

THE IMPACT OF ONLINE ENVIRONMENT ON THE DECISION OF THE CONSUMER OF HEALTH SERVICES

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Abstract: *The online environment has opened new opportunities for consumers of health services, both in terms of the need for information on identified health problem and the possibilities of solving them and choosing the desired health service, resulting in a significant impact on decision of the consumer of health services. The consumers of health services use the internet to get information on identified health problems both before consulting a health service or its buying decision, because of their desire to be informed when acquiring health service, and its subsequent purchase to verify the correctness of service received. In this context, the health care provider cannot create and promote his own desires and beliefs if he wants to be the top choice of the consumers of health services. This paper aims to analyze the impact of the online environment on the decisions of the consumer of health services. The study was conducted on a sample of 223 patients admitted to two public hospitals in Oradea. The patients were given a questionnaire with 20 items, which mainly focused on: information sources, accessing sites with medical content, the moment of accessing the site, verification of information and information from the online influence on their behavior. From the analysis it appears that the information sought by patients online are general, fewer patients frequently access sites of medical institutions, health care facilities or health blogs and forums. The decisions of the Consumers of health care services are influenced to a lesser extent by the information from the online environment, the decisive role in terms of making a decision represent the information received from the doctor. Finally, for the consumer of health care services is difficult to choose because, to some extent even if the needs are becoming increasingly difficult to satisfy a substrate remains related to the personality and mentality of each, of the personal factors regarding buying decision that cannot be changed as easily as it may seem at first glance.*

Keywords: online environment, health, information, buying decision, health services, consumer of health services

JEL classification: M31, I11

1. Purpose

The paper aims to analyze the impact the online environment has on the consumer of health services.

2. Material and methods

The population group studied was one composed of people over 15 years, hospitalized in two public hospitals in Oradea. Based on statistical data on patients hospitalized on July 4 2013 and its structure by sex and age groups, we calculated a sample of 223 subjects, stratified by sex and age group (Figure 1)

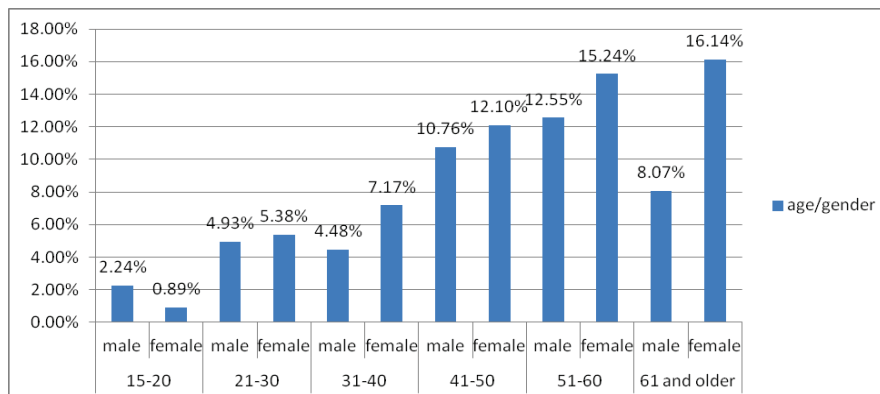


Figure 1. Distribution of the study group by gender and age group

Within each layer, the choice of subjects was random, the only exclusion criteria was patients who do not use the Internet. The education level of the subjects and background is shown in Fig. 2 and 3.

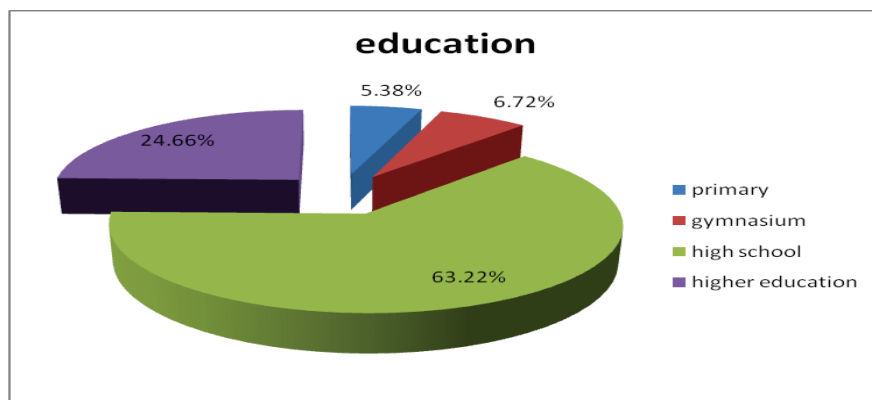


Figure 2. Distribution of the study group by level of education

Most hospitalized patients have an average level of schooling 63.22% and 24.66% higher studies.

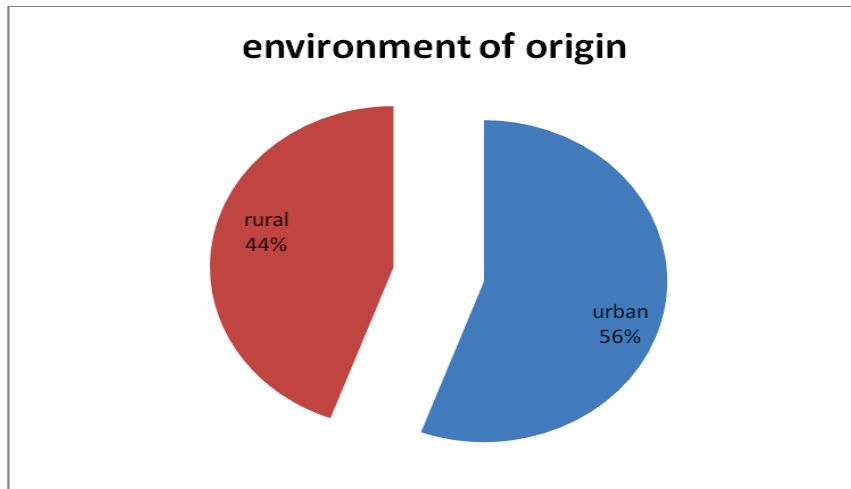


Figure 3. Distribution of study group after environment of origin

Patients come predominantly from urban environment (56%). Declaratively approximately 69.05% of the patients have a "good" health condition, 14.34% "bad" health condition and only 9.41% "very good". Compared to the health of the European population, where the population's perception of good health is 49% ,nor bad nor good 20%, good 24%, the population of patients admitted to two hospitals have the perception of good health in a higher percentage and very good at a rate much lower than the European population (figure 4).

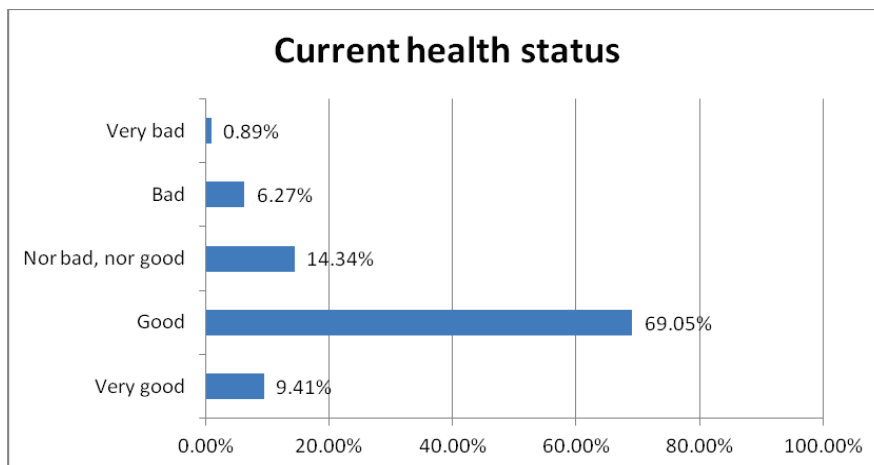


Figure 4. Distribution of study group on perception of actual health status

As a data collection tool used original questionnaire, self-administered, including the main socio-demographic data of respondents and 20 specific items (factual questions, referring to knowledge and opinion, in closed, open and mixed form).

3. Results and discussions

Of the analysis and interpretation of the responses to the questions individually applied, it can be found that there is insufficient knowledge of the role of the Internet as a source of information, less than half of the patients surveyed (43%) using the Internet (Figure 5).

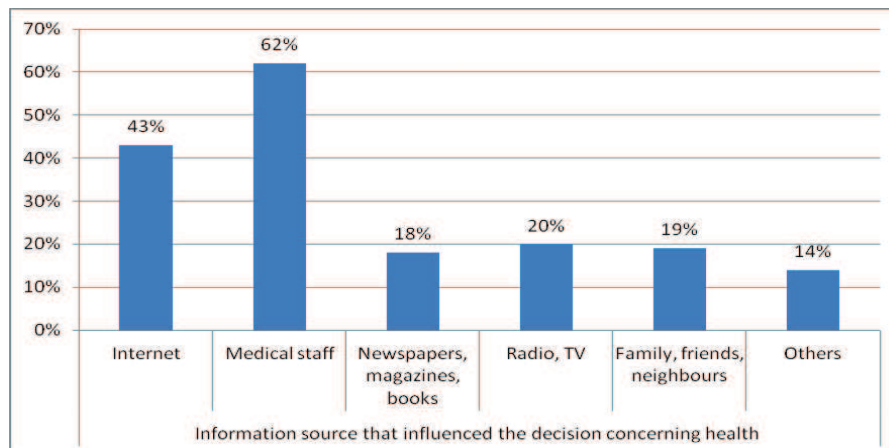


Figure 5. Distribution of the study group after the source of information used to influence a decision on health

Those who take decisions on health, by accessing the Internet are young people and adults (81% younger than 49 years), over the age of 60 as source of information prevails the medical staff (93%). There are no significant differences by gender or backgrounds. Accessed online source for obtaining health information is diverse, 84% of patients surveyed accessing multiple sources. Frequently accessed sites with various medical content (86%), compared to sites of medical institutions (83%) or medical facilities (hospitals, clinics, offices) ((62%) (Figure 6).

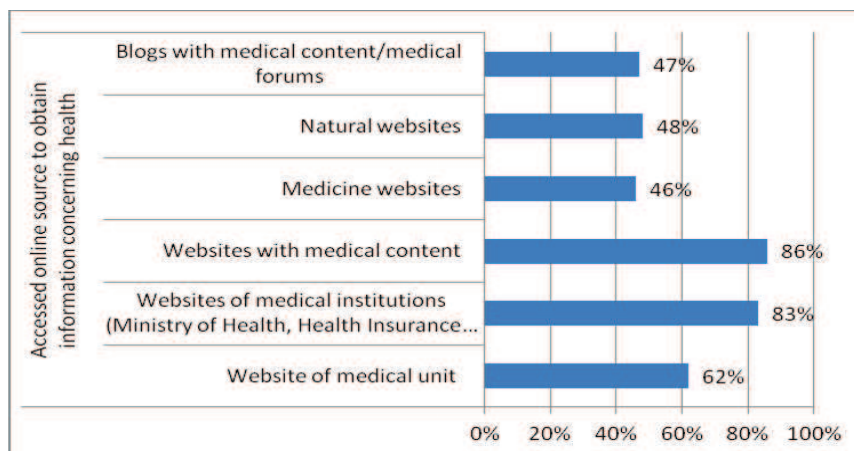


Figure 6. Distribution of the study group after the source accessed online to get health information

About half of the surveyed use blogs or forums. Declaratively these sources are more accurate since the interaction and the feedback that they realize.

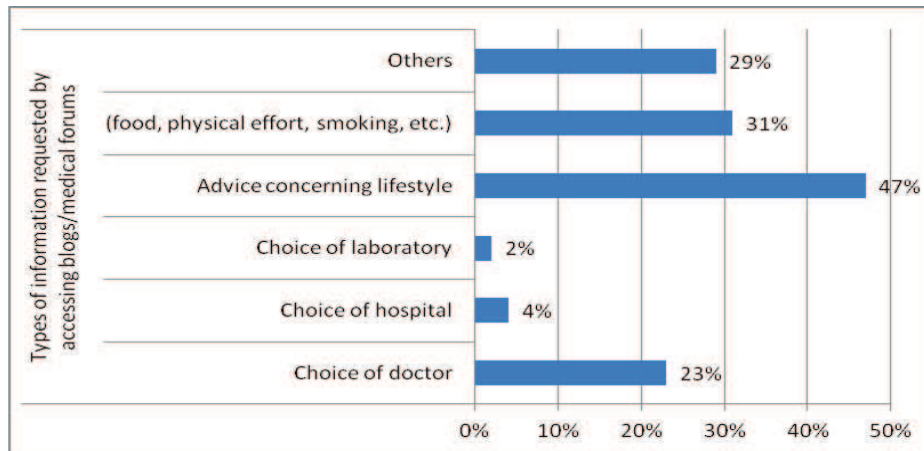


Figure 7. Distribution of the study group by type of information requested by accessing blogs / medical forums

Type of information requested on blogs / forums are diverse, most frequently people ask for advice on lifestyle: diet, what efforts are allowed to do, what treatment to take for the health problem, how to prevent the occurrence of disease (included in the chart to others) which doctor to choose.

Another question concerned the time they accessed information by visiting the doctor. Only 22% of patients access online environment before the visit to the doctor, if signs of disease appear, and half of the patients (51%) say they use the Internet both before and after visiting the doctor (figure 8).

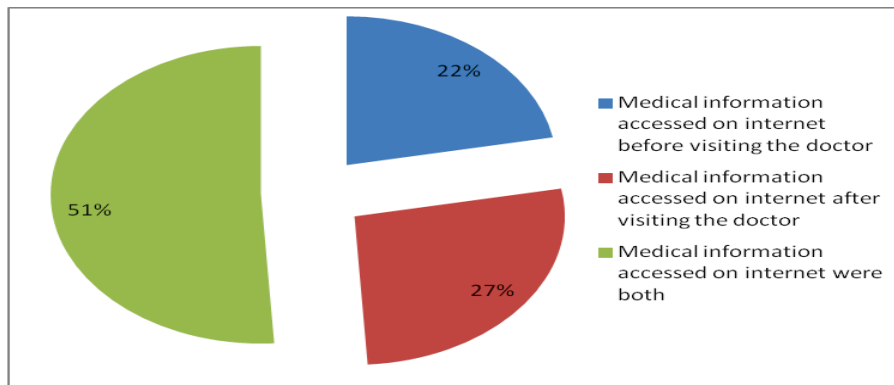


Figure 8. Distribution of the study group after when accessing the Internet reported to visit the doctor

Before the visit to the doctor declarative patients access information online in the desire to stay healthy or to have physical and good mental capacity (72%), because it takes too long to be scheduled in consultation or spend too much time in line for a referral or prescription (included in other) (23%), a small percentage (3%) rely on low accessibility (office or hospital too far, problems with transportation in the area where they live) (figure 9)

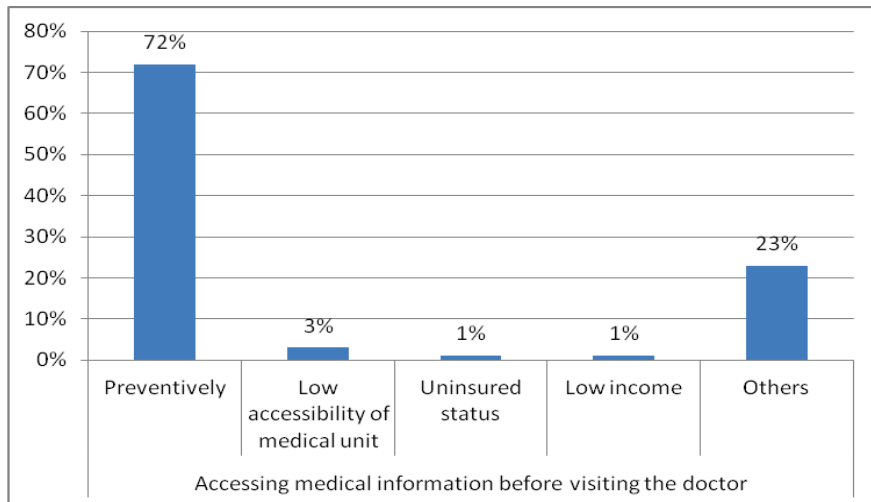


Figure 9. Distribution of the study group after when accessing medical information Before the visit to the doctor

After visiting the doctor the patient seeking medical information on the internet to obtain information (declaratively - I like to be informed to know more about the disease or treatment) (72%), 24% access the internet for explanations about the disease received from the doctor are summary. A small proportion (4%) is not satisfied with the information received and implicitly the doctor who gave this information (4%) (Figure 10)

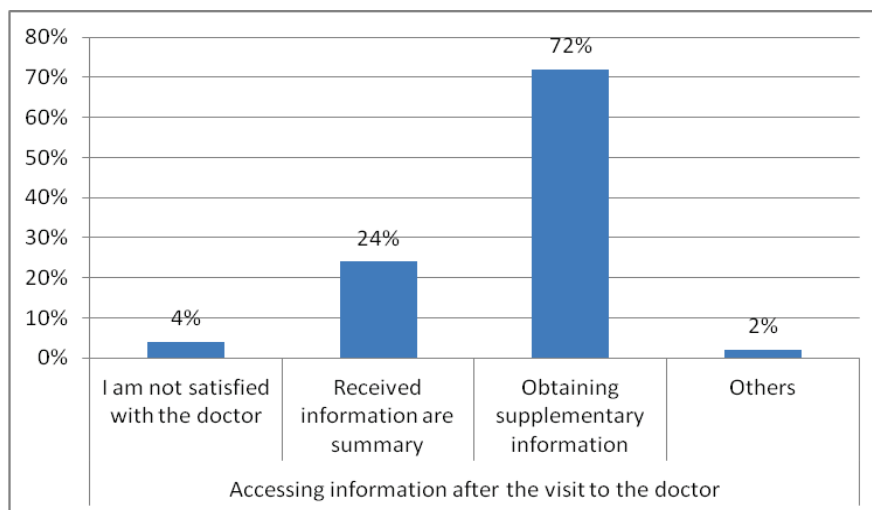


Figure 10. Distribution of the study group after when accessing health information after visiting the doctor

The doctor-patient relationship deteriorates at a rate of 31% when the patient does not obtain additional information from the doctor (Figure 11), and is forced to look for this information on the internet. Patients do not return to the doctor for a new visit to discuss with your medical information obtained from the internet, or to not to upset the doctor or the doctor believes that he is not interested. Half of the patients (53%) declaratively do not realize the extent to which obtaining new information on the Internet have influenced the relationship with their doctors.

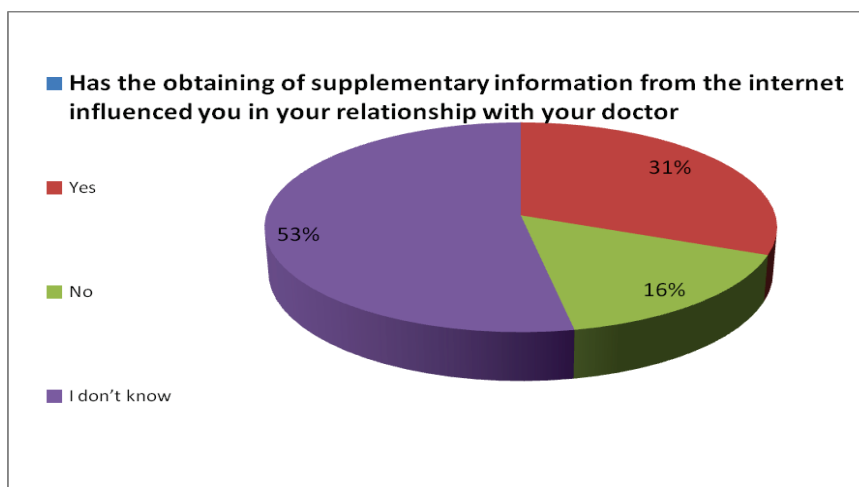


Figure 11. Distribution of the study group after the online influence exerted on the doctor-patient relationship

The degree of understanding of the information obtained from the Internet differs depending on the level of education of patients. Those with high school and higher education perceived much better information access, stating that this information are the same as those received from the doctor, but they were better understood from the Internet, or the physical state of consultation time that prevented understanding correct information (figure 12). In a small proportion of patients (6%) have been confused by online information, whether they did not fit the correlation between the diagnosis given and the signs and symptoms of the disease, or accessible information made it possible for the patient to assume a more serious diagnosis than it actually was.

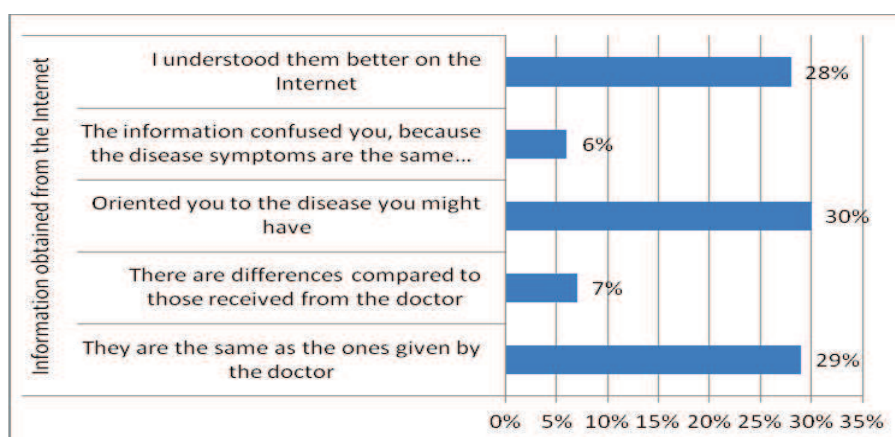


Figure 12. Distribution of study group after the understanding level of the information obtained from the Internet

The decisions taken by patients after obtaining access to online medical information are different (Figure 13).

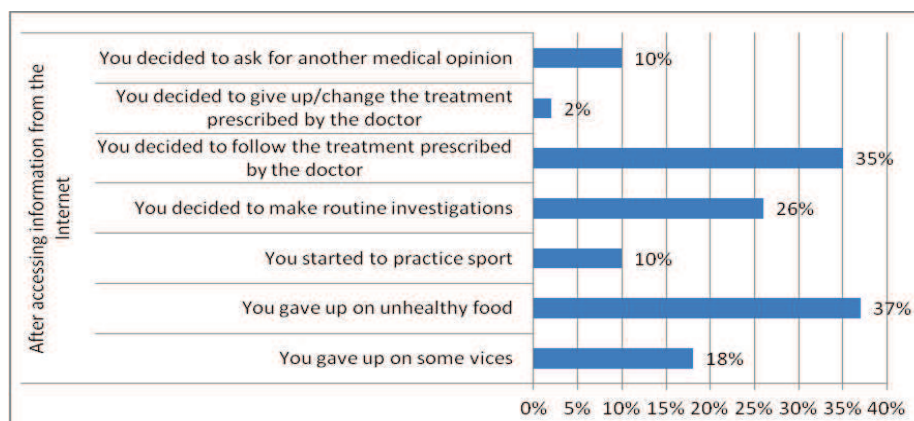


Figure 13. Distribution of study group based on the influence of information obtained from the Internet

A large number of patients are turning to a healthy lifestyle in terms of diet (37%), to give up some vices (18%) practice sports (10%). 35% of patients initially dissatisfied with the information received from the physician decide to follow the treatment, 26% decide to make further investigations and 10% request another medical opinion.

The usefulness of the Internet is considered very good and good 60% of patients, satisfactory by 29% patients. 11% of patients are not satisfied with the usefulness of the Internet, stating that the information provided is often contradictory, alarmist, do not explain many medical aspects.

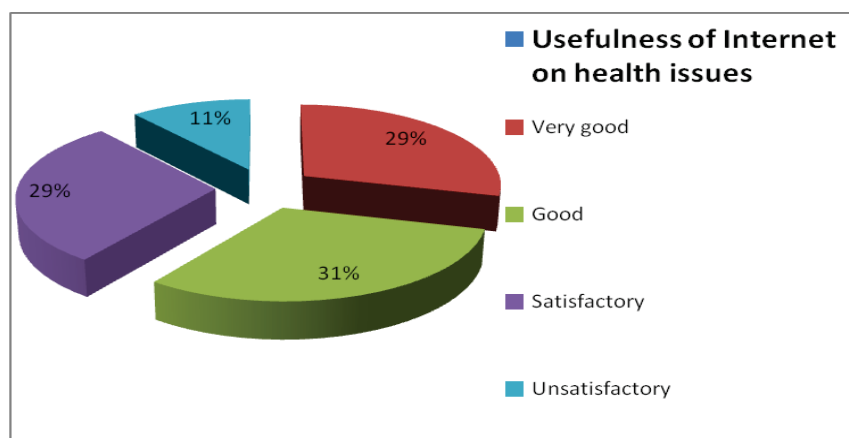


Figure 14. Distribution of study group after the usefulness of Internet concerning health issues

4. Conclusions

From the analysis it appears that the information sought by patients online are general, few patients frequently access sites of medical institutions, health care facilities or blogs and health forums. Consumer health care decisions are influenced to a lesser extent by the information from the online environment the decisive role in terms of making a decision has the information from the doctor. Finally, the consumer of health care is in a difficult position of choosing because, to some extent even if the needs are becoming

increasingly difficult to satisfy, a substrate remains related to the personality and mentality of each of the personal factors regarding the buying decision that cannot be changed as easily as it may seem at first glance.

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