

Understanding How Latinos Utilize Social Media to Improve Health Literacy: A Qualitative Study

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BACKGROUND

- Personal health literacy is essential for obtaining healthier outcomes through improved decision-making; however, health literacy is not equal among all populations living within the United States, especially minority populations. (Mas & Jacobson, 2019) Many Latinos suffer from chronic diseases at a higher rate due to poor health literacy, with 15% of them more likely to have obesity, 45% more likely to develop cervical cancer, and 65% more likely to have diabetes within their lifetime (Key, 2019).
- Between 2011 and 2018, the reported use of digital health technology, such as searching for health information online, increased on average from 12.5% to 27.4% among all races, except for Hispanics which was reported at 9.3%. (Mahajan et al., 2021)

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to understand how Latino populations utilized social media to improve their personal health literacy.

METHODS

This qualitative exploratory study examined how Latinos utilized social media to improve personal health literacy and explored the barriers affecting this population.

- Semi-Structured Interviews (5 Participants)
- Four Focus Group Discussions (19 Participants)

Recruitment

- Participants were recruited from February 2024 until March 2024 using purposive sampling.
 - Physical Flyer
 - Shared in Fontana, CA
 - Digital Flyer
 - Facebook
 - Instagram

Data Collection

- Data collected using the Zoom platform
 - Audio recorded following an interview guide

Data Analysis

- Audio files transcribed verbatim using gradcoach.com
 - Coded using values coding with MAXQDA software
 - Analyzed using an iterative inductive thematic analysis



RESULTS

Participants

- Not all 24 participants used every social media platform but did respond to the using the following platforms..
- **Figure 2.** illustrates the number of responses for each platform being selected as a platform used by the participants from the sample population.

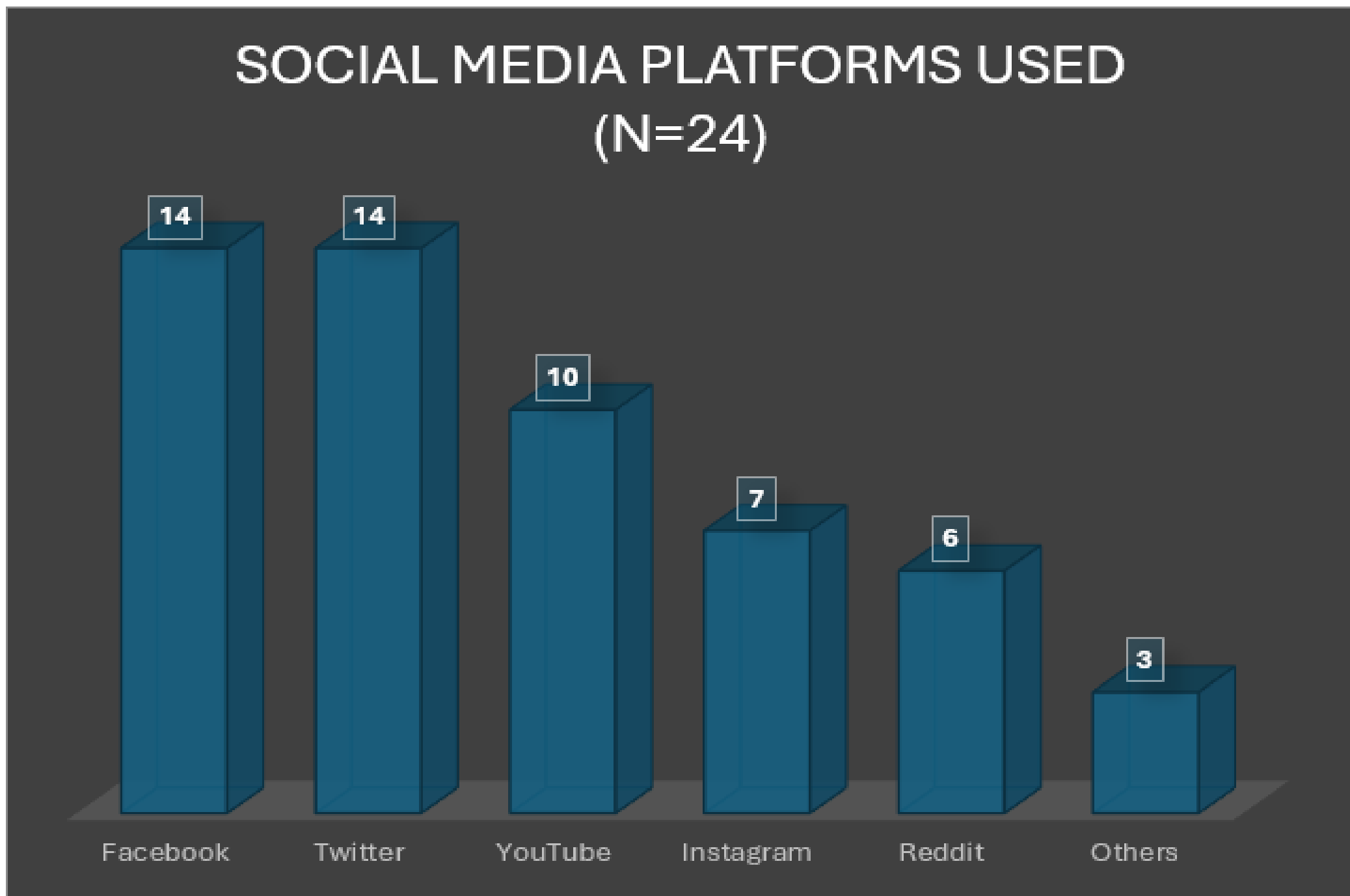


Figure 2. Social Media Platforms Used by Participants

Theoretical Framework

- Health topic awareness evolved into information exploration by reading articles and/or watching videos on the topic, consulting with a health professional, or cross-referencing information. These three factors enhanced the capacity for improved health literacy.
- Patterns began to emerge on how health information encountered was explored, examined, cross-referenced, and understood.
- **Figure 1** illustrates how information evolves from being encountered to being understood.

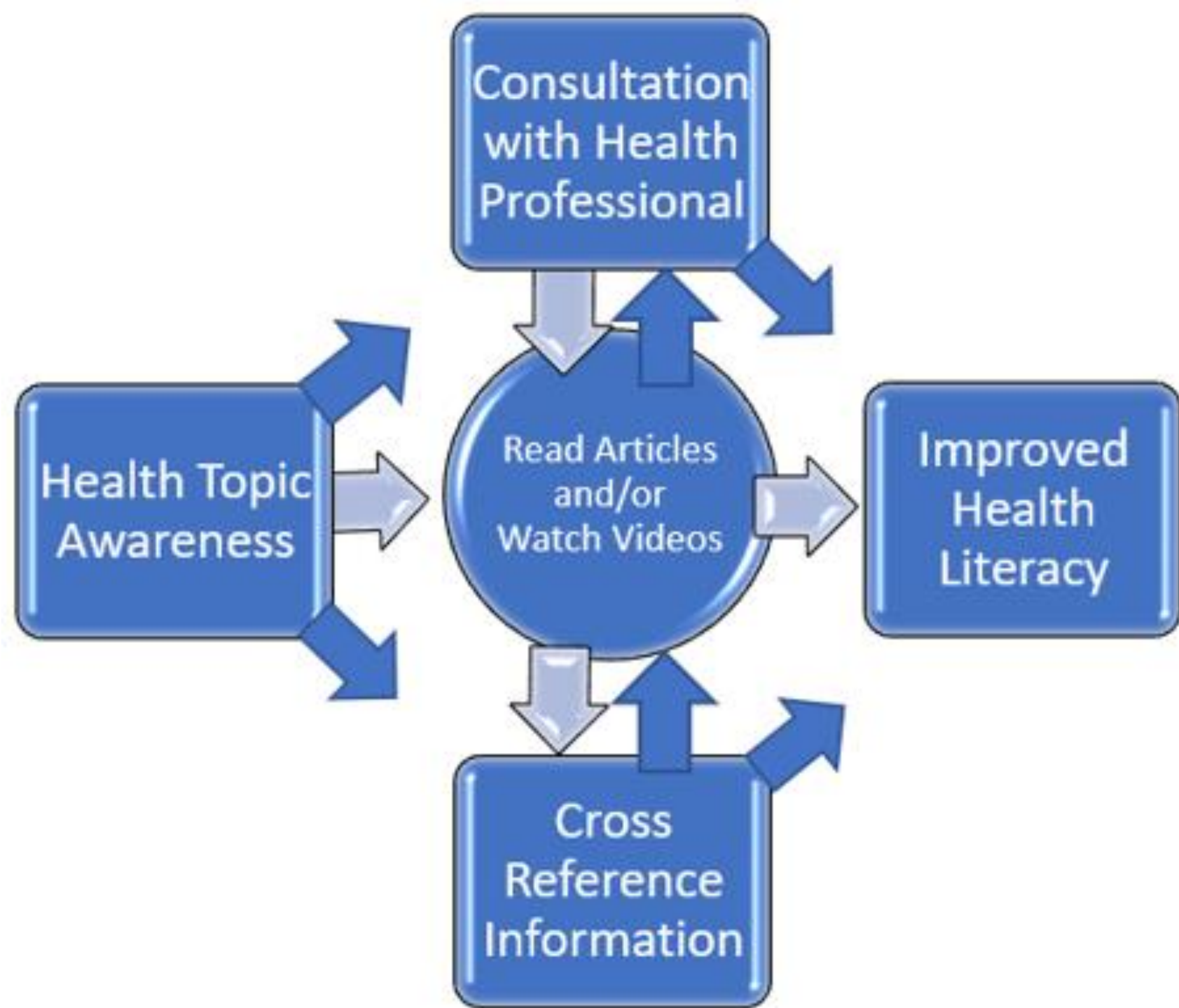


Figure 1. Cognitive Mediation Model

Upon an inductive thematic analysis, the following themes emerged to address the following research questions.

Research Question 1: How do Latino populations utilize social media platforms to gain knowledge on health topics to improve personal health literacy?

Themes Emerging

➤ Social Media Scanning

I think through the use of video articles, it helps us to understand how our body works and what we should do to have a healthy mind and a healthy body and what to avoid, yeah, food to avoid. So, checking out videos and articles online and on social media really helps to pass across the information on how to understand our body much more, and of course, having a healthy mind and body. (Focus Group Participant)

➤ Elaboration through Cross-Referencing

You know, what I do is, you know, when you compare, so actually from like different sources, three sources, four sources and you are still like seeing almost the same thing then you can make an influential judgment, you can make a judgment out of what is visibly being seen. So, for further information, you can just maybe cross-reference with a renowned organization like the W.H.O.(Focus Group Participant)

Research Question 2: What barriers affect the Latino population's ability to use social media to improve personal health literacy?

Themes Emerging

➤ Mistrust in Unverified Content

So, you know one of the reasons why we do not take what we see on social media for what it is; because anybody can post, you can just wake up in the morning and just say this is this, this is that, you know, I am reading, there are two conflicting messages about a particular topic. You do not know which to choose. So maybe there can be a verification process, whereby you have, only certified individuals can post about certain topics, especially when it comes to health. (Focus Group Participant)

➤ Difficulty Accessing Health Content

In order to get to like a good posting, you scan, you know, like, you'll go on, for example, Facebook, and then you will see stuff about Kim Kardashian, and then all about them. And, you know, you got to go through a lot of posts before you find a good post. (Interview Participant)

DISCUSSION

The results of our research produced two unsurprising findings and two surprising findings.

The unsurprising themes included scanning social media and mistrust in unverified content which have been addressed in previous literature (Scherer & Pennycook, 2020).

- Social scanning, also referred to as infoveillance (Chen & Wang, 2021), was a significant theme addressed as a method for maintaining current knowledge on new and relevant information.
- Although misinformation is difficult to fully irradiate from public networks such as social media platforms, an alternative is to improve the reliability of technology that can disprove inaccurate information for users who cross-reference information, such as in the dynamics observed during the Covid-19 outbreak (Liu et al., 2023).

The surprising theme of elaboration through cross-referencing as a use case for social media and the theme of difficulty accessing health content as a barrier were unexpected themes emerging from the results.

- Based on the number of social media sites acknowledged to have been used among multiple participants, the strategy of cross-referencing across multiple platforms and the utilization of multiple content methods may be beneficial for improving the expansion of social media to influence health literacy involving lifestyle behaviors (Gregory et al., 2024).
- Difficulty assessing health content, described as network density published in previous literature (Li & Cho, 2023), was addressed as the extent to where excessive information became overwhelming and debilitating to navigate.

A practical implication is the recommendation for health education organizations to incorporate a validation process of providing the inclusion of citations drafted in plain language supporting any factual information published, as a method to support the cross-referencing process for Latinos using social media to improve health literacy to optimize their health outcomes.

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