CREDIBILITY AND PERSONAL SOCIAL MEDIA USE OF HEALTH PROFESSIONALS: A FIELD STUDY

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Abstract -
Objectives: There is ongoing discourse regarding the potential risks to health professionals' reputations and credibility arising from their personal social media use. However, the specific impacts on professional credibility and the health professional-client relationship remain largely unexplored. This study aims to investigate the type and frequency of the content posted by health professionals on their Instagram accounts and its influence on their credibility and the professional-client relationship.
Methodology: In a controlled field study, participants reviewed randomly assigned mock Instagram profiles of health professionals. Mock profiles were constructed according to gender (female/male), social media usage (high/low), and social media richness (high/ low), with richness increasing from posts to stories to reels, and personal content type (high /low). Participants then rated the profile owners' credibility on a visual analog scale. An analysis of variance compared these ratings, and mediation analyses assessed the influence of credibility ratings on participants' willingness to become a client of the mock health professional.
Results: Results from 315 participants showed that health professionals with personal Instagram profiles displaying high social media richness were perceived as more credible than those with lower social media richness. Low social media usage is perceived as more credible than high social media usage. Personal content type is perceived as less credible as compared to those with low personal content type.
Contributions: These findings provide initial evidence of the impact of health professionals' personal online disclosures on credibility and the health professional-client relationship. Understanding public perceptions of professionalism and credibility is essential for informing e-professionalism guidelines and promoting best practices in social media use among health professionals.