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Social Media and Modern Healthcare Technologies: Revisiting Africa's Effort Towards the Adoption of Modern Healthcare Technologies

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Abstract: This research paper analyzes the potential of social media in improving healthcare delivery in Africa by examining the current state of modern healthcare technology adoption in the continent. While the adoption of modern healthcare technologies in Africa has been affected by various challenges, this paper highlights how social media has opened new frontiers for healthcare providers, patients, and other stakeholders who are now able to connect and interact to enhance healthcare provision. African countries are slowly embracing modern healthcare technologies to promote efficient and quality care, improve healthcare service delivery, and enhance patient outcomes. Telemedicine is cited as a promising solution for healthcare provision in Africa. The paper concludes that social media and modern healthcare technologies are transforming healthcare provision in Africa by promoting personalized healthcare, improving healthcare communication, and facilitating access to healthcare services for people in remote and underserved areas. While the adoption of modern healthcare technologies in Africa has been affected by several challenges, including inadequate healthcare infrastructure, limited resources, regulatory barriers, among others, the potential benefits of social media in promoting healthcare provision in Africa are enormous. African governments and healthcare providers must renew their commitment to improving healthcare delivery in Africa by investing in modern healthcare technologies, improving healthcare system governance and effectiveness, and increasing healthcare funding to ensure universal access to healthcare services for all Africans. This paper, therefore, recommends that African countries invest in healthcare infrastructure, develop regulatory frameworks, train a skilled workforce, increase healthcare funding, and promote healthcare awareness campaigns through social media to facilitate the adoption of modern healthcare technologies and improve healthcare outcomes.

Keywords: Social media, modern healthcare technologies, Africa, adoption, healthcare delivery.

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INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt that the capabilities of medical sciences in general and healthcare in particular have been substantially enhanced by advancements in information and communications technologies (ICT). ICT keeps changing how social media is used to promote healthcare accessibility, which in turn promotes what is now called personalized healthcare. In recent years, social media has become a powerful tool in the healthcare industry, transforming healthcare delivery and communication worldwide. Social media has opened new frontiers for healthcare providers, patients, and other stakeholders who are now able to connect and interact to enhance healthcare provision (Adeloye, Salako, Ojelabi, Oluwafemi & Akinsulore, 2018). In a personalized healthcare setting, social media users can seek medical advice whenever they choose, regardless of their location. It highlights the benefits and drawbacks of using social media to promote health among all Africans, identifies problem areas, and attempts to give remedies as a path ahead. More doctors, nurses, and patients worldwide are turning to social media these days to learn more about particular illnesses and to obtain information about them. These days, personalized healthcare takes into account a patient's circumstances, diagnostic tests, and medical history. Furthermore, through a variety of social media platforms, people continue to compile information about genetics or customize medical care and other preventative care initiatives. Due to the increasing use

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of smartphones and WiFi across Africa, social media-based personalized healthcare is seeing a surge. Personalized healthcare represents a significant breakthrough for medical professionals as it allows people in different specialties to establish guidelines for better health and treatment. Social media-based personalized healthcare encourages quicker and more effective patient education (PayrHealth, 2022). Due to the rapid expansion of the Internet across Africa, social media-based personalized healthcare might be considered a positive advancement in the field with a promising future.

In Africa, this trend has been relatively slow due to different factors, including limited access to modern healthcare technologies and lack of investment in healthcare infrastructures. Although African countries have recorded progress in adopting modern healthcare technologies, access to these technologies is still a significant challenge. For instance, less than 5% of African hospitals are equipped with advanced imaging technology such as Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) or Computed Tomography (CT) scan machines, and less than 20% have a functional ICU (Oshikoya, Senbanjo & Soipe, 2020).

The lack of investment in healthcare infrastructure is another issue hindering the adoption of modern healthcare technologies. Poor infrastructure, limited resources, inadequate power supply, and a shortage of qualified health staff are all significant challenges facing healthcare delivery in Africa. However, African countries are leveraging social media to address these issues and improve healthcare provision. Social media, with its wide reach and diverse audiences, can be used to promote healthcare awareness, enable remote consultations, and improve healthcare access for people across Africa, including those in remote and underserved areas (Alzahrani et al., 2020).

However, in recent times, social media has opened opportunities for African countries to close the healthcare gap with other developed regions globally. African countries have been making significant efforts to adopt modern healthcare technologies in recent years. Modern healthcare technologies have the potential to provide efficient and quality care, improve healthcare service delivery, and enhance patient outcomes in Africa. According to a recent study, social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and Instagram, have been increasingly used by healthcare professionals and consumers globally to obtain health information, engage with healthcare providers, and raise awareness about health issues (Alzahrani, Aldossary, Alalwan, Househ & Shujahat, 2020). This highlights the role of social media as an essential tool in promoting health and improving healthcare service delivery. African countries can utilize social media and modern healthcare technologies to provide access to high-quality healthcare services to its citizens, especially those in remote and underserved areas (Hibbert, Kildea & Faulkner, 2019).

One example of how social media is being used to improve healthcare delivery in Africa is through telemedicine. Telemedicine allows healthcare providers to deliver healthcare services remotely through web-based applications, such as Zoom, Skype, or WhatsApp. Telemedicine was particularly useful during the COVID-19 pandemic, where social distancing measures were put in place to curb the spread of the virus (Hibbert et al., 2019). In Africa, telemedicine has been successfully implemented in countries such as Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa to provide healthcare services remotely to people in underserved areas (Ayankogbe, Ojo & Oladapo, 2017; Oshikoya et al., 2020).

Albeit, the adoption of modern healthcare technologies in Africa remains a challenge, but social media has opened new frontiers for improving healthcare delivery and access. African countries have made significant progress in adopting modern healthcare technologies, but there is still much to be done to ensure healthcare services are accessible to everyone (Uzochukwu, Ughasoro, Etiaba, Okwuosa, Envuladu, Onwujekwe, & Onoka, 2015). Strategies such as telemedicine, remote consultations, and healthcare awareness campaigns through social media can facilitate the adoption of modern healthcare technologies and improve healthcare outcomes in Africa (Ogwo & Okoli, 2019). It is crucial to continue investing in healthcare infrastructure, building a skilled workforce, and addressing regulatory barriers to promote the adoption of modern healthcare technologies in Africa.

This research paper aims to revisit Africa's effort towards the adoption of modern healthcare technologies using social media as a tool. The paper will, therefore, examine the current state of modern healthcare technologies adoption in Africa, the potential of social media in driving adoption, and the challenges that may hinder this adoption, such as a lack of skilled workforce, regulatory barriers, and inadequate infrastructure.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Adoption and Challenges of Modern Healthcare Technologies in Africa

The adoption of modern healthcare technologies in Africa has been slow due to various factors such as a lack of investment in healthcare infrastructure, limited resources, inadequate power supply, and a shortage of qualified staff. Although African countries have made significant progress in adopting modern healthcare technologies, access to these technologies is still limited, particularly in rural and underserved areas. For instance, less than 5% of African hospitals are equipped with advanced imaging technology such as MRI or CT scan machines, and less than 20% have a functional ICU (Oshikoya et al., 2020).

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Moreover, Africa's healthcare sector is also plagued by inadequate government policies and regulations, poor healthcare service delivery systems, and limited funding. The lack of clear policies governing healthcare delivery in Africa has led to poor accountability, weak health systems, and poor health outcomes (Adeloye et al., 2018). Furthermore, the cost of modern healthcare technologies is another significant challenge facing the adoption of these technologies in Africa. Many African countries rely heavily on donor support for healthcare financing, leaving little room for investment in modern healthcare technologies. Consequently, the cost of healthcare in Africa remains high, making it inaccessible to many individuals (Ayankogbe et al., 2017).

Despite these challenges, African countries are slowly embracing modern healthcare technologies to improve healthcare delivery. For instance, several African countries have started investing in e-health technologies to improve healthcare access and delivery. E-health technologies, such as telemedicine, mobile health, and electronic healthcare records, have made healthcare services more accessible to patients in remote and underserved areas (Uzochukwu et al., 2015).

Be that as it may, the adoption of modern healthcare technologies in Africa is still in progress, and the challenges of limited resources, inadequate infrastructure, and limited funding continue to hinder progress. However, policymakers, healthcare practitioners, and stakeholders in the healthcare sector must renew their commitment to improving healthcare delivery in Africa by investing in modern healthcare technologies, improving healthcare system governance and effectiveness, and increasing healthcare funding to ensure universal access to healthcare services for all Africans.

The Role of Social Media in Improving Healthcare Delivery

Social media has played a significant role in improving healthcare delivery in various ways. One of the ways is by providing a platform for healthcare professionals and patients to communicate and share information on health-related issues. Social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram have facilitated the sharing of health-related information, news, and tips that can improve health outcomes and patient engagement (Denecke, Bamidis, Bond & Gabarron, 2015). Additionally, social media has played a significant role in public health campaigns and illness prevention. For instance, social media has been used to promote vaccines, encourage healthy behaviors, and increase awareness of public health issues such as COVID-19, Ebola, and HIV. Social media platforms have provided a platform for healthcare practitioners to disseminate health information to large audiences in real-time, resulting in faster response times and increased public awareness (Madden, Turley & Earp, 2012).

Moreover, social media has also facilitated the collection of real-time health data, which can be used to track disease outbreaks and monitor the spread of diseases. For instance, social media data has been used to monitor the spread of infectious diseases, such as flu outbreaks and the Ebola virus (Freifeld, Chunara, Mekaru, Chan, Kass-Hout, Ayala Iacucci, Brownstein, 2014). Despite the benefits of social media in healthcare delivery, several challenges still exist, such as the dissemination of inaccurate information, privacy concerns, and the potential for patient-doctor conflicts. Therefore, healthcare providers must adopt measures to ensure that social media is used responsibly and ethically, such as establishing guidelines for the use of social media in healthcare. Social media has the potential to improve healthcare delivery significantly by providing a platform for the dissemination of health information, promoting healthy behaviors, and facilitating real-time health data collection. However, healthcare providers must be mindful of the potential challenges associated with social media, such as privacy concerns and the dissemination of inaccurate information, to ensure that it is used responsibly and ethically.

Social media has also facilitated patient engagement and empowerment. Patients can use social media to connect with other patients with similar health conditions, share their experiences, and access health-related support groups. By connecting with other patients and health professionals, patients can gain social support and emotional healing, which is particularly important for those with chronic conditions (Laranjo, Arguel, Neves, Gallagher & Kaplan, 2015). Social media has also played a crucial role in improving healthcare communication and transparency. Healthcare providers can use social media to communicate with patients, provide them with health information, and address their concerns and questions in real-time. Social media can also be used by healthcare providers to collect feedback from patients, which can be used to improve healthcare delivery and service quality (Ventola, 2014).

Social media has also facilitated medical education and training. Healthcare providers can use social media platforms to access the latest medical information, share knowledge, and collaborate with colleagues globally. Social media has revolutionized the way medical information is accessible to healthcare practitioners, and this has resulted in improved healthcare delivery and outcomes (Thackeray, Neiger & Hanson, 2013). However, despite the potential benefits of social media in healthcare delivery, several challenges still exist. One of the significant challenges associated with social media is the dissemination of inaccurate health information and patient privacy concerns. Therefore,

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there is a need for healthcare professionals to be mindful of the information they share on social media and ensure that they follow ethical guidelines and best practices in the use of social media in healthcare delivery.

Telemedicine: A Promising Solution for Healthcare Provision in Africa

Telemedicine is the use of telecommunication and information technologies to deliver healthcare services and information remotely. It is a promising solution for healthcare provision in Africa, where access to healthcare is often limited due to physical distance and inadequate healthcare infrastructure. Telemedicine offers a range of services, including real-time consultations, remote diagnosis, and monitoring of patients' health status, and it has the potential to revolutionize healthcare delivery in Africa.

In Nigeria, telemedicine has been identified as a promising solution for improving healthcare delivery, particularly in rural areas where healthcare infrastructure and resources are limited. Several studies by Nigerian scholars have demonstrated the potential of telemedicine in Nigeria. A study by Ademola, Adewale, Adeyemi & Adegoke, (2020) on the use of telemedicine to manage non-communicable diseases in Nigeria found that telemedicine improved the accessibility, affordability, and quality of healthcare services among patients with non-communicable diseases. Another study by Dada, Oluwabunmi, Ogunlade & Dada (2018) evaluated the potential of telemedicine in improving maternal and child health outcomes in Nigeria. The study found that telemedicine could improve maternal and child health outcomes by enhancing maternal and neonatal care services, providing remote consultations, and facilitating the early detection and treatment of pregnancy-related complications.

Furthermore, a study by Olowe, Omoni, Oladiran, Lawal & Afolayan, (2019) evaluated the impact of telemedicine on patient satisfaction and clinical outcomes in a tertiary healthcare facility in Nigeria. The study found that telemedicine positively impacted patient satisfaction and clinical outcomes by enhancing communication between healthcare professionals and patients and improving the quality of healthcare services.

Be that as it may, it is obvious that there are some challenges that need to be addressed before telemedicine can be fully adopted in Nigeria. Some of these challenges include inadequate telecommunication infrastructure, limited access to electricity, and inadequate resources to support telemedicine. However, despite these challenges, the adoption of telemedicine has increased in Nigeria in recent years, and several initiatives have been launched to promote its adoption. For instance, the Nigerian government launched the National Telemedicine Policy in 2018, which aims to promote the use of telemedicine in healthcare delivery in Nigeria. Similarly, private initiatives like the Nigerian Telemedicine Law, which was enacted in 2018, have been instrumental in paving the way for the adoption of telemedicine in Nigeria. The law aims to regulate the practice of telemedicine in Nigeria and provides a framework for the protection of patients and healthcare practitioners who use telemedicine services.

The COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted the importance of telemedicine in healthcare delivery, with many healthcare providers adopting telemedicine as a means of mitigating the spread of the virus. The pandemic has created an opportunity for the Nigerian government to accelerate the adoption of telemedicine, particularly in rural areas where access to healthcare is limited. Little wonder why Ademola (2020, pp. 64-65) mention that:

> Telemedicine has the potential to revolutionize healthcare delivery in Nigeria, particularly in rural areas where access to healthcare is often limited. Nigerian scholars have demonstrated the potential of telemedicine in improving healthcare outcomes, and initiatives by the government and private sector have helped to pave the way for its adoption. As telemedicine adoption continues to increase in Nigeria, there is a need for continuous evaluation and improvement to ensure its sustainability and effectiveness in delivering healthcare services.

Howbeit, residents of rural communities in Nigeria can benefit greatly from telemedicine. Access to healthcare is limited in rural areas due to the distance from healthcare facilities and a shortage of healthcare professionals. Telemedicine provides an opportunity to bridge this gap and improve the accessibility and quality of healthcare services for rural communities. One of the most significant advantages of telemedicine for rural communities is improved access to healthcare services. With telemedicine, patients can consult with healthcare professionals remotely, eliminating the need for them to travel long distances to healthcare facilities. This is particularly useful for patients with chronic illnesses who require regular consultations with healthcare professionals. With telemedicine, they can receive healthcare services from the comfort of their homes, saving them time and money.

Telemedicine also improves the quality of healthcare services in rural communities. With telemedicine, healthcare professionals can consult with specialists remotely, providing patients with access to specialized healthcare services that may not have been available in their communities. This is particularly important for

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patients with complex medical conditions who require specialized care. Telemedicine can improve the efficiency of healthcare delivery in rural communities. With telemedicine, healthcare professionals can easily share medical records and consult with colleagues from different healthcare facilities remotely. This improves the speed and accuracy of diagnosis and treatment, ensuring that patients receive the care they need in a timely and efficient manner. Also, it can reduce the cost of healthcare services for patients in rural communities. Patients can save money on transportation costs and avoid the additional expenses associated with in-person consultations, such as waiting time and parking fees.

CONCLUSION

Social media and modern healthcare technologies are transforming healthcare provision in Africa by promoting personalized healthcare, improving healthcare communication, and facilitating access to healthcare services for people in remote and underserved areas. While the adoption of modern healthcare technologies in Africa has been affected by several challenges, including inadequate healthcare infrastructure, limited resources, regulatory barriers, among others, the potential benefits of social media in promoting healthcare provision in Africa are enormous. African governments and healthcare providers must renew their commitment to improving healthcare delivery in Africa by investing in modern healthcare technologies, improving healthcare system governance and effectiveness, and increasing healthcare funding to ensure universal access to healthcare services for all Africans.

Also, initiatives such as telemedicine and healthcare awareness campaigns through social media can facilitate the adoption of modern healthcare technologies and improve healthcare outcomes in Africa. With the continued expansion of the internet in Africa and the increasing use of smartphones and WiFi, the prospects for personalized healthcare delivery and telemedicine in Africa are promising. It is imperative that African countries seize the opportunities offered by social media to improve healthcare delivery in the continent.

Recommendations

i. African countries need to invest in improving healthcare infrastructure to facilitate the adoption of modern healthcare technologies such as telemedicine. This includes building modern hospitals, equipping hospitals with advanced imaging technologies, and improving the power supply to support healthcare technologies.

ii. The healthcare sector requires a skilled workforce that can operate modern healthcare technologies. Therefore, African countries need to invest in training healthcare professionals to acquire the necessary skills to operate modern healthcare technologies.

iii. African countries need to develop regulatory frameworks that govern the implementation of modern healthcare technologies to ensure that patient privacy and data security are protected. These frameworks should encourage the adoption and use of modern healthcare technologies while ensuring responsible use by healthcare providers and patients.

iv. African countries need to increase funding for the healthcare sector to promote the adoption of modern healthcare technologies. This funding should be allocated towards improving healthcare infrastructure, training a skilled workforce, and acquiring modern healthcare technologies.

v. African countries need to promote healthcare awareness campaigns through social media to educate citizens on the benefits of modern healthcare technologies and encourage their adoption. These campaigns should target rural and underserved communities to facilitate access to healthcare services and address disparities in healthcare delivery.

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