

Social Media In Swedish Healthcare

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Background

Social media are digital platforms characterized by user generated content. The concept incorporates blogs, wikis, podcasts and commentary fields as well as social networks, such as **Facebook** or **LinkedIn**, and micro-blogs, such as **Twitter** or **Instagram**. Social media are used not only by individuals, but enterprises and organizations use it for corporate branding, recruitment, collaborations and marketing. The use of social media has skyrocketed over the past few years and come to play an increasingly important role in our everyday communication. Today, 77% of Swedes with internet access use social media, making it something we all have to relate to, both professionally and privately. Furthermore, it gives rise to gray area issues in the interface between professional and private life, especially with regards to online safety, integrity and ethics. International studies points to an ambivalence in physicians' attitudes towards social media and Swedish studies show an increase in social media activity in healthcare, raising questions regarding Swedish physicians' views on this technology.

Purpose

The aim of this study was to investigate practicing physicians' views on social media and its integration into Swedish healthcare. Focus was put on areas of use for social media as well as the physician's clinical use, guidelines, ethical principles and online safety- and integrity. Lastly, interest was taken to demographic and practice-related predictors for the physician's online behavior.

Method

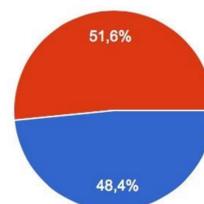
In this study, a mixed methods approach was followed. This involved a trans-sectional online survey created and distributed using *Google.forms*. The form was targeted at physicians practicing in VGR. SPSS was used for *frequencies* and *cross tabulation analyses* as well as for building tables and figures. In addition to the survey, interviews with a lawyer, a physician and a senior hospital communications manager, all selected for their special knowledge in this area, were conducted. These interviews shed light on different aspects of social media use and gave a more complete picture of its integration into healthcare.

Take home message

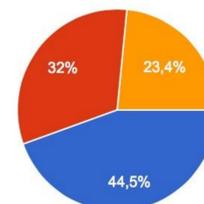
With better knowledge on the subject, we can spark the debate and contribute to a responsible integration of sociable technologies, with its incredible potential, into Swedish healthcare!

Results

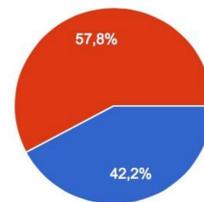
Of 127 survey respondents, slightly more than half (54.7%) reported that their workplace used social media, *publishing general information* being the most common area of use. Almost half of the survey population (42.2%) felt limited in their private use of social media and approximately the same proportion (44.5%) had adjusted their *privacy settings* on Facebook in order to limit patient's access to information about them. Furthermore, half of the survey population (51.6%) considers it inappropriate for physicians to have a personal Facebook profile and the majority (71.9%) had no knowledge of existing guidelines for physicians' use of social media. Age was the most consistent predictor for the physician's online behavior. Older respondents tended to consider it inappropriate for physicians to have a personal Facebook profile while younger adjusted their *privacy settings* in order to continue using social media.



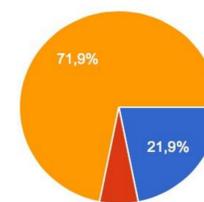
Frequency analysis, question 15
Do you consider it appropriate for a physician to have a personal Facebook profile that can be found by patients? **red** = No, **blue** = Yes



Frequency analysis, question 10
Have you adjusted your privacy-settings on Facebook to limit patients access to personal information about you? **red** = No, **blue** = Yes, **orange** = I do not have a personal Facebook profile



Frequency analysis, question 7
Do you feel limited in your private use of social media due to patients access to personal information about you? **red** = No, **blue** = Yes



Frequency analysis, question 17
Do you feel assisted by existing guidelines for use of social media in Swedish healthcare? **red** = No, **blue** = Yes, **orange** = I have no knowledge of existing guidelines

Conclusions

Results point to a lack of consensus and an uncertainty among physicians associated with social media use. These findings pertain to both private and professional use and are slightly more pronounced in older physicians. The knowledge of existing guidelines is limited, possibly yielding an additional reluctance to engage in social media. By providing a clearer view on integrity and safety issues as well as on ethical problems facing physicians that are active on social media, this study highlights areas that need regulation and can serve as a foundation for the elaboration of relevant guidelines.



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