizational loyalty [31]. Additionally, social media has proven effective for nurses to stay informed about industry events and policy discussions, as illustrated by campaigns led by the NSW Nurses and Midwives Association advocating for improved nurse-to-patient ratios [32]. However, the exploration of how these platforms influence professional identity remains underdeveloped, warranting further investigation.

2.4.3. Nurse and Patient/Client Relationship

Hoyle *et al.* explored the impact of social media on registered nurses' interpersonal skills, revealing that frequent engagement enhances both verbal and nonverbal communication, thus increasing patient engagement [33]. Furthermore, healthcare organizations are adopting platforms like YouTube for educational outreach, addressing the need for patient-centered care [34]. Although some studies suggest that social media may reduce face-to-face interactions, they also highlight its potential to facilitate ongoing communication, enabling nurses to adapt care based on patient feedback and public sentiment [35]. The dynamic interaction between social media and patient needs is a crucial area for further research.

2.4.4. Perceived Ease of Use of Social Media

The concept of perceived ease of use, as articulated by Shu (2023), plays a critical role in the adoption of social media among nurses [36]. Research indicates that nurses are more likely to embrace user-friendly platforms, which enhances their overall performance and engagement. Dzandu *et al.* (2023) found that a positive perception of ease directly influences users' motivation to learn and effectively utilize new technologies [37]. However, further examination is needed to understand how varying levels of digital literacy among nurses impact their perceptions and subsequent engagement with these platforms.

2.5. Social Media and Nursing

Social media's integration into the nursing profession is relatively recent, and the evidence regarding its utilization by nurses remains limited. Andrejco notes that while a significant majority of registered nurses are active users of social media, studies by Kung and OH reveal that 94% of 410 registered nurses frequently engage with social media, indicating its pervasive role in modern nursing practice [38]. Despite this, Vukušić *et al.* highlight that social media's integration varies significantly across different professional fields, including nursing [30]. Furthermore, there are substantial discrepancies in how hospitals implement and regulate social media, leading to inconsistencies in practice and potential ethical dilemmas [39].

2.5.1. Ethical Concerns

Nurses encounter unique ethical challenges when using social media, particularly regarding patient confidentiality and the potential for disparaging colleagues. The

balancing act between personal and professional lives on social media can create ambiguity regarding appropriate content sharing [40]. Additionally, frequent social media engagement may impair nurses' emotional recognition and responsiveness during patient interactions, adversely affecting their professional behavior [41]. Distractions caused by social media usage can lead to critical errors, such as medication mishaps and communication breakdowns during patient handoffs, posing serious risks to patient safety. Mariano *et al.* found that heightened social media use among nurses decreased patient engagement and care quality, as patients reported feeling neglected when nurses were distracted by their devices [42]. This dynamic resulted in significant communication gaps and diminished patient involvement in treatment decisions.

2.5.2. Lack of Guidelines and Policies

The absence of comprehensive guidelines for nurses' social media use in clinical settings presents a notable challenge. Vukušić *et al.* and Schroeder emphasize the **lack of consistent rules** governing social media usage, leading to an increased risk of misuse and unprofessional conduct [27] [30]. The inconsistency in policies across healthcare facilities further complicates matters, resulting in varied standards of professional behavior among nurses. Establishing uniform, evidence-based guidelines globally is crucial for maintaining professionalism in nursing and ensuring safe, effective patient care [43]. Additionally, there is a pressing need for research into how these guidelines can be effectively communicated and implemented within healthcare settings to foster a culture of responsible social media use among nurses.

3. Methodology

3.1. Study Design

The study employed a mixed-method approach using quantitative and qualitative techniques within a descriptive cross-sectional design, chosen due to time constraints and academic purposes. Data was collected in two phases: first, questionnaires were distributed to the target population; second, focused group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted on social media use for health information. An exploratory descriptive qualitative strategy was used to understand nurses' adoption of social media for nursing care within the technology adoption model framework, assessing its usefulness, ease of use, and behavior. This approach provided a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing nurses' social media adoption and directly informed the study's objectives.

3.2. Study Population

The study population consisted of all frontline nurses across various clinical departments, including the emergency room, outpatient department, children's ward, male ward, female ward, theater special ward, and public health unit,

allowing for meaningful insights related to the study questions.

3.2.1. Inclusion Criteria

Nurses were included if they provided informed consent, had been on duty for at least a year, and were present during the study period, ensuring sufficient engagement with the institution's social media accounts.

3.2.2. Exclusion Criteria

The study excluded rotational nurses with less than six months of tenure, voluntary personnel, and students on internships or attachments to maintain a focus on experienced nursing professionals.

3.3. Sampling and Sampling Technique

A stratified sampling technique was used to gather diverse viewpoints from participants. Nurses were selected for their potential to provide insightful information on social media use. Ward and unit managers helped identify participants meeting the inclusion criteria. A total of 313 nurses participated in the study, ensuring information saturation and addressing the research questions effectively.

3.4. Data Collection Procedures

Data was collected using a questionnaire, chosen for its ability to handle a large sample size and provide both qualitative and quantitative data quickly. Researchers distributed the questionnaires, addressing any respondent queries. The survey gathered information on nurse demographics, social media usage, health information sourced, reasons for seeking health information, and challenges faced. Out of 385 distributed questionnaires, 313 responses were received, achieving an 81.30% response rate, which is adequate for analyzing the study's objectives.

3.5. Focus Group Discussions

To gain deeper insights, two focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted, each with eight and nine participants. These sessions explored users' preferences for social media platforms, engaging content, and encountered challenges. A moderator facilitated discussions using a guide. Topics included favorite health information sources, reasons for using social media, types of sourced information, and the pros and cons of these platforms. The FGDs provided qualitative data, recorded with a digital audio recorder.

3.6. Data Analysis Techniques

Numeric data was analyzed using SPSS version 22, with quantitative descriptive statistics employed to describe and interpret the data, displayed via frequency tables and charts. Qualitative data was analyzed using thematic analysis with NVivo software. Researchers transcribed recorded interviews verbatim, cross-referenced with audio recordings, and incorporated field notes to ensure accuracy. This rigorous analysis allowed for a thorough exploration of the study questions regarding

health-related content, benefits, and risks of social media use among nurses.

3.7. Ethical Considerations

Approval was obtained from the relevant department head at a university's School of Nursing and Midwifery. Permission was also granted by a local hospital and the municipal health directorate. Respondents provided verbal consent and were informed they could withdraw at any time. Participant confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing names and keeping all information private, adhering to ethical guidelines for human research.

3.8. Validity and Reliability

Validity measures how accurately a tool measures what it is intended to, while reliability assesses the consistency of the measurement [44]. The questionnaire was carefully developed to ensure validity, aligned with study objectives, and reviewed by the research supervisor. A pretesting approach was used to ensure reliability and consistency. Ten individuals outside the study region completed the questionnaire, which was reviewed by the supervisor and a statistician for reliability. This process reinforced the credibility of the findings.

3.9. Limitations of the Study

Some participants hesitated to provide information due to confidentiality concerns or uncertainty about the study's purpose, potentially posing significant implications for the generalizability and reliability of the findings. This issue was addressed by ensuring clear communication about the study's purpose and strengthening assurances regarding participant confidentiality to encourage open and honest responses.

4. Results

4.1. Respondents' Demographic Features

A total of 313 Nurses participated in the study. The majority of the respondents are female, accounting for 64.9% of the sample, while 35.1% are male. This suggests that the nursing profession in this sample is predominantly female, which aligns with general trends observed in nursing demographics globally.

The largest age group is between 31 - 35 years, comprising 39.9% of the respondents, followed by those aged 36 - 40 years at 30.0%. The younger group of 23 - 25 years represents only 5.1%, and the oldest group, 41 - 45 years, accounts for 9.9%. This indicates that the nursing workforce in this sample tends to be more experienced and likely to be in their mid-career stages, with fewer younger nurses or new entrants.

The majority of respondents have a degree qualification, representing 64.9% of the sample. 24.9% of the nurses have a diploma, while 10.2% have pursued further studies to obtain a master's degree.

This reflects a strong emphasis on higher education within the nursing profession,

with a significant portion having attained a bachelor's degree or high.

The most common nursing grade is Nursing Officer, making up 39.9% of the sample, followed by Senior Nursing Officers at 30.0%. Staff Nurses account for 20.1%, and Midwifery Officers make up 9.9%. This shows a significant representation of higher-ranking officers (Senior Nursing Officer and Nursing Officer), which indicates that many nurses in this sample hold positions of responsibility.

Nurses with 4 - 7 years of experience form a significant portion of the sample, at 34.8%, while those with 8 - 11 years represent the largest group at 39.9%. Those with 1 - 3 years of experience make up 9.9%, while 12 - 15 years of experience represent 10.2% of the sample. Nurses with 16+ years of experience are the smallest group, making up 5.1%. This data suggests that the sample consists mostly of mid-career nurses with substantial experience (4 - 11 years), while those at the beginning or end of their careers are fewer, as depicted in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Demographic profile of the respondents.

Demographic Characteristic	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Sex	Female	203	64.9%
	Male	110	35.1%
Age Group	23 - 25 years	16	5.1%
	26 - 30 years	47	15.0%
	31 - 35 years	125	39.9%
	36 - 40 years	94	30.0%
	41 - 45 years	31	9.9%
Educational Level	Diploma	78	24.9%
	Degree	203	64.9%
	Master's Degree	32	10.2%
Nursing Grade	Staff Nurse	63	20.1%
	Nursing Officer	125	39.9%
	Senior Nursing Officer	94	30.0%
	Midwifery Officer	31	9.9%
Years in Service	1 - 3 years	31	9.9%
	4 - 7 years	109	34.8%
	8 - 11 years	125	39.9%
	12 - 15 years	32	10.2%
	16+ years	16	5.1%

4.2. Nurses' Use of Social Media

The study found that nurses primarily used Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter. LinkedIn and Google+ were also frequently used for health-related information. All respondents had used social media at least once. Additionally, nurses

mentioned using Google as a health information source. The main platforms included YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, and Google, as presented in **Figure 1**.

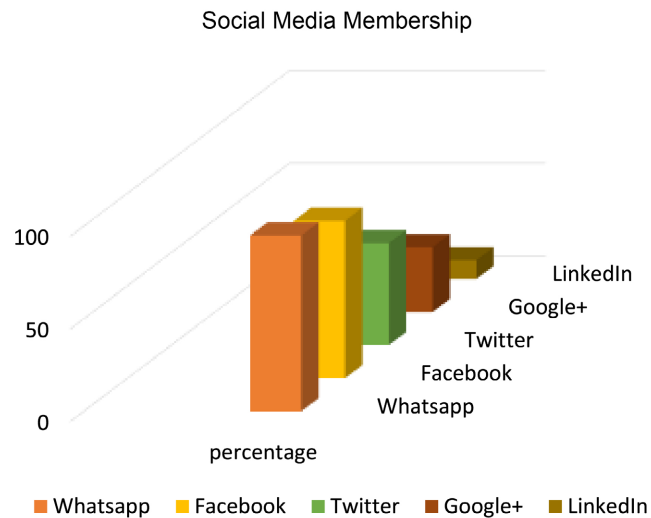


Figure 1. Social media membership.

Even before informing anyone, I “Google” any health concerns I may have, especially those that are quite personal. I go to Facebook or WhatsApp when I need advice or personal experiences. FGD-01-Male is the source.

Respondents who believed they had access to social media platforms at the very least and used them to get information shared similar views. According to one of the interviewees, this is driven by the need to broaden their coverage and do comparisons from other sources:

We use our memberships in Facebook groups and WhatsApp groups to get information, but we don’t use Twitter because it doesn’t allow for the inclusion of long-form content like symptoms and diagnoses. FGD_01_Male is the source.

4.3. Types of Health Information Sought

The goal of the study was to pinpoint the types of health information that nurses obtain via social media. A 5-point Likert scale was used to determine and evaluate this data. **Table 2** below displays the outcomes.

Table 2. Types of health information sought.

Type of Health Information	Mean	Strongly				
		Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Agree
Search for symptoms	2.83	28.80%	20.80%	11.50%	16.60%	22.30%
Search for health problems	3.23	15.50%	26.50%	10.50%	15.60%	31.90%
Search for diagnosis	2.61	23.00%	34.80%	12.80%	16.60%	12.80%
Search for patients’ experiences	3.36	15.00%	18.80%	6.70%	33.50%	26.00%

Continued

Search for the second opinion	3.22	22.40%	12.80%	10.50%	30.40%	23.90%
Search for insurance	2.24	34.50%	38.70%	4.50%	12.80%	9.50%
Search for medication details	2.42	34.20%	25.60%	12.50%	20.80%	6.90%
Search for therapy details	2.3	32.60%	35.50%	11.50%	10.90%	9.50%

Source: Field data, 2024.

The study found that most respondents used social media to explore patient experiences (mean = 3.36), health problems (mean = 3.23), and second opinions (mean = 3.22). However, there was less agreement on using social media for symptoms (mean = 2.83), diagnoses (mean = 2.61), drug information (mean = 2.42), research or therapy (mean = 2.30), and insurance (mean = 2.24).

4.3.1. Disease Symptoms

It is revealed from the study that 39.3% of participants researched disease symptoms online, a trend supported by focus group discussions. Nurses and students frequently use social media to quickly find information on symptoms and avoid unnecessary clinic visits. As one participant put it:

“I am aware of organizations where participants exchange information about sex, including symptoms of STDs, pregnancy symptoms, and reproductive health information”.

“In the hopes that someone would clarify what they mean or suggest, students search for signs of illnesses they believe they may be experiencing or share symptoms they notice in their bodies. As a result, fewer trips to the clinic are necessary (Source: FGD_02_Female)”.

4.3.2. Health Problems

The study shows that, 47.6% of respondents used social media to look up health-related issues, driven by widespread internet access and the abundance of available information. Commonly searched topics included HIV/AIDS, chronic illnesses, weight loss, STDs, and reproductive health.

4.3.3. Patients' Experiences

The study found that 59.4% of participants used social media to check patients' experiences. This use was supported by focus group discussions, which highlighted that social media, designed for interaction, helps in sharing and discussing medical information. Respondents often sought insights on recovery times, side effects, and treatments from support groups and used social media to compare their experiences with others when they felt misunderstood by their doctors.

Accordingly, a respondent stated that: *“We attempt to learn as much as we can about what other people went through in comparable situations, such as how long it takes to heal, whether the sickness has any side effects, and how to treat it. You may be aware of support groups for those living with specific illnesses, like HIV/AIDS or cancer”.*

4.3.4. Second Opinion

The study found that 55% of participants used social media to seek a second opinion on their health issues, often to validate an initial diagnosis due to the high cost of seeing multiple doctors.

4.3.5. Diagnosis, Therapy, and Medication

Interestingly, 29.4% of respondents sought diagnostic information, 20.8% looked for therapy details, and 28.5% searched for medication information. This was often for non-life-threatening issues, with students typically relying on medical practitioners for more detailed information on therapy and medication.

4.4. Perceived Benefits of Social Media as a Source of Health Information

A five-point Likert scale, as shown in **Table 3** and **Figure 2** below, was used for analysis and interpretation of the survey data replies.

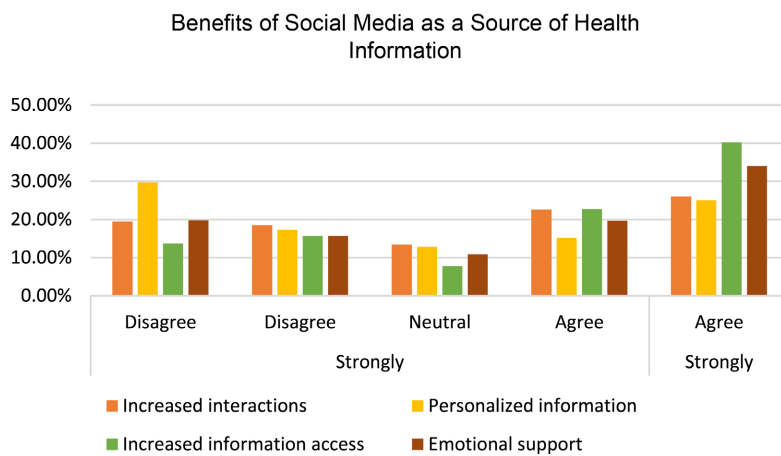


Figure 2. Benefits of social media in assessing health information.

4.4.1. Increased Interactions

Social media facilitates greater interaction on health-related issues (48.6%), with a mean score of 3.18. Users appreciate the broad audience and quick responses, as well as the less judgmental environment compared to traditional settings (Source: FGD_01_Male, FGD_02_Female).

Table 3. Perceived benefits of social media as a source of health information.

Perceived Benefits	Mean	Strongly				Strongly
		Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Agree
Increased interactions	3.18	19.50%	18.50%	13.40%	22.60%	26.00%
Personalized information	2.9	29.70%	17.30%	12.80%	15.20%	25.00%
Increased information access	3.61	13.70%	15.70%	7.70%	22.70%	40.20%
Emotional support	3.33	19.80%	15.70%	10.90%	19.60%	34.00%

Source: Field Data, (2024).

4.4.2. Increased Access to Information

Respondents noted a significant increase in access to health information (62.9%) due to social media, with a mean score of 3.61. Social media makes information readily available and affordable, allowing users to access sensitive topics easily and anonymously (Source: FGD_01_Male, FGD_02_Female).

4.4.3. Personalized Information

Social media facilitates greater interaction on health-related issues (48.6%), with a mean score of 2.9. Social media platforms provide personalized information by leveraging algorithms that track user behaviors, preferences, and interactions. Using pseudonyms enhances user experience by providing relevant health information, news, and resources directly suited to their needs (Source: FGD_02_Female).

4.4.4. Emotional Support

Emotional support (53.6%) ranked second (mean score of 3.33) as a reason for using social media. Users seek support from others with similar experiences and find comfort and hope through shared stories and encouragement (Source: Female FGD_02).

4.4.5. Anonymity

Respondents valued the anonymity offered by social media, which allows them to discuss sensitive topics without fear of stigma. Using pseudonyms helps users seek information on private issues like STDs and abortion (Source: FGD_02_Female).

4.4.6. Affordability

Social media is a cost-effective alternative to paid health consultations. With smartphones and free Wi-Fi available, students find it an accessible way to obtain information on personal and sensitive topics (Source: FGD_02_Female).

4.5. Challenges Encountered

The study identified several challenges students faced when using social media for health information. The main issues were unreliability (58.2%), loss of privacy (55.5%), inaccurate information (44.1%), risks of sharing personal data (31.3%), and information overload (29.5%). Responses were evaluated using a Five-point Likert scale (see **Table 4** and **Figure 3**).

Table 4. Challenges faced when using social media to access health information.

Challenges	Least Extent	Small Extent	Neutral	Some Extent	Great Extent
Lack of privacy	14.20%	16.00%	14.30%	36.70%	18.80%
Lack of reliable information	18.50%	19.50%	3.80%	35.50%	22.70%
Information overload	27.80%	31.60%	11.20%	25.60%	3.80%
Inaccurate health information	14.40%	7.00%	34.50%	18.50%	25.60%
Risks of disclosing information	25.60%	19.10%	24.00%	13.70%	17.60%

Source: Field Data, 2024.

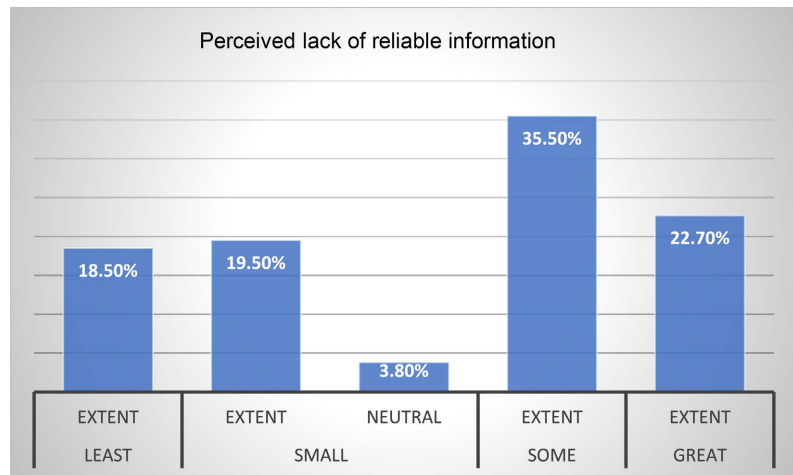


Figure 3. Respondents views on challenges in using social media to access health information.

4.5.1. Insufficient Privacy

Again, 55.5% of respondents highlighted insufficient privacy as a major concern. Social media often lacks robust privacy controls, making personal health information accessible to others if not properly secured.

4.5.2. Lack of Reliable Information

On the other hand, 58.2% of participants reported difficulty in finding trustworthy information. The challenge lies in verifying the accuracy of content on social media, which can be misleading or incorrect.

4.5.3. Information Overload

Additionally, 29.4% of participants identified information overload as a major challenge. The vast amount of varying information online can lead to confusion and misdiagnosis, as different sources provide conflicting advice. One focus group member noted the difficulty of sifting through diverse opinions and sources to find reliable information.

4.5.4. Inaccurate Health Information

Furthermore, 44.4% of respondents reported encountering inaccurate health information. Misinformation and unverifiable content are prevalent on social media, with users' often providing misleading advice based on personal experiences. This contributes to the spread of unreliable health information.

4.5.5. Disclosing Too Much Information

Not only but also, 31.3% of participants expressed concern about disclosing too much personal information while seeking help on social media. Engaging in health-related discussions often requires sharing sensitive details, which can be uncomfortable and risky.

4.5.6. Expensive Data

Some participants mentioned the high cost of data and slow network speeds as

obstacles to accessing health information online. Despite available school Wi-Fi, the cost of data bundles and connectivity issues were significant barriers for some.

4.5.7. Distractions

Distractions on social media were noted as a challenge, with users often diverted by unrelated content. This can hinder the search for health information, as highlighted by a respondent who experienced frequent interruptions while browsing.

5. Discussion

5.1. Health Information Sought by Nurses on Social Media

The study highlights the significant benefits of social media for nurses, emphasizing its role in sharing and receiving clinical guidelines and health information. Nurses found social media more effective than traditional methods like notice boards and books for disseminating clinical protocols. This supports previous research suggesting that social media provides a valuable communication channel for discussing and exchanging health information [45]. Additionally, the findings align with the European Association of Urology's initiative to use Twitter for sharing clinical procedures [46].

5.2. Benefits of Social Media for Registered Nurses

Nurses view social media as a valuable tool for professional development, including discourse, education, and training, aligning with findings by Adjei *et al.* and Maloney *et al.* [47] [48]. It offers a modern avenue for continuous learning and improves communication and referral networks within medical facilities. Platforms like SMS and WhatsApp facilitate discussions and sharing of patient information, such as scans and X-rays. However, some participants expressed concerns about technological issues, such as poor network and information overload, which could hinder nursing tasks. Despite these challenges, nurses find social media easy to use and navigate, aligning with Deng *et al.* and Mitzner *et al.* on technology adoption [49] [50].

5.3. Risks of Social Media Use for Registered Nurses

Participants highlighted several risks associated with social media use in nursing. They expressed concern about the spread of inaccurate or misleading information, which can be prevalent due to the unregulated nature of social media. This erroneous content, often shared by medical practitioners, can mislead patients and the public.

Another significant risk is the potential breach of patient privacy and confidentiality. Sharing patient information without consent, including photos or personal details, can violate patient dignity and undermine trust. This concern aligns with findings from Ahmed *et al.* and Lefebvre *et al.* noting that such breaches may be inadvertent or intentional [51] [52].

Additionally, social media use can lead to distractions and task interruptions,

impacting nurses' decision-making and increasing the likelihood of errors. Over-dependence on social media can also lead to addiction, diverting time and focus from nursing duties.

Despite these risks, participants generally viewed social media positively for its role in professional development and staying current with nursing topics, though some noted the time-consuming nature and ethical dilemmas involved. The study suggests that while nurses are well-positioned to use social media effectively, they must navigate these risks carefully.

6. Conclusions

The study highlights that WhatsApp is the most widely used social media platform, followed by Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. Social media is valued for enhancing communication and strengthening referral networks within healthcare organizations. Features like SMS and WhatsApp facilitate collaboration among nurses, improving referral discussions.

However, the study also emphasizes the need to carefully weigh the risks and benefits of social media use in nursing. Participants noted significant risks, such as exposure to incorrect or misleading information, which can impact nursing practice.

Recommendations

The study suggests that the Ghana Health Service should recommend specific social media apps for nurses and provide devices, particularly to remote health institutions, to enhance connectivity and improve care quality. It also recommends encouraging medical establishments to use social media to strengthen patient referrals.

Additionally, authorities should implement policies for continuous education on social media trends in healthcare. The Ministry of Health is advised to collaborate with health services, private agencies, and network providers to develop guidelines for social media use in clinical settings and improve internet access, especially in rural areas.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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