Israeli internet healthcare sites evaluation and content analysis / Valerie Magidov

Abstract:

The purpose of this qualitative research is to evaluate the quality of Israeli Internet healthcare sites and to examine if there are differences between the public, trade and private sectors. In addition it examines the possibility to identify criteria for evaluating healthcare Internet sites for health consumers and information managers without any special medical education.

Research questions:

1. Is it possible to develop criteria for evaluating Internet healthcare sites for healthcare consumers and information managers without special medical education?
2. What are the characteristics of Israeli healthcare sites according to criteria?
3. Are the differences between the healthcare sites in the public, trade and private sectors?

Different approaches for evaluating the quality of healthcare sites and some researches of the subject are presented in the literature review. Research questions deal with 11 evaluation criteria: authority, purpose of the site, currency, navigability and accessibility, links, design, audience, interactivity, usage, security and privacy policy. 45 healthcare sites, which were chosen randomly in the Israeli search engine "Achla", have been examined. The sites were divided into 3 sectors: public, trade and private. There were 15 sites in each sector.

As mentioned above, the evaluation was done using 11 criteria, each of which was divided into categories that define the criteria.

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Findings related to the first research question indicate that there is an agreement among most of the researches on main criteria for evaluating healthcare sites. 11 criteria for evaluation by health consumers and information managers without special medical education were developed on the basis of frequent criteria.

Findings related to the second research question indicates that (according to the criteria):

1. Authority- Israeli health consumers don't get necessary information about the institutions and the people behind the site. More than half of the sites don't provide at all or only partially provide information regarding the managers, designers and sponsors of the sites. Only in half of the sites the person in charge of the information has medical education. Only one third of the authors refer to sources.

2. Purpose of the site- all of the sites deal with advertisement. At the same time, more than one third of them provide content in addition and less than a third provide services as well.

3. Currency- most of the sites don't give any information about the currency of the data. Consequently, the Israeli health consumer doesn't know if the information he or she uses is the latest and the most updated.

4. Navigability and accessibility- more than one half of the sites are well organized, the navigation is rather simple with easy search, and convenient to the end user.

5. Links- both internal and external links are held on a high level in most of the sites.

6. Design- most of the sites looking good, making good impression, the pages are well planned and the design of the text itself is convenient for reading.

7. Audience- all of the sites apply to health consumers and only a few apply to healthcare professionals and institutions as well.

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8. Interactivity- the interactive service is low, it is hardly possible to tailor information, to take part in chat rooms, or to join a distribution group. In addition, feedback mechanisms are useless, as only one third of the sites have answered the question asked by the author of this research.

9. Usage- numerous sites provide data regarding the number of site visitors, therefore it's impossible to determine the exact level of rating of Israeli healthcare sites, though the difference is found between the public, trade and private sectors. This difference is discussed in findings related to the third research question.

10. Languages- Israeli healthcare sites use four languages: Hebrew, English, Russian and Arabic. Israeli sites are written in Hebrew, English and more often on both languages.

11. Security and privacy policy- a very small percentage of Israeli sites uphold the security and privacy policy.

Findings related to the third research question indicate that significant differences between public, trade and private sectors are found in all categories in the criteria of site design, in the category of navigation and logical organization in the criteria of navigability and accessibility, and in the criteria of usage.

In general, Israeli healthcare sites are of the lowest quality in the private sector, in comparison with those in the public and the trade sectors. The results confirm the concept of literature review that the health consumer has to examine the quality of healthcare internet information sources, be alert of sales propaganda, potential conflict of interests and exposure to incurrent information written by a person without any medical education.

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