



Challenges of Communicating Health Information on Diabetes Miletus through Facebook and Implications on Healthcare Delivery in Ebonyi State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Background: Communicating health information on social networking sites, especially Facebook can be quite gainful but at the same time contains a range of probable risks.

Objective: This study investigated the difficulties faced when sharing data related to a person's medical history including symptoms, diagnosis, procedures and outcomes through social media, and its implication on healthcare delivery in Ebonyi State, Nigeria.

Method: The adopted discursive analysis research method and anchored the discussion on the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT).

Results: The study found that health communication through Facebook faces the challenge of lack of status identification; thereby reducing fidelity and credibility.

Conclusion: The study concludes that Facebook and other social media platforms are vital platforms for sharing of information on diabetes among patients, doctors, nurses and other carers or care-givers. Diabetic patients that belong to Facebook groups that communicate their health challenges on the platform are more likely to better manage the disease than those who do not; this is because the sharing of health information among the members of the groups can potentially provide care, reduce trauma and increase the knowledge of patients about the disease.

Unique contribution: The study provides fresh insights into the major challenges of health communication through Facebook which has some negative consequences.

Key Recommendation: The study recommends that members of Facebook diabetic patient groups should always identify their status by indicating their professional status such as doctor, care-giver, nurse, Mr. Mrs or Miss 'A' 'B' or 'Z' before their names; diabetic patients in Ebonyi State should be encouraged to register in online health communication groups to enable them take advantage of the benefits of belonging to such groups.

Keywords: Communication, Challenges, health information, diabetes Miletus Facebook



INTRODUCTION

Diabetes is a very common and costly chronic illness affecting people of all ages (Association, 2008). Social support is important in managing the disease and promoting compliance with a strict maintenance regime (Anderson, and Funnell, 2005). In recent time, social media has become an integral part of our daily lives and the use of its various platforms such as Twitter, YouTube, Facebook are rapidly growing. According to Dixon (2023), the current total number of active monthly Facebook users is not less than 2.45 billion, including 183 million from the USA and 307 million from Europe, together constituting only 2% of the total number of Facebook users. Facebook is increasingly used as an alternative platform for sharing and seeking health related information. People are using online resources for health purposes including seeking advice, connecting with experts and individuals with similar experiences, sharing questions and concerns around treatment options or understanding professional diagnoses (Berner and Graber 2008).

Online social networks are not only free and accessible platforms for exchanging information, they have revolutionized how we create, share and consume contents (Nwafor, Ezema, & Igwebuike, 2022). Today, in almost everything we do, we use the Internet. Ordering for birthday cakes, buying a television, sharing moment with a friend, sending a picture over instant messaging. In fact, a lot of people check their smart phones within 15 minutes of waking up and most often they turn to social networking sites. A lot of medical institutions, healthcare organisations, and professional communities use accounts on social media for marketing activities, announcing events and educational purposes. Obviously, the benefits of social media include education and information sharing, personal brand development, networking and collaboration, marketing and recruiting. The list is endless.

Furthermore, the Internet has become a major source for health related information and users are significantly increasing over the years (Beck, Richard, Nguyen-Thanh, Montagni, Parizot and Renahy 2014). With the widespread use of the internet and its relatively inexpensive bandwidth, social and especially social networking sites, are beginning to be used by both healthcare professionals and patients. In 2011, Korda et al found that one of the most popular online activities was searching for online health information.

Social networks and health are closely related. The social cognitive theory posits that one's lifestyle and health-related behaviours are shaped by observing and modeling others' behaviours, and social reinforcement comes from the behaviours (Bandura, as cited in Schwarzer 2015). Similarly, the theory of reasoned action (TRA) suggests that subjective norms, that is, individuals' beliefs about whether a particular health behaviour is desirable in the eyes of close social ties, is an important determinant of their intention to perform or change the behaviour (Ajzen, and Fishbein., as cited in Trafimow, 2009).

Furthermore, social networks influence one's health by providing four broad types of support: emotional, instrumental, informational, and appraisal. Such support could help improve one's abilities to cope with stressful health challenges, leading to a better health outcome (DiMatteo, 2004). Over the past few years, Web-based social media, particularly social networking sites (SNSs), have grown substantially. Such growth, to a great extent, removed time and space



barriers for people to connect with one another, providing great potential for them to maintain existing social ties and expand social networks. Recent studies have demonstrated that social networking functions were effective in improving users' access to health information (Freyne, Berkovsky, Kimani, Baghaei & Brindal, 2010), engaging families in lifestyle changes (Baghaei, Kimani, Freyne, Brindal, Berkovsky & Smith, 2011) and motivating weight loss (Hwang, Ottenbacher, Green, Cannon-Diehl, Richardson, Bernstam, & Thomas, 2010). Despite these innumerable benefits, there are several challenges posed by the use of social media in the field of health.

The most remarkable development in the social media space is the fast and continuous growth of Facebook. In the U.S., more than 65 % of the Internet users use Facebook to update personal status, follow friends, or share information (Odoemelam, Nsude, Nwafor, & Ebeze, 2016). Worldwide, one in 7.7 people has a Facebook account, and close to 530 million are daily active users (Bullas, 2012). The use of Facebook also breaks into the health domain. Among U.S. Facebook users, 23 % have followed friends' personal health experiences or updates, 15 % have retrieved health information on the site, and 9 % have started or joined a health-related group (Fox, 2011). As such, Facebook holds a great potential to influence individuals' health behaviours by shaping their perceptions of social norms and the expectations that they set for themselves, or by improving their access to personally relevant information (Morris, Consolvo, Munson, Patrick, Tsai, Kramer, 2011).

Recent research has looked at how users use Facebook as a generic SNS for health information, why they use it, and their perceptions of the usage (Newman, Lauterbach, Munson, Resnick, Morris, 2011, Fox, 2011 and Zhang, 2012). However, there remains a knowledge gap on the challenges of using Facebook as a source of health information and the implications of sharing health information relating to health communities on Facebook. Such Facebook communities are public spheres that can be accessed by everybody. Such groups are communities formed based on common health interests rather than on a person's generic social ties. To fill this gap and shed light on the characteristics of health communities on Facebook and understand their potential for promoting health information exchange, this study investigated large and active diabetes group, named Diabetes on Facebook.

Research Questions

1. What are the challenges of communicating health information focused on challenges of diabetes patients' groups through Facebook?
2. What are the implications of communicating health information focused on challenges of diabetes patients' groups through Facebook?
3. How does communicating health information focused on challenges of diabetes patients' groups on Facebook affect healthcare delivery in Ebonyi State?



CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Diabetes mellitus

Diabetes is a chronic medical condition that affects how your body uses blood sugar or glucose. Glucose is an important source of energy for the cells in your body, but when you have diabetes, your body cannot properly process glucose, leading to high blood sugar levels. Type 1 and type 2 diabetes are two distinct forms of diabetes, each with its own causes, characteristics, and treatment approaches (Ghosh, 2023). Brutsaert (2023) describes Diabetes mellitus as a disorder in which the amount of sugar in the blood is elevated. Doctors often use the full name diabetes mellitus, rather than diabetes alone, to distinguish this disorder from arginine vasopressin deficiency, which used to be called diabetes insipidus (Brutsaert, 2023). Arginine vasopressin deficiency is a relatively rare disorder that does not affect blood glucose levels but, just like diabetes mellitus, causes increased urination.

Health Communication

Health Communication is the means of reaching out to the population and meeting their health needs through verbal and written approaches which further result in change in attitude and health behaviours of recipients (Rural Health Information Hub 2022-2023). Health communication could correct misconceptions and also enlighten the population on credible knowledge on health issues. It can as well proffer reliable guide to prevention, management and control of diseases especially during an emergency situation. These can be possibly achieved using the different means of human communication ranging from interpersonal to mass communication and more elaborate through the social media platforms which includes the Facebook. The challenges of using Facebook, as social media platform with vast coverage and unrestricted access for sharing and receiving messages come with enormous responsibilities which has some implication on healthcare delivery. This is because of the possible misinformation commonly associated with the use of Facebook and other online communication forms. This misinformation has made the Facebook to be seen as ‘fake news’ ‘super spreaders’ which no doubt, pollute the scene of health communication on Facebook. (Culliford 2020; Nwafor, 2022; Beveridge 2023).

The importance of health communication in healthcare delivery in Nigeria has gained the centre stage due to factors such as globalisation which give room for cross fertilisation of ideas across the globe via effective communication strategies on how to tackle diseases across borders and also introduce technological innovations on sensitive health discoveries (Olohiomeru 2019). The process of reaching out to the population requires planned strategies that also considers important components such as knowing the basic information needs, choosing the appropriate channels and analysing the audience literacy level, accessibility to the internet and cultural inclinations which could also shape the health communication campaigns (RHIH, 2023) This suggests the fact that the choice of information dissemination on sensitive health management through the use of social media platform designed to reach wider population in the shortest possible time becomes inevitable despite the inherent challenges and also considering the different strategies used in health communication based on the communication needs of the audience.



Communicating health information through Facebook

Basically, communication is categorised into four major types, intrapersonal, interpersonal, small group and mass communication. Mass communication involves using a technological device through the internet to disseminate information through the different facets of communication which are radio, Television, Newspapers, Magazines, cinemas, and also the social media which includes WhatsApp, X, YouTube, Instagram, WeChat, Bogs, Snapchat, Facebook and the likes. Social media, especially Facebook which is a channel used by health workers in disseminating health information online, guarantees spontaneous reach and covers a wide audience across the globe, is a sure bait for health communication which is capable of sharing pictures, words, videos not only to individuals but to organisations, associations and groups with similar interest. (Ramly and Adzharuddin 2015).

Facebook as a social network platform is regarded as an active tool for communicating ideas in detailed form. This is because it could be used to attract attention to an already established fact and can be used both for a private or public communication. It is public when it is targeted at a multiple network members and the messages sent are durable, because it can be exchanged for a longer period (Menefee, Thompson, Guterbock, & Valdez 2016). The advantage of involving multiple network members and the durability of the information shared often create opportunities for feedback in form of post, comment, tag, like, and share. In this case the platform is proliferated with fake news, but in closed group where the group administrator use ‘‘privacy setting’’ to ensure that members of the group are only exposed to guided information, the abuse of information on Facebook could be curtailed.

Benefits of Communicating Health Information on Facebook.

The major advantage of using social media in communicating health information is accessibility to the platform, which gives larger people opportunity to be connected and also enjoy enormous support for 24 hours, seven days in week despite their busy schedules, without having to interact face to face.(Lavec&O’Sullivan 2010). Face book not only educate the masses on the proper information meant to correct misconceptions but also create awareness and build authority which further provides effective communication for managing crisis in emergency situations and also monitor public health by answering common questions (Asehinde 2020).

The benefits of communicating health information on Facebook no doubt facilitate healthcare delivery by promoting healthcare through effective health education, promotion, preventive and management strategies, especially during emergency situations and also enhancing social interaction of health care workers on new innovation and discoveries (Austin 2019). However, the use of Facebook as a social media platform exposed to public access are not without its attendant challenges which has implications on Healthcare delivery all over the world.

Challenges of Communicating Health Information on Facebook

Despite the benefits of using Facebook to facilitate health communication through health education on health emergencies and other safety campaigns, Facebook like other social media have four



major challenges in health information management. These include but not limited to the unwillingness of some practitioners and health institutions to interact with the public, the danger of violating medical ethics by some non-professionals, and protecting the privacy of the patients and unguarded negative comments from some patients (Galavand, Panahi&Sedghi, 2020). The fear of these challenges however could be managed effectively by using the Facebook privacy setting mechanism where closed groups curtail influx of information through unapproved sources.

The inability of the less privileged groups to access the social media platform, the inability to measure result by following up cases and lack of authenticity of information shared on Facebook are some of disadvantages of using Facebook in health communication (Levacand O’Sullivan 2010). The challenge of inequality in access to Facebook due to barriers like illiteracy, low income, and also the inability to measure the success of the information disseminated through the Facebook suggest that the social media as a new technological innovation have not come of age. There future hold prospect for health communication through a globally accepted network which cuts across barriers.

It is also likely that the illiterate members of the society will not be able to participate in online social media communication of health issues. This is because their inability to read and write make them technically blind, hence they cannot access information on Facebook platforms and where they do, they are not likely to read and understand the suggestions and recommendations made by others. This is not the case when patients meet medical professionals in a face-to-face interaction.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Ghalavard, Panali and Sadghi, (2020), in Opportunity and Challenges of Social Media for Health Knowledge Management: A Narrative Review, elaborately discussed the intricacies of the use of social media in managing health information using a narrative approach. The study retrieved data from three electronic scientific data base, ‘Web of Knowledge, Pub Web and Google Scholar’ and also reviewed studies published between 2010-2019. The findings exposed four major challenges facing health information management to include, doctors’ unwillingness to interact with the public, disseminating health information on social media fail to comply with the ethics of medical profession, challenges on how the privacy of individuals could be protected and difficulty in managing negative comments. It is recommended that if the ethics of medical profession and the privacy of individuals are properly addressed; social media can be a veritable tool capable of developing health knowledge and effective management. The study delved into the review of literature on challenges of using social media to manage health knowledge and also suggested how effective management of information with due considerations of personal privacy and medical ethics could improve health knowledge. However, how to address the implications of these challenges on healthcare delivery in Ebonyi State was not covered, hence the need to close the gap in knowledge. Moreover, the researchers used review of literature which is a different approach to what the present study used, perhaps a different finding could emerge from this study.



Afful-Dadzie, Afful-Dadzie, Suleman, B. and Egala (2023) in the study *Social Media in Health Communication: A Literature Review of Information Quality*, used a systematic review and meta-analysis and forward chaining strategies to explore Social Media Health Information (SMHI) addressed in 93 articles published between 2000-2019, sourced from five different data base for academic research; Scopus, Web of Science, Cochrane Library, PubMed and MEDLINE with the major objective of finding how SMHI issues in the literature reviewed are structured to cover quality reporting. The findings discovered an irritating style on the social media of health issues and communication which are unacceptable, mostly on dental care, diabetes, and cancer. The study recommends a more acceptable criterion in assessing SMHI as a subject for future research. The above study thoroughly examined contents of social media health information with major motive of evaluating quality reportage. However, there is a missing link between the quality of the content and the implication on healthcare delivery, especially in an evolving society, hence the need for this study on the implication of communicating health information through Facebook on healthcare delivery in Ebonyi state.

Syn (2021) studied health information during a pandemic crisis: *Analysis of Centre for Disease Control [CDC] Facebook page during Covid-19*, with a major objective of assessing how people use Facebook during emergency health situations. The researcher used Facebook graph API to collate and analyse post on the Facebook page of CDC with major emphasis on the type of posts and how users engage with information disseminated therein and also their reactions to such messages for the period of six months, between January and June 2020. The finding of this study implies that the type of posts by the CDC during the period under review is closely associated with Covid-19, and users were massively engaged and also reacted promptly when issues relating to the pandemic is posted. The implication of this findings goes to support the fact that social media platforms, like Facebook, Twitter, Blogs, Messenger, WhatsApp are very effective in health education and correcting misconceptions during emergencies due to their wide coverage and immediacy. While both studies analysed the use of face book in health communication, the present study differs in scope, however, the findings of the above study may vary with findings of challenges of communicating health information through Facebook and the implication on healthcare delivery in Ebonyi state due to the different nomenclature, which is not under a pandemic situation, hence the gap in knowledge.

Inobemhe, Santas, and Udeh, (2022) evaluated a discourse on the effectiveness of health communication on Covid-19 Infodemic and conspiracy theory in Nigeria using summative evaluation design, which examined existing research materials in related journal articles, online materials and book chapters. The findings of this research suggests that effective communication on health issues via social media is essential to combating misinformation which could guide major health decisions especially during emergencies. Both studies shared similarities as they focused on health communication especially health emergencies but this study differ in the sense that it went further to unravel the challenges of health communication through Facebook and also weighed the implications on healthcare delivery in Ebonyi state.



Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Uses and Gratifications Theory and Social Identity Theory. The uses and gratification theory which was first propounded by Katz and Blumler in the 1940s deal with the understanding of why people choose to use a specific media and their reasons for such choice could be due to the satisfaction they derive from such use and exposure (Ogbuoshi 2011)

The study adopted the theory because it shapes the understanding of why people choose to communicate health information through Facebook. The gratifications that comes from sharing healthcare information through the Facebook gained popularity due to its ability to connect users across borders and also its ability to expose professionals and patients to new knowledge on health information which could be beneficial to them, who also are identified by their common interest which is a unifying force for effective interaction. Also, social identity which was propounded by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the 1970s describes how social identity supersedes one's identity and also could influence the behaviours of group members (Vinney 2019).

METHOD

Discourse analysis (DA) was adopted for this study. Discourse analysis is a qualitative research method for studying "language in context." (Gee, 2011). The process goes beyond analysing words and sentences, establishing a deeper context about how language is used to engage in actions and form social identity. In Gee's (2011) view, language is always used from a perspective and always occurs within a context. Thus, in its original sense, discourse analysis is associated with the study of linguistics – to analyse contexts, the use of words and their implications in the context the words are employed. However, discourse analysis is interdisciplinary but has been rarely used as a research method in health studies.

DA has the potential to reveal valuable insights into the social and political contexts in which varied discourses about health take place. Areas of research which are relevant to healthcare concerns include the discourses of: the interpersonal communication processes between doctors or nurse and patients, inter-professional conversation, in-depth interviews about lay health beliefs, conversations between lay people about health risks and issues, government-sponsored health promotion messages, health information in the mass entertainment and news media, service protocols, information/education pamphlets for patients; texts describing particular understandings of health and illness or clinical approaches to treatment medical and health-care journals and official texts, textbooks in health-care specialties, health care's system communication about such disease, paternalistic manners in health-care system.



DATA PRESENTATION

Facebook Diabetic Group

Judy May Rollins, 19 October, 2022

Hello my members...

I need a little personal input on a medication that has been on the market for a while...I believe it is Jardiance. Has anyone been on it? And have you experienced any nuisance side effects besides what is specified.

Kirt Etapa

Feedback: On it basically a water pill pees your brains out expelling the sugar from your system. The request made by the named patient above sought to get information that could help in the treatment of the ailment. Only one feedback was provided by Etapa who suggested a water pill to expel sugar from the system. This feedback is relatively inadequate to help the patient in case the recommendation does not work out. Again, Etapa did not state whether he/she was a medical expert. Hence, it the patient could be sceptical to accept the suggestion from an unexplained source. This suggest that there is a problem of identity in healthcare Facebook communication

Cindy Lee Pennicot, 9 September, 2007

Hello everyone

I recently discovered I'm diabetic I have to use insulin and was wondering am I going to gain weight now or lose it? As well is my body producing more glucose than it use to or is it less insulin, so the glucose builds up.

Feedback

Less insulin so the glucose in the body build up.

The one sentence feedback could be a solution to the problem. This is because the efficacy of any prescription or healthcare suggestion does not depend on the volume or number of words used. However, the source fails to identify status that could enable the patient to evaluate the strength of the recommendation. This could be said to be a setback in obtaining information on health issues in a diabetic patient groups. However, it is possible that a member of the group that made the suggestion has an idea of what should be done. In that case, this health communication interaction provides a useful clue to diabetic patients within the group.



John Howard 4 July, 2007

Are you Type 1 or Type 2. I'm type 1 and was diagnosed when I had my 12th birthday! Great eh?

Feedback

Aww you will be ok, you will have better control of your diabetes and blood glucose levels by being on insulin and in the long term will be better for it. You will feel much healthier having lower glucose levels (in the normal range) all the best! Let us know how you get on! xx were here if you need any help!

In the above suggestion, the respondent assures the patient that he/she will be ok if the patient controls blood sugar glucose levels. The fact that the provider of the feedback requests to know how the patient's gets on is encouraging. This could help sustain the patient's resistance as hope is to some extent a panacea to ailments.

Feedback

Ashley Dee, 12 September 2007

Hi Cindy,

Well I can tell you that, as a Type 1, I have never gained any weight. I am the same weight since high school. I just seem to stay in that area of weight and never go extremely over or under that point. If you keep a balanced diet, exercise and have good control of your sugars, you should have no problems with weight from you Diabetes.

Hope that helps!

This second feedback further reinforces the one provided by the first respondent. It reinforces that with insulin, the patient will be ok. It could be inferred from the forgoing that the interactions provided by Facebook to diabetic patients is beneficial in terms of exchange of ideas. However, the health communication challenges in such platforms are not resolved, particularly as majority of the Facebook diabetic patient groups operate a close system that makes it difficult for researchers to access information from the platform

Rudy Palais

Hi Community,

I am Rudy, a new member of this group. My A1C level is 5.7, I am prediabetic. My doctor put me on a statin because my HDL cholesterol is a little low and LDL cholesterol is a little high despite me eating a healthy diet and going to the gym twice a week. Statins have side effects that in the long run contribute to worse health. I am looking to reverse prediabetes with diet, exercise, herbal remedies- natural means, no meds. I am working on eating a ...

Feedback

There is no reverse to prediabetic

As the provider of the feedback did not identify status, it could be difficult for the patient to believe this unqualified suggestion. The suggestion is also capable of causing the patient a traumatic



situation as it is very discouraging. It could be argued from this premise that the major challenge to Facebook diabetes patient group health communication is lack of status identification.

Les James

25 June, 2023

Hi. Has anyone had experience of a similar situation as mine please? I was diagnosed with type 1 hereditary diabetes 9 months ago at age 51. I had been feeling unwell for a few months before. I was told that my diagnosis came later in life than normal probably due to my healthy lifestyle. So for the last 9 months since I was diagnosed I have been doing all the recommended actions for a diabetic.

Feedback

No feedback was offered to the patients by either the patients in the group or any medical doctor or nurses. This forced the patient to ask the question: Is there nobody in this platform? The patient still did not receive any answer. This is discouraging and capable of leading to a traumatic situation and despair.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From the literature reviewed in this study and the analysis of some selected messages and feedbacks provided by Diabetic Facebook Group members, we found that:

Health communication focused on challenges of diabetes patients' groups through Facebook faces the challenge of lack of status identification.

Health communication focused on challenges of diabetes patients' groups through Facebook can help diabetic patients in Ebonyi State get useful healthcare information.

Communicating health information focused on challenges of diabetes patients' groups through Facebook has consequences.

Our literature reviews and the discourse analysis of the excerpts from Facebook Diabetic Patients Groups indicated that there is often no status identification that could help patients seeking for advice to ascertain whether the piece of advice is from a medical practitioner or lay members in the groups. In support of this finding, all the messages retrieved from the various group platforms carried only the names of the sender and the person that provided the feedbacks

Well I can tell you that, as a Type 1, I have never gained any weight. I am the same weight since high school. I just seem to stay in that area of weight and I hope that's right, with me it's no weight gain, and I'm not the most active person, and my body is producing no insulin. Hope that helps!

This suggests that it is only the lay members of the groups that most often exchange health communication information in their various group platforms. This implies that nurses and medical doctors could be unwilling to provide advice in the platforms. This could be because any misapplication of such advice could implicate the medical practitioner. It can, therefore be argued that Facebook group communication by diabetic patients does not provide therapeutic certainty on



remedies for diabetics. This is because the lack of status identification makes it difficult for the patients to determine the professional knowledge level of the individual offering the advice.

Our study also found that health communication through Facebook can help diabetic patients in Ebonyi State get useful healthcare information. The finding is supported by the exchange of health information between Cindy Lee Pennicot and a diabetic patient who inquired to know whether less insulin can help the body glucose to build up. The feedback ‘Less insulin so the glucose in the body build up’ is reassuring.

We also found that communicating health information through Facebook has negative consequences. This include the possibility of making irritating comments that could peace off a patient or any medical professional that belongs to the group. In support of this finding, Afful-Dadzie et al., (2023) study discovered an irritating style on the social media of health issues and communication which are unacceptable, mostly on dental care, diabetes, and cancer. The authors also found that Facebook health communication study infringes on individuals right to privacy, and leads to non-compliance to professional ethics as well as difficulty in managing negative comments. The study notes that these challenges have not been properly addressed.

In addition, we found that communicating health information on Facebook is helpful in delivering health care services to the people in Ebonyi State. This implies that social media platforms, like Facebook, Twitter, Blogs, Messenger, WhatsApp are very effective in health education and correcting misconceptions during emergencies due to their wide coverage and immediacy.

CONCLUSION

Diabetes is a dreaded disease and the management should not only be handled by medical professional but also through the advice of patients who are experienced in the management of the diseases. Thus, the sharing of information among patients is necessary. Diabetic patients that belong to Facebook groups that communicate their health challenges on the platform are more likely to better manage the disease. This is because the sharing of health information among the members of the groups can potentially provide care, reduce trauma and increase the knowledge of patients about the disease. The warnings, advice and suggestions by group members and medical professionals through social media could provide disease management knowledge that may not be curative but helpful in sustaining the lives of diabetic patients.

Based on the findings of the study, we recommend that: The members of Facebook diabetic patient groups should always identify their status by indication their professional status such as doctor, care giver, nurse, Mr. Mrs or Miss ‘A’ ‘B’ or ‘Z’ before their names. Diabetic patients in Ebonyi State should register in online health communication groups to enable them take advantage of the benefits of belonging to such groups. There is need to urgently address the negative consequences of Facebook health communication and other social media health communication platforms.



Ethical clearance

Ethical consent and clearance were sought and obtained from participants used for this study. The purpose was explained to them and their participation was voluntary.

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Authors Contribution

Dr Chike Onwe conceived the study including the data analysis, Ifeoma Catherine Nwakpa collected the data, and Happiness Chinenye Nworie interpreted the data while Jacinta Chinenye Igwe wrote the manuscript. All the authors read and approved the manuscript before this publication.

Availability of materials and data:

The datasets upon which conclusions were made for this study are available on reasonable request.

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