



---

## Role of Social Media in Healthcare and Nutrition

---

**Dr. Sarita Kumari**

Assistant Professor, Department of Home Science, Nitishwar  
Mahavidyalay, BRABU Muzaffarpur

**Corresponding Author – Dr. Sarita Kumari**

**DOI- 10.5281/zenodo.10973305**

---

### Abstract:

The pivotal role of social media in healthcare, medical education, and research through collaboration and research dissemination. It outlines the use of platforms like Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter for patient communication, professional development, and knowledge-sharing. Despite these benefits, challenges such as concerns about misinformation, breaches of patient confidentiality, and unprofessional conduct persist. The importance of healthcare professionals adhering to ethical guidelines, especially concerning patient privacy, confidentiality, disclosure rules, and copyright laws. It acknowledges the significant impact of social media on patient education and healthcare research, noting platforms like WhatsApp for enhancing patient compliance and outcomes. However, it highlights the risks associated with the rapid spread of false news and misinformation on social media. Researchers are urged to consider biases and content quality when extracting data, emphasizing the need for quality control and regulation to address potential dangers and misinformation in the intersection of social media and healthcare.

---

### Introduction:

Today social media has become an integral part of our daily lifestyle and we prefer searching the internet rather than referring to books like old times even for a small piece of information. When speaking with someone, words only a small percentage of the message is delivered; The remaining is conveyed through body language and tone of voice. A significant increase in the global user base of social media platforms, with a growth from 4.2 billion users in January 2021 to 4.62 billion users by January 2022, representing a 10.1% year-over-year increase. The predominant platforms in 2023, based on consumer utilization, include Facebook (69%), YouTube (57%), Instagram (45%), TikTok (33%), and Twitter (30%) (Maxwell Iskiev 2023).

This data reflects the ongoing expansion and diverse levels of user engagement across various social media platforms. The essential role of social media platforms as tools for healthcare marketers and professionals to connect with patients and disseminate health-related information (Ventola CL, 2014). The substantial growth of interest in using the internet as a health promotion tool over the past decade (Korp, 2006). It notes the internet's emergence as a powerful global communication method for health interventions, offering public access to diverse health promotion programs. Additionally, the internet provides opportunities for people to communicate with others and engage with health professionals (Cassell et al. 1998). This underscores the internet's role in facilitating widespread access to health information and

fostering communication in the realm of health promotion. Peoples are now looking to blogs and social media communities for online option about recipes and food purchasing decision, even the simple choice of what to food your children for dinner can be influenced by whether you see an ad for food or post about the new healthy prepackaged meals available at the grocery store in your Facebook newsfeed.

The global society today needs a new education system; the one best on the concept of integrated education. Media is the most powerful tool to communicate and it helps promote the right thing at the right time as it will create interest and turn their attention in the learning process. As for as nutrition is concerned, which changing landscapes it has also made it's very into mass media and today most of the nutrition related work is done by media for example- In a younger age group or even the adult prefer smartphones and other device to keep tabs on their health related than visiting a doctor on a regular basis, it has also been the case with nutrition as more and more people are relying on mass media to know more about nutrition. Technology is playing a very crucial role in engaging people such as medical professionals and nutritionists etc. which in return, produce an understanding among the society about nutrition and its importance in daily life. Many medical professionals are engaging online with people to know about the daily routine, eating habits, food and providing them with significant information about food and nutrition to direct them towards a healthy lifestyle.

### **Advantage of Social Media**

Social networking provides a platform for widespread connection and support, eliminating the constraints of face-to-face interaction and offering continuous accessibility. Social networking's rapid information exchange makes it advantageous for busy individuals, as noted by Farhi (2009). Additionally, Kreps & Neuhauser (2010) contribute to the understanding of its communicative benefits. Certainly, in our tech-centric era, the prevalence of social networking is such that most individuals are familiar with, have visited, or maintain their own accounts on such platforms. By January 2008, social media participation had progressed to the 'early majority phase,' reflecting the widespread adoption of this innovation within the population. The acceptance of social media as a viable communication method is evident, supported by data from Deloitte (2009). With over 54% of Americans using social networking sites and 45% having profiles, platforms like Facebook boast over 300 million active users, indicating a continuous upward trend in participation.

MySpace and Twitter, with 110 million and 50 million active users respectively (Ostrow, 2009), contribute to the diverse landscape of popular social networks. Notably, health organizations like the Canadian Cancer Society, the American Medical Association, and Weight Watchers are leveraging these platforms for information dissemination. Indeed, the impact of social media on promoting positive health behaviors lies in the source of information. Messages originating within social networks, from friends, family, or co-workers, as opposed to experts, can be empowering and more effective. As emphasized by Kreps & Neuhauser (2010), altering health behavior necessitates changing shared social practices, given that attitudes, values, and beliefs about health are directly shaped by social interactions. Social networking facilitates connections, offering a favorable environment for positive health behavior change. Social modeling and influence are significant factors, as individuals are often influenced by observing the behaviors of their peers. For instance, curiosity can be sparked by seeing a friend's post about a new training program they enjoy.

The cycle continues as the individual, after trying the new program, shares their experience on their profile, enabling viral communication (VC) to spread within their network connections. Research suggests that viral communication (VC) wields more influence than traditional media channels (Cheema & Kaikati, 2010; Godes & Mayzlin, 2004). Companies, such as Ford Motors with the 'Fiesta Movement,' are capitalizing on this trend, leveraging bloggers to create buzz and positive content on social networking pages and platforms like

YouTube, showcasing the effectiveness of this approach (Barry, 2009).

### **Healthcare and social media**

Social media serves as an alternative to traditional mass communication methods. Coyle & Vaughn's (2008) study reveals that college students frequently visit their social networking accounts, with many never having visited a health organization's website. Health promotion agencies can enhance their reach by utilizing social networking sites rather than traditional government-run websites to engage with students effectively. Social networking sites are proactive in attracting and retaining users, tailoring experiences to their preferences. Notably, Facebook's "social ads" application exemplifies this by providing personalized advertisements based on users' activities and preferences. Such targeted strategies, as seen in advertising, can also be applied effectively in health promotion or other health interventions.

Social media has significantly transformed the healthcare sector by facilitating information sharing, fostering communication between healthcare professionals and patients, and promoting continuous learning through research and education initiatives. The influence of social media on health topics is indeed substantial, as patients increasingly turn to these platforms for information, support, and discussions on issues ranging from preventive measures like vaccines to specific medical treatments, creating a dynamic space for health-related discourse. Social media platforms have proven to be valuable tools for medical research by providing avenues for health interventions, educational campaigns, and real-time disease surveillance, contributing to advancements in healthcare and the understanding of various medical conditions. The connection between social media use and mental health is a subject of considerable interest. Research suggests the potential for social media to serve as an intervention platform for individuals dealing with mental disorders, offering avenues for support, awareness, and resources in the realm of mental health. The integration of social media into medical education has grown significantly, with healthcare professionals and organizations leveraging these platforms.

The prevalence of social media use among younger populations highlights its potential as a crucial tool in delivering medical education, shaping the learning landscape for future healthcare professionals. Social media's interactive nature allows users to create, share, and engage in content, fostering active learning, social networking, and self-reflection. This dynamic environment contributes to the continuous process of knowledge creation and dissemination among individuals and communities. While social media holds promise in

medical education, its educational value needs thorough empirical evaluation. The absence of comprehensive guidance in medical education curricula emphasizes the importance of conducting evaluative studies. Striking a balance between leveraging social media for education and upholding ethical standards in online interactions is crucial for clinicians and institutions navigating this evolving landscape. The study by researchers revealing 88.1% accuracy in stroke-related Instagram posts underscores the potential of social media for health information (Ramasubramanian et al). Meanwhile, von Muhlen and Ohno-Machado's systematic review highlights the widespread use of social media, particularly Facebook, among both students and healthcare professionals, underscoring its prevalence in the healthcare community.

The study shed light on critical issues associated with social media in healthcare (Marshall et al. and Lambert et al). Breaches of patient confidentiality and unprofessional conduct necessitate the establishment of guidelines. The evolving nature of technology underlines the complexity of social media in healthcare. As guidelines must adapt to these changes, it becomes crucial for healthcare professionals to use social media responsibly. Upholding trust in the public domain remains paramount in navigating the dynamic landscape of online interactions in the healthcare sector.

**Considering the below question, using social media is undoubtedly a better option for nutrition and healthcare.**

Although it is not the case that all the information available on social media is always valid and complete, sometimes it becomes very difficult for the general public to evaluate whether that information is valid or not.

We must consider the following question when using social media for nutrition information –

1. Which organization is providing the information.
2. What is the validity of the source
3. Is the information based on facts or just an opinion
4. Is the organization or author just promoting their products?
5. Is information has been reviewed.

**Conclusion:**

The comprehensive review underscores the multifaceted role of social media in healthcare, emphasizing the need for responsible use, ethical guidelines, and effective policies. It highlights the potential benefits in patient education, medical research, and professional development, but also addresses challenges such as misinformation, breaches of confidentiality, and unprofessional conduct. Striking the right balance is crucial to maximize the positive impact of social media on healthcare outcomes, knowledge advancement, and

overall patient experience. Absolutely, the challenges of breaches in patient confidentiality, unprofessional conduct, and the spread of false information underscore the critical need for robust ethical guidelines, quality control measures, and stricter regulations in the realm of social media and healthcare. Balancing the positive impact of social media on patient education and research with the potential risks requires a vigilant approach to ensure the reliability and accuracy of healthcare information disseminated through these platforms.

**Reference**

1. Barry, K. (2009). Ford Bets the Fiesta on Social Networking. Retrieved from <http://www.wired.com/>
2. C Lee Ventola: Social media and health care professionals: benefits, risks, and best practices. P T. 2014, 39:491-520.
3. Cassell, M., Jackson, C., & Chevront, B. (1998). Health Communication on the Internet: An Effective Channel for Health Behavior Change? *Journal of Health Communication*, 3(1), 71-79
4. Cheema, A., & Kaikati, A. (2010). The Effect of Need for Uniqueness on Word of Mouth. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 47(3), 553-563.
5. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1509/jmkr.47.3.553>
6. Coyle, C. L., & Vaughn, H. (2008). Social Networking: Communication Revolution or Evolution? *Bell Labs Technical Journal*, 13(2) 13-18. doi: 10.1002/bltj.20298
6. Deloitte Media Predictions, TMT Trends. (2009). Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu, 4-22.
7. Farhi, P. (2009). The Twitter Explosion. *American Journalism Review*, 31(3),26-31. [ajrarchive.org/Article.asp?id=4756](http://ajrarchive.org/Article.asp?id=4756)
8. Godes, D. & Mayzlin, D. (2004). Using Online Conversations to Study Word-of-Mouth Communication. *Marketing Science*, 23(4), 545-560. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1287/mksc.1040.0071>
9. Maxwell Iskiev, 2023, The fastest growing social media platforms of 10 April,2023
10. Korp, P. (2006). Health on the Internet: Implications for Health Promotion. *Health Education Research*, 21(1), 78-86. doi: 10.1093/her/cyh043
10. Kreps, G. L., & Neuhauser, L. (2010). New directions in eHealth communication: Opportunities and Challenges. *Patient Education and Counseling*, 78(3), 329-336. doi: 10.1016/j.pec.2010.01.013
12. Lambert KM, Barry P, Stokes G: Risk management and legal issues with the use of social media in the healthcare setting. *J Healthc Risk Manag.* 2012, 31:41-7. 10.1002/jhrm.20103
13. Marshall M, Niranjana V, Spain E, MacDonagh J, O'Doherty J, O'Connor R, O'Regan A: 'Doctors

can't be doctors all of the time': a qualitative study of how general practitioners and medical students negotiate public-professional and private-personal realms using social media. *BMJ Open*. 2021, 11:e047991.

14. Ostrow, A. (2009). Mashable: The Social Media Guide. Retrieved From <http://mashable.com/>
15. Ramasubramanian S, Aujla S, Raj A, Pendyala KS, Shivani R: Trending facts or misinformation: A study determining accuracy of Instagram posts in the context of stroke prevention and management. *Int J Med Sci Curr Res*. 2023, 6:167-73.
16. Von Muhlen M, Ohno-Machado L: Reviewing social media use by clinicians. *J Am Med Inform Assoc*. 2012, 19:777-81. 10.1136/amiajnl-2012-000990