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Framing the Midwifery Profession in The Digital Era: The Impact of Social Media on Midwifery Students

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ABSTRACT

One of the key pillars of maternal and child health services is the midwifery profession, particularly in efforts to reduce maternal and infant mortality. In this era of globalization, midwives face challenges not only in terms of clinical competence, but also in terms of how society views their profession, especially among the next generation of midwives. This study aims to examine the influence of social media use on undergraduate students' perceptions of the midwifery profession. A correlational quantitative study was conducted involving 144 midwifery students from the Faculty of Medicine, Andalas University. We used proportionate stratified random sampling to choose the participants. Structured questionnaires were used to gather information about how people use social media and what they think about the midwifery profession. After checking that the data was normal, a Pearson correlation analysis was done. The findings demonstrated that most people had a positive opinion of the midwifery profession (mean = 30.88) and are highly dependent on social media use (mean = 26.1). Respondents are very interested in professional content on social media such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok. The use of social media has a strong positive correlation with how respondents view the professional image of midwives ($r = 0.548$, $p < 0.001$). Social media has a major effect on how midwifery students see themselves as professionals. Adding digital professionalism and media literacy to the midwifery curriculum is important for helping people learn how to use digital tools in a responsible and moral way.

INTRODUCTION

Public trust, institutional respect, and students' commitment to a career in maternal and neonatal health services are all significantly influenced by midwives' professional image. In this era of digital transformation, social media has taken center stage to affect professional identity and public perception, especially among young adults, who make up the majority of healthcare students worldwide [1] As a result of this transition, it is necessary to reevaluate the ways in which digital media platforms have an impact on the branding and perception of health professions, including midwifery. Midwives' competence, autonomy, and vital role in primary care are frequently underrepresented in Indonesian and international media [2] These views, which are frequently influenced by media representation and cultural norms, have an impact on how midwifery students internalize their professional roles as well as public opinion. Other health fields, including nursing and medicine, have generally recognized the role of media, especially social media, in building a professional identity [3], midwifery education has yet to fully examine this relationship.

Social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube have increasingly become tools for health communication, professional advocacy, and career influence among students [4] These platforms provide a setting for rebranding midwifery as a contemporary, evidence-based, and empowering profession through visual narratives, testimonies, and professional campaigns. As social media content producers and consumers, midwifery students are exposed to a range of representations of their future career. To help educational institutions and professional groups with their rebranding strategies and efforts to encourage digital professionalism, it's important to understand how these images affect how students see things. There is little data on how midwifery students understand and internalize professional values through social media content, despite the fact that previous research has examined the general impact of media on health professions [5] This study fills a pertinent and timely gap in midwifery education by concentrating on the perceptions of midwifery students, advancing our knowledge of the ways in which professional identity formation and digital culture interact.

Thus, this study is important not only for its educational implications, offering guidance for curriculum development and student mentoring, but also for its wider role in redefining midwifery as a robust, contemporary profession that can adapt to the demands of the digital era. The main objective of this research is to examine the influence of social media use on the construction of the professional image of midwives among midwifery students. This research has specific objectives, specifically to identify the level of social media engagement among midwifery students related to professional content, to assess midwifery students' perceptions of the professional image of midwives, and to analyze the relationship between students' social media engagement and their perception of the midwifery profession.

This study fills in a major gap in our understanding of how digital media affects the professional identity of future midwives, which is an area that has not been studied much in midwifery education research. A lot of research has been done on the clinical skills of midwifery students, but not as much on how using social media affects how they feel about the profession. This study is important not only because it can help with curriculum development and student mentoring, but also because it can help change how people think about midwifery as a modern and flexible profession that can adapt to the needs of the digital age. The primary goal of this research is to investigate the impact of social media use on the development of midwifery students' professional image of midwives. Specifically, the purpose of this study is to assess the level of social media engagement among midwifery students in relation to professional content, investigate students' perceptions of midwives' professional image, and to examine the relationship between social media engagement and students' perceptions of the profession.

METHOD

This study uses a quantitative correlational approach to investigate the association between social media use and perceptions of the midwifery profession among midwifery students. The study population consisted of second- and third-year students participating in Andalas University's Undergraduate Midwifery Program. A total of 144 participants were chosen using proportionate stratified random sampling to ensure equitable representation across academic levels. Data was collected over a two week period in June 2025 using a structured questionnaire. The researchers created the questionnaire after reviewing existing instruments on social media activity and professional identity building. The instrument was divided into three sections: demographic information, social media involvement (frequency, purpose, and platform usage), and perceptions of midwives' professional image. All responses were rated on a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Before being fully set up, the questionnaire was tested for validity and reliability.

Inclusion criteria were actively enrolled as a second; third year student; active social media users (minimum 3 times per week); willing to participate voluntarily with informed consent. The minimum required sample size was calculated using the Slovin formula with a 5% margin of error, resulting in 109 participants. To enhance data reliability and account for non-response, the final sample size was increased to 144 students.

The study involved two main variables. Independent variable, social media engagement measured using a structured questionnaire developed based on prior validated instruments. Dimensions include frequency of use, type of platform, content viewed/shared, and perceived influence. The instrument consists of 7 items using a 5-point Likert scale. Dependent variable, perception of the midwives' professional image measured using a perception scale adapted from previous studies on professional image in health professions. Dimensions include perceived competence, respect, autonomy, and societal value of midwives. The questionnaire contains 7 items using the same 5-point Likert scale. This study was ethically approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Medicine, Universitas Andalas, with the ethical clearance number **400/UN.16.2/KEP-FK/2025**.

Participants completed the anonymous questionnaire either via a secure online platform (Google Form). Participation was voluntary, and no compensation was provided. Completion of the questionnaire took approximately 5–10 minutes. Descriptive statistics (frequency, mean, standard deviation) were used to describe respondent characteristics and response trends. Normality test (Kolmogorov–Smirnov) was performed to assess the data distribution. If data are normally distributed: Pearson Product-Moment Correlation test. If data are not normally distributed: Spearman Rank Correlation. The significance level was set at $p < 0.05$

RESULTS

In this study, 144 undergraduate midwifery students from Andalas University's Faculty of Medicine participated. To determine how social media use and the perception of the midwifery profession relate to one another, data analysis was done. Validity testing using Pearson Product Moment showed all items had significance values below 0.05, indicating all questionnaire items were valid. The reliability test using Cronbach's Alpha yielded a coefficient of 0.888, exceeding the minimum threshold of 0.7, which confirms the instrument is reliable for both constructs: social media use and professional image.

The Kolmogorov–Smirnov test for unstandardized residuals showed a significance value of 0.200 ($p > 0.05$), indicating that the residuals are normally distributed. Therefore, parametric correlation analysis is appropriate. The majority of students reported daily engagement with professional health-related content,

particularly short videos and infographics related to maternal health, birth stories, and midwifery tips. According to descriptive statistical analysis, the average social media engagement score was 26.13, indicating a high level of engagement with professional midwifery information on digital platforms. Table 1 illustrates the distribution of students based on their level of social media activity.

Table 1. Distribution of Social Media Engagement Levels

Engagement Levels	f	%
High	82	56.94
Moderate	57	39.58
Low	5	3.47
Total	144	100

Table 1 shows the distribution of social media engagement levels among respondents. The majority of students (56.94%) showed high levels of involvement, followed by 39.58% with moderate interest and only 3.47% with poor engagement. The majority of respondents reported regular involvement with professional health material, particularly short films and infographics on themes such as maternal health, birth stories, and clinical midwifery practices.

Most participants reported daily exposure to short videos and infographics on topics such as maternal health, birth stories, and clinical practices, with TikTok (47.9%), Instagram (38.2%), and YouTube (11.8%) being the most used platforms. Furthermore, students' perceptions of the midwifery profession were overwhelmingly positive. The mean score for perception was 30.8, indicating a strong sense of professional pride and identity. As shown in Table 2, over 90% of respondents expressed positive perceptions.

Table 2. Distribution of Perceptions on Midwifery Professional Image

Perception Category	f	%
Positive	130	90.28
Neutral	12	8.33
Negative	2	1.39
Total	144	100

In this study, "positive perception" is defined as agreement with statements about midwives' professional identity, significance, and societal worth. Specifically 91.3% of students saw midwifery as a professional and exciting field, 90.8% were proud to be a member of the profession, 92.3% acknowledged midwives' vital role in the healthcare system. These findings imply that students not only absorb professional information on social media, but also incorporate such messages into their developing professional self-concept.

Finally, correlation analysis using Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation revealed a significant positive relationship between social media engagement and perception of the midwifery profession ($r = 0.548$, $p = 0.000$). This indicates a moderate-strength correlation, meaning that higher engagement with professional content on social media is associated with more positive perceptions of the profession.

DISCUSSION

The study's results show a statistically significant and moderately strong positive relationship between midwifery students' use of social media and how they feel about the midwifery profession ($r = 0.548$, $p < 0.001$). This shows how digital spaces, especially social media, are having a bigger and bigger effect on how future healthcare workers develop and internalize their professional identity. It backs up the ideas behind social identity theory, which says that people shape how they see themselves by fitting in with groups they think are important to them. In this case, those groups are online midwifery networks and digital discourse [6], [7] Students can find and add to midwifery-related content on social media sites like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube. These websites have health campaigns, professional testimonials, educational materials, and advocacy content for maternal and reproductive health. They help create a digital culture that shows midwifery as competent, modern, and empowering. As students interact with these representations, their understanding of what it means to be a midwife in today's healthcare system changes

[8] Over 90% of the people in this study strongly agreed that midwifery is a professional field and has social value. This shows that they have internalized professional values, which is widely seen as a key part of forming a professional identity [9]

Nagaraj et al. (2020) return this up by asserting that social media not only shares information but also encodes the values, expectations, and norms of behavior in a profession [5] Students may feel more in line with their personal and professional identities if they are regularly exposed to content that supports midwives' expertise, independence, and impact. This alignment is important for promoting job satisfaction, long-term commitment, and emotional resilience, especially in fields that are emotionally taxing, like maternal and neonatal [10]

The development of digital technology has brought significant changes in the practice of nursing and midwifery education, especially through the use of social media. Today, social media is an integral part of students' lives, not only as a means of communication and entertainment, but also as a medium of learning both formally and informally. This digital platform acts as a third space that allows students to integrate their personal and academic lives, interact with fellow students, and build networks with the wider professional community [11]. The use of social media has been shown to support academic engagement, the development of a positive learning community, and strengthen students' professional identity [12], [13].

However, along with the benefits come major challenges related to digital professionalism and ethics. Digital literacy and understanding professional boundaries are crucial issues that need attention in midwifery and nursing education curricula. Studies show that while most students understand the importance of maintaining ethics online, there are still variations in understanding of professionally acceptable behaviors [14]. Therefore, the integration of education on digital professionalism into the curriculum is crucial. Educational institutions should provide systematic and in-depth training on the ethical use of social media and establish clear policies and guidelines to set boundaries for interactions in the digital world [15], [16].

Even though social media has its benefits, we need to be careful about how we use it. Because online content isn't filtered, it could spread false information, misrepresent professionals, or make the profession seem less important. Using social media inappropriately or without thinking about it can hurt credibility and change professional values [17], [18], [19]. So, it's important to include media literacy and digital professionalism in the midwifery curriculum. Students need to learn how to not only ethically consume digital content, but also how to create and interact with it in a responsible way [20] Another important aspect is how to use social media strategically to attract and keep future midwifery professionals. In places where midwifery isn't well-known, like many low- and middle-income countries, positive portrayals of the profession can help people learn more about it and get younger people interested. When used correctly, social media can be a very effective way to rebrand something and change how people think about it [2].

This study contributes to the expanding body of evidence that social media is not a neutral technology, but rather a dynamic sociocultural environment where professional identities are built, questioned, and negotiated [21]. Midwifery students that interact with professional narratives online are actively molding their self-concept and future positions in the health care system. The professional tales, conversations, and representations they encounter on these platforms shape their sense of what it means to be a midwife in today's healthcare environments.

In Indonesia, national health education programs have begun to include digital literacy as a fundamental skill, making this issue even more relevant. The introduction of government guidelines advocating the use of digital technology and media training in professional education represents a shift in educational objectives [22]. These programs seek not only to improve students' clinical and communication skills, but also to increase their capabilities in digital content production, ethical online conduct, and public involvement [23]. This institutional acknowledgment strengthens the hypothesis that social media may strategically affect professional image and health communication in the digital age.

The World Health Organization (WHO) emphasizes this global need in its Global Strategy on Digital Health, which emphasizes the need to provide health workers with safe, ethical, and professional digital skills [24]. As a result, midwifery education should not view digital interaction as optional or supplemental. Instead, it must contain organized components of digital professionalism and media literacy that will allow students to participate appropriately in online health discussions, advocacy, and education.

Finally, this study not only shows that social media improves students' perceptions of the midwifery profession, but it also emphasizes the critical necessity for collaboration between educational institutions and professional bodies. These initiatives should concentrate on preparing the next generation of midwives to be digitally literate, ethically conscious, actively engaged in molding public awareness of their profession, confident in dealing with digital health ecosystems [25].

Interestingly, the introduction of social media such as Twitter as part of curriculum assessment did not show an increase in cases of professional misconduct, thus reinforcing the view that social media can be positively integrated without jeopardizing the integrity of the profession if supported by appropriate guidelines [26]. With the right pedagogical approach, social media can be a tool to strengthen professional identity, build a sense of belonging to the profession, and increase students' confidence and retention in their studies [13]. Further research may be needed, particularly in exploring the effectiveness of newer social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok on learning outcomes, as well as how educational strategies can optimize the role of social media in shaping student professionalism in a sustainable manner [27]. Thus, the urgency of integrating digital professionalism in midwifery and nursing education cannot be ignored, given the strategic role of social media in shaping student behavior, identity, and performance in the digital era.

Conclusion

This study shows that active engagement with midwifery-related information on social media has a substantial impact on students' perceptions of the profession's expertise, autonomy, and social value. Integrating digital professionalism and media literacy into midwifery education is thus critical for enhancing students' professional identity and public knowledge of the discipline. The study's limitations include its cross-sectional design, single-institution sample, and dependence on self-reported data. Future research should include longitudinal and cross-institutional studies, as well as investigations into the impacts of specific platforms such as TikTok and Instagram, and evaluations of curriculum-based interventions on students' digital engagement and professional identity development.

Author Contributions

HF contributed on the study's concept, methodology, formal analysis, original draft writing, and general supervision. AR managed data curation, research, and validation, as well as evaluating and revising the text. YW managed project administration and coordinated institutional and participant-related resources. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the publication, and their contributions represent their distinct responsibilities and areas of expertise throughout the research process.

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