

Quality and Characteristics of Websites with Disability Related Information

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Introduction

The Internet is one of the main resources people use to find information on health-related issues. However, although people report having much trust in health-related information that they locate online, the World Wide Web is uncontrolled and unmonitored. Moreover, previous research has shown inaccurate and misleading information can be easily located in online searches of disability related terms. To date, little guidance on how to find quality online information on disabilities has been made available to individuals with disabilities and those who provide care for them.

Objectives

We sought to evaluate the quality and characteristics of disability-related Websites and determine which (if any) characteristics predicted high-quality Websites.

Methods

The sample consisted of Websites (including sponsored advertisements) appearing on pages containing the top 10 results returned when searching one of ten terms related to developmental disabilities using the Google and Bing online search engines on November 16, 2012. Of the 208 Websites appearing in the searches, 104 (50%) were relevant to our purpose for further analyses. Two research assistants coded 10 characteristics of each Website and two faculty-level researchers evaluated the quality of each Website. Descriptive and analytic analyses were performed, and highlights of the analyses are shown below.

Results

- We did not find statistically significant differences between the quality of Websites across disability categories; $F(9,94) = 1.69, p = .10$.
- Websites with references were more likely to have **high** quality; $r_s = .55, p < .0001$.
- Websites that either contained advertisements or were a sponsored advertisement were more likely to be a Website with **poor** quality; $r_s = -.44, p < .0001$, and $r_s = -.25, p = .01$.
- Websites with a .org or .gov top-level domain were more likely to be **high** quality than Websites with a .com top-level domain ($F(2,97) = 13.89, p < .0001$).
- Websites of for profit companies were more likely to be **poor** quality than governmental, non-profit organization, and online informational Websites ($F(3,95) = 11.57, p < .0001$).
- Table 1. General purpose of websites across disability categories

Purpose	ADHD	ASD	Blind	CP	Deaf	Dev. Del.	Dev. Dis	DS	ID	LD	Total
For profit	33%	0%	0%	0%	14%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	6%
Government	20%	29%	0%	18%	0%	0%	40%	17%	8%	22%	15%
Individual	0%	0%	14%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%
News agency	0%	7%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%
Non-profit org.	13%	36%	29%	27%	29%	42%	20%	25%	58%	33%	32%
Online informational	33%	29%	57%	54%	57%	50%	49%	42%	33%	44%	42%
University	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	8%	0%	8%	0%	0%	2%
Other	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	8%	0%	0%	1%

Conclusions

Websites most likely to be high quality when:

1. Uses a '.gov' or '.org' top-level domain
2. Contains references to external literature
3. Are not a sponsored advertisement
4. Does not have advertisements

Recommendations

- Use caution when using Internet to obtain disability-related information
- Do not use Internet as only source of information
- Use specific terms to increase chance of relevant returns
- Skip sponsored advertisements
- Government sites typically had very high quality

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