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**Title: Laypeople's Source Selection in Online Health Information-Seeking Process**

For laypeople, searching online health information resources can be challenging due to topic complexity and the large number of online sources with differing quality. Greater understanding of laypeople's source selections will significantly improve the understanding of their online health information seeking process and can potentially enable the design of better support mechanisms. Consequently, the goal of this article is to examine, among all the available online sources, which online sources laypeople select to address their health-related information needs, and whether or how much the severity of a health condition influences their selection.

The research team recruited 24 participants and asked each of them (using a retrieval system called *HIS*) to search for information regarding a severe health condition (SC) and a mild health condition (MC), respectively. The selected online health information sources were automatically captured by the HIS system and classified at both the website and webpage levels. Participants' selection behavior patterns were then plotted across the whole information-seeking process.

The results demonstrate that to the participants of this study, dot com is the most common online source for health information, although collecting useful information from these sources is relatively inefficient. In contrast, consulting dot edu and dot net sites might be a very efficient method with their much higher adoption rate.
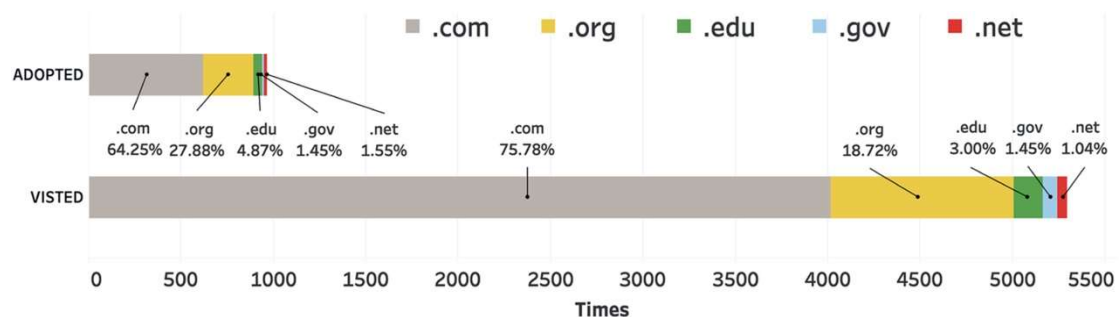


In terms of how the severity of a health condition influences source selection, participants visited and adopted more diverse types of webpages when conducting

MC tasks, whereas they relied more on health-specific pages (HSP) and search result pages (SERP) in SC tasks. With regards to personal webpages, which were supposed to deliver online users' personal experience and knowledge, are rarely visited when solving SC tasks, but its share increases gradually throughout the MC process.

**Task types and the health sources visited and adopted**
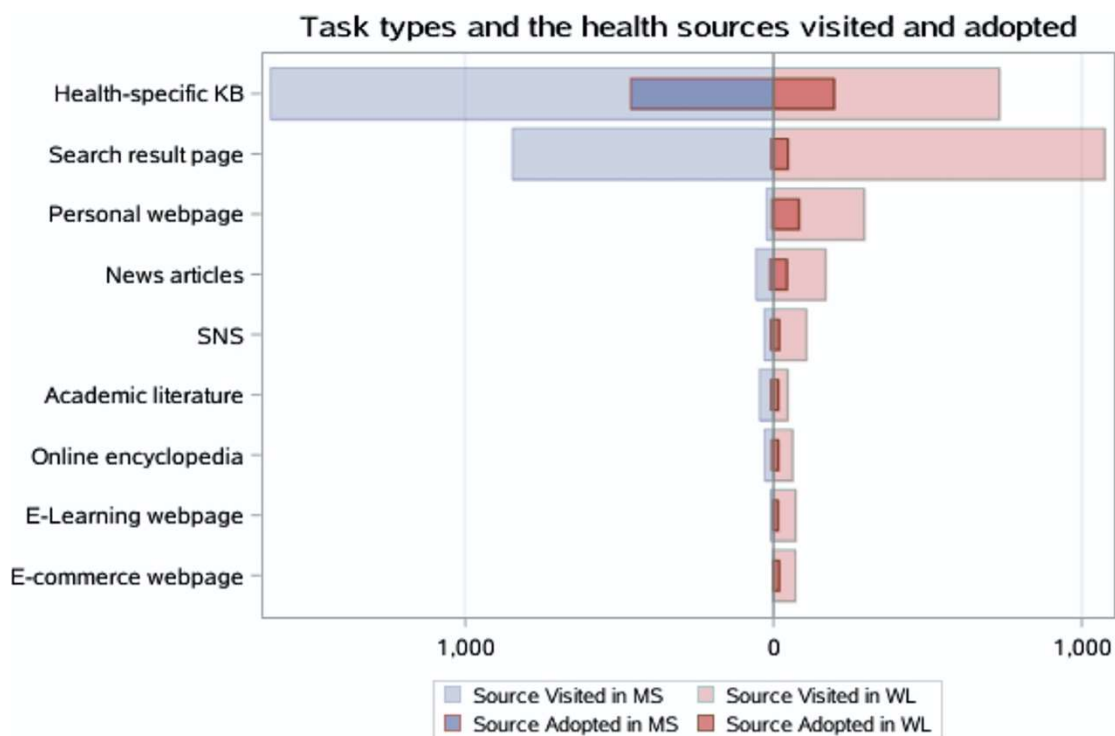


Based on these findings, it is suggested that attention should be paid to the quality and reliability of health information on dot com websites. Websites from the government and educational institutes as well as health-specific pages need more promotion. From the perspective of laypeople, they might need more support while information-seeking for less severe health conditions. Also, search engine strategies should be generated to help laypeople with their health information-seeking process.

In conclusion, this study reveals laypeople's real usage of different types of online health information sources, and engenders implications to the design of search engines, as well as the development of health literacy programs.