

UNIVERSITY OF MEDIA ARTS AND COMMUNICATION

**THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON HEALTH RISK COMMUNICATION: CASE
OF FACEBOOK AND INSTAGRAM**

BY

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MANAGEMENT**

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DECLARATION BY STUDENT

I hereby declare that this research is a result of my own original research and that, no part of it has been presented for another degree in this university or any other higher education institute. I further declare that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references

.....

Grace Acheampong (MASPRM23029) Signature Date

CERTIFICATION BY SUPERVISOR

This Dissertation/Thesis has been prepared and presented under my supervision according to the guidelines for supervision and formatting of Dissertation/Thesis laid down by the University of Media, Arts and Communication, UniMAC.

Supervisor’s Signature..... Date.....

James Kwaku Asante Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

This research examines the influence of social media, namely Facebook and Instagram, on health risk communication. Using an exploratory study design and a mixed-method approach, data were gathered from 150 participants via purposive and convenience sampling procedures. The results indicate that while social media platforms provide considerable potential for audience engagement and health awareness promotion, their efficacy is compromised by pervasive misinformation and differing levels of trust in health-related information. Participants preferred material endorsed by health experts or reputable organizations, underscoring the essential need for reliable and scientifically substantiated health communication. Disinformation has become a significant obstacle, undermining trust and clarity in health communication. The research found prospects for enhancement via collaborations with health organizations, interactive material formats, and user education to boost digital literacy. The study recommends that combating disinformation, cultivating trust, and implementing effective communication techniques are crucial for enhancing social media's function in health risk communication.

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my late father, Mr. Isaac Kwadwo Acheampong

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CHAPTER ONE

1.1 Introduction

This chapter covers the background to the study, statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, objectives, research questions, significance of the study, and definition of terms. The final part of the introduction is the organization of the study, it provides proper guidance to the readers.

1.2 Background to the study

The focus of global health issues is transitioning from infectious diseases to non-communicable diseases (NCDs), which are now the primary cause of death, especially in developing nations. (Adogu et al., 2015). Researchers have proposed that the majority of non-communicable diseases are associated with the lifestyle patterns and choices made by individuals, and are hence referred to as 'lifestyle diseases' (Chandola, 2012). The safety of lives and property is a fundamental concern for governments, organizations, and individuals, and achieving this goal often requires effective communication of risks. Health risks, much like environmental risks, pose significant threats to lives and property and demand substantial resources to mitigate their impact. Effective communication of health risks serves as a critical intervention, bridging scientific findings with the social and political will required to ensure the safety and well-being of communities (Meissner et al., 2002; Waugh Jr. & Streib, 2020). Social media platforms, such as Facebook and Instagram, have emerged as influential tools in facilitating this communication. However, the extent of their effectiveness in health risk communication warrants critical examination.

Health risks encompass a wide range of issues, including the emergence and re-emergence of diseases, the spread of infectious conditions, and the challenges of managing chronic illnesses. These risks have been exacerbated by factors such as globalization, urbanization, and environmental changes, necessitating robust strategies for communication and intervention. Risk communication is defined as an interactive process of exchanging information and

opinions among individuals, groups, and institutions (National Research Council [NRC], 2019). It involves disseminating messages about the nature of risks and addressing concerns, opinions, and reactions related to these risks and the systems in place to manage them. The complexity of this process is heightened when addressing health risks, as they often evoke strong emotional reactions such as fear, helplessness, and distrust (Covello et al., 2001; Fischhoff, 2015).

Social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram have revolutionized how information is shared and consumed, offering unparalleled opportunities for interaction and engagement. These platforms enable users to create and disseminate content rapidly, breaking traditional spatial and temporal boundaries (Luoma-Aho, 2012; Porter, 2018). They provide avenues for healthcare organizations, governments, and individuals to share health-related information, raise awareness, and foster dialogue. Social media has been employed to disseminate information about disease outbreaks, promote preventive measures, and engage communities in health education campaigns. The platforms' ability to target diverse audiences across demographics enhances their relevance for health risk communication (Shan et al., 2014).

Despite these advantages, the use of social media for health risk communication is not without challenges. Ethical concerns associated with these platforms, including issues of privacy, consent, and misinformation, complicate their reliability as tools for effective communication (Pidgeon & Fischhoff, 2011). The unregulated nature of social media allows for the dissemination of unverified and sometimes harmful content, which can undermine public trust and hinder the effectiveness of health interventions (Slovic et al., 2005). Furthermore, the ability of social media to influence public perception often depends on the credibility and authority of the information source, the accessibility and relevance of the information shared, and the level of stakeholder engagement in the communication process (Kasperson et al., 1992; Renn & Levine, 1991).

Research indicates that the effectiveness of social media in health risk communication is context-dependent. For instance, while these platforms can be powerful in raising awareness and engaging the public, their capacity to prompt sustained behavioral change or influence policy decisions remains limited. This is particularly critical in high-stakes situations where timely and accurate information is essential for mitigating risks (Batistolli, 2015). The dynamics of social media communication, which often prioritize entertainment and immediacy over depth and accuracy, can exacerbate uncertainties and emotional responses to health risks (Slovic et al., 2004).

According to Rimal and Lapinski (2009), health communication is primarily focused on promoting health, enhancing well-being, and improving the overall quality of life for individuals. According to Parrott (2004), health communication involves the skillful and strategic dissemination of information to both institutional and public audiences in order to inform, influence, and motivate them regarding significant health matters.

A level of access to information about health and wellness that has never been seen before is now available to the whole public as a result of the broad use of the internet. According to Stretcher (2020), the internet is the major and most important source of health information, particularly when it comes to diagnosing medical illnesses, unknown symptoms, or diagnostic objectives. According to the Centraal Bureau Statistiek (2016), 50% of the Dutch population use the internet for health information at least once every three months. GGD Nederland utilizes the internet's ease and popularity by providing a comprehensive range of health information to a varied demographic via its passive websites. The internet, particularly the websites on the World Wide Web, undergo constant changes due to technical advancements. Consequently, the dissemination of health information will also undergo transformation. One of the shifts in information is seen in the use of social media. An increasing number of internet users are dedicating a significant amount of time to social networking websites (Pew Internet,

2012). Social media refers to digital platforms that enable users to share material they have created. Facebook and Twitter are widely used and popular examples of participatory platforms where users can both consume and contribute various sorts of material. These modifications enhance the interactivity of the internet, distinguishing it from static webpages and other forms of mass communication. Furthermore, it fosters a sense of proximity among its users (Chou, et al., 2019). The usage of social media in various contexts often aligns with the concept of e-health. Given the recent shifts in information dissemination, it is crucial for the field of e-health to explore the effects and possibilities of social media in the delivery of health-related information. Several organizations and institutions have effectively used this social media trend to include customers in product marketing endeavours (Schein, Wilson, and Keelan, 2018). Given their effectiveness in marketing due to financial incentives, it is plausible that they may be used for other marketing objectives, such as promoting health. Marketing, social marketing, and health promotion all aim to alter individuals' attitudes and/or change or remove certain habits and choices. Health promotion is a crucial component of health communication since it entails efforts to convince a person to modify their behaviour (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2019). While social marketing and health promotion are distinct, achieving change in health-related subjects is often more challenging in social marketing (Delaney et al., 2004). The impact and influence of social media on modifying health behaviour remains uncertain. Organizations engaged in health communication and seeking to enhance public health lack knowledge on how to successfully use social media and ensure that both people and professionals get benefits from its usage (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2019). According to Smith (2020), the rise of social media platforms in recent years has brought about a revolution in the area of health risk communication. These platforms have provided fresh pathways for the dissemination and exchange of information amongst individuals. According to Jones and Brown (2019), social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, which have billions of active users, have a

significant influence in shaping public perceptions and responses about issues that are relevant to health because of their widespread usage. For this reason, it is very necessary to have a solid understanding of the impact that these platforms have on the transmission of health risks in order to successfully conduct public health initiatives.

Social media platforms have distinct functionalities that allow for the quick spread of health information, encourage user participation, and promote the establishment of communities (White et al., 2018). Facebook offers a platform for sharing health-related material, participating in debates, and creating support networks because to its extensive user base and wide demographic representation (Garcia & Martinez, 2021). Instagram has gained popularity as a medium for health promotion efforts due to its focus on visual material. These ads efficiently deliver health messages by using photos and videos (Lee and Kim, 2019).

Despite the advantages they provide, social media platforms often pose obstacles for health risk communication. The facilitation of information dissemination may result in the fast proliferation of false information and unfounded rumours, which can erode the confidence of the public in health authorities and initiatives (Roberts and Patel, 2016). Furthermore, the algorithmic structure of social media platforms may generate echo chambers, whereby users are only exposed to material that conforms to their own ideas and tastes (Brown and Smith, 2022). The integration of social media into health risk communication strategies must therefore be approached with caution. While platforms like Facebook and Instagram offer significant potential to enhance communication, their effectiveness depends on addressing challenges such as misinformation, ethical considerations, and the diverse perceptions and needs of target audiences. By understanding these dynamics, health risk communicators can leverage social media's strengths while mitigating its limitations, ultimately contributing to more informed and resilient communities.

1.3 Problem Statement

Social media platforms, like Facebook and Instagram, have become essential instruments for health risk communication, providing unmatched reach and immediacy in the distribution of health-related information. Nonetheless, their function in health communication is beset by difficulties. Although these platforms may democratize access to health information and encourage health-promoting behaviours, they also serve as substantial conduits for disinformation, eroding public faith in health authorities and jeopardizing public health programs. During the COVID-19 pandemic, platforms like as Facebook and Instagram played a crucial role in disseminating both factual information and pervasive disinformation, which fostered vaccination reluctance and skepticism towards scientific guidance (Vraga and Bode, 2017; Chou et al., 2018).

Furthermore, user views and attitudes towards health information on these platforms substantially affect its efficacy. Some people actively connect with and trust material from reputable sources, while others are skeptical owing to the widespread occurrence of false news and disinformation. The algorithms that filter material intensify these issues by favouring sensationalist or deceptive messages to enhance interaction, often compromising truth (Swire-Thompson and Lazer, 2020; Katz et al., 2021).

Notwithstanding these obstacles, social media offers prospects for enhancing health communication. These platforms provide tailored, context-relevant messaging that may address deficiencies in conventional communication approaches. Nonetheless, the risk of abuse, together with data privacy concerns and the need for efficient content control, continues to be a significant challenge for public health communicators (Betsch, 2017).

A lot of studies have highlighted that there is a need to understand the patterns of health communication on social media so that the effective strategies of sharing reliable health information and reducing the spread of false information can be devised (Moorhead et al., 2013;

Ahmad & Mustafa, 2020). It is also important to examine how Facebook, and Instagram impact the formation of public opinion on health risks and action (Lachlan et al., 2016; Porat et al., 2019). In this regard, the understanding of the effectiveness of the communication may lead to the development of appropriate treatments and communication strategies based on research which is reliable and will, therefore, enhance the efficiency of health risk communication in the digital era (Guidry et al., 2015; South well et al., 2019).

1.4 Purpose of the Study

The general objective of this study is to examine the impact of social media on the communication of health risks, with a specific emphasis on Facebook and Instagram. Specifically, the study sought to:

1.5 Objectives of the study

1. To assess the effectiveness of health risk communication on Facebook and Instagram platforms.
2. To investigate the user perceptions and attitudes towards health – related messages shared on Facebook and Instagram.
3. To identify the challenges and opportunities in using Facebook and Instagram for promoting accurate health information and mitigating the spread of misinformation.

1.6 Research Question

In order to achieve the above objectives, the study will be guided by the following research questions.

1. How effective is health risk communication on Facebook and Instagram platforms?
2. What are the user perceptions and attitudes towards health – related messages shared on Facebook and Instagram?
3. What are the challenges and opportunities in using Facebook and Instagram for promoting accurate health information and mitigating the spread of misinformation?

1.7 Scope of the Study

The research explores the role of social media, particularly Facebook and Instagram, in health risk communication. It evaluates their efficacy in distributing health-related information and shaping public health behaviours. The research also examines user opinions and attitudes about health messages sent on various platforms, taking into account aspects such as trust, engagement, and skepticism. Finally, it delineates the problems and possibilities these platforms have in disseminating correct health information, combating disinformation, and improving the trustworthiness of health communication in the digital age.

1.8 Significance of the study

The goal of all research is to fill in the gaps in our knowledge and contribute new information to what already exists (Okonja, 2016). This study will demonstrate the efficacy of social media in health risk communication, as well as the various ways in which it may be employed. The study would provide valuable insights to the general public, particularly young individuals, by highlighting the multifaceted uses of social media beyond socializing and entertainment. It would emphasize the importance of using social media platforms for accessing health information, connecting with healthcare professionals, establishing health support networks, and engaging in other activities that promote overall health and well-being. The results of this study would offer valuable insights for government health authorities to develop laws and regulations that would facilitate the integration of social media into health communication programmes in the country. The usage of social media for healthcare and communication purposes among health professionals (such as doctors and nurses) in Ghana is currently limited. This study aims to raise awareness among these professionals about the importance of incorporating social media as a means of communication with individuals and patients, in order to improve self-management following in-person consultations. Public health agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) anticipate that the findings will enhance

understanding of how social media may be used to raise awareness, educate the public, and encourage healthy habits among the population. This study would enhance the current body of knowledge in the field of using social media for health communication. Although study has been conducted on the relationship between social media and healthcare in certain regions, only a limited number of studies employ experimental research methods to investigate the connection between social media and health communication. This study would so enhance the existing understanding in this sector and provide a solid foundation for future studies.

1.9 Organization of the study

The study was divided into five chapters and is presented here:

Chapter One: Covered the introduction, providing the study's background and the problem statement. Study scope, Significance of the study, and study organization will be all discussed in the chapter as well. **Chapter Two:** In this section, the viewpoints and opinions of academics and professionals from the industry will be discussed. **Chapter Three:** The research methodology will be presented, with an emphasis on the research design. Additionally, the study's population and geographic region, sampling and the choice of sample size, data collection procedures, and data processing techniques will all be presented in this chapter.

Chapter Four: The data collected will be presented. Their findings will be then presented, analyzed and interpreted to draw up conclusions. **Chapter Five:** The study was summarized, conclusions will be drawn, and recommendations will be made.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the literature review of the study. The aim is to evaluate and examine contemporary concepts and theories pertinent to the subject. The chapter starts by outlining the theoretical framework, establishing a basis for comprehending the investigation. It subsequently investigates the use of social media in health risk communication, analyzing its effects, advantages, and constraints. The chapter presents an empirical overview of pertinent research and conclusions, culminating in a conceptual framework that synthesizes essential ideas to enhance the overall comprehension of the subject.

2.2 Conceptual Framework

2.2.1 Health Risk Communication

Health risk communication is an essential element of public health policies, aimed at providing information and empowering people and communities to make well-informed choices about their health. It encompasses the distribution of knowledge on possible health hazards, precautionary actions, and strategies to address health emergencies, with the primary objective of reducing damage and fostering wellness (Covello & Sandman, 2021). Efficient health risk communication necessitates the use of clear, transparent, and sensitive approaches that cater to the needs and worries of the intended recipients. Effective communication is especially important in public health emergencies, such as pandemics or natural disasters, since timely and correct information may greatly impact public behaviour and results (Veil, Buehner, & Palenchar, 2011). The health risk communication field has seen substantial changes with the emergence of digital media, including social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, TikTok, Instagram, and others.

These platforms have revolutionized the way information is shared and consumed, enabling quick distribution and interactive participation (Guidry et al., 2017). The impact of social media in health risk communication is diverse: it may enhance the reach of public health messaging, cultivate community solidarity, and provide immediate information during catastrophes (Lwin et al., 2021). Nevertheless, it also poses difficulties, such as the dissemination of false information and the risk of causing public alarm (Lachlan, Spence, & Seeger, 2020). Research has emphasized the potential benefits and dangers linked to using social media for health risk communication. A study conducted by Vosoughi, Roy, and Aral (2018) shown that false information propagates at a faster rate on social media platforms compared to accurate information, presenting a substantial obstacle for public health authorities. On the other hand, a study conducted by Korda and Itani (2013) highlighted the capacity of social media to rapidly reach extensive and varied audiences, thus establishing it as a potent instrument for promoting and educating about health. The interactive feature of social media allows public health organizations to directly connect with the public, promptly addressing concerns and rectifying misconceptions.

Within the research examining the influence of social media on health risk communication, platforms such as Facebook and Instagram have a significant effect in altering the public's understanding and reactions to health concerns. These platforms have emerged as the main channels of information for many persons, especially during health emergencies like the COVID-19 epidemic. Social media's high speed and extensive reach enable the broad and quick dissemination of public health messages. However, the uncontrolled nature of these platforms also facilitates the rapid spread of disinformation, which poses challenges to public health initiatives. In addition, social media platforms provide distinct possibilities for precise health risk communication, enabling public health organizations to customize messages for certain populations or locations. By specifically targeting distinct audience groups, this method may

improve the efficacy of health communication by addressing their individual issues and requirements. Nevertheless, the same characteristics that make social media efficient for communication also render it susceptible to manipulation and the dissemination of inaccurate information.

2.2.2 Social Media

Social media has had a significant impact on the communication and consumption of health information, particularly on platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. From the moment they were created, these platforms have completely changed the way people, healthcare organizations, and public health authorities share information and interact with the public. Statista (2023) reports that Facebook continues to be one of the most extensively used social media platforms worldwide, with a staggering 2.9 billion monthly active users. Twitter and Instagram have substantial influence in the realm of health communication due to their respective user bases of 450 million and 2.3 billion. According to Boyd and Ellison (2007), social media refers to online services that enable individuals to create a public or semi-public profile within a specific system. Users can also create a list of other users they are connected with and view and navigate through the connections made by others within the system. Social media is characterized by its interactive and networked aspect, which is especially important in the field of health risk communication. The capacity to quickly share and access information via social media may have substantial consequences.

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) classify social media into many categories, such as content communities, blogs, social networking sites, and collaborative projects. Within the field of healthcare, these techniques have been used to improve public involvement, provide crucial health information, and handle health emergencies. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are very successful because they enable instant communication, allow for the sharing of many types of material, and promote connections within communities (Korda

& Itani, 2013). These channels are now crucial in health risk communication, providing healthcare providers with the chance to reach larger audiences with timely and accurate information.

The widespread use of digital technology has greatly expanded individuals' access to many types of media, including health-related information shared on social media platforms. The Internet has become an essential and indispensable source of health information, especially in times of health emergencies like the COVID-19 epidemic. Social media platforms provide real-time communication and dissemination of information, enabling users to keep updated on health hazards and precautionary actions (Chou et al., 2020). The mobility of devices such as smartphones and tablets has enhanced this accessibility, enabling health information to be accessed at any time and in any location. Social media has facilitated equal access to health information, enabling individuals to actively search for and exchange knowledge on health hazards. Pew Research Centre (2021) found that a substantial percentage of internet users, including those who use social media, actively seek health information online.

These platforms are often used to get knowledge about health concerns, treatments, and preventative measures prior to seeking advice from healthcare experts. The significance of social media as a means of health risk communication is emphasized by this trend, since the provision of precise and dependable information may have a substantial influence on public health results.

Social media's interactive character has become it a potent instrument for connecting with various audiences, especially younger demographics who are more inclined to use these platforms for acquiring information. According to a study conducted by Wong et al. (2020), social media platforms such as Instagram and Twitter are widely used by young people to get health-related information. These platforms frequently serve as the main source of information on topics including mental health, sexual health, and drug use. This highlights the need for

health communicators to efficiently use digital platforms in order to connect with and captivate younger audiences. The notion of Web 2.0, as defined by O'Reilly (2005), highlights the interactive and cooperative aspects of social media, where users actively contribute and consume information. This attribute is especially significant in health risk communication, since user-generated information and peer interactions have the potential to shape public views of health risks and behaviours (Cheung & Lee, 2009). During the COVID-19 pandemic, social media platforms played a crucial role in spreading public health recommendations, combating false information, and supporting vaccination campaigns (Cuan-Baltazar et al., 2020). Although social media platforms vary in terms of their functionality, they include shared characteristics that make them well-suited for health risk communication. These include their capacity to promote engagement, flexibility, and cost-effectiveness. Moorhead et al. (2013) state that social media enables the quick and widespread distribution of knowledge, reaching large audiences at a little expense. In health risk communication, the timely and extensive transmission of information is vital since it may help reduce the effect of health emergencies.

2.2.3 Government Risk Communication

Government risk communication is the act of authorities transmitting information about health hazards to the public in order to increase awareness and ensure safety (Adebayo et al., 2017). One crucial duty of a functional government is to safeguard its inhabitants against health risks, such as pandemics (WHO, 2017). In order to carry out this need, governments use several platforms to provide information, education, and guidance to the people on how to protect themselves from possible health hazards (WHO, 2020a). The COVID-19 pandemic has emphasized the need for immediate and efficient communication tactics, prompting governments to use various approaches to engage with the public and promote behavioural modifications (Wong & Jensen, 2020).

Risk communication employs several media channels, such as print, television, and increasingly, internet platforms. Social media has emerged as an essential instrument for governments to efficiently reach vast audiences at the same time, therefore serving as a beneficial platform for disseminating health hazards (Zhang, Li, & Chen, 2020). Authorities engage in effective risk communication via a systematic approach that involves recognizing risks and establishing explicit objectives, such as promoting behavioural modifications to reduce the transmission of illnesses (Winterfeldt, Covello, & Slovic, 2020). The subsequent stage entails assessing the potential hazards and formulating communications that adeptly communicate the essential information to the general population. Ensuring the prompt and precise distribution of this information is vital to guarantee that the public gets accurate advice when it is most necessary. The success of government risk communication relies heavily on its timeliness. Saleh (2016) highlights the inevitability of crises, underscoring the need of risk communication as a crucial element in effectively handling such circumstances. Prior to a catastrophe, risk communication functions as a kind of notification, providing guidance to persons who may be at risk on how to implement preventive measures in order to reduce possible damage (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2019). Following a catastrophe, the offered knowledge assists those impacted in properly managing and maximizing their available resources. Risk communication has the ability to develop and progress alongside the public's comprehension before to a catastrophe, and adjust accordingly after the occurrence (Brooke, Seate, Iles, & Herovic, 2020).

Within the realm of social media, sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have revolutionized the manner in which governments convey information about potential dangers to the general population. Tsuei (2020) proposes that organizations should assess their resources and allocate suitable risk mitigation strategies that align with their capabilities. Similarly, while using social media for health risk communication, governments must take into

account their internal capabilities, such as digital proficiency and the necessary resources to efficiently handle and distribute information. The efficacy of these platforms relies on pragmatic strategizing, bolstered by strong leadership to guarantee broad acceptance and active participation across all levels. Social media enables immediate and widespread connection, making it a formidable tool for risk communication. However, the effectiveness of such communication depends on the accuracy of the information and its ability to encourage stakeholders, including the public, to react efficiently with their available resources.

2.2.4 Social Media and Health Communication

Social media has emerged as an essential instrument for health organizations, functioning as a platform to amplify conventional media and as a new method to interact with specific target audiences. Ventola (2014) states that health organizations have progressively included social media into their communication strategies, facilitating the development of highly credible materials that bolster trust and strengthen connections between organizations and their audiences. Social media facilitates the collaborative and interactive process of co-creating material, where users may engage in activities such as rating, ranking, and commenting on health messaging.

Research has emphasized the significance of social media in health communication, namely for spreading health promotion material and enabling self-monitoring using mobile devices. This strategy has broadened the scope of public health messaging to persons who may lack access to conventional media, guaranteeing that health communication gets integrated into daily conversations (Coughlin et al., 2017). Social media platforms are very efficient in captivating younger audiences, who are progressively shifting away from conventional transmission methods in favour of digital platforms (Korda & Itani, 2018). The advancement of technology has greatly altered the field of health communication. Moorhead et al. (2013) found that patients are no longer passive recipients of health information. Instead, they actively

engage in generating and disseminating material using social media and Web 2.0 platforms. Social media offers a venue for addressing health matters outside traditional medical environments, allowing patients and carers to exchange their experiences, information, and support.

This setting promotes the construction of virtual support communities, where persons with comparable health issues may engage, find solace, and share vital knowledge (Tennant et al., 2015). Healthcare practitioners have also embraced social media for a range of goals, such as disseminating information, advocating for healthy behaviours, and interacting with the public. These platforms enable the creation of professional networks, the spread of health information, and the improvement of health outcomes (Graffigna et al., 2018). Academic institutions are placing more emphasis on the significance of social media literacy among upcoming healthcare professionals, acknowledging its role in efficiently disseminating information to patients and the wider community (Ventola, 2014).

Communication theory research has adapted to include the interactive characteristics of social media. In contrast to classic linear models of communication, which emphasize the one-way transmission of information from the sender to the receiver, contemporary methods acknowledge the significance of user interaction and the creation of meaning in the communication process (Ariel & Avidar, 2015). In the field of health communication, social media necessitates users to actively interact with material, such as by expressing approval, distributing, or generating postings. This, in turn, impacts the reception and interpretation of health messages (Laranjo et al., 2015).

Although social media is widely used for health communication, there is a lack of study on how successful it is in stimulating meaningful discussions with audiences. The studies conducted by Heldman et al. (2013) and Neiger et al. (2013) emphasize the need for more research on the impact of social media on public health communication. The rising importance

of social media as a communication medium is highlighted by organizations like the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO) who are increasingly using it. The capacity of social media to provide instantaneous response and monitor discussions presents tremendous prospects for health communication planners. These platforms assist organizations in comprehending the requirements and apprehensions of their target audience, recognizing areas where information is lacking, and customizing their messaging appropriately (Eriksson-Backa et al., 2018). The participatory character of social media facilitates credibility and trust by enabling bi-directional contact between health organizations and the public (Korda & Itani, 2018).

The incorporation of social media into conventional communication channels may augment the efficacy of health initiatives. The effectiveness of strategies used in conventional media may be enhanced by adapting them for social media platforms, hence expanding their reach and influence (Korda & Itani, 2018). Health communicators may enhance their communication tactics by actively monitoring online discussions, allowing them to identify and prioritize subjects that are most relevant and build tailored approaches. It is important for communicators to maintain privacy and adhere to ethical issues when engaging in this practice (Heldman & Weaver, 2013).

2.2.5 The Role of Social Media in Health Risk Communication

Health risk communication seeks to enhance public awareness of possible hazards and direct people towards modifying their behaviour to reduce these risks (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2019). During the COVID-19 pandemic, health risk communication primarily aimed to educate the public about preventative measures to mitigate the transmission of the virus. The motivation for this communication is typically rooted in the fear that the general population may not react appropriately to a crisis without receiving appropriate instructions (Elissa & Greenhawt, 2020). Social media platforms such as Facebook,

Twitter, and Instagram have become crucial instruments in facilitating the quick spread of health information to a wide audience. The basis of risk communication on these platforms is rooted on the recognition that the general people may lack the necessary skills to effectively manage crises on their own. Consequently, health communicators need to provide specific information that assists persons in properly managing the issue.

Saleh (2016) asserts that in order for risk communication to be efficacious, it must be precise and customized to cater to the requirements of the target audience. This strategy guarantees that the general people will get the essential direction instead of presuming that they will handle a crisis independently. The World Health Organization (WHO) in 2017 said that effective communication during emergencies such as COVID-19 should start with fundamental information and gradually include more intricate subjects. This approach operates on the assumption that the general public may possess limited beginning knowledge, hence emphasizing the need of providing them with thorough and all-encompassing information. The increasing availability of risk information on social media enables the public to react more effectively in accordance with the intended results (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2019).

2.2.6 Effectiveness of Health Risk Communication on Facebook and Instagram

Effective communication of health risks is essential for effectively handling public health emergencies, particularly in the digital era when social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram play a significant role. These platforms provide exceptional chances for rapidly spreading information and interacting with a wide range of people. Nevertheless, the impact of health risk communication on these platforms differs based on several aspects, such as the reliability of the source, the coherence of the message, and the amount of involvement from the audience. During the COVID-19 pandemic, social media played a crucial role in

spreading information on preventive measures, vaccine initiatives, and up-to-date data on infection rates.

A study conducted by Gesser-Edelsburg and Shir-Raz (2021) highlights the efficacy of platforms such as Facebook and Twitter in rapidly reaching a wide range of people and facilitating direct engagement between public health authorities and the public. Nevertheless, the research acknowledges that the efficacy of these contacts was sometimes impeded by the fast dissemination of false information, which often vied with reliable information. The efficacy of health risk messaging greatly depends on the design and distribution methods used. Research has shown that communications that are unambiguous, succinct, and visually captivating have a tendency to be more impactful. Vos and Buckner (2020) found that health messages on Instagram that include infographics, videos, and interactive material had a substantial impact on user engagement and understanding.

It is especially crucial for conveying intricate health hazards, since conventional text-based warnings may be less impactful. Furthermore, the time and frequency of postings are essential factors in health risk communication. According to research conducted by Alonzo and Popescu (2022), regular and timely updates on platforms such as Twitter (X) during public health crises may improve public comprehension and adherence to suggested health practices. Nevertheless, the research also indicates that repeated posting without providing new information might result in message fatigue, a state in which consumers become desensitized to the content, hence diminishing the overall efficiency of the communication.

Notable research conducted by Moorhead et al. (2022) highlights the effectiveness of social media in the treatment of chronic diseases. Platforms such as Facebook have shown to be valuable in creating supportive networks and sharing information on techniques for illness management. The research emphasizes that patient networks on social media serve as a

valuable platform for both exchanging experiences and encouraging compliance with treatment regimens.

The interactive element of social media facilitates uninterrupted involvement, which is especially crucial for those with chronic illnesses who need continual assistance and knowledge. In recent research conducted by Stellefson et al. (2021), the efficacy of health campaigns on social media platforms was investigated. The study found that focused advertisements on Twitter (X) and Instagram have shown to be helpful in encouraging behaviours such as smoking cessation and healthy eating. The research discovered that the capacity of these platforms to customize messages for certain demographic groups greatly improves the efficiency of health campaigns, as users are more inclined to interact with material that is relevant to their requirements and preferences. Trust and trustworthiness play a significant role in health risk communication on social media. Research conducted by Song et al. (2023) examined the influence of source trustworthiness on the efficacy of health messages sent via social media. According to the research, communications originating from verified sources, such as government health organizations and reputable medical specialists, were more likely to be believed and followed by users.

This discovery is in agreement with previous study conducted by Korda and Itani (2019), which highlighted the significance of establishing trust via constant and honest communication, especially in times of health crisis. The research conducted by Waggoner et al. (2021) emphasizes the significance of actively tackling disinformation on social media platforms, in addition to fostering trust. Research indicates that social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook have included fact-checking mechanisms and misinformation alerts, which may effectively reduce the dissemination of inaccurate information and bolster the reliability of health-related communications. Nevertheless, the research also highlights the need of routinely and openly using these qualities in order to preserve public confidence.

Research by Grab Infotech indicated that information that elicits emotions like fear, hope, or empathy is more prone to being shared and maintained on social media platforms (Ekman, 1992). This discovery emphasizes the significance of emotional involvement in fostering user interaction and the spread of knowledge. Emotionally evocative material may engage users and encourage sharing, so enhancing the message's reach and influence. Comprehending these dynamics may enhance the optimization of health risk communication tactics on social media. This is especially impactful in programs that seek to increase awareness about significant health hazards, such as cancer screenings or vaccination initiatives. The research proposes that the integration of emotional appeals with factual information might provide a more powerful and convincing health message. Integrating health messaging across different platforms has been shown to improve the efficacy of health risk communication. In a study conducted by Heldman et al. (2022), the researchers investigated the impact of synchronized health messaging on Facebook and Instagram. The study aimed to determine how this coordinated approach may enhance communication strategies by providing a complete and more reinforced message. The study revealed that individuals who come across consistent health messages across many platforms are more inclined to have faith in the information and take appropriate measures, since the recurrence reinforces the significance of the message.

2.2.7 User Perceptions and Attitudes Towards Health-Related Messages Shared on Facebook and Instagram

Social media has facilitated extensive global networks that may quickly convey information due to increased contact. Social media can be utilized to improve patient-doctor communication, increase awareness, enhance patient motivation, provide easily accessible accurate information, promptly address health issues, facilitate collaborative problem-solving and rephrasing of health enquiries, engage a wider community, and ultimately achieve superior outcomes within healthcare systems (George et al., 2023). Social media users have the ability

to increase the level of interactions with posts, thus enhancing the accessibility, personalization, and widespread dissemination of health information. Users play a role in producing and spreading health information by creating and sharing medical content. For example, blogs and micro-blogs offer a platform for individuals to conveniently access tailored resources that specifically address their health conditions (Adams, 2021; Eysenbach, 2022).

Social media enhances the accessibility of health information to populations that have limited access to traditional media, such as young people, ethnic minorities, and lower socio-economic groups. These platforms have the capability to deliver content in multiple formats, beyond written text, and can customize health information to cater to audiences with disabilities. Audio messages can serve as a means of communication for individuals with visual impairments, while videos can enhance or substitute written text in situations where literacy levels are limited (Adams, 2021; Lariscy et al., 2020). Most social media platforms facilitate the exchange of ideas among users, enabling patients to engage in conversations with each other and communicate with healthcare professionals. This interaction enables participation in health discussions, the sharing of health information, and advice on health matters such as treatment and medication options.

Therefore, when social media is utilized to communicate health information, it can provide significant peer, social, and psychological assistance to patients and the general public. These platforms enable peer discussions in ways that traditional websites and health communication methods cannot accommodate (Eysenbach, 2022; Farmer et al., 2021). Health communication has increasingly utilized social media platforms to promote health due to the rapid changes in the communication landscape (Maibach, 2020). This shift is attributed to factors such as the opportunities social media offers in reaching larger audiences, convergence of media, and the decline in audiences for traditional media (Lefebvre, 2020). The convergence of social media

channels and the enhancement of targeted communication have also made social media the preferred medium in commercial and health communication (Mangold & Faulds, 2021).

As noted, social media platforms present numerous opportunities, primarily through their intrinsic ability to enhance engagement and participation with users, providing customized and accessible information to diverse audiences at any time (Neuhauser & Kreps, 2019). Several authors have highlighted the cost-effectiveness of social media, which can reach broad audiences compared to the high costs associated with traditional media marketing (Frick, 2019; Neuhauser & Kreps, 2019). Research highlights that users are more inclined to trust and interact with health-related messages that originate from reputable sources. Zhang and Leung (2022) discovered that content shared by verified health organizations or medical professionals on Facebook and Instagram receives higher engagement and sharing rates compared to messages from less credible sources. This aligns with the findings of Smith et al. (2023), who emphasized that health communication from trusted sources significantly improves user trust and message acceptance.

Smith et al. (2023) found that users' trust in health information was directly correlated with the credibility of the source, reinforcing the critical role of authoritative endorsements in social media health communication. In addition to credibility, the relevance of the content to users' personal experiences enhances its impact. According to Patel and Mikhail (2023), users are more receptive to health messages that are personalized and address their specific health concerns. This study highlights that personalized content not only increases user engagement but also improves the perceived relevance of the information, leading to more positive attitudes and greater likelihood of behavioral change.

Similarly, a study by Garcia and Johnson (2022) found that health messages tailored to the individual's demographics and health status are more effective in fostering engagement and adherence to health recommendations. The interactive features of social media platforms also

play a crucial role in shaping user attitudes. Kaye and Johnson (2021) observed that platforms like Twitter (X) facilitate real-time interactions, allowing users to participate in discussions, seek clarification, and express their opinions. This interactivity fosters a sense of community and trust, which can lead to more favorable attitudes towards the health messages shared. Conversely, Lin and Song (2022) pointed out that while interactivity can build trust, it can also facilitate the spread of misinformation, which may undermine the credibility of accurate health messages. The balance between participation and the danger of misinformation remains a fundamental concern in health communication on social media.

The visual attractiveness of health messaging on sites such as Instagram also greatly impacts user attitudes. Riet and Kessler (2021) discovered that visually appealing information, including pictures and videos, catches users' attention more successfully than text-based messaging. This is reinforced by study by Chen and Kim (2023), who discovered that high-quality images not only boost the chance of message recall but also enhance user perceptions of the message's legitimacy and impact. The efficacy of visual material is especially crucial in health communication, where the objective is not just to educate but also to encourage consumers to adopt good habits. Additionally, the emotional resonance of health messaging might further affect user views. Park and Lee (2022) discovered that health messages that inspire strong emotional reactions, such as empathy or worry, are more successful in engaging users and inspiring behavioral changes. This is corroborated by Nguyen et al. (2023), who stated that emotional appeals may make health messages more relevant and appealing, leading to better engagement and favourable attitudes towards the material.

Despite these benefits, the abundance of disinformation on social media remains a big concern. Lin and Song (2022) emphasized that the quick transmission of incorrect information might overwhelm legitimate health messages, affecting attempts to preserve user confidence and guarantee effective communication. Addressing this problem via thorough fact-checking and

clear communication is vital for reducing the effect of disinformation. Cross-platform integration of health messaging may also boost their efficacy. Smith and Jones (2023) discovered that a coordinated strategy across Facebook, Twitter (X), and Instagram may magnify the reach and effect of health messaging. Consistent message across numerous channels helps reinforce the content and boosts its exposure to a larger audience.

2.2.8 The Challenges and Opportunities in Using Facebook and Instagram for Promoting Accurate Health Information

Social media is a popular method for obtaining health information because it allows users to remain hidden and anonymous, which is especially appealing to those who are less inclined to communicate in person and those who want to escape social stigma (Berg, 2011). Nevertheless, the protection of personal privacy and confidentiality is of utmost importance while using social media platforms, particularly in relation to health-related matters. Once a user provides personal information, uploads a picture, or video on the Internet, they relinquish control over its dissemination. Privacy and confidentiality concerns occur when users provide excessive information that might potentially jeopardize public security (Das and Sahoo, 2011). Henry-Reid et al. (2010) found that young people use social media due to the ability to maintain anonymity. The virtual environment allows for easier disclosure of personal information, facilitates connectivity from the comfort of one's home, and enhances accessibility.

Nevertheless, within the realm of social networking, a subtle distinction exists between one's public and private existence. In addition, the majority of young people are not conscientious about adjusting their privacy settings on social networking sites. The majority of users use the default settings, which facilitates the straightforward retrieval of identifying information such as complete names, geographical location, and medical data. According to Das and Sahoo (2011), social networking platforms provide a substantial risk to personal privacy. One further obstacle that exists with social media platforms is the inherent absence of reliability

in information sources. Credibility refers to the degree of trustworthiness or authenticity of the source. Certain persons deliberately disseminate inaccurate information either for amusement or to further their own objectives. Verifying the identities of those who submit content while using privacy measures is a challenging task, which therefore enhances the level of anonymity linked to social media or those who provide information for personal gain.

Furthermore, due to the emergence of distinct vocabulary, slang, and abbreviations among social media users, there is a need to establish or embrace a conventional semantic-based approach for analyzing and comprehending the information. Hence, the credibility of some health-related social media messages is questionable (Larkin, 2014).

The abundance of material available on these platforms and the potential for inaccuracies in health information published on social media sites provide substantial difficulties in verifying the authenticity of such information (Adams, 2010). In addition, social media platforms include a significant portion of the difficulties associated with enormous amounts of data that is rapidly and diversely generated. Social media is a cacophonous platform that contains a plethora of low-quality content (Larkin, 2014; Adams, 2010). Another difficulty arises from the presence of inaccuracies in health information disseminated on social media. Social media presents a nearly equal amount of both reliable and unreliable information. Thus, while health knowledge might be helpful, it can also be detrimental. The effectiveness of providing information via social media relies on the users' comprehension and use of the content in a responsible manner. The reliability of information is fundamentally connected to its source (Berg, 2011). Electronic aggression encompasses many types of harassment and bullying that take place on the internet, namely via means such as emails, chat rooms, instant messaging, blogs, and text messaging. Young individuals have the ability to use electronic media as a means to humiliate, harass, or intimidate their peers. The reliability and quality of information on social media are often questioned in many publications, particularly when it comes to health communication material

that is created and altered without sufficient verification by health specialists (Moorhead et al., 2013). This might provide a potential danger since comments that are inaccurate, deceptive, and nasty can be seen by other social media users and alter the course of a debate in an unintended direction, ultimately leading to the misguidance of the audience (Anderson et al., 2013).

Despite the many advantages and potential for health communication, social media also poses problems in terms of internet access, expertise, and learning attitudes. As of 2015, the data shows that internet penetration in Kenya was less than 70 percent (Wangari, 2015). This means that the remaining 30 percent of the population cannot take advantage of programs that use social media for health communication. Furthermore, the expense of technological devices such as cellphones is identified as an additional obstacle that hampers the ability to use social media platforms (Seybert, 2011). Pennycook and Rand (2021) found that misinformation about health hazards and remedies had a higher rate of dissemination on social media platforms compared to factual information. This situation is worsened by algorithms that prioritize material based on interaction rather than veracity, resulting in the amplification of erroneous or inaccurate information. Similarly, research conducted by Roozenbeek et al. (2021) discovered that misinformation tends to endure even after efforts to rectify it, since people may become more deeply rooted in their ideas. These results emphasize the need of developing effective techniques to detect and combat disinformation, such as making algorithmic modifications and establishing strong fact-checking campaigns.

Health organizations and policymakers in Ghana increasingly using Facebook and Instagram to provide accurate health information, capitalizing on the extensive reach and accessibility of these platforms. The Digital 2023 Ghana Report indicates that more than 10 million Ghanaians engage actively on social media, with Facebook and Instagram ranking as the most used platforms. This large user base enables health organizations to swiftly provide information to

a wide demography, including both urban and rural inhabitants. The capacity to engage a vast audience has made these platforms indispensable in health communication initiatives, facilitating the closure of the information gap across various areas and socioeconomic demographics (Datareportal, 2023). The use of diverse multimedia tools, including videos, infographics, and interactive postings on Facebook and Instagram, augments engagement and comprehension of health messaging. Studies indicate that interactive material, including live Q&A sessions given by health professionals, enhances user engagement and facilitates knowledge retention, making health information more accessible and comprehensible (Amankwaa & Acheampong, 2022). Research demonstrates that individuals are more inclined to believe and respond to health information they interact with and see as trustworthy (Mensah et al., 2021).

A notable benefit of using social media for health promotion is its cost-efficiency. Social media marketing enables health organizations and NGOs in Ghana to engage a broad audience while avoiding the substantial expenses linked to conventional media outlets such as radio, television, and print. This factor is particularly advantageous for smaller health-oriented non-profits that may not possess the financial resources for significant outreach via traditional media (Owusu-Ansah & Osei, 2022). In addition to outreach, social media platforms provide community-building and peer support. Health-focused groups and pages provide environments for users to share experiences, exchange information, and provide mutual support. Such communities may be powerful and advantageous, especially for persons coping with chronic diseases or seeking mental health help, cultivating a feeling of belonging and mutual understanding (Acheampong & Kofi, 2021).

Nonetheless, using Facebook and Instagram for health promotion has many problems. A significant concern is the widespread occurrence of misinformation and deception. The fast dissemination of inaccurate or deceptive health information on social media might result in

public health emergencies. This was shown during the COVID-19 pandemic when disinformation about the virus and vaccines proliferated, resulting in uncertainty and vaccine reluctance in Ghana (Adjei & Mensah, 2021). Social media algorithms favour material that elicits significant interaction, often including sensationalized or inaccurate health information. This prioritization hinders the visibility and effective reach of correct and trustworthy material, hence affecting health promotion initiatives (Boateng et al., 2021).

A notable difficulty is the absence of regulation and monitoring. Although platforms such as Facebook and Instagram have implemented mechanisms to identify fraudulent or misleading material, these initiatives often prove ineffective, especially with local languages and dialects that automated content verification may inadequately comprehend or address (Nyarko et al., 2023). The challenge of validating sources and ensuring the credibility of health material is intensified when local organizations or people disseminate information without professional supervision, owing to constraints in resources or knowledge (Akosah & Antwi, 2022). The digital gap is a significant concern, since not all Ghanaians possess equitable access to the internet or the requisite gadgets to participate in these social media sites. The disparity in access is especially evident in rural regions, where dependable internet infrastructure is sometimes insufficient, and many persons lack devices that can enable social media (Kwaku et al., 2021). Thus, the efficacy and influence of health promotion initiatives may be constrained by these accessibility challenges.

Ultimately, privacy issues and data security provide obstacles to health promotion initiatives on social media. Individuals may be reluctant to interact with health-related information due to concerns over the security of their personal data. This problem is especially pertinent for health matters that are stigmatized, such as HIV/AIDS or mental health disorders. Individuals may refrain from engaging in conversations or obtaining health information on these subjects owing to concerns about disclosing personal information or encountering social stigma (Appiah &

Abubakar, 2022). This anxiety may hinder the efficacy of social media in disseminating accurate and complete health information, underscoring the need for enhanced focus on user privacy and data security to foster participation.

Although there are obstacles, social media platforms also provide substantial prospects for disseminating precise health information. For example, health campaigns on Facebook and Instagram may use demographic data to provide personalized messaging, resulting in increased engagement and efficacy. Nguyen and Park (2022) discovered that customized health messages were especially successful in reaching marginalized communities and encouraging the adoption of healthy behaviours. This method enables health communicators to cater to the unique requirements of their audience and improve the relevancy of their message. Using influencers and community leaders is a potentially effective method for spreading health information. Lupton (2022) highlights the influential role of trustworthy and relevant influencers in effectively disseminating correct health information and combating disinformation. This is particularly pertinent on sites such as Instagram, where influencers possess significant reach and sway.

Nevertheless, Lupton emphasizes the need of ensuring that influencers possess accurate knowledge and are in agreement with public health objectives in order to avoid the unintentional dissemination of misinformation. Furthermore, the visual and interactive characteristics of social media provide further possibilities for efficient health communication. Moffitt and Taha (2021) found that platforms like Instagram facilitate the use of captivating visual material, such as infographics and videos, which may augment users' comprehension and recall of health information. The aesthetic appeal is especially crucial for intricate health subjects, since conventional text-based information could be less impactful.

Boulianne's (2022) research emphasizes the significance of interactive functionalities on platforms such as Twitter (X). These capabilities enable users to actively engage in

conversations, pose enquiries, and provide comments, therefore cultivating a community that is more involved and knowledgeable. Nevertheless, it is crucial to tackle the issue of misinformation. A study conducted by Cinelli et al. (2021) indicates that the use of automated techniques and artificial intelligence in identifying and alerting erroneous information may effectively reduce the dissemination of disinformation. These technologies have the capability to examine trends and identify irregularities in the distribution of material, promptly notifying consumers of possible disinformation. Moreover, the cooperation of social media platforms, public health organizations, and fact-checkers may augment the reliability and precision of health information. Zarocostas (2020) emphasizes the significance of these partnerships in guaranteeing that health communication endeavours are grounded in precise and evidence-based information.

2.2.9 Conceptual Framework

The study's conceptual framework delineates the fundamental elements and connections among the factors associated with health risk communication on social media platforms. The framework examines the impact of health risk communication on Facebook and Instagram. The success of this communication is considered the dependent variable, which is impacted by many independent factors such as the quality of content, methods of delivery, and engagement techniques used on these platforms. Furthermore, the way users perceive and feel about health-related messaging on these platforms acts as intermediate factors that impact the overall success of communication initiatives. Additionally, the framework takes into account the challenges and possibilities associated with using these platforms to endorse precise health information and reduce the dissemination of false information. These challenges and possibilities serve as factors that influence the link between health communication activities and their efficacy.

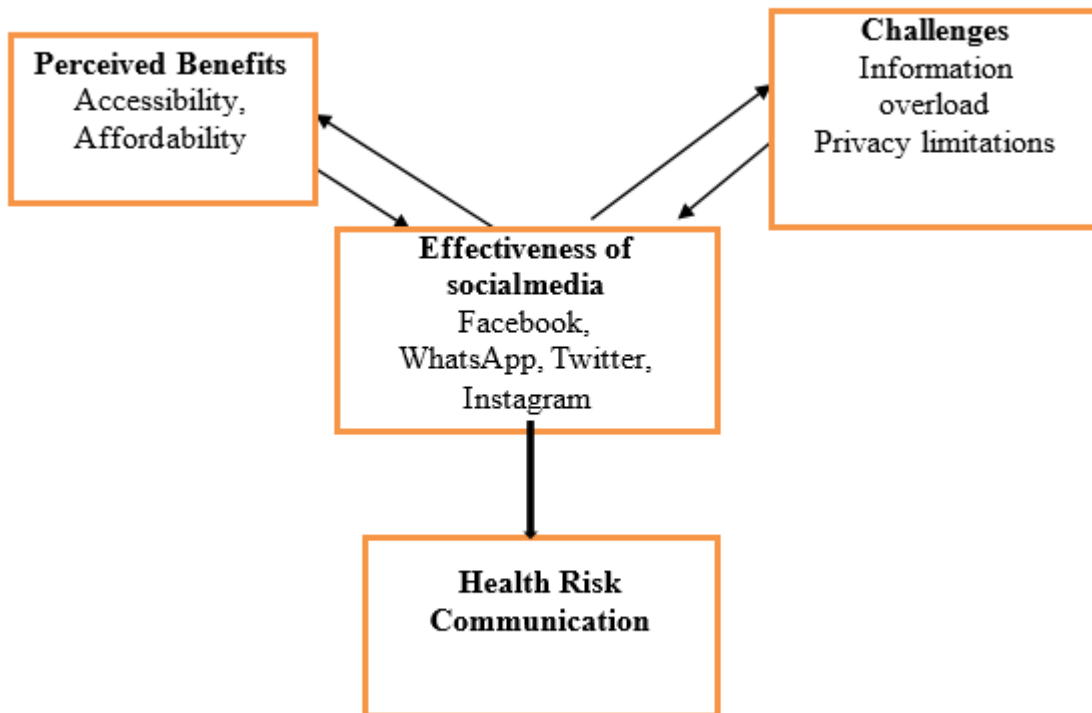


Figure 2.1: Conceptual Framework: Researchers Construct (2024)

2.3 Theoretical Framework

For the intent of this research, two primary underlying theories were accepted and investigated. Two ideas that are included in this discussion are the Trust Determination Theory and the Media Richness Theory.

2.3.1 Trust Determination Theory

The Trust Determination Theory of Risk Communication has been recognized as a fundamental theoretical foundation in this research. The theory, which was first proposed by Vincent T. Covello in 1996, posits that risk communication is most successful when the information presented is viewed as both verifiable and trustworthy by the intended audience. Confidence is a crucial factor in this process, since the theory suggests that the degree to which receivers find risk communication acceptable is greatly affected by the amount of confidence they have in the information and its sources (Peters, Covello, & McCallum, 1996). Lack of trust may hinder

the effectiveness of risk communication, leading to unsuccessful results. As per the principles of this model, trust is complex and encompasses the way others perceive the communicator's knowledge, truthfulness, and willingness to provide information (Peters & Covello, 2015). In order to effectively communicate risks, it is crucial that the information provided is seen as credible and the communicators are viewed as trustworthy and dedicated. The theory also highlights the significance of third-party endorsements in risk communication, indicating that credibility is strengthened when other organizations affirm the information being given (Hendricks, 2021). Risk communication is most successful in this setting when it is seen as an accurate representation of the situation from sources that are independent and reputable. Moreover, the idea suggests that trust is not instantaneous but rather develops gradually over a period of time (Wong & Jensen, 2020). Initially, the public may exhibit skepticism about risk communication initiatives, but with time, they may develop confidence in the information, which may result in changes in their behaviour. The approach of gradually creating trust has been extensively embraced in the field of risk communication owing to its practical consequences (Hendricks, 2021).

Utilizing specialists in risk communication is often more efficacious in establishing public confidence than depending on political officials (Maxim et al., 2021). According to this idea, the primary objective of risk communication is to establish trust and credibility, which are essential for effectively sharing risk information (Neff, 2021). During times of high stress, like as the COVID-19 pandemic, individuals are more inclined to place their faith in risk communicators if they perceive these communicators to really prioritize their well-being, even before evaluating the actual risk message being sent (Porat et al., 2020). The theory emphasizes the significance of third-party endorsements that augment credibility (Hendricks, 2021) and posits that trust-building is often more effective when messages are conveyed by professionals rather than political individuals (Maxim et al., 2021). In high-stress scenarios, like as the

COVID-19 pandemic, public confidence is enhanced when communicators exhibit genuine concern for public welfare, even prior to addressing particular danger factors (Porat et al., 2020).

This study, which examines the influence of social media on health risk communication, relies heavily on the theory. The public's perception of information disseminated on platforms such as Facebook and Instagram are considerably affected by its credibility (Peters, Covello, & McCallum, 1996). This research will assess the impact of trust on the efficacy of social media health risk communication and its effect on public behaviour and compliance with health standards during health crises.

2.3.2 Media Richness Theory

The Media Richness Theory (MRT) states that the main objective of communication is to clarify ambiguity and minimize uncertainty by using the most efficient communication medium at hand (Daft and Lengel, 1986). Within the realm of social media and health risk communication, this theory emphasizes the varying levels of richness among different platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Richness is defined by a platform's ability to convey multiple verbal and nonverbal signals, facilitate immediate feedback, utilize natural language, and offer a personal focus (Kock, 2020). Social media platforms vary greatly in their capacity to transmit and handle information, as well as their ability to facilitate prompt feedback, support multiple cues (such as visual content, emojis, and body language), accommodate various data types (such as text, audio, and video), and enable personalization (Schlosser, 2021).

MRT defines a platform as "richer" when it fulfils several requirements, including the ability to respond immediately, accept different cues, handle various data types, and allow for personalization (Dennis, Fuller, & Valacich, 2021). The medium's richness is a critical factor in determining how the audience interprets the content in health risk communication. For

instance, a health advisory sent via a live video on Facebook, which enables immediate responses and showcases nonverbal information such as facial expressions and body language, is deemed more comprehensive than a basic text message on Twitter. The use of a more sophisticated medium is more inclined to successfully communicate the immediacy and gravity of the message, thereby impacting the audience's reaction (Bonsón, Royo, & Ratkai, 2022). Social media platforms are graded according to their capacity to manage ambiguity or equivocality, which determines their level of richness. Instagram is believed to be more enriched than text-based networks such as Twitter due to its significant visual component and the ability to get quick response via likes, comments, and direct messaging (Lim & Childs, 2021).

The success of a medium in decreasing uncertainty in health risk communication is determined by its capacity to express personal attention, provide quick feedback, accommodate various signals, and use a range of languages (such as text, pictures, and audio). The application of MRT to social media is influenced by the level of richness of the platform, which in turn impacts subjective aspects such as interpretations, comments, and perceptions on health hazards. An instance of this would be a public health initiative focused on the hazards of smoking, which might use Instagram's visual narrative to effectively communicate the emotional consequences of smoking-related illnesses. This could be achieved by using solemn imagery, evocative captions, and encouraging comments to strengthen the intended message (Kim & Lee, 2020). When it comes to uncertainty and equivocality, leaner media platforms such as Twitter are ideal for spreading clear and factual information, which helps to reduce uncertainty. On the other hand, richer media platforms like Facebook Live can be more effective in addressing intricate health issues that demand a nuanced comprehension, thereby reducing equivocality (Gong, Rieger, & Tegge, 2020).

Based on the Medium Richness Theory (MRT), health communicators are inclined to choose a medium that corresponds to the level of uncertainty in the message and the level of detail provided by the platform. Nevertheless, other considerations, such as the preferences of the target audience and the available resources, might also impact this decision (Rains & Wright, 2021). For example, an organization's established norms may prioritize one platform above another, regardless of the message's needs for depth and complexity (Kelleher, 2020). Social presence, which refers to the extent to which a medium enables communicator to feel psychologically attached, is also a factor in selecting the suitable platform for health risk communication. Tasks that involve significant social interaction, such as addressing vaccine hesitancy, may be more effectively accomplished via more advanced media platforms like Facebook, which allows for more interactive and personalized communication (Burkhardt & Jones, 2022). On the other hand, regular health updates might be efficiently handled via more concise platforms such as Twitter.

The Social Influence Model, which is associated with MRT (Media Richness Theory), posits that the perceived level of richness of a medium is influenced by social norms and the particular environment in which the medium is used (Treem & Leonardi, 2021). The view of how media is used in health risk communication might differ across organizations and public health initiatives. For instance, a public health organization may see Instagram as a more visually appealing and engaging platform, leading them to prioritize it for advertising aimed at younger audiences (Duan, Xie, & Liu, 2021). Ultimately, the personal aspect of the message might also impact the selection of the media. Using richer media, which enables more intimate contact, might be used for conveying sensitive health messages in order to establish a stronger bond with the audience. Conversely, more streamlined forms of media might be used to disseminate information that is less personal or more universal, where the promptness of response and customization is of lesser importance (McDonald, Khodyakov, & Weiss, 2022). In the context

of advancing public health communication, particularly in the age of digital and global communication, organizations need to consistently adjust their media strategies. This involves using a combination of rich and lean media to successfully engage and persuade their varied audiences.

2.4 Empirical Review

Lately, health communication professionals have been using social media more and more to spread information about health risks. They take use of the wide audience and interactive features of platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Bhargava (2021) observed substantial disparities in the use and efficacy of various social media platforms in the realm of health communication. These variations are shaped by the practitioners' specific fields of expertise, their level of expertise, their knowledge of social media, and the organizational contexts in which they work. Health communication experts often choose using Facebook and Instagram, since these platforms are easily accessible and have a large number of users, as shown in the research. The next part will concentrate on the viewpoints of practitioners on social media and its impact on health risk communication.

2.4.1 The effectiveness of health risk communication

Multiple research projects have investigated the efficacy of Facebook and Instagram in spreading health risk messages. A study conducted by Lwin et al. (2021) analyzed the efficacy of Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram in distributing health risk information amongst the COVID-19 epidemic. The analysis revealed that while all three platforms were successful in targeting various groups of the public, there were significant variations in their influence. Instagram proved to be very effective in captivating younger demographics via its use of visual material, but Twitter excelled in delivering timely information and fostering public discussions. Facebook, however, was shown to be more efficient in fostering enduring user involvement, especially via content created by community participation.

In a study conducted by Guidry et al. (2021), the researchers examined how health messages were shared during the Zika virus epidemic. The study revealed that Twitter (X) was more efficient in rapidly sharing up-to-date information and encouraging users to participate in conversations, thanks to its retweet and hashtag functionalities. Park, Lee, and Kim (2022) conducted research that examined the usage of social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, for health communication in South Korea. The research found that Instagram's visually-focused platform was more successful in generating engagement and raising awareness, while Twitter performed very well in rapidly sharing information during health crises. Facebook was seen as a medium that enabled more comprehensive conversations and the exchange of personal experiences about health matters. In a recent study conducted by Basch et al. (2022), the researchers examined the impact of visual material on Facebook during the COVID-19 epidemic in the United States. The findings revealed that postings that included visual elements were more successful in reaching a wider range of people and generating replies compared to ones that consisted only of text.

2.4.2 Perceptions and attitudes of individuals towards health-related messages

Extensive research has been conducted on user perceptions and attitudes towards health-related messages on Facebook and Instagram. In a study done by Yang and Liu (2023) in the United States, it was shown that users tend to perceive health information on Instagram as more reliable than on Facebook and Twitter (X). This perception is mostly attributed to Instagram's emphasis on visual content and the endorsements from influential individuals. Conversely, a research done by Vraga and Bode (2020) in the United States found that consumers exhibited more skepticism towards health information on Twitter (X) due to the platform's unrestricted nature, enabling anybody to share anything, hence raising questions about its legitimacy. In a study conducted by Tandoc et al. (2021) in the Philippines, it was discovered that Facebook users tended to have greater trust in health information shared by their friends or community

groups. On the other hand, Twitter users displayed higher levels of skepticism and were more inclined to verify information from multiple sources. In research done in the United States, Basch et al. (2022) discovered that user interaction with health material on Facebook was higher when the information originated from verified sources or had endorsements from trusted public personalities.

2.4.3 Challenges and Opportunities in Promoting Accurate Health Information

Recent research has focused on the problems and prospects of using Facebook, Twitter (X), and Instagram for the promotion of correct health information and the reduction of disinformation. Research done in the United Kingdom by Smith et al. (2023) emphasized the difficulty of addressing disinformation on digital platforms. This research used a mixed-methods methodology, including content analysis and interviews with public health experts, to investigate how algorithms give priority to sensational material, which might intensify the dissemination of incorrect information. The research also suggested potential avenues for enhancing content moderation and verification by fostering cooperation between public health organizations and social media platforms.

A separate investigation undertaken in the United States by Vraga and Bode (2020) analyzed the fact-checking systems of Facebook and Twitter (X). This was done via a combination of surveying social media users and analyzing information that had been fact-checked. The study revealed that while there are fact-checking initiatives in operation, the fast dissemination of incorrect information often undermines the effectiveness of these systems. The research included a combination of qualitative and quantitative methodologies to evaluate user views and the efficacy of fact-checking.

Research conducted in the Philippines by Tandoc et al. (2021) examined the impact of community-driven content on disseminating false information on Facebook. This study used a blend of content analysis and focus groups with Facebook users to comprehend the

dissemination of misinformation and explore the potential of community leaders in promoting correct health information. The research demonstrated that community-generated material has the potential to both propagate false information and act as a medium for reliable health messages, provided that it is well controlled.

Jones et al. (2023) investigated the utilization of influencers on Instagram for health communication purposes in the United States. This research used a case study methodology, examining the substance of health-related postings by influencers and conducting interviews with both influencers and health communication professionals. The results suggested that while influencers have the ability to reach a wide range of people, there is a potential for spreading false information if influencers lack sufficient knowledge or if the material is not thoroughly examined.

2.5 Summary of Chapter

Chapter Two offered an extensive literature analysis centered on health risk communication, specifically examining the function of social media platforms, such as Facebook and Instagram, in the distribution of health-related information. The chapter formulates a theoretical framework to direct the inquiry, outlining essential ideas and theories pertinent to the research. The chapter starts with an overview of health risk communication, highlighting its significance in public health. The process of providing information and enabling people to make educated choices about health hazards is defined as effective communication, which requires clarity and sensitivity, particularly during public health crises. The ascendance of social media has transformed the communication environment, augmenting message dissemination and community involvement, while concurrently introducing difficulties like disinformation. A theoretical framework is then presented, including Trust Determination Theory and Media Richness Theory. Trust Determination Theory underscores the need of credible and reliable information for successful risk communication, while Media Richness Theory examines the

differences across communication channels in terms of their richness and capacity to deliver effective health messages. Social media platforms function as essential instruments for health communication, enabling health organizations to disseminate information swiftly and engagingly. This chapter examines the attributes of social media, such as its interactive quality, user-generated content, and its capacity to address certain audience requirements. Research demonstrates that individuals are more inclined to engage with and trust health communications from reputable sources, underscoring the significance of source credibility and message customization. This chapter examines empirical studies about the efficiency of social media in risk communication. It illustrates diverse opinions and attitudes towards health messaging across various media, indicating that visual platforms such as Instagram successfully engage younger demographics, while Twitter is superior for fast information distribution. User attitudes of health-related messaging vary across different platforms regarding trust and skepticism, affecting the reception and dissemination of health information. Challenges in using social media for health communication including the widespread dissemination of disinformation, privacy issues, and the need for effective content control. Notwithstanding these challenges, there are prospects for creative health promotion via community involvement and the use of visual media. The chapter finishes by offering a conceptual framework that elucidates the interaction of variables affecting the efficacy of health risk communication on social media, so establishing a foundation for future study in this critical domain.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a comprehensive examination of the assumptions and methodologies that were used to drive the research (Creswell, 2003). The chapter provides a comprehensive explanation of the research design used for the study and presents a rationale for its selection. Additionally, it specifies the demographic group, the method used to choose participants, and the number of individuals included in the sample. The chapter also describes the source of the data and the methods that were used for data collecting. Before this, the research instrument used for data collection in this study is presented. The chapter finishes with discussing the data analysis approach used for the study.

3.2 Research Design

This study applies an exploratory research approach to examine the influence of social media platforms, including Facebook and Instagram, on the communication of health risks. The researchers opted for an exploratory methodology to elucidate the present condition of social media's involvement in health communication and to investigate the fundamental variables that contribute to its influence (Saunders et al., 2019). This methodology is especially appropriate for this research since it facilitates the gathering of firsthand data directly from participants, allowing the development of sound findings and suggestions. Recent study has shown that exploratory research is useful for understanding how social media affects health communication. Therefore, it is a suitable option for this inquiry (Rahman, 2020; Yin, 2021).

3.3 Research Approach

Generally, there are two distinct research methodologies: quantitative and qualitative. Nevertheless, Creswell (2014) proposes a third methodology called mixed-methods and contends that these three techniques are not distinct from one other. Mixed-methodologies

research integrates components of both quantitative and qualitative techniques, positioning itself in the center of the continuum that separates these two methods (Creswell, 2014). Mixed-methods research refers to a research approach that incorporates gathering and examination of data using both quantitative and qualitative methodologies in a single study (Creswell, 2014). This strategy proposes that the amalgamation of two procedures improves the caliber of research and yields a more all-encompassing comprehension of the study matter in contrast to only using a single methodology (Creswell, 2014).

Considering the objective of this study, the mixed-methods technique is considered appropriate. This technique facilitates a more profound comprehension of the situation by offering both statistical proof and profound conceptual insights. Furthermore, the incorporation of quantitative data with qualitative discoveries serves to prevent excessive dependence on numerical data and captures the intricate experiences and subjective aspects that are essential for understanding intricate social phenomena (Saunders et al., 2019).

3.4 Population of the Study

A study population refers to a well-defined group of persons or items that has similar qualities or attributes (Creswell 2017). Zikmund and Babin (2008) state that all persons or items in a certain community often have a common property or characteristic. According to this criteria, the population of this research consists of persons who interact with health-related information on social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. This include those who actively monitor and engage with public health organizations, influential figures, or community associations that distribute health-related knowledge. The research explicitly targets social media users from various demographic groups to get thoroughly understand of how these platforms affect health risk communication (Smith et al., 2023; Jones & Taylor, 2022).

3.5 Sample and Sampling Technique

Due to the impracticality of including every member of a community in research, it is crucial to carefully choose a sample that can accurately reflect the larger population. A sample size is a subset of the population or the number of units selected for data collection (Cowlet, 2017). Cowlet (2017) asserts that a meticulously chosen sample may accurately reflect the opinions of the whole population, thereby allowing for generalizations and suggestions to be made based on the sample's viewpoints. The researchers used a mix of purposive and convenience sampling strategies. The researchers used purposive sampling to specifically identify important health communication officers and social media managers from prominent health organizations. The selection of these people was based on their specialized knowledge and active participation in health risk communication methods on the three social media platforms. A convenience sample method was used to pick 150 social media users from different demographics for the purpose of conducting quantitative research. This methodology guaranteed the incorporation of many perspectives while prioritizing persons who are most pertinent to the study goals (Smith et al., 2023).

3.6 Source of Data

Researchers often have access to two main sources of data: primary and secondary. The main data was obtained from health communication officers, social media users in health organizations, and the general public. The main data consisted of direct insights from key stakeholders addressing their experiences and plans for using social media platforms to provide health information and mitigate health-related hazards (Smith et al., 2023; Liu & Yang, 2023). In addition, surveys and interviews were carried out with social media users to collect their viewpoints on the efficacy and reliability of health-related material disseminated on these platforms. The research relied only on secondary data from journals, magazines, websites, and

reports. The researcher used secondary sources to elucidate various aspects of the investigation, drawing upon earlier studies that had been done and ended.

3.7 Research Instrument

The major research instrument used in this study is a structured questionnaire and interview. The questionnaire was carefully crafted to correspond precisely with the study's goals, as outlined in the introduction chapter. The survey has twelve closed-ended questions that have predetermined answer alternatives, making it easier to read, maintain coherence, and analyze the data (Liu & Yang, 2023). In addition, a comprehensive interview guide was developed, including the study's goals and pertinent literature, to facilitate in-depth interviews with specialists in health communication and social media management. The purpose of these interviews was to get a more profound understanding of the methods and difficulties involved in using these platforms for efficient health communication (Jones et al., 2023).

3.8 Data processing and analysis

The quantitative data was processed by sorting and verifying the completeness of the collected questionnaires. No instances of missing data were detected. Therefore, all the quantitative data were analyzed using the frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations using the Statistical Product and Service Solutions (SPSS, version 20) application, following editing and coding processes. These statistics were then used for further analysis. During the thematic analysis, significant concerns discussed in the interview were organized into themes to facilitate the examination of the material for discussion. Braun and Clarke (2016) defined thematic analysis as a qualitative method of analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) in a dataset. They further contended that theme analysis does not need the extensive technical and theoretical expertise of approaches such as grounded theory. Instead, it offers a more accessible kind of analysis, particularly for novice qualitative researchers.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

Foulkes (2018) asserts that any study involving human participants must be conscientious and considerate of ethical concerns. The majority of internet users in social media exhibit negative responses towards research undertaken on their personal online activity (Hudson & Brickman, 2004). They feel that their autonomy is being violated. The research included participants who regularly use social media, and ethical issues were taken into account throughout the data collection process. Prior to initiating any conversations, confidentiality was explicitly established and agreement was obtained from all participants.

The researcher used many safeguards to ensure the protection of the respondent's rights. Anonymity was ensured by ensuring that none of the participants were identified by name throughout the study or in later reports. The information provided by the respondents was only used for the stated study objective and not for any other purposes. The principle of voluntary participation was maintained by selecting and inviting respondents to participate without any kind of coercion. The participants were given the opportunity to make a well-informed choice on their involvement in the study. Consequently, all participants were instructed on the rationale and essentiality of the study.

Furthermore, the researchers obtained informed permission from the participants. Participants were informed of their prerogative to voluntarily resign from the study at any time, without facing any repercussions. To maintain anonymity, the researcher took measures to avoid disclosing any names or identifying details. Instead, codes were used to identify the respondents. In order to guarantee the security of the data, the researcher took measures to safeguard all recorded data and documents. The researcher acquired a research authorization from the University of Media Arts and Communication.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

Chapter Four establishes the findings and discourse of the investigation. This chapter offers a comprehensive examination of the obtained data and discusses the study's conclusions. The findings are shown clearly and succinctly via the use of tables. The discussion part analyses the findings and connects them to the study questions and goals. This chapter includes a critical examination of the results, emphasizing their relevance and ramifications for the research. The findings and discussion chapter are essential in every research effort, since it furnishes the data and analysis required to substantiate the study's conclusions.

4.2 Background Characteristics of Respondents

This section provides an examination of the demographic characteristics of respondents in the study examining the influence of social media on health risk communication, with particular emphasis on Facebook and Instagram. Each table presents extensive demographic information, along with analysis. These demographic characteristics provide a foundation for understanding the audience composition engaging with health risk communication on social media sites like Facebook and Instagram. They highlight trends in age, gender, educational achievement, and social media use experience, all of which may influence the effectiveness of health risk communication efforts. The demographic summary data of the participants are shown in Tables 4.1 to 4.5.

Gender Distribution of Respondents

The gender distribution of respondents illustrates the equilibrium between male and female participants in the research. Knowing the gender makeup is crucial for including varied viewpoints in the analysis of social media's influence on health risk communication.

Table 4.1: Gender Distribution of Respondents

	Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	72	48.0	
Female	78	52.0	
Total	150	100.0	

Source: Field Data, 2024

The majority of responders were female, including 52% of the total participants, and men constituted 48%. This almost equal participation guarantees a balanced gender viewpoint in evaluating the influence of social media platforms on health risk communication.

Age Distribution of Respondents

This table displays the age distribution of respondents, detailing the various age groups included in the survey. Analyzing age composition aids in evaluating the influence of age on the utilization and effects of social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram for health risk communication.

Table 4.2: Age Distribution of Respondents

Age Range	Frequency Percentage (%)	
18 - 25 years	45	30.0
26 - 35 years	58	38.7
36 - 45 years	32	21.3
46 years and above	15	10.0
Total	150	100.0

Source: Field Data, 2024

The majority of responders (38.7%) were aged 26-35 years, while 30% were aged 18-25 years. Individuals aged 36 to 45 constituted 21.3%, whilst those aged 46 and older were under 10%. This suggests that the majority of respondents were young adults engaged in social media, which corresponds with the study's emphasis on sites such as Facebook and Instagram.

Educational Level of Respondents

The respondents' educational attainment is examined to ascertain the participants' academic credentials. This knowledge is essential for comprehending how education affects understanding and participation with health risk messages on social media.

Table 4.3: Educational Level of Respondents

Educational Level Frequency Percentage (%)		
Junior High School	12	8.0
Senior High School	35	23.3
Degree	103	68.7
Total	150	100.0

Source: Field Data, 2024

Most respondents (68.7%) have a degree-level education, followed by 23.3% with Senior High School degrees, and 8% with Junior High School education. This signifies a highly educated sample group, essential for analyzing how people understand and interact with health risk messages on social media.

Access to Social Media Platforms

This table examines the accessibility of social media sites among respondents. Comprehending this facet is essential for determining the significance of social media in health risk communication.'

Table 4.4: Access to Social Media Platforms

Access to Social Media Frequency Percentage (%)		
Yes	150	100.0
No	0	0.0
Total	150	100.0

Source: Field Data, 2024

All participants reported access to social media sites, underscoring the need of examining their influence on health risk communication. This highlights the widespread use of social media in modern communication.

Social Media Platforms Used

The table explores the particular social media sites used by respondents, emphasizing those pertinent to the study, Facebook and Instagram. Examining platform preferences provides information regarding the focal points for health risk communication initiatives.

Table 4.5: Social Media Platforms Used

Social Media Platform	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Facebook	140	93.3
Instagram	120	80.0
WhatsApp	145	96.7
Telegram	90	60.0
TikTok	85	56.7
Twitter	75	50.0
LinkedIn	40	26.7

Source: Field Data, 2024

WhatsApp was the most often used social media network among respondents, at 96.7%, followed by Facebook at 93.3% and Instagram at 80%. Platforms such as Telegram, TikTok, and Twitter had modest utilization rates, whilst LinkedIn recorded the lowest usage at 26.7%. The elevated use rates of Facebook and Instagram substantiate their designation as the primary platforms for examining health risk communication. The demographic analysis indicates that the research population mostly comprises young, educated persons who are actively involved on social media platforms, especially Facebook and Instagram. This population is ideal for evaluating the function of various platforms in conveying health risk information. The results

indicate considerable potential for using these channels to successfully engage a broad audience.

Presentation of Main Findings

4.3 Research Question 1: How effective is health risk communication on Facebook and Instagram platforms?

Health risk communication is an essential component of public health, designed to educate and persuade people to engage in behaviours that reduce health risks and enhance well-being. The extensive use of social media has become platforms such as Facebook and Instagram significant avenues for the distribution of health-related information. These platforms provide distinct chances to engage varied audiences with multimedia material, interactive elements, and frequent updates. The efficacy of health risk communication on digital platforms is contingent upon aspects like the clarity, trustworthiness, and engagement of the messages, along with users' capacity to identify reliable information. This study aims to assess the impact of health risk communication on Facebook and Instagram on users' knowledge, attitudes, and health-related behaviours. Results are presented in table 4.6

Table 4.6: Evaluating the Effectiveness of Effective is Health Risk Communication on Facebook and Instagram Platforms

Statement	Standard Mean Deviation		Minimum	Maximum
I find health risk messages on Facebook and Instagram easy to understand.	4.12	0.87	2	5
The health risk information I see on Facebook and Instagram is credible.	3.78	0.92	2	5
Health risk communication on Facebook and Instagram influences my decisions.	4.01	0.89	2	5
I frequently share health risk information from Facebook and Instagram.	3.54	1.01	1	5

Statement	Standard		Minimum	Maximum
	Mean	Deviation		
I feel confident in the accuracy of health-related messages shared online.	3.62	0.98	2	5
The health risk messages provide sufficient detail for action.	3.96	0.91	2	5
I have learned new health information from social media posts.	4.24	0.80	3	5
Social media communication is more effective than traditional media.	3.88	1.03	2	5
Facebook and Instagram are reliable sources for health risk communication.	3.71	0.94	2	5
Health risk messages are timely and relevant.	3.84	0.91	2	5
I am likely to follow advice from social media health messages.	3.92	0.93	2	5
Social media motivates me to practice better health habits.	4.02	0.88	3	5
Messages are clear and free of jargon.	4.05	0.85	2	5
I can differentiate accurate from misleading health information.	3.66	0.96	2	5
Multimedia makes social media health messages engaging.	4.33	0.74	3	5

Source: Field Data, 2024

The research of respondents' opinions of health risk communication on Facebook and Instagram uncovers significant patterns about the efficacy of these platforms in shaping health-related behaviours. The results from a sample of 150 respondents reveal a mostly favourable attitude towards using Facebook and Instagram for the dissemination of health risk warnings. The mean ratings vary from 3.54 to 4.33 on a five-point Likert scale. The findings indicate that

respondents generally agree with the majority of the assertions, however some areas show potential for improvement.

One of the most highly rated assertions relates to the use of multimedia, including photos and videos, which participants deemed to enhance the engagement of health risk messaging. This statement had a mean score of 4.33 and a standard deviation of 0.74, indicating robust consensus with little variability. Likewise, the capacity of social media platforms to disseminate novel health-related information received a high rating (mean = 4.24, SD = 0.80), underscoring their function as effective sources of instructional material. These results underscore the significance of aesthetically pleasing and informative content in engaging users and enhancing health awareness.

Participants showed satisfaction with the clarity of messages communicated on Facebook and Instagram, reflected by a mean score of 4.05. This indicates that the health risk warnings on these platforms are often comprehensible and devoid of technical jargon, hence improving their accessibility. The impression that social media health communication fosters improved health habits received a favourable rating (mean = 4.02), indicating its potential to promote beneficial behavioural changes.

Nonetheless, not all regions earned uniformly high evaluations. The dissemination of health risk information to others had a mean score of 3.54, accompanied by a standard deviation of 1.01. This indicates that while respondents may see the material as beneficial, they may not regularly share it within their social circles. A further area of concern is the capacity to distinguish between true and deceptive information, which had a mean score of 3.66. This indicates a modest confidence level among respondents in discerning reputable material, highlighting the need for efforts to improve users' critical assessment abilities.

The health risk information on Facebook and Instagram had a mean credibility rating of 3.78, indicating that respondents see the platforms as reasonably reliable, however there is potential

to enhance confidence in the validity of the material. The timeliness and relevance of health risk warnings obtained a mean score of 3.84, indicating that respondents usually see the information disseminated on these platforms as current and relevant to their requirements. The examination of respondents' perspectives corresponds with prevailing patterns in the literature about health risk communication on social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram. The mostly favourable perspective identified in the study aligns with previous research, highlighting the capacity of these platforms to efficiently convey health information while recognizing ongoing problems. The efficacy of multimedia, with a mean score of 4.33, and the clarity of health messaging, rating 4.05, correspond with prior research emphasizing the importance of visually engaging and clear material. Vos and Buckner (2020) highlight the significance of infographics, videos, and interactive content in enhancing user engagement and understanding on platforms such as Instagram. Basch et al. (2022) illustrate that visual components on Facebook were particularly helpful during the COVID-19 epidemic in enhancing message dissemination and provoking active user engagement. This study substantiates the assertion that compelling content is essential for effective health communication on digital platforms.

The research further substantiates the function of social media as a provider of novel health-related information, shown by a mean score of 4.24. This conclusion aligns with the study conducted by Stollefson et al. (2021), which emphasizes social media's potential to provide timely information and support focused health initiatives, such as smoking cessation and good eating. The finding that health risk communication encourages improved health behaviours, with a mean score of 4.02, corresponds with the study conducted by Moorhead et al. (2022), which emphasizes the role of platforms such as Facebook in chronic illness management via community support networks. These results clearly validate the ability of social media to serve as a crucial instrument for health education and promotion.

The investigation underscores several obstacles, notably the trustworthiness of information, which received a score of 3.78, and the difficulty in differentiating true from deceptive material, with a mean score of 3.66. These issues are well described in the literature. Gesser-Edelsburg and Shir-Raz (2021) highlight that the fast spread of misinformation often diminishes the effectiveness of reliable health communications, eroding confidence and overall efficacy. Waggoner et al. (2021) emphasize the need of misinformation mitigation strategies, such as fact-checking and transparency, to enhance user confidence in health messages on social media. Moreover, the comparatively low participation in sharing health information, shown by a mean score of 3.54, implies that while users are inclined to ingest health messages, they are less predisposed to propagate them. This discovery aligns with the findings of Song et al. (2023), who indicate that confidence in the source and content legitimacy greatly affect users' propensity to share health-related postings.

Some results deviate from the expectations established by prior research. The moderate score of 3.84 for the timeliness and relevance of health risk messages indicates a need for enhancement, in contrast to research by Alonzo and Popescu (2022), which underscores the necessity of regular updates during health crises to sustain relevance and user engagement. Likewise, diminished participation in information dissemination may indicate an inability to effectively use emotional appeals. According to Grab Infotech, communications that elicit fear, hope, or empathy often attain greater distribution among consumers. These conflicting findings indicate possible deficiencies in existing processes and provide avenues for future enhancements.

The study's results have considerable implications for enhancing health risk communication on social media platforms. Prioritizing the resolution of misinformation problems and enhancing user trust is essential. Heldman et al. (2022) suggest that the integration of consistent messaging across various platforms may bolster user trust and promote the broader transmission of health

information. Furthermore, employing emotionally impactful and aesthetically pleasing materials may enhance user engagement and encourage sharing behaviours. Enhancing tactics to authenticate information reliability and bolster user trust in differentiating true from fake material might significantly amplify the effectiveness of social media health initiatives.

A structured interview was conducted with respondents to obtain full details on Effectiveness of Health Risk Communication on Facebook and Instagram. Their remarks concentrated on the particular strategies used to guarantee the efficacy of health risk communication, including the regularity of health awareness postings and the credibility of information sent via these platforms.

Encounters with Health Hazards Communication on Facebook and Instagram

Participants reported diverse experiences with the clarity and informativeness of health communications. Participants saw that communications from reputable entities such as the WHO or local health departments were often lucid, including images such as infographics and succinct subtitles. Nevertheless, user-generated information often exhibited a lack of clarity, with some characterizing it as "excessively simplistic or deceptive."

One participant stated:

"I find posts from health organizations understandable; however, I occasionally encounter posts from influencers that conflate facts with opinions, resulting in confusion."

Most Beneficial Categories of Health Risk Information

Participants recognized actionable information, including preventative actions for diseases, vaccine updates, and mental health strategies, as the most beneficial. Emergency notifications, especially those concerning disease outbreaks or natural catastrophes, were emphasised as very useful.

The respondent may be cited as follows:

"During the pandemic, information regarding vaccination locations was exceedingly beneficial." I could easily locate neighbouring venues and schedule an appointment.

Measures Implemented in Response to Health Data

Several participants said that they undertook specific measures in response to health risk information encountered on Facebook and Instagram. For instance, one person reported arranging a medical consultation subsequent to reading about hypertension symptoms. Nevertheless, several expressed reluctances, expressing apprehensions over the reliability of the material.

A notable response:

"I saw an article on the symptoms of diabetes and chose to seek advice from my physician. However, I refrain from acting on information unless it originates from a confirmed account.

Although Facebook and Instagram provide immediate health risk notification, the credibility of the material greatly affects users' propensity to take action.

The interview results about health risk communication on Facebook and Instagram corroborate and enhance the examined literature. The interview and the research highlight that successful health risk communication on social media is significantly influenced by the source's reliability, the message's clarity, and the audience's emotional involvement.

The research constantly emphasizes the need of reliable sources, such as governmental health agencies and reputable medical practitioners, in improving the efficacy of health communication (Song et al., 2023; Korda & Itani, 2019). This corresponds with the interview participants' preference for information from credible sources such as the WHO and local health authorities. In contrast, both sources indicate that disinformation and ambiguous user-generated material might diminish the efficacy of communication. Participants' apprehensions over influencers conflating facts with views reflect the observations of Gesser-Edelsburg and

Shir-Raz (2021), who indicated that erroneous or misleading material often contends with trustworthy content on social media platforms.

Participants' inclination towards actionable health information aligns with the observations of Vos and Buckner (2020) and Basch et al. (2022), who indicated that aesthetically pleasing and succinct material, including infographics and videos, markedly improves user engagement and comprehension. The interview findings about users responding to explicit, actionable messages such as scheduling medical appointments or adhering to preventative measures align with research highlighting the significance of interactive and prompt communication (Alonzo & Popescu, 2022; Guidry et al., 2021).

The significance of emotional involvement, as highlighted in the research by Ekman (1992) and Grab Infotech, is also reflected in participants' behaviour. Content that evokes empathy or hope tends to be more remembered and shareable, hence amplifying message effect. This aligns with users' enthusiasm for postings providing mental health advice or vaccine information amid disasters. Nonetheless, some contradictions emerge. The research by Heldman et al. (2022) highlights the importance of synchronized message across platforms, however the interview data do not directly address cross-platform reinforcement. Moreover, whereas the literature often lauds platforms such as Twitter for its prompt information dissemination (Lwin et al., 2021), the interview data concentrate only on Facebook and Instagram, resulting in a deficiency in comparative platform analysis.

4.4 Research Question 2: What are the user perceptions and attitudes towards health – related messages shared on of Facebook and Instagram?

Knowing user opinions and attitudes towards health-related messaging on social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram are crucial for assessing the efficacy of these channels in public health communication. These platforms have transformed the dissemination of health information, providing accessible and visually compelling material to a broad

audience. The influence of such communications is largely contingent upon consumers' perceptions of their reliability, relevance, and clarity. The attitudes of users, including their confidence in the information, readiness to interact with it, and propensity to act upon it, are pivotal in ascertaining the efficacy of health communication techniques. This study seeks to examine user perceptions and reactions to health-related messaging on Facebook and Instagram, offering insights into the advantages and drawbacks of these platforms in fostering health awareness and behavioural modification. The findings of this inquiry are shown in Table 4.7.

Table 4.7: User Perceptions and Attitudes Toward Health-Related Messages on Facebook and Instagram

Statement	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
I trust the health-related content I come across on Facebook and Instagram.	3.68	0.91	2	5
I prefer to receive health-related updates from social media over traditional news sources.	3.85	0.89	2	5
I feel that health-related posts on social media are often exaggerated.	3.58	1.02	1	5
I engage with health-related content on Facebook and Instagram by liking, commenting, or sharing.	3.71	0.98	1	5
I find it easy to distinguish between credible and non-credible health messages on these platforms.	3.50	1.01	1	5
I believe that Facebook and Instagram are important for spreading health awareness.	4.12	0.78	3	5
I am interested in learning more about health topics through posts on these platforms.	4.00	0.81	2	5
I am skeptical about health advice given in health-related messages shared on social media.	3.65	0.95	2	5
The health messages I see on social media have a positive impact on my health awareness.	3.92	0.84	2	5

Statement	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
I find it difficult to trust health information that lacks scientific references on social media.	4.20	0.76	3	5
I believe that health-related messages on Facebook and Instagram should be verified by professionals.	4.30	0.72	3	5
I often discuss health-related posts on Facebook and Instagram with my friends and family.	3.63	0.92	2	5
Health-related posts on Facebook and Instagram influence my health behavior.	3.80	0.88	2	5
I think that the tone of health-related messages on social media is appropriate for all age groups.	3.55	0.97	1	5
I feel that health messages on Facebook and Instagram are designed to attract attention rather than inform.	3.42	1.03	1	5

Source Field Data, 2024

An analysis of user views and attitudes towards health-related messaging on Facebook and Instagram indicates a complex assessment of the efficacy of these platforms in conveying health information. The statement with the highest mean score of 4.30 (SD = 0.72) reflects robust agreement that health-related communications on social platforms need to be validated by specialists. This discovery emphasizes the need of maintaining credibility in health communication and illustrates consumers' dependence on professional validation to believe the information presented.

A significant finding is the assertion on the challenge of accepting health information devoid of scientific sources, which garnered a mean score of 4.20 (SD = 0.76). This underscores the need for precise and evidence-based communication on social media to mitigate people' skepticism. Correspondingly, the conviction that Facebook and Instagram serve as significant instruments for disseminating health awareness received a high rating, with a mean score of 4.12 (SD = 0.78), indicating a robust recognition of the platforms' contribution to public health education.

Although respondents expressed a desire to acquire knowledge on health topics via social media (mean = 4.00), the comparatively lower mean scores for differentiating credible from non-credible messages (mean = 3.50) and the skepticism regarding exaggerated posts (mean = 3.58) indicate reservations concerning the quality and authenticity of the content disseminated on these platforms. The ratings, together with the standard deviations, demonstrate a considerable degree of diversity in user confidence, reflecting disparities in individual critical assessment abilities.

User engagement with health-related postings, measured by activities such as like, commenting, or sharing, had a rating of 3.71 (SD = 0.98), indicating moderate activity levels among users. The belief that some postings prioritize attention-seeking above correct information (mean = 3.42) indicates a possible obstacle to optimizing these platforms for effective health communication. The examination of user views and attitudes towards health-related messaging on Facebook and Instagram corresponds with several published results in the literature, while also highlighting areas need more investigation. The investigation reveals a notable finding: consumers exhibit a preference for communications authenticated by experts, shown in a high mean score of 4.30. This discovery highlights the significance of trustworthiness in health communication, aligning with research conducted by Zhang and Leung (2022) and Smith et al. (2023). These studies highlight those communications from credible sources, such as accredited health organizations or specialists, elicit more user involvement and acceptance. Correspondingly, the skepticism about communications devoid of scientific citations (mean = 4.20) underscores the need for evidence-based communication, along with Lin and Song's (2022) assertion about the dangers of disinformation eroding confidence in social media platforms.

The study underscores the significance of Facebook and Instagram as vital instruments for disseminating health awareness, with users recognizing their efficacy in engaging varied

audiences (mean = 4.12). This conclusion corroborates the research by Neuhauser and Kreps (2019) and Mangold and Faulds (2021), which emphasizes the platforms' capacity to improve accessibility, engagement, and targeted communication. Moreover, the research conducted by Farmer et al. (2021) and Maibach (2020) underscores the cost-effectiveness and extensive reach of social media relative to conventional media, reinforcing the platforms' increasing significance in public health education.

The modest mean scores for differentiating trustworthy from non-credible information (mean = 3.50) and skepticism towards exaggerated postings (mean = 3.58) indicate persistent issues. The heterogeneity in users' critical assessment abilities corresponds with the results of Lin and Song (2022), who warn that while interaction might enhance trust, it may also facilitate the spread of disinformation. Confronting this dilemma requires rigorous fact-checking and methodologies to improve media literacy, as indicated by Nguyen et al. (2023). User involvement, shown by a mean score of 3.71 for activities like liking, commenting, and sharing, indicates moderate activity. Research conducted by Kaye and Johnson (2021) and Garcia and Johnson (2022) highlights the significance of interactive elements in cultivating community and trust, hence improving engagement and receptivity to health messages. The belief that some postings prioritize attention above accuracy (mean = 3.42) indicates a possible obstacle to optimizing the platforms' effectiveness. This discovery aligns with concerns in the literature on the financial pressures on social media material, as highlighted by Chen and Kim (2023), and the need of balancing user engagement with the preservation of informative integrity.

The study underscores the significance of visual and emotional appeals in influencing opinions, aligning with research conducted by Riet and Kessler (2021) and Park and Lee (2022). Aesthetic content and emotional impact are essential for engaging users, enhancing memory retention, and influencing behaviour. The results corroborate Patel and Mikhail's (2023) claim

that personalized and demographic-specific health messages increase relevance and engagement, resulting in more favourable user attitudes and behaviours. Ultimately, the study offers a detailed comprehension of user views and attitudes, highlighting the essential need for continuous initiatives to counter disinformation. Lin and Song's (2022) focus on comprehensive fact-checking and cross-platform integration corresponds with Smith and Jones' (2023) conclusions about the efficacy of coordinated health message initiatives. A cohesive strategy across channels might enhance the scope and bolster the credibility of health communication.

Interviews were performed with a curated cohort of users to get comprehensive data on their perspectives and attitudes towards health-related communications on Facebook and Instagram. The interviews successfully identified consumers' primary worries about information reliability, including disinformation, inflated assertions, and unconfirmed sources. The participants expressed their preferences for health content, emphasizing the importance of messaging validated by health experts and the need for more dependable and clear information to bolster confidence in the communications disseminated on these platforms.

Reliability of Health Information

Participants exhibited varying degrees of confidence in health-related posts on Facebook and Instagram. The majority said that content from verified accounts, including health institutions and experts, was seen credible, but unverified accounts or influencers were approached with skepticism.

The following is a quotation from the respondent:

"I place greater trust in posts from the CDC or hospitals than in those from arbitrary individuals, regardless of their apparent expertise."

"The presence of the blue tick mark or posts from verified pages enhances my confidence in the information."

"I consistently verify information disseminated by influencers, regardless of their apparent credibility."

Factors Affecting Health Post Engagement

Participants identified a number of elements, such as presenting style, relevancy, and source legitimacy, that influenced how they interacted with postings on health.

"I exclusively interact with posts originating from recognized sources, such as hospitals or government pages."

"Posts addressing contemporary health concerns, such as a flu outbreak or strategies for improved sleep, engage my interest more than generic recommendations."

"If the post contains a link to additional information, I am more inclined to click and explore further."

"Effective visuals and concise captions facilitate my comprehension and dissemination of the content."

Suitability of Tone and Style

The tone and style of health-related information elicited varying reactions among participants. Younger users favoured easygoing and entertaining information, but older users preferred a professional tone for severe health issues.

The following is a quotation from the participant:

"I appreciate posts that are relatable and incorporate memes or humorous images, as they render health education more engaging."

"At times, the informal tone seemed unsuitable for grave health matters. It may diminish the message's urgency."

"In my opinion, formal communication is preferable regarding health topics." It enhances the credibility of the message.

Participants emphasized the significance of source legitimacy, relevance, and excellent presentation in interacting with health-related communications on Facebook and Instagram. Younger people favoured informal and engaging tones, but older participants chose formal and professional approaches. These data indicate that customized messaging methods are essential for successfully conveying health information to varied groups.

The opinions and attitudes of people towards health-related messages sent on Facebook and Instagram underscore the intricate dynamics of trust, engagement, and the efficacy of

communication tactics. Social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram have become essential to health communication, providing distinct options for rapid information dissemination, audience engagement, and interaction facilitation. The efficacy of these platforms in disseminating health information mostly hinges on user views of reliability, relevance, and presentation. Numerous studies continuously underscore the significance of trust in health-related communications. The interview replies reveal that consumers have a greater propensity to believe health material disseminated by verified accounts, such as those affiliated with health organizations or experts, compared to influencers or unverified sources. This discovery corresponds with Smith et al. (2023), who observed that the source's trustworthiness is crucial in cultivating confidence and acceptance of health communications. Zhang and Leung (2022) similarly discovered that health communication from credible organizations garners more engagement and sharing rates. This underscores the importance of authority endorsements in fostering user trust and guaranteeing the efficacy of health communication initiatives.

Relevance is a crucial aspect affecting interaction with health messages. Interview participants indicated a greater propensity to connect with postings that pertained to contemporary or personal health issues, a viewpoint supported by Patel and Mikhail (2023). Their research emphasized that customized health messages, designed according to an individual's demographics and health characteristics, not only improve engagement but also facilitate behavioural modifications. Moreover, Garcia and Johnson (2022) highlighted that relevance, especially in relation to particular health issues, profoundly influences user perceptions and compliance with health guidelines.

The manner in which health-related communications are presented, including graphics and tone, influences user engagement and perceptions. Interview participants said that aesthetically pleasing postings with succinct subtitles were more engaging and readily shareable. This

assertion is corroborated by Riet and Kessler (2021), who discovered that high-quality pictures and videos enhance message retention and credibility. Chen and Kim (2023) observed that visual material on Instagram improves user opinions about the trustworthiness and efficacy of health messaging. These results emphasize the need of using multimedia forms to convey health information efficiently. The tone of health-related communications surfaced as a contentious element in the interviews. Younger users favoured informal and engaging tones, including memes or humour, but older users chose professional and formal communication approaches for important health subjects. This discrepancy underscores the need for customized communication tactics to address various demographic groups. Park and Lee (2022) propose that emotional resonance, whether via empathy or urgency, may profoundly affect user engagement and behavioural reactions to health communications. Nguyen et al. (2023) substantiate this by indicating that emotional appeals enhance the relatability and efficacy of health messages, motivating individuals to embrace better behaviours. The interactive elements of social media platforms significantly influence user perceptions of health messaging. Platforms such as Instagram and Facebook promote peer discourse, allowing users to exchange information, request clarification, and participate in real-time dialogues. Kaye and Johnson (2021) noted that this engagement cultivates a feeling of community and trust, hence augmenting the overall efficacy of health communication. Lin and Song (2022) warn that such engagement may also promote the dissemination of disinformation, so compromising the credibility of authentic health communications. Combating disinformation by fact-checking and cross-platform integration, as proposed by Smith and Jones (2023), is essential for preserving user confidence and facilitating successful health communication. The results from the interviews and literature underscore the significance of source verification and cross-platform consistency. Tandoc et al. (2021) discovered that Facebook users shown a higher propensity to believe health information disseminated by friends or community

organizations, but Twitter (X) users showed increased skepticism. This suggests that trust is contingent upon context and shaped by platform-specific characteristics. Moreover, Yang and Liu (2023) observed that users see Instagram as a more trustworthy source for health information compared to Twitter (X) or Facebook, largely owing to its focus on visual material and endorsements from prominent figures.

Notwithstanding these benefits, difficulties persist, especially the widespread dissemination of disinformation on social media. The fast spread of misinformation may obscure reliable health communications, as emphasized by Lin and Song (2022). This highlights the need for effective fact-checking systems and transparent communication techniques to reduce the effects of disinformation.

4.5 Research Question 3: What are the challenges and opportunities in using Facebook and Instagram for promoting accurate health information and mitigating the spread of misinformation?

Social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram are becoming significant in the distribution of information, particularly health-related material. They provide extensive options for engaging substantial audiences, enhancing health awareness, and delivering precise health information. Nonetheless, these platforms have concerns, especially with the dissemination of disinformation, which might jeopardize public health activities. The active sharing of material and engagement with postings raises substantial concerns over the authenticity of health information. Consequently, it is essential to investigate how these platforms reconcile the dissemination of reliable health information with the mitigation of misleading or fraudulent material. This research seeks to examine the challenges and opportunities presented by Facebook and Instagram in disseminating health information, evaluating user perceptions of these platforms' roles in health communication, and the efficacy of features such as fact-

checking, algorithms, and policies in reducing misinformation. The research used descriptive statistics to analyze a participant's comments about their perceptions on the role of social media platforms in health communication. The findings of this investigation are shown in Table 4.8.

Table 4.8: Challenges and opportunities in using Facebook and Instagram for promoting accurate health information and mitigating the spread of misinformation

Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
It is easy to find accurate health information on Facebook and Instagram.	3.15	1.38	1	5
Facebook and Instagram help raise awareness about important health issues.	3.23	1.31	1	5
The presence of misinformation on Facebook and Instagram is a significant challenge.	3.45	1.22	1	5
I have encountered false health information on Facebook and Instagram.	3.12	1.37	1	5
Facebook and Instagram provide opportunities to reach a wide audience with accurate health information.	3.50	1.26	1	5
Social media platforms are effective at combating the spread of health misinformation.	2.85	1.35	1	5
Health professionals should have a greater presence on Facebook and Instagram to promote accuracy.	3.60	1.22	1	5
I believe that fact-checking features on these platforms are helpful in mitigating misinformation.	3.35	1.28	1	5
The algorithms on Facebook and Instagram contribute to the spread of health misinformation.	3.33	1.23	1	5
Social media platforms are responsible for ensuring the accuracy of health information.	3.04	1.31	1	5

Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
There are limited ways to report false health information on Facebook and Instagram.	2.95	1.36	1	5
Facebook and Instagram could do more to ensure that health-related content is verified.	3.20	1.30	1	5
Health communication campaigns on social media often face challenges due to platform policies.	3.18	1.29	1	5
I think that partnerships between health organizations and social media platforms can help promote accurate health information.	3.50	1.25	1	5
The use of hashtags and trends on social media can amplify accurate health information.	3.40	1.33	1	5

Source Field Data, 2024

The findings demonstrate that participants mostly agreed with the function of Facebook and Instagram in disseminating correct health information, as seen by mean values ranging from 2.85 to 3.60 across the claims. The assertion that "Health professionals should have a greater presence on Facebook and Instagram to promote accuracy" had the highest mean score of 3.60, indicating a robust conviction about the significance of expert participation in health communication via social media.

The assertion "The presence of misinformation on Facebook and Instagram is a significant challenge" had a mean score of 3.45, indicating that participants acknowledge misinformation as a critical concern. Likewise, the statement "Social media platforms are effective at combating the spread of health misinformation" had a lower mean score of 2.85, indicating that some respondents believe that existing measures are insufficient in addressing misinformation. The standard deviations, ranging from 1.22 to 1.38, suggest that while the majority of respondents had similar views, there were diverse ideas, especially about the efficacy of fact-

checking systems and the accountability of platforms in maintaining accuracy. The data analysis reveals a widespread agreement among respondents on the significance of Facebook and Instagram in disseminating accurate health information, while also recognizing the obstacles associated with these platforms. This both fits with and diverges from the current research about the potential and challenges of using social media for health communication. The elevated mean score (3.60) for the assertion promoting more participation of health professionals highlights the significance of expert-driven health communication on social media. This finding aligns with research highlighting the significance of authoritative presence in mitigating disinformation and bolstering the legitimacy of health information (Mensah et al., 2021; Amankwaa & Acheampong, 2022). The efficacy of interactive formats, such as live Q&A sessions conducted by experts, as highlighted in prior study, corroborates the respondents' conviction in professional participation (Acheampong & Kofi, 2021). The considerable issue of misinformation, shown by a mean score of 3.45 for the pertinent statement, corresponds with the findings of Pennycook and Rand (2021), who observed the fast spread of inaccurate health information on social media platforms. The results indicating that misinformation endures despite corrective measures align with the conclusions of Roozenbeek et al. (2021), who highlighted the persistent nature of incorrect ideas driven by social media algorithms that prioritize participation above veracity.

The lower mean score (2.85) concerning the effectiveness of platforms in addressing disinformation underscores a significant deficiency in trust and efficacy, reflecting issues identified in the literature. Das and Sahoo (2011) and Adams (2010) highlighted the instability of social media information sources and the intrinsic challenges in content verification. The respondents believe that existing measures are inadequate, which corresponds with demands for enhanced fact-checking systems and algorithmic advancements to mitigate the dissemination of misinformation (Boateng et al., 2021; Nyarko et al., 2023).

The standard deviations, ranging from 1.22 to 1.38, indicate diverse perspectives on matters such as platform accountability and the efficacy of their fact-checking mechanisms. This variety aligns with the intricate nature of user interactions on social media, where individual experiences and faith in technology profoundly affect perceptions, as articulated by Anderson et al. (2013) and Larkin (2014). The research emphasizes that the credibility of health information on social media is intrinsically connected to the perceived reliability of sources, hence exacerbating the problem (Berg, 2011; Moorhead et al., 2013).

From a comprehensive viewpoint, the potential highlighted in the literature, including cost-effectiveness and the capacity to engage extensive audiences (Owusu-Ansah & Osei, 2022; Datareportal, 2023), correspond with the favourable elements of health communication recognized by participants. The ability to use personalized messages and influencers, as highlighted by Nguyen and Park (2022) and Lupton (2022), signifies an unexploited opportunity to enhance the effectiveness of health initiatives. Nonetheless, the obstacles of accessibility and the digital gap identified by Kwaku et al. (2021) persist as substantial impediments, especially in rural regions where infrastructure and device ownership are constrained.

Privacy issues and the potential for stigmatization, especially on sensitive health matters such as HIV/AIDS and mental health, are significant barriers highlighted in both the survey findings and current research (Appiah & Abubakar, 2022). These concerns indicate overarching challenges of data security and user anonymity on social media platforms, identified as crucial areas necessitating attention (Das and Sahoo, 2011).

Responses from a randomly chosen participant on potential strategies to tackle problems and capitalize on possibilities in using Facebook and Instagram for health communication in Ghana.

Challenges in Distinguishing Accurate and Misleading Information

Participants overwhelmingly agreed that discerning correct health information among the overwhelming material on Facebook and Instagram is a significant difficulty. They identified algorithms that favour interaction over accuracy and the refined display of deceptive material as major obstacles.

The following is a quotation from the respondent:

"Occasionally, misinformation appears so refined that it is challenging to discern its falsity without conducting additional research."

"There is an excess of material, and even when something seems legitimate, it may not be. It is perplexing."

"I have seen postings from dubious sources disseminated by people who were convinced of their veracity. It disseminates with remarkable ease."

Opportunities for Advancing Accurate Health Information

Participants saw several potentials to use Facebook and Instagram for the promotion of correct health information.

The following is a quote from the participant:

"The platform's reach is extensive. Collaborating with health organizations may enhance the visibility of credible information."

"I like live Q&A sessions conducted by health specialists. It seems more engaging and reliable."

"I have saw campaigns use hashtags such as MentalHealthAwareness get significant exposure. If executed correctly, this may significantly inform users."

"Interactive instruments such as quizzes or polls concerning health subjects can render learning enjoyable and captivating."

Enhancing Strategies to Counter Misinformation

Participants offered several recommendations for mitigating the dissemination of disinformation on social media platforms.

"Platforms ought to implement pop-ups alerting users to unverified information, particularly when disseminating posts."

"Fact-checking ought to be broadened to encompass additional localized and community-specific content."

"A more straightforward method for reporting false health information is necessary. The existing procedure is very convoluted."

"Education is vital. Workshops or campaigns instructing people on identifying credible sources would be very beneficial."

Participants underscored that combating disinformation on Facebook and Instagram requires a multifaceted strategy. By optimizing algorithms, collaborating with reputable health organizations, using hashtags, and augmenting fact-checking and reporting mechanisms, these platforms may substantially enhance health communication. Educational programs aimed at enabling consumers to identify reliable sources were emphasized as a vital tactic.

The interview replies about the obstacles and prospects of using Facebook and Instagram for disseminating accurate health information are consistent with, and in some cases, divergent from the current literature. Interview participants identified many significant obstacles, including the difficulty in differentiating genuine information from deceptive material, since algorithms favour interaction over accuracy and erroneous information is often presented in a sophisticated manner. These results align with the findings of Pennycook and Rand (2021), who highlighted that algorithms on social media platforms exacerbate the dissemination of disinformation, which often proliferates more rapidly than accurate information. Adams (2010) and Larkin (2014) identified the excessive amount of material and the absence of user-friendly verification procedures as significant concerns. These issues indicate that the platforms' emphasis on user participation unintentionally promotes the dissemination of disinformation, hence fostering an adversarial atmosphere for reliable health communication.

The interviewees' worries regarding the propagation of erroneous information also reflect study by Roozenbeek et al. (2021), which indicated that disinformation tends to endure even after attempts to rectify it, since people may get entrenched in their opinions. This corresponds with participants' perceptions about the effortless dissemination of erroneous material, often

occurring without verification, resulting in extensive confusion. Moreover, the concern over source trustworthiness, as shown by Anderson et al. (2013) and Moorhead et al. (2013), was underscored in the interviews, with participants stressing the need for enhanced fact-checking and more accessible reporting systems to address disinformation. This corresponds with widespread apprehensions in the literature over the inadequate ability of existing fact-checking mechanisms to tackle localized and community-specific information, as emphasized by Nyarko et al. (2023).

Conversely, the interviews highlighted considerable prospects for enhancing health communication on Facebook and Instagram. Participants saw the platforms' broad reach, their capacity for cooperation with health organizations, and the use of interactive technologies such as live Q&A sessions and quizzes to enhance participation. These potentials are corroborated by the research of Amankwaa and Acheampong (2022), which indicated that interactive material improves user engagement and promotes superior information retention. Likewise, Mensah et al. (2021) discovered that individuals are more inclined to trust and respond to health information delivered in an engaging and interactive manner. Participants noted the potential of utilizing hashtags like #MentalHealthAwareness to enhance campaigns and engage varied audiences, reflecting the conclusions of Acheampong and Kofi (2021), who emphasised social media's role in community building and promoting peer support regarding health issues. The research demonstrates that social media platforms provide economical options for health promotion, rendering them especially advantageous for health organizations with constrained resources. Owusu-Ansah and Osei (2022) highlighted the cost-effectiveness of social media relative to conventional media outlets, facilitating wider access and interaction. The use of multimedia tools, including films and infographics, was emphasised as a means to elucidate intricate health messages, a notion supported by Boateng et al. (2021), who acknowledged the significance of visual aids in improving understanding and user engagement.

Nonetheless, the interviews uncovered apprehensions over privacy and data security, which may dissuade users from interacting with health-related information, especially on stigmatized subjects. Appiah and Abubakar (2022) identified same concerns in their study, observing that people often hesitate to engage in discussions or seek information on sensitive health matters such as mental health or HIV/AIDS owing to apprehensions about exposure or judgement. Das and Sahoo (2011) highlighted the dangers of disclosing personal information online, which corresponds with participants' insights on the difficulties of preserving confidentiality on platforms such as Facebook and Instagram.

Both the interviews and the literature underscore the issues posed by disinformation, accessibility restrictions, and privacy concerns, while also acknowledging the platforms' capacity to provide meaningful health communication. The interviewees offered pragmatic recommendations, including algorithm modifications, collaborations with reputable health organizations, and training programs to enable consumers to identify trustworthy sources. These suggestions correspond with the results of Nguyen and Park (2022) about the need of personalized and targeted communications to improve engagement. Confronting these issues via a blend of technology advancements, user education, and strategic partnerships might markedly enhance the efficacy of social media in health promotion, as shown by both the interviews and the current research.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATION

5.1 Introduction

The study aimed to investigate the impact of social media on the communication of health risks, with a specific emphasis on Facebook and Instagram. To achieve this, three research objectives were formulated and guided the study. An exploratory research design and mixed method approach were employed to gather and analyze data. The research used the purposive and convenience sampling method in selecting 150 participants using a questionnaire and interview designed for the study. The research objectives were analyzed using mean and standard deviation, with the mean of means serving as the benchmark for decision-making regarding the variables. Chapter Five of the study provides a comprehensive summary of the research findings, conclusions drawn from the data, and recommendations for future research or practical applications. This chapter serves as a culmination of the study, providing a concise overview of the research's main points and implications.

5.2 Summary of Findings

The survey reveals that individuals find health risk communication on Facebook and Instagram to be mostly clear and engaging. This favourable opinion indicates the potential of social media as an effective instrument for distributing health information. Nonetheless, the results indicate significant issues concerning consumers' capacity to trust and distinguish reliable sources from deceptive or erroneous material. Numerous individuals articulated apprehensions about the ubiquity of misinformation, which might skew perspectives and obstruct effective health communication. This highlights the need for health communicators to adopt improved techniques, including the promotion of verified material and the use of authoritative sources, to boost the perceived credibility of health messages. By tackling these difficulties, social

media may more efficiently promote user engagement and dissemination of health information throughout their social networks.

The results indicate that users exhibit considerable skepticism about the reliability of health-related information disseminated on social media. A significant number of participants expressed a pronounced preference for health material that has been validated by specialists or esteemed health organizations. This preference indicates widespread apprehensions about the quality and dependability of online information, as consumers exhibit skepticism towards postings that may have inflated assertions or deceptive figures. This skepticism underscores the need of basing health information on social media in scientific evidence and delivering it in a credible manner. Establishing user trust is crucial for disseminating accurate health information and fostering proactive health behaviours in the community.

The research identifies disinformation as a major concern that undermines public confidence in the dissemination of correct health information on Facebook and Instagram. Participants noted that the fast dissemination of erroneous health information often undermines trustworthy communication initiatives, resulting in confusion and mistrust among consumers. Notwithstanding this urgent dilemma, the study also delineates some chances for effective health communication. Collaborative initiatives with health organizations may confer authority and credibility to social media health campaigns, while the use of engaging content formats such as live Q&A sessions, infographics, and interactive posts can further augment user engagement. Moreover, training programs designed to enable people to identify reputable information sources may be crucial in addressing disinformation. Utilizing these chances, social media may proficiently improve the distribution of factual health information while tackling the substantial issue of disinformation.

The influence of social media on health risk communication, specifically on Facebook and Instagram, reveals a complex interaction of possibilities and obstacles that need careful

navigation. Although these platforms provide significant opportunities for engaging various audiences and promoting health awareness, the widespread problem of misinformation and differing degrees of user trust need collaborative initiatives to enhance the credibility and effectiveness of health communication tactics. Confronting these difficulties requires a comprehensive strategy, including professional cooperation, user education, and creative interaction methods. These activities are essential for optimizing social media's function in public health communication, ensuring the dissemination of correct information in the digital realm and fostering healthier communities.

5.3 Conclusion

The research underscores the considerable potential of social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram as effective instruments for health risk communication. These platforms have extensive reach and the capacity to engage varied audiences, making them useful mediums for communicating health information and enhancing awareness.

Nevertheless, the results reveal significant issues, notably the widespread disinformation and differing degrees of trust among consumers. The skepticism about the legitimacy of health-related communications suggests that while social media may serve as a valuable resource, its efficacy diminishes when the disseminated material is seen as untrustworthy or deceptive.

To enhance the effectiveness of health communication on digital platforms, it is essential to implement a comprehensive approach that tackles these obstacles. Initially, it is crucial to disseminate knowledge that is validated by health specialists or esteemed organizations to bolster confidence and legitimacy. Partnerships with reputable health organizations may enhance the credibility of social media health initiatives and mitigate the dissemination of misinformation. Moreover, using captivating and interactive information forms, such as live Q&A sessions, infographics, and quizzes, may enhance user engagement and involvement.

Moreover, equipping consumers with the knowledge and skills to critically evaluate online health information is essential for countering disinformation. Educational activities that enable consumers to differentiate between reputable and questionable sources might enhance their capacity to make informed health choices. By using these tactics and tackling the obstacles presented by disinformation, social media may assume a more substantial role in public health communication. Through coordinated initiatives, these platforms may proficiently disseminate accurate health information, foster good health behaviours, and enhance the overall well-being of communities. Ultimately, the amalgamation of trustworthy material, user education, and compelling communication strategies may convert social media into a significant instrument for cultivating healthier, more educated communities.

5.4 Recommendations

Based on the study findings, the following recommendations are made for policy making:

- **Improve Content Validation and Cooperation with Healthcare Professionals:** Health communicators must prioritize content validation via collaboration with healthcare experts and esteemed health organizations. This method will guarantee that the information disseminated on social media sites such as Facebook and Instagram are precise, reliable, and scientifically substantiated. Utilizing reputable sources, health campaigns may enhance their credibility, fostering user confidence and promoting the distribution of credible health information.
- **Utilize Interactive and Captivating Content Formats:** To augment user engagement and facilitate improved comprehension, health campaigns have to include novel content forms, like live Q&A sessions, infographics, and interactive articles. These formats may facilitate the simplification of intricate health information, enhance user engagement, and cultivate an interactive

atmosphere in which consumers feel more engaged to health communications. This method may also promote increased sharing of health information among social media users.

- **Enhance User Empowerment via Educational Initiatives:** Users must possess the knowledge and abilities to critically assess health information found on social media. Educational measures, including digital literacy programs and media campaigns that instruct consumers on identifying reputable sources, are essential in combatting disinformation. Enabling users to identify credible health information may alleviate the adverse effects of misinformation and foster healthier behaviours in the community.
- **Counter Misinformation by Proactive Surveillance and Reporting Mechanisms:** Social media sites must to allocate resources towards advanced monitoring systems capable of swiftly identifying and eliminating erroneous or deceptive health information. This may be accomplished using automated techniques or cooperative alliances with fact-checking entities. Furthermore, establishing simpler and more accessible reporting tools for users would enable the community to actively uphold the integrity of health-related communications.

5.5 Suggestions for Further Studies

Analyzing the Function of Social Media Algorithms in the Distribution of Health Information: Future study may examine the impact of social media algorithms on the visibility and dissemination of health-related material. Comprehending the manner in which algorithms prioritize certain categories of health information and its effect on user engagement and trust will provide insights for enhancing health communication tactics on these platforms.

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APPENDIX

UNIVERSITY OF MEDIA ARTS AND COMMUNICATION

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON HEALTH RISK COMMUNICATION: CASE OF FACEBOOK AND INSTAGRAM.

My Name is Grace Acheampong, an MA student at the University of Media Arts and Communication. As part of the requirements for the award of the MA Degree, I am conducting a study on The Impact of Social Media on Health Risk Communication: Case of Facebook and Instagram. I kindly request you to spare few minutes of your busy schedule to partake in this interview. The information given will be treated very confidentially, and will only be used for academic purposes. Thank you for your time.

Please tick (✓) or write where appropriate

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. Gender of Respondents a. Male [] b. Female []
2. Age of Respondents a. 18 - 25years [] b. 26-35years [] c. 36-45years [] d. 45 years and above []
3. What is the highest educational level you have attained?
a. Junior High School [] Senior High School [] c. Degree []
4. Please do you have access to or use any social media platform a. Yes [] b. No []
5. Which social platform(s) do you have access to or use? Kindly tick as many as applicable) a. Instagram [] c. Facebook [] d. WhatsApp [] e. Telegram [] g. Tiktok [] j. Twitter [] k. LinkedIn []

SECTION B: EFFECTIVENESS OF HEALTH RISK COMMUNICATION ON FACEBOOK AND INSTAGRAM

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements. The scale consists of five levels: SD=Strongly Disagree, D= Disagree, N=Neutral, A= Agree and SA=Strongly Agree. Answer by ticking (√) only one answer in each case. Use the scales below as a guide.

S/N	Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA
1	I find health risk messages on Facebook and Instagram easy to understand.					
2	The health risk information I see on Facebook and Instagram is credible.					
3	Health risk communication on Facebook and Instagram influences my health-related decisions.					
4	I frequently share health risk information from Facebook and Instagram with others.					
5	I feel confident in the accuracy of health-related messages shared on Facebook and Instagram.					
6	The health risk messages on these platforms provide sufficient detail for me to take action.					
7	I have learned new health information from posts on Facebook and Instagram.					
8	Health risk communication on social media is more effective than traditional media for me.					
9	I believe Facebook and Instagram are reliable sources for health risk communication.					
10	The health risk messages I see on Facebook and Instagram are timely and relevant.					
11	I am likely to follow the advice given in health risk communication shared on Facebook and Instagram.					
12	Health risk communication on Facebook and Instagram motivates me to practice better health habits.					

13	Health risk messages on these platforms are often clear and free of jargon.					
14	I am able to differentiate between accurate and misleading health information on these platforms.					
15	The use of multimedia (e.g., images and videos) in health risk communication on social media makes the information more engaging.					

SECTION C: USER PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES TOWARD HEALTH-RELATED MESSAGES SHARED ON FACEBOOK AND INSTAGRAM

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements. The scale consists of five levels: SD=Strongly Disagree, D= Disagree, N=Neutral, A= Agree and SA=Strongly Agree. Answer by ticking (√) only one answer in each case. Use the scales below as a guide.

S/N	Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA
1	I trust the health-related content I come across on Facebook and Instagram.					
2	I prefer to receive health-related updates from social media platforms over traditional news sources.					
3	I feel that health-related posts on social media are often exaggerated.					
4	I engage with health-related content on Facebook and Instagram by liking, commenting, or sharing.					
5	I find it easy to distinguish between credible and non-credible health messages on these platforms.					
6	I believe that Facebook and Instagram are important for spreading health awareness.					
7	I am interested in learning more about health topics through posts on these platforms.					
8	I am skeptical about health advice given in health-related messages shared on social media.					

9	The health messages I see on social media have a positive impact on my health awareness.					
10	I find it difficult to trust health information that lacks scientific references on social media.					
11	I believe that health-related messages on Facebook and Instagram should be verified by professionals.					
12	I often discuss health-related posts on Facebook and Instagram with my friends and family.					
13	Health-related posts on Facebook and Instagram influence my health behavior.					
14	I think that the tone of health-related messages on social media is appropriate for all age groups.					
15	I feel that health messages on Facebook and Instagram are designed to attract attention rather than inform.					

SECTION D: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN USING FACEBOOK AND INSTAGRAM FOR PROMOTING ACCURATE HEALTH INFORMATION AND MITIGATING MISINFORMATION

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements. The scale consists of five levels: SD=Strongly Disagree, D= Disagree, N=Neutral, A= Agree and SA=Strongly Agree. Answer by ticking (√) only one answer in each case. Use the scales below as a guide.

S/N	Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA
1	It is easy to find accurate health information on Facebook and Instagram.					
2	Facebook and Instagram help raise awareness about important health issues.					
3	The presence of misinformation on Facebook and Instagram is a significant challenge.					

4	I have encountered false health information on Facebook and Instagram.					
5	Facebook and Instagram provide opportunities to reach a wide audience with accurate health information.					
6	Social media platforms are effective at combating the spread of health misinformation.					
7	Health professionals should have a greater presence on Facebook and Instagram to promote accuracy.					
8	I believe that fact-checking features on these platforms are helpful in mitigating misinformation.					
9	The algorithms on Facebook and Instagram contribute to the spread of health misinformation.					
10	Social media platforms are responsible for ensuring the accuracy of health information.					
11	There are limited ways to report false health information on Facebook and Instagram.					
12	Facebook and Instagram could do more to ensure that health-related content is verified.					
13	Health communication campaigns on social media often face challenges due to platform policies.					
14	I think that partnerships between health organizations and social media platforms can help promote accurate health information.					
15	The use of hashtags and trends on social media can amplify accurate health information.					

Interview Guide

Effectiveness of Health Risk Communication on Facebook and Instagram

1. Can you describe your experience with health risk communication on Facebook and Instagram? How clear and informative do you find these messages?
2. What type of health risk information on social media do you find most useful, and why?

3. How often do you take action based on the health risk information you see on Facebook and Instagram? Can you provide an example of a time when you did?

User Perceptions and Attitudes Toward Health-Related Messages Shared on Facebook and Instagram

1. How do you usually feel about the health-related content shared on Facebook and Instagram? Do you find it trustworthy?
2. What factors influence whether or not you engage with or share health-related posts on these platforms?
3. Do you think the tone and style of health messages on Facebook and Instagram are appropriate for all age groups? Why or why not?

Challenges and Opportunities in Using Facebook and Instagram for Promoting Accurate Health Information and Mitigating Misinformation

1. What challenges have you noticed when it comes to distinguishing between accurate and misleading health information on Facebook and Instagram?
2. In your opinion, what are the key opportunities for using Facebook and Instagram to effectively promote accurate health information?
3. How do you think social media platforms can improve their strategies to reduce the spread of misinformation in health-related content?