



International Journal of Innovative Technologies in Social Science

e-ISSN: 2544-9435

Operating Publisher
SciFormat Publishing Inc.
ISNI: 0000 0005 1449 8214

2734 17 Avenue SW,
Calgary, Alberta, T3E0A7,
Canada
+15878858911
editorial-office@sciformat.ca

ARTICLE TITLE

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF ERECTILE DYSFUNCTION IN THE
DIGITAL AGE: BETWEEN MEDICAL TREATMENT AND ONLINE
MISINFORMATION

DOI

[https://doi.org/10.31435/ijitss.3\(51\).2026.6571](https://doi.org/10.31435/ijitss.3(51).2026.6571)

RECEIVED

12 June 2026

ACCEPTED

31 August 2026

PUBLISHED

08 September 2026

LICENSE



The article is licensed under a **Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License**.

© The author(s) 2026.

This article is published as open access under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0), allowing the author to retain copyright. The CC BY 4.0 License permits the content to be copied, adapted, displayed, distributed, republished, or reused for any purpose, including adaptation and commercial use, as long as proper attribution is provided.

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF ERECTILE DYSFUNCTION IN THE DIGITAL AGE: BETWEEN MEDICAL TREATMENT AND ONLINE MISINFORMATION

Kamila Zmysłowska (Corresponding Author, Email: kamila1zmyslowska@gmail.com)

Nicolaus Copernicus Voivodeship Hospital in Koszalin, Tytusa Chałubińskiego 7, 75-581 Koszalin, Poland
ORCID ID: 0009-0002-2413-0806

Adam Hajdaniak

Jan Mikulicz-Radecki University Hospital in Wrocław, Borowska 213, 50-556 Wrocław, Poland
ORCID ID: 0009-0005-1401-3122

Anna Szatkowska

Jan Mikulicz-Radecki University Hospital in Wrocław, Borowska 213, 50-556 Wrocław, Poland
ORCID ID: 0009-0003-9970-3354

Malwina Kwaśniewska

Nicolaus Copernicus Voivodeship Hospital in Koszalin, Tytusa Chałubińskiego 7, 75-581 Koszalin, Poland
ORCID ID: 0009-0006-0775-8174

Jan Mateusz Kiersztyn

Dr Jurasz University Hospital No.1 in Bydgoszcz, Marii Skłodowskiej Curie 9, 85-094, Bydgoszcz, Poland
ORCID ID: 0009-0004-4714-0868

Aleksandra Grabowska

Regional Hospital in Kołobrzeg, Edmunda Łopuskiego 31-33, 78-100 Kołobrzeg, Poland
ORCID ID: 0009-0003-6112-1260

Natalia Seńcio

Poznań University of Medical Sciences, Collegium Maius, Fredry 10, 61-701 Poznań, Poland
ORCID ID: 0009-0009-4358-7511

Klaudia Aleksandra Stadnik

Regional Hospital in Szczecinek, Tadeusza Kościuszki 38, 78-400 Szczecinek, Poland
ORCID ID: 0009-0006-2601-3813

ABSTRACT

Erectile dysfunction (ED) is a common sexual health problem that affects not only physical functioning but also psychological well-being, intimate relationships, and quality of life. It is associated with lower self-esteem, self-confidence, and sexual satisfaction, as well as increased anxiety and depressive symptoms. Fear of sexual failure may contribute to a cycle in which anxiety increases the risk of further unsuccessful sexual experiences. ED can also negatively affect intimate relationships, highlighting the importance of a biopsychosocial approach that combines medical and psychological treatment. The digital health information environment presents an additional challenge. Although the Internet and social media provide easy access to health information and opportunities to share experiences, they also facilitate the spread of misinformation. Research on platforms such as Reddit, YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram has identified low-quality content and the promotion of treatments unsupported by clinical guidelines. “Natural” remedies for sexual performance may be particularly risky because they can contain undeclared pharmacological substances. Exposure to misleading information may increase unrealistic expectations, anxiety, and shame, while encouraging self-diagnosis, self-treatment, and delays in seeking professional medical advice.

Further research is needed to examine how online misinformation affects the psychological functioning of men with ED. Important areas include recommendation algorithms, differences between platforms, and health literacy. Solutions should focus on improving digital health literacy, increasing healthcare professionals’ presence on social media, and promoting evidence-based diagnosis and treatment.

KEYWORDS

Erectile Dysfunction (ED), Male Sexual Health, Media, Misinformation, Disinformation

CITATION

Zmysłowska, K., Hajdaniak, A., Szatkowska, A., Kwaśniewska, M., Kiersztyn, J. M., Grabowska, A., Seńcio, N., & Stadnik, K. A. (2026). The psychological impact of erectile dysfunction in the digital age: Between medical treatment and online misinformation. *International Journal of Innovative Technologies in Social Science*, 3(51). [https://doi.org/10.31435/ijitss.3\(51\).2026.6571](https://doi.org/10.31435/ijitss.3(51).2026.6571)

COPYRIGHT

© The author(s) 2026. This article is published as open access under the **Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0)**, allowing the author to retain copyright. The CC BY 4.0 License permits the content to be copied, adapted, displayed, distributed, republished, or reused for any purpose, including adaptation and commercial use, as long as proper attribution is provided.

Introduction

Erectile dysfunction (ED) is one of the most common male sexual health problems and represents an issue that extends beyond the mere physiological ability to achieve or maintain an erection. The contemporary approach to ED increasingly relies on the biopsychosocial model, according to which sexual functioning results from the interaction of biological, psychological, interpersonal, and social factors. The European Society for Sexual Medicine (ESSM) emphasizes that focusing exclusively on the organic causes of ED may lead to an underestimation of the importance of anxiety, beliefs about sexuality, intimate relationships, and other psychosocial factors.

This issue has gained additional significance in the digital age. The Internet has enabled men to access information about sexual health, ED symptoms, medications, and alternative treatment methods more easily and anonymously. At the same time, this information environment facilitates the dissemination of content unsupported by scientific evidence, oversimplifications, myths, and advertisements for products of unproven effectiveness. Studies of social media indicate that content related to men’s health is highly popular, while its quality and consistency with current medical knowledge remain problematic.

Consequently, the contemporary experience of ED can be viewed as a phenomenon situated at the intersection of two processes. On the one hand, advances in medicine have increased access to effective treatment methods. On the other hand, the digital information environment may reinforce anxiety, unrealistic expectations regarding sexual performance, and a tendency toward self-diagnosis and self-treatment.

Methodology

This study has a review-based design focused on systematic medical information retrieval. The research material was collected from the PubMed database and Google scholar using targeted search queries. The analysis focused on the articles aimed at the psychological, medical, and biopsychosocial aspects of erectile dysfunction (ED), as well as the impact of the digital information environment on the perception, diagnosis, and treatment of this condition. The selection of sources primarily included systematic reviews and meta-analyses, recommendations issued by scientific societies (such as ESSM), and studies examining the quality and reliability of sexual health content available on social media and online platforms.

Literature Review

1. Psychological Consequences of Erectile Dysfunction

The literature indicates that ED can have a significant impact on men's psychological functioning. A systematic review of studies examining the psychosocial consequences of ED found that, before treatment, patients frequently reported reduced sexual satisfaction, poorer sexual relationship quality, reduced self-confidence, lower self-esteem, and depressive symptoms. At the same time, improvements in erectile function following treatment were associated with improvements in most of the psychosocial outcomes analyzed (McCabe & Althof, 2014).

An important element of the psychological experience of ED is anxiety related to the evaluation of one's sexual performance. An unsuccessful attempt at sexual intercourse may lead to anticipation of another failure, increased attention to one's own sexual functioning, and avoidance of intimate situations. In this way, a vicious cycle may develop: a single failure increases anxiety, anxiety makes it more difficult to achieve an erection, and another failure reinforces the belief that one is sexually inadequate (Dewitte et al., 2021; Brotto et al., 2025).

The ESSM indicates that psychological factors may both contribute to the development of ED and maintain an existing disorder. Particular importance is attributed to fear of failure, dysfunctional beliefs about sex, avoidance of sexual activity, and difficulties with communication and intimacy within a relationship (Dewitte et al., 2021). For this reason, psychological interventions should include, among other approaches, cognitive-behavioral techniques, anxiety reduction, and work on communication between partners (Dewitte et al., 2021; Brotto et al., 2025).

2. ED, Depression, and Mental Health

The relationship between ED and depression is particularly important from the perspective of the psychological impact of sexual dysfunction. A systematic review and meta-analysis of studies examining ED and depression confirmed a significant association between these problems, while also indicating the possibility of a bidirectional relationship. Depression may increase the risk of developing ED, while the presence of ED itself may increase the likelihood of depressive symptoms (Liu et al., 2018).

This relationship has clinical significance because ED should not be regarded solely as an isolated sexual problem. Low mood, low self-esteem, a sense of loss of masculinity, and fear of judgment may affect both sexual behavior and overall quality of life (McCabe & Althof, 2014; Dewitte et al., 2021). Consequently, effective management should address not only the restoration of erectile function but also the patient's psychological well-being (Dewitte et al., 2021; Brotto et al., 2025).

3. ED and Intimate Relationships

Erectile dysfunction can affect the functioning of both partners. Erectile difficulties may be interpreted by a female or male partner as an indication of a lack of attractiveness, lack of desire, or problems within the relationship, even when the actual cause of ED is biological or psychological. At the same time, the man may experience shame and fear of disappointing his partner (McCabe & Althof, 2014; Dewitte et al., 2021).

The psychosocial literature indicates that treatment should take the relational context into account rather than focusing exclusively on the patient's individual symptoms. The ESSM recommends a multidisciplinary approach combining medical treatment with psychological interventions (Dewitte et al., 2021). Such an approach may improve not only sexual function but also treatment adherence and the quality of the sexual relationship (Dewitte et al., 2021; Brotto et al., 2025).

More recent recommendations from the Fifth International Consultation on Sexual Medicine (ICSM 2024) also emphasize the need to consider the psychosocial needs of the patient and their partner and to make treatment decisions collaboratively (Brotto et al., 2025; Stern et al., 2025).

4. Medical Treatment and the Psychological Experience of ED

The development of pharmacotherapy, particularly phosphodiesterase type 5 inhibitors (PDE5 inhibitors), has significantly changed the treatment of ED. Current ICSM recommendations identify PDE5 inhibitors as first-line treatment for most men, while emphasizing the importance of individualized therapy. In cases of inadequate effectiveness or contraindications, other methods are also available, including intracavernosal injections, vacuum erection devices, and penile prostheses (Stern et al., 2025).

Pharmacotherapy may also have psychological significance. Improvement in erectile function may lead to increased self-confidence and sexual satisfaction. A systematic review of studies found improvements in many psychosocial parameters following the use of PDE5 inhibitors, although their effects on overall life satisfaction and relationship satisfaction were less consistent (McCabe & Althof, 2014).

At the same time, excessive emphasis on pharmacological treatment may reduce ED to a purely physiological issue. The ESSM points out that easy access to medical treatment may lead both patients and clinicians to overlook the psychological and relational determinants of the disorder (Dewitte et al., 2021).

The contemporary approach should therefore move away from simply contrasting medical and psychological treatment. A more appropriate model is an integrative one, in which pharmacotherapy is used to improve physiological function, while psychological interventions help reduce anxiety, modify dysfunctional beliefs, and improve communication and sexual relationships (Dewitte et al., 2021; Brotto et al., 2025; Stern et al., 2025).

5. The Internet as a Source of Information About Erectile Dysfunction

ED is a particularly important health issue in the context of seeking information online. Shame, fear of judgment, and difficulties discussing the problem with a physician may cause men to turn first to Internet search engines or online communities (Dewitte et al., 2021; Dubin et al., 2024; Sellke et al., 2023).

A study analyzing posts by young men on Reddit found that fewer than one-third of the individuals analyzed reported having consulted a physician regarding ED. At the same time, attempts to explain the causes of the problem independently were common, including explanations involving mental health problems, pornography, or masturbation. The analyzed material also included depressive symptoms and statements concerning self-harm or suicidal thoughts (Sellke et al., 2023).

These findings suggest that the Internet may serve an ambivalent function. On the one hand, it provides anonymity and the opportunity to obtain support for a problem that may be difficult to discuss directly. On the other hand, users may receive information from people without medical training, base their diagnosis on the experiences of other users, or undertake treatment without consulting a specialist (Sellke et al., 2023; Dubin et al., 2024; Fode et al., 2020).

6. Misinformation About ED on Social Media

One of the most important problems in the contemporary information environment is the spread of misinformation, meaning information that is false, inaccurate, or misleading. This problem is particularly visible on social media, where the popularity of content does not necessarily correspond to its scientific quality (Dubin et al., 2024; George et al., 2025).

An analysis of men's health content on TikTok and Instagram found a very high level of interest in these topics while simultaneously identifying low overall information quality. Physicians accounted for only a small proportion of the content analyzed, while materials published by professionals were significantly more consistent with scientific knowledge than content created by non-physicians (Dubin et al., 2024).

The mechanism through which social media algorithms operate is particularly noteworthy. Content generating high levels of user engagement is more likely to be further disseminated. Consequently, controversial, sensational, or quick-result-oriented messages may be more visible than scientific information, which often requires discussion of limitations, risks, and uncertainty. More recent literature on social media and men's health highlights the potential for the algorithmic amplification of popular content to contribute to the spread of misinformation and to make it more difficult for users to distinguish evidence-based information from speculation (George et al., 2025; Dubin et al., 2024).

7. The Quality of Information About ED on YouTube

The problem of information quality can also be observed on YouTube. A study of videos concerning ED found that, although the materials were often relatively easy to understand, their overall quality was limited. The median DISCERN score was 2 on a five-point scale, and 80.4% of the videos received a score of no more than 3. Furthermore, 28% of the videos analyzed contained direct misinformation (Fode et al., 2020).

Similar results were obtained in a study of Arabic-language YouTube content concerning ED. Only 16% of the videos analyzed were classified as evidence-based, whereas 84% did not meet this criterion. Importantly, the number of views or likes did not correlate with the reliability of the information (Fode et al., 2020).

From a psychological perspective, this means that patients may mistakenly equate the popularity of information with its truthfulness. If numerous materials present ED as a problem that can be resolved through a “natural” product, a particular diet, a supplement, or a simple sexual behavior, users may perceive such solutions as more accessible than comprehensive medical consultation (Fode et al., 2020; George et al., 2025).

8. Reddit and Online Communities as Alternative Sources of Knowledge

Reddit represents an interesting example of an online community in which users share experiences concerning ED and its treatment. An analysis of 2,634 comments from two Reddit threads dedicated to men and ED identified 45 different treatment methods. These included, among other approaches, changes in sexual behavior, lifestyle modifications, medical treatment, communication with a partner, and supplements (Sellke et al., 2023).

The most concerning finding is that only 24.4% of the treatment methods discussed were consistent with current American Urological Association guidelines. Furthermore, fewer than half of the positive statements concerning treatments referred to guideline-consistent methods (Sellke et al., 2023).

These findings demonstrate a potential discrepancy between “user experience” and scientific evidence. A personal success story can be highly psychologically persuasive, even though it does not constitute evidence of the effectiveness of a particular method. In the case of ED, this problem may be particularly important because users often seek a solution that is quick, discreet, and does not require a visit to a physician (Sellke et al., 2023; Dewitte et al., 2021).

9. Misinformation, Supplements, and Counterfeit Medications

One of the most practical risks associated with online misinformation is the sale of products advertised as “natural” remedies for improving erectile function. The literature indicates that some such products may contain undeclared pharmacological substances (Sansone et al., 2021; Ho et al., 2022).

In a study of products advertised as natural sexual-performance enhancers, 74 of 91 samples analyzed contained PDE5 inhibitors or their analogues. Significant differences in the composition of individual samples were also identified, along with inadequate labeling information (Ho et al., 2022).

A more recent study of products sold online as herbal alternatives to Viagra likewise demonstrated the problem of product adulteration. All three products purchased contained sildenafil, despite being advertised as herbal preparations, and one of them contained approximately 200 mg of sildenafil (Ho et al., 2022).

This issue has not only medical but also psychological implications. A man experiencing shame or anxiety about seeking medical consultation may prefer to purchase a product online because doing so allows him to maintain anonymity. Thus, psychological barriers associated with ED may increase vulnerability to online marketing and misinformation (Dewitte et al., 2021; Sansone et al., 2021).

10. The “Infodemic” and Sexual Health

This phenomenon can be interpreted within the broader context of the so-called infodemic. The World Health Organization describes an infodemic as an overabundance of information, including false or misleading information, which may lead to confusion and risky health behaviors. Digitalization and the development of social media increase the speed at which information can be disseminated.

Although the concept of an infodemic was developed particularly in the context of health crises, its mechanisms are useful for analyzing the digital information environment surrounding ED. A man seeking answers to an intimate problem may simultaneously encounter medical content, user opinions, supplement advertisements, pseudoscientific explanations, and pornographic content. The boundaries between education, marketing, and personal opinion may be difficult for users to recognize (Dubin et al., 2024; George et al., 2025; Sellke et al., 2023; Fode et al., 2020).

11. The Digital Information Environment and Masculinity

An especially important area for future research concerns the influence of digital representations of masculinity on the experience of ED. Contemporary social media often promote an image of men as sexually capable, physically attractive, and able to engage in unlimited sexual activity. Such messages may create unrealistic standards of sexuality (George et al., 2025; Dubin et al., 2024).

For a man experiencing ED, the discrepancy between actual functioning and an idealized image may lead to shame, reduced self-esteem, and increased fear of judgment. In this way, the digital environment may not only provide information about ED but also influence how men interpret their own symptoms (McCabe & Althof, 2014; Dewitte et al., 2021; George et al., 2025).

This issue is particularly important in the context of young men. Studies of Reddit posts indicate that young users often attempt to explain their erectile difficulties through pornography, masturbation, testosterone levels, or other popular narratives present on the Internet (Sellke et al., 2023).

This does not mean, however, that all online discussions have a negative impact. Anonymous communities can reduce feelings of isolation, facilitate the exchange of experiences, and encourage individuals to seek professional help. The problem is therefore not the mere presence of the Internet but the lack of mechanisms enabling users to distinguish personal experience from evidence-based knowledge (Sellke et al., 2023; George et al., 2025).

12. Differences Between Evidence-Based Treatment and Self-Treatment

The literature makes it possible to identify characteristic differences between evidence-based medicine and independently searching for solutions online. Official recommendations emphasize the need for diagnostic assessment, evaluation of risk factors, individualized treatment, and consideration of the patient's psychological and relational needs (Stern et al., 2025; Dewitte et al., 2021; Brotto et al., 2025).

The Internet, by contrast, often presents ED as a problem that can be solved quickly through a specific product or a simple behavioral change. Such a message may be particularly attractive to a person who feels ashamed and wishes to avoid contact with the healthcare system (Dubin et al., 2024; Fode et al., 2020; Sellke et al., 2023; George et al., 2025).

The problem also lies in the fact that ED may be a sign of other health problems. Therefore, completely avoiding medical consultation may result not only in ineffective treatment of ED but also in failure to detect comorbid conditions. Current medical sources emphasize that ED may coexist with conditions including vascular disease and diabetes (Stern et al., 2025).

13. Opportunities for Combating Misinformation

The literature indicates that combating misinformation should not be limited to removing it. Increasing the presence of specialists in the digital space is an important component. Studies concerning TikTok and Instagram indicate that content created by physicians was considerably more reliable than content published by non-physicians (Dubin et al., 2024).

At the same time, more recent reviews concerning social media and andrology indicate that the mere presence of experts may be insufficient. Professional content must also be adapted to the characteristics of digital communication: it should be concise, understandable, engaging, and suited to the way users consume information (George et al., 2025).

In this context, digital health literacy may play an important role, referring to the ability to find, evaluate, and use health information obtained from digital sources. In the case of ED, this may include the ability to recognize advertisements disguised as educational content, identify reliable medical sources, understand the difference between an opinion and scientific evidence, and recognize potentially dangerous products (George et al., 2025; Dubin et al., 2024; Fode et al., 2020; Sansone et al., 2021).

14. Research Gap

Despite the growing number of studies examining the psychological consequences of ED and the quality of health information available online, the literature still contains several important gaps (Dewitte et al., 2021; McCabe & Althof, 2014; Dubin et al., 2024; Fode et al., 2020; Sellke et al., 2023; George et al., 2025).

First, there are relatively few studies directly linking the psychological experience of ED with exposure to online misinformation. Most studies examine either the psychosocial consequences of ED or the quality of online information concerning sexual health (McCabe & Althof, 2014; Dewitte et al., 2021; Dubin et al., 2024; Fode et al., 2020; Sellke et al., 2023).

Second, prospective studies are needed to determine whether exposure to specific types of online content actually increases anxiety, lowers self-esteem, or delays contact with a physician, or whether individuals who already experience greater levels of anxiety and shame are more likely to seek information online (Dewitte et al., 2021; Sellke et al., 2023).

Third, research is needed into the influence of recommendation algorithms. The process through which a single search concerning ED may lead to subsequent content about pornography, testosterone, supplements, “natural” treatment methods, or pharmacotherapy remains insufficiently understood (Dubin et al., 2024; George et al., 2025).

Fourth, there are relatively few studies comparing the effects of different platforms—for example, TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, Reddit, and online forums—on perceptions of ED and treatment-related decision-making (Dubin et al., 2024; Fode et al., 2020; Sellke et al., 2023; George et al., 2025).

15. Conclusions From the Literature Review

An analysis of existing research indicates that ED should be understood as a problem with multidimensional consequences. Erectile dysfunction can affect self-esteem, self-confidence, mental health, sexual satisfaction, and intimate relationships. In turn, psychological factors such as fear of failure, depression, and dysfunctional beliefs about sexuality may contribute to the development or persistence of ED (McCabe & Althof, 2014; Liu et al., 2018; Dewitte et al., 2021; Brotto et al., 2025).

Contemporary treatment should therefore combine medical and psychological approaches. Current recommendations emphasize the importance of personalized treatment and consideration of the needs of both the patient and their partner (Dewitte et al., 2021; Brotto et al., 2025; Stern et al., 2025).

At the same time, digitalization has changed the way men seek information about ED. Social media and online forums may reduce the barrier of shame and provide a sense of community, but they may also facilitate the spread of misinformation. Studies of Reddit, YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram indicate a significant presence of content that is inconsistent with current scientific evidence (Sellke et al., 2023; Fode et al., 2020; Dubin et al., 2024; George et al., 2025).

A particularly dangerous consequence of digital misinformation is the possibility of progressing from incorrect information to actual health behavior—for example, self-administering supplements, purchasing medications from unreliable sources, or avoiding medical consultation. Literature concerning counterfeit and contaminated sexual-enhancement products demonstrates that this risk is real rather than merely theoretical (Sansone et al., 2021; Ho et al., 2022).

Ultimately, the relationship between ED, psychological well-being, treatment, and the digital environment should be understood as a dynamic feedback loop. ED symptoms may cause anxiety and shame, which encourage men to seek anonymous information online. Exposure to misinformation may then increase uncertainty, reinforce unrealistic expectations, or lead to inappropriate treatment decisions. Conversely, effective, evidence-based medical treatment combined with psychological support may reduce both ED symptoms and their negative psychosocial consequences (Dewitte et al., 2021; McCabe & Althof, 2014; Sellke et al., 2023; George et al., 2025).

Discussion

Erectile dysfunction should be viewed as a multidimensional problem whose significance extends beyond physiological dysfunction itself. The analysis of the literature presented here indicates that ED is closely associated with men’s psychological functioning, self-esteem, sense of self-worth, anxiety levels, depressive symptoms, and the quality of intimate relationships. At the same time, psychological factors may not only be consequences of ED but may also contribute to its development and persistence. Fear of sexual failure is particularly important because it may lead to a vicious cycle that perpetuates symptoms and increases the patient’s psychological burden.

The contemporary approach to ED should therefore be based on a biopsychosocial model and involve the integration of medical diagnosis and treatment with psychological interventions and consideration of the relational context. Pharmacotherapy, including the use of PDE5 inhibitors, remains an important component of treatment; however, improvement in erectile function does not always mean that the problem has been fully resolved. Effective treatment should also address the patient’s emotional needs, reduce anxiety, modify dysfunctional beliefs about sexuality, and support communication between partners.

The digital information environment is an important contemporary factor influencing the experience of ED. The Internet can serve as a valuable source of education, enable anonymous help-seeking, and reduce

feelings of isolation associated with sexual problems. At the same time, the availability of large amounts of unverified information may make it difficult for users to distinguish evidence-based knowledge from opinions, personal experiences, marketing, and misinformation. The popularity of a particular piece of content does not necessarily correspond to its scientific credibility.

The possibility of misinformation translating into actual health behaviors is particularly important. Self-administration of supplements, purchasing products from unreliable sources, basing a diagnosis on the experiences of other users, or avoiding medical consultation may result in ineffective or potentially dangerous management. In the case of ED, this problem is further intensified by shame, fear of judgment, and the desire to maintain anonymity. These factors may make quick and discreet solutions offered online more attractive than professional diagnosis and comprehensive treatment.

Based on the literature reviewed, the digital environment may also influence not only how ED is treated but also how men interpret their own sexual performance. Idealized representations of masculinity and sexuality may reinforce unrealistic expectations, increase feelings of inadequacy, and intensify fear of judgment. At the same time, anonymous online communities may have a positive function by enabling the exchange of experiences and encouraging individuals to seek professional help. The key problem is therefore not the mere presence of the Internet but the quality of available content and the user's ability to evaluate it critically.

An important research gap remains the insufficient understanding of the direct relationship between exposure to ED-related misinformation and men's psychological functioning. Prospective studies are particularly needed to determine whether specific types of online content contribute to increased anxiety, reduced self-esteem, delayed medical consultation, or risky treatment decisions. Further research should also examine the role of recommendation algorithms and differences between individual social media platforms.

Conclusions

The way men seek information about ED in the digital environment may influence their psychological experience of the disorder, treatment choices, and willingness to seek professional help. However, the mechanism underlying this influence is not unidirectional.

It can be conceptualized as a potential feedback loop:

ED → shame and anxiety → seeking anonymous information online → exposure to content of varying quality → changes in the interpretation of symptoms → selection of a particular treatment approach → decision to seek or avoid medical consultation.

When reliable information is available, this process may instead have a positive trajectory:

reduced uncertainty → better understanding of ED → greater awareness of treatment options → greater willingness to seek consultation → evidence-based treatment

In conclusion, ED should be regarded as a complex phenomenon existing in a dynamic relationship between the body, psychological well-being, interpersonal relationships, and the information environment. Effectively addressing its negative consequences requires not only access to effective treatment methods but also appropriate health education, the development of digital competencies, and the availability of reliable and accessible content created by specialists. Combining medical, psychological, and educational approaches may reduce both the consequences of erectile dysfunction itself and the risks arising from misinformation and inappropriate decisions made under its influence.

REFERENCES

1. Dewitte, M., Bettocchi, C., Carvalho, J., Corona, G., Flink, I., Limoncin, E., Pascoal, P., Reisman, Y., & Van Lankveld, J. (2021). A psychosocial approach to erectile dysfunction: Position statements from the European Society of Sexual Medicine (ESSM). *Sexual Medicine*, 9(6), 100434. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.esxm.2021.100434>
2. Stern, N., Bajic, P., Campbell, J., Capogrosso, P., Domes, T., Miranda, E. P., Mulhall, J. P., Nascimento, B., Pignanelli, M., Pastuszak, A. W., & Brock, G. (2025). Evolving medical management of erectile dysfunction: Recommendations from the Fifth International Consultation on Sexual Medicine (ICSM 2024). *Sexual Medicine Reviews*, 13(4), 513–537. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sxmrev/qeaf035>
3. Brotto, L. A., Atallah, S., Carvalho, J., Gordon, E., Pascoal, P. M., Reda, M., Stephenson, K. R., & Tavares, I. M. (2025). Psychological and interpersonal dimensions of sexual function and dysfunction: Recommendations from the Fifth International Consultation on Sexual Medicine (ICSM 2024). *Sexual Medicine Reviews*, 13(2), 118–143. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sxmrev/qeae073>
4. McCabe, M. P., & Althof, S. E. (2014). A systematic review of the psychosocial outcomes associated with erectile dysfunction: Does the impact of erectile dysfunction extend beyond a man's inability to have sex? *The Journal of Sexual Medicine*, 11(2), 347–363. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jsm.12374>
5. Liu, Q., Zhang, Y., Wang, J., Li, S., Cheng, Y., Guo, J., Tang, Y., Zeng, H., & Zhu, Z. (2018). Erectile dysfunction and depression: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *The Journal of Sexual Medicine*, 15(8), 1073–1082. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsxm.2018.05.016>
6. Dubin, J. M., Aguiar, J. A., Lin, J. S., Greenberg, D. R., Keeter, M. K., Fantus, R. J., Pham, M. N., Hudnall, M. T., Bennett, N. E., Brannigan, R. E., & Halpern, J. A. (2024). The broad reach and inaccuracy of men's health information on social media: Analysis of TikTok and Instagram. *International Journal of Impotence Research*, 36, 256–260. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41443-022-00645-6>
7. Sellke, N., Jesse, E., Callegari, M., Muncey, W., Harris, D., Edwins, R., Pominville, R., Abou Ghayda, R., Loeb, A., & Thirumavalavan, N. (2023). Is Reddit a reliable source for information on erectile dysfunction treatment? *International Journal of Impotence Research*, 35, 484–489. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41443-022-00586-0>
8. Fode, M., Nolsøe, A. B., Jacobsen, F. M., Russo, G. I., Østergren, P. B., Jensen, C. F. S., Albersen, M., Capogrosso, P., & Sønksen, J. (2020). Quality of information in YouTube videos on erectile dysfunction. *Sexual Medicine*, 8(3), 408–413. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.esxm.2020.05.007>
9. George, M., Modgil, V., Pearce, I., & Stasinou, T. (2025). Social media and men's health: Separating science from speculation in andrology. *Basic and Clinical Andrology*, 35, 28. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12610-025-00275-0>
10. Sansone, A., Cuzin, B., & Jannini, E. A. (2021). Facing counterfeit medications in sexual medicine: A systematic scoping review on social strategies and technological solutions. *Sexual Medicine*, 9(6), 100437. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.esxm.2021.100437>
11. Ho, H. M. K., Xiong, Z., Wong, H. Y., & Buanz, A. (2022). The era of fake medicines: Investigating counterfeit medicinal products for erectile dysfunction disguised as herbal supplements. *International Journal of Pharmaceutics*, 617, 121592. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijpharm.2022.121592>