Original Article

HOW OPHTHALMOLOGISTS AND OPHTHALMOLOGISTS-IN-TRAINING IN NIGERIA USE THE SOCIAL MEDIA

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ABSTRACT

BACKGROUND: The social media has revolutionized the practice of medicine in the area of communication and information dissemination.

AIM: This study aims at examining the ways ophthalmologists who practice in Nigeria use the social media and how they impact on their practice.

MATERIALS AND METHODS: This was cross-sectional study of eighty-seven (87) consenting ophthalmologists and ophthalmology residents at the 40th Annual Scientific and General Meeting of the Ophthalmological Society of Nigeria held from 24th to 28th August, 2015 in Jos, Nigeria. Self-administered questionnaires and data obtained were recorded in the data sheets and analysed using the SPSS version 20 (2014). Simple statistics and comparisons of associated variables were made using Chi-square.

RESULTS: Of the 87 respondents, 82 (94.2%) used the social media while only 5 (5.8%) were not on any social media platform. WhatsApp was the preferred social media platform with 50 (50.5%) of the respondents using it, followed by Facebook (38; 38.4%), LinkedIn (8; 8.1%), Instagram (2; 2.0%) and Twitter (1; 1.0%).

Majority of the respondents (66; 46.5%) used the social media for social interaction; 43 (30.3%) of them used them to interact and collaborate with colleagues; 21 (14.8%) utilized them for patients' education. Only 6 (4.2%) of the respondents used the social media for marketing of their practice.

Fifty-two (59.9%) of the respondents believed that the use of social media had enhanced their practice

CONCLUSION: The study has shown that majority of the ophthalmologists and residents interviewed were on the social media platform. However, social interaction with friends was the major reason they use the social media.

KEYWORDS: Social media, use, ophthalmologists and ophthalmologist-in-training

NigerJMed2016: 358-362

INTRODUCTION

In the practice of medicine, change is a fundamental phenomenon. More recently, the major catalyst for change is the internet and social media[1]. The evolution of medicine has led to new diagnostic tools, therapies and ways of communicating which requires constant adaptation by the physicians[1,2]. The use of the social media and the internet has leveraged the physicians to keep abreast with the speed-of-light changes that continue to occur in the field of medicine[3]. Social media generally refers to internet-based tools that allow individual and communities to gather and communicates; to share information, ideas, personal messages, images, and other content, and in some cases, to collaborate with other users in real time[4-6]. Social media are also referred as "web 2.0" or "Social networking"[6]. Social media sites provide a variety of features that serve different purposes for the individual user. These include blogs, social networks (Facebook, Myspace, Twitter, etc.), video-and photo-sharing sites, wikis, and a myriad of other media[3].

The use of Social media has increased exponentially in the past one decade[3,6]. For example, in the United States, it has been found to jump from 8% to 72% since 2005[3,6]. The usage cut across all age groups and professions; and it is pervasive around the world[7,8]. Facebook the most popular social media site boasts of more than a billion users which is approximately one seventh of the world population[3]. In addition, each day 100 million active Twitter users send more than 65 million tweets, and two billion videos are viewed on YouTube[3]. Social media have been linked to highly

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significant political events, such as the Arab Spring revolution, as well as to widespread societal trends, including the shortening of individuals' attention spans and the decline of print news media[3].

In Nigeria as at 2013, there were about 50 million internet users; 72% of them were visiting social networking sites[9]. About 55% of them use the email and 46% visited and used entertainment sites. There were over 6.5 million Nigerians on Facebook in 2013 and it has been noted that many Nigerians are now using more mobile social media like WhatsApp, 2go, Eskimi and others[9]

In healthcare, the social media provide the practitioners with tools to share information, to debate health care policy and practice issues, to promote health behaviour and engage with the public, and to educate and interact with patients, caregivers, students and colleagues[2,10-12]. It has been observed that physicians generally join online communities where they can read new articles, listen to experts, research medical developments, consult colleagues on patient issues and network[2]. There they can share cases and ideas, discuss practice management challenges, make referrals, disseminate their research, market their practices or engage in advocacy[1,11]. A handful of physicians has been found to use the social media to communicate directly with patients to augment clinical care[2,12].

A survey of more 4000 physicians found that more than 90% of physicians use some form of social media for personal activities, whereas only 65% use these site for professional reasons[2]. In another study, one third of physicians have reported participating in social network[8].

To our knowledge, there is no study available to us on how Nigerian physicians and indeed ophthalmologists practicing in Nigeria use the social media. Therefore, we aim to explore the usage of the social media by ophthalmologists and ophthalmologists-in-training (residents) in Nigeria and how the use of the social media impact their practice.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study design and data management: This was descriptive cross sectional study. Ophthalmologists, Residents in ophthalmology, Diplomates and Fellows who attended the 40th Annual General meeting and Scientific Conference of the Ophthalmology Society of Nigeria (OSN) which held from 24th-28th August, 2015, in Jos, Nigeria. Respondents were then administered pre-tested semi-structured questionnaires. Data obtained were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20 (2014). Simple statistics such as frequencies and percentages were determined and comparisons of associated variables were made using p–values and Chi-square.

Ethical consideration: Approval to carry out this study was sought for and obtained from the Ethical Committee of the University of Port Harcourt Teaching Hospital. Informed verbal consent was also obtained from all the respondents.

Result

Of the 87 respondents who participated in the study, 52 (59.8%) were males and 35 (40.2%) females. Majority of them were consultants (n=58, 66.7%). A total of 82 (94.2%) of the respondents use the social media and only 5 (5.8%) were not using the social media. See table 1

Table 1: Demographic data of respondents

Variable		Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age	24 – 30	01	1.2
	31 – 40	31	35.6
	41 – 50	34	39.1
	51 – 60	18	20.7
	61 – 70	03	3.4
Sex	Male	52	59.77
	Female	35	40.23
Status of respondents			
	Consultant	58	66.7
	Fellow	03	3.4
	Diplomate	03	3.4
	Resident	23	26.5
Use of social media	yes	82	94.2
	No	05	5.8

There was a statistically higher usage of social media amongst the male respondents, 52 (63.41%) compared to the female respondents 30 (36.59%) ($X2 = 5.46$, $p=0.02$). Those within the age brackets of 31-40 and 41-50 were more involved in the use of the social media but this was not statistically significant ($p>0.05$). See table 2.
The respondents used various types of the social media but majority of them used more of Facebook and WhatsApp. See table 3

Table 2: Association between socio-demographic variables and use of social media

Characteristic Age group	Use of social media yes freq.(%)	No freq.(%)	Total	Chi-square X^2	p-value
24 – 30	1 (1.22)	0 (0.0)	1 (1.15)		
31 – 40	30 (36.59)	1 (20.0)	31 (35.63)		
41 – 50	32 (39.02)	2 (40.0)	34 (39.08)	4.64	0.326
51 – 60	17 (20.73)	1 (20.0)	18 (20.69)		
61 – 70	2 (2.44)	1 (20.0)	3 (3.45)		
Total	82 (100.0)	5 (100.0)	87 (100.0)		
Sex					
Male	52 (63.41)	0 (0.0)	52 (59.77)		
Female	30 (36.59)	5 (100.0)	35 (40.23)	5.46	0.02*
Total	82 (100.0)	5 (100.0)	87 (100.0)		

**p-value statistically significant (p<0.05)*

Table 3: Types of social media used by the respondents

Type of social media (multiple responses)	Frequency	percent
BBM	1	0.51
Facebook	72	36.92
Instagram	12	6.15
Twitter	25	12.82
LinkedIn	11	5.64
WhatsApp	72	36.92
WeChat	2	1.03
Total	195	100.00

The respondents used the social media for many purposes as shown in table 4. Most respondents however used the social media for social interaction. This was statistically significant (p-value <0.05).
Fifty-two (59.77%) of the doctors said that the use of social media has enhanced their practice. Twenty-five (28.74%) of the doctors said their practice has not been enhanced with use of social media. There was no response from ten (11.49) of the doctors.

Table 4: purposes for the use of social media

Purpose of using social media (multiple responses)	frequency	%
Interact and collaborate with colleagues	43	30.28
Marketing of practice	6	4.23
Passing information	1	0.70
Patient education	21	14.79
Reading news	1	0.70
Religious purpose	1	0.70
Response to messages	1	0.70
Social interaction	66	46.48
Teleconferencing	1	0.70
Total	142	100.00

X^2 = 392.43 p-value = 0.001

DISCUSSION

This study has shown that majority of the ophthalmologists/ophthalmology trainees in Nigeria surveyed used the social media. This finding is similar to other studies on social media usage by physicians[2,8] . It is interesting to note that although those in the age brackets of 31-40 and 41-50 years used social media more, the finding was not statistically significant. Younger age has been found to be a consistent predictor for use of social media by physicians[13] and this is observed also in this study. Male gender was also found in the study by Cooper et al[13]to be a consistent predictor for the use of social media. Our study showed a statistically significant usage of social media among the males compare to the females which is consistent with Cooper et al's[13] study.

In our study Facebook and WhatsApp were the most preferred social media for most of the respondents. Facebook and WhatsApp are also the most commonly used social media sites in Nigeria[9]. This probably may the responsible for this finding. Apart from LinkedIn which is professional networking site, all the other social media used by the respondents are social networking sites.

This study showed that ophthalmologists and ophthalmology trainees used the social media mainly for social interaction. Other major purposes of the use of the social media included collaboration and interaction with colleagues on professional issues and patient education. Our finding is similar to that by Househ[12] in his survey of over 4000 physicians where 90% of them used the social media for personal social activities while 65% of them used them for professional related activities. The use of social media for patient education should be encouraged as we noted in this study. This is because the use of social media by the general public in Nigeria has increased[9]. This will to improve awareness of patients on health related issues. Over fifty percent of those surveyed in this study believed that their use of social media has enhanced their practice especially through collaboration and exchange of ideas on the social media. Househ[12] noted this among physicians in the USA. When practice management challenges are resolved through consultation with colleagues without limitations occasioned by geography barrier, we believe that practice of such colleagues especially from poor resourced countries would be enhanced and the patients will be better for it.

CONCLUSION

The study has shown that majority of the ophthalmologists and residents interviewed were on the social media platform. However, social interaction with friends was the major reason they use the social media. Majority of them believed that the use of social media has enhanced their practice. We wish to encouraged that collaboration with colleagues should be promoted more using the social media.

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