

**PERCEIVED INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON HEALTH PROMOTION
OUTCOMES AMONG UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN NNAMDI AZIKWE
UNIVERSITY, AWKA**

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ABSTRACT

The research work examined the perceived influence of social media on health promotion outcomes among undergraduate students in Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka. Social media platforms have become essential tools for disseminating health information, raising awareness, and promoting healthy behaviors among youth. However, there is limited research on how undergraduate students engage with these platforms for health purposes. The study assessed the level of social media usage, the health topics explored, and the factors influencing students' adoption and usage of social media for health promotion outcomes. Guided by four research questions, the study employed a descriptive survey research design. A sample of 200 undergraduate students was randomly selected from a population of 25,000. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled "Undergraduates' Social Media Habits and Health Promotion Outcomes," rated on a four-point scale. The instrument yielded a reliability score of 0.77, indicating strong internal consistency. The findings revealed low usage of social media for accessing health information but high levels of engagement with health-related topics and behaviours. Significant factors influencing social media adoption for health promotion were identified, though actual utilization for achieving tangible health promotion outcomes remained low. Based on these findings, the study recommends targeted social media campaigns that promote credible health information. It suggests leveraging social environments by establishing peer-led health groups on platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter to encourage healthier lifestyles. Additionally, workshops and online courses on effectively using social media for health promotion are advised. This research underscores the critical need to enhance health communication strategies and ensure access to credible health sources through social media.

Keywords: Social media, Health Promotion, Undergraduates

Introduction

The rapid proliferation of social media has transformed the way people communicate and access information. Social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube, have become ubiquitous in modern society, enabling users to engage in online interactions, share content, and participate in virtual communities (Maya, 2024). These platforms have facilitated a

significant increase in connectivity, allowing people to stay connected with their social circles regardless of geographical distance. More importantly, social media has emerged as a key player in the dissemination of information, particularly in the realm of health promotion. By leveraging the wide reach of these platforms, health professionals and organizations can effectively share information and promote healthy behaviors to diverse audiences (Trappe, 2020). Trappe (2020) highlights that social media platforms offer unique opportunities for health promotion, especially in fields like cardiology, by allowing for rapid dissemination of health information, facilitating patient-provider communication, and supporting health behavior change through peer networks and social support.

According to Ghahrami, *et al.*, (2021), social media has been found to be a valuable tool in changing health-related behaviors among young adults, particularly undergraduates. By adopting and utilizing social media, health promotion initiatives can be implemented to encourage healthy behaviors, raise awareness about specific health issues prevalent among undergraduates (e.g., stress, anxiety, and poor nutrition), and provide support for students struggling with these concerns. For example, social media platforms can be used to promote physical activity through the sharing of workout routines and motivational content, encourage healthy eating by providing nutritious recipes and meal planning tips, and support stress management by offering mindful exercises and resources for mental well-being (Ghahrami, *et al.*, 2021). Additionally, social media can serve as a collaborative dissemination platform to reach and influence the target audience and deliver health-related information tailored to the specific needs and interests of undergraduates.

According to Welch, Petkovic, Pardo, Rader and Tugwell (2016) demonstrates the effectiveness of social media campaigns in promoting healthy behaviors and improving health

outcomes among young adults. By leveraging popular social media platforms, such as Facebook and Instagram, health promotion initiatives were able to reach a large and diverse audience of young adults, including undergraduates. These campaigns adopted and utilized engaging content, such as infographics, videos, and interactive quizzes, to educate participants about the importance of physical activity, healthy eating, and stress management. Moreover, the social media platforms allowed for personalized feedback and support, as participants could ask questions, share their experiences, and receive encouragement from both health professionals and their peers. Welch *et al.* (2016) suggest that the interactive and engaging nature of social media can contribute to improved health outcomes by increasing knowledge, motivation, and self-efficacy among young adults.

While social media can be a valuable tool for promoting health and wellness, it is important to recognize that its impact on health behaviors is not always straightforward. Social media's adoption and use can have both positive and negative effects on mental and physical health. On the one hand, engaging with health-related content on social media can increase awareness, knowledge, and motivation to adopt healthy behaviors (Smith, Saleem, and Alhabash 2020). For example, following fitness influencers or joining online communities focused on healthy eating can inspire individuals to exercise regularly and make nutritious food choices. On the other hand, excessive or passive social media use, such as scrolling through idealized images or comparing oneself to others, can lead to increased stress, anxiety, and decreased physical activity (Smith *et al.*, 2020). This is particularly relevant for undergraduates, who may already be experiencing academic pressures and mental health challenges. For some students, social media may serve as a relaxing and stress-reducing activity, providing a much-needed mental break. However, when used excessively or in an unhealthy manner, social media can exacerbate

feelings of tension and anxiety, ultimately leading to negative health outcomes. This dual impact underscores the need for a nuanced understanding of social media's role in health promotion, one that considers both its potential benefits and drawbacks.

Revolutionizing the way health messages are shared and health behaviours are promoted, the adoption and utilization of social media platforms can achieve health promotion outcomes through an appropriate level of awareness and favorable attitudes among undergraduates towards the use of these platforms. These outcomes, which represent changes in health status attributable to planned interventions and programs such as exercise, nutrition, and stress management (Nutbeam and Muscat, 2021), can be attained by leveraging the reach and engagement potential of social media. However, it is crucial to recognize that these platforms can also have negative effects on both mental and physical health (Smith *et al.*, 2020). This dual impact underscores the need for a thorough understanding of social media's role in health promotion, one that considers both its potential benefits and drawbacks in order to develop effective strategies and interventions.

Health promotion as a multidisciplinary approach aims to promote health, prevent disease, and improve quality of life, Journal of Health Promotion and Disease Prevention, (2021). It is also a social and political process that aims to create healthy public policy, healthy environments, and healthy behaviors (Global Health, (2023). In essence, health promotion has the potential to drive positive change in individuals, communities, and populations, making it a crucial strategy in the quest for optimal health and wellbeing.

Determining the effectiveness of adopting and using social media platforms to change health behaviours and promote positive health outcomes among undergraduate students. While social media has potential for reaching a wide audience, more research is needed to evaluate the

long-term impact on sustainable behaviour change. Methodological approaches are also lacking with studies using quantitative methods or focusing on short-term engagement rather than measuring changes in health behaviours.

Considering the rampant of social media usage among undergraduate students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, the researchers deem it necessary to find out the perceived influence of social media on Health Promotion outcomes and addressing these gaps in the research is crucial for optimizing social media strategies to improve public health especially among Undergraduates who are frequent social media users.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the influence of social media on Health Promotion outcomes among undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikwe University Awka. The specific objectives are as follows:

1. Assess the level of social media usage by undergraduates for accessing health information.
2. Determine the types of health topics and behaviours that undergraduates engage with on social media.
3. Identify factors that influence Undergraduate's adoption of social media for health promotion outcomes.

Research Questions

1. What is the level of social media usage among undergraduates for accessing health information?
2. What types of health topics and behaviors do undergraduates most commonly engage with on social media platforms?

3. What factors influence undergraduates' adoption of social media for health promotion outcomes?

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) (Bandura, 1986) posits that learning is a cognitive process influenced by observational learning, reinforcement, self-efficacy, behavioral capability, and environmental factors. In the context of health promotion, Social cognitive theory has been used to understand how individuals adopt healthy behaviors (Bandura, 1997). This study applies Social cognitive theory to investigate how social media use influences health promotion outcomes among undergraduates. The key components of Social cognitive theory relevant to this study include observational learning, reinforcement, self-efficacy, behavioral capability, and environmental factors. Observational learning refers to the process of learning through observing others' behaviors and outcomes on social media. Reinforcement includes the likes, comments, and shares that follow health-related posts. Self-efficacy is the belief in one's ability to adopt healthy behaviors, while behavioral capability refers to the knowledge and skills necessary for healthy behaviors. Environmental factors include the social media platforms and peer networks that influence health promotion outcomes.

Based on social cognitive theory, this study proposes that observational learning and reinforcement on social media will increase self-efficacy and behavioral capability, leading to improved health promotion outcomes. Additionally, environmental factors (social media platforms and peer networks) are expected to moderate the relationships between observational learning, self-efficacy, and health promotion outcomes.

Methodology

The design for the study is a Descriptive survey design. This design allows for the identification of trends, patterns, and relationships between variables, which is essential for understanding the adoption and utilization of social media on health promotion outcomes.

This research was conducted at Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, a leading federal institution in Nigeria's higher education landscape. The university's main campus is strategically located in Awka, the capital city of Anambra State, with additional campuses in Nnewi and Agulu. As one of the top 25 federal universities in the country, Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka is committed to academic excellence and quality, ssunder the guidance of the National University Commission.

The study's population consisted of 25,000 undergraduate students enrolled across the 14 faculties at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra state. The sample for this study consisted of 200 undergraduate students selected from the population of 25,000 students at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, using a simple random sampling technique.

The data collection instrument used in this study was a questionnaire titled "Undergraduates' social media habits and Health Promotion outcomes. The questionnaire consisted of four parts, each focusing on a specific aspect of health promotion and social media use. The instrument was based on a four-point scale of Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2) and Strongly Disagree (1). The instrument was validated by three experts, two experts in the department of Health Promotion and Public Health Education and one in Measurement and Evaluation in the department of Educational Foundation, faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The reliability of the research instrument was established through a robust process. The instrument was administered to 20 participants in Chukwuemeka Odumegwu

Ojukwu University Igbariam. Cronbach alpha was used to establish internal consistency, which revealed a high coefficient value of 0.77 indicating excellent internal consistency and reliability.

Data for the study was analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Results

Research Question 1: What is the level of social media usage among undergraduate students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka for accessing health information?

Table 1: Mean ratings on the level of social media usage among undergraduate students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka for accessing health information.

N=200			
	Mean	SD	Remark
1. I use social media to learn about healthy habits.	2.56	.70	High
2. I have used Facebook to get health information.	1.58	.86	Low
3. I have used Instagram to get health information	1.94	.84	Low
4. I have used Twitter to get health information.	1.50	.90	Low
5. I have used You Tube to get health information.	1.54	.88	Low

Table 1 shows that the Mean ratings on the four questions out of five listed items on the level of social media usage among undergraduate students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka for accessing health information were low. However, they agreed on item number one. The mean scores of the questions are as follows 2.56, 1.58, 1.94, 1.50 and 1.54 respectively. The respondents however have the following scores in SD; .70, .86, .84, .90, and .88 respectively.

Research Question 2: What type of health topics and behaviours do undergraduate students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka most commonly engage with on social media platforms?

Table 2: Mean ratings on the type of health topics and behaviours undergraduate students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka most commonly engage with on social media platforms.

N=200

HEALTHY TOPICS ON SOCIAL MEDIA	Mean	SD	Remark
1. Healthy eating.	3.49	.64	High
2. Videos on exercise and fitness.	3.15	.61	High
3. Pep talks by health experts.	2.23	.80	Low
4. Online discussion about mental health.	2.02	.87	Low
5. Tracking physical activities or exercise routine.	3.07	.74	High

Analysis in Table 2 shows that the respondents had high mean rating in three questions asked out of five questions on the type of health topics and behaviours undergraduate students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka most commonly engage with on social media platforms. However, the student's online discussion is not about mental health and they don't pep talk by health experts. The mean scores of questions 1 -5 are as follows 3.49, 3.15, 2.23, 2.02 and 3.07 respectively. The respondents however have the following scores in SD; .64, .61, .80, .87, and .74 respectively.

Research Question 3: What factors influence undergraduate students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka in adoption of social media for health promotion outcomes?

Table 3: Mean ratings on the factors that influence undergraduate students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka in adoption of social media for health promotion outcomes.

N=200

	Mean	SD	Remark
1. Self-efficacy.	2.50	.88	High
2. Skills and capabilities.	3.49	.64	High
3. Observational learning.	3.15	.61	High
4. Incentives and rewards.	1.50	.97	Low
5. Social identity.	3.07	.74	High

Analysis in Table 3 shows that the respondents have high mean rating in four of the questions asked out of five on adoption of social media for health promotion outcomes among undergraduate students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka (mean = 2.50, 3.49, 3.15 and 3.07 respectively). Meanwhile, undergraduate students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka has

low mean rating on question number four (mean = 1.50). The respondents however have the following scores in SD; .88, .64, .61, .97, and .74 respectively.

Discussion of Findings

Level of social media usage among undergraduates students of Nnamdi Azikwe University, Awka for accessing health information

The finding in research question one revealed that the level of social media usage for Undergraduates students of Nnamdi Azikwe University, Awka for accessing Health information is low. This means that undergraduate students do not frequently use social media, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube to learn healthy habits or to get health information. This findings was in line with the findings of Megnesha (2021) that a significant portion of students utilized social media for health information, with a focus on specific platforms. However, it also highlighted that while many students were aware of social media as a source for health-related information, actual usage rates for obtaining such information varied widely among different platforms. Mengesha (2021) reported that factors like daily social media usage and the type of health information sought influenced students' engagement with health content on social media. It's also aligns with the findings of Mengesha (2021), where students showed a high mean score in using social media to learn about healthy habits but low scores for specific platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube. The researchers believes that more awareness and targeted educational efforts are needed to encourage students to access credible health information through social media.

Types of health topics and behaviours undergraduate students of Nnamdi Azikwe University, Awka commonly engage in on social media

The finding in research question two reveal distinct preferences among undergraduate students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, regarding health topics and behaviours on social media. Students show high engagement with content related to healthy eating, exercise videos, and tracking physical activities. This suggests a prioritization of practical health information related to diet and fitness over more complex health discussions. The finding also agreed with the views of Lee *et al.* (2023) that topics related to healthy eating and exercise were the most prominent health-promoting behaviours reported by students, which is consistent with the findings, where “healthy eating” and “videos on exercise and fitness” received high mean ratings from respondents. Similarly, Greene *et al.* (2011) noted that students frequently engage with fitness and nutrition topics, mirroring the high mean ratings observed in this study. However, engagement with pep talks by health experts and online discussions about mental health remains low, consistent with Greene *et al.* (2011) that young adults prefer social interaction and entertainment to serious health discussions. The researchers are of the opinion that, while students actively engage with practical health topics on social media, there is a critical need to promote discussions on mental health and expert advice to enhance overall health literacy.

Factors that influence Undergraduate students of Nnamdi Azikwe University, Awka in adopting social media for health promotion outcomes

The findings in research question three revealed several key motivators influencing undergraduate students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, in adopting social media for health promotion outcomes. The results show that skills and capabilities, observational learning, social identity, and self-efficacy are significant factors influencing students’ use of social media

for health promotion. However, incentives and rewards appear to have a low influence on their adoption of social media for this purpose. These findings align with the work of Laranjo *et al.* (2015), which found that factors such as skills, social influence, and self-efficacy are critical in motivating individuals to adopt social media for health-related behaviours, while incentives and rewards play a smaller role. Similarly, Huang *et al.* (2014) emphasized the importance of observational learning—seeing peers engage in healthy behaviours—as a significant influence, which is consistent with the current study’s high mean ratings for this factor. Additionally, they found that social identity strongly shapes users’ decisions to adopt social media for health promotion, with students more inclined to participate when their social circles engage in similar health practices. The researchers believe that enhancing students’ skills, self-efficacy, and leveraging social identity and observational learning will significantly boost their adoption of social media for health promotion outcomes.

Conclusion

Based on the finding of this study, the researcher concluded that, awareness and targeted educational efforts are needed to encourage students to access credible health information through social media. Again, while students actively engage with practical health topics on social media, there is a critical need to promote discussions on mental health and expert advice to enhance overall health literacy. The researchers also conclude that enhancing students’ skills, self-efficacy, and leveraging social identity and observational learning will significantly boost their adoption of social media for health promotion outcomes. Therefore, increasing awareness, alongside leveraging the power of social networks, is crucial to enhance health literacy and behaviour among students.

Recommendations

1. Universities and health institutions should actively promote mental health discussions on social media by partnering with influencers, experts, and student ambassadors to reduce the stigma and encourage more engagement on health promotion.
2. Educational institutions should implement targeted social media campaigns focusing on credible health information. These campaigns could include interactive content on nutrition, exercise, and health management strategies to make health information more relatable and engaging for students.
3. Leverage social environments by creating peer-led health promotion groups on platforms like Facebook or WhatsApp, where students can encourage each other to adopt healthier lifestyles, thus enhancing the positive influence of social support on health behaviors.
4. Workshops or online courses on how to effectively utilize social media for health promotion should be offered to students. These programs would help improve their skills in identifying credible health information sources and avoid problematic social media use that hinders health-promoting behaviors.

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