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THE ROLE OF ICT IN THE ACQUISITION AND RECEPTION OF HEALTH AND MENTAL HEALTH CONTENT: A LITERATURE REVIEW

La investigación sobre el papel de las TIC en la obtención y recepción de contenidos de salud y salud mental: Una revisión de la literatura

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Resumen

Introducción: esta revisión de literatura explora la investigación en diferentes países y particularmente en México, sobre la recepción y formas de consumo de información en salud y salud mental, enfocándose en los estudios que abordan el uso de las Tecnologías de la Información y Comunicación (TIC) para acceder a contenidos sanitarios. El objetivo principal es analizar los enfoques y metodologías en los trabajos de audiencias/usuarios en el campo de la comunicación y salud con el fin de identificar tendencias y lagunas de conocimiento relacionadas con la utilización de las TIC y el consumo de información sanitaria. **Metodología:** mediante una selección de estudios elegidos a través de palabras clave, se almacenaron en Excel trabajos relevantes de bases de datos como Redalyc, Elsevier, SAGE Journals, Scielo, Ebsco, Scopus y Dialnet, junto con las memorias de diferentes congresos de comunicación. **Resultados:** los resultados destacan la compleja interacción entre individuos, TIC e información de salud, enfatizando en la importancia de considerar aspectos socioculturales y enfoques metodológicos alternos en la investigación de la recepción mediática. **Conclusiones:** en este sentido, los hallazgos subrayan la necesidad de comprender la forma en que los usuarios interactúan con los recursos informativos de salud y sus implicaciones para la formulación de políticas públicas y la promoción de la alfabetización mediática y de salud mental.

Palabras clave:

comunicación sanitaria, audiencias, usuarios, recepción, Tecnologías de la Información y las Comunicaciones.

Abstract

Introduction: This literature review explores research conducted in different countries, particularly Mexico, on the reception and patterns of consumption of health and mental health information, focusing on studies that address the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) to access health content. The main objective is to analyze the approaches and methodologies used in audience/user studies in the field of health communication in order to identify trends and knowledge gaps related to ICT use and the consumption of health information.

Methodology: Using keyword-based selection, relevant studies from databases such as Redalyc, Elsevier, SAGE Journals, SciELO, EBSCO, Scopus, and Dialnet were recorded in Excel, together with proceedings from different communication conferences. **Results:** The findings highlight the complex interaction among individuals, ICT, and health information, emphasizing the importance of considering sociocultural aspects and alternative methodological approaches in research on media reception. **Conclusions:** The findings underscore the need to understand how users interact with health information resources and the implications of these interactions for public policymaking and the promotion of media and mental health literacy.

Keywords:

health communication, audiences, users, reception, Information and Communication Technologies.

1. INTRODUCTION

Today, ICT have substantially transformed the way people access health information. The proliferation of websites, mobile applications, and digital social networks has simplified access to digital health resources, creating opportunities for people to obtain information and use it to make decisions about their physical and mental well-being. This changing information landscape has also created an important challenge for academic research: how has the relationship between ICT and the acquisition of health information been addressed? This literature review examines this crucial question by exploring how the phenomenon has been studied.

Against this background, the present literature review explores how the reception of health and mental health information has been studied over the past five years in order to identify approaches to the use of ICT in people's lives for obtaining health content, both general health information and information on mental disorders, worldwide and particularly in Mexico.

A comprehensive understanding of how technological tools influence the acquisition of health information raises a series of challenges and questions that have not yet been fully explored. As society increasingly adopts these technologies as primary sources of information, it is necessary to analyze the extent to which ICT affect the acquisition of health knowledge. However, the specific challenges and problems faced by this area of research have not yet been fully delineated because the approaches and methods used are diverse, given the nature of the subject under study.

It is precisely in this context that the present literature review becomes relevant, as its central purpose is to examine how previous studies have approached the relationship between ICT and the acquisition of health information. In doing so, it seeks to identify emerging patterns and trends, as well as areas in which knowledge remains limited or insufficient. Ultimately, this review aims not only to shed light on the current state of research at the intersection of ICT and the consumption of health information resources, but also to provide a solid basis for future research capable of addressing the challenges and opportunities in this field in greater depth.

To conduct this review, a moderately exhaustive analysis was performed of studies focusing on audiences/users (hereinafter referred to as “users”) and the reception of health information in general. Attention was then focused on studies in which the use of ICT to search for health and mental health information was a central aspect of the research analyzed.

The purposes of using this deductive method were twofold. First, it made it possible to understand the scope of the different approaches and perspectives previously used to study users and the reception of health information. Second, it made it possible to identify trends and knowledge gaps concerning the use of ICT to search for information in this field.

It should be noted that, in this study, reception research is understood as research in which reception is conceived as a process involving multiple mediations determined by the social relationships between media and receivers, as well as by their current, cultural, and historical position (Martín-Barbero, 1984; Orozco, 1990; Padilla, 2012); that is, mediations established by users living in particular contexts.

Furthermore, with the emergence of the Internet, many communicative elements have had to be reinvented not only technically but also theoretically, leading communication researchers to emphasize the analysis of changes occurring as a consequence of digital technological development. How should the different ways of being situated within communication be named? Orozco (2010) explains that being an audience and existing as an audience have changed significantly in territorial terms because of the portability afforded by these new forms of communication.

In this sense, the debate over the labels audiences/users entails an expansion rather than a deconstruction, since both terms coexist and vary according to cognitive behaviors related to media consumption. Accordingly, this study considers both audiences of traditional media and users of digital platforms, bearing in mind that the latter have also been studied as audiences in the literature reviewed.

2. OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this literature review is to explore how the reception and consumption of health- and mental-health-related information have been studied, focusing on the use of Information and Communication Technologies. In this regard, the study seeks to identify the focus and approaches of research conducted over the past five years, both worldwide and specifically in Mexico. It also analyzes trends, knowledge gaps, and emerging lines of research concerning the use of ICT to obtain health content.

2.1. Literature review strategy

The role of ICT in the acquisition and reception of health and mental health content: A literature review

The methodology was as follows. First, the relevant keywords were identified: “users,” “audiences,” “reception,” “information seeking,” “health,” “mental health,” and “Mexico.” These terms were combined in different ways to ensure that the selected studies addressed the topics of interest. Each combination was designed to ensure that the studies selected were directly aligned with the research objectives.

The studies were selected using a deductive methodology that began with a general overview of the reception, seeking, and consumption of health information and subsequently focused the analysis on mental health. This sequential approach helped explain how studies related to communication and mental health fit within the broader research landscape.

The literature search was conducted in several databases, including Redalyc, Elsevier, SAGE Journals, SciELO, EBSCO, Scopus, and Dialnet. Proceedings from conferences organized by the Latin American Association of Communication Researchers (ALAIC) and the Mexican Association of Communication Researchers (AMIC) were also considered. This systematic process resulted in the identification of a corpus of 112 research articles.

Studies were included in the corpus according to specific criteria: articles had to provide a theoretical or contextual foundation, include a methodological design, and present results derived from fieldwork. Undergraduate and graduate theses, essays, and theoretical reflection articles were excluded. Selection was also limited to studies written in Spanish, English, or Portuguese.

To ensure that this literature review reflected the most recent transformations in the digital environment in Latin America, a specific time frame was established. The report of the Seventh Ministerial Conference on the Information Society in Latin America and the Caribbean, coordinated by Peñafiel et al. (2021) for the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), indicates that the largest increase in Internet users over the previous 12 years occurred between 2014 and 2015, with growth of 6.3%. The period from 2015 to 2022 was therefore selected.

The studies identified through this review were recorded and organized in a database created in Excel. Each article was classified according to key criteria such as year of publication, country of the data source, journal or conference, document type, country where the study was conducted, thematic area, bibliographic reference, study objective, methodology, theory, results, and link to the article.

The analysis stage involved reviewing recurring topics and approaches in the studies collected. The 112 articles were also read in detail to identify research questions, objectives, theories, and emerging methodologies. This careful review made it possible to identify both knowledge gaps and emerging research trends and directions in this constantly evolving field.

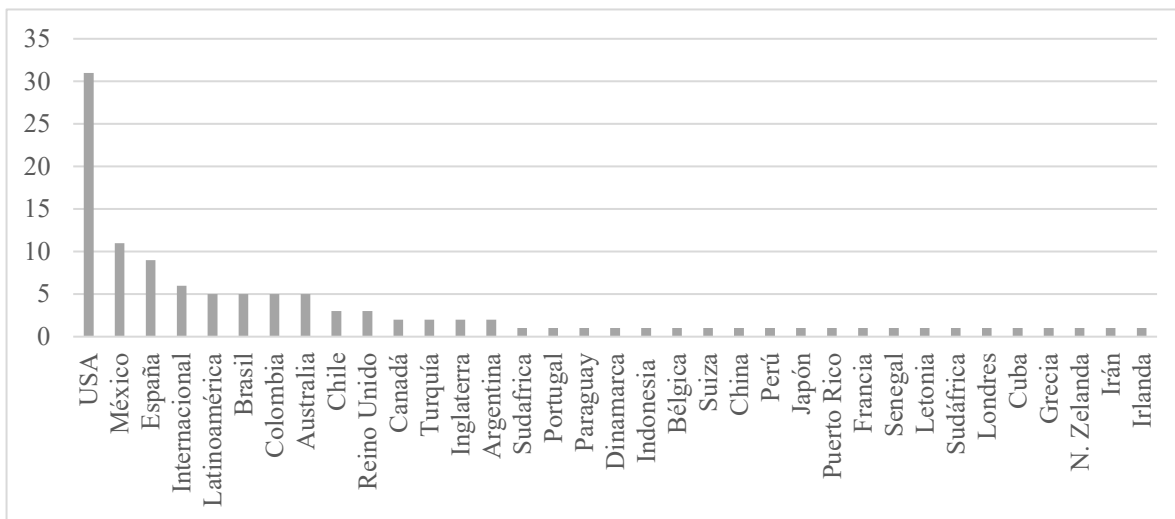
3. RESULTS

3.1. Studies of health-information reception and users around the world

What topics does health communication address internationally? What is the general state of research on how people seek and use health information? Although one objective of this review is to situate research on the reception and users of health information in Mexico, it is necessary to begin with a global review in order to understand regional and local specificities.

Figure 2 shows the distribution of the 112 publications identified in the databases consulted. However, because some were published in English-language journals, clear differences in academic production among countries cannot be established. In addition, the term “Mexico” was often used together with the keywords to identify studies being conducted in the country, which significantly influenced the results. Nevertheless, searches that did not use “Mexico” as a keyword showed that the United States and Spain lead academic research on health communication with an emphasis on user and reception studies.

Figure 1. Studies on the reception, seeking, and consumption of health information around the world.



Source: Prepared by the author.

The contrast between the United States and the other countries is evident. Nevertheless, even though the body of work identified in this literature review is limited, the topic is clearly part of researchers’ agendas around the world. This initial geographical overview of publications from recent years shows emerging topics related to the use of ICT in health practices that are receiving increasing attention from scholars in countries such as the United States, Spain, Australia, China, Canada, and the United Kingdom, while other countries continue to focus most of their research on the more traditional study of how individuals appropriate public-sector health communication initiatives.

Every geographical area with at least three publications in the database contains at least one study addressing the role of ICT in the consumption of health information, indicating a growing interest in this topic in different parts of the world. In the specific case of research conducted in Mexico, articles addressing reception, audiences, and health in general were comparatively easy to find,

The role of ICT in the acquisition and reception of health and mental health content: A literature review

whereas studies related to ICT and the seeking and consumption of digital information resources on general health and mental health were more difficult to locate.

Following an exhaustive search for such studies, it can be observed that, although still scarce, research does exist on the use of ICT to seek and consume digital information resources on health in general. These studies provide a precedent for establishing new paradigms in communication and mental health from the perspective of user studies in the network society.

Mental health studies have been conducted mainly in the United States, Australia, Spain, and the United Kingdom. Nevertheless, as noted above, when search efforts focus on a particular country it is possible to identify studies showing that the topic, although still very limited, is present on researchers' agendas, as was the case in Mexico. This situation indicates that scientific production on the subject remains insufficient in some Latin American countries and that there is an urgent need to generate knowledge about this phenomenon.

3.2. Thematic areas

To categorize the publications into thematic areas, the approach that best fit each study was assessed. Although some studies could have been included in more than one area, each was placed in the category most closely related to its content. Forced groupings were avoided, and 16 thematic areas were created to reflect the diversity of topics contributing to advances in public health from a communication-research perspective, with particular emphasis on user studies.

The following table reflects the diversity that has characterized recent health-communication research emphasizing the reception, seeking, and consumption of information about health and physical and mental illnesses. In some cases, the use of ICT in practices of seeking and consuming this content was decisive in creating new thematic areas that more precisely reflected their relationship to the objective of the literature review. It is important to note that the term "reception" in the table encompasses studies of audiences, users, and the ways in which information is received.

Table 1. *Thematic areas in studies on the reception, seeking, and consumption of information in health communication*

Thematic area	Description	Studies
Reception and health in general	Studies that do not address a specific disease and do not involve ICT as a central element of the research.	17
Reception, ICT, and health in general	Studies in which ICT are a central element of the research but no specific disease is addressed.	14
Reception and COVID-19	Studies of COVID-19 from the perspective of media reception in which ICT do not play a major role in the analysis.	13
Reception and use of ICT to search for general health information	Studies in which ICT play an important role in the process of receiving general health information.	9

Reception and mental health	Studies addressing reception processes and mental disorders in which ICT are not the primary focus.	9
Reception and infectious diseases	Articles on media reception of infectious diseases in which ICT are not part of the central discussion.	7
Reception, ICT, and mental health	Studies in which ICT are an essential part of the media-reception process concerning mental disorders.	6
Use of ICT to search for information on infectious diseases	Studies of web searches concerning diseases such as HIV, HPV, etc.	6
Use of ICT to search for mental-health information	Publications on web searches concerning mental disorders such as depression, anxiety, etc.	6
Reception and health literacy	Studies of users' knowledge during the process of receiving health information in general.	6
Reception, ICT, and health-information overload	Articles on how large amounts of information affect the media-reception process for health information in general.	4
Reception and noncommunicable chronic diseases	Studies on the reception of information about cancer, diabetes, etc., in which ICT are not part of the article's central discussion.	4
Reception and use of ICT to search for mental-health information	Studies that investigate web searches for information about mental disorders and analyze the reception of that information.	3
Reception, ICT, and noncommunicable chronic diseases	Articles addressing ICT as a central element in the reception process concerning diseases such as cancer, diabetes, etc.	3
Reception, ICT, and infectious diseases	Studies addressing ICT as a central element in the reception process concerning diseases such as HIV, Zika, etc.	3
Reception and use of ICT to search for information on noncommunicable chronic diseases	Studies on web searches for information about diseases such as cancer that also analyze the reception of that information.	2
Overall total		112

Source: Prepared by the author.

The role of ICT in the acquisition and reception of health and mental health content: A literature review

Studies in the category with the largest number of publications (“Reception and health in general,” with 17 studies) do not address a specific health problem but instead focus on emerging health practices among the populations studied. Examples include Pollock et al. (2022), who found that general knowledge, perceptions, myths, and attitudes regarding stillbirth were insufficient in Australian society and concluded that public-awareness campaigns were needed; Lipsey and Shepperd (2019), who examined how audiences more frequently avoided health messages from companies they perceived as powerful and capable of using their data than from companies perceived as less powerful; and Cannon and Niederdeppe (2022), who showed that a robust and sustainable health-communication policy derives from understanding existing beliefs and attitudes about the issue, the proposed policy, and its alignment with the broader values of key audience segments.

The studies cited above reaffirm the influence of information on health decisions and its relationship with sociocultural factors. They show that people’s decisions concerning their well-being are conditioned by the availability of and access to information within their social and cultural contexts. Other publications focus on specific health problems, such as chronic diseases or mental disorders, without explicitly addressing the role of ICT in information consumption. Nevertheless, the following points can be highlighted from these studies.

Walker (2022) explains that, in the case of HIV, there is persistent fatigue toward messages about the condition; the findings of that study showed that highly emotive media can help counter the climate of indifference surrounding HIV/AIDS awareness. López (2021), in turn, argues that in the case of cancer, deeply rooted cultural factors often carry more weight than emotions because the condition has a social construct shaped by information, context, and experience, which can contribute to delayed diagnosis.

The studies described in the preceding paragraph show that choosing to examine a communication-related aspect of a specific health problem offers several advantages in terms of specialization, since each health issue has particular characteristics that make it unique. For example, the implications of ICT use in mental health practices are, in our view, very different from those associated with physical health problems.

Within the thematic area “Reception, ICT, and health-information overload,” several studies have highlighted how the large amounts of information encountered by different groups affect the way health content is consumed today. AlGhamdi et al. (2020) concluded that chronic patients often face overwhelming amounts of health information and lack the skills needed to filter it. Bautista et al. (2019) found that university students also experience information overload and have low levels of digital health literacy.

Crook et al. (2016), for their part, emphasized that health literacy, information overload, and the ability to filter information influence the dissemination of health information through the Internet and affect behavioral intentions. These studies highlight the need to develop digital health literacy skills and the importance of considering information overload when providing online health content.

A specific thematic area was established for articles on COVID-19 because of the topic’s recurrent presence in academic research in recent years. These studies address perceptions, fears, and

associated risks; the role of news media, political authorities, and social networks; and beliefs and social representations surrounding the pandemic. They also explore issues related to vaccines, perceptions of government sources, and the media used to obtain information about other diseases in the pandemic context (Fernandes et al., 2021; Garcés-Prettel et al., 2021; Muñiz & Corduneanu, 2020; Paredes et al., 2022; Weerakoon et al., 2022; Wheatley, 2022).

Studies on users, information reception, and the pandemic reveal the widespread impact of the health crisis on all aspects of daily life. They also underscore the need to advance health communication, since beliefs remain fundamental and media, digital, and health literacy are becoming increasingly urgent. Strengthening these competencies is crucial to address effectively the challenges that arise in a post-pandemic context and to ensure reliable and appropriate communication for the benefit of society as a whole.

3.3. Methodologies in studies of users and health-communication reception

Analyzing the methodological approaches used in the studies recorded in the database makes it possible to understand the dimensions covered by quantitative, qualitative, and multimethod approaches to the study of the reception and consumption of health information. This provides a more complete and precise view of how communication is researched and addressed in this field, thereby strengthening the theoretical and practical foundations of health communication.

The following table presents the classification of the texts that make up the database used in the literature review. The main purpose of this classification is to analyze the methodological design of research on the reception and consumption of health information.

Table 2. *Methodological approaches in studies of media reception and health published from 2015 to 2022*

Approach	Publications
Qualitative	32
Quantitative	64
Multimethod	12
Overall total	112

Source: Prepared by the author.

Table 2 shows that over the past five years, 57% of researchers have used a quantitative approach to answer their research questions, while qualitative studies ranked second but still represented a substantial proportion (28%). Finally, although multimethod approaches have gained ground in recent decades, studies using these methodologies remain very scarce in health communication. This raises the following question: do the characteristics of quantifiable evidence traditionally required in the health field lead researchers working from a health-communication perspective to rely frequently on quantitative methodologies?

Forty-two of the 61 studies using a quantitative perspective were characterized by the use of questionnaires with probabilistic and non-probabilistic samples. Examples include Myrick and Chen (2022), who used a survey to describe how the public responds to media coverage of politicians disclosing illnesses; Fernandes et al. (2021), whose aim was to understand the expression of beliefs about the COVID-19 pandemic among Facebook users through a survey; and Dibb (2019), who used this technique to determine how Facebook (FB) users interpret the

comparison information they see on FB and whether this was associated with perceptions of physical health.

Among the remaining studies with the same methodological orientation, some used experiments, whereas others constructed databases with information obtained from the web. Examples include the design of a meditation intervention to induce a positive, low-arousal affective state and examine its effects on attention to and comprehension of health messages (Takahashi & Earl, 2020), and the construction of a database using content from the Cancer Information Service (CIS) of the National Cancer Institute to analyze differences in cancer-information seeking among cancer survivors, caregivers, and tobacco users (Vanderpool et al., 2021).

Among publications classified as qualitative, there is a recurring interest in focus groups and semi-structured interviews. However, studies such as Caran et al. (2019), Orellana et al. (2016), Piedrahíta et al. (2017), Reveilhac (2022), and Seco-Sauces and Ruiz-Callado (2020) display a distinctive quality in the development of their data-collection strategies. Authors such as Wright Mills in the 1960s, and more recently a group of scholars brought together in a volume edited by Flores-Márquez and González (2021), have referred to this as “methodological imagination,” understood as the ability to venture into innovative ways of examining cultures, particularly today, when the digital world has significantly permeated people’s lives and communication phenomena have become increasingly complex.

The studies recorded in the multimethod category follow a similar logic, combining surveys, focus groups, web scraping, discourse analysis, and in-depth interviews to understand reception and health phenomena from an interpretive perspective while also establishing frequencies and approximations based on larger samples or concrete measurements (Almeida et al., 2021; Brodeur et al., 2021; Eisenkölbl et al., 2021; Fogg-Rogers et al., 2015; Martín-Critikián & Medina-Núñez, 2021).

This overview of methodological processes makes a fundamental contribution to the development of critical thinking about the methodological approaches applied in research. Objects of study must be situated within a framework in which research techniques appropriate to the problem under investigation are applied. This allows methodological processes to be better understood and suitable instruments to be identified for each particular study.

3.4. What place does mental health occupy in health communication? Emerging topics in the network society

The search for studies on users and the reception of health communication revealed limited interest within social-science academic research in mental disorders as a public-health problem. In fact, very few articles on the topic have been published in recent years compared with other health conditions that are addressed more frequently. However, when this observation is compared with the results in Table 1, it may appear contradictory because mental-health publications account for 22% of all studies in the database, a substantial proportion given that 16 thematic areas were reviewed across 112 studies. It is therefore important to clarify that these studies were identified through an exhaustive search rather than as a result of a large body of academic production on the topic.

In other words, although a substantial percentage of mental-health publications was recorded in the database reviewed, this does not mean that there is a substantial academic literature on the subject. On the contrary, the exhaustive search revealed limited interest in mental health as a public-health problem within academic research in communication sciences. The following section explains this situation in greater detail.

When the literature was searched using the keywords without including “mental health,” no studies within this thematic area appeared in the results, unlike projects addressing other diseases whose defining characteristic is physical harm (HIV, AIDS, cancer, etc.). Mental-health studies began to enter the corpus only when they were searched for specifically, and even then they were difficult to locate. Their identification required what could be described as an exhaustive review effort, particularly in the case of publications from Mexico.

On this basis, it can be stated that the place occupied by mental health in user and reception studies is characterized by limited interest among health-communication researchers worldwide; Mexico is among the countries with the lowest academic production on the topic.

In this context, and on the basis of the present literature review, one emerging topic in health communication is the search for mental-health information by users in the network society. This is largely because the problem intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic, reaching highly concerning prevalence levels, which attracted the attention of researchers in different parts of the world, as reflected, for example, in recent studies by Brodeur et al. (2021) and Canchari et al. (2022).

Although this trend became easier to observe after the health emergency, it is not in itself a new practice, as various studies of the phenomenon have been conducted in recent years. For example, Sassenberg and Greving (2016) described the influence of the Internet as a means of obtaining health information and information about disease severity among U.S. patients with a chronic condition in relation to their perceptions of their own bodies. Another example is Freeman et al. (2018), who analyzed the Internet sources used by Spanish adolescents to obtain health information, together with the sociodemographic characteristics and variables influencing the choice of the Internet for seeking this type of information.

3.5. Studies of reception, ICT, and the seeking of health and mental-health information

The current research landscape concerning users, reception, and the use of ICT to seek and consume digital health-information resources is characterized by several emerging issues, including cyberchondria, self-reported health behaviors, health-information overload, health-information-seeking trends, and Internet and health. These topics include studies belonging to thematic areas in which ICT play an important role in the search for health content; however, they have been addressed in different ways, as explained below.

First, there are studies that do not address a specific disease, problem, or type of health but instead focus on needs and ways of obtaining health information. Mendoza and García (2020), for example, identified older adults' uses and management of ICT in consuming health content; their findings showed that television remained a primary source through which this group obtained such information. Seco-Sauces and Ruiz-Callado (2020), meanwhile, examined how Web 2.0 information resources are used in virtual communities of patients with rare diseases, finding that these resources have an increasingly prominent presence and foster greater socialization of patients' experiences.

The role of ICT in the acquisition and reception of health and mental health content: A literature review

With regard to articles on specific diseases such as HIV, Martínez-Martínez (2020), for example, established a relationship between searches for the term “AIDS” in digital sources and cases of the condition in Spain, showing a directly proportional concomitance between the two. Vanderpool et al. (2021), in turn, described how the pandemic affected cancer-information needs in a crisis context and how public-health agencies responded to the information needs of different audiences.

In the post-pandemic context, numerous studies emerged on how health information was obtained during the pandemic and on the effects this had on those consuming such content. One of the main methodological tools in these studies was Google Trends, which helped researchers understand how people reacted to the COVID-19 crisis and how these reactions were reflected in searches for health-information resources. Researchers also used questionnaires to identify and support the finding that digital social networks had become primary sources of information for many people (Iglesias-Osores et al., 2021; Muñiz & Corduneanu, 2020; Pullan & Dey, 2021).

The studies described thus far form part of what the author of this article conceives as a theoretical framework under construction worldwide, which seeks to answer the following questions: How are health problems experienced in the network society? What role do digital media play in obtaining information about health problems? What meanings do these practices acquire in users’ onlife experience? The present study seeks to contribute to the knowledge gaps that remain in answering these questions.

Articles concerning the seeking and reception of mental-health information from digital sources can be classified into two groups. First are projects that examine the empirical evidence for these practices by asking: Do people search digital sources for mental-health information? These studies answer affirmatively and demonstrate this through methodological tools such as Google Trends and questionnaires. Some focus specifically on two conditions, depression and anxiety, in order to analyze the relationship between search trends for the terms “Anxiety” and “Depression” and their prevalence during the pandemic (Gordillo & Mestas, 2021; Iglesias & Saavedra-Camacho, 2020; Paredes-Ángeles & Taype-Rondan, 2020).

Second are the few studies that have explored the seeking and reception of mental-health information from digital sources from users’ own experiences: What happens with these searches? What motivates them? What do users do with the resources they find? In the United States, Berger et al. (2021) presented qualitative findings on how LGBTQ adolescents connect online to form support networks and share information, whereas Craig et al. (2021) examined the same situation from a quantitative perspective. Their findings show that participants’ use of digital social networks centers on emotional support and development, general educational purposes, entertainment, and the acquisition of LGBTQ+-specific information.

This section suggests that user studies and health-information seeking have been addressed extensively in countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Spain, and theoretical models of information seeking have even been developed (Ruppel, 2016). However, the reception of the information users search for has not been sufficiently investigated; therefore, questions about what happens after users conduct these searches remain unanswered.

This is a complex phenomenon involving three interrelated elements: searches, uses, and appropriations of digital resources related to health and, for the purposes of this study, mental

health. Therefore, beyond simply exploring the searches themselves, it is essential to investigate the uses and appropriations that arise from them in order to better understand the impact and relevance these resources have in users' daily lives.

3.6. Current questions and knowledge gaps concerning web searches for health information in Mexico

In Mexico, communication and health research from the perspective of users and reception is scarce and focuses mainly on the evaluation of health-communication campaigns or the reception of health news. Accordingly, this section examines studies in which ICT intervention is a key feature of the acquisition of health information in Mexico's network society.

One of the first studies identified in this literature review on the use of ICT in health practices in general was conducted by Santamaría et al. (2016), who described the importance of Facebook as a health-communication tool for issues such as sexuality, obesity, and nutrition among university students. Their results, however, showed that this group displayed little interest in health or disease-prevention topics.

Martínez-Domínguez (2020), in a study on the social appropriation of ICT in Mexico, had already pointed, on the basis of the 2015 ENDUTIH, to the growing use of the Internet by the Mexican population to search for health-related information. The author noted that at that time 64.1% of Mexican households had Internet access and 44.5% of the population used the Internet to search for health information. These data show the importance of ensuring the quality and accessibility of online health information so that people can make informed decisions and improve their well-being.

Over time, research on the use of ICT as a means of obtaining health- or disease-related content has become more common in the country. For example, García et al. (2018) analyzed the role of mobile applications in the lives of a group of 220 people aged 15 to 54 and concluded that "Health Apps are widely used, with the main reasons for use being improvements in diet and weight loss ...; they tend to be used for between one and four weeks, mostly with positive results" (p. 156).

Parissi-Poumian et al. (2023), in turn, studied information-seeking patterns concerning the prevention and treatment of psychoactive-substance use in Mexico, both among the general population and among personnel working in prevention and treatment. Their findings showed that the general population searches for the most common substances, such as marijuana, alcohol, and tobacco, whereas professionals search for information both on the most common substances and on those whose use is increasing, such as crystal methamphetamine and inhalants.

As can be seen, this type of research in Mexico is emerging and scarce. In contrast with the international context, Mexican research on this phenomenon—the seeking and reception of health information from digital sources—remains insufficient. Future research should therefore examine in greater depth the meanings these practices acquire in people's daily lives and the appropriation of the information obtained through such searches. Studies could also focus on specific groups to achieve a more inclusive geographical distribution and address specific diseases or emerging conditions that can be systematized.

Regarding the study of mental-health information-seeking practices, no indexed articles or publications in the reviewed conference proceedings were found that addressed this phenomenon in Mexico. This statement is limited by the moderately exhaustive search conducted in this study.

Nevertheless, it provides sufficient grounds to support the need for research that describes information needs concerning mental disorders in the country and thereby contributes to understanding the uses and appropriations arising from these practices while giving users a voice.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Research on the reception, seeking, and consumption of information in health communication reveals a complex interaction among individuals, ICT, and the diversity of health-related topics. These studies demonstrate the importance of considering multiple dimensions of media reception, including different methodological approaches and the sociocultural implications surrounding interactions between users and health information, in which ICT play a highly significant role. These findings underscore the relevance of research in this field for improving health literacy, facilitating informed decision-making, and promoting a culture of health care in increasingly digital societies.

The general landscape of studies on the reception and users of health information highlights sustained interest in health communication in different parts of the world. Despite disparities in academic production, there is broad recognition of the importance of understanding how individuals appropriate health-communication initiatives. The United States and Spain have led research in health communication, particularly with respect to the use of ICT in health practices. This points to a trend toward convergence between technology and health in contemporary society.

The diversity of thematic areas designed to reflect the range of topics in health communication highlights the intersection among health information, ICT, and sociocultural characteristics. Studies on reception and health in general have shown that people's health decisions are influenced by the availability of and access to information within a specific social and cultural context. In addition, emerging issues such as health-information overload have created a need to develop digital health-literacy skills in order to filter and properly understand online content.

Within this landscape, mental health has emerged as a fundamental topic, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although academic production remains insufficient in many countries, searches for and consumption of information about anxiety and depression from digital sources have increased. Mental health has become a shared concern in the network society, and social networks have provided platforms for forming support networks and obtaining information.

Methodological approaches have evolved to address the complexity of communication in the network society. The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods has made it possible to understand both general trends and individual experiences in the reception of health information. Although quantitative methodologies predominate, the importance of qualitative methodologies for obtaining a richer and more contextualized understanding of seeking and consumption practices has been recognized.

This literature review showed that although health-information seeking is among the interests of researchers around the world, some aspects of what happens to the content users obtain through their own agency remain underexplored. Given the accelerating development of digital media and access to large amounts of health information, it is therefore necessary to advance social-science reflection on this phenomenon.

Understanding users and the ways in which they obtain and consume health and mental-health information from digital sources is essential for formulating public policies based on rigorous data, both to identify and reduce the risks associated with receiving information of questionable scientific and therapeutic value and to develop tools that encourage self-care and connect people with mental-health services or valuable online information through media, digital, and health literacy. Without understanding these key aspects, it is difficult to define areas of opportunity, possibilities, and challenges.

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The role of ICT in the acquisition and reception of health and mental health content: A literature review

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The role of ICT in the acquisition and reception of health and mental health content: A literature review

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Conflict of interest:

The author declares that the article entails no conflict of interest with any institution or individual.

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