

The Importance of Information Quality in Acquiring Health Information on Social Media during COVID-19: The Case of Young Adults in Klang Valley

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Received Date: 30 August 2022

Accepted Date: 21 September 2022

Published Date: 1 November 2022

Abstract. The emergence of COVID-19 has heightened global interest in health information. The public is increasingly reliant on social media platforms for acquiring and exchanging various sorts of information. With the growth of health information hoaxes, particularly during the epidemic, Malaysians who actively seek health information on social media would be at risk. The inability of certain people to critically evaluate the contents of COVID-19 resulted in their disseminating misleading information. With the rising interest in health information and social media, it is interesting to investigate the importance of health information acquisition on social media during COVID-19 among young adults.

Keywords: Health information seeking, information quality, social media, young adult, information management.

1 Introduction

The COVID-19 outbreak has encouraged people worldwide to increase their use of social media for health-related information (Shehata, 2020). There was a considerable demand for information about the pandemic, and all of the released reports worried people about what the pandemic could do (Zakar et al., 2020). During a crisis or a public health emergency, information sources assist individuals in becoming more attentive and aware of the situation, learning preventative actions, and reducing anxiety created by the uncertainty of a newly emerging circumstance. However, even though there has been much growth in social media applications during pandemics, trust is still one of the biggest problems for social media health services in getting more people to use them (Li & Wang, 2018).

Many news and stories are provided to us through various social media platforms since the COVID-19 epidemic has afflicted the country, such as WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat. According to a survey undertaken by the Institute of Strategic and International Studies Malaysia (ISIS), 70% of the 363 false news stories about government action concern COVID-19 and the spread of viruses across the community (Wan, 2020). This fact is corroborated by discoveries relating to a viral story that spread through the WhatsApp application involving the claim of a Medical Officer called Dr. Chong Yit Khang, who reportedly published a statement addressing the policies and procedures of the Malaysian Ministry of Health's response to the COVID-19 epidemic (Hospital Kuala Lumpur, 2020). This incident significantly impacts health practitioners' and government agencies' efficacy and efficiency in carrying out their responsibilities, including delivering accurate information about necessary actions and posting information about the pandemic's current situation.

Previous research indicates that health authorities should focus on adopting appropriate methods and approaches for information delivery to ensure the public's efficient distribution of vital information (Mohamad et al., 2020). In addition, it is becoming increasingly important for health practitioners to understand how consumers receive and assess health-related information on social media to communicate effectively during public health emergencies (Neely et al., 2021). Appropriate and essential efforts may be undertaken to enhance social media usage when health professionals, and healthcare institutions, particularly those involved in health communication, are aware of the factors that lead to increased social media use. This study is aim to gain knowledge about the importance of information quality in acquiring health information on social media during COVID-19 through a representative sample of the general public to prepare for the future growth of social media for health education and information acquisition.

2 Previous Studies on Knowledge Sharing

2.1 Health Information Acquisition on Social Media

The term "Health Information Seeking Behavior" (HISB) refers to a specific type of information-seeking behavior in health research. Health information-seeking behavior is defined as the "purposive acquisition of health information from selected information carriers" (Gallegati et al., 2021). HISB has several potential benefits, the most significant of which is the potential to close knowledge gaps between social groups and educate individuals outside the doctor's office (Gallegati et al., 2021). This practice demonstrates performance in the context of health improvement through efforts to gather health information and the mechanism through which individuals obtain information (Roselina et al., 2021). Health-related information is gathered in the context of self-monitoring and self-care.

Throughout the COVID-19 outbreak, social media has been the most searched source of information. According to Bi et al. (2021), social media platforms have increasingly become necessary as a source of health-related information for netizens. Social networking like Facebook and Instagram have been utilized for newsgathering.

The Importance of Information Quality in Acquiring Health Information on Social Media during COVID-19: The Case of Young Adults in Klang Valley

Additionally, through the many features of WeChat, various health-related information was regularly created and distributed among many users (Zhang et al., 2017). Numerous factors contribute to the desire for information including worry about a specific health condition or disease, a health-related threat or benefit, or an interest in a media-covered discovery (Basch et al., 2018).

2.2 Information Quality

As health information quality and availability improve, people may receive health information through various media platforms, including printed publications, digital media, websites, and new media (Zhang et al., 2020). Previous research has concentrated on acquiring health information via the internet and new media and the associated development of positive living practices. According to Anaeto et al. (2021), when individuals have access to relevant and appropriate health information, they may make wise decisions and adopt healthy lifestyle behaviors.

According to a recent study, low-quality information is a serious concern, and there is no transparent process for evaluating information quality and the reliability of submitted materials (Khan et al., 2021). The dissemination of low-quality material might endanger patients and undermine the professional image (Marar et al., 2019). This issue indicates that the quality of information is a significant determinant in acquiring health information. Some research has established the critical role of content and quality variables in establishing trust (Rowley et al., 2016). Additionally, the literature addressed issues of information's credibility, availability, relevance, and currency (Zhang, 2013).

3 Methodology

The research methodology section describes the process of collecting data from respondents. This section includes the procedures for this study, such as sampling technique, sample size, unit of analysis, measurement, collecting data, and data analysis. The survey research method was adopted for the study. The target population for the research comprised young adults aged 18 to 35 living in Klang Valley. A sample size of 250 was used for the study. A questionnaire was utilized to collect answers from all research participants. The questionnaire contained questions about respondents' backgrounds, frequency of using social media to get health information, and reasons for using social media to acquire health information about COVID-19. The factors that impact the acquisition of health information during COVID-19 were also sought. However, this questionnaire sample will be restructured to fit the needs of this study. In addition, the researcher is using a multiple-choice and Likert scale questionnaire. This questionnaire distribution and collection spanned four (4) weeks. The data was collected through an electronic survey via a Google Form questionnaire. In order to get sufficient coverage, the questionnaire was distributed through WhatsApp and other social media such as Facebook and Instagram. The data collected was organized via descriptive statistical methods, and its analysis was facilitated using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

4 Findings

The study revealed the information quality perspectives of young adults when acquiring health information on social media during COVID-19.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics on the socio-demographic characteristics

Characteristics		N=250	Percentage (100%)
Gender	Male	49	19.6
	Female	201	80.4
Age	18 – 23	129	51.6
	24 – 29	84	33.6
	30 - 35	37	14.8
Occupation	Student	161	64.4
	Employee	75	30.0
	Entrepreneur	5	2.0
	Other	9	3.6
Education	High school graduate	18	7.2
	Diploma/ foundation	82	32.8
	Bachelor's Degree	122	48.8
	Master	26	10.4
	Ph.D.	2	0.8

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics on the socio-demographic characteristics. Out of the population used for the study, 19.6% of the respondents were males, and 80.4% were females. Most of the respondents (51.6%) were between 18 and 23. The finding is closely followed by respondents aged 24 to 29 (33.6%). The least number of respondents (14.8%) who participated in the study were aged 30 to 35.

Among the respondents, students ranked the highest, with 64.4% of respondents who participated in the study. Employees ranked second (30.0%) among respondents who participated in the study. In descending order, the table also showed respondents with other occupations (3.6%) and entrepreneurs (2%) as participants in the study.

There are five different education level categories of respondents. Most of the respondents (48.8%) who participated in this study had bachelor's degrees. This finding is closely followed by respondents with diplomas or foundations (32.8%). The table also showed respondents with master's (10.4%), high school graduates (7.2%), and only 0.8% of participants with a Doctor of Philosophy.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics on the use of social media in acquiring health information

Item		N=250	Percentage (100%)
Length of social media use to search/ read health information about COVID-19 on social media	1 hour or less	172	68.8
	2 - 4 hours	64	25.6
	5 or more hours	14	5.6
	8 or more	19	7.6

The Importance of Information Quality in Acquiring Health Information on Social Media during COVID-19: The Case of Young Adults in Klang Valley

Frequency to search/ read health information about COVID-19 on social media	times a week		n	%
	3 -7 times a week	Once or twice a week		
	3 -7 times a week	Once or twice a week	59	23.6
	Once or twice a week	Once or twice a month	97	38.8
	Once or twice a month	Facebook	75	30.0
Type of social media use to search/ read health information about COVID-19 on social media		Instagram	115	17.4
		Linked In	130	19.6
		Snapchat	3	0.5
		Telegram	0	0
		Twitter	54	8.2
		Tik Tok	109	16.5
		WhatsApp	69	10.4
		YouTube	109	16.5
		Other	53	8.0
		20	3.0	

Table 4.2 shows the descriptive statistics on the use of social media in acquiring health information. 68.8% of the respondents admitted that they had used social media for 1 hour or less to search or find health information about COVID-19 on social media. About 25.6% of respondents spend about 2 to 4 hours, and 5.6% spend about 5 or more hours acquiring health information on social media.

The table also shows respondents' frequency of searching or reading health information about COVID-19 on social media. Most respondents (38.8%) searched for health information on social media once or twice weekly. 30% of respondents search for health information on social media about once or twice a month. In addition, 23.6% of respondents search for health information on social media about 3 to 7 times a week. The least number of respondents (7.6%) who participated in the study searched for health information on social media about 8 or more times a week.

The table shows the type of social media used to search or read health information about COVID-19 on social media. Findings show that Instagram was the most commonly used social medium, accounting for around 19.6%. Facebook closely follows this finding with 17.4%, and Twitter and WhatsApp usage among respondents equal 16.5%. Besides, Tik Tok, Telegram, and YouTube are among the social media used by respondents to search for health information with 69%, 54%, and 53%, respectively. Respondents revealed that they rarely used Linked In (3%) and never used Snapchat (0%) to search for health information. Other than that, 20% of respondents used another social media platform to acquire the health information.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics on the influence of information credibility on health information acquisition

Statements	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
I trust health information more if it identifies a (written/ updated/ reviewed) date in social media.	0	0	8	3.2	39	15.6	100	40.0	103	41.2
I trust health information more if it discloses its sources of information in social media.	0	0	7	2.8	36	14.4	82	32.8	125	50.0
I trust health information more if its contents are free of spelling errors in social media.	3	1.2	18	7.2	72	28.8	78	31.2	79	31.6
I trust health information more if the information it contains is not subjective (free from bias or financial interest).	1	0.4	7	2.8	41	16.4	90	36.0	111	44.4

Table 3 shows the respondents' feedback on information credibility when acquiring health information on social media. The findings indicate that 41.2% of the respondents strongly agreed that they trust the health information when it identifies the written, updated, or reviewed date on social media. In addition, half of the respondents (50%) strongly agreed that health information is more trusted if the information on social media is disclosed to them. 31.6% of respondents strongly agreed that they trusted health information on social media when the contents are free of spelling errors. Additionally, 44.4% of respondents strongly agreed and trusted the health information when the contents were not subjective (free from bias or financial interest).

Table 4. Descriptive statistics on the influence of information availability on health information acquisition

Statements	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
I can find health information I need quickly in the social media.	0	0	6	2.4	20	8.0	120	40.0	124	49.6
Health information in social media is convenient for me to access.	0	0	5	2.0	13	5.2	106	42.4	126	50.4
Information related to health readily available on social media when needed.	0	0	6	2.4	27	10.8	113	45.2	104	41.6

Table 4 shows the respondents' feedback on information available when acquiring health information on social media. The findings show that 49.6% of respondents strongly agree that they can find health information needed on social media in a short time. 50.4% of respondents strongly agree that health information on social media is convenient. Additionally, 45.2% of respondents agree that information related to health is readily available on social media when needed.

Table 5. Descriptive statistics on the influence of information relevance on health information acquisition

Statements	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
I prefer to acquire relevant health information in social media.	0	0	8	3.2	47	18.8	102	40.8	93	37.2
The health information content on social media is useful to me.	0	0	2	0.8	32	12.8	108	43.2	108	43.2
I feel confident in using health information from the social media to make health decisions.	3	1.2	15	6.0	89	35.6	91	36.4	52	20.8
I understand health information presented on the social media.	0	0	3	1.2	41	16.4	117	46.8	89	35.6

Table 5 shows the respondents' feedback on information relevance when acquiring health information on social media. The findings show that 40.8% of the respondents agreed that they prefer relevant health information on social media. The respondents indicated that health information content on social media is helpful to them, with 43.2% of respondents strongly agreeing and agreeing equally. Moreover, 36.4% of respondents feel confident in using health information from social media to make health decisions, and 46.8% understand health information on social media.

Table 6. Descriptive statistics on the influence of information currency on health information acquisition

Statements	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Currency of health information is a factor that is considered when I am acquiring it.	1	0.4	0	0	35	14.0	108	43.2	106	42.4
The social media updates health information frequently and quickly.	0	0	1	0.4	42	16.8	113	45.2	94	37.6
The social media acquires up to date health information.	0	0	2	0.8	37	14.8	113	45.2	98	39.2
Health information in the social media help me stay abreast of my field of interest.	0	0	10	4.0	53	21.2	101	40.4	86	34.4

Table 6 shows the respondents' feedback on information currency when acquiring health information on social media. The findings show that 43.2% of the respondents agreed that the currency of health information is a factor considered when acquiring it. 45.2% of respondents agreed that social media updates health information frequently and quickly and also acquires up-to-date health information. In addition, 40.4% of respondents agreed that health information on social media helps them stay abreast of their field of interest.

5 Discussion

This research examines the significance of information quality on young adults' intentions to acquire health information through social media during COVID-19. Most respondents strongly agreed that information credibility was important in acquiring health information on social media. Information credibility is related to young adults' trust when searching for reliable information. Due to the variety of sources of information and the absence of quality verification, social media enables the spread of unverified information and even misinformation. Therefore, to ensure the value of specific information, individuals need to assess the information format to establish its usefulness (Shang, 2019). For example, young adults can evaluate information by determining the quality of the contents and evaluating the source's reliability. Recent research demonstrates that a highly trustworthy information source is more effective at producing positive attitude change and has a more significant influence on persuasion, particularly when participants lack prior attitudes or are unable to develop a new attitude depending on message content (Huo et al., 2017).

The availability of information relates to its exposure on social media. This means that young adults knew where to go or believed that social media contained health-related information. Access to and usage of health information available online may be an essential tool for improving their health awareness and assisting them in making informed health care decisions. Available evidence shows that the most significant reason for obtaining health information over the internet was the ease with which requested health information could be located (Parija et al., 2020). Any limitation in information availability, such as limited Internet access or restricting social media platforms, makes it impossible for young adults to obtain COVID-19 health information.

The COVID-19 influence on growing numbers of young adults relies on social networks to communicate with friends and family, find relevant information, and keep up with the latest news. The findings revealed that young adults agreed and strongly agreed that health information on social media is relevant and valuable. Other studies indicate that social media was a beneficial health-related learning resource for young adults. The findings indicated widespread support for social media in the lives of young people because it provided a relevant and accessible source of health information that could appeal to their particular needs and common interests (Goodyear & Armour, 2020). The finding was supported by Vranešević et al. (2019) that a significant proportion of survey respondents in Croatia and Serbia utilize and see social media as a source of relevant information.

Additionally, currency is one of the most critical factors in evaluating the quality of health information. The findings indicate that currency of information is considered when acquiring health information on social media during COVID-19. Due to the ease of updating information, the exchange rate on social media may be greater than that of other forms of resources (Shabani & Keshavarz, 2021). People are looking for the current and updated COVID-19 contents to keep up with the latest news and developments related to COVID-19, such as knowing the number of COVID-19 cases, the recovered, and the deceased. In the context of social media, information standards are centered on the user and play a key role in user acceptance. If the information offered by a social media platform is trustworthy, exhaustive, and frequently updated to meet users' expectations, they will feel at ease when making task-related decisions (Aboelmaged, 2007). People can stay up to date on the needed health information on social media if it is continuous updating, timeliness, and keep announcing upcoming events.

6 Recommendation and Conclusion

Young people's informational needs for COVID-19 are essential to designing an effective way to reduce the virus's adverse effects. This research examined and described the significance of information quality in acquiring health information through social media during COVID-19. With a growing percentage of the population relying on social media for news and research, Malaysians searching for health information on COVID-19 must have access to credible and high-quality sources. Social media's informal, unstructured, and self-disclosing character leads to differing information quality, particularly in health communication. It is intended that this study will generate new insights that will support health agencies, governments, the media, organizations, academic institutions, and others in improving their health communication strategies. In addition, the policies and recommendations are relevant to young people in an environment of disinformation, mistrust, and terror. When young people are educated about COVID-19, they can navigate their digital environment securely and make informed decisions that protect their health and the health of their families and communities.

Based on the results, the author may infer that the quality, credibility, availability, relevancy, and currency of health information on social media are significant for young people seeking health information. Information quality is essential for assisting young people in making better decisions, reducing the spread of false news, and maintaining accurate information about the COVID-19 scenario. This research also supports that social media may be a good health resource for young people.

Thus, the author would like to provide future suggestion for adoption by government entities and future studies based on the findings. Producers and disseminators of information should strive to enhance young adults' perceptions of information quality and increase their reputation, including its credibility, accuracy, relevance, and comprehensiveness, as all the characteristics are the crucial criterion for evaluating information and knowledge by users. The reason is that the quality of information is the most crucial factor in building trust, especially when there are more serious health threats. As the number of Malaysians who use social media to access information

The Importance of Information Quality in Acquiring Health Information on Social Media during COVID-19: The Case of Young Adults in Klang Valley

keeps increasing, it is imperative to ensure they are aware of the reliable and high-quality information when searching for health information on COVID-19.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to acknowledge the Faculty of Information Management, Selangor branch and Research Nexus UiTM (ReNeU), Office of Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research & Innovation) Universiti Teknologi MARA for funding and support.

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