

## Research Article

# Youth Engagement with Social Media Skits for Health Awareness in Nigeria: A Descriptive Study

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**Emmanuel Olukunle Olumuji** 

Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye, Nigeria 

**Isaac Akerele** 

Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye, Nigeria 

## Abstract

With the rise of social media in the digital age, new and more effective channels for delivering public health awareness messages have emerged. This study examines the exposure of the youth to health-related skits on social media and the appeals used to communicate messages that influence viewership and social behaviour. Media Richness Theory serves as the theoretical framework. The study reveals that social media skits effectively communicate health messages, with 72% of respondents reporting the adoption of positive health behaviours and 69.1% indicating that skits helped them discontinue negative health habits. The findings also highlight that fear-based appeals in skits are particularly effective in deterring harmful behaviours (74%), while humour appeals make respondents more receptive to health messages (63.7%). Despite the uncertainty regarding the credibility of information in skits, a vast majority (91.4%) believe that professional health organisations should utilise skits as a medium for dissemination of public health campaigns. The study concludes that social media skits are promising tool for promoting health awareness. It recommends that health bodies and public health communication authorities should leverage the power of humour to enhance public health message retention and impact. Additionally, skit content creator through collaboration with health experts should ensure the generation of credible skits.

**Keywords:** appeal; health awareness; skits; social media; youths



## 1. Introduction

Social media has brought about a major revolution in communication and changed the media landscape. With the advent of social media, the limitations of the traditional media, such as circulation barriers and regulatory frameworks are addressed. Hence, users can access and share information seamlessly (Libuse and Cerna, 2017). Audience can now fulfil their media needs as well as contribute to information on the media space via social networking sites and user generated contents like Facebook, Twitter, Tiktok, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Pinterest. This offers opportunities for public discussion, reactions and comments on information, including real-time communication via virtual video calls on platforms like YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram (Latha et al., 2020).

Users armed with a wealth of information can engage in meaningful conversations across cultures and national boundaries, aligning with Marshall McLuhan's visions of the world as a global village. Social media platforms allow for viewing, sharing and commenting on contents, facilitating speed in information diffusion, apart from the entertainment function, which has been noted as a major benefit of social media to audiences (Ojomo and Sodeinde, 2021). Latha et al. (2023) opine that social media has increasingly become a media through which audiences' source for medical and health awareness-related information, in areas of proper nutrition, mental health, exercise and fitness, medicine, disease prevention and sexuality. Social media use in healthcare serves as an aid to patients and foster their autonomy while complementing the information provided by healthcare professionals and by providing psychosocial support (Smailhodzic et al., 2016)

Gharamani, et al. (2022) assert that social media in health promotions campaign is of high importance to health educators, health professionals, regulators and all key stakeholders in the health sector. According to the above studies, social media influence, positively, physical health behaviours like proper diet and healthy eating choice in young adults. However, Ojomo and Sodeinde (2021) note that the use of video-based messages in form of short drama sketches referred to as skits have revolutionized the entertainment industry, revolving around social themes of cultural values, domestic and sexual violence, insecurity, politics, social issues of all sorts which appeal to audiences, especially youth demography. Ayakoroma and Fawei (2021) add that with fast rising issues related to health and wellness in the society, social media skits are used in communicating health and wellness messages and awareness campaigns on account of their appeal and reach.

Since social media networking platforms affords the opportunity to watch, re-watch as well as comment on and share videos which, if well optimized, rank high on search engines and gain massive views on social media platforms, it has become pertinent to study social media skits as tools for sharing and shaping health awareness among youthful audiences. This study, therefore, sets out to uncover the role played by social media skits in the communication of health awareness messages among youth audiences.

### Research objectives

1. To determine the channels on social media that youths make use of, in sourcing for health awareness information.
2. To ascertain what appeals to youths in video-based information on health awareness on social media.
3. To examine the influence of social media skits on health behaviour of youths.

## 2. Health awareness and social media

Health awareness is the extent to which individuals or communities are conscious or informed about their health and understand health-related issues, including disease prevention, healthy lifestyle choices, healthcare access, and overall well-being. Harald (2016) notes that when users search for information on health, the results are sorted and presented not only based on the relevance of the query with presented results, but also heavily influenced by search history and social networks, consequently some health messages that are of benefits may not be presented to users. This also poses a challenge to the exposure of health awareness messages.

Qingmao et al (2020) agree that health-promoting messages released on social media may lack influence due to several factors, one of which is the framing of messages and the formats of the media. These affect the degree of influence of health-promoting messages. While health professionals and organisations use social media to share credible information regarding a wide range of topics including disease prevention, healthy lifestyles and treatment (Rajshri and Jessica, 2023), those credible health information compete among the myriads of misinformation on social media platforms and as a result may not get the exposure necessary. Consequently, credible health professionals may not get their messages the exposure needed if they lacked the social influence and network. Qingmao et al., (2020) discover that using appropriate pictures and enough videos in health promotion messages improves exposure to health messages on social media. Rajshri and Jessica (2023) also outline strategies that could be employed for health promotion and disease prevention for healthcare professionals on social media, noting that social media offers new and innovative ways that make health promotion interactive, engaging and accessible.

Rajshri and Jessica (2023) add that the use of health influencers to share evidence-based information via their social media platforms can amplify health awareness campaigns. They can engage in policy discussions to gather insights and opinions that will further guide the planning of interventions and health campaigns, being experts on social media trends and ranking strategies. Rajshri et al., (2023) note that by sharing User-Generated Contents (UGC), health promoters can demonstrate that their messages resonate with real people and thus increase engagement and the reach of said messages. UGC can be used to engage communities and invite users to share their experiences with health-related topics and issues. The health sector has been influenced and improved by the potentials of social media, especially in the communication of health

information and campaign programmes by key stakeholders (Gharamani et al, 2022). The World Health Organisation (WHO) sees health as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. Stephan (2020) avers that promotion of health through adequate and well understood information is important, particularly in crisis periods. He asserts that empowering individuals to actively manage their health and the factors that influence it is fundamental to the effectiveness of health promotion.

Social media has increasingly become an important platform to exchange information for public health issues and the promotion of healthy behaviours and prevention health awareness (Zhuo-ying et al., 2020). Since it provides free access to large data, it has improved the pattern for spread of health information. This is because social media serves as a collaborative dissemination platform that can reach and influence the target audience and deliver health related information, since it can provide ubiquitous and user-friendly approach to attract large numbers of participants and can also allow certain level of engagements with the health-related messages (Gharamani, 2022)

Furthermore, Seymour (2018) argues that given the popularity of the social media, the time users spend on the platforms every day, a significant opportunity exists to use these platforms to improve interventions, engagement and retention of health messages. Designing Health messages on social media, according to Elaf et al. (2020) can either emphasise the benefits of complying with the message content or the consequences of not doing so. Elaf et al. (2020) further note that key factors like the perceived usefulness of social media platforms, in terms of ease of access to information influence acceptance of the messages.

### *Use of appeals for health awareness messages*

Health messaging on social media may have different themes running through them. The themes, also called 'appeal' are delivery mechanisms used to communicate health information and elicit necessary responses in terms of acceptance and behavioural changes (Koinig, 2021). Koinig (2021) states that 'message appeals' refer to cues utilised in promotional messages to attract recipient's interest and attention. Communication of health risk messages is vital as well as providing instructions on how to communicate these messages, hence the need for specific appeals in health messaging. Harrington (2016) asserts that persuasive health messages, their design, dissemination, and impact, is ubiquitous in the field of communication. This is because words, sounds, and image alone or in combination can influence people to change their minds and their bodies.

According to Harrington (2016), on the micro-level, the content of the message (which includes the use of language, evidence, the presentation of the arguments) and the format of messaging (audio-visual effects or use of multimedia channels) can influence the appeal of health messaging. On the macro-level, the type of framing, the emotional appeal and tailoring of health messages can influence health behaviour change and information processing. Clayton and Myrick (2023) explore various negative appeals utilised by communication researchers and practitioners in health communication. They include disgust, guilt and anger. Disgust appeals in persuasive health campaigns messaging depict contents that are psychologically or organically spoiled. Disgust appeals make use of repulsion to dissuade unhealthy practices. For example, health campaigns that show diseased gums in its messages to deter children from eating unhealthily, uses disgust appeal (Rubenking, 2019). Similarly, guilt appeal uses the audience's moral values or accepted societal norms and values to leverage the audience into adopting a behaviour or changing from one. Guilt appeal may be used to dissuade the audience from engaging in societal ills. A practical example can be "your parents invested so much in you, don't waste your life, stop smoking today," this message utilises guilt, leading to internal blame and evaluation for future behaviour change in the audience (Rubenking, 2019). Lester et al., (2019) in a study on the appeal of mental health awareness messages, notes that the most utilised message appeal in mental health and well-being messaging on social media is sorrow, followed by affliction, ease or convenience, hope, humour, guilt or shame, success, and fear. In a similar study of appeals in health communication messages, Carey and Sarma (2016) reveal that threat-based road safety communications that target affective (fear) and cognitive (perceived efficacy) mechanisms can positively affect driving behaviours on the road.

Bailey et al., (2022) say that fear appeals, although contentious, have been revealed by empirical studies to be able to change behaviours, when information threat is accompanied by high efficacy of messaging. Burcu (2017) as well, in a study of public service announcements regarding health awareness says that the most used appeal is fear as they change behaviours in terms of motivating attitudes and intention changes. Myrick (2023) on the nature of anger appeal in communicating health messages and how it can backfire to the source of the message. Allison (2021) designs a social media study to educate adolescents about e-cigarette. Allison opined that messages that communicate non-addiction health effects in the intake of e-cigarette especially for harms with social implications. Appeals in health communication can take on negative and positive themes to persuade and influence the adoption and cessation of health behaviours and may include fear, guilt, disgust, shame, success, convenience and other themes that convince the audiences.

### *Influence of social media skits on youths' behaviour*

Social media skits, often short video drama sketches, are widely used for entertainment purposes, particularly focusing on comedy and drama forms for social media audiences (Ojomo and Sodeinde, 2021). They have gained popularity, especially among young audiences, serving both entertainment and educational purposes (Chukwuebuni et al., 2023). These skits offer unique potentials, fostering audience engagement and delivering a distinct form of entertainment as compared to traditional mass media (Chukwuebuni et al., 2023). Social media skit makers convey messages such as love, hard work, career, personal development, and emotional stability (Obiechina, 2023). Brown (2017) highlights that social media skits serve as means to satisfy entertainment needs beyond sharing information, harnessing the capabilities of Web 2.0 technologies for real-time

communication, feedback, and audience participation. According to Awa-kalu (2016), their global appeal allows rapid dissemination and interaction, transcending geographic boundaries.

Beyond entertainment, there are untapped potentials in areas such as health awareness, brand support, and political engagement for social media skits. Ojomo and Sodeinde (2021) suggest categorising social media skits into themes like politics, feminism, health, and fitness to enhance research. These skits resonate mostly with youthful audiences, informing them of social issues, political matters, commerce and general issues that rank high in the society. A 2022 report by Dataleum, a global talent accelerator, ranked skit making as currently the third largest entertainment industry in Nigeria with a net worth of over N50 billion (Guardian, 2023), with majority of skit content producers as youths. Nigerian Social media skits makers like Sydney Talker, Mr Macaroni, Mark Angel, Taooma, Broda Shaggi, Twyse not only rake in millions in revenue from social media revenue, brand ambassadorship and other forms of promotion, they also attain symbolic image and perceptions, especially among youths in Nigeria. As a result, studies on skit videos become critical in the academics when matters of communication with young audiences are concerned.

According to Ojomo and Sodeinde (2021), beyond entertainment and other positive benefits like information, critics noted stimulation of aggressive thoughts, feelings, behaviours and biased perception of reality in the society, as part of negative influence of social media skits. They, however, noted that these influences may not be entirely alluded to skits alone, and may be because of other factors like social norms, influence from friends and social circles or individual reasoning. While skits majorly perform entertainment functions, their messages most times reflects on different societal issues like domestic violence, sexual violence, cultural values, insecurity, police brutality among others in Nigerian skit Industry. Some of these skits focus on specific themes with specific comedy styles (Ojomo and Sodeinde, 2021) one of such is health skit maker and health practitioner, 'Aproko doctor' and skit maker. On the influence of the skits on behaviours of audiences, Ojomo and Sodeinde (2021) assert that social media skits create with its audience, overtime, a psychological bond in which the audience members begin to see themselves as friends of the social media skit makers and these parasocial relationships lead to adoption of lifestyles especially among youths who adopt the social standards reflected in skits. Chukwuebuni et al (2023) affirm that youth audiences are not only aware that skits educate on avoiding negative behaviours and actions but promote opinions and views on social issues, but they also adopt these ideas freely.

Youths, according to Chukwuebuni et al (2023), recognise skits as potent persuasion and influence on their lifestyle, goals and aspirations. They are also mobilised to take stands and sides on political issues. Godwin (2022) adds that skits makers through the contents of their skits, have become social influencers and greatly influence public opinion especially among youth audiences based on their assumed roles as opinion leaders. Furthermore, Chineyene (2022) avers that COVID-19 themed comedy skits functioned in reporting and spreading of awareness of health during the pandemic, although there was misrepresentation of information, social media skits influenced the opinions and reactions of people to the virus and adherence to safety measures. Perceptions were shaped by information on social media and specifically by skit makers during that period, exemplifying the critical role of skits in influencing even the adoption of health behaviours in dire situations like a global pandemic.

Therefore, skits play critical roles in the adoption of behaviours and influencing of opinions, perception of social and political matters, even to other areas of adopting lifestyles and behaviours among youths. The potentials are not only limited to entertainment but also more critical areas, it is for this purpose that this study bridges the gap that exists to uncover if and how social media skits spread awareness on health or not, especially among youths.

### 3. Theoretical framework

For this study, Media Richness Theory, also known as Information Richness Theory, was adopted. The theory was proposed by Richard L. Daft and Robert H. Lengel in 1986 to explain how different communication media vary in their ability to convey information effectively (Anaeto, Onabajo, and Osifeso, 2008). Media Richness Theory categorises communication media from low to high richness based on their ability to convey information. Rich media, such as face-to-face communication and telephone communication are considered as high in richness because they allow for immediate feedback. In contrast, media like plain written text or simple graphics are low in richness as they lack these interactive features. Daft and Lengel developed a four-item scale to measure the level of media richness for the five types of media including: face to face, telephone, written personal, written formal, and numeric formal. Each media can be measured by the level of immediacy of feedback, variety of channels (audio, visual), source of the message (personal or impersonal), then the richness and variety of language (Bergins, 2016).

Media Richness Theory is relevant to this study, as the nature of social media platforms in networking as well as their multimedia edge makes for a rich media. Media Richness Theory ranks the ability of different communication media to effectively pass information across to audiences (Anaeto, Onabajo, and Osifeso, 2008). Social media and particularly, social media skits, are a form of mass media unlike the traditional print and broadcast and it presents users with many features to facilitate smooth communication of health messages. Via social media, feedback can be achieved, using likes, comments, reactions and shares of the target audience. Furthermore, social media skits have visual, audio and text appeal, which further increase the channels through which health messages can be transmitted. From instructions on the harm of smoking to the lungs, to proper use of sanitary pads for ladies or fitness exercises, social media skits provide a rich media which can influence engagement and interactivity. This study operationalises MRT through three main constructs: (1) multimedia channels (audio-visual elements in skits), (2) immediacy of feedback (likes, comments, shares), and (3) ambiguity reduction (clarity of health messages).

Through social media skits, health organisations and practitioners have a platform that can give patients the chance to visit hospitals on account of mild health issues. The common practice is often to offer clarifications, further answers to questions posed on comment sections of social media platforms, beneath skit videos. In line with Media Richness Theory, social media health skits posted on social media platforms can be said to be rich in its feedback mechanism as such posts can lead to further discussions, shared experiences and questions that users can relate to and learn from (Gharamani, 2022). More so, the nature of social media as it possesses a way to rank up campaigns and health awareness interventions on search engines and social media platforms through trends attests to its richness. When health skits are shared and re-shared massively, a faster form of awareness is possible within a brief time, when the videos trends.

#### 4. Methodology

The study used a descriptive survey research approach to examine the role of social media skits in health awareness of youths. The target demography for this research includes all individuals residing in Ogun State, South-West Nigeria who actively engage social media platforms. The primary focus of this research are youths who use internet gadgets to access online content. The study population is 9,206,614 subscribers who are active internet media users in Ogun State during the first quarter report of the National Bureau of Statistics (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). The sample size of 385 was determined using the online based sample size calculator (<https://www.calculator.net/>); data were collected, using online survey mode via Google form. A link containing informed consent documentation and survey link were shared on different social media platforms. The instrument was validated using the test-retest method conducted over a two-week interval with 15 respondents who were not part of the main study sample. Data obtained from the pilot test were analysed, yielded a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.76 and found to be reliable for use in this study.

The researchers used purposive sampling technique to specifically choose internet users who are currently active and reside within Ogun state, to determine social media users who make use of social media skits in getting health awareness messages. Ogun state was chosen, purposely, for this study as it is the state with the highest concentration of tertiary institutions in Nigeria and as a result, a high number of youths that are relevant to this study (Vanguard, 2024). The researchers used the incidental sampling method to engage participants in this study by accessing their different social media platforms, ensuring an objective approach with online questionnaires by using Google Form. Data collected were analysed using SPSS (version 25).

#### 5. Results

Table 1: Social media platforms for health awareness or health-related information

	Frequency	Percent
Facebook	200	51.9
YouTube	81	21.0
Instagram	62	16.1
Others	42	10.9
Total	385	100.0

Source: Field survey, 2023

51.9% of the respondents confirmed that they come across health awareness or health related information on Facebook. Another 21% confirmed that it is on YouTube, while 16.1% confirmed it is Instagram.

**Table 2:** Appeals used by Social Media Skit-makers.

VARIABLES	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I pay attention to health because health skits make me feel bad about my health habits (guilt appeals)	16(4.2%)	108 (28.1%)	160 (41.6%)	36 (9.4%)	65 (16.9%)
I watch health skits because they highlight dangers of unhealthy activities like smoking and unsafe sex (fear appeals)	64 (16.6%)	221 (57.4%)	49 (12.7%)	18 (4.7%)	33 (8.6%)
I give my viewing time to health skits because they present serious health issues in a funny manner	42 (10.9%)	217 (56.4%)	72 (18.7%)	24 (6.2%)	30 (7.8%)
I pay attention to health skits for the reason that consequences of bad health habits are presented in disgusting images and clips (disgust appeals)	28 (7.3%)	137 (35.6%)	119 (30.9%)	30 (7.8%)	71 (18.4%)
I watch health skits because unsafe health practices are presented in a way to make me get angry at companies that profit from unsafe products (like tobacco etc) (anger appeals)	28 (7.3%)	156 (40.5%)	121 (31.4%)	22 (5.7%)	58 (15.1%)

Source: Field survey, 2023

The results in the table 2 contains data on the various appeals in health awareness skits on social media. Around 32.3% of the respondents acknowledged guilt appeals in health skits, indicating a potential effectiveness in influencing health habits by evoking self-reflection and consideration of healthier choices. But 41.6% are undecided about this assertion, with a combined 26.3% either strongly disagreeing or simply disagreeing that guilt appeals spurred them to listen to skits. A substantial 74% recognize the effectiveness of fear appeals in health skits, suggesting that highlighting the dangers of unhealthy activities can be influential in promoting awareness and behaviour change.

Over two-thirds (67.3%) appreciate the use of humour in health skits, highlighting the potential effectiveness of a light-hearted approach in engaging audiences and conveying serious health issues. Approximately 43% acknowledge the impact of disgust appeals in health skits, suggesting that presenting consequences of bad health habits in a visually impactful way may effectively capture attention and influence behaviour.

**Table 3:** Social Media Skits Influence on Health Behaviour

Variables	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Skits on social media has made me cease negative health behaviours (smoking, excessive eating habits, etc)	59 (15.3%)	207 (53.8%)	64 (16.6%)	36 (9.4%)	19 (4.9%)
Health awareness skit on social media has made me adopt a positive health behaviour. (Exercising, healthy habits, etc)	69 (17.9%)	246 (63.9%)	27 (7%)	20 (5.2%)	23 (6%)
Health skits have made me more conscious of getting health check-ups done regularly.	69 (17.9%)	223 (57.9%)	50 (13%)	20 (5.2%)	23 (6%)
Health awareness skits on social media have enriched my knowledge on some health topics	87 (22.6%)	241 (62.6%)	25 (6.5%)	20 (5.2%)	12 (3.1%)
I usually ignore social media skits messages on health awareness (eg. scroll past, indifference after watching etc)	14 (3.6%)	65 (16.9%)	225 (58.4%)	57 (14.8%)	24 (6.2%)

Source: Field survey, 2023

The respondents in the data collected in table 3 above to measure the influence of social media skits on the health behaviours of the respondents shows that a major 81.8% attribute positive health behaviour adoption to health awareness skits on social media, attesting to their potential impact in motivating individuals towards healthier habits. Also, with 15.3% strongly agreeing and 53.8% agreeing, a substantial 69.1% credit health skits on social media with helping them discontinue negative health behaviours, emphasizing the potential influence of such content on promoting positive lifestyle changes. Also, a notable 75.8% attribute increased awareness and adherence to regular health check-ups to health skits, which means there is a significant potential of this medium in promoting proactive healthcare behaviours.

Similarly, 85.2% acknowledge that health awareness skits on social media have significantly contributed to enriching their knowledge on various health topics, highlighting the educational impact of such content. However, majority (75.2%) either disagree or strongly disagree that they ignore health awareness skits on social media, suggesting that there is a potential for engagement or impact with skits.

**Table 4:** Suggestions for effective health awareness campaigns

VARIABLES	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
National and international organisations should use social media skits to communicate health awareness information (WHO, UNICEF, NMA, etc)	147 (38.2%)	205 (53.2%)	4 (1%)	16 (4.2%)	13 (3.4%)
Humour should be used more in health skits to aid in remembrance of the messages	131 (34%)	213 (55.3%)	10 (2.6%)	20 (5.2%)	11 (2.9%)
Health skits should use personal testimonials and real patient stories that youth can relate to.	117 (30.4%)	215 (55.8%)	20 (5.2%)	16 (4.2%)	17 (4.4%)
Celebrity influencers and youth role models should participate in health skits to encourage more viewership.	141 (36.6%)	201 (52.2%)	12 (3.1%)	12 (3.1%)	19 (4.9%)
Production quality and visual appeal of health skits need to be improved with better scripts, acting and sound.	137 (35.6%)	215 (55.8%)	2 (0.5%)	10 (2.6%)	21 (5.5%)
Health authorities should run social media promotions to increase reach and discovery of educational health skits.	169 (43.9%)	183 (47.5%)	4 (1%)	12 (3.1%)	17 (4.4%)

Source: Field survey, 2023

The respondents in table 4 seem to support the recommendations for improvement of skit-based health awareness campaigns by health bodies and professionals, about 91.4% of the respondents expressed support for the use of social media skits by national and international organizations for health awareness communication. Likewise, a significant 89.3% advocate for the increased use of humour in health skits, recognizing its potential to enhance message remembrance and engagement.

Also, 86.2% support the incorporation of personal testimonials and real patient stories in health skits, recognizing the potential impact of relatable narratives in capturing the attention and empathy of the youth audience. 88.8% endorse the involvement of celebrity influencers and youth role models in health skits and 91.4% advocate for the enhancement of production quality and visual appeal in health skits to increase its effectiveness. Finally, a combined 91.4% (strongly agree 43.9% and agree 47.5%) endorse the idea of health authorities running social media promotions to increase the reach and discovery of educational health skits, to utilise its potential for expanded impact and audience engagement.

## 6. Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that Facebook (51%), and YouTube (21%), emerged as the most preferred platforms for youth to access health awareness information. Instagram was utilised by 16.1% of the respondents, while other platforms accounted for 10.9%. Although previous studies such as Bezzubtseva et al. (2022) and Kong et al. (2021) focus on specific platforms like Instagram and TikTok, this study explored a broader range of social media platforms. Megan et al. (2022) identify YouTube as the most prominent platform for health information, while this study found that Facebook was more frequently used by the sample.

The results provide compelling evidence that social media skits play a significant role in promoting health awareness and fostering positive health behaviours among Nigerian youths. Notably, 88.1% of respondents reported high exposure to health skits, and 75.1% confirmed that these skits effectively communicated disease prevention strategies. However, concerns about the accuracy of the health information, misinformation and trivialisation of serious health issues in these skits remain, with 53% of respondents expressing uncertainty about the potential for misinformation—a finding consistent with Amonyze et al. (2022), where 65% of respondents from Southern Nigeria expressed similar concerns. This suggests that confidence in skit content varies depending on the topic and the content creator, highlighting ongoing credibility challenges in health information dissemination. This also brings to the fore the richness of social media skit contents which proponents of Media

Richness Theory advocates that it has to have high richness base on the contents' ability to convey accurate health information (Bergins, 2016).

Further analysis reveals that a significant majority (75.8%) of respondents agreed that health skits heightened their awareness of the need for regular medical check-ups, reinforcing the role of skits in encouraging proactive healthcare behaviours, as outlined by Tha'er et al. (2021). Similarly, Ojomo and Sodeinde (2021) emphasise the potential of social media skits to influence audiences' behaviours, a claim supported by the 81.8% of respondents in this study who credited skits for encouraging healthy habits such as exercise and better eating practices. This aligns with findings from Chukwuebuni et al. (2023), who identified skits as powerful tools for discouraging negative behaviours, as 69.1% of this study's respondents reported that health skits helped them discontinue harmful health practices.

The high exposure of youths to health skits aligns with Ojomo and Sodeinde's (2021) assertion that skits are increasingly popular for both entertainment and education. The current study further confirms that humour appeals in health skits significantly influence youth engagement. This is consistent with Chukwuebuka et al. (2023), who submit that young people perceive skits as effective educational tools for promoting positive behaviours. One key finding is that humour was the most preferred appeal in health messages, with 89.3% of respondents acknowledging its effectiveness in encouraging engagement with health information. This supports Lester et al.'s (2019) argument that humour enhances message retention, suggesting that health campaigns should incorporate humour alongside fear-based appeals. Notably, 74% of respondents recognised the effectiveness of fear appeals in influencing their decisions to watch and engage with health messages, aligning with existing literature on the use of threat appeals in health communication (Bailey et al., 2022; Carey and Sarma, 2016).

Fear efficacy may stem from its visceral impact—graphic images of damaged lungs in skits may clear any ambiguities in messaging and linger on in memory, as posited by Bailey et al. (2022). Contrariwise, the success of humour could reflect youths' preference for engagements that are non-threatening, a finding supported by Chukwuebuni et al. (2023) but contrasted by Lester et al. (2019), who prioritised sorrow appeals in the area of mental health. This difference suggests the effectiveness of an appeal depends on whatever is the context of the health issue. Campaigns may, therefore, be effective when they are, carefully, tailored to each case. MRT also contextualises the findings of this study on feedback mechanisms. The 74% effectiveness of fear appeals and 63.7% receptivity to humour correlate with MRT's emphasis on immediate audience interaction. For example, fear-driven skits often provoke comments like "This scared me into quitting smoking," which is an example of real-time feedback that validates a message's impact. Hence, by framing skits as high-richness media, MRT provides a means to interpret how immediacy (several shares/trending) and multimedia appeal drive youth engagement.

Lester et al. (2019) also notes that sorrow and emotional appeals were most effective in mental health awareness messaging, indicating that audiences experiencing psychological challenges may be more receptive to skits featuring shared testimonies and sympathy-driven content. Meanwhile, around 41.6% who are undecided about guilt appeals highlights a tension: while skits may have an immediate effect (MRT's feedback construct), a moralistic sort of messaging may not resonate with youth audiences who seek entertainment. This is consistent with Clayton and Myrick's (2023) caution that guilt appeals may backfire when used without efficacy cues (e.g., actionable solutions). Despite 91.4% endorsing skits for health campaigns, the 53% skepticism about skits' credibility demonstrates that the richness in skit format of messaging does not guarantee trust. Amonyeye et al. (2022) cautioned that humour's entertainment value may trivialise serious issues, making it necessary that experts collaborate on skit-making health campaigns in order to achieve a balance in engagement and accuracy—a challenge MRT overlooks but is vital for ethical health communication. Additionally, the call for higher production quality in skits, including improved video, sound, and acting, aligns with findings from Bezzubtseva et al. (2022) on the impact of multimedia over text-based formats for health education.

In the light of these findings, Gharamani et al. (2022) emphasise the importance of health practitioners leveraging social media platforms to disseminate health information. This study also underscores the need for credible sources in health skits, as 53% of respondents were uncertain about the reliability of the information. A majority (53.2%) agreed that professional and legally recognised health organisations, such as the WHO, UNICEF, and the Nigerian Medical Association (NMA), should utilise social media strategies for their health awareness campaigns. Furthermore, respondents supported the use of celebrity influencers to increase viewership and engagement among youth audiences. Finally, the overwhelming majority (91.4%) advocated for increased outreach and visibility of health skits, with 75.2% of respondents indicating that they do not skip or scroll past health skits on social media. This suggests that enhancing the reach of these skits could effectively broaden their audience and improve the dissemination of health information.

## 7. Conclusion

The study concludes that social media skits play a significant role in shaping health awareness and influencing youth behaviour. Skits effectively engage young audience by using appeals such as humour, fear, and sorrow, particularly on platforms like Facebook and YouTube. They promote the adoption of positive health habits and discourage harmful health behaviours. Despite concerns about the credibility of some kinds of health information, potential ethical and practical challenges of using entertainment content for health communication in skits, and the possibility of misinformation and trivialisation of serious health issues, the use of social media skits as tool for health promotion is evidently not in doubt as evinced by this study. This study advances digital health literacy by isolating skits as a mixture of entertainment and education in addition to the different and unique message formats, that permeate generic social media contents. The unique blend of humorous and short relatable contents resonates with Nigerian youth and is a culturally attuned alternative to traditional health campaigns. To maximise social media skits' impact, health authorities and organisations should focus on producing high-quality, relatable content tailored to youth, ensuring both credibility and engagement in health messaging.

## Recommendations

The study's findings led to the following recommendations to improve the effectiveness of social media skits in health communication:

- i. Digital content creators and health organisations should adopt and prioritise popular platforms among youths, such as Facebook, YouTube, TikTok and Instagram, for distributing educational health skits. Health campaigns should also incorporate the use of hashtags and the shareability of videos to increase reach.
- ii. Digital content creators should ensure that health skits targeting youth should focus on humour appeals, which enhance memory and learning. The production quality of these skits should be improved to focus on better scripting, acting, sound and overall visual appeals to engage audiences more effectively.
- iii. Health organisations in Nigeria, such as the Nigerian Medical Association (NMA), along with other national and international health bodies, should leverage the potential of social media skits to promote health literacy and foster positive behaviour change among youth.
- iv. To address the issue of misinformation in health skits, mechanisms for fact-checking should be established. Collaboration between content creators and health experts is essential for maintaining quality control. Experts can display certifications or verifications on their profiles, signalling to audiences that the information provided is credible and trustworthy.
- v. Future research can expand on the findings of this study by conducting studies that will focus on digital content creators and public health practitioners/institution, exposure, engagement and influence of health skits across different social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, TikTok and Instagram. Additionally, given that this study focused solely on Nigerian youths, future studies should include diverse demographic groups and geographical regions to enhance the generalisability of the results and provide a broader understanding of how different audiences interact with health skits across platforms.

## Limitation to the study

The study focused on youths in Nigeria, limiting generalisability of its findings; in other words, it does not treat other demographic groups or geographical regions. Also, the study did not incorporate qualitative methods, such as interviews or focus groups, which could have provided deeper insights and triangulated the survey findings. Additionally, the lack of longitudinal data restricts understanding of long-term behavioural impacts. These limitations should be considered when applying the results to broader contexts.

## Declarations:

- Originality statement: I, Emmanuel Olakunle OLUMUJI, confirm that this manuscript is original, has not been previously published, and is not under review elsewhere.
- Author approval statement: I, Emmanuel Olakunle OLUMUJI, confirm that all authors have read and approved the submitted manuscript, and the author order has been agreed upon by all co-authors.
- Conflict of interest disclosure: The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest associated with this research. No financial, personal, or institutional relationships influenced the study's design, data collection, analysis, or interpretation. This disclosure affirms the objectivity and academic integrity of the work presented in this paper.
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