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Faculty of Humanities, Imo State University

Role of Social Media Influencer “Aproko Doctor” in Promoting Healthy Living among University of Ilorin Undergraduates

Shittu Adefowope Luqman

Mass Communication

Al-Hikmah University

lashittu@alhikmah.edu.ng

Ajijola Bashiru Amoda

Mass Communication

Al-Hikmah University

ajijolaba@gmail.com

Katibi Kehinde Sa’adat

Mass Communication

Al-Hikmah University

kskatibi@alhikmah.edu.ng

Adenugba Farida Adepeju

faridaadenugba011@gmail.com

Abstract

In recent years, social media influencers have become increasingly prominent, leveraging their large online followership to shape opinions and behaviours, predominantly among youths. Numerous studies have established that youths are now aware of social media influencers and rely on them for information, especially when it’s about living healthily. However, most of these studies were carried out in the United States of America, Europe and Asia, with little evidence on why youths rely on social media influencers for health information in developing countries. The motivation of the study is to investigate the role of social media influencer “Aproko Doctor” in promoting healthy living among University of Ilorin undergraduates. The study was grounded in the source credibility and technological determinism theories. Employing a multi-stage sampling technique, 239 self-administered questionnaires were deployed and Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyse the data gathered. Findings revealed that respondents were aware that Aproko Doctor regularly posts health-related contents on his social media handles. Similarly, the findings established that respondents did not find it difficult to adopt and sustain health advice shared by Aproko Doctor on his social media handles due to their current lifestyles. The study concluded that Aproko Doctor plays a significant role in promoting healthy living among University of Ilorin undergraduates. The influencer’s credibility, reinforced by his

medical background, allows the respondents' trust and willingness to act on the health advice he provides. The study recommends that University Health Services, government and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) should consider partnering with credible social media influencers like Aproko Doctor to amplify health promotion campaigns on and off the campus.

Keywords: Aproko doctor, Healthy living, Social media Influencer, Social media, Undergraduates

Introduction

The growing prevalence of unhealthy lifestyles among students is becoming a significant cause for concern, considering that it negatively impacts their immediate and long-term health (Charles *et al.*, 2021). These behaviours are responsible for a variety of health issues, such as obesity, sexually transmitted diseases, chronic illnesses, and mental health disorders (Bartlem *et al.*, 2015). According to Laranjo (2016), social media has emerged as a potent instrument for promoting health and facilitating interventions to modify behaviours. The use of social media among students has advanced beyond simple connectivity and conversation; social media has evolved into a forum where individuals with established reputations share information (Vromen, Xenos, & Loader, 2014).

The concept of influencers originates from the pioneering research conducted by Lazarsfeld (Halperin, 2015), where he developed the concept of 'opinion leaders' to explain how ideas spread within a society. According to this concept, the dissemination of ideas typically originates from mass media and then influences opinion leaders, who in turn exert their influence on the wider community (Olajojo, 2020).

Health influencers on social media possess a significant capacity to disseminate health related information to vast audiences through various platforms like Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and TikTok. These individuals often demonstrate their expertise and leverage their authoritative position to educate the public on a range of health topics, such as women's health, beauty treatments, wellness practices, and illness prevention. In Nigeria, an example of such an influencer is Egemba Chinonso Fidelis, popularly known as Aproko Doctor, a Nigerian Medical Doctor, health influencer and actor, the founder of Healthy Brands and 100K Club, a non-profit organisation.

Despite the recognized potential of social media influencers in promoting healthy living, the specific mechanisms through which they shape attitudes and behaviours remain unclear. Research suggests that influencers can inspire healthier lifestyle choices among their followers, particularly undergraduates, who are increasingly managing their own health based on the content shared by these digital opinion leaders (Willoughby *et al.*, 2023; Tiwari, 2024; Sokolova *et al.*, 2024; Cooper *et al.*, 2024). Previous studies such as Powell and Pring (2023) and Karatas *et al.* (2022) have explored various aspects of social media influence on health but have paid little attention to undergraduates and developing countries. This study seeks to fill this gap by assessing the potential of social media influencer "Aproko Doctor" in promoting positive lifestyle changes among Nigerian undergraduates.

Objectives of the Study

1. To determine the extent of awareness of Aproko Doctor's social media handle on health-related matters among University of Ilorin undergraduates.
2. To identify the types of health-related information Aproko Doctor disseminates through his social media handles to the University of Ilorin undergraduates.

3. To assess the perceived credibility of Aproko Doctor on health matters among University of Ilorin undergraduates.
4. To identify challenges being faced by University of Ilorin undergraduates in adopting healthy behaviours promoted by Aproko Doctor's social media handle in health-related matters.

Review of Literature

Internet

The advent of the internet has brought about a substantial transformation in our methods of communication and interpersonal connections (Reed, 2018). The internet required a method of communication that was adaptable and interconnected, based on the principles of supply and demand established by post-World War II accessibility laws (Chester & Allenby, 2018). The internet is a techno-social system that allows humans to communicate through technical networks. It serves as the standard method for accessing and transmitting material online, mostly through webpages and hyperlinks. The system is specifically built to function and collaborate with individuals in order to improve their cognitive abilities, communication skills, and collaborative efforts (Maier *et al.*, 2021). As of July 2020, the estimated global count of active internet users was 4.57 billion, which represents 59% of the total world population (Rahman, Haque, & Aziz, 2023).

With the increasing accessibility and popularity of the internet, smartphones equipped with advanced technologies like 4G, 5G, and soon 6G have become the primary means of accessing the internet worldwide. According to Mao *et al.* (2017), mobile internet users now make up 91% of the total internet user base. This highlights the significant importance of the internet and the web in the lives of individuals, professionals, and enterprises worldwide. The advent of modern technology has led to a shift in professional communication from written forms to digital formats, including emails, online meetings, WebEx seminars, Webinars, and several other digital options. The spread of the coronavirus led to an increase in the number of individuals working remotely through online platforms, as well as adapting to new technology, software, and social media networks (Lal, Dwivedi, & Haag, 2021).

As a result, there was a notable increase in individuals' dynamism worldwide (Cavusgil *et al.*, 2018). This generated a need for a novel product in the market that would enable the establishment and engagement of interpersonal connections. In the year 2000, social media platforms emerged, with advanced technologies, sophisticated designs, and innovative interaction tools that offered personalised experiences (Buhalis *et al.*, 2019).

Social media

Currently, approximately 3.6 billion individuals worldwide use social networks, with an anticipated increase to 4.41 billion by 2025 (Hanlon & Tuten, 2022). As of the second quarter of 2020, Facebook is the dominant player in the market, boasting more than 2.7 billion monthly active users. It is also the largest social network globally (Apostol *et al.*, 2021). The recent achievements and setbacks in viral advertising highlight the difficulty that marketing professionals face in controlling their message when it spreads rapidly. Currently, viral marketing is highly prevalent in the digital realm, providing opportunities to enhance brand recognition and visibility through increased conversions, views, and shares. Social media serves as a catalyst for viral marketing, facilitating a significant volume of informal, real-time contact among individuals worldwide (Castro *et al.*, 2022). There are no limitations, and it is inherently intricate and challenging to anticipate the extent of a

campaign's reach. Social media enables users to communicate with peers from different countries while maintaining the casual nature of a Facebook wall post. In addition, blog sites enable us to assess a diverse range of viewpoints and have redefined the concept of "breaking information". More so, the most significant surge in social media platforms is the global expansion of digital influencers.

Social Media Influencers

With the rise of the internet in the late 1990s and the popularity of blogs in the early 2000s, individuals discovered the potential to attract large audiences by creating compelling contents and interacting directly with their followers (Hearn & Schoenhoff, 2015). One of the first individuals to attract large audiences by creating contents was Heather Armstrong, who founded dooce.com in 2001 and became widely known as a "mommy blogger" (Fischer, 2018).

Social media influencers have transitioned from ordinary users with substantial followings to influential individuals who have the power to shape ideas, habits, and even markets. In the mid-2000s, the term "influencer" slowly gained prominence as platforms such as YouTube and early fashion blogs started to nurture individuals who had a significant number of followers (Born & Haworth, 2017). The scholars added that these trailblazers, frequently self-taught, produced material centred on fashion, beauty, lifestyle, and specialized hobbies, gathering devoted followers.

Presently, digital influencers have the ability to connect with millions of followers (Wielki, 2020). Therefore, their ability to exert influence over followers and peers has a significant and far-reaching impact. Still, it primarily depends on the concept of word-of-mouth marketing, as discussed specifically in the context of an online approach. The internet is crucial for the progress of contemporary word-of-mouth marketing. Hence, the world is currently encountering a novel opportunity to engage in communication with its peers and various brands. Given the present circumstances, the concept of digital influencers and social media marketing becomes apparent.

Social Media and Health Promotion

With the widespread availability of digital connectivity nowadays, health groups, medical professionals, and influencers are utilizing social media's interactive capabilities to raise awareness of health issues, promote healthy lifestyle choices, and positively impact public health (Freeman *et al.*, 2015). The use of social media in healthcare has fundamentally transformed the dynamics of patient-doctor interactions and the methods employed for health promotion (Huang, 2016). In addition to healthcare professionals, doctors have adopted social media as a means to directly engage with patients, providing easily understandable information and circumventing the need for in-person appointments for regular questions.

Rajshri and Malloy (2023) observed that various categories of health-related content disseminated on social media encompass health information, health practices, and social support. Health information encompasses all content pertaining to health or healthcare. Individuals have the option to disseminate health-related material through their personal social media profiles in order to increase public knowledge about a specific health concern or solicit guidance from their social media connections (Rajshri & Malloy, 2023). Social media has the potential to foster and support healthy behaviours, direct messaging or the dissemination of motivational information. Healthy behaviours encompass engaging in

regular physical activity, consuming a nutritious diet, and ensuring adequate sleep (Rajshri & Malloy, 2023).

Theoretical Framework

2.2.1 Source Credibility Theory

The source credibility theory, developed by Hovland and Weiss in 1951, proposes that the persuasiveness of a message is influenced by the perceived credibility of the source (Weismueller *et al.*, 2020). The recipients of information might be influenced by peripheral indications, such as the credibility of the source (Sui & Zhang, 2021). Source credibility theory focuses on the extent to which recipients consider the information source as credible, competent, and trustworthy. Kreegimäe, Andersson and Niiranen (2019) observe that a communicator's positive characteristics affect the receiver's acceptance of a message, meaning that information source features influence the value of the communicated message.

Source credibility includes several aspects that, when evaluated, show to what extent individuals consider a source to be credible. Two major dimensions of source credibility theory are expertise and trustworthiness (Weismueller *et al.*, 2020). Expertise describes the degree to which recipients perceive the information source as delivering correct and valid assertions (Weismueller *et al.*, 2020), and trustworthiness is the degree of the receiver's confidence that the source provides information that is valid, objective and honest (Weismueller *et al.*, 2020). The source credibility theory is relevant to this study because it examines Aproko Doctor's credentials as a medical doctor, which is a major contributing factor to his perceived credibility and expertise on health-related matters. Relatively, the University of Ilorin undergraduates would tend to believe Aproko doctor as a trusted influencer in promoting health-related matters because he is seen as a health professional, which makes him a credible source that the students can receive accurate information from.

Methods

The study was carried out among the students of the University of Ilorin, Kwara State. The study adopted a multi-stage sampling technique to distribute questionnaires to 239 students of the institution. The researcher used a self-administered questionnaire containing a series of relevant questions to elicit information from the target population. The questionnaire consisted of two parts: Part A provided answers to the demographic factors of the respondents, while Part B addressed the research questions. The data was analysed with the Special Package for Science (SPSS) version 26.0 and results were presented in descriptive statistics analysis using percentages, tables, and frequency count.

Results

The data revealed that most respondents were male, at 51.1% (n=122), and 48.9% (n=117) were female. In terms of age, 20.7% (n=49) were between the ages of 15-19, 41.8% (n=100) were between the ages of 20-24, 21.2% (n=51) were between the ages of 25-29, and lastly, 16.4% (n=39) were aged 30 and above. The data also showed that students from the Department of Common Law represented 20.5% (n=49), students from departments of Urban and Regional Planning 25.1% (n=60), 26.8% (n=64) represented students from the Department of Chemistry, while 27.6% (n=66) were students from the Department of Mathematics. This implies that students from the Department of Mathematics were the majority. When it comes to students' level, 31.7% (n=76) were in 400 level, 11.6% (n=28) were in 100 level, those who were in 200, 300 and 500 level represented 14.9% (n=36), 18.6% (n=44) and 13.1% (n=31) respectively, while 10.1% (n=24) represented those in 600 level.

What is the extent of awareness of Aproko Doctor's social media handle on health-related matters among University of Ilorin undergraduates?

The data revealed that the majority of the students, 85.9% (n=205,) stated that they were aware of Aproko Doctors' social media handle, while a handful of students, 14.1% (n=34), said no. This implies that a significant majority of the respondents admitted that they are aware of Aproko Doctors' social media handles. Additionally, 21.9% (n=52) stated that they visit Aproko Doctor's social media handle daily, 22.9% (n=5) picked weekly, while those who said they visit Aproko Doctor's social media handle monthly and rarely represented 7.1% (n=17) and 48.1% (n=115), respectively. This concludes that the majority of the respondents rarely visit Aproko Doctor's social media handle. The findings revealed that 82.4% (n=197) agreed that they are aware that Aproko Doctor regularly shares health-related contents on his social media platforms, 17.6% (n=42) disagreed that they are aware that Aproko Doctor regularly shares health-related contents on his social media platforms. This connotes that a significant majority of the respondents admitted that they are aware that Aproko Doctor often shares health-related contents on his social media platforms. Lastly, the data indicated that 35.3% (n=84) frequently see Aproko Doctor's health-related content on their social media feeds, 38.8 % (n=93) selected that they see it occasionally, 14.1% (n=34) chose rarely, while 11.8% (n=28) stated that they never see Aproko Doctor's health-related content on their social media feed. This implies that the majority of the respondents admitted that they occasionally see Aproko Doctors' health-related content on their social media feeds.

What are the types of health-related information that Aproko Doctor disseminates through his social media handles to University of Ilorin undergraduates?

The findings revealed that 85.2% (n=204) of the respondents agreed that Aproko Doctor provides information on disease prevention and management on his social media platforms, while 14.8% (n=39) disagreed. This indicates that a significant majority of the respondents admitted that Aproko Doctor provides information on disease prevention and management on his social media platforms. Also, 85.6% (n=205) of the respondents agreed that Aproko Doctor provides information on mental health and wellness on his social media platforms, while 14.4% (n=34) disagreed with the statement. This suggests that a significant majority of the respondents supported that Aproko Doctor provides information on mental health and wellness on his social media platforms. Additionally, 86.7% (n=207) of the respondents supported that Aproko Doctor provides nutritional advice on his social media platforms, while 13.3% (n=32) disagreed. This means that a significant majority of the respondents acknowledge that Aproko Doctor provides nutritional advice on his social media platforms. Also, 77.1% (n=184) agreed that Aproko Doctor provides information on physical fitness and exercise on his social media platforms, while 22.9% (n=45) disagreed. This infers that a significant majority of the respondents accepted that Aproko Doctor provides information on physical fitness and exercise on his social media platforms. Finally, the data revealed that 85.4% (n=213) agreed that Aproko Doctor provides sex education content on his social media platforms, while 14.6% (n=26) disagreed. This implies that a significant majority of the respondents declared that Aproko Doctor provides sex education content on his social media platforms.

What is the perceived credibility of Aproko Doctor on health-related matters as a source of health information among University of Ilorin undergraduates?

The findings revealed that the majority of the respondents, 75.3% (n=180), agreed that they find health information shared by Aproko Doctor on social media credible because he is a medical doctor, while 24.7% (n=59) disagreed. This indicates that a significant majority of the respondents admitted that they find health information shared by Aproko Doctor on social media credible because he is a medical doctor. 75.3% (n=180) also agreed that they often share the health information provided by Aproko Doctor on social media with their friends and family, while 24.7% (n=59) disagreed. This implies that a significant majority of the respondents accepted that they regularly share the health information provided by Aproko Doctor on social media with their friends and family. Furthermore, the majority of the respondents, 80.6% (n=193), supported that they act on some of the health-related content of Aproko Doctor without doubting him, while 19.4% (n=46) disagreed. This indicates that a significant majority of the respondents admitted that they act on some of the health-related content of Aproko Doctor without doubting him. Finally, the data revealed that 82.1% (n=196) agreed that they don't verify health-related information they get from Aproko Doctor from other sources because they trust him while 17.9% (n=43) disagreed. This connotes that a significant majority of the respondents admitted that they don't verify health-related information they get from Aproko Doctor from other sources because they trust him.

What are the challenges faced by University of Ilorin undergraduates in adopting healthy behaviours promoted by Aproko Doctor on his social media handles?

The findings showed that an average of the respondents of 42.5% (n=101) agreed that they experience difficulty following Aproko Doctor's health advice on social media due to lack of resources, while 57.5% (n=138) disagreed. This infers that a majority of the respondents opposed that they experience difficulty following Aproko Doctor's health advice on social media due to lack of resources. Similarly, 32.2% (n=77) admitted that they find it difficult to follow Aproko Doctors' health advice on social media due to peer pressure discouraging them from adopting the healthy behaviours, while 67.8% (n=162) disagreed. This denotes that the majority of the respondents don't find it difficult to follow Aproko Doctors health advice on social media due to peer pressure discouraging them from adopting the healthy behaviours. Additionally, the data revealed that 38.6% (n=92) agreed that they find it difficult to adopt and sustain Aproko Doctors' health advice on social media due to lack of discipline, while 61.4% (n=147) disagreed with the statement. This connotes that the respondents who opposed that they find it difficult to adopt and sustain Aproko Doctors health advice on social media due to lack of discipline constituted the majority. Furthermore, the survey reveals that 40.3% (n=96) agreed that they find it difficult to follow Aproko Doctors health advice on social media because they are students and their parents still cater for their needs while 59.7% (n=143) disagreed that they find it difficult to follow Aproko Doctors health advice on social media because they are still students and their parents still cater for their needs. This denotes that the respondents in the survey who differed that they find it difficult to follow Aproko Doctors health advice on social media because they are still students and their parents still cater for their needs were the highest. Lastly, the findings revealed that 47.1% (n=113) supported that they find it difficult to adopt and sustain health advice shared by Aproko Doctor on social media due to their current lifestyle while 52.9% (n=126) disagreed that they find it difficult to adopt and sustain health advice shared by Aproko Doctor on social media due to their current lifestyles. This infers that more than half of the respondents

opposed that they find it difficult to adopt and sustain health advice shared by Aproko Doctor on social media due to their current lifestyle.

Discussion of findings

The study had four research questions. The research question one, which seeks to know the extent of awareness of Aproko Doctor's social media handle on health matters among University of Ilorin undergraduates. Findings revealed that a significant majority of the respondents declared that they were aware of Aproko Doctors' social media handles. The finding is consistent with that of (AlMuammar *et al.* 2021), who established that more than half of the respondents in Saudi Arabia considered social media physicians to be reliable sources of information, indicating widespread awareness and trust in health-related content shared by these professionals.

Research Question Two sought to identify the types of health-related information that Aproko Doctor disseminates through his social media handles to University of Ilorin undergraduates. The findings revealed that a significant majority of the respondents supported that Aproko Doctor provides information on mental health and wellness on his social media platforms. Moreover, the findings established that a significant majority of the respondents acknowledge that Aproko Doctor offers nutritional advice on his social media platforms. Additionally, the findings revealed that Aproko Doctor provides information on physical fitness and exercise on his social media platforms. Finally, the findings showed that a significant majority of the respondents declared that Aproko Doctor provides sex education content on his social media platforms. The study's findings are corroborated by Onyechi (2023), whose findings emphasize the significant relationship between social media credibility and health information-seeking behaviour, suggesting that credible figures like Aproko Doctor can effectively influence youth in seeking and using health information.

Research question three aimed to assess the perceived credibility of Aproko Doctor as a source of health information on health matters among University of Ilorin undergraduates. Findings revealed that a significant majority of the respondents admitted that they find health information shared by Aproko Doctor on social media credible because he is a medical doctor. Finally, the findings reveal that a significant majority of the respondents admitted that they don't verify health-related information they get from Aproko Doctor from other sources because they trust him. This appeal enhances the likelihood that his content will be shared and acted upon, further justifying the study's findings and validating the source credibility theory.

Finally, research question four sought to identify the challenges faced by University of Ilorin undergraduates in adopting healthy behaviours promoted by Aproko Doctor social media handles on health matters. Findings revealed that a majority of the respondents reported experiencing difficulty following Aproko Doctors' health advice on social media due to lack of resources. The findings of this study align with those of Ikpi and Undelikwo (2019), who suggested that social media use has a significant influence on health lifestyle modification among students.

Conclusion

This study concludes that Aproko Doctor plays a significant role in promoting healthy living among University of Ilorin undergraduates. The findings indicate that a majority of respondents are active on social media, primarily using platforms like Instagram, Facebook and X, where they occasionally encounter health-related content shared by Aproko Doctor. The influencer's credibility, reinforced by his medical background, is a key factor in the respondents' trust and willingness to act on the health advice he provides.

Recommendations

1. University health services should consider partnering with credible social media influencers like Aproko Doctor to amplify health promotion campaigns on campus.
2. Also, Aproko Doctor and other health influencers should seek to increase interaction with followers by responding to queries, conducting Q&A sessions, and encouraging user-generated content.
3. Additionally, the government should establish guidelines to ensure that health information shared on social media is accurate and reliable. Collaborating with influencers like Aproko Doctor to disseminate verified information can enhance public trust in health communication.
4. Educators should encourage students to critically evaluate health information they encounter on social media. Workshops on media literacy and the importance of cross-verifying information from multiple sources would be valuable.
5. Collaboration between public health practitioners and NGOs should be encouraged to leverage Aproko Doctor's influence for broader health promotion initiatives.

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