



A Survey Report on Influence of Social Media on Drug Sales

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Abstract:

Social media's widespread use has had a significant impact on how people communicate and how society behaves, including how drugs are traded illegally. This study looks into the ways that social media helps spread, sell, and advertise both legal and illicit medications. Drug traffickers can interact with potential customers in a simple, anonymous, and extensive way through platforms like Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, and Telegram. These platforms frequently target vulnerable populations like teenagers and young people. The study highlights important strategies employed by online drug dealers to evade platform moderation and law enforcement identification, such as the use of coded language, emoticons, hashtags, and encrypted communications. These strategies increase the hazards to public health by normalizing and glamorizing drug use in online settings. The study examines user behaviour, platform vulnerabilities, and the increasing significance of peer-to-peer promotion and influencer culture in promoting drug-related information. It also emphasizes how challenging it is for regulatory agencies to stay up to date with the changing landscape of online medicine sales. The methodological foundation of the study consists of case studies, interviews, and digital ethnographic analysis, which shed light on enforcement issues as well as user experiences. The results highlight how urgently coordinated action is required, including more algorithmic monitoring, more stringent content moderation guidelines, and platform providers' legal accountability. The report also suggests cross-sector partnerships between governments, tech firms, schools, and medical experts, as well as strong digital literacy initiatives to inform young people about the risks of medication interactions online. Social media abuse in drug-related activities necessitates a multifaceted, proactive strategy based on public involvement and policy reform.

Key Words: Social media, Illicit drug trade, Online drug sales, Digital drug marketing, Encrypted messaging, Coded language, Platform regulation, Youth and drug exposure, Public health, Digital literacy, Content moderation, Law enforcement challenges, Social media policy, Drug-related online behaviour.

I. INTRODUCTION

Introduction on Influence of Social Media on Drug Sales

The rapid growth of social media and mobile apps over the past decade has led to a paradigm shift in the pharmaceutical industry. Social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, and Twitter have become key players in how pharmaceutical companies market drugs, offer telemedicine services, and engage with consumers. These platforms not only serve as communication tools but have also become marketing hubs for drug sales, pushing the boundaries of how medications are advertised, sold, and consumed. Social media's role in shaping consumer behaviour has reached new heights, particularly in the context of online pharmacies, prescription drug sales, OTC medications, and even illicit drug markets. In particular, apps and websites that offer prescription medication delivery services, online consultations, and health management programs are contributing significantly to the changing landscape of pharmaceutical

commerce. This digital transformation brings with it both benefits and concerns, including consumer convenience and access to healthcare, as well as risks like drug misuse, lack of oversight, and misleading drug advertisements.

Social Media Apps and Websites Facilitating Drug Sales (Online Pharmacies and Drug Delivery Services)

The proliferation of online pharmacies has been one of the most significant changes in drug sales driven by social media platforms. Apps such as 1mg, Pharm Easy, Netmeds, Medlife, and Health Kart have become increasingly popular due to their ability to deliver prescription drugs and over-the-counter (OTC) medications directly to consumers' doorsteps. These platforms utilize social media to target specific demographics, engage users with promotions, and share customer reviews and health-related content, which influences consumer decisions to purchase medications. For instance, 1mg uses Instagram and Facebook to promote its online pharmacy services, often featuring offers, discounts, and collaborations with influencers or healthcare experts. Users are encouraged to upload prescriptions via the app, and medications are then delivered to their homes, bypassing the traditional brick-and-mortar pharmacies. The role of social media advertising in influencing these consumer choices cannot be overstated, as these platforms use detailed algorithms to target users based on search behaviour, location, and health interests. This targeted marketing approach makes it easier for people to access drugs, whether they are seeking prescription drugs for chronic conditions or OTC medications for common ailments. Furthermore, platforms like Pharm Easy have integrated online doctor consultations to provide users with a holistic healthcare experience. By consulting with doctors via video calls, patients can receive prescriptions, which they can then use to order medications online. These services, while offering convenience and affordability, also pose challenges in ensuring medication safety, especially in cases where consumers bypass physical exams and rely on digital consultations alone.

Apps Promoting Wellness and OTC Drugs

Beyond traditional pharmacies, social media has fuelled the rise of wellness apps that promote OTC drugs, dietary supplements, and other non-prescription health products. Apps like Skin Kraft (for personalized skincare treatments) and HealthifyMe (for weight loss and fitness) are prominent examples. These apps engage users by offering consultations with doctors or nutritionists via in-app chats or video calls, providing tailored treatment plans, and allowing users to purchase prescribed or recommended products directly through the app. These platforms also leverage social media influencers, promoting their products or services in a personalized manner to their followers, often on platforms like Instagram and TikTok.

The appeal of these apps lies in their ability to make healthcare more accessible, especially for individuals who are uncomfortable with or cannot afford in-person consultations. However, these apps also have the potential to contribute to self-medication and the overuse of certain medications, as users may rely on the suggestions of influencers or app recommendations without proper medical oversight. The ethics of recommending such products through social media raises concerns, particularly when it comes to the safety of using drugs or supplements that have not been properly evaluated by regulatory bodies.

The Role of Social Media Influencers in Drug Promotion

Social media influencers have become central figures in promoting pharmaceutical products, wellness products, and mental health services. These influencers often collaborate with pharmaceutical companies to advertise drugs or health-related services, including prescription drugs, OTC treatments, and even illegal substances. The role of influencers in healthcare marketing raises significant ethical and legal questions, especially in the absence of clear regulatory guidelines for drug promotion.

For instance, influencers on platforms like Instagram and TikTok frequently endorse products that claim to alleviate symptoms of conditions such as anxiety, sleep disorders, and chronic pain, which often include OTC pain relievers or dietary supplements. However, some influencers may also promote drugs that have potential for misuse or dependency, such as anti-anxiety medications, opioids, and weight-loss pills. The trust that followers place in these influencers can lead to dangerous consequences, especially when users fail to seek professional medical advice before using these medications. This growing trend has raised alarms regarding misleading advertising and the potential for drug misuse among young social media users.

In response to this growing issue, many social media platforms, including Instagram, have implemented more stringent advertising guidelines, prohibiting the promotion of prescription drugs without the involvement of healthcare professionals. However, enforcement is inconsistent, and the marketing of drugs often occurs through more subtle means, such as sponsored posts, affiliate links, or user-generated content, which can be difficult to track and regulate.

Online Counselling and Addiction Treatment

As the demand for mental health services has risen, the proliferation of online counselling apps has mirrored this trend. Platforms like Better Help, Talk space, and Sober Grid provide users with access to licensed therapists, addiction counsellors, and support groups directly through their smartphones. These apps have gained significant traction on social media as they offer a convenient and discreet way to access therapy and addiction recovery resources.

While these platforms offer legitimate services to individuals suffering from mental health issues or substance use disorders, they also present opportunities for unethical drug promotion. For example, some online counselling platforms may facilitate prescriptions for anti-anxiety medications or antidepressants without adequate in-person assessments, increasing the risk of overprescription and self-medication. Additionally, addiction recovery services offered through these platforms may sometimes promote the use of medication-assisted treatment (MAT) without adequate oversight or guidance, raising concerns about the appropriateness and safety of these interventions.

Social media's role in promoting these addiction treatment apps is complex. While these platforms provide support and resources for people struggling with substance abuse, they also contribute to the stigmatization of mental health conditions and addiction, often focusing on personal stories of recovery, which may not be representative of the overall recovery experience. Furthermore, the gamification of addiction treatment and the normalization of medication use via social media may influence users to view drug use as a "normal" coping mechanism for mental health challenges.

Regulatory and Ethical Concerns

The rapid growth of online drug sales and healthcare services via social media has raised numerous regulatory and ethical concerns. Many countries have stringent regulations around the advertising and sale of pharmaceuticals to ensure the safety and efficacy of medications, as well as to prevent the spread of misleading drug advertisements. However, the digital health space often operates in a regulatory grey area, with platforms like Facebook and Instagram struggling to enforce their own advertising guidelines.

Regulatory bodies such as the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in the United States, Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) in the UK, and the Central Drugs Standard Control Organization (CDSCO) in India have established rules regarding the advertisement of drugs. However, social media platforms often face challenges in monitoring user-generated content that promotes drugs or health products, leading to concerns about unapproved and unsafe medications being advertised to the public.

Ethical issues also arise when pharmaceutical companies target vulnerable populations through influencer marketing and online consultations. The promotion of drugs to individuals without face-to-face doctor consultations or regulatory oversight can lead to unsafe drug practices, including the purchase of illicit substances, misuse of prescription drugs, and self-medication without medical supervision.

Social media and online platforms are increasingly influencing the way people access and purchase drugs, shaping the pharmaceutical industry through the promotion of both prescription medications and over-the-counter products. Online pharmacies, wellness apps, and addiction treatment services are all utilizing social media to reach large audiences and make healthcare more accessible. While these advancements offer convenience and affordability, they also raise significant ethical, regulatory, and safety concerns. Misleading advertisements, self-medication, and the promotion of illicit drugs through social media require urgent attention and regulatory action to safeguard public health and ensure that drug sales are conducted responsibly and ethically.

Rationale

Social media has become a powerful marketing tool in the pharmaceutical industry, allowing drug companies, healthcare providers, and influencers to reach global audiences through targeted ads and sponsored content. Consumers increasingly seek health advice and product recommendations on platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, often bypassing traditional medical sources. While this expands access to health information, it also raises concerns about misinformation and unregulated advertising. This project explores the impact of social media on drug sales, consumer behaviour, and the need for effective regulation to protect public health.

AIM AND OBJECTIVES

Aim

To explore the impact of social media on drug sales, including how online platforms influence consumer behaviour, drug marketing, and distribution.

Objective

1. To examine how pharmaceutical companies use social media for marketing and promoting drugs.
2. To analyse the role of social media influencers in shaping consumer decisions related to drug purchases.
3. To investigate the effects of social media on consumer awareness and attitudes toward pharmaceutical products.
4. To assess the ethical and regulatory concerns surrounding drug promotion on social media.
5. To explore the influence of social media on consumer trust in online pharmacies and drug delivery services.

Survey reports

This research will help understand how social media impacts decisions to purchase drugs and the effectiveness of related advertisements. It also addresses the ethical and regulatory concerns surrounding drug promotion in the digital age. Ultimately, the project aims to provide insights for improving public health strategies and pharmacy practice in response to these trends.

List of questions asked during the survey:

(1) Age

- Under 18
- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65+

(2) Gender

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary
- Prefer not to say

(3) Location (Country/Region)

- Your answer

(4) Occupation

- Healthcare Professional
- Student
- Business Professional
- Retired
- Other (Please specify): _____

(5) Have you ever used social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, etc.)?

- Yes
- No

(6) Which social media platforms do you use regularly? (Select all that apply)

- Facebook
- Instagram
- Twitter
- TikTok
- LinkedIn
- YouTube
- Pinterest
- Reddit

- WhatsApp

(7) How often do you encounter content related to drugs on social media? *

- Never
- Rarely
- Occasionally
- Frequently
- Very frequently

(8) What type of drug content do you encounter on social media? (Select all that apply)

- Advertisements for specific prescription drugs
- Health tips or informational posts
- Personal stories or testimonials
- News articles related to pharmaceuticals
- Posts from healthcare professionals
- Other:

(9) To what extent do you believe social media influences people's decisions to purchase drugs (both legal and illegal)?

- Not at all
- To a small extent
- To a moderate extent
- To a large extent
- To a very large extent

(10) In your opinion, how effective are social media advertisements in raising awareness about drugs?

- Not effective at all
- Slightly effective
- Moderately effective
- Very effective
- Extremely effective

(11) How much do you trust the information related to drugs shared on social media?

- Not at all trustworthy
- Somewhat untrustworthy
- Neutral
- Somewhat trustworthy
- Very trustworthy

(12) Have you ever consulted with a healthcare provider about a drug you learned about through social media?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

(13) Do you think social media advertising encourages consumers to ask their doctors for specific drugs?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

(14) Do you believe that social media plays a significant role in increasing drug sales?

- Yes, it plays a significant role
- No, it does not play a significant role
- It plays a minor role
- I am unsure

- (15) Which factors do you think contribute most to the influence of social media on drug sales?
(Select all that apply)
- Targeted advertisements
 - Influencers/celebrities endorsing drugs
 - Peer reviews or testimonials
 - Health-related trends or challenges
 - Ease of access to drug information
 - Emotional appeal (e.g., stories of healing or recovery)
 - Other:
- (16) Have you ever seen a drug advertisement on social media that influenced your perception of a particular drug?
- Yes
 - No
 - Not applicable
- (17) Do you think there should be stricter regulations on drug advertisements on social media?
- Yes
 - No
 - Maybe
- (18) What potential risks do you believe could arise from the promotion of drugs on social media?
(Select all that apply)
- Encouraging self-diagnosis
 - Promoting unnecessary medications
 - Misleading information about drug effectiveness or safety
 - Infringing on patient privacy
 - Increasing healthcare costs
 - Other:
- (19) Should pharmaceutical companies be required to disclose their financial relationships with social media influencers who promote their drugs?
- Strongly disagree
 - Disagree
 - Neutral
 - Agree
 - Strongly agree
- (20) What steps do you think can be taken to ensure that drug promotions on social media are ethical and responsible?
- Your answer
- (21) In your opinion, how can social media be used responsibly to educate the public about drugs?
- Your answer
- (22) Do you have any additional comments or suggestions regarding the impact of social media on drug sales?
- Your answer

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The survey was conducted separately for each person online on social media platforms, and 101 responded and submitted it with email verification.

1) Age

Age

101 responses

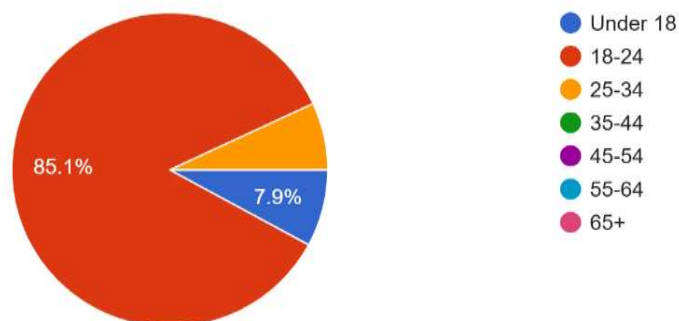


Figure 5.1 A Pie Chart of Age.

(As shown in figure 5.1) The data represents age demographics from a survey with 101 responses. The majority (85.1%) of respondents fall within a specific age group (likely 18-24, though it's unclear), while 7.9% are under 18. The remaining age groups are not listed, possibly indicating minimal or no responses from them. The data suggests a strong skew toward younger participants.

2) Gender

Gender

101 responses

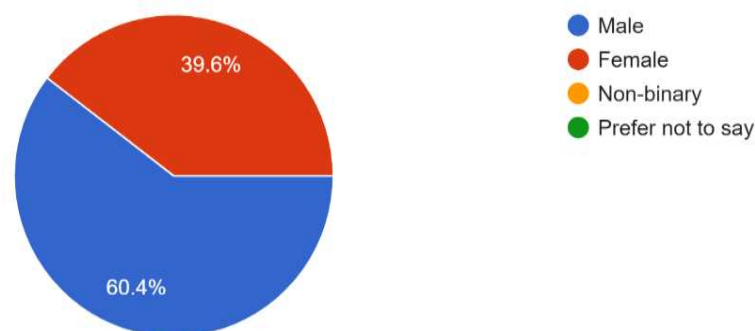
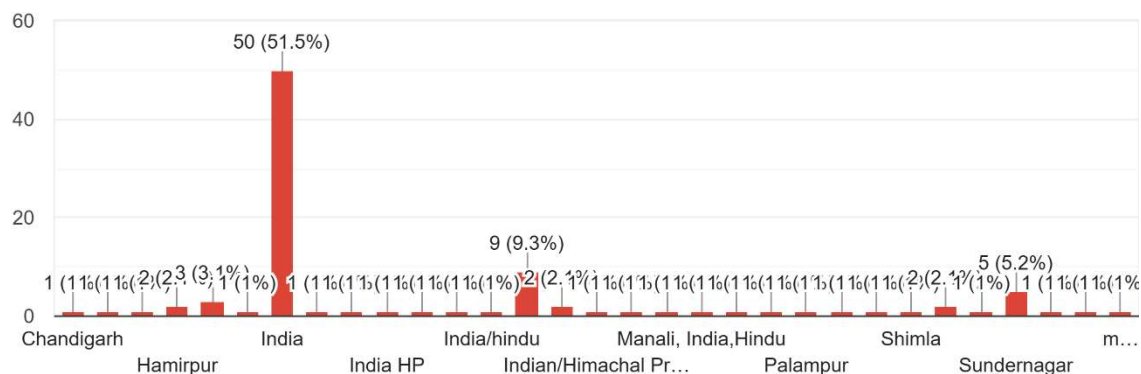


Figure 5.2 A Pie Chart of Gender.

(As shown in figure 5.2) The survey collected 101 responses on gender. The majority (60.4%) identified as female, while 39.6% identified as male. There is no percentage listed for non-binary or "prefer not to say," suggesting either very few or no responses in those categories.

Location (Country/Region)

97 responses



3) Location

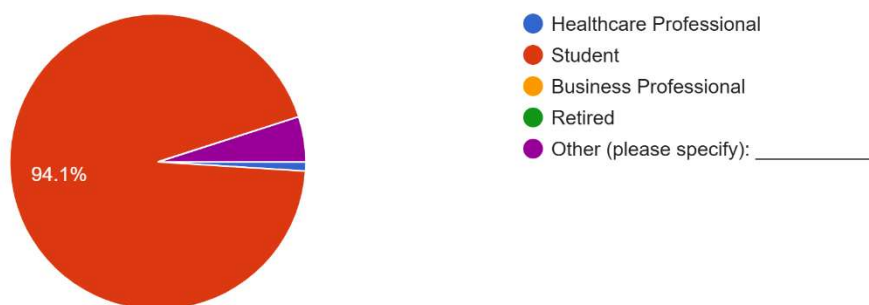
Figure 5.3 A Graph of Location.

(As shown in figure 5.3) The survey received 97 responses regarding location, with a significant majority (51.5%) identifying as being from "India." The data also includes specific cities and regions, such as Chandigarh, Hamirpur, Manali, Palampur, Shimla, and Sundernagar, each with smaller representation. Some respondents provided variations like "India HP" or "India/Hindu," indicating possible regional or cultural identifiers. The second-largest group (9.3%) is from unspecified location, while other locations have only 1-2% representation. The data highlights a strong concentration of respondents from India, particularly Himachal Pradesh.

4) Occupation

Occupation

101 responses

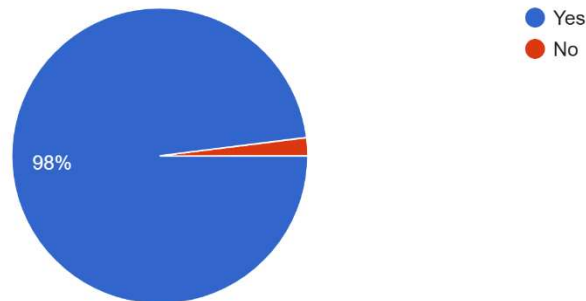
**Figure 5.4** A Pie Chart of Occupation.

(As shown in figure 5.4) The survey collected 101 responses on occupation, with an overwhelming majority (94.1%) identifying as students. Other categories such as healthcare professionals, business professionals, retired individuals, and "other" had minimal or no representation. This suggests that the survey primarily engaged a student demographic.

5) Have you ever used social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, etc.)?
Figure 5.5 A Pie Chart of People Who Have Used Social Media.

Have you ever used social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, etc.)?

101 responses



(As shown in figure 5.5) The survey asked respondents if they have ever used social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, or TikTok. Out of 101 responses, an overwhelming 98% answered "Yes," indicating that nearly all participants have used social media, with only a small percentage (2%) who have not. This suggests a high level of social media engagement among the surveyed group.

6) Which social media platforms do you use regularly? (Select all that apply)

Which social media platforms do you use regularly? (Select all that apply)

101 responses

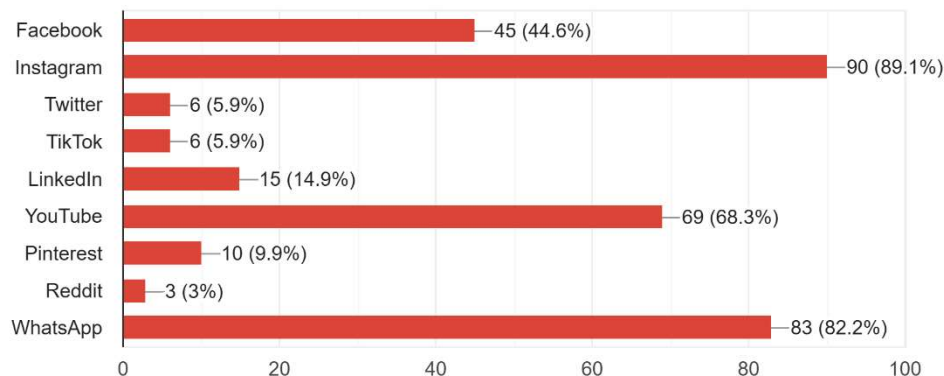


Figure 5.6A Graph of Who Uses Social Media Regularly.

(As shown in figure 5.6) The survey asked respondents which social media platforms they use regularly, allowing multiple selections. Instagram was the most popular, with 89.1% of participants using it, followed closely by WhatsApp (82.2%) and YouTube (68.3%). Facebook also had significant usage at 44.6%. Other platforms like TikTok, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Pinterest had lower engagement, each under 15%, while Reddit had the least usage at just 3%. This data highlights Instagram, WhatsApp, and YouTube as the dominant platforms among the respondents.

7)How often do you encounter content related to drugs on social media?

How often do you encounter content related to drugs on social media?

101 responses

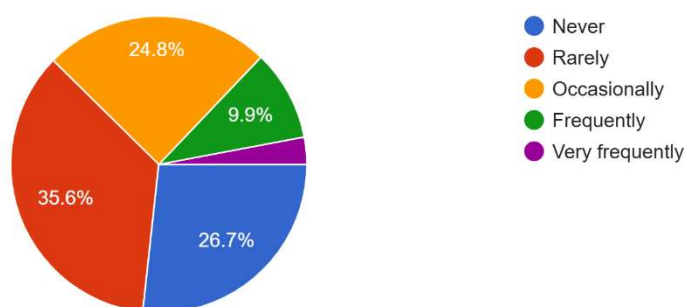


Figure 5.7 A Pie Chart of People Who Have Encounter Drugs Related Content on Social Media.

(As shown in figure 5.7) A survey of 101 respondents examined how often they encounter drug-related content on social media. The results showed that 9.9% of participants reported never seeing such content, while 24.8% stated they rarely come across it. The most common response was occasionally, with 35.6% of respondents selecting this option. Additionally, 26.7% indicated they see drug-related content frequently, and a smaller 3.0% reported encountering it very frequently. These findings suggest that a majority of users are exposed to such content at least occasionally, with a notable percentage seeing it frequently.

8)What type of drug content do you encounter on social media? (Select all that apply)

What type of drug content do you encounter on social media? (Select all that apply)

101 responses

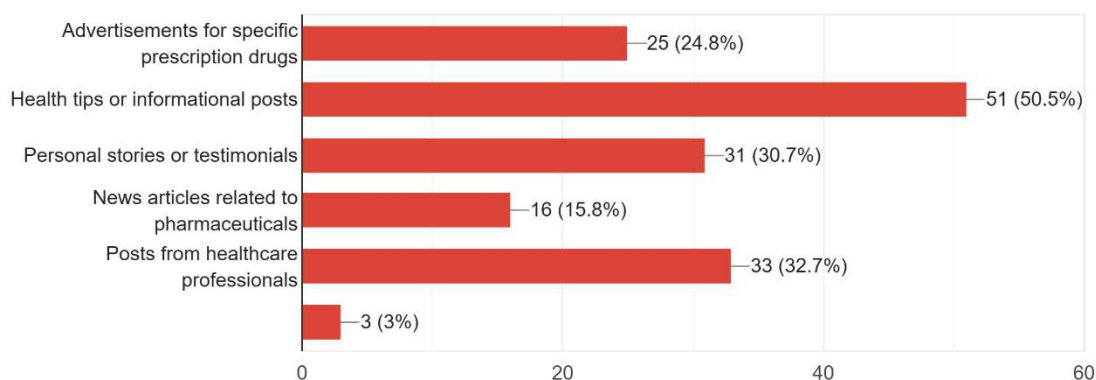


Figure 5.8 Types of drug-related content encountered on social media based on survey responses.

(As shown in figure 5.8) A survey of 101 respondents explored the factors contributing to the influence of social media on drug sales. The most significant factors were targeted advertisements and influencers/celebrities endorsing drugs, with 43.6% of respondents selecting each. Peer reviews or testimonials and health-related trends or challenges were also influential, both chosen by 41.6% of participants. Additionally, emotional appeal (such as personal stories) and ease of access to drug information were cited by 35.6% of respondents. Lastly, some factors, possibly including other influences, were selected by 17.8% of respondents.

9) To what extent do you believe social media influences people's decisions to purchase drugs (both legal and illegal)?

Have you ever seen a drug advertisement on social media that influenced your perception of a particular drug?

101 responses

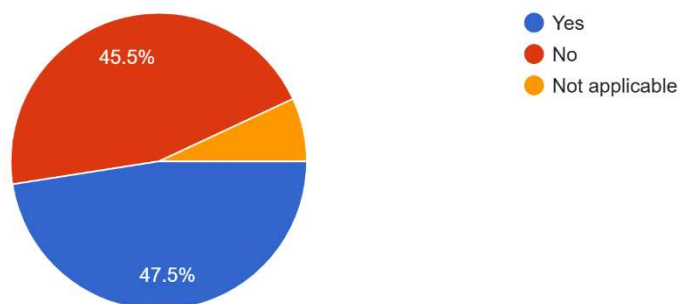


Figure 5.9 A Pie Chart of People Who Got Influenced to Purchase Drugs.

(As shown in figure 5.9) A survey of 101 respondents asked whether they had ever seen a drug advertisement on social media that influenced their perception of a particular drug. The results showed that 45.5% said yes, while 47.5% said no. A smaller 7.0% found the question not applicable to them.

10) In your opinion, how effective are social media advertisements in raising awareness about drugs?

Do you think there should be stricter regulations on drug advertisements on social media?

101 responses

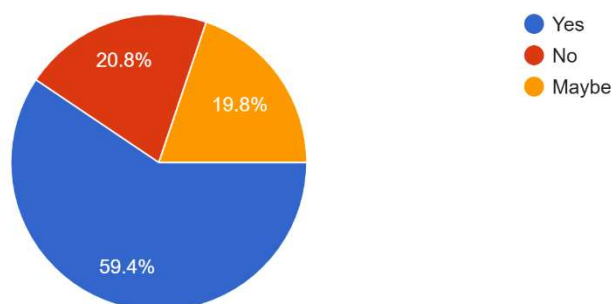


Figure 5.10 A Pie Chart of Effectiveness of Social Media Advertisements in Raising Awareness About Drugs.

(As shown in figure 5.10) A survey of 101 respondents asked whether there should be stricter regulations on drug advertisements on social media. The majority, 59.4%, answered "Maybe", indicating uncertainty or conditional support for stricter rules. Meanwhile, 20.8% responded "No", suggesting they do not see a need for additional regulations, while 19.8% supported stricter regulations by selecting "Yes".

This suggests that while a significant portion of respondents are unsure, there is a relatively even split between those in favour and those against stricter regulations.

11) What potential risks do you believe could arise from the promotion of drugs on social media?

What potential risks do you believe could arise from the promotion of drugs on social media?

(Select all that apply)

101 responses

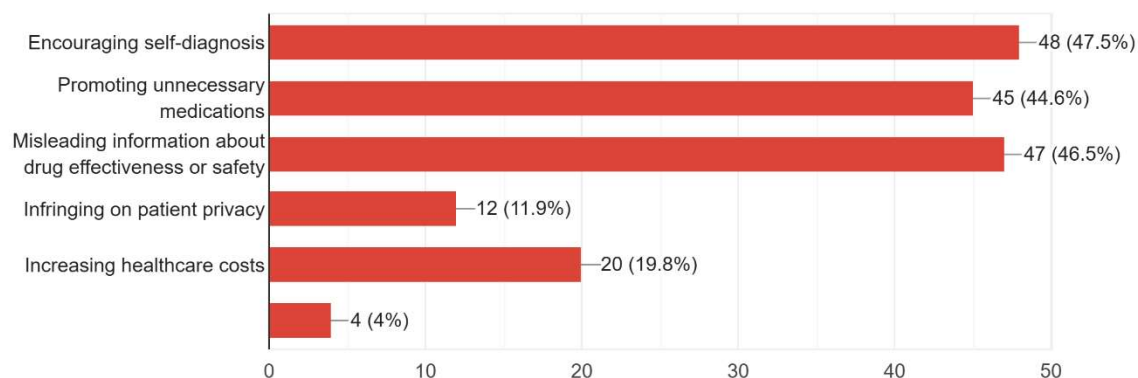


Figure 5.11 A Graph Showing Perceived Potential Risks of Drug Promotion on Social Media.

(As shown in figure 5.11) A survey of 101 respondents explored the potential risks of drug promotion on social media. The most commonly cited risks were encouraging self-diagnosis and promoting unnecessary medications, both selected by 47.5% of respondents. Close behind, misleading information about drug effectiveness or safety was chosen by 46.5%, highlighting concerns about misinformation. Additionally, infringing on patient privacy was noted by 11.9%, and increasing healthcare costs was identified by 19.8% of participants. A smaller 4.0% of respondents pointed to other risks not explicitly listed in the survey.

These results suggest that people are most concerned about misinformation and self-diagnosis, which could lead to improper drug use.

12) Have you ever consulted with a healthcare provider about a drug you learned about through social media?

Have you ever consulted with a healthcare provider about a drug you learned about through social media?

101 responses

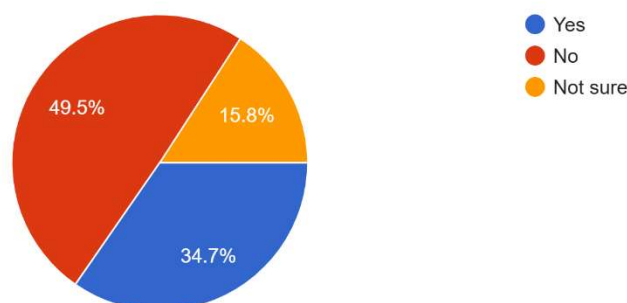


Figure 5.12 A Pie Chart Showing How Many People Consulted to a Healthcare Professional After Learning About it Through Social Media.

(As shown in figure 5.12) The survey results show that nearly half of respondents (49.5%) have not consulted a healthcare provider about a drug they discovered on social media. However, a significant portion (15.8%) have done so, indicating that social media can influence healthcare discussions. Additionally, 34.7% are unsure, which suggests that some may be indirectly influenced by online drug promotions without consciously recognizing it. These findings highlight the growing role of social media in shaping public awareness of medications, emphasizing the need for accurate and responsible drug-related content online.

13) Do you think social media advertising encourages consumers to ask their doctors for specific drugs?

Do you think social media advertising encourages consumers to ask their doctors for specific drugs?

101 responses

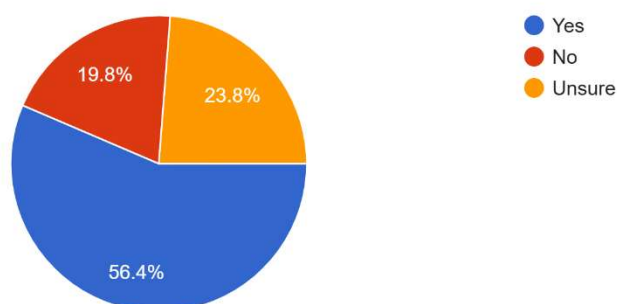


Figure 5.13 Influence of Social Media Advertising on Consumers Requesting Specific Drugs from their Doctors.

(As shown in figure 5.13) The survey indicates that a majority of respondents (56.4%) believe that social media advertising encourages consumers to ask their doctors for specific drugs. Meanwhile, 23.8% say no, and 19.8% are unsure. This suggests that many people recognize the persuasive power of social media in influencing healthcare decisions, reinforcing the need for ethical marketing practices and proper regulations to prevent misinformation and overmedication.

14) Do you believe that social media plays a significant role in increasing drug sales?

Do you believe that social media plays a significant role in increasing drug sales?

101 responses

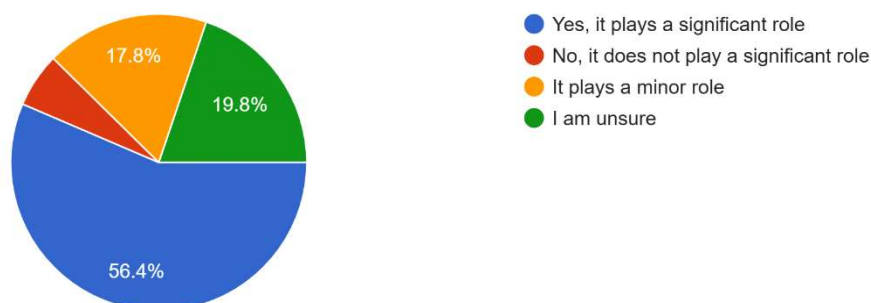


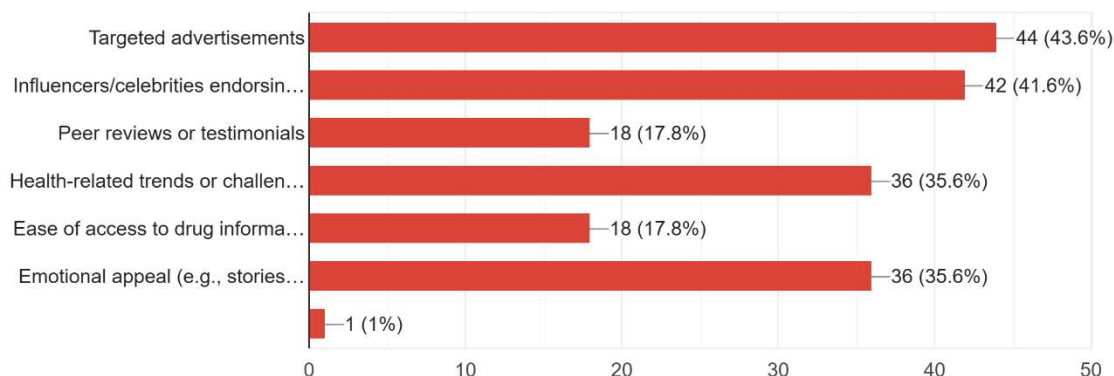
Figure 5.14 A Pie Chart of Perceived Role of Social Media in Increasing Drug Sales.

(As shown in figure 5.14) The survey shows that a significant portion of respondents (62.4%) believe social media influences drug sales, with 19.8% saying it plays a major role and 42.6% believing it plays a minor role. Meanwhile, 17.8% think it does not play a significant role, and 19.8% are unsure. These findings suggest that while opinions vary, most people acknowledge that social media contributes to drug marketing and sales, emphasizing the need for responsible advertising practices.

15) Which factors do you think contribute most to the influence of social media on drug sales? (Select all that apply)

Which factors do you think contribute most to the influence of social media on drug sales? (Select all that apply)

101 responses



Figure

5.15 Factors Contributing to the Influence of Social Media on Drug Sales.

(As shown in figure 5.15) The survey reveals that the most influential factors driving drug sales through social media are targeted advertisements (43.6%) and influencer/celebrity endorsements (43.6%), highlighting the impact of strategic marketing and trusted personalities. Peer reviews/testimonials (41.6%) and health-related trends/challenges (35.6%) also play a significant role, showing the power of social proof and viral content. Meanwhile, ease of access to drug information (17.8%) and emotional appeal (17.8%) contribute to consumer decision-making but to a lesser extent. Only 1% of respondents considered other factors, indicating that marketing tactics and social influence are the primary drivers of drug sales on social media.

16) Have you ever seen a drug advertisement on social media that influenced your perception of a particular drug?

Have you ever seen a drug advertisement on social media that influenced your perception of a particular drug?

101 responses

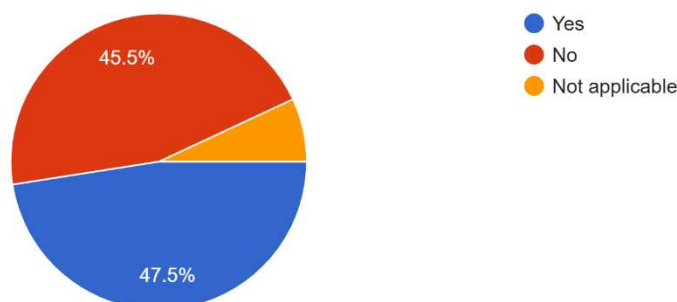


Figure 5.16A Pie Chart of Impact of Social Media Drug Advertisements on Consumer Perception.

(As shown in figure 5.16) The survey indicates that 45.5% of respondents have seen a drug advertisement on social media that influenced their perception of a drug, while 47.5% have not. This suggests that nearly half of the participants acknowledge the persuasive impact of social media drug ads. Meanwhile, a small percentage likely selected "Not applicable," indicating they may not recall seeing such ads or engaging with

them. These findings highlight the significant role social media plays in shaping public opinions about medications, reinforcing the need for responsible advertising and accurate medical information online.

17) Do you think there should be stricter regulations on drug advertisements on social media?

Do you think there should be stricter regulations on drug advertisements on social media?

101 responses

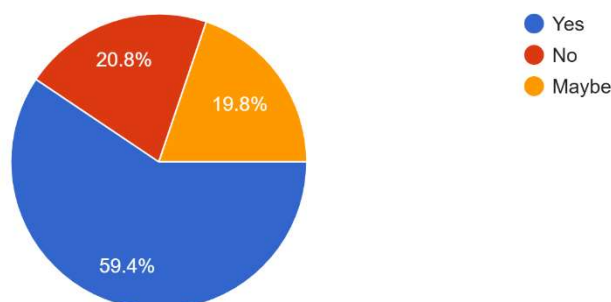


Figure 5.17A Pie Chart of People Opinion on The Need for Strict Regulation on Drug Advertisements on Social Media.

(As shown in figure 5.17) The survey shows that 59.4% of respondents believe there should be stricter regulations on drug advertisements on social media, indicating strong concern about misleading or unethical promotions. Meanwhile, 20.8% are unsure, suggesting some uncertainty about the necessity or effectiveness of stricter rules. Only 19.8% oppose additional regulations, implying that a minority feel the current guidelines are sufficient. These results emphasize a widespread desire for more oversight to ensure accurate and responsible drug marketing online.

18) What potential risks do you believe could arise from the promotion of drugs on social media?

What potential risks do you believe could arise from the promotion of drugs on social media?

(Select all that apply)

101 responses

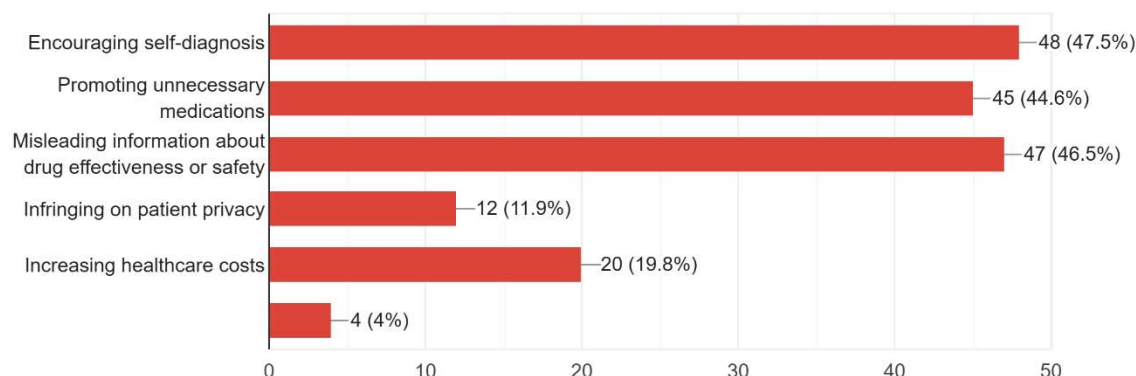


Figure 5.18 A Graph showing potential risks from the promotions of drug sales.

(As shown in figure 5.18) The survey results highlight major risks associated with drug promotion on social media. The most common concerns are encouraging self-diagnosis (47.5%) and misleading information about drug effectiveness or safety (47.5%), showing fears that inaccurate or exaggerated claims could lead to

poor healthcare decisions. Additionally, promoting unnecessary medications(44.6%) and increasing healthcare costs (46.5%) suggest worries about overmedication and financial strain. Infringing on patient privacy(11.9%) and rising healthcare costs (4%) were lesser concerns but still relevant. These findings emphasize the need for stricter regulations and public awareness to ensure ethical and accurate drug marketing on social media.

19) Should pharmaceutical companies be required to disclose their financial relationships with social media influencers who promote their drugs?

Should pharmaceutical companies be required to disclose their financial relationships with social media influencers who promote their drugs?

101 responses

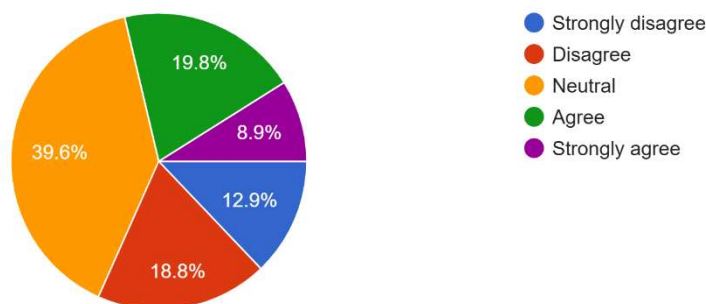


Figure 5.19 A Pie Chart Showing Public Opinion on Mandatory Disclosure of Pharma Influencer Financial Relationships.

(As shown in figure 5.19) The survey results show that a majority of respondents support requiring pharmaceutical companies to disclose financial relationships with social media influencers promoting their drugs. 39.6% agree, while 18.8% strongly agree, indicating that transparency is a key concern for many. Meanwhile, 19.8% remain neutral, suggesting some uncertainty about the necessity of such disclosures. Opposition is relatively low, with 12.9% strongly disagreeing and 8.9% disagreeing. These findings suggest that most people favor greater accountability to prevent potential conflicts of interest and misleading drug promotions.

20)What steps do you think can be taken to ensure that drug promotions on social media are ethical and responsible?

- Providing trustworthy information
- It should be under control of pharmaceutical companies to take action against drugs influencers with the help of the government of India.
- It should be under supervision of educated peoples like Doctors and other medical staff along with Advisory committee and PTC.
- Pharmaceutical companies, regulatory bodies, health- care providers and community members.
- Have to Remove all the contents which prefer drugs
- To ensure ethical and responsible drug promotions on social media, regulatory bodies should establish clear guidelines and monitor compliance. Pharmaceutical companies must provide accurate and balanced information, disclose potential risks, and avoid targeting vulnerable populations. Social media platforms should also label sponsored content and allow user reporting of suspicious promotions.
- Ensuring that drug promotions on social media are ethical and responsible requires a combination of regulatory oversight, platform policies, and industry
- Accurate information, risk disclosure, Labeling and disclosure
- Just go through the content post on social media
- First of all, such promotions shouldn't be allowed. Influencers promote products just for the money, without considering the consequences. These paid partnership programs should be stopped.
- Govt should bring a law to regulate not only drug advertisement but also other ads which are misleading
- It depends on the promotions
- Channels certified from proper government authorities should be allowed to promote required and important drugs.
- Transparent disclosure of drug info. Including the risk and side effect. Avoid misleading claims

- Both govt. And private sector should be responsible and have check on sale and marketing of all drugs.
- Strict Regulatory Guidelines – Authorities like the FDA, WHO, or national drug agencies should enforce clear regulations on drug advertisements, ensuring claims are accurate and scientifically backed.
- Regulations on Advertisements
- With proper control and coordination
- Drug should not be promoted anywhere , if something to promote then only its harm and avoiding and staying away should be the main priority
- It provides knowledge related the product
- Include necessary disclaimers about risks, side effects, and appropriate use.
- Organise Awareness camp
- Correct information should be provided with expert consents. Consider proper investigation and outcomes.

21) In your opinion, how can social media be used responsibly to educate the public about drugs?

- Accurate information
- Effective that provide knowledge to people
- Save me
- Only those professional persons educate the public who have the knowledge about drugs.
- Tells about information
- But some of the drugs which are beneficial like multivitamins, and other supplements of vitamins etc. I think knowledge of ADRs and side effects should also educate the people about drugs and its significance
- Fact checking and verification, positive messaging's ,collaborate with influencers, personal stories
- Social media can be used responsibly to educate the public about drugs by sharing accurate, unbiased, and reliable information from credible sources, such as healthcare professionals, regulatory agencies, and reputable health organizations.
- Ensuring ethical and responsible drug promotions on social media requires a balance between education, transparency, and regulation. Here are some key steps: 1. Regulatory Oversight 2. Transparency and Accuracy 3. Fact-Checking and Misinformation Control 4. Ethical Influencer Marketing 5. Community Education Initiatives 6. Restricting Targeted Advertising Reason
- Tailor content to specific age groups, demographic or communities to ensure relevance and effectiveness.
- By posting right and trustworthy content
- By running ads to the Targeted audience.
- Educational video and posts citing proper facts
- Effecient platform to engage people
- Government regulated and certified channels must be used to educate people. The drugs related information should be given thoroughly with probable bad effects on health
- Provide science based information about the risk of drug use.
- By giving youth right information.
- Encouraging Open Conversations Create forums or communities where patients can share experiences while ensuring discussions are moderated by experts. Encourage responsible storytelling by individuals who have used certain medications.
- By providing proofs
- Advertise only useful drugs
- Showing its impacts and effect on health
- By providing the advertisement of product
- By telling about the bad effect of drugs and how severely it can effect their health and also by telling real life stories
- Fact-check all posts to prevent misinformation from spreading.
- Never
- Use Valuable and quality data
- Money
- By advertising the drugs
- All the indications of drugs are told to public in simple language for better understanding and lessen the misunderstanding .

22) Do you have any additional comments or suggestions regarding the impact of social media on drug sales?

- After influencing from social media some people time take selfmedication which are injurious and people have different genetic makeup so some drugs gave adverse effects to particular person so advertisement must be banned of some drug because they must be taken after the consultation of practitioner sales also increases.
- Dangerous for health
- Pharmaceutical companies should prioritize transparency, accuracy, and patient-centered approaches in their social media marketing efforts to maintain public trust and ensure responsible promotion of drugs.
- Social media impacts drug sales by increasing awareness but also enabling misinformation and illegal sales. Stronger regulations, AI moderation, verified medical sources, and public education can help ensure ethical and safe drug promotions.
- Influencer marketing, Misinformation and disinformation
- Pharmaceutical companies should create their own pages or channels on social media platforms, and they should use these pages to provide information and advertisements related to their drugs. This should include proper descriptions of the drugs, their adverse drug reactions (ADRs), side effects, uses, chemical constituents, and other relevant details.
- People get influenced by social media and instead of going to the doctor, they directly go to take drugs which can be very harmful
- Increased Awareness Social media helps spread awareness about new drugs, treatments, and advancements in medicine, making healthcare information more accessible.
- Social media should only discuss its impacts, any advertisement about drugs sale should be cut down completely
- Ya I would like to say that advertisement related to drugs should have to be banned and content related to drug should also to be restricted on social media
- Social media has great impact on all people in every field either drug related or something else.

CONCLUSION

This project explored the growing influence of social media on drug sales, focusing on public exposure, perception, and behaviour related to pharmaceutical products promoted online. A survey conducted among 101 individuals evaluated how frequently people encounter drug-related content on social media, their trust in such promotions, and their purchasing behaviours. Results suggest that platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube are key sources of drug marketing, with many respondents reporting exposure to ads for OTC products, wellness supplements, and even prescription drugs. Some admitted to purchasing medicines based on these promotions, often without medical advice. Concerns were raised about the authenticity and safety of drugs marketed online, with varying levels of awareness about the associated legal and health risks. While many acknowledged the importance of consulting a healthcare professional, the influence of unverified online sources remains strong. In conclusion, social media offers opportunities for health awareness but also poses risks like misinformation and self-medication. Stronger regulations, public education, and the involvement of healthcare professionals are essential for ensuring safe medication use in the digital age.

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