

# EXPLORING DOCTORS' AND MIDWIVES' PERSPECTIVES ON UTILISING SOCIAL MEDIA FOR MATERNAL HEALTH PROMOTION

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**Abstract:** *This study investigates the perspectives and experiences of doctors and midwives in Ilorin, Nigeria, regarding the use of social media for maternal health promotion. Through in-depth interviews with ten healthcare professionals; eight doctors and two midwives, three key themes emerged from thematic analysis: perceptions of social media's role, practical experiences of its application, and strategies for optimisation. Participants viewed social media, including platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram, as a powerful tool for enhancing patient education, fostering supportive communities, and extending the reach of maternal health information. It facilitates awareness of issues such as postpartum depression, promotes healthier behaviours, and ensures continuous support. However, challenges such as misinformation, privacy concerns, and unrealistic expectations temper its benefits, necessitating credible content and careful management, as supported by Social Cognitive*

*Theory's emphasis on outcome expectations and self-efficacy. Practically, participants employed varied platforms and interaction methods, direct messages, group chats, and calls, sharing content like videos and infographics, though time constraints, limited training, and poor internet access posed barriers. Proposed optimisation strategies included debunking myths with expert input, government regulation of misinformation, and amplifying credible content through proactive education. This study concludes that while social media holds transformative potential for maternal health, addressing these challenges through training and infrastructure improvements is crucial. By leveraging its strengths, healthcare providers can significantly enhance maternal health outcomes in Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** *Doctors, Digital platforms, Maternal health promotion, Midwives, social media*

## Introduction

Maternal health remains a critical global public health challenge, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, and regions like sub-Saharan Africa where high maternal mortality and morbidity rates persist despite ongoing interventions (WHO, 2023). Nigeria ranks as the third country with highest number of maternal deaths given the country's maternal mortality ratio of 1,047 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2020 (Central Intelligence Agency, 2020). Health communication alongside other interventions, has been identified as crucial to the management of public health issues in sub-Saharan Africa (Olaoye, & Onyenakeya, 2023).

In response, digital technologies, particularly social media, have emerged as transformative tools for disseminating maternal health information, bridging gaps in healthcare access, and empowering women with knowledge (Fayoyin, 2016; Skouteris & Savaglio, 2021). The increasing reliance on the internet and social media for health-related information has reshaped how expectant and new mothers seek guidance, moving away from traditional consultations with doctors and midwives to more interactive, accessible, and community-driven digital platforms (Baker & Yang, 2018).

Maternal health encompasses care before, during, and after pregnancy (WHO, 2016), and the digital revolution has introduced new ways to support women through these stages. The internet now serves as a primary source of health information, facilitating telemedicine, virtual consultations, and self-care management (Adenuga, Iahad, & Miskon, 2017; Aririguzoh et al., 2021). Social media platforms, in particular, have fostered online communities where women exchange experiences, access real-time advice, and receive emotional support, factors that significantly influence maternal well-being (Gui et al., 2017; Vickery et al., 2020). Studies suggest that these platforms enhance patient engagement, reduce isolation, and improve health literacy, making them valuable supplements to conventional healthcare (Obasola & Mabawonku, 2018; Skouteris & Savaglio, 2021).

However, the rapid proliferation of digital health information also raises concerns. Misinformation, privacy risks, and varying digital literacy levels among users pose challenges to the credibility and safety of online maternal health resources (Zhu et al., 2019; Wakelin et al., 2022). Excessive social media use has even been linked to adverse health behaviours, such as poor dietary habits and sleep disturbances, which may negatively impact pregnancy outcomes (Zhang et al., 2021). Given these dualities, healthcare professionals play a crucial role in ensuring that social media is leveraged effectively, providing accurate

information, countering myths, and guiding patients toward reliable sources (Aderinoye et al., 2020).

Despite growing recognition of social media's potential in maternal health promotion, limited research explores healthcare providers' perspectives on its use. Doctors and midwives, as frontline maternal health workers, offer critical insights into the benefits, challenges, and best practices for integrating social media into maternal care. This study addresses this gap by examining the experiences and perceptions of doctors and midwives in Ilorin South, Nigeria, focusing on:

1. Their views on social media's role in maternal health promotion,
2. Their firsthand experiences using digital platforms for maternal healthcare delivery, and
3. Their recommendations for optimizing social media to enhance maternal health outcomes.

By centering the voices of medical professionals, this research contributes to evidence-based strategies for harnessing digital tools in maternal health, ensuring safer, more informed, and equitable care for women in an increasingly connected world.

### **Social Media**

Social media is described as a group of Internet-based applications built on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, allowing for the creation and exchange of User Generated Content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). According to Xu and Zhang (2013) social media refer to a set of internet-based technologies/applications, generally engaged for the creation, modification, update and exchange of user-generated content, as well as the establishment of new links between the content creators themselves.

They are a set of information technology platforms and web-based applications which facilitate interactions and networking as they provide the functionality for sharing, relationships, group, conversation and profiles (Kietzmann et al., 2011). Kapoor et al. (2018) define social media as comprising "various user-driven platforms that facilitate diffusion of compelling content, dialogue creation, and communication to a broader audience" (p.536). They further describe social media as a digital space created by the people and for the people, serving as an environment that facilitates interactions and networking at different levels. Skouteris and Savaglio (2021) also consider social media as internet-based social network platforms and media sharing sites or mobile phone applications (apps) such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, that allow individuals to communicate, share content, and collaborate.

While social media as a term has been defined severally, all definitions of social media agree that social media implies the use of online or internet technologies for communication (Wolf, Sims & Yang, 2018). The proliferation of social media platforms and number of active social media users over time has made it one of the most important internet applications (Aichner et al., 2021). The spate of social media usage across the globe has increased significantly with an array of available platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, WhatsApp, Reddit, WeChat, Weibo, Tencent, and TikTok (Zhu et al. 2020). In this paper, social media refers to the use of such internet-based network platforms and mobile phone applications for maternal health promotion.

### **Social Media and Maternal Health Promotion**

Health promotion is the enablement of individuals to have increased control over their health, as well as to improve their health (Nutbeam & Muscat, 2021). As explained by Nutbeam and Muscat, this encompasses not only actions aimed at strengthening the skills and capabilities of individuals, but also actions targeted at changing social, environmental and economic determinants of health, with a view to optimizing the positive impact of such factors on public and personal health.

In this paper, maternal health promotion thus refers to communication efforts and actions aimed at enabling pregnant and post-natal women gain control over their health, and consciously improve their health during the stages of pregnancy, delivery and after delivery. These include communication, information dissemination/seeking, education, and sensitization on maternal health related issues (during pregnancy, delivery and after childbirth).

Research has shown that social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp and LinkedIn, offer unique opportunities of information seeking, interaction, sharing of valuable information and promotion of healthy practices related to maternal health (Agboola & Waziri, 2020; Chioma, Uygun & Gujrati, 2022, Skouteris & Savaglio, 2021).

Social media has been widely adopted by patients, caregivers, and healthcare professionals, with studies indicating its usefulness in patient empowerment, health promotion, patient–physician relationship building, public health surveillance, and quality improvement (Chen & Wang 2021). According to Obasola and Mabawonku (2018), the dispersal of maternal health-related information as a strategy for preventing pregnancy and birth complications was hitherto made possible through print and oral communication approaches, for example, through antenatal classes. The current model of communication which incorporates social media reduces the burden on doctors and midwives, and makes mothers inclusive in the promotion of their health during pregnancy (Baker & Yang, 2018). Skouteris and Savaglio (2021) submitted that social media platforms offer an avenue to leverage preconception and pregnancy health information among young women.

The literature undoubtedly highlights the potentials of social media in promoting healthy behaviors, addressing misconceptions, and empowering individuals with knowledge about maternal health. Aderinoye et al. (2020) confirmed that social media plays a major role in facilitating maternal and healthcare information among nursing mothers. Similarly, Vickery et al. (2020) found midwives to be positive about the use of the Internet by pregnant women because they believed it made them well-informed.

In spite of such benefits accruable to the use of internet and social media for maternal health, scholars further draw attention to certain potential setbacks (Ventola, 2014). Concerns on the accuracy and authenticity of information being accessed on the internet and social media space (Sayakhot & Carolan-Olah, 2016; Zhu et al., 2019) as well as issues relating to pregnant women and midwives' privacy, and skills required to access and use such digital technologies (Wakelin et al., 2022) are among the critical issues associated with the use of social media for maternal promotion. Focus on devising strategies to leverage mobile health and use digital promotion to improve maternal and new-born care in Nigeria have thus been emphasized (Emma-Anyasodo et al., 2020). Therefore, further examination of the use of social media in maternal health promotion, from the perspectives of health professionals, as carried out in this paper, is considered relevant to gain further insights from their experiences.



### **Theoretical Framework: Social Cognitive Theory**

This study is anchored in Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), a framework developed by Albert Bandura (1986) that examines how individuals acquire and modify behaviours through dynamic interactions between personal cognitions, environmental influences, and social systems (Wood & Bandura, 1989). SCT posits that learning is not merely a passive absorption of information but an active process shaped by observation, modelling, and reinforcement within one's social context (Bandura, 1991).

Central to SCT is the concept of reciprocal determinism, the idea that behaviour is influenced by, and in turn influences, both personal factors (e.g., beliefs, self-efficacy) and external factors (e.g., societal norms, digital environments). In the context of this study, SCT provides a lens to analyse how doctors' and midwives' perceptions and experiences with social media shape their professional use of these platforms for maternal health promotion.

### **Relevance to the Study**

**Behavioural Modelling:** Health professionals' adoption of social media is likely influenced by observing peers, institutional practices, and patient engagement trends. SCT suggests that if clinicians perceive colleagues effectively using digital tools (e.g., WhatsApp for antenatal advice), they are more likely to replicate such practices.

**Self-Efficacy and Barriers:** Bandura (1997) emphasised that individuals act based on their confidence in executing a behaviour (self-efficacy). Doctors' and midwives' willingness to use social media may depend on their technical skills, trust in online platforms, and perceived risks (e.g., misinformation).

**Environmental Reinforcements:** Institutional policies, cultural attitudes toward digital health, and patient demand act as external reinforcements. For instance, in settings where pregnant women increasingly seek information online, clinicians may feel compelled to engage proactively.

By applying SCT, this study interrogates not only how doctors and midwives use social media but also why, unpacking the cognitive, behavioural, and contextual factors that drive or inhibit their adoption of these tools for maternal health promotion.

### **Methodology**

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore doctors' and midwives' lived experiences and perceptions of using social media for maternal health promotion in Ilorin, Nigeria. Phenomenology was selected as the most appropriate research design as it facilitates an in-depth understanding of how individuals make sense of their experiences within specific sociocultural and professional contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Through this approach, we sought to uncover the essence of participants' experiences with social media as a tool for maternal healthcare delivery and health promotion.

The research was conducted at two major public healthcare facilities in Ilorin: The University of Ilorin Teaching Hospital (UIITH), a tertiary referral centre serving Kwara State and neighbouring regions, and the General Hospital, Ilorin, one of Kwara State's oldest and most prominent healthcare institutions. Participants were purposively selected based on two key



criteria: (1) their professional roles as either doctors or midwives, and (2) their demonstrated familiarity with and use of social media for maternal health-related purposes.

Data collection occurred between May and June 2024 through in-depth interviews with ten participants. This sample size was determined to be sufficient upon reaching data saturation - the point at which additional interviews ceased to yield new insights and the collected data became repetitive (Fusch & Ness, 2015). The interviews were designed to elicit rich, detailed accounts of participants' professional experiences with social media in maternal healthcare contexts.

Following data collection, we employed thematic analysis to identify patterns and meanings within the interview transcripts. To enhance the study's reliability, we implemented the member checking technique (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), whereby participants were given opportunities to review and verify the researchers' interpretations of their responses. This process helped ensure that our findings accurately reflected participants' intended meanings and experiences.

The phenomenological approach proved particularly valuable for this study as it allowed us to explore not only how healthcare professionals use social media in their maternal health practice, but also how they perceive its value, challenges, and potential within Nigeria's unique healthcare landscape. By focusing on participants' lived experiences, we gained nuanced insights that quantitative methods might have overlooked.

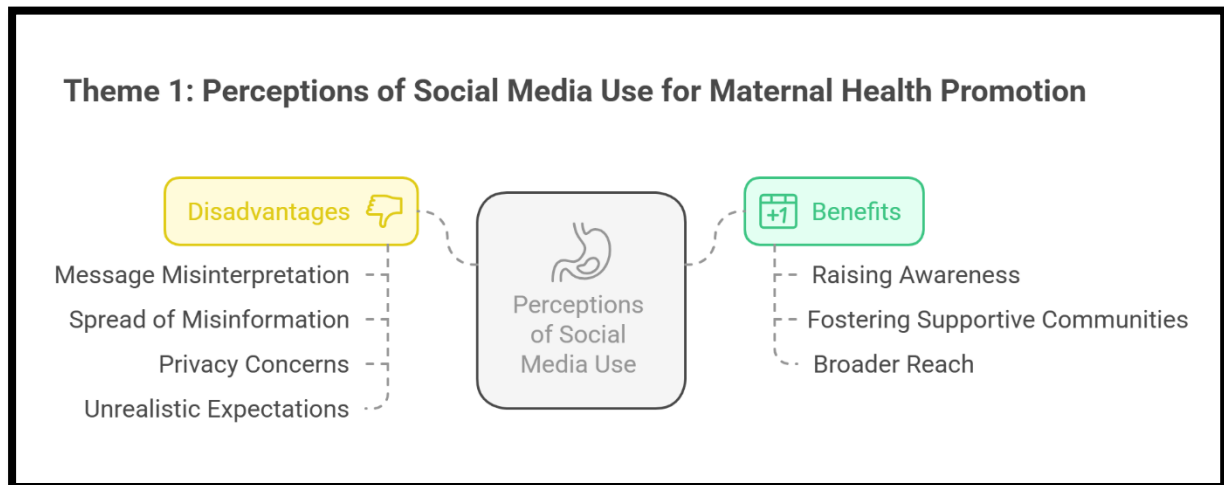
## Findings

### **Exploring Doctors' and Midwives' Perspectives on Utilising Social Media for Maternal Health Promotion**

This study explored the perspectives of doctors and midwives in Ilorin, Nigeria, regarding the use of social media for maternal health promotion. The research involved in-depth interviews with ten participants, five males and five females, comprising eight doctors and two midwives. These participants were evenly distributed between two hospitals: General Hospital and the University of Ilorin Teaching Hospital (UITH), with five from each institution. Through thematic analysis, three key themes emerged, capturing their perceptions and experiences: (1) perceptions of social media use for maternal health promotion, (2) experiences of its practical application, and (3) strategies for optimising its potential. Each theme is elaborated below, enriched with sub-themes and supported by participants' voices.

#### **Theme 1: Perceptions of Social Media Use for Maternal Health Promotion**

The first theme delves into how doctors and midwives perceive social media as a tool for promoting maternal health. Participants expressed a mix of optimism and caution, recognising its potential to enhance health outcomes while acknowledging its pitfalls. Two primary sub-themes emerged: the benefits and the disadvantages of social media in this context.



**Figure 1. Perceptions of Social Media Use for Maternal Health Promotion**

### Benefits of Social Media Use

Participants widely appreciated social media's capacity to bolster maternal health promotion. They identified several advantages, including its ability to raise awareness and disseminate knowledge effectively, foster supportive communities, and extend the reach of health information.

#### Raising Awareness and Knowledge Dissemination

Social media was lauded for its role in spreading vital maternal health information. Inf.2, a participant, noted its educational value: "It helps you know of the current trends and innovations. It brings about knowledge. Knowledge is very powerful." Similarly, Inf.4 highlighted its utility in cautioning against harmful practices: "It is a way of disseminating information and warning them against habits that can affect their lives and children." Inf.8 further underscored its impact on raising awareness about critical issues such as "postpartum depression, birthing complications, and lifestyle factors during pregnancy," illustrating social media's effectiveness in addressing pressing maternal health concerns.

#### Fostering Supportive Communities

The platform's ability to build communities among expectant mothers was another celebrated benefit. Inf.2 observed, "It shows new practices and trends and builds a community of like minds," suggesting that social media connects individuals with shared experiences. Inf.8 elaborated on this, stating, "Building a strong, engaged community allows members to support each other and self-regulate harmful content," highlighting how these virtual networks provide emotional and informational support.

#### Broader Reach

Participants also valued social media's extensive reach, enabling them to connect with diverse audiences. Inf.1 remarked, "There is a better reach; there are people with the wrong mindset and social media helps eradicate and solve that issue." Inf.7 echoed this sentiment, appreciating the opportunity to "reach women in different regions and make a positive change" through targeted health messages. This wider dissemination underscores social media's potential as a transformative tool in maternal healthcare.



## **Disadvantages of Social Media Use**

Despite its advantages, participants identified significant challenges, including message misinterpretation, the spread of misinformation, privacy concerns, and the creation of unrealistic expectations.

### **Message Misinterpretation**

A recurring concern was the risk of messages being misunderstood online. Inf.9 explained, "The challenges are misinterpretation when relating with patients online. Messages can be misinterpreted when you are not seeing patients physically." Inf.7 added, "People easily misquote what is written," while Inf.4 described patients self-diagnosing based on social media content: "They come to the hospital and tell the doctor what they believe is wrong with them." These insights reveal the complexities of conveying accurate health advice digitally.

### **Spread of Misinformation**

The proliferation of misinformation was a prominent worry. Inf.2 warned, "Some people give wrong information. Social media is powerful in spreading the wrong information." Inf.10 reinforced this, noting the challenge of "combating misinformation and myths that often spread on social media." Inf.5 described the chaotic mix of "verified and unverified" messages, while Inf.9 admitted to encountering "a mix of accurate health information and misinformation." Inf.1 highlighted the consequences: "People believing they are now doctors and can take care of themselves because of what they see online," illustrating the potential harm to maternal health outcomes.

### **Privacy Concerns**

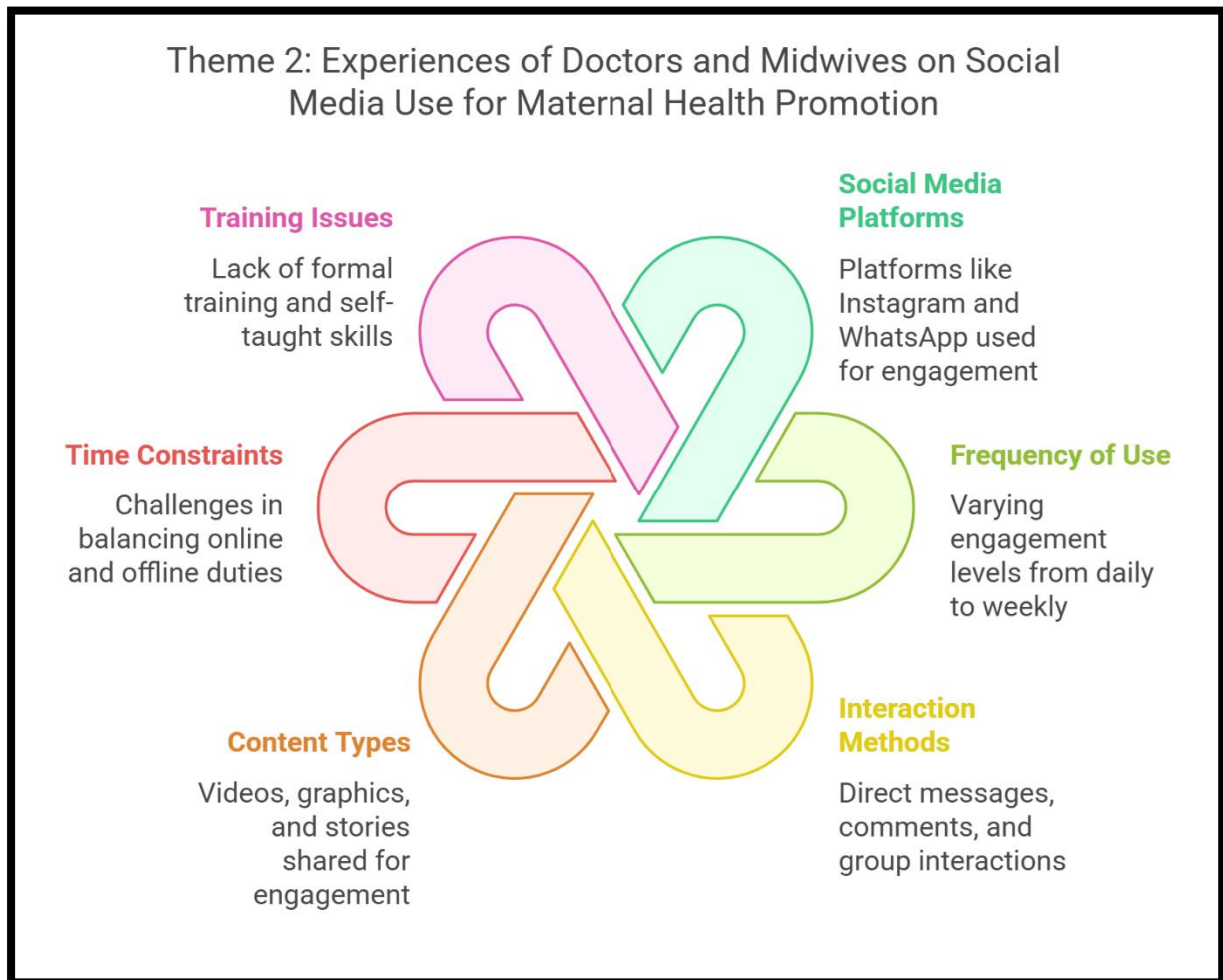
Privacy emerged as a critical drawback. Inf.2 linked it to misinformation's impact: "There is wrong information that is being passed and it affects expectant mothers and hampers them." Inf.8 concurred, citing "privacy concerns" alongside misinformation and harmful comparisons. Participants like Inf.3, Inf.7, and Inf.9 repeatedly flagged privacy as a significant issue, reflecting the delicate balance between outreach and safeguarding personal information.

### **Unrealistic Expectations**

Social media's tendency to foster unrealistic expectations through idealised portrayals was another concern. Inf.8 noted, "Potential for harmful comparisons between mothers," suggesting that such content could pressure expectant mothers unduly. These disadvantages highlight the need for careful management of social media's role in maternal health promotion.

## **Theme 2: Experiences of Doctors and Midwives on Social Media Use for Maternal Health Promotion**

The second theme explores the practical experiences of doctors and midwives in using social media to engage with patients on maternal health matters. It encompasses two sub-themes: the nature of their social media use and the constraints they encounter.



**Figure 2. Experiences of Doctors and Midwives on Social Media Use for Maternal Health Promotion**

### Nature of Social Media Use

Participants shared diverse experiences regarding the platforms they use, their frequency of engagement, interaction methods, and content formats.

#### Social Media Platforms Used

The choice of platforms varied, reflecting their unique strengths. Instagram was popular for visual content, with Inf.1 noting, "It allows one to post videos easily," and Inf.8 listing it among preferred platforms. WhatsApp dominated due to its accessibility, with Inf.2 stating, "I make use of WhatsApp because it is easier," and Inf.6 adding, "It is what most people use." Inf.9 also relied on WhatsApp for patient communication. Facebook's broad reach was valued, as Inf.10 explained, "It allows me to share information with a larger audience," while Inf.5 and Inf.4 used it alongside WhatsApp. TikTok was mentioned by Inf.2 for occasional use, and Twitter appealed to Inf.7 for its "diverse audience" and ability to share "threads and long-form content."

#### Frequency of Social Media Use

Engagement ranged from daily to occasional. Inf.1 used TikTok "every day," and Inf.9 relied on WhatsApp "multiple times a day." Weekly use was common, with Inf.2 posting "maybe

once a week," Inf.5 using it "once or twice weekly," and Inf.7 sharing content "at least thrice in a week." Inf.10 used Facebook "a few times per week," while Inf.3 and Inf.6 were occasional users, with posts "once in a month" or "once in a while."

### **Modes of Interaction**

Participants employed various interaction methods. Direct messages were key, with Inf.10 using "private messages" and Inf.9 valuing texts for "personalised advice." Comments on posts were noted by Inf.10, while social media groups, especially on WhatsApp, were popular, Inf.4 used them to "answer questions and give tips," and Inf.8 engaged via "community groups." Calls offered a personal touch, with Inf.3 preferring "direct voice calls" and Inf.9 using "audio/video calls" for tailored support.

### **Types/Formats of Content Shared**

Content varied from videos to personal stories. Inf.5 shared "videos because it engages my patients better," and Inf.8 posted "informative videos on prenatal care." Graphics were favoured by Inf.1, Inf.3, and Inf.7 for their visual appeal. Text-based information provided depth, as Inf.7 and Inf.9 noted, while infographics offered concise insights, per Inf.7 and Inf.9. Inf.8 shared "personal stories from other mothers" to connect emotionally with audiences.

### **Constraints in Social Media Use**

Participants faced several hurdles, including time pressures, limited training, and internet access issues.

### **Patients' Demands and Offline Responsibilities**

Balancing offline duties with online engagement proved challenging. Inf.5 noted, "Patients take a lot of my time due to lots of questions," while Inf.2 restricted use to "once a week" due to time constraints. Inf.7 added, "It is not easy combining work with educating people on maternal health."

### **Training and Social Media Use**

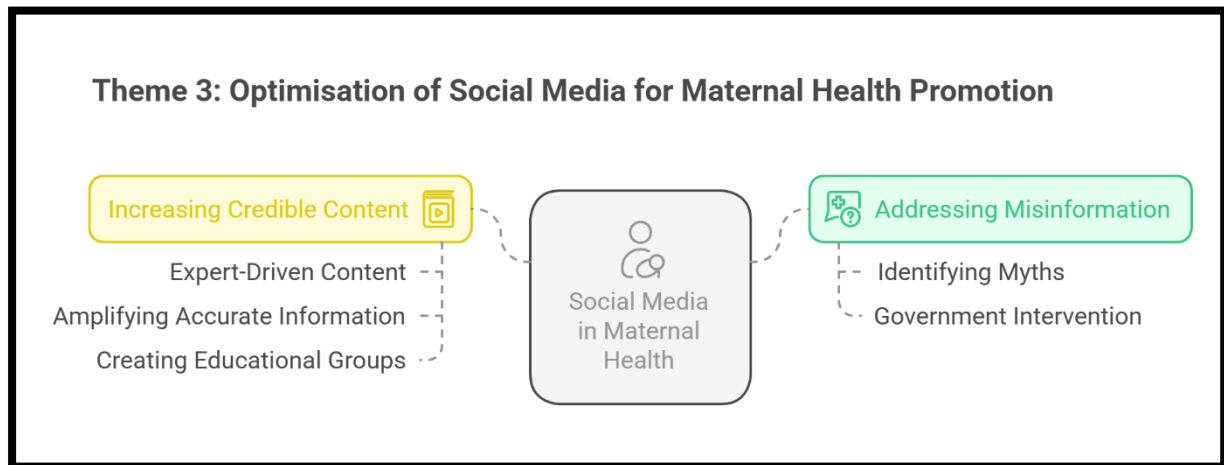
Training experiences varied. Many were self-taught, with Inf.10 stating, "There is no formal training for such; one has to build oneself." Inf.3 felt training was unnecessary, while Inf.7 and Inf.8 learned independently. Conversely, Inf.2 felt "adequately trained" due to professional knowledge, and Inf.5 relied on "basic knowledge."

### **Limited Internet Access**

Poor internet connectivity hindered use, with Inf.2 citing "data; internet" as a barrier, reflecting broader infrastructural challenges in Nigeria.

## **Theme 3: Optimisation of Social Media for Maternal Health Promotion**

The final theme outlines strategies proposed by participants to enhance social media's effectiveness in maternal health promotion, focusing on tackling misinformation and boosting credible content.



**Figure 3. Optimisation of Social Media for Maternal Health Promotion**

### Addressing Misinformation

Participants suggested proactive measures to counter misinformation. Inf.2 advocated identifying and refuting myths, citing "Aproko Doctor" as an example, while Inf.4 urged government intervention to "curtail some information being shared."

### Increasing Content from Credible Sources

Ensuring reliable content was a priority. Inf.4 insisted content "should be shared by trained medical experts," and Inf.10 called for "actively sharing accurate information from credible sources." Inf.8 suggested "amplifying accurate content" to refute myths. Inf.5 proposed involving "trained experts" to create educational groups, and Inf.6 encouraged practitioners to "spread more information" proactively.

These findings illuminate the dual nature of social media in maternal health promotion, as perceived and experienced by doctors and midwives in Ilorin. While it offers unparalleled opportunities for awareness, community-building, and outreach, it also poses risks of misinformation, misinterpretation, and privacy breaches. Participants' experiences reveal a practical reliance on platforms like WhatsApp and varied engagement patterns, tempered by constraints such as time and internet access. Their proposed strategies underscore a need for credible, expert-driven content and systemic support to maximise social media's potential in improving maternal health outcomes in Nigeria.

### Discussion of findings

This study investigated the perceptions and experiences of doctors and midwives in Ilorin, Nigeria, regarding the use of social media as a tool for maternal health promotion. Conducted through in-depth interviews with ten healthcare professionals, eight doctors and two midwives, the research unearthed three overarching themes: perceptions of social media's role, practical experiences of its use, and strategies for optimisation. These findings illuminate both the potential and the challenges of leveraging social media in this context, offering insights that resonate with broader scholarly discourse and Social Cognitive Theory (SCT).

### **Theme 1: Perceptions of Social Media Use for Maternal Health Promotion**

The doctors and midwives in this study regarded social media as a potent instrument for advancing maternal health, echoing sentiments found in prior research. They highlighted its capacity to educate patients, foster engagement, and provide ongoing support to expectant mothers. Platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook enable the rapid dissemination of health information, promoting healthy behaviours, preventing complications, and raising awareness about critical issues like postpartum depression and birthing challenges. For instance, regular online interactions were seen to encourage timely medical consultations and strengthen trust between healthcare providers and patients, a finding consistent with Bervell and Al-Samarraie (2019). These studies affirm social media's efficacy in correcting misconceptions and empowering women with knowledge, aligning with the participants' views on its educational benefits.

However, the optimism was tempered by significant concerns. Participants pointed to the pervasive spread of misinformation, which can lead to harmful behaviours and heightened anxiety among expectant mothers. Privacy issues also loomed large, with the risk of sensitive information being exposed online, while idealised portrayals of motherhood were seen to fuel unrealistic expectations. These challenges resonate with the literature, as Ventola (2014) and Richmond, et. Al. (2024), similarly underscore the need for credible content and careful management of online patient interactions to mitigate such risks. The duality of social media's impact, both beneficial and problematic, mirrors the principles of SCT, in which outcome expectations shape behaviour. Providers anticipated positive outcomes, such as improved patient education, but also negative ones, like misinformation, influencing their engagement. Moreover, their self-efficacy, or belief in their ability to use social media effectively, played a pivotal role. Participants with higher confidence embraced its potential, suggesting that targeted training could enhance their competence and utilisation, a point we revisit later.

### **Theme 2: Experiences of Doctors and Midwives on Social Media Use for Maternal Health Promotion**

The practical experiences of these healthcare professionals revealed a dynamic interplay between platform preferences, usage patterns, and interaction methods, alongside notable constraints. WhatsApp emerged as the preferred platform due to its accessibility and ease of use, facilitating real-time patient communication, a trend also noted by Jeyaraman et al. (2023). Facebook and Instagram were valued for their wide reach and visual capabilities, ideal for sharing videos and infographics, while Twitter's detailed threads appealed to those engaging diverse audiences. TikTok, with its short, engaging clips, catered to younger demographics, reflecting a strategic adaptation to patient preferences.

Usage frequency varied widely. Some participants engaged daily, ensuring continuous support and follow-up care, a practice supported by Ventola (2014) for its role in maintaining patient-provider connections. Others used social media weekly or occasionally, influenced by workload and patient needs, highlighting the flexibility required in balancing digital and traditional responsibilities. Interaction methods were equally diverse: direct messages on WhatsApp offered personalised consultations, comments and group chats on Facebook and WhatsApp fostered community engagement, and audio/video calls provided in-depth support. The content shared, ranging from videos and graphics to infographics, text, and personal stories, catered to different learning styles, enhancing patient understanding and emotional connection.



These findings align with SCT's concept of observational learning. Patients can model healthy behaviours from educational content, such as prenatal care videos, within a digital environment that shapes both provider and patient actions. However, challenges tempered these benefits. Time management proved difficult, with participants struggling to juggle offline duties and respond to patient inquiries online. One remarked that "combining work with educating people on maternal health" was not easy, a sentiment reflecting the strain of dual responsibilities. Training emerged as another hurdle: many lacked formal instruction, relying on self-directed learning or networking, as one noted, "There is no formal training for such; one has to build oneself." Yet, some felt their professional knowledge or guidelines from bodies like the World Health Organisation sufficed, illustrating varied self-efficacy levels. Limited internet access further constrained usage, a practical barrier rooted in Nigeria's infrastructural challenges. These obstacles, misinformation, time pressures, inadequate training, and connectivity issues, underscore the need for supportive interventions, reinforcing SCT's emphasis on the interplay of personal, environmental, and behavioural factors.

### **Theme 3: Optimisation of Social Media for Maternal Health Promotion**

Participants proposed actionable strategies to maximise social media's effectiveness, focusing on countering misinformation and amplifying credible content. A proactive approach to debunking myths was widely endorsed, with one suggesting emulating influencers like "Aproko Doctor" to "identify the myths first and then talk about them." Government intervention was also advocated, with calls to "curtail some information being shared," highlighting the need for regulatory oversight. Ensuring content credibility was paramount, participants urged that "content should be shared by trained medical experts," advocating for ongoing education and the amplification of trustworthy information to refute misleading claims. Practical suggestions included forming educational groups led by experts and encouraging practitioners to "spread more information" proactively.

These strategies align with SCT by enhancing the digital environment with credible models for patients to observe and emulate, while boosting providers' self-efficacy through training. The emphasis on expert-driven content echoes Bervell and Al-Samarraie (2019), who stress the importance of authoritative voices in health promotion. Collectively, these optimisation efforts aim to mitigate the identified challenges, misinformation, privacy risks, and time constraints, enhancing social media's role in maternal health. The call for training resonates with the findings on self-efficacy: those with greater confidence navigated platforms more effectively, suggesting that formal programmes could bridge skill gaps and empower providers.

The discussion reveals a nuanced picture of social media's role in maternal health promotion among doctors and midwives in Ilorin. It is a double-edged sword, offering unparalleled opportunities for education, support, and outreach, yet fraught with challenges like misinformation and privacy concerns. Practical experiences highlight a reliance on accessible platforms like WhatsApp, tailored to diverse patient needs, but constrained by time, training, and connectivity. Proposed optimisation strategies, rooted in credibility and proactivity, offer a pathway forward, aligning with SCT's framework of learning, efficacy, and environmental influence. These insights not only corroborate existing literature but also underscore the need for tailored interventions, training, infrastructure improvements, and regulatory support, to harness social media's full potential in improving maternal health outcomes in Nigeria.

Conclusion



The findings of this study underscore the significant potential of social media as a tool for doctors and midwives in promoting maternal health in Ilorin, Nigeria. Platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram empower healthcare providers to enhance patient education, foster engagement, and offer continuous support to expectant mothers. By facilitating broader reach and consistent communication, these tools enable the promotion of healthier behaviours, raise awareness of critical issues, and help prevent complications, ultimately strengthening the bond between providers and patients. The capacity of social media to deliver timely, accessible information positions it as a vital asset in improving maternal health outcomes.

Nevertheless, this potential is tempered by notable challenges that demand attention. The pervasive spread of misinformation threatens to undermine trust and lead to harmful practices, while time constraints hinder providers' ability to balance online engagement with their demanding offline responsibilities. Additionally, the lack of formal training for many participants highlights a gap in preparedness, limiting their confidence and effectiveness in navigating these digital platforms. Addressing these obstacles is essential to fully harnessing social media's benefits in maternal healthcare delivery.

By capitalising on the strengths of social media, its accessibility, reach, and interactivity, and implementing targeted strategies to mitigate its drawbacks, healthcare providers can unlock its transformative power. Enhancing training programmes to boost self-efficacy, improving internet infrastructure to ensure consistent access, and promoting credible content to counter misinformation are critical steps forward. Through such efforts, doctors and midwives can leverage social media not only to educate and support expectant mothers but also to significantly elevate maternal health outcomes, paving the way for a more informed and healthier community.

### **Recommendation**

Based on the findings of this study, several key recommendations emerge to optimise the use of social media for maternal health promotion by doctors and midwives in Nigeria. To enhance their effectiveness, formal training programmes should be established, equipping healthcare professionals with the skills to create compelling content, engage patients meaningfully, and manage misinformation. Such training would bolster their confidence and competence, addressing the self-efficacy gaps identified. Additionally, improving internet infrastructure is essential, as limited connectivity hampers consistent use of platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook. Advocating for better access in healthcare settings would ensure reliable communication with expectant mothers. Furthermore, providers should be encouraged to disseminate credible, expert-driven content—such as videos, infographics, and personal stories—to combat misinformation and deliver accurate education effectively. Strengthening regulatory oversight is also critical; collaboration with government bodies could introduce measures to curb the spread of false information, safeguarding maternal health outcomes. Finally, fostering community engagement through educational groups on accessible platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook would enable trained professionals to offer tailored advice and facilitate peer support, enhancing patient trust and interaction. Collectively, these steps aim to harness social media's transformative potential while overcoming its challenges, paving the way for improved maternal healthcare delivery in Nigeria.

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