Internet and Social Network as Health/ Physical Activity Information Sources

Dulce Esteves
Beira Interior University, Portugal & CIDESD - Research Center in Sports Sciences, Health and Human Development, Portugal

Paulo Pinheiro
Beira Interior University, Portugal & NECE - Research Center in Business Sciences, Portugal

Kelly O'Hara
Beira Interior University, Portugal & CIDESD - Research Center in Sports Sciences, Health and Human Development, Portugal

Rui Brás
Beira Interior University, Portugal & CIDESD - Research Center in Sports Sciences, Health and Human Development, Portugal

INTRODUCTION

The Internet increasingly serves as a platform for the delivery of health information and its potential use as health information source has been demonstrated across a wide range of conditions (Bennett & Glasgow, 2009).

The Internet has been acknowledged as a valuable channel of health promotion, with information in web spread throw static health educational sites, peer support groups, online health consultations and delivery of Internet interventions (Vandelanotte, Spathonis, Eakin, & Owen, 2007).

Health information seeking is defined as the purposive acquisition of information from selected information sources to guide health-related decision making (Johnson & Case, 2012).

Health information seeking behavior comprehends intentional or active efforts to obtain specific information not found by the normal patterns of media exposure or by interpersonal sources (Atkin, 1973; Griffin, Dunwoody, & Neuwirth, 1999).

Lambert and Loiselle (2007) consider two main dimensions when defining the concept of Health information seeking behavior: (1) the information dimension, that emphasizes the characteristics of the information sought, namely the type (content and diversity of the search) and the amount (how much information about a given topic one seeks) and (2) the method dimension, focused on the discretionary actions individual use to obtain health related information and sources of information used (include direct and indirect questioning, asking for clarifications, discussing and exchanging information with others, reading and using information technologies).

Considering the information dimension of health information seeking behavior, Weaver et al. (2009) consider the existence of two main groups: one more related to medicine (with high loadings on the medications, illness or disease, treatments and insurance measures) and other related with wellbeing (with high loadings on the exercise and diet measures). Physical Activity (PA) information seeking on the Internet is considered as a sub-level of health information seeking by Pew Surveys (Jones & Fox, 2009). This article intends to present the potentialities, problems and future trends of the use of the

Internet and online Social Networks (SN) as PA information sources and promoting channels and the actual perspective of associated technology to become active.

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BACKGROUND

Regular moderate-intensity PA influences health status and wellbeing, with important role in the prevention of various chronic diseases (Klavestrand & Vingård, 2009). In fact, the benefits of PA on health have been extensively reported by World Health Organization, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (USA), American College of Sport Medicine, American Heart Association, European Community (EU Working Group "Sport & Health"). Embracing an active lifestyle is broadly seen as an important step to achieve good health status and wellbeing, among all ages.

The exponential growth and penetration of new information technologies may affect the PA patterns, since those technologies

1. May be an adequate channel to delivery PA promotion policies, and
2. They are an important information repository that individuals can use to seek for exercise and fitness information.

Considering the importance of exercise on health status, Fox and Jones (2009) report a huge interest in information about exercise and fitness by Internet users. The percentage of American adults getting PA information online increased from 21% in 2002 to 38% in 2009, the major evolution of the health topic covered in the survey. Pew Project report showed that 72% of online 18-29 year olds use SN websites, and 31% of online teens (aged 12-17) get their information on health, dieting or PA from the Internet (Gabarron, Fernandez-Luque, Armayones, & Lau, 2013).

McCully, Don, and Updegraff (2013), consider that when analyzing the Internet use for seeking PA information, people generally search for PA associate with healthy dietary, and weight control. Internet users seeking information about weight, dietary and PA, show a higher level of PA and more fruits and vegetables intake than those who do not use the Internet to seek this kind of information (Mcully et al., 2013).

Indeed, the Internet is an interesting medium for seeking and promoting Health and PA, since

1. It provides the option of delivering versions of individualized computer-tailored interventions at any time and place (Brouwer et al., 2009);
2. Have the potential to service large numbers of the population (Vandelanotte et al., 2007);
3. Have convenience, novelty, appeal and flexibility of use (Leslie, Marshall, Owen, & Bauman, 2005);
4. Permit automated data collection (Brouwer et al., 2009);
5. Allows proactive recruitment (contacting potential participants and offering them services) (Leslie et al., 2005);
6. Can be delivered through various non-face-to-face channels, thus reducing the influence of barriers associated with face-to-face interventions (e.g., time constraints, childcare) (Marcus et al., 2007);
7. Allows participants to access large amounts of information and choose the time to interact and receive information (Brouwer et al., 2009); and
8. Offer the advantages of cost savings (Steele, Mummerey, & Dwyer, 2007).

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