

Exploring the Social Media Usage among Health Care Professionals in Chennai, India

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Abstract:

Background: Over the past decade, social networking has become a vital medium for healthcare professionals (HCPs) in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, facilitating the sharing of awareness, information exchange, and interpersonal connections. However, uncertainties persist regarding the fundamental behaviours of HCPs and the ethical use of social media to enhance efficiency within the healthcare system. This study aims to explore HCPs' attitudes towards the professional use of social media in Chennai.

Methods: A cross-sectional study involving 460 HCPs from diverse healthcare professions in Chennai was conducted. Data were collected through a Google survey distributed via Google Forms. Descriptive statistics were employed for result analysis.

Results: The study revealed a predominance of female participants, with the 25-35 age group being the most represented. Government-affiliated HCPs outnumbered those from the private sector. WhatsApp and Facebook emerged as the most commonly used social media platforms, with YouTube also being prevalent. Notably, participants largely concurred that social media, particularly Google, improved their knowledge and skills.

Conclusion: The findings underscored that a significant proportion of respondents believed social media, specifically platforms like Google and WhatsApp, contributed to enhancing their knowledge and skills. Healthcare practitioners actively engage with social media, viewing it as an effective educational tool in the healthcare domain. These insights can inform strategies for the ethical use of social media in professional development among healthcare professionals in the region.

Keywords: Social Media, Health Care Professionals, Interpersonal Connections, Educational Tool.

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Introduction

Health care workers face everyday challenges and problems that include a high degree of contact between colleagues and the sharing of information. The decision-making process will be strengthened with the inclusion of social media which will produce valuable health benefits which lead to excellent results.

Owing to the difference between various medical roles and duties, social media use varies in different health care environments. Researchers have initiated an examination of the rate of adoption and usa-

bility of social media from the perspectives of different stakeholders. In the context of medical education, a study observed that visibility and recognition are more pronounced within undergraduate circles compared to postgraduate circles.

Nevertheless, the study revealed a common interest in the integration of new technologies among both groups. [1]. The launch of eHealth heralds a new age in the development of advanced and creative solutions to help health care sector decision-making. Advancing online technology can also

assist practitioners in the collection, management and engagement of resources of higher quality. The growing utilization of social media platforms within the healthcare sector can additionally provide real-time insights into health habits and facilitate the exchange of data to enhance clinical outcomes [2] Emerging online media platforms are transforming the engagement patterns of diverse stakeholders and facilitating increased information sharing to support effective decision-making among healthcare professionals (HCPs).

However, in highly collaborative and open networks [3], it is crucial to prioritize the protection of patient privacy. The establishment of virtual communities of practice stands out as the primary factor influencing professionals' inclination to participate in social media. While the exchange of knowledge among peers has seen enhancements in practice, the privacy of these online groups limits knowledge accessibility to specific users, hindering the dissemination of information in a multidisciplinary setting that could contribute to performance and outcome improvements [4]. Recognizing the factors that encourage practical utilization, coupled with understanding the effective types of platforms, represents an existing gap in knowledge that requires further research [5].

Preliminary evidence in diverse healthcare practices reveals conflicting opinions regarding the benefits, challenges, extent of information sharing, connectivity, and efficiency achieved through the adoption of social media. The primary research challenge is to comprehend the connections between influential variables and the acceptance and utilization of social media by healthcare professionals (HCPs). The analysis also seeks to understand the strength of relationships between the underlying variables and the adoption by HCP of so-

cial media. It also aims to analyse the type and frequency of HCP using platforms.

Methods

This study employed an anonymous exploratory approach using convenience sampling to investigate the utilization of social media among healthcare workers. The research analyzed the prevalence of social media usage and estimated the daily time spent by healthcare practitioners on these platforms. The study was conducted with the approval of the Ethics and Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Balaji Medical College.

Given the absence of a validated questionnaire and the preliminary nature of the study, a 20-question survey was developed after thorough discussions among the investigators. This questionnaire was then pre-tested among doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and allied health science students. Subsequent to feedback from this pilot group, the questionnaire underwent further refinement.

To enhance the robustness of the methodology, a diverse group of healthcare professionals, including doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and allied health science students, participated in the study. The questionnaires were distributed online while maintaining anonymity in the healthcare context.

Google Forms facilitated the collection of responses, and SPSS ver-24 was employed for the data analysis. The study employed descriptive statistics, specifically frequency and percentage calculations, to analyze and interpret the findings. This expanded and diversified sampling method, coupled with the refinement of the questionnaire based on pilot feedback, strengthens the overall methodology of the research.

Results:

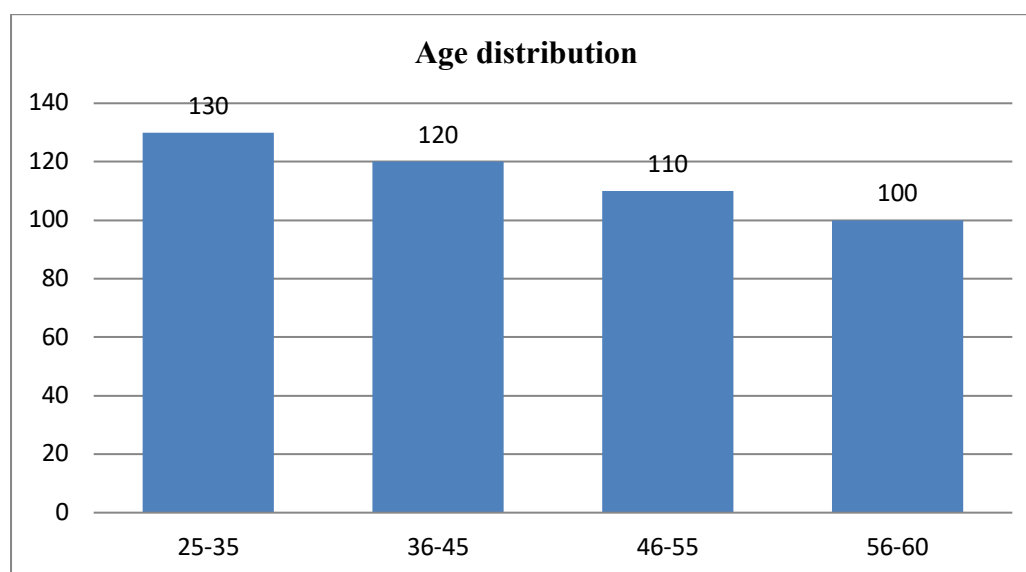


Figure 1: Age distribution of study participants

A total of 460 respondents from various healthcare professions in Chennai participated in this study. Among them, the majority, comprising 130 individuals (28.2%), fell within the age group of 25 to 35 years. Additionally, approximately 100 respondents (21.7%) were in the age bracket of 56 to 60 years.

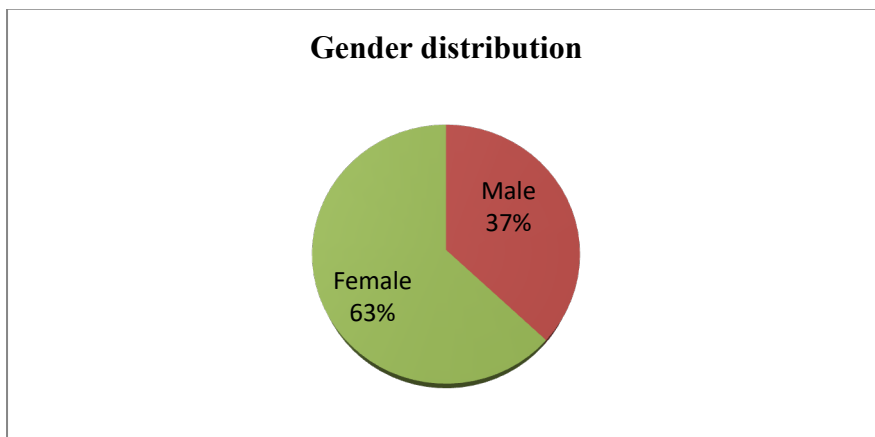


Figure 2: Gender distribution

A large number of study participants 290 (63%) were female HCP (Fig-2).

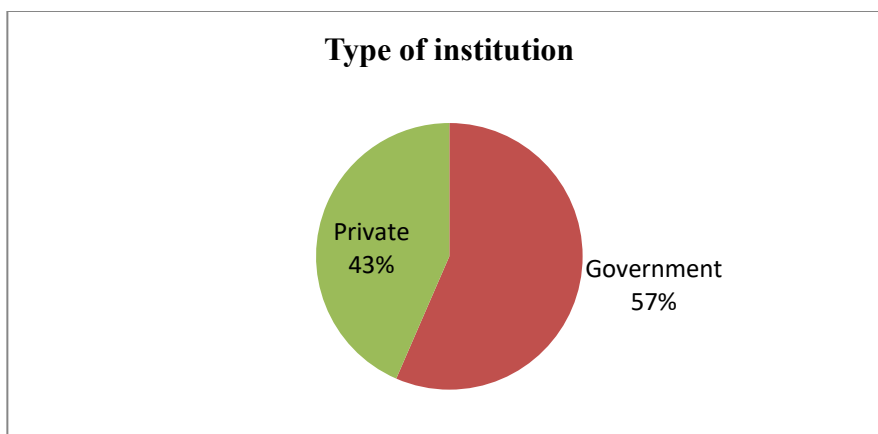


Figure 3: Type of institution

Majority of the study participants worked in the government sector (280, 57%). (fig-3).

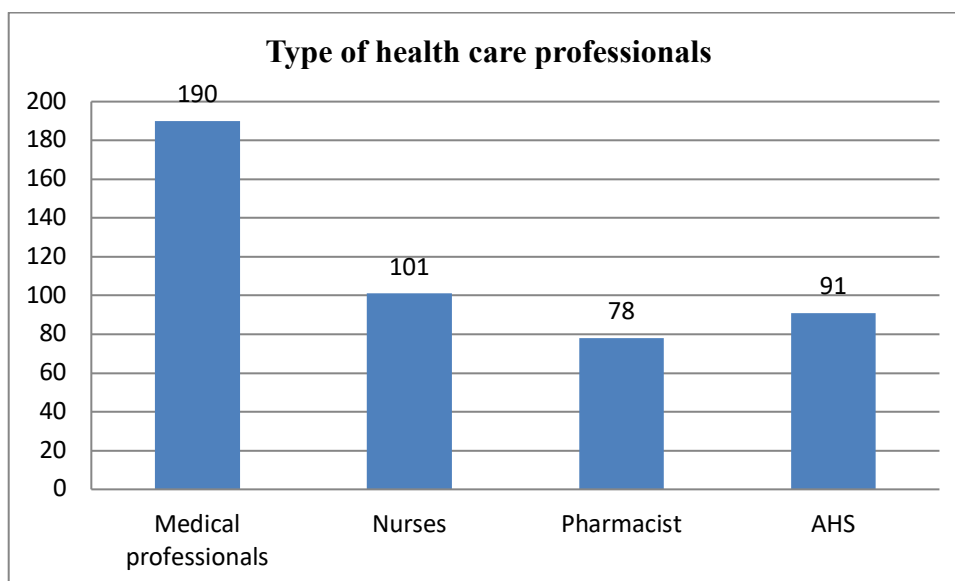


Figure 4: Type of health care professionals

The sample included 190 (41%) medical professionals, 22% of them were nurses, 17% pharmacists, and 20% of them were Allied Health Science students.

Table 1: Frequency of social media usage among health care professionals

Social media usage	Govt.	Private
Never	5	2
Always	170	90
Rarely	60	20
If necessary	45	68
Total	280	180

Table-1 shows the frequency of social media used among health care professionals. Majority of government health care professionals are always using social media than private professionals.

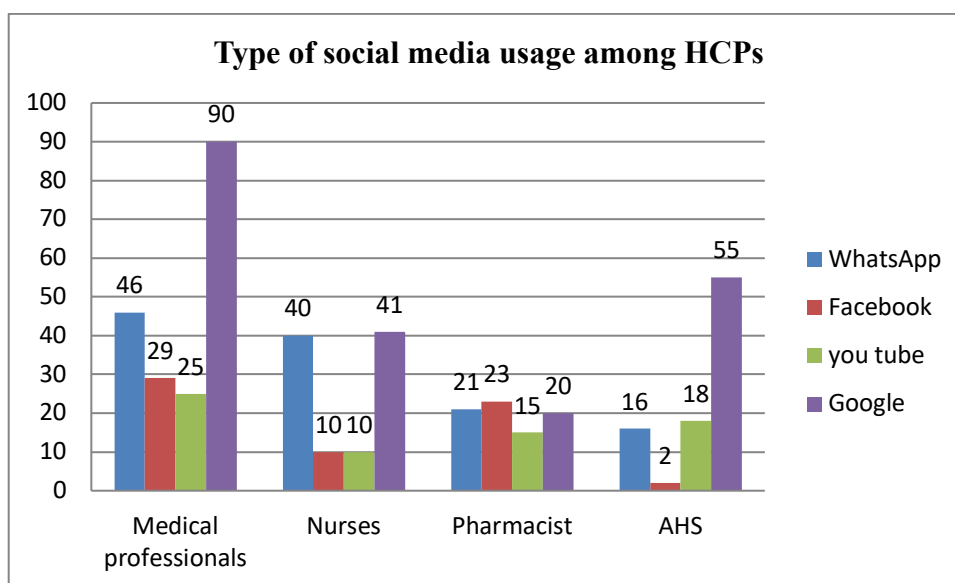


Figure 5: Type of social media usage among healthcare professionals

Most of the medical professionals, nurses and AHS are using Google to improve their medical knowledge followed which WhatsApp, face book and youtube.

Discussion

Healthcare information is constantly changing as new clinical evidence becomes available. Healthcare professionals encounter an extensive volume of data that requires effective management and utilization for mission success. Social media platforms can potentially facilitate increased communication for information and experience sharing among healthcare workers. This research delves into the impact of different factors on the utilization of social media by healthcare professionals. The findings of this study about the HCP usage towards different types of social media. The findings show that Google, WhatsApp, and YouTube are the most used sites to improve their medical knowledge. Previous research in a related field concluded that face book is mainly used by HCPs for personal growth and information exchange [6]. Research has shown that social media can be used by health professionals as a valuable and dynamic tool for ac-

cessing up-to - date information, maintaining professional connections, [7] and sharing knowledge and promoting health.[8] Social media has also been shown to enable professional networking, community outreach, and social capital building. Social networking channels provide the opportunity to assist the individual practitioner with recently released facts and pipeline data alerts. To disseminate alerts and health information to end users, many journals have turned to social media [9-11]. Although this may be a possible source for new, evidence-based information to be obtained or notified, several organizations restrict or block access in the workplace to social media [11]. This decision might result from healthcare staff's limited awareness of the potential benefits and applications of social media. Additionally, responder bias played a role in this analysis, as the research could have been more inclined to involve individuals with a heightened interest in social media.

Conclusion

This study demonstrated that among the health care professionals surveyed, Google, Whatsapp, Facebook, and YouTube were the most utilized social

media platforms for enhancing their knowledge in healthcare. The effective utilization of social media for this purpose may vary across professions, considering that healthcare professionals currently employ social media in diverse ways. Future research should examine how to use these platforms for healthcare education efficiently and effectively. To better understand social media education channels for healthcare professionals, additional studies are also required.

Ethical Approval: The ethical approval for the study was obtained from the institutional ethical committee of Sree Balaji Medical College and Hospital.

Author Contribution: Seshadhri Arumugam designed the entire work. S.Balabaskaran, B.A.Abhilash, K.Sowmiya, Krishna Prasanth Baalann, Kaashini Prabakaran and B.N.Surya contributed in making necessary corrections and revision of the manuscript. The final draft was checked by all the authors.

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