

Assessment of Social Media Usage for Medical Information Among Medical and Dental Students

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: social media is used rapidly and effectively to communicate, educate, learn, create, and share updated information and ideas. medical and dental students use social media for medical/dental information and communications through different websites.

Objective: the objective of the study was to assess the usage of social media for medical/dental information among medical and dental students and to assess the purpose of social media for medical information.

Methodology: a cross-sectional study was conducted among medical and dental students with a pre-designed questionnaire consisting of 33 questions related to the usage of social media, the questionnaire was emailed to 750 students and the final response received was 600. A chi-square test was employed and $p < 0.05$ was considered statistically significant. all analyses were performed using SPSS software version 23.

Results: there was an 80% ($n = 600$) of response rate for filling the questionnaires from medical ($n_1 = 300$) and dental ($n_2 = 300$) professional students and, 61.2% reported with usage of social media to inquire about medical information. Among them, 54.2% reported social media is a necessity today and social media is a source to share medical information (51.8%). 49.8% believed social media creates an opportunity to promote themselves and their activities. the observed responses were found to be significant regarding social media usage ($p \leq 0.05$).

Conclusion: medical and dental students use social media for medical information through different websites, for sharing medical information, making learning more interesting, and for reading uploaded educational articles and medical communications.

Keywords: Social media, Medical information, Medical communication.

INTRODUCTION

“Social media refers to the means of interactions among people in which they create, share, and exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks”.¹ As of 2021, the number of people using social media is over 4.48 billion worldwide, with the average user accessing 6.6 social media platforms on a monthly basis. Popular platforms like Facebook have over 65.86% of their

monthly users logging in to use social media daily.² In upcoming years, it may reach over 6 billion worldwide.²

Social media (SM) is a modality used to communicate, educate, and learn rapidly and effectively. It has been growing exponentially in the last few years³. There is no doubt that social media platforms are becoming a significant source of scientific information, including scientific news, technical discussions, and educational tools.

Medical and dental students can use social media to learn new information, elicit opinions through scientific discourse, facilitate learner-teacher interaction, and interact with the educational process outside the classroom.³ Medical and dental students, like students of other majors, spend a portion of their time on social media to socialize or to obtain scientific information.³ Social media, including, Instagram, Twitter, Wikipedia, Facebook, Pinterest, YouTube, WhatsApp, Snapchat, etc., provides an opportunity for educators to engage undergraduate students who are the members of the millennial generation in active learning while enhancing knowledge and fostering communication.⁴ According to Crook *et al.*, the web-based communities for learning has four key advantages: (1) it enables collaboration among different users, (2) it allows users to create personal content through different forms of media, (3) it permits users to publish individual works, and (4) it creates new approaches to research.⁴

Healthcare professionals recognize the importance that, the medical science community is immediately living, learning, teaching, and practicing medicine in the digital and communication era, where the students connect with others, and share information, Ideas, and personal messages.⁵ It was reported that “social media tools can be used safely in medical education settings and that their use may have a positive impact on learner outcomes”.⁶

With the current pandemic crisis, education worldwide is shifting toward distance learning. However, with the emergence of social networking sites, learners can adapt to a unique setting for educational use to better exchange ideas and for social collaboration. The continued use of social media platforms for educational purposes might change students’ academic performance and help educators redefine students’ learning experiences.⁷ Many dental students reportedly use social media platforms, such as YouTube and Twitter, to support their learning experiences and to

communicate with their instructors.⁷ Social media usage among medical students has also witnessed a tremendous surge.⁸

Determining medical and dental students’ usage of social media for gaining knowledge of medical/dental information through different websites and for medical communications. To what extent, do medical or dental students use social media for educational purposes and to acquire medical/dental information? Thus, this study aimed to assess the usage of social media for medical information among medical and dental students.

AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of the study is to assess the usage of social media for medical information among medical and dental students.

OBJECTIVES

1. To assess the usage of social media among medical and dental students for medical information
2. To evaluate the duration of social media usage.
3. To assess the usage of different websites on social media
4. To assess the purpose of usage of social media.
5. To assess the social media usage for accessing the shared medical information, and healthcare communications.

MATERIALS & METHODS

STUDY SETTING & STUDY DESIGN

A voluntary anonymous online survey-based study was distributed to the medical and dental students of all 4 years and Interns from medical and dental colleges in Rajahmundry, Andhra Pradesh. For the duration of 4 months (June 2021 to September 2021). And to look over the validity of the study, a pilot study was conducted among 30 professional students from both medical and dental. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Institutional Ethical Committee board at Lenora Institute of dental sciences.

MEASUREMENT TOOL

A structured questionnaire was developed based on previously conducted studies that were related to the usage of social media among medical and dental students. The questionnaire consists of 33 questions in 4 sections, of which 4 questions are related to demography and the remaining questions on the number and type of social media utilization, duration of usage, purpose, professional usage and accessibility of educational material, necessity and quality of medical information on social media. The questionnaire responses were based on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 to 5 depending on the degree of agreement in section 4. The study details were informed to the respondents before the distribution of survey forms.

SAMPLING: The questionnaire was emailed to 750 students using the web-based tool (google forms) and the final responses received were 600.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS: The descriptive statistical analysis was performed using IBM, SPSS software version 23. A Chi-square test was employed and $P < 0.05$ was considered statistically significant.

RESULT

Out of 750, there was an 80% (N= 600) response rate for filling the questionnaires from medical ($n_1=300$) and dental ($n_2=300$) professional students. Table 1 summarizes the demographic characteristics of both professional students elaborated as 75.2% of responses were from females than males (24.8%), 5 and 1.7% were from the age group of 18-21 years participated more. 30.7% of both medical and dental 4th-year students responded more. The extent of social media usage by medical and dental

professional students is interpreted in Table 2. Two or more applications were used by 200(33.3%) and 216 (36%) medical and dental students respectively as statistically significant ($P= 0.03$). Both professional students use social usage. Almost 153 medical (25.5%) and 169 dental (28.2%) students, use social media less than 3-5 hours per day (P value 0.05). Most of the medical 188(31.3%) and dental 184 (30.7%) were neutral about social media being a trusted source for medical information. 174(29%) medical and dental 193(32.2%) students use social media sometimes to inquire medical information ($P=0.05$). Most professional students use social media for entertainment purposes). Table 3 shows the results of the usefulness of social media for gaining medical information. The responses for social media help to gain more information on different subjects showing statistical significance of P value 0.05. Moreover, 288(38%) medical and 220 (36.7%) dental students were sure about social media made learning more interesting. Table 4 illustrate the importance of social media usage for career guidance and the quality of healthcare communication. Almost 161 (26.8%) medical and 164 (27.3%) dental students agree that social media site usage is a necessity today. Furthermore, 156 (26%) medical and 155 (25.8%) dental students agree that social media sites, share current information regarding medical sciences. Both medical 163 (27.2%) and 136 (22.7%) students think that social media provides enough opportunities for medical and dental students to promote themselves and their activities ($P=0.05$). And almost 164 (27.3%) medical and 149 (24.8) dental students think that social media improve the quality of healthcare and its communication.

Table-1: Demographic Characteristics Of Professional Students

Characteristics	Frequency Of Participants	Number (%)
Age Intervals	1) 18-21 Years	310 (51.7%)
	2) 22-25years	280 (46.7%)
	3)26-30 Years	10 (1.7%)
Gender	1) Female	451 (75.2%)
	2)Male	149 (24.8%)
Current Major Of Education	1)Medicine	300 (50%)

	2)Dentistry	300 (50%)
Current Education status	1) 1 st Year	133 (22.2%)
	2) 2 nd Year	62(10.3%)
	3) 3 rd Year	90 (15.0%)
	4) 4 th Year	184(30.7%)
	5) Internee	131 (21.8%)

Table 2. Usage Of Social Media By Professional Students

Questions	Response	Medical	Dental	Chi-Square	P-Value
How Many Social Media Applications Do You Use?	I Don't Use Anyone	15 (2.5%)	12 (2.0%)	2.02	0.03*
	One Application	85 (14.2%)	72 (12.0%)		
	Two Applications Or More	200 (33.3%)	216 (36%)		
What Are the Social Media Sites Do You Use Most?	1sm Site (Facebook, Whatsapp, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter)	167 (27.8%)	159 (26.5%)	7.59	0.1
	2sm Sites	60 (10%)	48 (8.0%)		
	3sm Sites	58 (9.7%)	64 (10.7%)		
	4sm Sites	14 (2.3%)	23 (3.8%)		
	5sm Sites	1 (0.2%)	6 (1.0%)		
On Average, How Many Hours Do You Spend on social media Per Day	Less Than 3 Hours	153 (25.5%)	169 (28.2%)	5.70	0.05*
	3-5 Hours	126 (21.0%)	100 (16.7%)		
	More Than 5 Hours	21 (3.5%)	31 (5.2%)		
I Believe That social media Is A Trusted Source For Medical Information	I Don't Agree	18 (3.0%)	27 (4.5%)	1.98	0.37
	Neutral	188 (31.3%)	184 (30.7%)		
	I Agree	94 (15.7%)	89 (14.8%)		
I Use social media To Inquire about Medical Information.	Never Did	15 (2.5%)	9 (1.5%)	7.17	0.05*
	Rarely	46 (7.7%)	54 (9.0%)		
	Sometimes	174 (29.0%)	193 (32.2%)		
	I Use It A Lot	65 (10.8%)	44 (7.3%)		
The Main Source for My Treatment Decisions Is	Specialist Physician	217 (36.2%)	207 (34.5%)	0.89	0.63
	Advice Commonly Shared	71 (11.8%)	78 (13.0%)		
	On Social Media	12 (2.0%)	15 (2.5%)		
What Is the Purpose You Use social media?	Search Of Medical/Dental Information	76 (12.7%)	57 (9.5%)	4.43	0.35
	Medical/Dental Learning	60 (10.0%)	57 (9.5%)		
	Professional Networking	8 (1.3%)	10 (1.7%)		
	Exchange Of General/Subject-Based Ideas	52 (8.7%)	63 (10.5%)		
	Entertainment	104 (17.3%)	113 (18.8%)		
I Follow Some Medical Sites And /Or Forums on The Internet	Yes	226 (33.7%)	228 (38.0%)	1.49	0.47
	No	34 (5.7%)	26 (4.3%)		
	Maybe	40 (6.7%)	46 (7.7%)		

* p value ≤ 0.05 is statistically significant

Table 3: Usefulness Of Social Media For Gaining Medical Educational Sources And Learning Material

Questions	Response	Profession		Chi-Square	P-Value
		Medical	Dental		
Do You Read/Share Educational Articles Uploaded On Social Networking Apps (Facebook, WhatsApp)	Yes	222 (37.0%)	213 (35.5%)	2.08	0.35
	No	33 (5.5%)	29 (4.8%)		
	Maybe	45 (7.5%)	58 (9.7%)		
Do You Follow Any Educational Groups On Social Media (E.G. Facebook/Twitter)?	Yes	210 (35.0%)	210 (35.0%)	0.95	0.62
	No	60 (10.0%)	66 (11.0%)		
	Maybe	30 (5.0%)	24 (4.0%)		
Do You Watch Instructional Videos Uploaded On The Internet?	Yes	222 (37.0%)	224 (37.3%)	1.01	0.60
	No	38 (6.3%)	31 (5.2%)		
	Maybe	40 (6.7%)	45 (7.5%)		
Do You Discuss Cases On Networking Apps (Facebook/WhatsApp)?	Yes	117 (19.5%)	109 (18.2%)	0.49	0.77
	No	115 (19.2%)	118 (19.7%)		
	Maybe	68 (11.3%)	73 (12.2%)		
Do You Surf The Web For Learning Material?	Yes	212 (35.3%)	226 (37.7%)	1.99	0.37
	No	26 (4.3%)	25 (4.2%)		
	Maybe	62 (10.3%)	49 (8.2%)		
Do You Have Any Applications Related To Medical /Dentistry Education?	Yes	177 (29.5%)	178 (29.7%)	0.04	0.98
	No	89 (14.8%)	87 (14.5%)		
	Maybe	34 (5.7%)	35 (5.8%)		
Does Social Media Improve Access To Your Courses And Learning Material?	Yes	222 (37.0%)	229 (38.2%)	0.51	0.77
	No	18 (3.0%)	15 (2.5%)		
	Maybe	60 (10.0%)	56 (9.3%)		
Does Social Media Help You Learn More Independently?	Yes	195 (32.5%)	200 (33.3%)	0.66	0.71
	No	34 (5.7%)	37 (6.2%)		
	Maybe	71 (11.8%)	63 (10.5%)		
Should Social Media Be Utilized More By University/Teaching Staff?	Yes	155 (25.8%)	173 (28.8%)	3.04	0.21
	No	35(5.8%)	37 (6.2%)		

	Maybe	110 (18.3%)	90 (15.0%)		
Does Social Media Make Your Learning More Interesting?	Yes	288 (38.0%)	220 (36.7%)	3.29	0.19
	No	18 (3.0%)	30 (5.0%)		
	Maybe	54 (9.0%)	50 (8.3%)		
Does Social Media Help You To Gain More Information On Different Subjects?	Yes	237 (39.5%)	230 (38.3%)	1.11	0.05*
	No	15 (2.5%)	21 (3.5%)		
	Maybe	48 (8.0%)	49 (8.2%)		
Does Social Media Give a Better Chance To Access New Resources?	Yes	226 (37.7%)	237 (39.5%)	1.15	0.56
	No	16 (2.7%)	14 (2.3%)		
	Maybe	58 (9.7%)	49 (8.2%)		
Does Social Media Improve My Ability To Be Creative And Innovative?	Yes	212 (35.3%)	204 (34.0%)	0.52	0.76
	No	21 (3.5%)	22 (3.7%)		
	Maybe	67 (11.2%)	74 (12.3%)		
Does Social Media Improve My Research Skills?	Yes	200 (33.3%)	208 (34.7%)	0.56	0.75
	No	20 (3.3%)	17 (2.8%)		
	Maybe	80 (13.3%)	75 (12.5%)		

* p value \leq 0.05 is statistically significant

Table 4: Importance Of Social Media Usage For Career Guidance And Quality Of Health Care Communication

Questions	Response	Profession		Chi-Square	P-Value
		Medical	Dental		
Do You Think the Use Of Social Media Site Is A Necessity Today?	Strongly Agree	79 (13.2%)	74 (12.3%)	1.48	0.82
	Agree	161 (26.8%)	164 (27.3%)		
	Neutral	57 (9.5%)	56 (9.3%)		
	Disagree	2 (0.3%)	5 (0.8%)		
	Strongly Disagree	1 (0.2%)	1 (0.2%)		
Do You Think Sharing Medical And Healthcare Information To Others Is Very Easy In Social Media Sites?	Strongly Agree	88 (14.7%)	90 (15.0%)	4.84	0.18
	Agree	168 (28.0%)	144 (24.0%)		
	Neutral	40 (6.7%)	58 (9.7%)		
	Disagree	4 (0.7%)	5 (0.8%)		
	Strongly Disagree	0 (0.0%)	3 (0.5%)		
Do You Think Social Media Sites, Shared Current Information Regarding Medical Sciences?	Strongly Agree	65 (10.8%)	51 (8.5%)	4.71	0.31
	Agree	156 (26.0%)	155 (25.8%)		
	Neutral	76 (12.7%)	88 (14.7%)		
	Disagree	3 (0.5%)	4 (0.7%)		
	Strongly Disagree	0 (0.0%)	2 (0.35%)		
Do You Think These Social Media Sites Provides Enough Opportunities To Medical Students To Promote Themselves And Their Activities?	Strongly Agree	57 (9.5%)	51 (8.5%)	9.27	0.05*
	Agree	163(27.2%)	136(22.7%)		
	Neutral	68 (11.3%)	96 (16.0%)		
	Disagree	10(1.7%)	16 (2.7%)		
	Strongly Disagree	2 (0.3%)	1 (0.2%)		
Do You Think Social Media Sites Help In Finding Job Opportunities?	Strongly Agree	57(9.5%)	48(8.0%)	6.54	0.16
	Agree	160(26.7%)	155(25.8%)		
	Neutral	72 (12.0%)	82 (13.7%)		
	Disagree	11 (1.8%)	10(1.7%)		
	Strongly Disagree	0 (0.0%)	5 (0.8%)		
Do You Think Social Media Site Improve The Quality Of Healthcare And Its Communication?	Strongly Agree	51 (8.5%)	39 (6.5%)	7.87	0.04*
	Agree	164 (27.3%)	149 (24.8%)		
	Neutral	72 (12.0%)	100 (16.7%)		
	Disagree	12 (2.0%)	12 (2.0%)		
	Strongly Disagree	1 (0.2%)	0 (0.0%)		
Do You Think Social Networking Site Help In Study Material Like Lectures, Notes, Video?	Strongly Agree	90 (15.0%)	92 (15.33%)	1.96	0.57
	Agree	166 (27.7%)	156 (26.0%)		
	Neutral	32 (5.3%)	42 (7.0%)		
	Disagree	5 (0.83%)	7 (1.17%)		
	Strongly Disagree	7 (1.17%)	3 (0.5%)		

* p value \leq 0.05 is statistically significant

DISCUSSION

Social media describes web-based applications that allow people to create and exchange content.⁹ Social media was able to affect medical and dental students by its huge popularity. Students agreed that social media platforms are now becoming the most visited websites worldwide, as it provides a convenient and readily available tool to

keep up with their community and the rest of the world.¹⁷ This present study addresses three important issues related to the usage of social media for medical information. The first issue was about the extent of usage of social media by professional students. Secondly, the usefulness of social media for gaining medical educational sources and learning material. Lastly, the importance of

social media usage for career guidance and quality of health care communication. The equally presented responses of medical and dental students were compared with many previous studies.

According to the study conducted by Saadeh R A et, al, the hours spent on social media for 3-5 hours on average, and the professional students don't agree that social media is trusted for medical information. Our study shows dissimilarities with the hours spent on social media for less than 3-5 hours on average and the response neutral to believe that social media trusted source for medical information. In our study, Facebook is the most used social media site along with WhatsApp, Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter and the number of Social media applications used by medical & dental students and professional students use social media for some time to inquire about medical information was similar to the study conducted by Saadeh R A et, al. Most professional students use social media for entertainment purposes other than education.

According to the study conducted by Sen S. et, al, the educational articles uploaded on social media sites (Facebook, WhatsApp) were read or shared by professional students, following educational groups on social media sites and surfing the web for learning material were observed similarly in our study. Having any of the applications related to medical or dental education material. Social media improves access to courses and learning material, helps in learning more independently, and should be utilized more by the university or teaching staff also similar to findings. The only dissimilarity compared with the Sen S. et, al, study was the clinical cases were not discussed on social media sites among 115(19.2%) and 118(19.7%) medical and dental students respectively(P=0.77).

Our study includes (1) makes learning more interesting (2) helps to gain more information on different subjects (P = 0.05) (3) gives a better chance to access new resources (4) improves the ability to be

creative and innovative (5) improves research skills were similar with the study conducted by Rajeh TM et.al.

Our finding shows participants' agreement with responses to 1) the use of social media sites is a necessity today.2) Social media site helps in finding job opportunities.3) Social media sites provide enough opportunities for medical or dental students to promote themselves and their activities and 4) social media sites improve the quality of healthcare and its communication similar to the study conducted by Sattar K et, al.

Our strength of the study is assessing social media usage for medical information, educational materials, career guidance, and healthcare communication among professional students. Our study conducted on health professional students explain a greater degree of generalizability. There are a few limitations in our study, that is the negative impact on health professionals by misusing social media and the communication capabilities provided by social media usage to improve clinical education was not explained in proper context. Further research on the effect of social media usage on academic performance is recommended.

CONCLUSION

Social media can support education with a unique learning experience when balanced with its potential drawbacks.⁸ Social media tools have gradually gained a grip in education and have a great impact on the learning process. In an online environment, social media sites guide students to learning communities speedily and provide easy access to the course or course-related materials.¹⁹ Medical and dental students use Social media for medical information through different websites, for sharing medical information, making learning more interesting, reading educational articles and m communications.

Declaration by Authors

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