

# A New Health Information Platform: Youth Consumer Behaviour towards Healthcare Websites

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**Abstract.** This study has explored the youths' behaviour towards healthcare websites as a new form of receiving health information. Mixed method was employed to triangulate the results. 300 respondents from the Klang Valley, Malaysia who have used healthcare websites to search for health information were selected as the sample of the study. The age range of the respondents was 18 to 25. Besides that, focus groups were conducted to interview 15 respondents. The Theory of Reasoned Action was used to guide this research, as the questionnaires were created based on the elements on this theory. The results showed that youths found healthcare websites informative and they had specific intentions of using these websites. Healthcare websites are the new source for healthcare information, especially for tech-savvy young generation.

**Keywords:** Youth, Behavior, Healthcare Website, Theory of Reasoned Action.

## 1. Introduction

Due to the steadily growing relationship involving health organization and people who seek for health information, there has been a massive amount of online healthcare information [1]. Healthcare has become so popular on the internet, that the Consumer and Patient Health Information Section (CAPHIS) took the liberty of listing healthcare websites on the webpage titled: *Top 100 List: Health Websites You Can Trust*. This page contains healthcare information on general health, women's health, men's health and other health related issues (Consumer and Patient Health Information Section [2]).

Health information is strewn over all types of media platforms from books, television programs, radio channels, and so forth. A case in point, whenever we visit clinics or hospitals, we can find numerous amounts of information on health through pamphlets while waiting to see the doctor, and with the rise of technology and science, we even have the advantage of using the internet to gain facts and truly understand our sickness and symptoms [3].

Both government and private sectors are in unison when it comes to the importance of educating the public on health [4]. Every year, large sums of funds are credited to the media in efforts to create awareness of past, present, and new information. This is done in hope that the public will receive accurate information on health, the transformation of health beliefs and the creation of new health performances. Those who are involved in the healthcare industry have had first-hand experiences dealing with the public who constantly get wrong information regarding health, and are in the dark of the ever-changing health systems. These experts urge the public to rely on mass media as the foundation for the dissemination of knowledge regarding health, assuming that the message will get across, as plenty of hard work is required by media officials to spread information to all walks of life.

With health related pages for us to follow and like, it is an unending well of information that defies time and space. Furthermore, Harvey et al. [4] claimed that at times, it is an ardent task for this group of people to discuss their health problems face-to-face with their doctors, mostly due to privacy issues. It can be difficult to discuss sensitive issues with their doctors, although there is patient-doctor confidentiality during these medical sessions. When doctors receive inadequate information about the patient's problem, it will not solve the problem but increase the possibility of making things worse.

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With all this stumbling blocks, this group needs an alternative approach to seek for health information, and this is where the internet comes into the picture. It provides all the answers to their questions and doubts and with the benefit of no direct contact with any health providers. As mentioned earlier, many websites provide healthcare information, which is accessible 24 hours a day, and it is user-friendly, therefore removing any form of complexity of difficulty [5].

If we look at the evolution of healthcare websites, we need to consider how the internet has changed since it first started. At one point, the government had full control over the internet, using it for research and security purposes, twenty-odd years down the road; it has now become a source of universal information where the government, private sectors and individuals can contribute to it [6].

In the past, one could only find healthcare information by visiting a doctor, and you could only do it when you are not feeling well, even then, it is highly unlikely that we actually ask our doctor what is wrong. Many patients are now taking part in finding information of their health through blogs, social networks and so forth in order to fulfill all the unanswered questions [7].

People who surf the net to find health information are likely to have a high interest in health. They may read health related articles, watch health-related programs on the television, and/or discuss health issues with family and friends [8]. Nevertheless, we are grateful to be in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, where the internet has proven time and time again to be our main source of knowledge. What makes the information on these websites credible is that well-known practitioners are the ones contributing their medical expertise, as debated by Owen & Feng [9].

Consumers can easily be attracted to websites that have relevant information that is easy to retrieve [10]. The main issues of this study are to look at whether attitude and behaviour play a role when youths decide to seek information on health using healthcare websites. If so, how often must one visit a website of this genre for it to become a norm every time they go online? With the issues stated above, it leads us to this question: Does consumer behaviour play a role in youths' decision to use healthcare websites?

## 2. Literature Review

An article by Hardt & Hollis-Sawyer [11] entitled Older Adults Seeking Healthcare Information on the Internet looks at how the elderly people are facing difficulties in adjusting to the ever-increasing costs of healthcare, and owing to these circumstances, will they turn to the internet to find information on health? The results showed that although surfing the net is one of the best way to find health information, it was not the preferred choice for older consumers. The male participants did not mention any usage of the internet to find health information, whilst the female respondents only listed the net as their fourth option to find health-related information. The reason for this behaviour is that senior citizens trust and rely solely on their doctors for all their health information.

A review of postnatal mental health websites: help for healthcare professionals and patients [12], aims to verify whether the internet has accessible and effective information on helping women who suffer from postnatal mental illness. The study's main purpose is to justify the quality of information provided. To find websites that have information on postnatal mental illness, specific keywords such as "*postnatal depression*", "*postnatal illness*", "*postpartum depression*" and "*postpartum illness*" were typed into search engines (Google, Yahoo, Ask Jeeves and Bing). Research findings found that the substance and quality of all the websites varied. Most of the websites focused on symptoms rather than any risk factors, while others had superficial information.

Taken from the American Journal of Managed Care, Using Websites to Engage Consumers in Managing Their Health and Healthcare [10] looks at the possibility of community healthcare websites in cultivating the behaviour of consumers to manage their health. This study evaluated 32 websites where 16 associations were in charge of. The researchers characterized the consumer behaviour of people who visited the 32 healthcare websites based on shopping behaviours when buying healthcare products, their behaviour when they dealt with healthcare providers, how they manage their own health problems and their own prevention of health. 25 of the healthcare websites had information for their consumers, and 14 from these 25 websites had information that related to at least 3 out of 4 consumer behaviour characteristics mentioned above.

### 3. Methodology

The research is designed to provide a better understanding of consumer behaviour towards healthcare websites among the young generation in the Klang Valley area, Malaysia. For this research, questionnaires were randomly distributed and collected among the youths in Klang Valley, specifically those pursuing their tertiary education; therefore, the respondents were in the age group of 18 to 25.

This research used the simple random sampling method to collect data because every element in the population had an equal chance of selection. Apart from that, if there were any errors in the data, detecting it would be easy. Furthermore, simple random sampling does not require an in-depth understanding of the population.

To obtain data to test the hypothesis, the process of collecting information was through questionnaires in order to discover youths' consumer behaviour towards healthcare websites. The structure of the questions was a mix between a majority of closed questions and a few open-ended questions. The questionnaire used a combination of analytic and descriptive ways to find the young generation's behaviour when they used healthcare websites to get health information. All the quantitative data were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 19.0. 3 focus groups which comprised of 15 respondents were conducted to answer research questions.

### 4. Result and Discussion

Table 1: The Outcome of Hypotheses Test

Variables	Attitude	Subjective Norms	Intention	Behavior
Beliefs about Behavioral Outcome	0.802**			
Normative Beliefs		0.593**		
Attitude			0.608**	
Subjective Norms			0.420**	
Intention				0.725**

n = 300

According to the data collected, beliefs and evaluation of the respondents towards healthcare websites are more towards the individual's preference. A majority of them believed that online health information should be easily accessible. The respondents believed that healthcare websites enhanced their knowledge on health information. This strongly suggests that youths are looking to new media as a platform of finding health information. One of the interesting outcomes in this research is how those who took part in this study believed that healthcare websites could influence their views on matters regarding health. This demonstrated that apart from doctors and other healthcare providers, these websites were able to assist youths whenever they have any query on health. On the other hand, this study has also proved that the respondents felt it is better to see a doctor to treat any minor illness instead of referring to health websites. Here, we can see that there is a slight amount of skepticism on healthcare websites from this group of people.

According to the findings, most of the respondents have a mind-set that these websites are informative. As all of the respondents are from the *Generation Y*, they see the importance of the internet and how it is an information-finding tool. A surprising fact found was how some of the respondents still used health websites even after visiting their doctors. It was interesting to see how they still wanted extra information on ways of treating their illnesses. Nevertheless, this section showed that youths use healthcare websites to get a second opinion, but they are not ready to rely on it solely.

Social influences can alter a person's belief on healthcare websites or better yet, motivate them to use it. The results show that among all the social pressures, youths would probably believe the views of their healthcare providers when it came to visiting healthcare websites. The data goes a step further by proving that healthcare providers can motivate the respondents to use these websites. The rationale behind this is doctors, pharmacists, nurses and so forth are in the medical line; hence, they have better knowledge on health compared to family and friends. Furthermore, they would also know which website provides the best health information.

Subjective norms towards healthcare websites showed how social influences could change a person's way of thinking towards healthcare websites whereas this section showed how certain elements of social influence could actually make the respondents use healthcare websites. According to the findings, youths would actually use healthcare websites suggested by healthcare providers. With growing health problems among adolescents worldwide like obesity and diabetes, there is a serious need for them to be health conscious.

Regarding the intentions of using healthcare websites, the findings stated that, youths who took part in this study plan to start or set a time to use healthcare websites in search for health related information. Based on this alone, we can see a positive feedback from the youths. Furthermore, they also gave a certain amount of priority in planning to find information on exercise routines.

According to the findings, a majority of the respondents will use healthcare websites to find exercise routines. This illustrated that this young generation intend to start exercising to stay fit. Apart from that, the respondents also will use healthcare websites to improve their understanding of symptoms, conditions, or treatments when they are ill.

In this study, three focus groups were conducted in three different locations. There were 5 members in each group; the duration of 45 minutes to an hour was spent to discuss four questions. For this research, we designed the questions to elicit feedbacks on several issues related to consumer behavior towards healthcare websites.

The focus groups yielded an insightful and rich qualitative data. The analysis of the data provided the main data theme which was consumer behavior towards the health websites. The issues related to consumer behavior were identified in the data categories: the motivation and rationale behind of visiting websites when you are ill, the factors that determine the credibility of the websites, the habit and the main purpose of visiting healthcare websites.

According to the focus groups' findings, it was agreed by most of the participants that they visited the websites before they "physically" visit the doctors. Most of the replies were free flow of information, save time, to get some simple remedies to "cure" the simple "illness" such as flu and mild fever. The information from the website could help them to prepare themselves if they decided to consult the doctor; they could understand better when the doctor do the explanation. However, they would prefer to visit the doctors if their situation did not get better.

Regarding the individuals that can influence the behavior of seeking healthcare related information from the websites, all respondents gave different answers, such as mother, sister, roommates, good friends, and brothers. Despite different individuals, the rationale of choosing them could be "summed up as credible". The aspect of the credibility could be seen in the selected group where they were involved in medical field, such as nurse, medical students/assistant or have more medical knowledge.

Based on the focus groups' findings, there are a few factors that determine the credibility of the websites. With the countless websites available, respondents agreed that they did not take the face value, they counter checked the content with other websites, they looked for the author/spoken person who has high credibility. Comments by the others of the websites were not taken by them fully and wholeheartedly since they would investigate further. Two of the participants from the focus groups said that: I will read the comments but I will also search for articles and compare again.

Regarding the intention of Visiting Health Care Websites, respondents confirmed that it is a norm to log in and look for information from the healthcare websites. They were mainly there to look for tips, diets and remedies that could contribute to beauty and fitness. They were concerned about their looks and weight

management. They did look for additional information for some diseases for the purpose of prevention such as diabetes.

According to TABLE 1, all hypotheses were accepted. The first one reflected on how belief and evaluation towards healthcare websites has a significant relationship with attitude towards healthcare websites among youths. Before youths form attitude, they must have a certain belief towards the subject and evaluate it depending on their own personal preferences.

Apart from that, the second hypothesis showed how normative beliefs and motivation to comply with healthcare websites has a significant relationship with subjective norms towards healthcare websites among youths. Social influences have the ability to persuade a person. In this case, we could see how youths believed the opinion of people in their social. After knowing how the people around them felt about healthcare websites, it could also be a form of motivation for these individuals to use healthcare websites. The next step is for the person to use healthcare websites because of the social pressure he/she receives. At this point, we see how subjective norms work.

The third hypothesis is attitude towards healthcare websites has a significant relationship with intentions of using healthcare websites. At this stage, using healthcare websites is confirmed. The question that came up was what the intentions of using these websites are. Some of the respondents felt that healthcare websites gave them a clear picture before visiting a doctor, therefore their intention of using healthcare websites was as a reference before going to the clinic.

The fourth hypothesis showed that subjective norms towards healthcare websites have a significant relationship with intentions of using healthcare websites. From this, we can see that social pressure can somehow form our own intentions.

The fifth and last hypothesis showed that intentions of using healthcare websites have a significant relationship with behaviour of using healthcare websites. After forming their intentions, these youths knew that healthcare websites are good, and they will visit it for various reasons. The formation of behaviour depends on favourable intentions; positive intentions of using healthcare websites formed the respondent's intentions of using healthcare websites.

## **5. Conclusion**

It is very crucial and critical to attain the similar result from these cross methodologies. This implies that they are much more credible due to the fact that the same results were discovered from the different research approach. The results were extensively supported by both methods. Healthcare website has become a new platform for them to obtain information on health related issues. However, they would consult the doctors if they were ill. In other words, the websites only served as additional information to them, nothing beyond that.

The healthcare information could be easily found on countless websites, but they were very cautious on the validity of the contents. They were selective and only looked for credible websites created by professional health personnel. They were very rigorous to validate the accuracy of the contents.

Certain findings indicate that youths use healthcare websites before consulting their doctors, which in fact is a good practice. It shows that they are well prepared to face any illness. Furthermore, it can even make a visit to the clinic worthwhile. Patients can ask questions and get a better understanding of their doctor's diagnosis.

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