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“ABSOLUTE MONOPOLY”, “AREAS OF CONTROL” OR “DEMOCRACY”? EXAMINING GENDER DIFFERENCES IN HEALTH PARTICIPATION ON SOCIAL MEDIA

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Statement of the Problem: Online health participation relates to different aspects of active steps made online in order to elicit or provide information or support. Studies extensively investigate search for health information online. However, studies investigating health participation online are rare, so are the studies investigating this phenomenon on social media. Moreover, none of them considers gender differences regarding this phenomenon. In addition, these studies relate to health participation as a single phenomenon, whereas it is known that social media use is multidimensional.

Methodology & Theoretical Orientation: This study encountered between several hypotheses. First hypothesis is “absolute monopoly”, according to which women, who are known as dominant in search for online health information, will also be dominant on health participation domain. Second hypothesis, “areas of control”, argues that men are more active health participants than women. The third hypothesis is “democracy”, according to which there are no gender differences in health participation on social media. The data were collected through telephone survey of about 1000 respondents. Three aspects of health participation on social media were examined using binary logistic regression analysis: sharing own experience with coping with chronic health condition, discussing the work of health institutions and posting or commenting the health-related content.

Findings: The results mostly support the “democracy” hypothesis. No gender differences found in multivariate analysis. However, the bivariate analysis provided a little support for the “absolute monopoly” hypothesis. Women tend to post/comment the health-related content on social media more than men.

Conclusion & Significance: The health participation on social media is democratic in terms of gender. Women seem not succeeding in transformation of their dominance from search for health information area to the health participation domain. Conversely, men do not manage to establish dominance in this area of health-related social media use.

Biography

Dennis Rosenberg writes a Ph. D. dissertation on the effect of health-related social media use on health behavior changes. His dissertation includes theoretical frameworks from various fields of research: communication studies, information systems research, public health research and sociology. His studies are based on the data collected during his Ph.D. studies. He is interested in studying gender and ethnic differences in health-related use of social media and factors affecting sustained health-related use of social media. In addition, he studies various aspects of e-government use in Israel and different aspects of immigrants' inclusion into a broader society (marriage patterns and intentions to stay in the country).

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