



Harnessing Social Media Tools for the Promotion of Health Care Marketing in Post-COVID- 19 Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

In Nigeria, healthcare marketing challenges are increasing due to legislative acts that have made it extremely difficult to promote healthcare marketing. However, with the advent of social media, people can get health care services online. Notably, social media platforms are increasingly becoming vital for promoting health care in Nigeria. They serve as a link to hotlines, online forums, and other resources that individuals can use in healthcare marketing in an emergency. This study investigated the impact of using social media tools for the promotion of healthcare marketing in post-COVID-19 Nigeria. While Diffusion of Innovations Theory and Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) served as the theoretical framework, the descriptive qualitative research design was used as the research method. Document analysis was employed to examine and interpret data relating to social media and healthcare marketing. Findings reveal that social media plays a significant role in promoting healthcare marketing in Nigeria. The study recommends that, through social media, information and resources can be shared with people and used as support to promote healthcare marketing.

KEYWORDS

Social media,
Healthcare
marketing,
Post-COVID-19,
Information,
Resources

INTRODUCTION

According to SocialSellinator (2023), “the world grappled with the unprecedented challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, industries across the board felt the impact, and the marketing industry was no exception”. It was reported that the crisis created an urgent need for businesses to pivot their strategies, with a special emphasis on their social media marketing. Now, as we navigate the post-pandemic landscape, it is essential to understand the changes brought about by

the pandemic and how to harness them for future growth. However, the pandemic has brought about a significant shift in the way businesses communicate with their customers (Nwafor & Eze, 2021).

It was reported that as face-to-face interactions during the pandemic dwindled, social media filled the gap, becoming a vital conduit connecting brands with their audience. In fact, during the first wave of the pandemic in 2020, 70% of respondents reported that their social media use increased. This surge in social media usage opened up new opportunities for marketers (SocialSellinator, 2023). It allowed businesses to engage with their customers in real-time, respond to their needs swiftly, and even humanise their brand as they navigated the same challenges as their customers (Musa & Ibrahim, 2020).

Furthermore, the pandemic also brought about unique challenges. Businesses found that their messages might be wrong as the crisis unfolded, or their supply chain was not in a position to deliver, creating potential advertising and public relations crises. Therefore, businesses needed to be nimble and adapt to the changing circumstances quickly. Furthermore, the pandemic also accelerated the shift from traditional to digital marketing. According to SocialSellinator (2023), as businesses moved online, they had to quickly adapt to digital marketing strategies, including social media marketing, Google Ads, and other digital platforms. Indeed, a digital presence became necessary for survival, with social media taking centre stage. However, one industry that was more affected than others was the Health Care Service, due to the high demand generated by the virus, lockdowns, and the search for solutions to health problems without leaving homes or undertaking complex actions to receive care. While many health care providers successfully adapted to users' and patients' demands, others struggled and could not continue their operations. As a result of these challenges, this study seeks to investigate the impact of social media tools in the promotion of healthcare marketing post-COVID-19. Specifically, the objective of the study is to examine the impact of social media on health care marketing post-COVID-19. The core research question is: What is the impact of social media on health care marketing post-COVID-19 in Nigeria?

There is a suboptimal use of social media tools in fostering health care marketing in Nigeria in the post-COVID-19 era (Aliyu & Olowu, 2021). Various health care providers in the country failed to adopt the extensive use of social media platforms. Moreover, the social media potential remained unharnessed despite its proven cost-effective and efficient way to engage with patients. Similarly, health care delivery has formed a new shape due to the pandemic, thereby making digital tools essential for sustaining health care access and marketing (Chukwu & Nwamuo, 2021). However, for its inactive use, health care services become less accessible to technologically proficient individuals who depend greatly on these platforms. Also, health care providers do not have effective communication channels to get across to a broad range of audience speedily, particularly when addressing false information. When social media tools are not harnessed, they would limit the growth of health care entrepreneurs, thereby diminishing patients' engagement and limiting public health outcomes in Nigeria (Nwafor & Eze, 2021).

SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media encompasses the digital tools that allow users to communicate, create and share content, and do information searches. Put differently, social media refers to the interactive online media platforms that provide people with a means and space to engage and exchange ideas, perspectives, contacts, knowledge, and skills, as well as other resources like career and job advice (Arikenbi, Ainakhuagbor, Chukwuma, & Ikharo, 2023). The researchers cited above belong to a category of media practitioners that focuses on social networking, which allows people to express themselves freely, interact with friends and share information with families and medical personnel as well as make their opinions known on the World Wide Web. Nwafor and Eze (2021) posited that social media platforms are requisite tools for sharing health information and reaching out to the public during health crises. As life evolves in this post-COVID-19 era, these realities will likely persist. The demand for social media skills and social media marketing professionals is growing exponentially. Brands that do not exist on social media today are likely to fall behind and lose out to competitors in the near future because they are unable to keep up with current market demands. It appears that the most frequently used social media tools on the web are Facebook, Twitter (now X), Flickr, YouTube, Instagram and other interactive options. This is because they can be used for the storage and dissemination of information, unlike traditional media, which is linear (one-way channel communication), social media is transactional (allowing interaction between one person and another) (Arikenbi et al., 2023).

Meanwhile, a study revealed that demographic characteristics, such as education, age, and the levels of digital literacy, had a significant influence on the effectiveness of social media tools in healthcare business (Ogunyemi & Chukwuma, 2021). As stated by Ajala and Adebayo (2020), young adults between the ages of 18 and 34 are highly active on social media platforms and use them for health-related content, mostly on Instagram; they do so to know what is trending. Similarly, Imhonopi and Ojakorotu (2021) argued that middle-aged citizens use Facebook for health information, especially for preventive purposes and to manage chronic disease, access reliable health information, and make decisions concerning family health. Concerning gender, Okafor and Akpan (2021) opined that Nigerian women strongly engage with Pinterest, Instagram and Facebook for information on nutrition, wellness, and child health, while men involved with fitness, nutrition, weight loss and content focused on health risks on Instagram to maintain good health status and gain preventive measures (Adebisi, Olanrewaju & Adeboye, 2020). In the same vein, it was discovered that highly educated individuals preferred health professionals and medical understanding of diseases on LinkedIn and Twitter to appreciate medical progress and be abreast of time on health decisions (Osagie & Olajide, 2021).

Meanwhile, the less educated personalities chose visual content, such as videos and health tips, with a high proclivity towards using Facebook and WhatsApp for health information (Ayodele & Eze, 2020). They were involved in this arrangement to have access to health messages. Those Nigerians who are highly literate digitally have a high tendency to engage with telemedicine and health-tracking apps to manage chronic diseases (Ibraheem & Salami, 2021). Conversely, as argued by Onah, Adeyemo & Olamide (2019), those deficient individuals in digital literacy have a preference for easy-to-access content on

WhatsApp and Facebook, such as posts based on text or easy-to-comprehend videos, to stay informed.

HEALTHCARE MARKETING

In a study conducted by Sachim (2023), it was discovered that healthcare marketing appears to be a process of creating and executing a plan to reach and engage health care consumers, to promote better health outcomes. It includes all aspects of marketing communications, from advertising and public relations to digital and social media. Focusing on behaviour change, awareness creation, and the goals of public health, 'health marketing' is defined as the process of promoting the health and well-being of communities or general populations (Grier & Bryant, 2022). Sachim (2023) affirmed that to be effective, healthcare marketing must be based on a deep understanding of consumer needs and behaviours. It must also take into account the unique challenges of the healthcare industry, such as regulatory constraints, and the complexities of the healthcare system. Healthcare marketing strategies, using social media, will go a long way in increasing the awareness of health issues among people, and also give people the opportunity to discuss their challenges openly (Al-Dmour, Masa'deh, Salman, Abuhashesh & Al-Dmour, 2020). For instance, social media was used to raise awareness about the infectiousness of Covid-19 as well as the precautionary measures (Al-Dmour, et al, 2020).

TYPES OF HEALTHCARE MARKETING

According to Sachim (2023), there are different types of marketing for health care:

- a. **Advertising:** Advertising is the most common type of healthcare marketing. It includes paid placements in print, online, and broadcast media about health matters.
- b. **Public relations:** Public relations type of health care marketing focuses on generating positive publicity for a healthcare organisation through news, stories, press releases, and media relations.
- c. **Community outreach:** This health care marketing strategy involves working with local organisations and groups to promote health and wellness in the community.
- d. **Patient education:** This is one of the health care marketing strategies that provides educational materials and resources to patients to help them make informed decisions about their health.

The benefit of using social media to promote health care marketing was advocated by Sachim (2023), which includes:

- **Reaching a wider audience:** Marketing your healthcare organisation through multiple channels can reach a larger audience, increasing awareness of your services and ultimately leading to more patients.
- **Tailoring your message:** This is one of the types of health care marketing that are useful because it enables you to get a better target at specific

audiences and create messages that are tailored to their needs. This can result in more patients using your services.

- **Increasing brand awareness:** This is when the healthcare organisation becomes well known as a trusted source of medical care, more patients are likely to choose your services as a result of a strong marketing campaign.

IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON HEALTHCARE MARKETING

According to Stellefson, Paige, Chaney, and Chaney (2020), social media serves as a collaborative dissemination platform to reach and influence the target audience and deliver health-related information. The concept of social media can provide effective, widespread, and user-friendly strategies to draw big crowds and show a certain degree of interaction with health-related messaging (Jane, Hagger, Foster, Ho, & Pal, 2018). Apart from that, the activities on social media act as an intervention to enhance the early detection of illnesses and enhance behaviour modification strategies such as highlighting the negative effects of a health condition, and offering social support (Plackett, Kaushal, Kassianos, Cross, Lewins, & Sheringham, 2020). According to Al-Dmour et al. (2020), social media has a major positive impact on protecting public health, and it may also inspire people to adopt healthier lifestyles (Maher, Ryan, Kernot, Podsiadly, & Keenihan, 2016). Preliminary research suggested that social media interventions can successfully encourage changes in health-related behaviour.

To buttress the role of social media in healthcare marketing, the use of Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Twitter has been deployed to provide individuals the opportunity to connect and share their experiences, especially those that affect them and their families. This has helped families to reduce the stigma attached to COVID-19 (Lawrence, 2019). The work of Olubunmi (2021) also supports this view because social media provides a space for individuals to share their mental health experiences without the fear of judgment. For instance, tools like Twitter, hashtags #MentalHealthMatters and #End are used to create interaction among those having mental challenges. Consequently, the stigma of having mental challenges is reduced drastically, and others can also benefit from their experience. The Internet has long been a part of social marketing campaigns, encouraging target audiences to click, download, and learn more. However, Web 2.0 has created new opportunities for information sharing and audience participation that practitioners and researchers have only lately started to investigate (Alden, 2011).

According to Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project report of 2010, 74% of American grown-ups utilise the Web, 80% have looked online for data connected with a particular sickness or therapy, 34% have perused somebody's blog or remarks about wellbeing or clinical issues, 25% have watched a wellbeing or clinical video on the web, 24% have consulted internet-based surveys of medications or clinical therapies, and 18% have searched out others online with comparable wellbeing concerns (Fox, 2011). Moreover, of the 62% of grown-up American Web clients who take part in web-based long-range informal communication destinations, 23% have utilised them to peruse companions' very own well-being encounters and 15% have tracked down well-being data on the locales (Fox, 2011).

More importantly, the Facebook page tagged Get Yourself Tested (GYT) was utilised as a mission objective to reduce the spread of sexually transmitted diseases among youngsters through data, open communication with health care

providers, parents, guardians, and treatment as required. (GYT, 2011) Also, Freeman and Chapman (2009) used online channels (Open-source promoting effort) to redesign cigarette packages. Their mission was to establish good relationships and build trust with current and possible future smokers. Pempek and Calvert (2009) demonstrate how online PC games, called ‘advergimes’, were used not only to advertise items in the market but also to showcase different types of health marketing foods.

Text4Baby was introduced in February 2010 by the National Healthy Mothers Healthy Babies Coalition and its partners, a free instant message-based data administration that provides women with specific health information from the beginning of their pregnancy until the baby's birthday and different educational messages that are tailored to the mother's stage of pregnancy or the age of the baby. The findings showed that the programme evaluation of Text4Baby changed the behaviour of participants who had participated in the programme with the belief that it would reduce infant mortality.

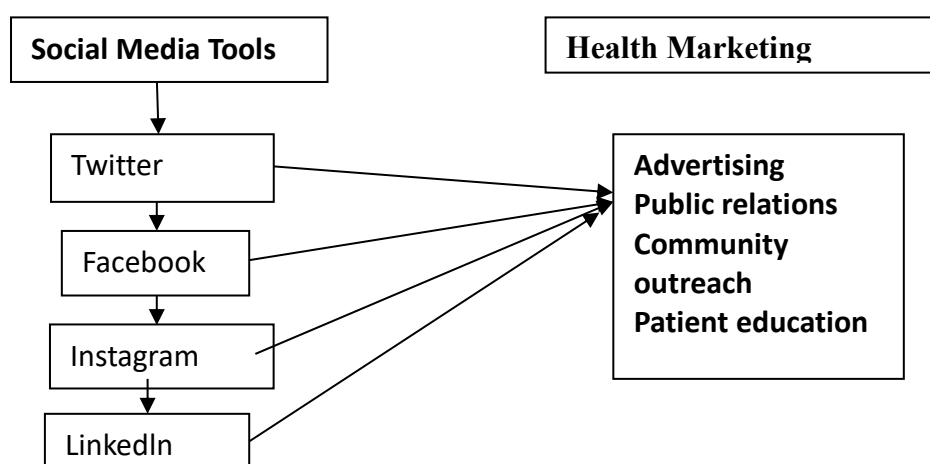


Fig1: Conceptual framework of impact of social media on health marketing

RESEARCHERS MODEL: 2024

This model described how different social media platforms were used to promote healthcare marketing in Nigeria. X is a well-liked social media site where you may make a profile that represents your goals and personal brand and network with other healthcare management experts. Health practitioners can target potential patients based on demographics, interests, region, and age by using Facebook and LinkedIn. For instance, if you are a provider of geriatric services in a particular area, you can make an advertisement specifically aimed at the elderly population in that area. Similarly, Instagram has a feature that allows users to share a 24-hour sequence of health photos and videos about individuals.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study is anchored on two theories, namely: Diffusion of Innovations theory and Technology Acceptance Model. The theory of Diffusion of Innovations was propounded by Rogers in 2003. The theory explains how new

ideas, behaviours, technology, or items spread gradually as opposed to spreading suddenly through a society or social structure. The theory highlights a number of variables that affect how quickly a concept or action spreads.

Innovative people and early adopters are the first to adopt, and adoption then moves through the population to the early majority and late majority. This theory is applied to hasten the implementation of significant public health initiatives, most of which seek to alter social system behaviour. Diffusion of Innovations theory can be applied to varied health issues and solutions, including using family planning in rural areas, using telemedicine in rural areas, adopting innovative medication regimens for diabetes control, and implementing health counselling interventions. The Diffusion of Innovations theory is also used to create public health initiatives. The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) was developed by Fred Davis (1986). The model postulates that users' behavioural intentions are predictors of technology acceptance. Behavioural intentions are based on the users' perceptions of the technology's utility and simplicity of use. Technology Acceptance Model is a helpful foundation for comprehending the possible application of social media in health care marketing in Nigeria.

It implies that these platforms' perceived utility and usability will have an impact on their adoption and utilisation. Nonetheless, it is vital to take into account the social and cultural elements that could impact this procedure.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive qualitative research design. Descriptive qualitative research, according to Creswell, involves exploring experiences in their own terms without predefined categories, focusing on understanding how individuals make sense of major life experiences. The researcher adopted this design because the study aims to explore, understand, examine and analyse the existing literature relating to social media and health marketing with the view to finding a solution to a problem.

The study adopted *documentation as a method of data collection* for this investigation. This is the process of compiling and examining already existing written or digital records, resources, and papers to gain knowledge and understanding about a specific topic.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Research Question: What is the impact of social media on health care marketing in post-COVID-19 in Nigeria? Health marketing has been on the rise in Nigeria because it has helped professionals to access different ways of using social media to solve health-related issues. However, with the growth of social media, people can now obtain a variety of health services online. In this study, we looked at how social media platforms are used in Nigeria and abroad to promote healthcare marketing. Martinez et al. (2021) carried out a study to investigate the impact of a mobile game designed to facilitate healthy eating habits among children from low-income communities. Integrated in the game are rewards for making healthy food choices and providing educational content about nutrition, where children gain marks for making healthy food choices within the game. In the study, a sample of children was divided into two groups: those who played the game and those who did not (control group). The authors tracked the food choices of the children for some weeks to ascertain the impact of the game on their eating habits. Incorporated in the mobile game were various interactive features to

educate children about healthy nutrition while at the same time encouraging them to adopt healthy eating behaviours. Results revealed that those children who played the game had a high tendency to select healthier food options compared to those who didn't engage with the game.

An investigation was carried out on the sexually transmitted disease prevention programme, supported by MTV, the Kaiser Family Foundation, the CDC, Planned Parenthood Federation of America, and other partners, which featured the Get Yourself Tested (GYT) Facebook page. The programme started in 2009 with the intention of reducing the number of young people who become infected with STDs through education, open communication with partners, medical professionals, and parents, as well as testing and treatment when necessary (GYT, 2011). On the campaign's Facebook page, there are posts regarding the value of getting tested for STDs, celebrity testimonies, promotional competitions, images, and an online locator tool for locating affordable and free testing facilities (Levine, 2011). More than 14,000 people were fans of the page as of June 2011 (GYT, 2011).

Social media platforms have given mental health providers in Nigeria a platform to support mental health in the country. Gbonjubola Abiri is among these experts. She is a doctor who uses social media platforms like X and Instagram to provide online counselling services, disseminate information about mental health resources, and educate the public about mental health issues. Dr Abiri responds to inquiries from people in need of mental health help and offers information on various mental health illnesses and how to treat them via her social media platforms. Also, Al-Dmour et al (2020) used social media platforms to dramatically boost public health awareness, encourage individual behavioural adjustments, and bolster protection against COVID-19. Similarly, a study by Garcia et al. (2023) examined the incorporation of telehealth services with text messaging to give full maternal care during the COVID-19 pandemic. By employing a mixed-method approach, the study included virtual consultations combined with regular text message updates that supplied health tips, appointment reminders, and educational resources. Study outcomes revealed that mothers who participated in the programme showed improved satisfaction with their maternal care experience and enhanced adherence to suggested health practices. Based on the findings, it was recommended that leveraging technology can efficiently support maternal health services during challenging periods, opening more opportunities for future innovations in health care delivery. The study underlined the relevance of adaptable healthcare solutions to bring about continued support of mothers during public health issues. Hence, the successful incorporation of telehealth and text messaging could serve as a model for future maternal health programmes, especially in marginalised communities.

Freeman and Chapman provide an overview of RJ Reynolds' open-source marketing strategy from 2007–2008, which involved including smokers in the development of Camel and Camel Signature Blends cigarette packaging through the use of social media networks. Customers were directed by advertisements during the campaign to the Camel website, where they could vote on the best packaging options and leave blog comments about their preferred flavours and packaging. The winning design was mailed to participants in the form of empty packages. Additionally, customers uploaded their video reviews of the new flavours to the internet so that others may leave comments. The authors claim that this campaign was especially notable because it took advantage of a legal loophole in the tobacco industry that forbids tobacco advertising through the

majority of traditional media outlets. This gave the company a rare and beneficial chance to market its brands, foster relationships with current and potential future smokers, and establish trust.

CONCLUSION

The post-pandemic period has outlined the critical role of social media in improving healthcare marketing in Nigeria. By bridging communication gap and promoting accessibility and engagement, social media platforms present innovative answers to longstanding problems in the healthcare sector. However, the poor utilisation of social media tools continues to impede the full culmination of their potential, especially in reaching marginalised communities and addressing false information.

To effectively harness the power of social media, those concerned in the health sector must employ tailored approaches that consider inclusivity, digital literacy, and sustainability. Investing in training, multilingual content, and data-driven campaigns will not only promote health outcomes but also consolidate public trust in the healthcare system. By accepting these measures, Nigeria can build a strong health care marketing framework that is compliant with future challenges and optimises the essence of digital innovation for all.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the conclusion of this study, the following recommendations are made:

The healthcare organisations in Nigeria should invest in social media campaigns of their choice, which use analytical data to channel health-connected content to particular demographics.

Healthcare organisations should employ social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter), to engage diverse audiences more efficiently, attack false information, and foster health services, specifically in low-access zones. This measure will facilitate easy access, enhance patients' involvement, and assist in building trust in the healthcare system in this post-COVID-19 period.

Government agencies and healthcare organisations should jointly promote digital literacy among healthcare staff and the public. This is to allow both partners to optimise the merits of social media for health promotion and easy access.

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