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A Cross-Sectional Study On The Factors Influencing Online Health Information Seeking Tendencies And Its Association On Health Care Behaviors Of Filipino Citizens In Metro Manila During The COVID-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

As COVID-19 cases continue to rise, people's daily lives started to revolve around the internet. This cross-sectional study was conducted to explore the factors that influence the inclination of Metro Manila residents to seek online health information and its association with health behaviors during the COVID-19 pandemic. A total of 385 respondents were recruited via snowball sampling to answer an online questionnaire distributed through Google forms.

The study's findings revealed that 384 of the 385 respondents search for health information online. Among them, 90.6% search for symptoms while none search for healthy behaviors. The most visited websites were health portals or medical encyclopedias. Significant relationships between the inclination to seek online health information and health status (p=.000) and technological literacy (p=.000 & p=.017) were evident.

Respondents that seek online health information to resolve medical problems are more likely to have changed positive views and behaviors. Furthermore, individuals who prefer to search for health information online to resolve medical concerns will change their decisions and have high self-efficacy in deliberating the obtained data.

Overall, the findings of this study suggest that since online health information has a visible influence on health behaviors, the credibility of online health information must be evaluated thoroughly. The current research contributes to a better knowledge of health information acquisition via the internet as well as continuing public policy about the utility of online health information. Furthermore, healthcare professionals may assist their patients in medical decision-making by referring them to accurate and credible websites or sources.

KEYWORDS: *online health information seeking, health behaviors, Metro Manila, COVID-19*

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1 INTRODUCTION

As of August 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought over 216 million cases and 4.4 million deaths internationally (Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center, 2021). The continuous increase of patients did not only cause international panic but has also led to the start of containment measures such as the initiation of lockdown, travel ban, and other restrictions. Given these barriers, people with health problems avoid going to the hospital due to the fear of acquiring the virus (Wong et al., 2020). The gradual shift to an online set-up has turned people's attention to the big web for gathering health information. With this, increased access to online health information has been reported (Varma et al., 2021). According to the National Cancer Institute (2018), more than 60% of the US population collects health information from the Internet. However, no recent study has tackled the prevalence of gathering health information among Filipino residents in Metro Manila.

The Internet is a powerful worldwide platform that provides easy access to health-related information in times of medical need. Recently, many research articles have stated that demographic factors influence one's inclination to conduct internet searches. A study done in Kuwait by Alkathlan et al. revealed that factors such as gender, nationality, level of education, and using a computer at work were proven to be significant determinants of searching the web for health data. Furthermore, numerous studies have also established the positive and negative outcomes of searching for health information online. As stated by Dameery et al. (2020) and Farooq et al. (2020), browsing the Internet for health-related information and making it the only source of health diagnosis can increase a patient's stress and anxiety. Moreover, excessive surfing has also led to the interruption of treatment and neglect in need of medical assistance, as many patients started treating themselves before visiting a physician leading to further worsening of their diseases (Hullur et al., 2020; Sharma & Khanna, 2019). On the other hand, Link et al. (2021) argue that seeking health information substantially affects one's self-efficacy and therefore have positive perceptions and attitudes.

Therefore, in light of this, the study aimed to identify the factors that affect one's inclination to seek online health information and the effect of searching for health data on one's health-seeking behavior among Filipino citizens in Metro Manila.

2 RESULTS

Table 1 Frequency Distribution of the Socio-Demographic Profiles

Variable	Parameter	n	%
Sex	Male	255	66.2
	Female	130	33.8
Age	18-24	301	78.2
	25-31	36	9.4
	32-38	16	4.2
	39-45	12	3.1
	46-52	13	3.4
	53-59	7	1.8
Highest Educational Attainment	High School Undergraduate	1	0.3
	High School Graduate	54	14.0
	College Undergraduate	248	64.4
	College Graduate	72	18.7
	Master in Graduate School	5	1.3

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	Doctorate in Post Graduate School	5	1.3
Monthly Income	P10,000 or below P10,000	47	12.2
	Between P10,001 to P20,000	21	5.5
	Between P20,001 to P40,000	36	9.4
	Between P40,001 to P75,000	25	6.5
	Between P75,001 to P130,000	14	3.6
	Above P130,001	6	1.6
	Not applicable	236	61.3
Occupation	Support Staff and Manual Laborers	12	3.1
	Business and Finance	32	8.3
	Education	8	2.1
	Engineering, Health, Science and Technology	34	8.8
	Housewife/Unemployed	5	1.3
	Student	294	76.4

Table 1 shows the socio-demographic profile distribution of the research respondents. A total of 385 respondents were recruited from the general population. Among them, 66% were females, while 34% were males. The 18-24 age group accounts for about 80% of the respondents, followed by the 25-31 age group representing 9.4% of the total. About 64.4% of the respondents are college undergraduates, 18.7% are college graduates, 14% are high school graduates, 2.6% completed postgraduate school, and 0.3% are currently in high school.

Since the majority (76.4%) of the respondents are students, 61.3% do not have a source of income, only 12.2% have a monthly income less than the minimum wage, while 9.4% earn Php 20,000 to Php 40,000 monthly. As per the occupation of the remaining 23.6%, most (8.8%) are employed in the fields of engineering, health, science, and technology, followed by 8.3% in the business and finance sector.

Table 2 Frequency Distribution of Health Condition Search Patterns and Sources of Health Information on the Internet

	n	**%**
Have you ever used the internet to find health-related information?	384	99.7
What are the usual health-related information you search on the internet?		
Symptom	349	90.6
Disease	254	66.0
Service info (e.g., doctor, hospital)	148	38.4
Medication	218	56.6
Test	109	28.3
Treatment and procedure	241	62.6
Alternative medicine	113	29.4
Vitamins and supplements	168	43.6
Health insurance	32	8.3
Healthy behaviors (e.g., diet, exercise)	-	-
Others	-	-
What are the websites you visit to gather health-related information?		
Health portals/Medical encyclopedia (e.g., MIMS, PubMed, MedlinePlus, WebMD)	316	82.1
Hospital/Clinics	136	35.3

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National and International Organizations Competent for Health (e.g., DOH / CDC/ WHO)	283	73.5
Online Encyclopedia (e.g., WikiPedia)	91	23.6
Physician/Medical Associations	100	26.0
Scientific Journals Database	155	40.3
Social Media	145	37.7
Q&A sites (e.g., Yahoo! Answers, Reddit, Quora)	125	32.5
Others	1	0.3

Table 2 presents the distribution of the respondents' health condition search patterns and sources of online health information. 99.7% answered 'yes' when asked if the respondents utilize the internet to search for any health-related information. The most searched health-related information is symptoms (90.6%), followed by disease (66%). Meanwhile, the respondents do not utilize the internet to search regarding healthy behaviors.

Regarding the websites visited to gather health-related information, 82.1% utilize health portals or medical encyclopedias such as MIMS, PubMed, MedlinePlus, and WebMD. 73.5% use national and international organizations competent for health like the DOH, CDC, and WHO. Meanwhile, 37.7% of the respondents rely on social media for information, while only 35.3% visit hospitals or clinics.

Table 3 Chi-Square Analysis of Socio-demographic Profiles, Health Status, and Technological Literacy to Inclination to Undergo Seeking Online Health Information

Variable	**Parameter**	**Have you ever used the internet to find health-related information?**		**Chi-square Value**	**P-value**
		Yes	No		
Sex	Male	254	1	.511	.475
	Female	130	0		
Age	18-24	301	0	.280	.998
	25-31	36	1		
	32-38	16	0		
	39-45	12	0		
	46-52	13	0		
	53-59	7	0		
Highest Educational Attainment	High School Undergraduate	1	0	.554	.990
	High School Graduate	54	0		
	College Undergraduate	247	1		
	College Graduate	72	0		
	Master in Graduate School	5	0		
	Doctorate in Post Graduate School	5	0		
Monthly Income	P10,000 or below P10,000	47	0	.633	.996

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	Between P10,001 to P20,000	21	0		
	Between P20,001 to P40,000	36	0		
	Between P40,001 to P75,000	25	0		
	Between P75,001 to P130,000	14	0		
	Above P130,001	6	0		
	Not applicable	235	1		
Occupation	Support Staff and Manual Laborers	12	0	.310	.997
	Business and Finance	32	0		
	Education	8	0		
	Engineering, Health, Science and Technology	34	0		
	Housewife/Unemployed	5	0		
	Student	293	1		
Current Health Status	1	0	0	385	.000*
	2	7	0		
	3	93	0		
	4	210	0		
	5	74	0		
	Not Applicable (0)	0	1		
Chronic Disease	None	324	0	385	.000*
	One	44	0		
	Two or More	16	0		
	Not Applicable (0)	0	1		
Level of Computer Skills	Good/Excellent	201	0	191.99	.000*
	Accepted	150	0		
	Not bad	29	0		
	Do not know how to use	3	0		
	Not applicable (0)	0	1		
Use of Smartphone	Yes	382	0	31.417	.000*
	No	2	1		
Use of Computer or Laptop at Home	Yes	370	0	5.692	.017*
	No	14	1		

*p-value significant level at .05 level

Table 3 delineates the Chi-square analysis for the independence of socio-demographic profiles, health status, and technological literacy to the inclination to undergo seeking online health information. The result evidently shows a significant relationship between the inclination to seek online health information and the current health status (p=.000), as well as the technological literacy (p=.017) of the respondents.

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Table 4 Correlation Analysis on Health behaviors based on Frequency of Seeking Online Health Information

		TOTAL	How often do you use the internet to find health-related information?
ITOTAL	Pearson Correlation	1	.298**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	385	385
How often do you use the internet to find health-related information?	Pearson Correlation	.298**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	385	385

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 4 depicts the strength of the relationship between the total behavior of respondents seeking online information and the frequency of seeking online health information. Based on the results, there is a positive low degree of correlation (r=.298) between the two variables. Hence, it cannot clearly conclude a direct relationship between the frequency of seeking online health information and health behaviors of the respondents.

Table 5 Linear Regression on the Frequency of Internet Use and the Total Score on Online Health Behavior

	Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	29.394	.827		35.559	.000
	How often do you use the internet to find health-related information?	1.075	.176	.298	6.109	.000

a. Dependent Variable: ITOTAL

Table 5 displays the change in the frequency use of internet and the total score on online health behavior using the linear regression analysis. The results of the linear regression analysis present the following equation where Online Health Behavior = 29.394 + 1.075* Frequency use of internet + error. The table shows that the coefficient for frequency of internet usage is 1.075. Therefore, in every unit increase in the frequency use of internet, there is a 1.075 increase in the total score on online health behavior.

Table 6 Health Behaviors Towards Online Health Information-Seeking

Statements	Mean	Interpretation
After searching for online health information, I will change my views to align with the information I obtained.	3.88	Agree

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After searching for online health information, I will change my decision, aligning it with the information I obtained about whether to see a doctor or medical expert.	3.79	Agree
After searching for online health information, I will change my judgments, aligning with the information I obtained, on personal medical issues.	3.77	Agree
Online health information is an important reference for me when making medical decisions.	3.83	Agree
I will discuss the health information I acquired online with a doctor or medical expert.	4.08	Agree
I am confident that I can find useful and reliable online health information.	3.85	Agree
I am confident that I can evaluate the accuracy and reliability of online health information for making medical decisions.	3.62	Agree
I am confident that I can make good use of online medical information.	4.00	Agree
I am confident that I can make correct medical judgements on personal medical issues based on online medical information.	3.36	Neutral

Table 6 summarizes the health behaviors of the respondents towards seeking online health information. Data shows that the respondents who are inclined to search for online health information are more subjected to have changed positive views and behaviors based on the information gathered online.

Table 7 Final Factor Analysis Matrix

Rotated Component Matrix[a]			
Statements	**Component**		**Source**
	1	**2**	
After searching for online health information, I will change my views to align with the information I obtained.	0.188	0.806	CD
After searching for online health information, I will change my decision, aligning it with the information I obtained about whether to see a doctor or medical expert.		0.819	CD
After searching for online health information, I will change my judgments, aligning with the information I obtained, on personal medical issues.	0.264	0.821	CD
Online health information is an important reference for me when making medical decisions.	0.418	0.636	CO
I will discuss the health information I acquired online with a doctor or medical expert.	0.467		CO
I am confident that I can find useful and reliable online health information.	0.700	0.403	PS
I am confident that I can evaluate the accuracy and reliability of online health information for making medical decisions.	0.793	0.275	PS
I am confident that I can make good use of online medical information.	0.801	0.253	PS
I am confident that I can make correct medical judgements on personal medical issues based on online medical	0.781	0.150	PS

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information.			
CD, Changing Decisions; CO, Consulting Others; PS, Promoting Self-Efficacy			

Table 7 highlights the final factor analysis matrix of the statements regarding the health behaviors of the respondents towards seeking online health information. Based on the analysis, there are two major factors involved: changing decisions and promoting self-efficacy. Consulting others is found to be a supporting factor of the two rather than being a standalone factor.

3 DISCUSSION

The increasing use of the Internet to seek health-related information has been reported in various studies (Bujnowska-Fedek et al.,2019; Stankova et al., 2020). In this study, among the 385 respondents, 99.7% or 384 reported scrutinizing the Internet for health information. Regarding the search patterns, results from this study are in line with the results presented by Cheung & Wong (2019), wherein the majority (81.50%) of the respondents reported that they frequently use the Internet to search for information related to symptoms of diseases. Symptoms of diseases appear as the most searched health-related information as it serves as a pre-consultation self-diagnostic tool and a deciding factor in physician consultation (Cheung & Wong, 2019).

In the study by Cheung & Wong (2019), the health portal/ medical encyclopedia was reported as the second most used health-related information reference since, most of the time, it belongs to the top results from the search engine. It may also be due to the convenience and clarity of content presentation. However, the reported significant source of online health-related information was the online encyclopedia. This contradicts the presented result since only 2 out of 10 respondents reported using an online encyclopedia to collect online health-related information. A possible reason for this is that since most of the respondents are undergraduate students, they are more likely to use scientific databases.

The study results are parallel to the findings from Jacobs, Amuta, and Jeon's (2018) wherein most of the respondents that exhibited higher technological literacy based on the questionnaire were more likely to gather online health information. In contrast, the respondents who admitted to having lower technological skills tend to gather health information from friends and family rather than on the Internet. The researchers reported a significant inversely proportional relationship between health information-seeking tendencies and technological literacy($p<0.001$).

Indeed, the necessity of media literacy is prominent in online health-seeking (Magsmen-Conrad et al., 2018). Most middle-aged adults have expressed that they find the Internet quite complex and experienced numerous struggles in accessing online health information. This may then be considered a possible factor in their reluctance to utilize the Internet for health information and instead use the Internet to reconnect with their loved ones.

Regarding the relationship between health status and online-seeking behavior, the study results also coincide with the findings of other researchers. Liobikiene and Bernatonienė (2018) have also declared that health status was a significant determinant in an individual's online health information-seeking tendencies. Based on the study's findings, those who regard their health to have a poor shape utilized the internet for health information more frequently than those who consider their health condition optimal.

In contrast to the present study, age, sex, and educational attainment significantly influenced Turkish participants' online health information-seeking behavior (OHISB) as presented in the study by Demirci et al. in 2020. A systematic review by Mirzaei et al. (2021) on the predictors of OHISB found age, education, sex, health condition, and financial income as central predictors. Regarding sex, numerous studies states that females use the Internet more to seek health information than males (Escoffery, 2018; Galeshi et al., 2018; Demirci et al., 2020). This may be because women

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tend to take responsibility for health-related issues in families and relationships due to socialization and gender roles (Nölke et al., 2015).

In the study by Mirzaei et al. (2021), when age was examined as a factor determining one's OHISB, it was found that those ≤25 years old, 26–35 years, and 36–45 years all sought health information more frequently than the participants ≥46 years old. Younger populations have a greater inclination to access and use eHealth information than older populations, likely due to differences in the level of technological literacy and device accessibility (Reiners et al., 2019).

In the present study, it is possible that no significant difference was found because most of the sample belongs to the 18-24 age bracket (78.2%). According to Mirzaei et al. (2021), as the educational level increases, the tendency to search for health information online also significantly increases. Similar results were obtained in a study conducted by Massey (2016) in the United States and by Chu et al. (2017) in Hongkong.

Given that most of the respondents are college undergraduates, this may explain the lack of significant association between the involved variables. According to Alkhatlan et al. (2018), as monthly income increases, so is the proportion of the participants who obtain health-related information online; this may be due to better Internet access.

Furthermore, a study conducted among patients in Ghana (2019) revealed that monthly income is a positive predictor of online health information seeking. People who earn higher income tend to search the Internet for health-related information. This could be attributed to the assumption that having more income allows individuals to be more capable of using the Internet and acquiring internet-ready devices such as smartphones and laptops.

Consistent with the findings of our study, employment status positively affects health information seeking on the Internet. However, the effect is not statistically significant (Nölke et al., 2015; Li et al., 2016; Demirci et al., 2020). Noting that the sample was predominantly female, between ages 18-24, are college undergraduates, and have no monthly income, it is possible that some associations could not be detected because of the lack of variability in the study sample.

Having the skills and the means to utilize the internet in searching for health-related information has proven to be a significant factor in promoting appropriate health behaviors. Furthermore, the frequency of internet usage has also been sought to influence health-seeking behavior.

The results of the present study revealed that there is a weak correlation between the means of health behaviors among the frequency of use of the internet. The study's findings were in parallel with a paper conducted by Mitsutake et al. (2016) among Japanese adults, which revealed that frequent access to the internet, together with high eHealth literacy, is significantly associated with good health behavior.

The researchers used the Five-point Likert Scale to interpret the respondents' mean health behaviors. The statements were evaluated based on the respondents' level of agreement. Although the majority showed positive behaviors towards online health information seeking, the respondents were neutral regarding personal medical issues. This behavior exists due to the central tendency bias, the inclination to choose responses closer to the middle rather than the endpoints to avoid extreme response choices (Pimentel, 2019).

The study explored the hypothesis that online health information-seeking affects health behaviors. The study established that individuals who prefer to search health information online to resolve medical concerns will change their medical decisions and have high self-efficacy in deliberating the obtained information.

In the study of Chen et al. (2018), which was the basis of the health-seeking behavior component of the questionnaire of this study, three factors: (1) changing decisions, (2) consulting

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others, and (3) promoting self-efficacy, were observed upon the analysis of the statements of their Online Health Information Utilization (OHIU) questionnaire. In contrast, analysis of the responses in the present study yielded two factors, (1) changing decisions and (2) promoting self-efficacy, negatively predicting Hypothesis 3.

The Internet is a valuable tool that could greatly influence patients' health decisions. In line with this, the present study has found that Changing Decisions is a significant dimension of health behavior observed in the respondents. The study's results showed consistent trends like recent articles on health decision-making due to information obtained from the Internet.

In a study conducted by Fedak et al. (2019), they found that health internet users often schedule for an appointment to consult a health professional and inquire information about the diagnosis or treatment of certain diseases under the influence of the Internet. After searching for health information on the Internet, patients also reported modifying their diet and increasing their physical activity.

Furthermore, certain features predispose respondents to health-related behaviors after searching for health-related information. A study conducted in 2019 showed that Internet use by endocrinology patients has positively influenced their decisions concerning their management plan (Kyriacou & Sherratt).

Moreover, Borges et al. (2021) revealed that the Internet also influences increasing autonomy on health-related decisions of pregnant women during their gestation period and prepares pregnant women for better communication with health professionals.

The present study provides evidence of the impact of the Internet on health decision-making behaviors in the general population in Metro Manila. It is worth noting that analyzing the relationship between the two provided a significant finding that could effectively promote an efficient diagnostic and therapeutic process for patients.

Another significant dimension observed in the respondents' health behavior is promoting self-efficacy. This study revealed that promoting self-efficacy is associated with seeking health information, given its significant role in shaping perceptions, judgment, and decision-making concerning medical and health-related information. Pourrazavi et al. (2022) emphasized that self-efficacy served as a strong, encouraging factor in information-seeking behavior, including health and medical information. The results revealed the likeliness of individuals shifting to a more positive view and behavior based on their acquired knowledge from the internet.

In their study, Link et al. (2021) argue that self-efficacy has a more substantial effect on positive perceptions and attitudes toward online health-seeking behavior, indicating that individuals who prove to be healthy assume that they benefit from seeking health information.

The present study revealed that 37.7% of the respondents utilized social media to search for health-related information, only ranking fourth behind health portals, national and international organizations, and scientific journal databases. In line with this, Niu et al. (2021) discussed a positive relationship between the use of social media to seek health information and self-efficacy. Their study discovered that participants who use social media for health have higher self-efficacy and thus would more likely show greater intentions to perform health behaviors on social media.

In another study by Tetri & Juujärvu (2022), self-efficacy contributes to the likelihood of individuals engaging themselves in the utilization of digital healthcare systems. This encompasses the online health-seeking information behavior of individuals, which enhances and promotes self-efficacy by receiving online health information that is credible, understandable, comprehensive, and accurate.

4 METHODOLOGY

4.1 Study Design

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A quantitative research design is utilized in gathering and analyzing data. This employs the purpose of the correlational approach, which measures the variables and assesses their relationship without influencing the same variables.

4.2 Study Population

The study population included residents from Metro Manila, Philippines aged 18 to 59. In determining the sample size, the Cochran's Formula of finite population was used which indicates that:

$$n = \frac{\frac{z^2pq}{e^2}}{1\frac{z^2pq}{e^2N}}$$

Where n is the sample size, z is the score of the confidence level, p is the proportion of the population, q is 1-p, and e is the margin of allowable error. With a population of 7,799,446, a total of 385 respondents were recruited for the study. People living outside Metro Manila, not within the age bracket of 18-59 years old, and are not literate in using Google forms were excluded from the sample collection. Additionally, people with mental health conditions, pregnancy, high vulnerability, and those who require special needs were automatically excluded. Participants who decided to withdraw were automatically excluded from the study.

4.3 Survey Instrument

The questionnaire was developed based on currently available studies. The tool used to gather the socio-demographic factors, health status, and technological literacy of the respondents, was based on the study of Alkhatlan et al. (2018) entitled Factors affecting seeking health-related information through the internet among patients in Kuwait. For the collection of data regarding the association of online health information seeking tendency on health care behaviors, the study of Chen et al. (2018) entitled Online Health Information Utilization questionnaire from the study Health Information Obtained from the Internet and Changes in Medical Decision Making: Questionnaire Development and Cross-Sectional Survey was used.

The questionnaire which was open from the last week of January until the last week of March consisted of five sections: demographic profile, prevalence and patterns of online health information seeking, quality of heath, technological literacy and association between online health information seeking and health care behavior. The quality of health and technological literacy part allowed the respondents to rate their health status and technological skills. The association between online health information and health care behavior comprises 9 items which used a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5, indicating the respondents agreement.

Questionnaires were deployed online through Google forms wherein a QR code was created that directed the participants to the questionnaire for easy accessibility.

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4.4 Statistical Analysis

The data gathered from this study were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical tools, specifically frequency and percentage, mean score analysis, chi-square test, Pearson correlation coefficient, regression analysis, and factor analysis. The researchers utilized (1) frequency and percentage to identify and describe the demographic characteristics of the participants, sort users of online self-diagnostic platforms from non-users, find out the platforms utilized and determine the type of health-related information searched on the internet. (2) Mean score analysis was used to find out the health behaviors that result from online health information seeking. (3) Chi-square tests for significant relationship or association between variables. Its usage determined the relationship between demographics, health status, and technological literacy and the inclination of the respondents to undergo online health information seeking. (4) Pearson correlation coefficient determined the strength of the relationship of the respondents' health behaviors and the frequency in seeking online health information. (5) Linear regression evaluated the effect of frequency of internet usage on the health behaviors of the respondents. (6) Final factor analysis was employed to describe the underlying factors observed in the responses of the respondents regarding their health behaviors toward seeking online health information. The researchers utilized the SPSS Statistics 25 software package for data entry and analysis.

5 CONCLUSION

The surge of COVID-19 cases in Metro Manila directly affected the lifestyle of Filipinos. People started to depend on the internet for their daily needs, including health information seeking. The objective of the research was to identify different factors associated with online health information seeking and its implications to the health-seeking behavior of Filipino citizens in Metro Manila. Specifically, the researchers aimed to: (1) identify the different demographic profiles of respondents; (2) determine the health condition search patterns and sources of health-information on the internet; (3) identify if there is a significant relationship between the socio-demographic characteristics, health status, and technological literacy to their inclination to undergo online health information seeking; (4) determine if there is a significant relationship between the frequency of acquiring online health information and health behaviors; and (5) determine the resulting health behaviors of the respondents that utilize online health information seeking.

The data gathered were statistically treated and analyzed using frequency and percentage, mean score analysis, Chi-square test, Pearson correlation coefficient, linear regression and final factor analysis. The study proved that online health information seeking was rampant in Metro Manila during the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on the findings, it was statistically proven that:

1. Majority of the respondents were females aged 18-24 years old, who are college undergraduates and do not have a monthly income.
2. The most searched health information was symptoms (90.6%), followed by disease (66%). The respondents mostly visit health portals or medical encyclopedias (82.1%) to gather health-related information.
3. A significant relationship was established between the inclination to seek online health information, health status and technological literacy, but none for sociodemographic factors.
4. The frequency of internet usage affected health behaviors as established by a positive low degree of correlation (r=.298).
5. The respondents exhibit positive views and behaviors after seeking online health information, but neutrality is seen regarding personal medical issues. They also tend to change medical decisions and have high self-efficacy in resolving medical concerns.

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Overall, the findings of the study suggest that online health information-seeking tendencies can influence an individual's health care behavior. Thus, the credibility of online health information must be evaluated thoroughly, and healthcare professionals must assist patients in medical-decision making by referring to accurate and credible resources.

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