Influence of social media on urologic knowledge acquisition among young urologists in Saudi Arabia

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Abstract

Objectives: The present study explores how young urologists in Saudi Arabia are adopting social media as a learning tool and how this new development is shaping as far as learning is concerned.

Methods: A 18-item online survey via surveymonkey.com was conducted. The survey was distributed through email in Saudi Arabia. The survey targeted young urologists and urology residents. The survey design and distribution was performed according to CHERRIES guidelines. Due to the quantitative nature of study data, SPSS software was used to analyze collected data.

Results: A total of 104 young Saudi urologists responded to our survey. Participants were mostly familiar with the use of Twitter (86%), followed closely by YouTube (82%) and then Snapchat and Instagram (73% and 63%, respectively), a large portion (72%) of participants believe that social media has a moderate-to-high influence on their urology knowledge, YouTube was by far the most used source to watch and understand surgical skills, followed by reference books and websites, respectively.

Conclusion: Social media has contributed to the spread of medical information among urology community and outside the urology community as well, with easier spread of medical knowledge to all involved by using social media, an extensive impact is achieved to both physicians and patients as well. For future work, this study should be conducted again, to monitor and compare the progression of usage among urologists.

Keywords: Knowledge acquisition, social media, urologist

INTRODUCTION

With the new technologies being extensively used in the field of medicine, this use of new technology led to exploration of new modalities that had an impact either in diagnosis or in the treatment or both. It is noted that physicians are using social media to find better ways for improving their knowledge.1

Through social media, a health practitioner can share appropriate health information, direct people, alert them about common misleading information, publish scientific research, communicate with colleagues, market their products, or attend medical conferences.

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There are some health-care professionals using social media to communicate with their patients in different ways that ensure and enhance their clinical care and provide medical practitioners with tools that help to keep themselves updated with new information.\textsuperscript{2,3}

Young urologists in Saudi Arabia get benefit from the development of social media and mostly online to update and increase their information consistently. Urologists have joined this technology where they can browse medical journals, listen and consult the experts, and be informed about developments and evolutions in the medical field.

This survey reveals how urologists in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia use social media as an educational tool and how they utilize and develop its use in the proper way.

**METHODS**

An 18-item online questionnaire was designed and conducted at survemonkey.com. The survey was distributed via emails and WhatsApp to urology communities in Saudi Arabia. Young urologists and urology residents were targeted in this questionnaire. The design and distribution of the survey was carried out according to the guidelines of Cherries. Given the quantitative nature of the study data, Excel was used for the analysis of the collected data.

**RESULTS**

A total of 104 young Saudi urologists responded to our survey, among which 15 were recently graduated and board certified, and 89 were residents under training, of which 39 were in senior levels postgraduate year (PGY) 4, PGY5, and recently graduated, the mean age of participants was 29.6 years. Participants were mostly familiar with the use of Twitter (86%), followed closely by YouTube (82%) and then Snapchat and Instagram (73% and 63% respectively). Twitter and YouTube were equally and most frequently used in a professional way by 56% each, followed by Google+ [Figure 1]. While Snapchat, followed by Twitter, was the most social media application used for personal purposes, although 79% of participants did not have an updated professional social media account.

A large portion of participants (72%) believe that social media has a moderate-to-high influence on their urology knowledge, [Figure 2]. Twitter was ranked second after urology books and before urology journals, as the most frequently used for knowledge update, [Figure 3].

YouTube was by far the most used source to watch and understand surgical skills, followed by reference books and websites [Figure 4].

Sixty-seven percent of young urologists follow urological events on social media, 72% follow urological associations, 81% follow urology experts in social media, and 56% follow urological journals on social media, as presented in Figure 5.
While 28% of the participants believe that urologists are most influential in social media, as shown in Figure 6, surprisingly, only 30% of the participants have read the guidelines on the appropriate use of social media in urology.

DISCUSSION

Communication channels have changed dramatically with the advent of Web 2.0 tools. Social media platforms allow sharing various types of information with heterogeneous population in real time. These characteristics created new themes of learning in an unprecedented way. This study showed how young urologists use social media to connect with professionals, expand their knowledge, and develop their skills. A large portion of the study’s participants are familiar with social media platforms, with Twitter being the most familiar platform to 86% of them, while Facebook was the least familiar to the participants. While the majority of the participants do not have a dedicated professional social media account, most of them believe that social media has a moderate-to-high influence on their urology knowledge, with more than half of them (56%) use YouTube and Twitter for professional purposes. In addition, around half of the participants use YouTube to learn new techniques, and little less than quarter of them use Twitter for knowledge update. These ratios clearly indicate a strong trend toward using social media in professional life. Moreover, approximately one-third of young urologists from our sample think that urologists are more influential in social media than in journals, books, and conferences. Nevertheless, only 30% have read the guidelines on the appropriate use of social media in urology.

Comparing these results with other studies’ findings, in our sample, around 70% of respondents have not read the guidelines, a similar result was declared in previous studies, as the authors stated that more than half of social media users were not familiar with professional social media guidelines. The study justifies this phenomenon by the reasons of not seeing any value and not wanting invasion of privacy. Regarding the most used social media platform for professional purposes, YouTube was the most used platform, since 56% of the sample used it in professional practice. This also coincided with the findings of previous study as the study’s results showed that YouTube is the most used platform for professional use (63%). In previous study, however, the second most used platform was LinkedIn, whereas in our case, Twitter scored the same percentage as YouTube (56%).

The implications of these results can be summarized as follows:

1. Social media is highly adopted by young urologists, professional organizations, such as journals, conferences, and hospitals should keep this in mind when marketing for events, submissions, jobs, or any other service
2. Young urologists use YouTube to learn surgical skills more than any other source. This suggests that schools should not underestimate the value of providing a good quality learning management systems to support self-learning using various media.
Finally, the knowledge of the guidelines for appropriate use of social media for urologists should be encouraged by providing various summaries or infographics to communicate the information in an easier and smoother way, as illustrated in previous study.\textsuperscript{[6]}

**CONCLUSION**

Social media are promising tools for more interesting and interactive health educational experience and can actively facilitate in the delivery of health care. Social media has contributed to the spread of medical information among the urology community and outside the urology community as well, once social media will be more actively utilized by local medical organizations and institutions, extensive impact to both physicians and patients will be achieved, and easier spread of medical knowledge to all involved. For future work, this study should be conducted again, to monitor and compare the progression of usage among urologists. We anticipate that the behavior might have increased dramatically due to COVID-19 pandemic, as most online recourses witnessed a significant surge in use and interaction. Thus, repeating this survey or a similar one would provide valuable insight to maximize utilization of this rich resource for information diffusion and knowledge sharing.

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**Conflicts of interest**

There are no conflicts of interest.

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