

Short Paper

Understanding the Role of Social Media Use on Self-Medication Practices of Mothers: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

In many barangays across the Philippines, mothers often face challenges in accessing reliable healthcare services, leading them to turn to self-medication as a practical but potentially risky alternative. While there is a growing interest in how social media influences self-medication practices, existing research and literature tend to focus either on the general population or specific age groups, without giving much attention to the unique role that mothers play in this dynamic. Specifically, the intersection of social media use and self-medication practices among mothers has been underexplored in a specific population. This qualitative study explored the influence of social media use on self-medication practices among mothers residing in a selected barangay in District IV, Quezon City. While literature highlights social media's global impact on mothers' health behaviors, local insights remain underexplored. Using purposive sampling, five mothers aged 18 to 40 years, who had lived in the community for at least six months and engaged weekly with health-related social media content, were interviewed. Semi-structured interviews were analyzed using a systematic six-phase thematic analysis, revealing a total of six themes. The findings reveal the multifaceted role social media plays in mothers' health decisions, emphasizing the need for targeted education to promote responsible self-medication practices in community settings.

Keywords – Social Media, Self-Medication, Mothers, Health Information, Influence

INTRODUCTION

In many barangays across the Philippines, mothers often face challenges in accessing reliable healthcare services, leading them to turn to self-medication as a practical but potentially risky alternative. With the increasing use of social media as a source of health information, this practice has become more prevalent, especially in communities where professional medical guidance is limited. In a study by Diaz (2024), social media platforms often promote idealized portrayals of motherhood that can create pressure and anxiety among mothers. Such practices may lead to misdiagnosis.

In the past few years, particularly at the start of 2020, social media has been the primary source of information, allowing people to consume and share information. However, the prevalence of misinformation also increased (Shu et al., 2020). Global trends suggest that social media has become a pivotal platform for individuals worldwide seeking health-related information, offering both advantages and challenges. The prevalence of social media use for health information has grown significantly during the year of the COVID-19 pandemic, with an estimated 76% of respondents relying on social media for health-related information, with an estimate of 59.2% engaging with such information at least every week (Neely et al., 2021).

Moreover, the Philippines has been named the ‘Social Media Capital of the World’ with a significant engagement rate and usage according to a survey by We Are Social (2023). Moreover, Yanga et al. (2022) found that a substantial faith in sources on the internet is demonstrated by the fact that 35.3% of respondents in Metro Manila consult healthcare professionals, while 37.7% of respondents depend on social media for health information.

Although social media makes health information easily accessible, problems such as misinformation and inconsistent accuracy of content still exist. Users must critically assess online health information and get reliable advice from medical professionals before undergoing practices that may affect their well-being to further prevent any complications to their health.

The prevalence of self-medication among people in the Philippines can be attributed to several factors. To begin with, the emergence of several features in different applications allowed health influencers to share content about health in general. Allowing people who are not in the healthcare field to also provide health information without it being verified by a healthcare professional. Numerous social media platforms display an extensive amount of health-related content that may persuade users to engage in self-medicating or other healthcare practices (De Castro et al., 2023). Moreover, the culture of Filipinos to seek traditional treatment first rather than seek professional care is rampant, especially in rural areas of the country. According to a study by Robredo et al. (2022), this changes their behavior when it comes to seeking healthcare. The essence of their spirituality has influenced some Filipinos to allow prayers to heal the ill. The way Filipinos handle spirituality, managing themselves, and resiliency in the face of illness is a matter of personal preference (Kawi et al., 2024). Furthermore, the lack of education in the low-income communities and the availability of antibiotics without prescriptions in sari-sari stores, which are small businesses run by a family that sells necessary household necessities. It is noted that 65 out of 106 stores (60%) are selling antibiotics. In addition, people had several misconceptions about the indications, side effects, and proper usage of antibiotics (Barber et al., 2017, as cited in Berdida et al., 2021).

Filipinos might integrate both traditional and modern medicine practices, which creates a unique and dynamic way of understanding their well-being. Finally, recognizing the importance of these behaviors and practices of Filipinos remains an unresolved issue that

needs to be explored and given recommendations. While there is a growing interest in how social media influences self-medication practices, existing research and literature tend to focus either on the general population or specific age groups, without giving much attention to the unique role that mothers play in this dynamic. Specifically, the intersection of social media use and self-medication practices among mothers has been underexplored in a certain population. This study is significant because it sheds light on how mothers, who often serve as primary decision-makers in family health, rely on and are influenced by social media in their self-medication choices. By addressing this gap, the research can provide insights that are valuable for healthcare professionals, policymakers, and educators in designing culturally relevant health interventions, improving health literacy, and promoting safer medication practices among families.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Self-medication is a growing global health behavior, especially in developing countries where access to healthcare may be limited. Ghasemyani et al. (2022) conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis on the global prevalence of self-medication and found that 67% of the study participants had practiced self-medication at least once, citing previous experiences, perceived mildness of illness, and accessibility of medication as key factors. Economic limitations and inadequate healthcare infrastructure further drive self-medication trends.

Mothers, in particular, have contributed to the widespread practice of self-medication. A significant factor for their self-medication comes from their child's health variables, wherein the primary reason was the severity of the sickness. Most mothers tried to treat the children themselves at home first for mild diseases using their experience of treating similar problems in the past. But in cases of serious injuries, they immediately visited the doctor. Many mothers practice self-medication due to long waiting times at healthcare centers and expensive healthcare services. The most used medications were antipyretics, antibiotics, anti-allergics, antidiarrheals, and analgesics (Akhtar et al., 2021). Along with this, influence from families and peers has contributed to the self-medication practices of mothers, specifically the use of herbal medication. Some of these remedies were even used as an adjuvant together with prescribed medications (Torres et al., 2023).

In addition to the factors mentioned above, low levels of education and the parents' daily occupation are also factors for self-medication (Kashundu et al., 2024). Filipino parents often self-medicate without fully understanding proper dosages, only relying on online resources and previous prescriptions (Gamboa et al., 2021). However, some still practice self-medication, specifically the use of antibiotics, even if they were highly knowledgeable of their proper use. Financial difficulties, medication accessibility, and convenience are the primary reasons why they continue to do so (Monilla and Del Rosario, 2025).

As we live in the digital age, the use of social media has completely changed the way we communicate, express ourselves, interact with others, and, most importantly, how we consume information. Social media, which are internet-based platforms, allow users to create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content in an instant. In the Philippines, Facebook, along with TikTok and Instagram, is one of the primary social media platforms being utilized (Howe, 2025). With the recent COVID-19 pandemic, social media was invariably one of the primary platforms that impacted public health behaviors (Krishnan, 2021).

Although social media use is not inherently beneficial or harmful in itself, it has become a platform for misinformation, especially in terms of the self-medication practices of many Filipinos. Capuyan (2024) mentioned that with the widespread availability of health information and online communities, social media platforms act as convenient outlets for individuals aiming to comprehend and analyze their symptoms. Users frequently utilize social media to exchange personal stories, request advice, and acquire knowledge about different health issues.

Studies have shown that mothers frequently use social media platforms to connect with other mothers and seek emotional support, practical advice, and health-related information (Torres et al., 2023; Tarcuc et al., 2022). These online communities often fill gaps left by formal healthcare systems (Luu et al., 2022). While some first-time mothers remain cautious and verify online information with healthcare professionals (Torres et al., 2023), others rely heavily on peer-shared advice without fact-checking, reflecting a shift toward informal, community based information and a growing trend in which social media acts not just as a support system but also a substitute for professional health guidance (Tarcuc et al., 2022). Unfortunately, there are incidents of drug intoxication in children that result in an overdose, which is a risk associated with self-medication done by mothers (Kashundu et al., 2024).

It is to be noted, however, that the Philippines has a policy regarding self-medication. The FDA and DOH particularly talk about the prohibition of selling and purchasing unlicensed medications and unregistered pharmaceutical goods, and even efforts to protect public health. But in order for these policies to be fully implemented and successful, the government, together with the Filipino citizens, of which Filipino mothers are part, must effectively cooperate.

All reviewed literature concludes to one thing, which is the dual influence of social media on its users. The studies highlighted that while social media can help provide access to health information and promote awareness, it also facilitates exposure to high amounts of misinformation, which can lead to potential risks such as self-diagnosis and unsafe self-medication. These behaviors are greatly influenced by economic and financial constraints, beliefs, educational attainment, and digital health literacy. This is widespread not just locally in the Philippines, but all around the world, which is very alarming.

It is evident that even with the existence of policies, clear and better digital literacy, improved and stricter enforcement of laws, and community-based initiatives are required to ensure responsible consumerism of health information and reduce the risks of self-medication fueled by social media.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Locale

The study utilized a descriptive qualitative research design to explore the influence of social media on self-medication practices among mothers residing in a selected barangay in Quezon City. It aimed to capture the lived experiences of mothers who engaged in self-medication based on health-related content accessed through platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, and X. The selected barangay in District IV, Quezon City, was justified based on its high social media engagement, limited access to consistent healthcare services, and socioeconomic context where self-medication is common.

Participants and Sampling

The respondents were selected through purposive sampling and included five (5) mothers aged 18-40 years old who had at least one year of parental experience, actively used social media for health information, and had practiced self-medication within the past six (6) months. The small sample size (five mothers) was justified as appropriate for qualitative research, allowing in-depth exploration of lived experiences rather than statistical generalization, consistent with qualitative research standards; moreover, Hennink and Kaiser (2022) found in their study that data saturation could be achieved with this number of respondents. Exclusion criteria included healthcare professionals, pregnant women, individuals with cognitive impairments, and those unwilling to provide informed consent.

Data Collection

The semi-structured interview guide was developed based on the study's statement of the problem and informed by relevant literature on social media use and self-medication practices. It comprised open-ended questions designed to elicit mothers' experiences, perceptions, and health-related decision-making influenced by social media, with probing questions used to facilitate depth and clarification of responses. Data were collected through semi-structured, face-to-face interviews lasting approximately 20–30 minutes.

To establish content validity, the interview guide underwent expert review by specialists from the Information Technology, Language, Media, and Nursing departments. The reviewers assessed the guide using the institution's Trustworthiness Certification Form, which evaluated clarity, relevance, linguistic appropriateness, and alignment with

the study objectives. Revisions were incorporated based on the experts' recommendations to enhance clarity and contextual suitability. The finalized and validated interview guide was subsequently utilized for data collection.

Data Analysis

All sessions were audio-recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's Six-Phase Thematic Analysis (Ahmed et al., 2025). Other measures, such as member checking, peer debriefing, and thematic coding, were employed to ensure trustworthiness.

Ethical Considerations

The study also provided ethical considerations, including obtaining informed consent, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity, adhering to non-maleficence, cultural sensitivity, and approval from the Institutional Ethics Review Committee (IERC). This methodological framework provided an in-depth understanding of how social media shapes self-medication behaviors, offering insights relevant to health education and policy development.

RESULTS

Theme 1: Social Media as a Practical Health Resource

Sub-theme 1: Platform Preference and Usage

Mothers consistently favored platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube due to their accessibility, ease of use, and abundance of easily understandable health-related content. These platforms guided short videos, brief tutorials, and community-based discussions where health concerns were openly shared. One participant emphasized the convenience of video-based content, stating, "*Short video lang po siya. Mga FB Reels ganon. Mas maayos kasi makakuha ng impormasyon pag mga bidyo*" (Participant 1). Another participant highlighted the convenience of having readily accessible information, stating, "*Ayun na nga kasi recorded na lahat... kasi nandon na lahat ng kailangan*" (Participant 2).

Trust in these platforms was further reinforced through personal experience and perceived effectiveness of information obtained online. One participant expressed confidence in the credibility of social media-based health advice, stating, "*Mapagkakatiwalaan, kasi ginagamit ko naman eh. Inaapply ko naman sa sarili ko, yun nga sinasabi ko yung sa pills diba sa social media ko nakita tapos effective... lalo na sa Facebook ah*" (Participant 4).

The frequent use of these platforms highlights how social media has emerged as a primary alternative source of health information, particularly when professional medical consultation is perceived as unnecessary or inaccessible.

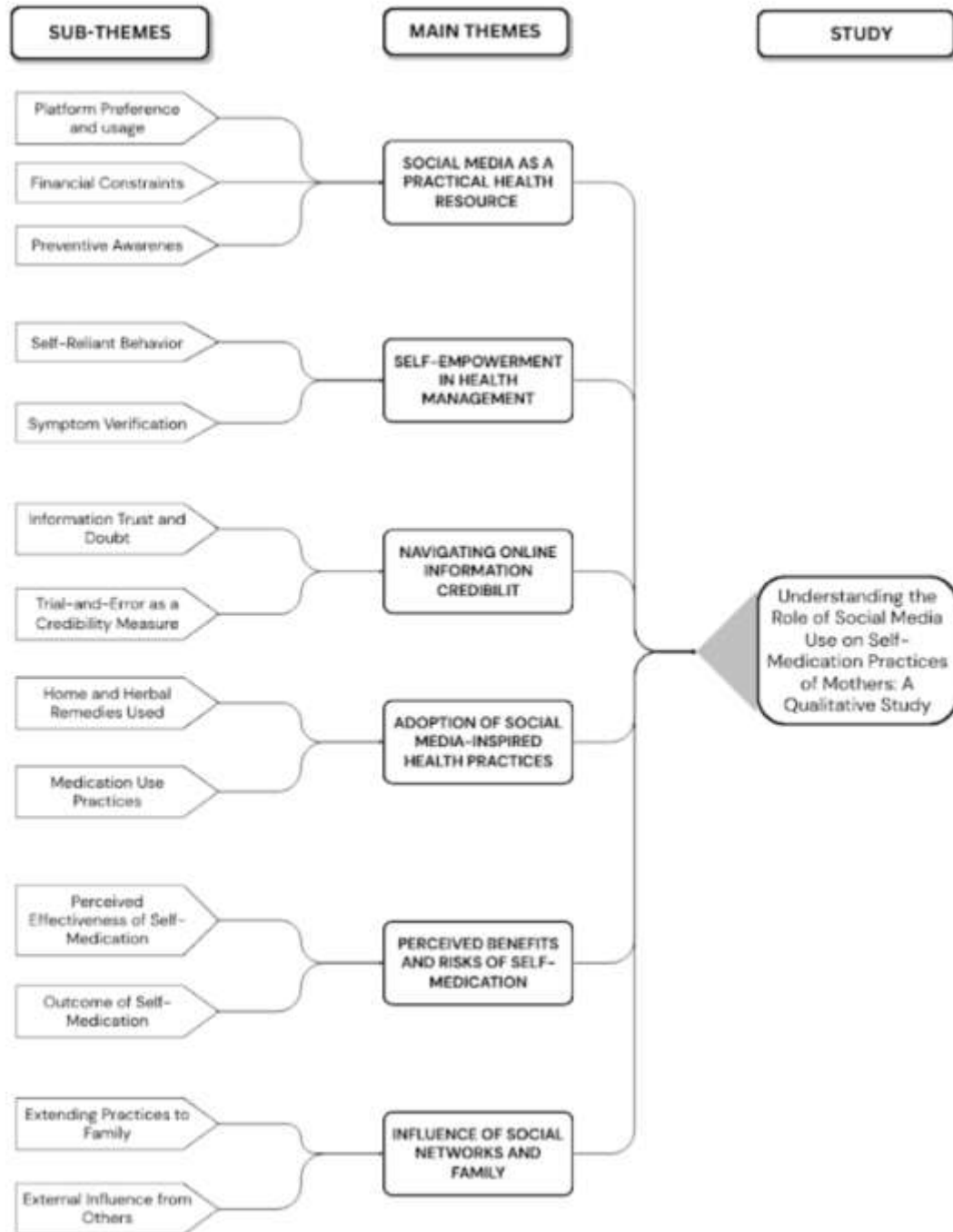


Figure 1. Summary of Themes and Sub-themes of the Study

Sub-theme 2: Financial Constraints

Economic obstacles significantly affected dependence on social media. Mothers highlighted that going to clinics or purchasing prescribed medications often stretched their finances, making free online guidance more attractive. One mother explained, “... *kasi minsan mahal din ang gamot eh, lalo na pag papa-check-up*” (Participant 1), while another noted that avoiding consultation fees was a primary reason for seeking information online, stating, “*Kasi una, para hindi na magpacheck-up sa doktor dahil may bayad*” (Participant 3).

For some participants, social media became a substitute for professional consultation, particularly among first-time mothers seeking guidance for minor health concerns. As one participant shared, “*As a first-time mom, sa social media ako naghahanap ng mga idea sa iinumung gamot o basta mga information para i-resolve ko yung mga dapat i-resolve na problema ko*” (Participant 2). Others relied on prior medical prescriptions to justify current self-medication, explaining, “*Nung dalaga kasi ako, nagpacheck-up ako. Yun ang nireseta sa akin. Kaya parang ngayon, bakit pa ako magpapacheck-up eh alam ko naman na yun*” (Participant 3).

The financial burden associated with healthcare services, including laboratory procedures, further reinforced dependence on digital platforms. One participant elaborated, “*So ang ginawa ko, nag-search ako... kasi sa realidad, let’s face the fact, pag pumunta ka ng doctor kailangan mo ng pera. Tapos sasabihin nila may mga laboratory, ganon...*” (Participant 4). These narratives indicate that the use of social media for health decision-making was not merely driven by convenience but represented a pragmatic response to economic limitations, compelling mothers to seek alternative and cost-free sources of healthcare advice.

Sub-theme 3: Preventive Awareness

Mothers in the study perceived social media as a vital tool for preventive health, using it to acquire practical strategies that mitigate the progression of illness while reducing financial burdens. They translated online guidance into daily practices, applying lifestyle advice, recognizing early symptoms, and implementing home-based interventions as cost-effective alternatives to formal healthcare. For instance, mothers described following infant care recommendations found online, such as burping a baby after feeding and avoiding shaking to prevent harm, reflecting a proactive understanding of caregiving risks, stating, “*Pag sa baby, after padedehin kailangan iburp siya bago patulugin. Basta more on babies napapanood ko don. Tulad pa ng sa baby na wag ialog-alog kasi naalog din ang utak nila..*” (Participant 2).

Others applied general health practices, such as boiling coconut water before consumption, demonstrating the translation of digital information into everyday routines, stating, “*Minsan oo. kapag may nakikita ako pag nireresearch ko eto gawin ko. yung example, buko kailangan daw pakuluan. edi ako naman, pakulo ko rin*” (Participant 3).

One mother reported regulating her PCOS symptoms after following online recommendations, stating, “Oo, ganon. Kasi syempre makikita mo naman sa social media kung bakit ganito... Yung PCOS, mga ganon... Tapos yun sinearch ko tapos nag-pills ako, naging regular ulit yung mens ko” (Participant 4). Beyond information, participants emphasized the economic benefits of social media, particularly for financially constrained families, as it allowed them to access health knowledge and determine necessary medications without the cost of medical consultations, stating, “Sa social media... Kaya malaking tulong talaga ang social media lalo na sa aming mga mahihirap. Pag wala kaming pera, wala kaming pampagamot, search. Yun ang pinaka number 1 na ginagawa” (Participant 4); “Para malaman ko kung ano yung mga gamot na kailangan ko para sa mga sakit” (Participant 5).

These findings suggest that mothers strategically utilize social media as a preventive health resource, integrating digital guidance into daily practices to protect themselves and their families while minimizing financial strain. This aligns with Luu et al. (2022), who observed that women in resource-poor contexts rely on alternative information sources to bridge healthcare gaps, and De Castro et al. (2023), who highlighted the cost-effectiveness and accessibility of digital platforms in health decision-making, particularly among economically disadvantaged populations.

Theme 2: Self-Empowerment in Health Management

Sub-theme 1: Self-Reliant Behavior

Exposure to health-related information empowered mothers to manage minor health issues independently, without immediate recourse to professional assistance. Many participants reported feeling confident in their ability to apply knowledge gained from social media and other digital sources, interpreting consistent success in self-treatment as evidence of self-reliance. For example, one mother described how she discovered effective remedies for common ailments online, stating, “*Sa social media lang. Nag search ako ano pwedeng gamot tas nakita ko, uy mefenamic pwede pala tas ayon uminom ako tas effective nga. Tapos pag masakit din ulo ko, di talaga ako hiyang sa paracetamol, ang ginagawa ako nagsusuob ako ng may asin, which is nakita ko lang din sa social media.*” (Participant 5)

Another participant highlighted relying on digital information during personal or familial illness, stating, “*Nung nagkasakit yung anak ko sa bronchopneumonia niya, gumaling siya. Tsaka pag nagkasakit ako. Don ako naghahanap sa Facebook tulad nung sumakit ngipin ko, nakahanap ako ng mas mabisang gamot kaysa sa mga nakasanayang gamot.*” (Participant 2)

These narratives indicate that mothers strategically utilized online health information to make treatment decisions, enhancing their confidence in managing minor conditions. While this self-reliance fostered independence and a sense of control, it also normalized

the bypassing of professional medical advice, highlighting both the benefits and potential limitations of digital health engagement.

Sub-theme 2: Symptom Verification

Mothers frequently verified their symptoms by comparing them with online posts, videos, or feedback from individuals with similar experiences. This method of comparison provided reassurance and increased confidence that their situation was under control. For example, one participant explained how online feedback influenced her decisions, stating, *“May nagco-comment okay naman daw po siya gamitin, maganda naman daw po siya. Mabilis, effective ganon. Kaya minsan trina-try ko rin po. Parang naiimpluwensiyahan ako ganon.”* (Participant 1)

Similarly, another participant described taking self-medication before seeking professional care, stating, *“Kasi yun nga ang sinasabi ko, nagddesisyon na kami muna eh. Nagmmedication na kami ng sarili namin na ano tapos kapag di na talaga kaya.”* (Participant 3)

These narratives illustrate that social media provides both validation and autonomy, empowering mothers to make health-related decisions independently. At the same time, reliance on peer confirmation occasionally supplanted professional medical advice, highlighting a potential risk. The sub-theme indicates that social media fosters a strong sense of self-reliance, enabling mothers to manage health problems with confidence while also creating vulnerability due to unsupervised self-treatment. This observation aligns with Dalandas et al. (2023), who noted that digital platforms during the pandemic both supported individual health management and encouraged hazardous self-medication practices. Similarly, Beig et al. (2025) found that greater access to online health information enhanced understanding but also increased the inclination to self-treat. Consequently, Major Theme 2 underscores the tension between empowerment and vulnerability in mothers' health-related decision-making.

Theme 3: Navigating Online Information Credibility

Sub-theme 1: Information Trust and Doubt

Mothers exhibited varying levels of trust regarding health information found online, reflecting a nuanced balance between confidence and skepticism. Some participants relied on content they perceived as credible, whether because it was widely shared or came from trusted sources, while others remained cautious, aware of the prevalence of misinformation. One participant expressed this ambivalence, stating, *“...Minsan maniniwala ka, minsan hindi.”* (Participant 2), *“Oo maasahan siya. Kasi pag kailangan ko ng mag gguide saakin. Don ko siya nahahanap.”* (Participant 2)

Another participant described a cautious approach, acknowledging both the potential usefulness and the risk of falsity, stating, “50/50 kasi di ko rin masasabi na totoo talaga yung nakikita ko doon... Aware din ako maraming fake sa social media kaya 50/50 talaga ako.” (Participant 5)

Yet some mothers reported direct reliance on online guidance for self-treatment, emphasizing its effectiveness based on personal experience, stating, “Kasi nga, proven and tested... Tapos yung nagka mens na ko dahil nag take ako ng pills para nga raw ma regularize yung menstruation, dahil sa social media ko nakuha Yun. Wala akong kinausap na iba, dun ko lang talaga nakuha. Ayun okay naman.” (Participant 4)

These responses indicate that mothers often assessed credibility through practical outcomes or social validation rather than strict medical verification. While trust in social media enabled autonomous health decisions, it also exposed them to potential misinformation, reflecting a complex interplay between confidence and caution. The findings highlight that mothers navigate online health content critically, balancing perceived reliability with awareness of possible inaccuracies, which can influence both self-reliant behaviors and health outcomes.

Sub-theme 2: Trial-and-Error as a Credibility Measure

Mothers confessed that they assessed the credibility of health information based on outcomes. If a home remedy or medication proved effective once, they were likely to rely on it for future situations. For instance, one first-time mother described using social media to find ideas for remedies and general guidance, stating, “As a first time mom, sa social media ako naghahanap ng mga idea sa iinuming gamot o basta mga information para iresolve ko yung mga dapat iresolved na problema ko.” (Participant 2)

Similarly, another mother recounted experimenting with medications for menstrual regulation by combining different online recommendations, stating, “Oo. Ay dati naman, nag-ano ako nag-mens ako, yung volume ng mens sinearch ko, dapat daw ganito lang. Edi ngayon, pinag-combine combine ko yung mga ano...kasi merong gamot na hemostan pampatigil ng dugo.” (Participant 4)

These examples illustrate a trial-and-error approach to health management, demonstrating both ingenuity and resourcefulness. At the same time, assessing effectiveness based solely on short-term outcomes underscores potential risks, as safety and long-term implications are often not considered.

Together, these sub-themes indicate that mothers establish credibility through personal experience and social validation rather than professional standards. This aligns with Jenkins et al. (2020), who observed that individuals often rely on clarity, familiarity, and popularity cues when evaluating digital health information. Torres et al. (2023) similarly noted that while some mothers exercise caution, others place significant trust in guidance

from social media groups. Theme 3 thus highlights the delicate balance between doubt and risk-taking in mothers' online health decision-making.

Theme 4: Adoption of Social Media-Inspired Health Practices

Sub-theme 1: Home and Herbal Remedies Used

Participants frequently relied on natural or home remedies promoted online, including herbal teas, steam inhalation, and topical applications. These treatments were appealing due to their low cost, cultural familiarity, and perception as safer alternatives to conventional medications. Mothers described using a variety of methods when formal remedies were unavailable or unaffordable, stating, “Kunyari yung mga pagpapaligo sa kama, suob o yung pagpapausok, at tsaka minsan pag walang mabiling gamot, mga herbal nalang...” (Participant 1)

Similarly, some mothers applied herbal approaches for their own health conditions, stating, “Tulad sa akin, yung about sa sakit ko kung pwede namang mainom sa herbal herbal. Kasi ganon din.” (Participant 3)

Others relied on specific plant-based remedies for children, such as boiling alugbati leaves for consumption, stating, “...Ang nakita ko naman is pwede yung alugbati para sa kanya, pakukulan mo tapos iinumun daw...” (Participant 5)

These narratives indicate that mothers strategically incorporated online health information into home-based care practices, balancing cultural knowledge, accessibility, and perceived safety. While these remedies reflect resourcefulness and self-reliance, they also highlight the potential limitations of relying solely on unverified online guidance for treating illnesses.

Sub-theme 2: Medication Use Practices

In addition to herbal treatments, mothers frequently administered over-the-counter medications independently, often guided by recommendations found online. While these practices sometimes provided immediate relief, the absence of professional supervision created the potential for incorrect dosages and misuse, particularly regarding antibiotics. Some participants described actively seeking the most effective pharmaceutical option when standard medications seemed ineffective, stating, “...tapos di na tumatalab yung mga sinasabi nilang mefenamic o amoxicillin. naghanap ako ng pinaka mabisa. nahanap ko don yung Ponsamic.” (Participant 2)

Others admitted adjusting prescribed dosages based on personal judgment or resource limitations, stating, “Ang reseta kasi ng doctor is 3x a day. pero ang ginagawa ko lang pag nakukuha naman sa 2 sa isang araw, stop na.” (Participant 3)

These narratives demonstrate that mothers integrate both traditional and contemporary self-care methods influenced by online resources. Social media not only reinforces culturally rooted treatments but also introduces pharmaceutical options that can be leveraged independently. This aligns with Maever et al. (2023), who observed that Filipino self-care practices blend traditional knowledge with accessible remedies, and Kashundu et al. (2024), who emphasized the persistence of cultural self-medication alongside biomedical approaches. Theme 4 underscores the role of digital guidance in shaping daily caregiving routines, highlighting both the resourcefulness and the potential risks associated with unsupervised medication use.

Theme 5: Perceived Benefits and Risks of Self-Medication

Sub-theme 1: Perceived Effectiveness of Self-Medication

Mothers generally believed that self-medication was effective for minor ailments, particularly when treatments or medications provided immediate relief. This perception reinforced their ongoing reliance on internet-based guidance. Several participants reported using remedies based on personal or familial experience, often extending these practices across generations, stating, “...Yun naman ang madalas na gamot e, yung impormasyon base nalang sa experience ko sa mga anak ko tapos yun na din pinapainom ko sa mga apo ko...” (Participant 1)

Others described positive effects even with limited or single-dose usage, reinforcing confidence in self-administered treatment, stating, “...Pag umiinom naman, umu-okay naman eh. Di naman siya yung pag umiinom, wala. Okay naman kasi pag uminom ako ng isang beses, may epekto naman sa katawan ko.” (Participant 3)

Some mothers also highlighted the effectiveness of self-medication for common ailments such as fever, cold, or cough, stating, “Sa mga simpleng sakit lagnat, sipon, ubo ganon. Effective naman yung mga na-try ko...” (Participant 5)

These narratives indicate that perceived efficacy plays a key role in reinforcing mothers’ confidence and habitual use of self-medication. While this approach supports resourcefulness and autonomy in managing minor health issues, it also underscores the potential risks of relying on short-term relief without professional consultation.

Sub-theme 2: Outcome of Self-Medication

While some mothers reported beneficial results, others experienced unproductive or potentially harmful effects. Despite these risks, self-medication remained a common practice, underscoring both the reliance on and the limitations of online guidance. For example, one mother described managing her child’s fever at home and only seeking professional care if symptoms persisted beyond a few days, stating, “...Pag may lagnat di

na namin dinadala inaano nalang namin parang doctor-doctoran kami... pero pag 2-3 days di pa rin nawala, dun pa lang namin siya dadalhin sa hospital...” (Participant 1)

Another participant highlighted her preference for herbal remedies, foregoing professional consultations whenever possible, stating, *“Kaya hangga’t kaya na maanuhan ko sa mga herbal, di na ko nagpapacheck up...”* (Participant 3)

These narratives indicate that mothers continuously weigh the perceived benefits against the potential dangers of self-medication. Confidence in the effectiveness of home or pharmaceutical remedies drives continued use, while adverse experiences underscore the inherent risks of relying on unverified online recommendations. This aligns with findings by Ghasemyani et al. (2022), who observed that self-medication persists globally despite awareness of associated risks, and Ortiz-Prado et al. (2023), who highlighted that misleading information during crises often contributes to ineffective or unsafe medication practices. Consequently, Theme 5 emphasizes the ongoing conflict between convenience, perceived effectiveness, and potential hazards inherent in self-directed health management.

Theme 6: Influence of Social Networks and Family

Sub-theme 1: Extending Practices to Family

Mothers frequently applied remedies and health practices discovered online to their children and other family members, reflecting their role as primary health decision-makers within the household. They often shared successful strategies with relatives and friends, reinforcing the circulation of online health knowledge within their social networks. One participant explained how she documented and shared effective practices, stating, *“... Pag may nagiging success, tatanong ako kung paano. Inisscreenshot ko siya tas sinesend ko sakanila.”* (Participant 2)

Similarly, another mother described actively advising others to try strategies she had found online, or encouraging them to search for solutions themselves, stating, *“... Sinasabi ko sa kanila na ‘ay eto ginagawa ko to. i-try mo baka maano mo’ or minsan sasabihin ko ‘try niyo kaya mag-ano ka sa Google tapos try mo lang’...”* (Participant 3)

These behaviors demonstrate that mothers not only internalize digital health information but also serve as conduits for knowledge dissemination, extending self-care practices throughout their families. This illustrates both the empowerment afforded by access to online resources and the influence of mothers in shaping household health routines.

Sub-theme 2: External Influence from Others

Mothers' health choices were significantly shaped by recommendations from family, friends, neighbors, and virtual acquaintances. These social networks reinforced confidence in using certain treatments or medications, often validating decisions initially informed by online sources. For example, one participant shared how a neighbor's suggestion influenced her decision to administer a medication, stating, "*Recommend lang din minsan ng kapitbahay na painumin ng Cetirizine.*" (Participant 1)

Another mother described consulting experienced elders before applying remedies to her one-month-old child, combining online information with traditional guidance, stating, "*Oo, actually noong nakaraan nagka sakit siya. Syempre 1 month old, nakakita ako mga herbal ganon... Pero nagtanong muna ako sa mga matatanda...*" (Participant 2)

These narratives indicate that mothers not only rely on online sources but also incorporate advice from their social environment, which strengthens the cycle of self-medication and home-based health practices. Mothers often serve as intermediaries, relaying digital health information to family members and thus amplifying the influence of social networks within the household. This observation aligns with Rauf et al. (2021) and Cabral et al. (2024), who highlighted that mothers frequently act as key decision-makers in household health management. In this study, social media further enhances its role, allowing recommendations from external networks to directly shape health behaviors at home.

DISCUSSION

The study showed that mothers often used social media as a useful health resource, as reflected in Major Theme 1, which includes three sub-themes. This highlights that mothers used Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube better because they were easy to use, had a lot of health-related content, and were accessible. Financial constraints play a big role in this decision, with prescribed medications and healthcare facilities being viewed as unaffordable. Mothers also used online content to learn about preventive measures to avoid expensive treatments, using lifestyle tips and early symptom recognition. These results show how mothers' seeking health information online is connected to practicality, affordability, and prevention.

In relation to Major Theme 2, health management, mothers described gaining confidence to address common illnesses independently. Their behavior was self-sufficient and handled minor conditions without going to a healthcare professional for consultation immediately. Comparing symptoms to online posts or peers reassured them, but in some cases, it replaced professional guidance. This theme emphasizes the empowering yet potentially risky nature of self-directed health management.

The findings also uncovered problems with navigating the credibility of online information, which is Major Theme 3 of this study. Some mothers acknowledged the application of the trial-and-error method, while others discussed depending on popularity indicators such as shares and likes to evaluate the trustworthiness of online content. This method of credibility testing emphasizes both attentiveness and risk, as short-term relief was sometimes mistaken for medical accuracy.

The Major Theme 4, which comprised two subthemes, was the adoption of social media-inspired health practices. Mother often used herbal and home remedies they found online because they were culturally familiar and inexpensive. At the same time, many reported taking antibiotics and other over-the-counter drugs based on internet advice. This practice is a blend of traditional and biomedical approaches, but also poses a risk of abuse in the absence of healthcare professional guidance.

Mothers' perceptions of the balance of their practices were illustrated by Major Theme 5, which is the perceived benefits and risks of self-medication. On the one hand, many people claimed that self-medication was effective in reducing their symptoms. However, some had harmful results. These disparate experiences show how, in spite of known risks, perceived effectiveness keeps the practice going.

Finally, the results emphasize the role of the family and social networks as the Major Theme 6, which included relying on outside influences from friends, family, and peers, as well as extending practices to children and family members. Mothers reinforced the spread of social media practices within the family by acting as decision makers regarding health in their homes and as a channel for online health information.

In its entirety, the findings indicate that although mothers used social media for preventive, economical, and practical reasons, this dependence also resulted in self-medication patterns shaped by social influences, cultural customs, and empowerment. These findings highlight the dual role of social media as both a resource and a risk in daily health management.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study revealed that mothers rely on social media as a practical health resource due to accessibility, financial constraints, and preventive awareness. It empowers them to self-manage health issues and share experiences, but also exposes them to risks such as misinformation, misuse of medicines, and delayed professional care. Mothers integrate both traditional and modern practices, highlighting the need to balance digital support with professional guidance to ensure safe and responsible health decisions.

It is recommended to strengthen digital health literacy through barangay-level training, infographics, and partnerships with schools and women's groups. Health professionals should collaborate in creating expert-backed content on popular platforms and integrate

safe self-care and first-aid education into community health programs. Local health authorities must regulate misinformation, establish verified online channels, and expand affordable telehealth services like e-konsulta stations. Barangay health workers should be trained to guide mothers in evaluating online information, while family-based and peer-led health education can further build community trust. Lastly, future research should conduct longitudinal studies and explore digital tools like triage chatbots to better connect online health-seeking with professional care.

IMPLICATIONS

This study carries significant implications for research by opening pathways to examine the complex relationship between digital platforms and health behaviors. Future studies may focus on evaluating the effectiveness of digital health literacy interventions, which will be able to help mothers discern credible health information from misinformation online. Researchers can also investigate how different social media platforms shape self-medication decisions and explore the long-term effects of these practices on maternal and child health. Moreover, intervention-based and longitudinal studies are needed to assess how innovations such as telehealth services, peer-led advocacy, and digital triage systems can bridge the gap between online health seeking and professional medical care. Overall, this study provides a foundation for future research that links social media use, community health education, and healthcare systems toward promoting safe and informed self-medication practices among mothers.

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DECLARATION

Conflict of Interest

No conflicts of interest exist between the authors that might be deemed significant to the article's content.

Informed Consent

Informed consent was obtained from all participants of the study.

Ethics Approval

This study was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Ethics Review Committee in accordance with established ethical standards for research involving human participants.

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