

Exploring Health Information-Seeking Behaviors on Social Media

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INTRODUCTION:

The rise of social media as a primary source for health-related information has transformed the landscape of consumer health information-seeking behaviors. Zhao and Zhang (2017) noted that social media platforms have become significant venues for exchanging health-related information and advice, particularly for individuals seeking peer-to-peer support and personal experiences. This study explores how consumers engage with social media to seek health information, assesses the perceived reliability of such information, and examines its implications for public health communication.

RESEARCH QUESTION:

How do consumers seek health-related information through social media, and what roles, benefits, and concerns are associated with this process?

OBJECTIVES:

1. To identify the types of health information commonly sought on social media, as highlighted by Zhao and Zhang (2017).
2. To assess the perceived reliability of health information on social media platforms, considering the variability based on source and context (Zhao & Zhang, 2017).
3. To evaluate the impact of social media-sourced health information on users' healthcare decisions, including potential effects on treatment choices and self-diagnosis (Zhao & Zhang, 2017).

HYPOTHESIS:

1. Social media is a significant source of health information for a wide demographic range.
2. The perceived reliability of health information on social media is variable and depends on the source.
3. Social media influences users' healthcare decisions, including self-diagnosis and treatment choices.

MATERIAL AND METHODS:

STUDY DESIGN: Cross-sectional survey design

STUDY POPULATION:

- Inclusion criteria: Individuals aged 18 and above, active social media users
- Exclusion criteria: Individuals below 18, non-social media users

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- **STUDY TOOLS:** Online questionnaire (MCQ format) including sections on demographics, health information sources, reliability, and behavioural impact
- **DURATION OF STUDY:** 2 months (March 2025 –May2025)
- **SAMPLE SIZE:** 245 participants
- **SAMPLING TECHNIQUE:** Convenience sampling
- **DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE:** An anonymous online survey will be disseminated via email and social media platforms to collect data on health information-seeking behaviors.

OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS:

Health Information-Seeking Behavior: The act of searching for health-related information online.

Reliability: The perceived trustworthiness of health information based on its source.

DATA ANALYSIS PLAN:

Data will be analysed using SPSS version 28. Descriptive statistics will be used to summarize demographic data, while inferential statistics, such as chi-square tests, will assess the relationship between variables. Significance will be set at $p < 0.05$.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS:

- Informed consent will be obtained from all participants prior to data collection.
- Data confidentiality will be maintained through anonymous data collection and secure storage.

IMPLICATIONS OF RESEARCH:

The findings of this study will provide insights into how social media influences health information-seeking behaviors and how perceived reliability of digital health content impacts healthcare decision-making. This will inform the development of targeted health communication strategies.

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8. Additional references will be formatted using the Vancouver referencing style and managed through Mendeley.