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Exploring the Relationship Between Students' Social Media Use and Video Sharing Intent in Promoting Health Communication

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ABSTRACT

Social media has demonstrated immense value in health communication initiatives. However, its facilitative role in enabling the productive dissemination of health-related short videos remains less explored. Moreover, it is still unclear how students positively utilize social media to share short videos for health communication. Therefore, this study employed a quantitative research design to investigate students' social media use characteristics, time spent on social media, number of videos shared, and attitude toward video sharing. An online survey was conducted to obtain responses from students of Njala University in Sierra Leone. Spearman's non-parametric correlation analysis was carried out to determine the nature of the relationship between the study variables. Results revealed a positive significant association between time spent on social media and number of videos shared. Although time spent on social media was also positively associated with positive attitude toward sharing videos, the relationship was not statistically significant. Furthermore, it was revealed that more students use WhatsApp and Facebook to share videos. This study offers practical implications for leveraging social media and short videos to enhance health communication.

INTRODUCTION

Based on advancements and rapid growth in mobile communication technologies, social media has become a powerful and widely used digital media tool (Hruska & Maresova, 2020; Kim & Sin, 2013; Osterrieder, 2013; Phoon, 2017). Today, social media plays a pivotal role in disseminating media content and information. Therefore, it is assumed that a health promotion drive can be made more productive through effective and responsible social media use (Carlyle, 2017; Ghahramani *et al.*, 2022; Roy & Malloy, 2023).

Evidence from prior studies confirms that social media can drive attitudinal and behavioral change (e.g., Adewuyi, 2016; Korda & Itani, 2013; Mahoney & Tang, 2016). However, despite challenges associated with social media use, such as the uncontrolled dissemination of irrelevant content, security and ethical concerns (Kasturi, 2014), its potential to enhance effective health communication remains prominent (Johns *et al.*, 2017; Thapliyal *et al.*, 2024; Wella *et al.*, 2025). Moreover, students' misuse of social media is a thorny issue that continues to attract scholarly attention in recent studies (e.g., Zhang & Rau, 2021). In view of these issues, this study provides insight into how students can positively engage with social media to promote health communication.

Recently, short videos have gained significance as tools for health communication (e.g., Song *et al.*, 2021; Zhu *et al.*, 2023). A short video embodies a blend of audio, video and text that facilitates information sharing in health communication. Short video platforms such as Tiktok, YouTube Shots, Instagram Reels etc., offer affordances that make communication seamless (Zhu *et al.*, 2023). They enable live streaming and interactivity while at the

same time sustain audience engagement. Obviously, short videos hold a special place in health communication and their utility in this direction is crucial.

This study focuses on the utility of social media as an avenue for disseminating health-related videos to a wider audience of university students. Thus, social media platforms are considered a suitable means to access and facilitate engagement with the videos that promote health communication. However, the effectiveness of any social media intervention to enhance health communication depends on appropriateness in design and implementation (Amkeeva & Bywood, 2013). While the integration of social media for health communication is popular in previous studies, the concurrent use of short videos in this context is growing but understudied. Therefore, students' perceptions of social media use patterns and their attitudes and intentions toward online video sharing are explored. Also, since the study explored the dual application of social media and video in health promotion, the findings would be deemed appropriate in informing the design and implementation of health communication activities.

Research Questions

1. What is the relationship between students' social media use and video sharing behavior?
2. What are the characteristics of students' social media use?
3. What are the perceptions of students' on sharing a health-related video through social media?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Students' use of social media to foster health

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communication is the central focus of this study. It attempts to position social media platforms for the purpose of driving efficient and productive transmission of health messages. Arguably, social media is gaining prominence as the most widely used media channel (Jiawei & Renwen, 2019). Miller (2019) defined social media as “online and mobile communities that exist to let people share news, opinions, personal information, photos, and videos” (p. 211). This definition emphasizes the content dissemination function of social media. Notably, social media is a fast-evolving digital tool that is employed to facilitate communication and share content. Within the scope of this study, social media is examined based on students’ intent to use it as a medium to share a health-focused video.

Substantial evidence exists in previous studies to support the use of social media for health communication purposes (e.g., Johns *et al.*, 2017; Thapliyal *et al.*, 2024; Wella *et al.*, 2025). In a review that catalogue existing evidence on the use of social media for health promotion and behavior change, Korda and Itani (2013) pointed out that social media could be a powerful tool that enables interactivity and a wider reach. However, despite its promise for health promotion, they pointed out that social media may not be immune to future challenges, such as information overload, effective monitoring against inappropriate content and measuring meaningful engagements.

A notable feature of social media is its ability to reach wide audiences. Neiger *et al.* (2012) study focused on the use of social media in a health promotion drive. They outlined the interplay of functions that social media plays in health communication. Relatedly, the capacity of social media to engage audiences, transmit information rapidly and promote services was prominently echoed. Based on these set of capabilities, social media could be utilized for health communication purposes. However, the researchers cautioned that social media should not be viewed as a magic wand to initiate immediate solution to address behavior change issues.

Moreover, social media has proved to be very useful in reaching hard-to-reach populations for health promotion and education. For instance, Smith and Denali (2014) identified ways in which social media can be utilized as a tool to reach populations along the USA/Mexico border. Before the introduction of social media, traditional modes of health communication were very expensive to employ in health communication endeavors. This mostly involved the use of radio or television. Moreover, these traditional health communication initiatives were only able to reach a minimal percentage of the targeted population. On the contrary, it was possible to reach more people and rapidly disseminate health messages through the use of social media.

Similarly, Johns *et al.* (2017) reviewed the use of social media for the delivery of health promotion interventions on smoking, nutrition, and physical activity to empower behavior change. They also observed that social media

is less costly when used for health promotion. However, they noted that the intervention may not produce important benefits. Some of the studies they reviewed failed to engage users, whereas others reached large audiences. The review also found out that the inclusion of social media did not influence smoking cessation or weight loss. However, few studies indicated that use of social media could enhance physical activity levels.

On the other hand, social media and mobile technology have a symbiotic relationship. The growth in the number of social media users has been partly influenced by advances in technology. Cooke-Jackson (2013) reported that more than half of social media users in the United States are now using advanced smartphones, which enhance their social media use experience. Consequently, the resultant increase in the use of social media has enhanced access to health information. This point underscores the rationale for investigating students use of social media and their intent to use it as a medium to share videos to promote health communication. Cooke-Jackson’s study and many others have focused on Facebook and Twitter, which has left YouTube underutilized as far as health communication is concerned. This gap in the literature reinforces the need to use YouTube to share the health-related video. Attention is now placed on how to leverage social media to promote health communication initiatives. To this end, social media can play a pivotal role in enabling viable information sharing in a health communication initiative. Just like social media, recent studies have explored the applications and effects of short videos in health communication initiatives (e.g., Song *et al.*, 2021; Zhu *et al.*, 2023). For instance, integrating a short video tutorial on helping parents in clinical situations avoid anxiety was found to have a positive effect (Ewing *et al.*, 2020). It is evident that short videos are pivotal in stimulating effective health communication. This justifies the study’s object of investigating students’ video sharing behaviors in promoting health communication.

In a study evaluating the effectiveness of health campaign strategies, Harrington *et al.* (2014) suggested innovative approaches to the integration of new media in health communication. The study offered valuable insights into the importance of using multiple channels in health communication endeavors. Therefore, the current study draws inspiration from this strategy of applying multiple channels by focusing on students’ use of social media tools to share a health-related video to promote health communication.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the Entertainment-Education Theory. Propounded by Miguel Sabido, the theory draws on a communication strategy involving the design and transmission of messages that both inform and entertain for the purpose of edification or behaviour change. Application of the entertainment education theory is prominent in health communication interventions. Notably, the theory can be very effective in leveraging

the short video through social media to reach wider audiences and achieve positive health communication outcomes, The strength of this theory lies in the duality of purpose that the media content serves; to educate and entertain. Using this approach in health communication interventions would yield much dividend and enable an understanding of the mechanism that drive students' video sharing intent. Therefore, this study adopts the entertainment education theoretical perspective.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study used a quantitative design through an online survey. For expediency, the convenient sampling method (Bhattachcherjee, 2012) was employed and valid responses were obtained from 65 undergraduate students of Njala University in Sierra Leone.

As part of the data collection procedure, a short video on the dangers of self-medication was produced. It was posted on YouTube and participating students were given access to the link via a WhatsApp social media group

created for the study participants. Also, participants gained access to an online survey, which was designed in Google Forms, through the WhatsApp group. The questions in the social media use section of the online survey questionnaire were adapted from Yang & Wang (2015). These items measured students' social media use variables. Specifically, eight questions/statements were included for this measure. Sample items included, "How much time do you spend using social networking services such as Facebook and WhatsApp on a daily basis?" Video sharing attitudes and behaviors were also assessed. An example item included, "How do you pass along online videos to your friends?" In addition, an open-ended question was included to assess whether students would share a short film on social media and why.

Data analysis employed descriptive and inferential statistical approaches via the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26.0. To answer research question one, a non-parametric Spearman's correlational analysis was executed. Furthermore, descriptive statistics

Table 1: Spearman's correlational analysis on the association between students' social media use and video sharing behavior

Variable	n	M	SD	1	2	3
1. Time spent on social media	65	2.75	0.77	-		
2. Number of videos shared on social media	65	2.35	1.25	.25*	-	
3. Positive attitude towards sharing online videos	65	3.54	0.81	.12	-.09	-

Note. * Shows that $p < .05$. M and SD represent mean and standard deviation, respectively.

were applied to analyze students' social media use characteristics. To answer research question three, data from an open-ended question were analyzed qualitatively.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Relationship between Social Media Use and Video Sharing Behavior

The first research question explored the relationship between the extent of students' use of social media and their video sharing behavior. Thus, the non-parametric Spearman's correlational analysis was carried out to determine the relationship among three variables: 1) time spent on social media, 2) number of videos shared on social media, and 3) positive attitude towards sharing online videos. Results displayed in Table 2 revealed that a significant positive relationship exists between time spent

on social media and the number of videos shared on social media, $r_s(63) = .25, p < .05$. This result revealed that the more time students spend on social media the more likely they are to increase the number of videos shared. Conversely, there was a positive relationship between time spent on social media and positive attitude towards sharing online videos, but it was not significant, $r_s(63) = .12, p = .35$. Furthermore, the results showed a non-significant negative relationship between number of videos shared on social media and positive attitude towards sharing online videos, $r_s(63) = -.09, p = .47$.

The descriptive statistics showed that students held a consistent favorable perception about their social media use and video sharing behavior. Time spent on social media has a mean of 2.75 (SD = 0.77), which is slightly higher than number of videos shared on social media

Table 2: Time spent using social media such as Facebook and WhatsApp on a typical day

Time Spent	Frequency(n)	Percent (%)
1-60 minutes	29	44.6
1-2 hours	23	35.4
2-3 hours	13	20.0
Total	65	100.0

with a mean of 2.35 (1.25). Evidently, positive attitude towards sharing online videos was relatively higher with a mean of 3.54 (SD = 0.81).

Characteristics of Students' Social Media Use

Research question two asked, what are the characteristics of students' social media use? This question explored how and to extent students use social media tools. First, the study explored the amount of time students spend on

social media on a daily basis, and second, the social media platforms students use to share videos online.

As shown in table 2, students did not typically spend more than 3 hours on social media. The usage pattern for time spent on social media indicated 44.6% (1 – 60 minutes), 35.4% (1-2 hours), and 20.0% (2 – 3 hours). When asked about the number of videos watched via popular video sites within the past three days, the responses indicated 4.5% (no video), 76.9% (1 – 5

Table 3: Platforms used to share online videos

Variable	Frequency	Gender (%)		Total (%)
		Male	Female	
Through social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp	53	49.2	32.3	81.5
Through popular video sharing websites such as YouTube	4	4.6	1.5	6.2
Using instant messaging services such as MSN Messenger and Yahoo Messenger	1	.0	1.5	1.5
I do not share online videos	7	4.6	6.2	10.8

videos), and 12.3% (6 – 10 videos). Thus, a majority of respondents used social media sites to watch videos. Most students typically watched between 1 – 5 videos. Table 3 shows how students shared videos. Specifically, the results indicated that 81.5% did so through Facebook and WhatsApp, 6.2% through YouTube, 1.5% through instant messaging services, and 10.8% indicated that they did not share online videos at all. From the results, more male students (49.2%) used WhatsApp and Facebook to share videos than female students (32.3%). Notably, while a majority of students were inclined to share videos through social media platforms, some did not share online videos at all.

Perceptions on Intention to share the health-related video on social media

Research question three qualitatively explored students' perceptions of their intention to share the health-related video on social media. The qualitative data were derived from an open-ended question that was the last item on the questionnaire. The question asked students to briefly describe why they would or would not share the video on social media. It was a follow-up question to the one that asked how likely students would be to share the short film on social media. Because the online survey did not allow for incomplete responses, all participants responded to the open-ended question. The researcher then applied the open coding technique to identify ideas and themes from the open-ended comments for further analysis (Bhattachcheriee, 2012).

Importantly, the majority of the students expressed willingness to share the health-related video on social media platforms. Their responses confirmed appreciation for the video and its viability to transmitting a vital health message. Respondents generally believed in the

effectiveness of the video in influencing health attitudes and behavior of people. From the comments provided, most of the students indicated their appreciation of the short film because of its effectiveness in conveying the message about self-medication. For instance, one student noted that, "I will happily share this video based on it's imperative information. I certainly believe it will change the narrative of many people who have been self-medicating." Another student declared, "I will share it to help spread the message about the dangers of self-medication." Although further research is necessary, these comments suggest that the message of the short film was conveyed clearly.

Some of the comments made underscored students' belief in the efficacy of social media to share videos in particular. For example, one student commented that, "the use of social media will be effective," and another believed that, "many people use social media." However, another felt unable to share the video on social media, noting, "I don't spend much time on social media." This provided evidence that those who were negative about sharing the video did so not necessarily because of dislike for the short film but because of access to internet or social media. Another student had this to say, "I don't use internet often." Were there any negative comments? It is important to be really transparent about the results of the comments so that future research can improve the intervention techniques to be even more successful.

Another conclusion that emerged from the comments was that the video served an educationa function as postulated by the entertainment education theory. This was inferred in some of the comments made, such as, "the video will educate people," and "the video is educative." One student indicated willingness to share the video in order "to educate others about self-medication."

The educational purpose that the film could be a central focus of any future health promotion campaign. Overall, the use of social media is a potential pathway to ensure a wider dissemination of pertinent health messages. The video could be effectively disseminated to hard-to-reach audiences through social media.

Discussion

Primarily, the study sought to assess the relationship between students' use of social media and their video sharing behavior. The Spearman's correlational analysis revealed a mix of significant and non-significant relationships among the study variables. Specifically, the results indicated a significant positive association between time spent on social media and the number of online videos shared. Although the majority of students did not spend more than three hours on social media each day, conversely, more students were inclined to sharing online videos on a daily basis. This has positive implications for efforts aiming at using of social media to disseminate digital media content for health communication purposes (Johns *et al.*, 2017; Thapliyal *et al.*, 2024; Wella *et al.*, 2025). It is worth noting that because students spend moderate time online, the use of short videos as tools in health communication deserves consideration in future implementation.

On the other hand, the positive association between time spent on social media and positive attitude toward sharing videos online was not significant. Nonetheless, it is assumed that normally students who spend more time on social media are likely to sharing videos online. This implies that short videos can be viable tools for health communication (Ewing *et al.*, 2020).

Conversely, the negative association between the number of videos shared on social media and positive attitude toward sharing videos online is worthy to note. This negative association does not imply any form of limitation in the use of social media to share video content. For instance, the interpretation is that as students spend less time on social media the more willing they are likely to share videos online. Arguably, their limited time on social media did not have a negative influence on intention to share videos. Similarly, even though students watched few videos on social media platforms, they were willing to share the short film online. One may conclude that some students make minimal use of social media. However, limited time on social media does not affect their intention to share videos on social media.

The descriptive statistical analysis presented a clearer picture of the ways students engage with social media. It is undisputed that a higher number of students regularly share online videos with friends through social media sites like Facebook and WhatsApp. This conforms with earlier studies that reported the growing use of social media for health communication (e.g., Johns *et al.*, 2017; Thapliyal *et al.*, 2024; Wella *et al.*, 2025). Interestingly, some students do not share videos online. The results also suggest that students are avid users of social media and thus suitable

candidates for a campaign to share health-related videos. However, their use of social media is limited in terms of time spent in comparison with students in developed nations. The reasons for such a limited time spent on social media could not be established in this study. Arguably, possible factors for such limited daily use include, data cost or poor network; however, there is no empirical evidence to support this assertion.

It is also important to note that Facebook and WhatsApp are the social media platforms that students reported engaging with regularly. This finding provides a foundation for continued use of these social media platforms for health communication, as underscored in the study by Ghahramani *et al.* (2022), which reported the effective use of Facebook. For this study, the researcher primarily used WhatsApp. Most of the study activities were disseminated via WhatsApp, and students tended to participate enthusiastically. This study provides an indication of the potential of using WhatsApp for similar research and for sharing health-related videos. Another interesting finding of this study regarded students' intention to share the short video. Majority of the students indicated that they would be willing to share the short video via social media, which suggests that short videos may be helpful in conveying and widely disseminating health messages. In sum, the integration of social media and short videos is crucial for health communication in this digital age.

CONCLUSION

Social media serves as a facilitator of information and content sharing for health communication. Considering the emerging role of short videos in health communication, this study explored the characteristics of students' social media use as well as the relationship between their use of social media and video sharing behaviors. Students who participated in this study were regular users of social media and indicated intent to share the health-related video via social media. Notably, time spent on social media was positively associated with positive attitude toward sharing videos online. The conclusion is that students who spend more time on social media are more likely share videos online. This has implications for health communication as it highlights the need to use social media to share health-related videos. It underscores the fact that students can put social media to a more productive use.

This study has investigated students' social media use and intent to share short videos as tools in health communication. However, it is restricted to a single university with limited participants. Future studies should capture a wider sample size to strengthen and generalize the finding. A study employing an experiment design is encouraged to determine the effects of short videos in exerting change in behaviors.

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