The Role of Social Media in Maternal Health: Balancing Awareness, Misinformation, and Commercial Interests

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Abstract:

Maternal health information through social media functions as a fundamental information source, which presents both benefits and disadvantages for pregnant women in Jordan. This study conducts a literature review on the ways social media influences maternal health knowledge by showing its beneficial aspects of healthcare accessibility along with its unfavorable outcomes from incorrect health information and health service promotion as well as unmonitored medical consultations. The research shows that mothers seek guidance through Instagram and Facebook platforms for maternal health matters, but the extensive spread of incorrect information creates significant danger to their health. The public exposes itself to dangerous medical choices when it follows health information from unqualified self-styled experts despite their lack of medical credentials. The study utilized Uses and Gratifications Theory to analyze how expecting mothers access digital medical content together with how algorithm systems affect such information distribution. The research results highlight a pressing need for regulatory monitoring while also showing our requirement for improved digital medical expertise and higher medical specialist involvement to fight misinformation and make social media health material more believable. The study advances current digital health communication research through its policy recommendations, which improve maternal health awareness by providing pregnant women evidence-based, reliable information. Enhancing digital health literacy combined with professional intervention online will both work together to improve the fetal and maternal health results in pregnant women.

1. Introduction

Social media plays a significant role in enhancing health awareness among pregnant women by providing effective communication channels for disseminating health-related information on pregnancy and maternal care [1-13]. Anxiety symptoms such as poor sleep and fatigue are frequent during pregnancy, affecting up to 54% of pregnant women [9]. According to a Pew Research survey published in 2021, 81% of pregnant women use social media to access health-related information [14-18]. Platforms such as Instagram and Facebook serve as major sources where pregnant women seek information, join parenting groups, and interact with maternal health professionals. On one or more occasions, the

Internet was used to obtain information on pregnancy, labor, or the impending baby. The majority, 79%, had sought for information in the preceding month, and the frequency of Internet searches ranged from once a month to 62 times per [18]. Pregnancy apps were the most popular digital media sources among women, followed by websites and social media sites including Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. Pregnancy applications (81.7%) are the most popular resource, demonstrating that mobile apps play an important role in supplying pregnancy-related content. Websites (74.6%) are the second most popular source. A small percentage (3.5%) do not use any online sources for pregnancy-related material [10]. One of the biggest factors has been the ongoing technology advancements in health and illness
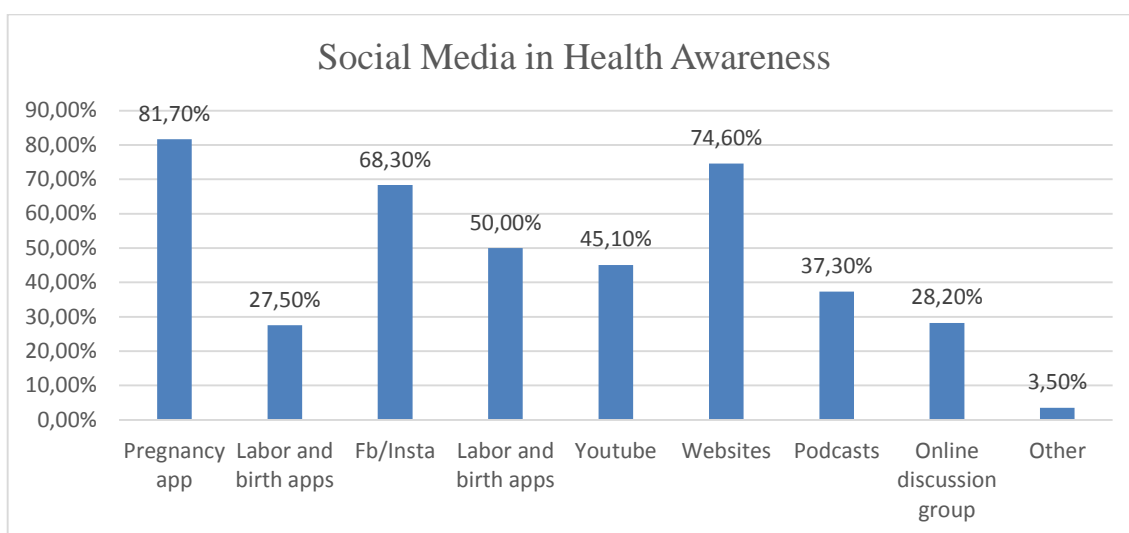
Figure 1. *The Role of Social Media in Health Awareness*

management, which are now integrated into many people's cellphones through a variety of apps that include everything from fitness trackers to calorie counters [7]. Social media platforms and smartphone programs, apps are crucial components of the quickly evolving landscape surrounding pregnancy and the adjustment to first-time parenting [5]. Even though a lot of theoretical research has shown how digital health technologies have changed significantly, there aren't many studies that examine these technologies, their potential effects, and user experiences. Furthermore, social media encourages healthy behaviors by providing guidance and health recommendations, reinforcing the role of digital spaces in enhancing maternal health awareness [1]. Figure 1 is the role of social media in health awareness.

1.1 Research Questions

1. How does social media contribute to maternal health awareness among pregnant women in Jordan?
2. What are the most commonly accessed social media platforms for maternal health information?
3. How does misinformation spread through social media impact pregnant women's health decisions?
4. What strategies can be implemented to enhance the reliability of maternal health information shared on social media?

1.2 Hypotheses

H1: Social media positively influences maternal health awareness by providing accessible healthcare

information. H2: Pregnant women in Jordan rely on social media as a primary source of health information. H3: Misinformation on social media significantly impacts pregnancy-related health decisions, leading to potential health risks. H4: Strengthening digital health literacy and professional engagement on social media can mitigate misinformation.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Increasing Health Awareness Among Pregnant Women

Social media is an effective tool for raising health awareness among pregnant women. Through various platforms, they can access accurate and trustworthy information about healthcare and essential pregnancy guidelines [3]. Therefore, it is crucial to implement effective interventions that can lower pregnancy risks and enhance maternal health. Numerous other pregnancy care services offered by doctors, therapists, and social workers, such as yoga and physical activity, lifestyle, mindfulness, and psychotherapeutic interventions, are effective ways to enhance maternal well-being during pregnancy in addition to routine checkups [16].

The graph depicts pregnant women's sources of knowledge about physical exercise. Health care practitioners were the most often reported source of information (45.7%), followed by mass media (31.5%). The Internet (11%) is utilized as frequently as family and friends (11%), indicating that, while online sources are useful, they are not as influential as healthcare experts or mainstream media [14].

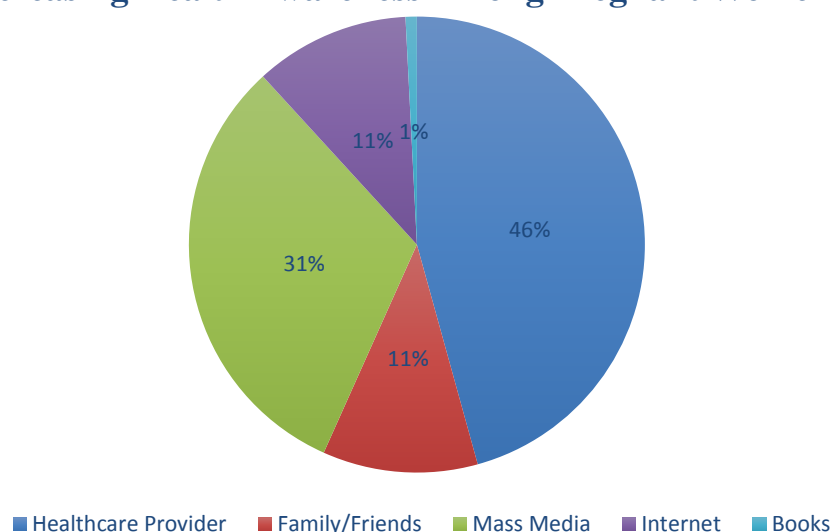**Increasing Health Awareness Among Pregnant Women**

Figure 2. Increasing Health Awareness Among Pregnant Women

In addition to reliable health professionals, social media has also paved the way for independent consultants, influencers, and wellness coaches to offer paid online consultations. Platforms such as Instagram and Facebook host numerous accounts where self-proclaimed health experts conduct live Q&A sessions, providing advice on prenatal care, diet, and birthing methods. While some of these individuals possess legitimate credentials, others lack formal medical training, potentially spreading misleading information [11]. The commercialization of maternal health through social media has led to unregulated paid consultations, where pregnant women often receive medical advice without legal consent or accountability mechanisms in place. This raises concerns over misinformation and the potential health risks associated with following unverified recommendations [11]. A notable example includes influencers advocating for unproven natural remedies for pregnancy complications, which in some cases have led to adverse health effects [12]. Figure 2 shows increasing health awareness among pregnant women.

2.2 Providing Essential Health Information

Social media is becoming the most popular way for people to create, access, and share health information due to the expansion of the Internet and developments in information technology. Social media has become a common tool for women in pregnancy to communicate with their doctors about health-related activities, prevent connected ailments, and share health information with friends and family [15]. According to data from the Demographic and Health Survey, just 41.7% of women in rural areas of the country got four or more prenatal consultations due to a lack of internet knowledge [19]. This valuable information empowers expectant mothers, improving their maternal care and increasing the chances of a healthy pregnancy and safe childbirth [20]. Engaging with such information instills confidence and resilience in decision-making for the health of both mother and baby [13].

However, the accessibility of information on social media also comes with risks, as some unverified sources, amateur health enthusiasts, and myth-based beliefs circulate widely. Many self-proclaimed health influencers promote alternative remedies, homeopathic treatments, and traditional practices that lack scientific backing. This has led to an increase in pregnant women opting for "natural" methods without consulting medical professionals, believing that these approaches are safer than modern medical interventions [11]. Examples include misleading claims about herbal teas inducing labor, avoidance of essential medical screenings due to unfounded fears of radiation exposure, and misinformation regarding vaccine safety during pregnancy [11]. Throughout pregnancy, the most popular topics searched online were fetal development (74.3%), food (53.6%), health problem management (39.6%), personal care (34.7%), and delivery preparation (33.7%). Infant maintenance (21.4%), feeding children (19.8%), and connection (19.5%) were the least frequently reported subjects by pregnant mothers [2].The prevalence of such narratives on platforms like Instagram and Facebook has resulted in an alarming
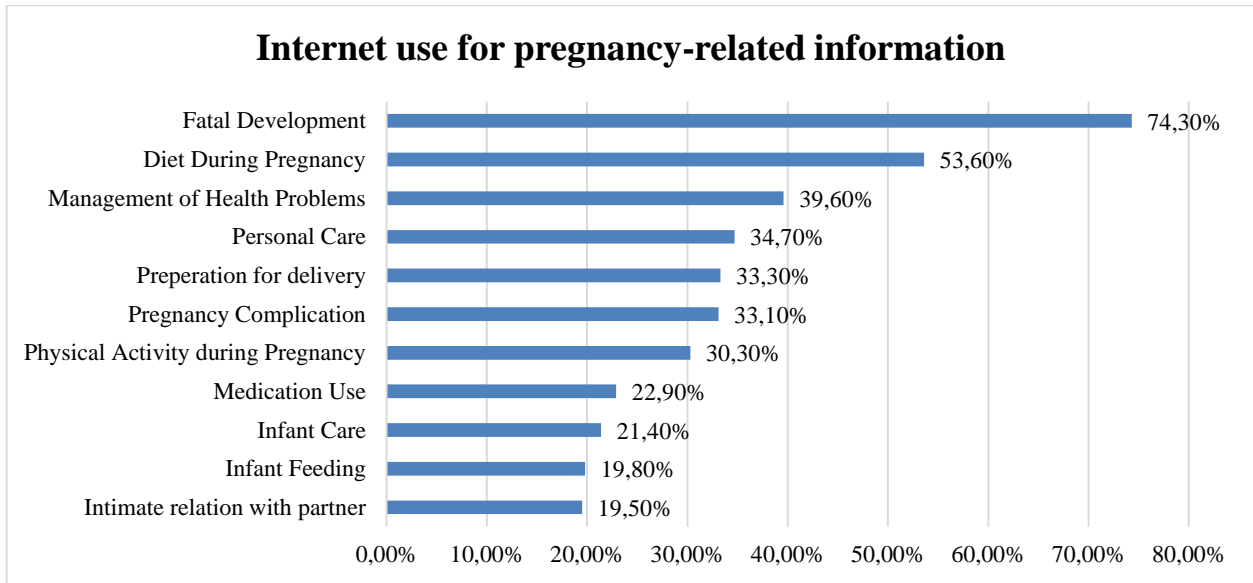
Internet use for pregnancy-related information

Figure 3. *Pattern of Internet Use for Pregnancy-Related Information*

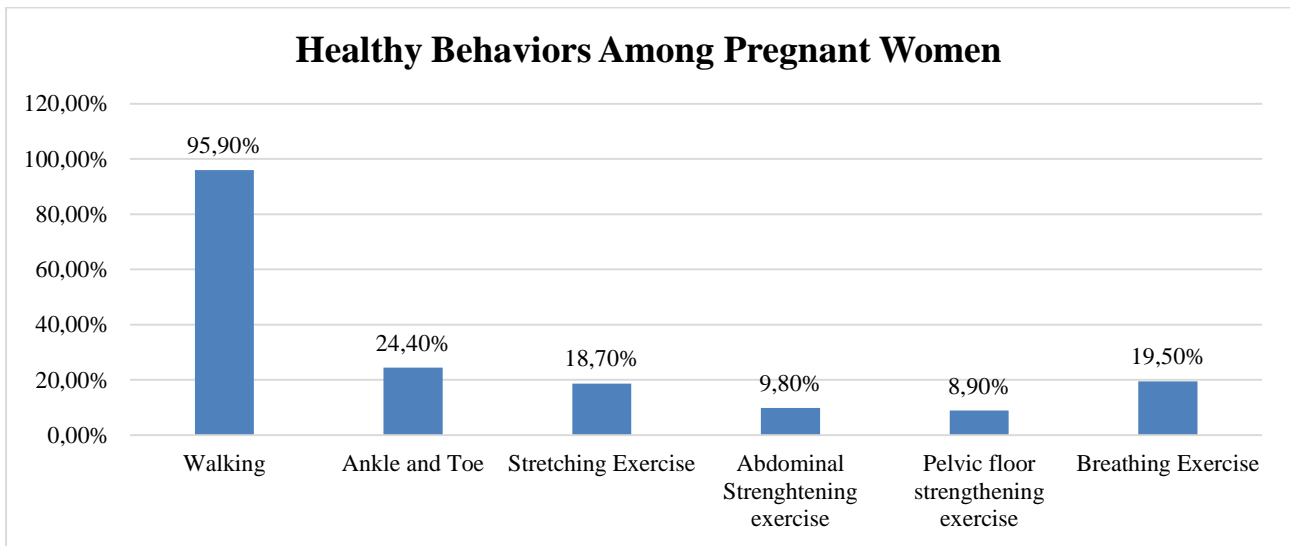**Healthy Behaviors Among Pregnant Women**

Figure 4. *Encouraging Healthy Behaviors Among Pregnant Women*

trend where women make critical health decisions based on anecdotal evidence rather than professional medical guidance. This highlights the need for stricter content regulation and improved health literacy campaigns to ensure expectant mothers receive scientifically validated information [12].

2.3 Encouraging Healthy Behaviors among Pregnant Women

Social media is essential for encouraging healthy behaviors during pregnancy. Posts, photos, and videos shared on social media platforms provide information about healthy diets and physical activities for expectant mothers [1], which helps to improve maternal and fetal health [13]. Social media also encourages interaction and discussion, which enables pregnant women to share their experiences and seek support, which improves emotional well-being and health awareness [7]. Social media enhances knowledge in women that almost all of the women sampled (99.5%) ate meat at some point during their pregnancies, and nearly two-thirds (66.1%) ate meat throughout all three trimesters (Santiago, et al., 2023). Social media highlights that walking is the most popular type of exercise (95.9%), possibly due to its safety, ease, and accessibility. Low participation in pelvic floor and abdominal strengthening exercises suggests a lack of awareness or access to guided prenatal fitness programs [14]. A growing trend on platforms like Instagram and Facebook involves accounts dedicated to encouraging healthy behaviors among pregnant women. These accounts, often managed by nutritionists, fitness trainers, and maternal health coaches, provide daily tips on maintaining a healthy lifestyle during pregnancy.

Some leverage live videos, Q&A sessions, and interactive posts to engage with their audience, making expert advice more accessible [6]. However, to fully understand the effectiveness of such content, it is essential to analyze the role of algorithms and user habits. Figure 3 is pattern of internet use for pregnancy-related information.

Social media platforms employ algorithms that tailor content based on user engagement, meaning that pregnant women who frequently search for health-related topics are more likely to be exposed to a curated feed promoting wellness and fitness. This aligns with the Uses and Gratifications Theory, which suggests that users actively seek content that meets their needs, whether for informational, social, or emotional gratification. Thus, while social media contributes positively to promoting healthy pregnancy behaviors, it is crucial to ensure that the information disseminated aligns with evidence-based medical guidance [12]. Figure 4 is encouraging healthy behaviors among pregnant women.

3. Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations that should be considered:

1. **Self-Reporting Bias** – The reliance on survey-based responses may introduce bias as respondents may not accurately recall their social media usage or may provide socially desirable answers.
2. **Limited Sample Size** – The study focuses primarily on Jordan, and its findings may not be generalizable to broader populations in the Middle East.
3. **Evolving Nature of Social Media** – Social media trends and misinformation patterns are dynamic, requiring ongoing research to keep findings relevant.
4. **Lack of Longitudinal Analysis** – The study provides a snapshot of social media influence on pregnant women but does not track long-term health outcomes.

4. Future Research Directions

Given the growing impact of social media on maternal health awareness, future studies should:
- Conduct **longitudinal research** to assess the long-term effects of social media health interventions on maternal and neonatal outcomes.
- Expand the scope of research to include **comparative studies** across different Arab countries to identify cultural and regional differences in social media utilization.
- Investigate **effective intervention strategies** for combating misinformation on social media, including AI-driven fact-checking tools and government policies.
- Explore the **psychological impact** of social media on pregnant women, particularly anxiety, stress, and decision-making processes.

5. Advantages of Methodology and Results

The study combines survey replies with quantitative data efficiently. Through the validation of survey responses against current research and statistical trends, this mixed-method technique improves the dependability of findings. Social media is the main source of information about maternal health, according to the study. The study emphasizes the dangers of disinformation and how unsubstantiated health claims disseminated on social media can have a detrimental impact on people's health decisions [8]. It complicates the analysis by introducing the Uses and Gratifications Theory to explain how pregnant women regularly seek health information on digital platforms. The study focuses on pregnant women in Jordan, solving a knowledge gap in maternity health studies in the region. The study focuses on pregnant women in Jordan, addressing a knowledge gap in maternal health research in the region.

6. Conclusion

While social media has increased maternal health awareness in Jordan, it is a two-edged sword. It delivers vital health resources while also spreading dangerous falsehoods. To maximize its benefits, stakeholders must take a proactive approach to promoting trustworthy health information and combating false trends. According to 95.9% walking is the most preferred method of exercise during pregnancy. Similarly, despite their importance in relaxation and labor preparation, breathing exercises are not as common. These results suggest that pregnant women should be better informed about the advantages of a varied fitness regimen. Social media can remain an effective instrument for enhancing maternal health outcomes in Jordan if healthcare organizations, legislators, and online platforms work together.

Author Statements:

- **Ethical approval:** The conducted research is not related to either human or animal use.

- **Conflict of interest:** The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper
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