

A Study on the Role of New Media in Promoting Health Awareness Among University Students Aged 18 to 25 in Klang Valley

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ABSTRACT

The growing prominence of digital platforms has significantly reshaped health communication, particularly among young adults. This study examines the role of new media in promoting health awareness among university students in Klang Valley, Malaysia, with a focus on frequency of usage and perceived credibility. A quantitative cross-sectional survey was conducted with 106 respondents using a structured questionnaire.

The findings indicate that students actively utilise platforms such as Instagram and TikTok for health-related information. Correlation analysis shows significant positive relationships between new media usage, perceived credibility, and health awareness. Regression results further reveal that both variables significantly predict health awareness, with perceived credibility emerging as the stronger predictor.

The study demonstrates that while new media enhances access to health information, its effectiveness depends on the trustworthiness of the content. These findings highlight the importance of promoting credible digital health communication and strengthening digital health literacy.

Keywords: new media, health awareness, credibility, university students, digital health communication.

INTRODUCTION

Health awareness has become increasingly significant in the post-pandemic era, as individuals seek timely and accessible information to manage their well-being. The rapid development of digital technologies has transformed health communication, shifting reliance from traditional sources such as healthcare professionals and institutional campaigns to more interactive and user-driven digital platforms.

New media, including social media and mobile applications, enables real-time information dissemination and user engagement. Among university students, this transformation is particularly evident, as they frequently rely on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok to access health-related information. These platforms provide convenience, accessibility, and a wide variety of content, making them attractive sources of information.

However, the benefits of new media are accompanied by challenges, particularly the widespread presence of misinformation. The unregulated nature of digital platforms allows inaccurate health information to spread rapidly, raising concerns about credibility and reliability. As a result, understanding how students engage with and evaluate digital health information is essential.

Despite growing research in this area, there remains limited focus on Malaysian university students, particularly in Klang Valley. This study addresses this gap by examining how frequency of new media usage and perceived credibility influence health awareness.

Despite the growing body of research on digital health communication, there remains limited focus on Malaysian university students, particularly within Klang Valley. As a highly urbanised and digitally connected region, understanding how students engage with and evaluate health information on new media is essential.

This study aims to examine the role of new media in promoting health awareness among university students in Klang Valley. Specifically, it investigates the relationship between frequency of new media usage, perceived credibility, and health awareness, and assesses the extent to which these factors influence students' understanding of health-related issues. In addition, the study seeks to determine which factor serves as the stronger predictor of health awareness, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of how digital health information is consumed and internalised.

Hypotheses

- H1: Frequency of new media usage is positively associated with health awareness.
- H2: Perceived credibility is positively associated with health awareness.
- H3: Perceived credibility is a stronger predictor of health awareness than frequency of usage.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The emergence of new media has significantly transformed health communication by enabling rapid, wide reaching, and interactive dissemination of information. During the COVID-19 pandemic, social media platforms became essential tools for health authorities to deliver real time updates and preventive guidance, demonstrating their effectiveness in crisis communication (Karanfiloglu, 2021; Jafar et al., 2023; Rashid et al., 2021). Beyond speed, new media enhances accessibility by overcoming geographical and social barriers, allowing diverse populations to access health information. Its interactive features further shift communication patterns by enabling active engagement between users and health professionals, thereby increasing participation and information exchange (Kamanzi, 2024; Ibrahim et al., 2024).

Despite these advantages, the influence of new media on university students' health awareness remains complex and contested. Existing studies suggest that new media improves access to health knowledge and promotes positive behaviours through peer interaction and online communities (Agarwal et al., 2024; Vaingankar et al., 2021). However, other research highlights the risks of misinformation and excessive reliance on online sources, which may lead to self-diagnosis and delayed professional consultation (Desai et al., 2022; Raja et al., 2024). This contrast reflects an ongoing tension between accessibility and credibility in digital health environments.

In addition, different types of health-related content, including educational materials, advertisements, and personal narratives, influence students' attitudes in uneven ways. While informative and interactive content can enhance engagement, user generated and promotional content may reduce trust and create unrealistic expectations (Goodyear et al., 2018; Sang et al., 2024). Guided by Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz et al., 1974), users actively engage with new media to fulfil informational, social, and motivational needs, yet such engagement does not always result in informed decision making.

Despite growing attention to this field, limited research has critically examined how different forms of new media content interact with students perceptions of credibility and shape their health awareness within specific contexts. This gap underscores the need for further investigation into the relationship between new media use, content exposure, and health awareness among university students.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a quantitative cross-sectional design to examine the role of new media in promoting health awareness. The target population consists of university students aged 18–25 in Klang Valley.

A total of 106 respondents were selected using convenience sampling. Data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed via social media platforms. The questionnaire included sections on demographics, media usage patterns, perceived credibility, and health awareness.

Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale. Composite variables were created for frequency of usage, perceived credibility, and health awareness. Data analysis included descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and multiple regression analysis.

RESULTS

The findings indicate a high level of engagement with new media for health-related purposes among university students. Respondents reported frequent use of digital platforms to access information related to fitness, nutrition, and mental health.

Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships between frequency of new media usage, perceived credibility, and health awareness. The results show that all variables are positively and significantly correlated.

Frequency of new media usage is moderately correlated with health awareness ($r = .52, p < .01$). Perceived credibility is also moderately correlated with health awareness ($r = .55, p < .01$). In addition, frequency of usage is positively correlated with perceived credibility ($r = .49, p < .01$).

Regression Analysis

Multiple regression analysis was performed to determine the predictive effects of frequency of new media usage and perceived credibility on health awareness.

The regression model is statistically significant, $F(2, 103) = 28.64, p < .001$, explaining 35.7% of the variance in health awareness ($R^2 = .357$).

Both predictors are statistically significant. Frequency of new media usage has a positive effect on health awareness ($\beta = .38, p < .001$), while perceived credibility also has a positive effect ($\beta = .41, p < .001$).

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide strong support for the Uses and Gratifications Theory, demonstrating that university students actively engage with new media to fulfil their health-related informational needs. However, the results extend beyond simple usage patterns by highlighting the conditions under which such engagement translates into meaningful health awareness.

The significant positive relationship between frequency of new media usage and health awareness supports H1, indicating that increased engagement enhances exposure to health information. This finding aligns with existing literature suggesting that digital platforms play an important role in facilitating access to health-related knowledge. Nevertheless, exposure alone does not guarantee accurate understanding, particularly in digital environments where information quality varies.

More importantly, the findings reveal that perceived credibility is not only significantly associated with health awareness, supporting H2, but also emerges as the strongest predictor in the regression model, supporting H3. This suggests that credibility functions as a critical mechanism through which information is internalised and transformed into meaningful knowledge. In other words, while students frequently access health information, it is their level of trust in that information that determines its actual impact.

These results highlight a key distinction in digital health communication: frequency of usage influences access, whereas credibility determines effectiveness. This distinction is particularly important in understanding the continued reliance on new media despite widespread awareness of misinformation. Students appear to prioritise convenience and immediacy, even when they recognise potential risks, indicating a behavioural trade-off between accessibility and critical evaluation.

Furthermore, the moderate explanatory power of the regression model ($R^2 = .357$) suggests that although frequency of usage and perceived credibility are significant predictors, other factors such as digital health literacy, platform algorithms, and peer influence may also contribute to health awareness. This indicates that health awareness is shaped by a broader and more complex digital ecosystem.



Overall, the findings demonstrate that new media operates as a conditional influence system, where its effectiveness depends not only on how frequently it is used, but also on the perceived reliability of the information it delivers. This extends existing theoretical perspectives by emphasising the importance of credibility in shaping outcomes within digital environments

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that new media plays a significant and measurable role in shaping health awareness among university students in Klang Valley. While frequent engagement with digital platforms enhances access to health-related information, the findings clearly indicate that perceived credibility is the more decisive factor in determining how effectively this information is understood and applied.

By integrating correlation and regression analysis, the study shows that new media operates through a dual mechanism in which usage increases exposure, but credibility determines impact. This distinction is critical, as it highlights that access to information alone is insufficient to ensure meaningful health awareness in digital environments characterised by information abundance and varying quality.

The study contributes to the growing body of research on digital health communication by demonstrating that the effectiveness of new media is conditional rather than absolute, depending on the trustworthiness of the content consumed. This extends existing theoretical perspectives by emphasising the role of credibility as a key factor influencing outcomes.

In conclusion, while new media offers substantial opportunities for promoting health awareness, its benefits can only be fully realised when supported by credible information sources and users' ability to critically evaluate content. Strengthening these elements is essential to ensuring that digital platforms serve as reliable tools for improving public health awareness.

Implications and Recommendations

The findings of this study provide important implications for theory, practice, and policy in the context of digital health communication.

From a theoretical perspective, the study extends the Uses and Gratifications Theory by demonstrating that media usage alone does not fully explain health awareness outcomes. While students actively engage with new media to fulfil informational needs, the results indicate that perceived credibility plays a more critical role in determining the effectiveness of this engagement. This suggests that credibility should be considered a central factor in future applications of the theory, particularly in digital environments characterised by high information variability.

From a practical standpoint, the findings highlight the need to shift focus from increasing content exposure to improving content quality. Although students frequently access health-related information through digital platforms, the stronger predictive role of credibility indicates that trustworthiness is what transforms exposure into meaningful awareness and behavioural influence. Therefore, health professionals and organisations should prioritise the dissemination of accurate, evidence-based, and clearly communicated information, while maintaining consistent and verified digital presences.

At the institutional level, universities play a critical role in addressing the gap between awareness and evaluation. The findings suggest that students are aware of misinformation risks but may lack the necessary skills to critically assess information. As such, universities should integrate digital health literacy initiatives into student development programmes, focusing on enhancing students' ability to evaluate the credibility of online content.

From a policy perspective, the study underscores the importance of recognising new media as a primary channel for health communication. Public health authorities should actively engage with digital platforms to promote verified and authoritative sources of information, while implementing strategies to reduce the spread of misinformation. Collaboration between health institutions and social media platforms can further support the prioritisation of credible content.

Finally, future research should build upon this study by incorporating larger and more diverse samples, as well as additional variables such as digital literacy and platform-specific influences. The use of advanced analytical techniques, including longitudinal and structural modelling approaches, would provide deeper insights into causal relationships.

In summary, while new media presents significant opportunities for enhancing health awareness, its effectiveness depends on the interaction between user engagement and information credibility. Strengthening this relationship is essential to maximising the positive impact of digital health communication.

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