10. New Trends in Health Communication

Entanglements between Social Media,
TV Series, Psychology, and Mental Health

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◀ ABSTRACT

In recent years, significant changes have occurred in health communication. New challenges and opportunities have emerged, such as the need to provide timely information without creating a news overload, healthcare professionals becoming players in health communication by introducing new strategies and hybridizing media languages for medical and scientific dissemination, and user-generated content produced by patients on social media leading to the destigmatization of some diseases. The goal of this chapter is to understand these changes through a socio-technical approach that studies the mutual connections between health communication, institutions, the media, communicators, and the social context. Through the analysis of a case study, chosen for its significance, the entanglements between TV series, social media, and psychology are shown. The main results point out that health communication is a multidimensional process in which there are many overlaps between disciplines. TV series can be successfully used in psychotherapy and can be a significant starting point for scientific dissemination on social media because they help to create relevant and understandable messages. The rise of health communicators has also highlighted the need to elaborate deontological guidelines for communication. This chapter contributes to the field by adopting an original approach to health communication that considers its multidimensionality and current trends.

Introduction

In the last 20 years, digital and social media have disrupted health communication practices. New players have appeared, such as influencers and healthcare professionals, while public institutions have faced a partial loss of trust. Various forms of media have increased their connections, hybridized their languages, and contaminated each other. Social media has also caused new forms of health communication to emerge, such as user-generated content by citizens who have started talking about health issues that once were kept secret, destigmatizing some conditions or diseases. These processes were magnified during the Covid-19 pandemic, which constituted an unprecedented situation.

The pandemic has passed, but the world is facing new challenges, many of which involve health, such as the aging of the population, persistent health system stress, wars that create health emergencies, and the disruption of the global supply chain that causes difficulties in the production and distribution of medicines. This scenario needs to be carefully studied, since it is highly relevant to the health of the global population.

The goal of this chapter is to frame these changes within a socio-technical approach that studies the mutual connections and influences between the actors involved: institutions, the media, communicators, and the social context. This is done through the analysis of a case study (*TV Therapy*) chosen for its significance in this context. The article first maps out the theoretical background concerning the recent changes in health communication, with a focus on the Covid-19 pandemic. Thereafter, the methodology is described. The next section illustrates the case study, disentangling the dimensions involved: communication about psychology issues, TV series, and social media. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the main results that highlights the complex network of relations between health, social media, and other media and pinpoints the need for further interdisciplinary research.

Theoretical Background:
Changes in Health Communication

Health is defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" (WHO n.d.b), highlighting the importance of considering health from a holistic approach and not only from the perspective of healthcare or diseases. This perspective is also adopted in relation to mental health, which is defined as

> a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community. It is an integral component of health and well-being that underpins our individual and collective abilities to make decisions, build relationships and shape the world we live in. Mental health is a basic human right. And it is crucial to personal, community and socio-economic development. Mental health is more than the absence of mental disorders. (WHO 2022)

It can be argued, then, that the concept of health has shifted toward wellness, with the absence of diseases considered to be only one of the necessary conditions. From this point of view, health treatments are an important part of care but not the only one. Among the tools for health promotion WHO (n.d.a) also identifies communication, for its potentially powerful impact on the health condition of citizens. Health communication is the result of the interaction between institutions, communicators, culture, the media, and the social context (Lovari 2017). In the last 20 years, institutions have faced a loss of trust by citizens; new reliable players of communication have emerged (such as digital media influencers, citizens, and professionals); and the media landscape has been increasingly affected by digitalization and hybridization between various forms of media. Moreover, the Covid-19 pandemic showed how effective and accurate communication is important to manage emergency situations and accelerated several processes that had been underway and that involve public institutions (such as the WHO, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and local governments), citizens, social media influencers, and healthcare workers.

A first point to be addressed is that an unprecedented quantity of health information is now available in the media environment. However, quantity cannot be equated with quality. What happened during the Covid-19

pandemic demonstrates this. The rapid spread of Covid-19 required the activation of quick and effective communication channels among the different levels of the population to prevent infection and reassure people. The abundance of information that became available created information chaos, which the WHO defines as an *infodemic* (Nielsen et al. 2020, Ducci et al. 2022). It became difficult for people to distinguish between accurate and reliable information, fake news, and misleading information, as well as between qualified and unqualified sources.

Governments around the world, public health authorities such as the WHO, and social media platforms all took steps to contain the spread of disinformation, with varying degrees of success. Governments launched communication campaigns on both broadcast and social media to update citizens and provide them with useful information. For example, they empowered citizens to manage the pandemic by communicating the measures necessary to contain and prevent contagion, such as proper handwashing and mask-wearing (Raamkumar et al. 2020, Hanson et al. 2021, Shin et al. 2022). They also made agreements with social media platforms to limit the spread of misinformation (Lovari 2020). Social media platforms, for their part, created information centers (Carelli and Vittadini 2020) and attempted to moderate fake news, although it was noted that moderating or banning certain keywords resulted in conversations being encrypted or moved to other platforms (Seiter and Brophy 2022). These efforts were in line with the health promotion actions suggested by the Ottawa Charter: build healthy public policy, create supportive environments, strengthen community actions, develop personal skills, reorient health services, and move to the future (WHO 1986). They were also almost coherent with the WHO guidelines (2017) for an effective health communication that should be accessible, actionable, credible, trusted, relevant, timely, and understandable.

Another process that has been observed is the destigmatization of some diseases and pathological conditions through broadcast media, news, and social media. Research has shown that depicting mental illness or addiction in the media can help to diminish the stigma about some conditions (Theriot 2013, Oldfield 2021). Exposure to different social networks can also reduce some social stereotypes (Neubaum et al. 2020). Moreover, people who suffer from chronic diseases or disabilities (such as eating disorders, mental health issues, and rare diseases) can share their experiences and daily lives through user-generated social media content, such as blog posts or videos. By telling their experiences and therapeutic journeys, they can contribute to raising

awareness of these lesser-known issues, destigmatizing these conditions, and encouraging others to seek help from healthcare professionals (Moorhead et al. 2013). Photographs, other images, and videos are among the most used formats on social media. They are particularly well suited for narratives and storytelling because they allow users to show themselves and tell their stories in their own voices. This pervasiveness of the visual dimension has also led to cross-contamination with other media. Memetic culture is one of the most remarkable examples of the hybridization of visual cultures, creating mash-ups of different visual materials taken from movies, TV series, broadcast programs, and internet culture. Memes have been successfully employed in healthcare communication, with their particular tone of voice adding a hint of humor to serious content (Reynolds and Boyd 2021).

The internet and social media have been used for health purposes, such as information seeking and obtaining social support, since 2010 (Eysenbach 2008, Moorhead et al. 2013). Research has shown that the Covid-19 pandemic intensified these practices. Especially at the beginning of the pandemic, people increased their use of internet and social media for a variety of purposes, including to seek information about the ongoing situation, maintain social contact, or entertain themselves (Marchal and Au 2020, Abuhashesh et al. 2021, Kothari et al. 2022). Together with the abundant information that was available, and the social isolation caused by local lockdowns, this situation produced stress and anxiety among people (Eleftheriades et al. 2022, Liu et al. 2022). However, the internet and social media were also valuable sources for understanding the context of the pandemic: people found qualified material among peers and institutional channels (Akhther and Sopory 2022, Basch et al. 2022, Lanier et al. 2022) as well as social support (Hooper et al. 2022, Qin et al. 2022).

During the pandemic, social media influencers and celebrities supported the visibility of preventive measures (such as handwashing, mask-wearing, and vaccines) and encouraged people to do fitness activities at home (Godefroy 2020, Gupta et al. 2022, Pöyry et al. 2022). Studies have shown, for example, that celebrities' tweets obtained more visibility than those of medical or public health institutions (such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention or the WHO) due to the tone of voice they used (more emotional or connected to experience) and the celebrities' visibility (Kothari et al. 2022, Myrick and Willoughby 2022).

At the intersection of these communication dynamics, healthcare workers emerged as new players in communication. The pandemic forced them to

rethink their communication strategies and move from traditional channels to digital ones, such as social media, for the purpose of disseminating information and presenting their profession. This was particularly the case for self-employed professionals who, during the pandemic, found themselves having to communicate with their patients in an unprecedented context. Research has shown that healthcare workers disseminated accurate information about the pandemic through their social media accounts, debunking fake news or misleading information and revealing what was happening in hospitals (Pangborn et al. 2023).

This trend strengthened after the pandemic. Studies have demonstrated that, healthcare professionals were able to use the "idioms of practice" (Fernández-Ardèvol et al. 2020) that had already been consolidated by influencers regarding managing profiles and relationships with online communities (Locatelli 2021). In order to build coherent profiles, healthcare professionals created their own brand image and developed a continuous editorial plan over time. In their medical and scientific communication, they tried to popularize technical concepts and make them understandable by laypeople. This was done, for example, by using hints of humor or irony, taking inspiration from other media or from internet culture (making memes or tutorials for example), and interacting with their followers (Locatelli, 2021). Scholars have also argued that the involvement of healthcare workers, adequately supported by their institutions, has positive effects on health promotion campaigns (Czerniak et al. 2023). An important point to be addressed in this context is the need to give healthcare professionals adequate communication training (Yilmaz et al. 2022) and to formulate ethics and deontological norms (Kiasalar et al. 2022).

The Covid-19 Pandemic in Italy

In order to contextualize the case study of this chapter, it is important to briefly trace how the Covid-19 pandemic developed in Italy. Italy was one of the first countries to experience major outbreaks of Covid-19, particularly in Lombardy. In the province of Bergamo, where the first major outbreaks occurred, hospitals were overcrowded, and many ill people died at home. This was a very threatening and stressful experience for people. It became necessary to provide citizens with health information without requiring them to travel to hospitals, as hospital access was restricted to urgent care and Covid-19 patients (Lovari 2020). The Italian government chose to live

stream their daily press conferences on Facebook to update people on the evolution of the pandemic and the measures taken. Local health authorities also used their social media profiles to communicate with people (Locatelli and Lovari 2021). The response to the pandemic evolved as knowledge about the virus and its spread deepened. Between March and May 2020, there was a general lockdown. During the summer of 2020, people gradually resumed work and social activities, with restrictions and preventive measures such as wearing masks and maintaining social distance. Autumn and winter 2020, as well as 2021, were characterized by new spikes in the number of cases – with consequent local lockdowns – but also by the introduction of vaccines. During 2021 and 2022, people learned to live together with the virus, and at the end of March 2023, the Italian government lifted the state of emergency.

The above scenario depicts a context in which there are several intersections between fields that were once separated. It is, therefore, interesting to investigate the entanglements between the health communication of healthcare professionals, broadcast media, and social media. This is a new and underdeveloped topic, since these subjects are usually studied among the respective fields. However, due to the contemporary complex media system, it is a very promising area of investigation. In light of the novelty of the approach, the chapter focuses on a case study, chosen for its significance according to the theoretical background described.

Research Background and Methodology

The analysis of the case study presented here is part of a broader portfolio of projects being carried out at the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore that aim to investigate the transformation of health communication, new forms of scientific dissemination, and the role of social media in this process. These are *Health Communication Monitor*, a systematic review and scientific dissemination project on the latest trends in health and media communication research, managed by the author of this article and promoted by the Graduate Schools ALMED and ALTEMS; *Progetto Abbi Cura di Te*, a project for master's students about health communication and social media, led by the author of this article during her *Media and Reti Sociali* course; and *Trust in Science*, an interdisciplinary project investigating how scientific knowledge is mediated in our contemporary complex society,

with Piermarco Aroldi as the principal investigator. While research for these projects was being conducted, the case of *TV Therapy* was discovered and considered worth analyzing because of the entanglement between health communication, social media, and TV series that it presents.

The methodology adopted a grounded approach (Glaser and Strauss 1967), allowing the data to guide the interpretation in light of the background described above. Data collection consisted of an in-depth interview with the two creators of the project (Alessia and Giorgia Romanazzi), the identification of the Instagram contents related to *TV Therapy*, and of the podcast episodes dedicated to medical dramas *Doc – nelle tue mani* (Rai1, 2020-) and *In Treatment* (HBO, 2008-2011). The analysis consisted of a content analysis of the transcription of the interview; a longitudinal content analysis of the themed *TV Therapy* posts and stories published on the Instagram account of Alessia Romanazzi (Rose 2016, Locatelli 2021); and a content analysis of the podcast episodes. Particular attention was paid to the visual dimension during the analysis of the Instagram posts and stories.

About the ethics of research, the full disclosure of the case study, of the names of the two creators, and of their social accounts was discussed and decided together with them considering the already public nature of the project.

TV Therapy: The Case Study

TV Therapy is a complex project that consists of group psychotherapy, a podcast, and an Instagram column. In order to understand the entanglements between (social and broadcast) media and psychology, it is important to describe the project and its structure.

The Project

TV Therapy was first conceived as an experimental form of group psychotherapy by Alessia Romanazzi, a psychologist and psychotherapist, and her sister Giorgia Romanazzi, a TV series editor, combining their professional expertise.[1] They adapted to TV series the well-established technique of using books and movies in psychotherapy sessions, with the aim of helping patients explain their psychological states.

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[1]   In the rest of this article, they are referred to as "the creators" for brevity.

Group therapy is a technique in which psychotherapy is done in groups with a maximum of eight participants. The presence of other patients stimulates "mirroring", through which patients help each other accept a psychological problem or ask questions about it. *TV Therapy* consists of weekly online meetings led by the creators. Alessia Romanazzi chooses the participants after interviewing them to evaluate whether this kind of therapy is suitable for them (for example, they do not need individual psychological support or have serious mental illnesses). At the time of the interview with the creators, the patients involved in the project were all female and mostly aged between 25 and 40 years old.

Patients are assigned to watch a TV series, which is then used in the meetings as a trigger for discussion; unfolding diseases and pathologies (such as post-traumatic stress disorder and panic attacks); telling everyone's stories; exploring personal emotions; and understanding the underlying psychological dynamics.

The creators were inspired by what emerged during the group therapy to create the podcast *TV Therapy* with the goal of explaining psychology through TV series to the general public (while preserving the privacy and professional secrecy of their patients). The podcast is distributed through major music streaming platforms, such as Spotify. The topic of each episode is chosen after consideration of news stories, media discourses, and suggestions by Instagram followers. The tone of the podcast is serious but not grave in order to frame TV series as more than an entertainment product. Both the creators contribute to conceiving and writing the episodes, taking special care to be accurate and not misleading.

The podcast episodes have the following structure: they are between 30 and 50 minutes long, and they are narrated by the two creators. Their titles imitate the ones of the famous TV series *Friends* (NBC, 1994-2004), starting with "Quello che…" ("The one with…"). The cover image of the podcast is a mashup of images reminiscent of both the fields involved: media (a television, a microphone, and a cassette tape) and psychology (Sigmund Freud and a chair). Its main colors are light blue and yellow, matching the graphic style and visual identity of the Instagram accounts of the two creators (light blue from the Instagram account of Alessia Romanazzi[2] and yellow from the one of Giorgia Romanazzi[3]).

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[2]   @iononmistresso

[3]   @tellyst

Each episode is dedicated to a TV series and starts by describing its plot, main characters, features, anecdotes, and trivia. Then it examines the psychological dynamics of the characters or the situations narrated, alternating the description of the plot (through the voice of Giorgia Romanazzi) with the explanation of the psychological dynamics presented (through the voice of Alessia Romanazzi). In this way, it is possible to explain mental states or illnesses (such as anxiety, anger, or narcissism) through describing key episodes or moments from the TV series chosen.

Both the group therapy and the podcast are promoted on Instagram through dedicated posts and stories identified by the hashtag #tvtherapy. The posts and stories also have the goal of encouraging discussions about psychology on Instagram using TV series as a starting point. The colors of the posts and stories match the ones of the podcast cover.

A longitudinal analysis of the posts revealed the evolution of their style. The first ones were simple, composed of one picture consisting of a screen-grab of the Spotify interface. Later, they evolved into carousels consisting of two pictures: a cover image and a graphic describing the main contents of the episode. Reels (short videos) with brief extracts of the episodes also began to be posted. The latest posts are more elaborate, containing a carousel composed of the cover image and then a series of graphics explaining the key insights of the episode. They include images of the main characters of the TV series or some significative pictures or brief extracts to highlight the situations that are explored. Other posts take inspiration from TV series to realize memes featuring well-known characters (for example, Jessica Fletcher from *Murder, She Wrote*, CBS, 1984-1996).

The captions summarize the episode in a way that makes the public curious to listen to it (for example, they might start with a question asking whether the reader has ever thought about a certain aspect of a TV series) and end with the explicit request to followers to post comments and ask questions. The longitudinal analysis of the posts showed also that during time *TV Therapy* became a periodic and recurring content (like a sort of editorial column) in the creators' Instagram accounts.

Psychology and TV Series

In group psychotherapy, the creators assign participants a TV series to watch according to the topic that they want to explore (for example, anger or anxiety) and then, during the meetings, they discuss it. The situations depicted

in the TV series can be used as a starting point for participants to describe their personal situations. According to Alessia Romanazzi, this technique works because participants start describing an aspect or an episode that impressed them and, in doing this, they begin to speak about themselves. In order to work on participants' decision-making process, the creators use interactive episodes or ask participants to reflect on the choices that characters made by describing what they would have done in their shoes.

The creators explained that participants seem to "interiorize" TV series, unconsciously using them as "repertoires" for talking about their lives and for giving names to emotions and psychological states. This process is very similar to the *catharsis* described by Aristoteles, in which people can experience feelings and emotions without really living them. The creators cited the example of the TV series *The Bear* (Hulu, 2022-), which starts with the image of a bear in a cage. After the group watched it, the creators noticed that participants started using the expression "to feel caged" (to feel trapped), which they had never used before, without referring directly to the series. Another interesting example of this process is that during group therapy, patients tend to cite TV series that aired on broadcast television when they were younger, such as *The Gilmore Girls* (The WB, 2000-2007). The creators also pointed out that participants interpret TV series in a very personal and individual way, according to their condition, background, or mood. The same scene, for example, can be described in very different ways, each one from a different perspective.

One important point to consider regarding using TV series as a tool for exploring personal emotions is how they are accurate in describing the psychological states or mental illnesses of the characters. As the creators highlighted, in recent years, the psychological description of characters has become more accurate, specific, and multidimensional, especially in British series (such as *Fleabag*, BBC Three, BBC One, 2017-2019) that mix psychological accuracy with comedy and drama. According to Giorgia Romanazzi, screenwriters are like "artists who draw from their personal experience to stage emotions and feelings. They put in images what they have felt or lived." Alessia Romanazzi expressed that it is like screenwriters have become group therapy participants: sharing their emotions and experiences through images, they "mirror" actual patients who draw on these images to speak about themselves.

The creators noted that TV series that do not directly deal with mental health are paradoxically more accurate because they delve into the psychology

of the characters in a deeper and more detailed way. Marvel series such as *Moon Knight* (Disney+, 2022) and *WandaVision* (Disney+, 2021), which really delve into the emotional aspects of the superheroes, are remarkable examples of this. Another one – albeit in the context of film rather than TV series – is constituted by the dementors in the *Harry Potter* franchise (2001-2011) that deprive people of all their emotions. In doing this, they are, according to the two creators, a perfect description of the state of depression and desperation, although they are not connected with a mental health issue at all. Another example is *SKAM Italia* (TIM Vision, Netflix, 2018-), which contains many tiny details about the everyday lives of adolescents that permit adolescents to identify with the characters but also let adults "go back in time," as Giorgia Romanazzi put it, and realize how much they have in common with contemporary adolescents despite their different historical contexts.

Giorgia Romanazzi also pointed out that the episode structure of TV series develops over time, allowing the screenwriters to deepen the psychological description of the characters and their many facets. For long-running TV series, viewers, actors, and characters grow together.

Another aspect that emerged from both group therapy and conversations with followers on Instagram is that people reflexively and consciously choose TV series according to their psychological states or pathologies. The two creators observed that, for example, participants' TV series preferences changed during the Covid-19 pandemic. In the beginning of the outbreak, people chose familiar, slow-paced, and reassuring products, such as *Friends* (1994-2004), *Gilmore Girls* (2000-2007), and the first episodes of *The Office US* (NBC, 2005-2013). During the second phase of the pandemic (after 2020), people chose TV series that let them express and explore their anxiety, worry, and discomfort and reprocess the uncertainty and sense of impotence they were experiencing. Specifically, the creators noticed that products such as medical or crime series reassure people because they have a standard structure which is repeated during every single episode. Their characters also show great competence and devotion in doing their work, giving viewers the comforting idea that in tragic situations, there are people who know what to do.

The algorithmic recommendations of streaming platforms, especially Netflix, are another factor that influences people's choices. Giorgia Romanazzi remarked that when Netflix promotes a TV series through its recommendations or its social media accounts, more people reach out to her on Instagram to ask questions about it.

Mental Health, Dissemination, and Social Media

Alessia Romanazzi started her professional Instagram account in 2015. She approached it as a way to disseminate psychology content, choosing a serious but not grave tone of voice. She chose a graphic style and organized her content in periodical columns (it is to say contents regularly and periodically published like magazines' ones), creating a strong personal image. She has improved the channel over time, adding new columns; trying new formats (posts, carousels, stories, Instagram Live, reels, interactive stickers); and changing the graphic style according to the trends of the platform. *TV Therapy* and TV series are only some of the many topics she analyzes. She regularly interacts with her followers through comments or question boxes. In the interview, she defined her audience as "self-selected," very interested in her topics, educated, kind, inclined to debate, with rare incidents of flaming. The audience constitutes a "community" where people can establish a dialogue.

One thing that the creators noticed when looking at the analytics of their Spotify account is that their audience is predominantly made up of women between the ages of 25 and 40 from Northern Italy, with a small and increasing presence of men. This is consistent with the composition of the group therapy participants. Alessia Romanazzi explained this by clarifying that, in Italy, men are less confident or comfortable when speaking about mental health than women. In order to address this gap, the creators are trying to engage the male audience both on the podcast and on Instagram by choosing TV series that might be interesting to them, such as *Game of Thrones* (HBO, 2011-2019), *The Last of Us* (HBO, 2023-), *The Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power* (Amazon Prime Video, 2022-), and *You* (Netflix, 2018-). They also decided to focus more on the TV series themselves than on psychology as a starting point to create a connection with men followers.

Alessia Romanazzi noted that dissemination about psychology is not easy, because she must find a balance between the accuracy of the content and the need to reach a large audience. According to her, it is impossible to appeal to everyone or to take all people into account because of the many individual variables involved. Furthermore, she highlighted that the process of normalizing the discussion of mental health allows people to speak more openly about certain aspects of their lives but also exposes them to excessive psychologization, which risks pathologizing even normal situations. For example, people sometimes use expressions that indicate pathology (such as dependency disorder, toxic relationships, narcissism, imposter syndrome)

when they describe problematic situations that are normal. According to the psychologist, this is a form of backlash against the past, when people did not speak about mental health. Now the task is to normalize the fact that not every problematic situation is pathologic. The chance to speak publicly about mental health and normalize mental health issues or just problematic situations is in line with the approach proposed by the WHO (2022) which portrays mental health as more than the absence of mental disorders and as related to a state of well-being and the capacity to manage the complexities of everyday life.

Alessia Romanazzi emphasized that science communicators must explain scientific and technical topics and make them understandable without being trivial or simply following trends. It is also important not to just say what people want to hear or try to make everyone happy, because that is impossible. Moreover, she argued that healthcare professionals should never lose their critical viewpoint and fall into a sort of "populism." Scientific communicators must keep their critical distance and scientific accuracy to help people dive under the surface of things. The creators agreed that social media is a place where experts, such as themselves, can engage in dialogue with people about their subjects of expertise on an equal level. They said that they have a reciprocal relationship with their followers, in which they influence each other by opening new perspectives or helping each other think about situations in different ways. This is a consequence of the fact that they have a small number of highly engaged followers.[4] It is also probably due to the role of platform algorithms in showing their content and recommending them to new followers who share, for example, the same interests or geographical area.

TV Therapy and Medical Dramas

Two episodes of the podcast are particularly interesting because they are dedicated to medical dramas: episode 25 to *Doc – Nelle tue mani* and episode 59 to *In Treatment*. An analysis of these two episodes shed more light on the entanglements of social media, health communication, and TV series.

Based on the true story of doctor Pierdante Piccioni, *Doc – Nelle tue mani* is a very successful Italian TV series that tells the story of Andrea

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[4] @iononmistresso has 44.800 followers, and @tellyst has 4.700 followers (numbers updated in September 2023).

Fanti, a doctor who loses his memory and must re-discover himself and restart his career in a public hospital. The series was aired in February 2020, overlapping with the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic in Italy. This coincidence influenced its success: according to the creators, the plot is full of good sentiments and is based on doctors who are devoted to their work, doing it with passion and taking excellent care of patients. These elements contrasted sharply with what people were experiencing in Italy at the time (during the first weeks of the pandemic, a huge number of ill people were stuck in hospital without being able to see their families). While watching the series, viewers experienced psychological gratification and were reassured by doctors taking good care of dying patients. Thus, *Doc – Nelle tue mani* let people express and aggregate their feelings at a time when they could not leave their homes or meet up with other people. Giorgia Romanazzi said that this series acted as a sort of soothing 'balm' for people because it gave dignity to dying patients.

The second season was aired in 2022. The screenwriters decided to add the Covid-19 pandemic to the plot, featuring several situations experienced in 2020, such as empty streets, the need to travel with self-certification, and the continuous sound of ambulance sirens. By 2022, the population had become less fearful about dying from the disease, but new psychological states had appeared, such as Covid-19 fatigue, prolonged stress, and anxiety. The episodes gave viewers the chance to reprocess what had happened, express the fatigue of co-living with Covid-19, and realize the importance of taking care of everyone's psychological wounds. Therefore, according to the creators, *Doc – Nelle tue mani* was the perfect trigger for people to start reprocessing what had happened during the pandemic.

Episode 59 of the podcast is about *In Treatment*, an American TV series that tells the story of a psychotherapist (Paul Weston) and his psychotherapy sessions with patients. The series highlights the psychological dynamics of the patients but also delves into the personality of the psychotherapist, depicting him as having both positive and negative personality traits. It was written under the supervision of professionals and is therefore highly accurate. Giorgia Romanazzi noted that an interesting aspect of the production of the series is that its episodes were recorded following the real order of the sessions, with the aim of reproducing the development of the therapy. She also highlighted that the screenwriters used a fascinating narrative expedient: since during the sessions the psychotherapist is not allowed to communicate his feelings about what the patient is sharing, the screenwriters decid-

ed to reveal them through the soundtrack. Alessia Romanazzi pinpointed that there is a sort of 'parental' representation of the psychotherapist: as there are no perfect parents, there are no perfect psychotherapists. The goal of therapy is not to be perfect but to help patients learn to deal with their problems and emotions.

Discussion and Conclusions

The analysis of the entanglements between social media, TV series, and psychology has unfolded some contemporary aspects of the media landscape and the evolution of health communication. This study contributed to the field by adopting an original approach to health communication that considered its multidimensionality and the complex network of influence among the actors involved.

First, it emerged that TV series are useful for mirroring and reprocessing psychological dynamics. This is possible due to the accurate depictions of characters and situations through everyday details that help people relate to the story told. This mirroring process of living or re-living a situation without experiencing its consequences is very similar to the Aristotelian *catharsis*.

Using broadcast media together with social media meets the need for communication to be relevant, which is one of the WHO's criteria for strategic health communication. TV series and social media have content and contexts that are relevant to people and grab their attention. They are understandable because they speak a language that people can comprehend, and they are easily accessible.

There are also many links between this study's findings and those of media studies and research on the sociology of media. The findings about the interiorization of TV series and the importance of the ones watched during youth are reminiscent of what research about media and generations has found: media provide people with generational repertoires that let them build their generational belonging (Vittadini et al. 2013, Vittadini 2018, Colombo 2019). As the two creators noted, *TV Therapy* session participants (but also many social media followers) interpret TV series in their own ways, according to their backgrounds, moods, experiences, and emotions. This recalls what well-established media research paradigms have already demonstrated, such as the informational-semiotic model of Umberto Eco and Paolo Fabbri (1978); the encoding/decoding model (Hall 1973); and

the uses and gratification model (Katz et al. 1973). It is not possible to fully explain these theories here. In sum, it can be said that media research has highlighted the active role that the public plays in understanding media messages according to their cultural and social background. In line with this, people choose media content that fulfills their needs, as was demonstrated during the Covid-19 pandemic. This is one of the possible explanations for people's choice of TV series that should be backed up with more research. Another possible one is that the recommendation algorithms of streaming platforms influence people's choices.

The case study presented revealed mutual connections and influence between seemingly distant elements, such as group psychotherapy, TV series, podcast episodes, and social media accounts. Sometimes social media inspired a podcast episode, other times the latter was the trigger for a discussion with Instagram followers, and other times a TV series inspired group therapy, podcasts, and Instagram posts. Both the podcast and the column on the Instagram account helped people discover psychology and discuss it with a professional. Medical and scientific dissemination requires making technical concepts accessible to the general public. In line with the WHO principles for health communication, this hybridization process makes health communication understandable and actionable: it is possible for people to better understand concepts and to start reflecting or acting on certain topics.

Institutions may benefit from adopting this approach to health communication, which will help them produce targeted messages or campaigns that are more relevant and understandable for people because they are framed in a way that relates to their experience. Appropriate and effective health communication, especially about mental health, can be crucial for prevention, which is one of the pillars of conceiving health as a complete state of well-being and not only the absence of diseases. The use of visual communication or visual materials – as in the case study described and also as demonstrated in previous research (Locatelli and Lovari 2021, Lee et al. 2022) – can improve the effectiveness of such communication.

During the pandemic, there was a surge in online searches for health information and support concerning a range of psychological issues and other scientific and medical ones. Due to the possible influence on people's health that social media may have, it is important to continue studying these forms of medical and scientific communication to understand how they affect people. As Alessia Romanazzi highlighted, healthcare professionals have a huge

responsibility on social media and cannot abandon their accuracy or critical approach to pursue social media metrics or their followers' favor. According to the WHO, health communication should be credible and trusted. This stresses the urgent need to establish ethical and deontological guidelines for healthcare professionals and improve people's digital health literacy so that they can distinguish between accurate and non-accurate information. These efforts will make important contributions to limiting the spread of disinformation and reinforcing the trust in institutions.

This research is limited to a single case study that can be defined as a best practice. The results cannot be generalized, but they represent a promising starting point for further research.

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