

Examining How Youth Use Mobile Devices for Health Information: Preliminary Findings of a Survey Study with High School Students in Croatia

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Abstract : As more and more youth use mobile devices, such as tablets and smartphones, for information seeking in their everyday lives, the purpose of this study is to understand the behaviors of youth seeking health information on mobile devices. The specific objective of this study is to examine 1) for what health issues youth use mobile devices, 2) for what reasons youth use mobile devices to obtain health information, 3) in what ways youth use mobile devices for health information, and 4) the features of health applications that youth find useful. The researchers devised a questionnaire for this study. Four hundred eight students from two high schools, located in Osijek, Croatia, participated by answering the questionnaire (281 girls and 127 boys). The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and content analysis. The results show that among all participants, about 85 percent (n = 344) reported having used mobile devices for health information. The most frequent health topic for which they had been using mobile devices is physical activity (n = 273), followed by eating issues and nutrition (n = 224), mental health (n = 160), sexual health (n = 157), alcohol, drugs, and tobacco (n = 125), safety (n = 96) and particular diseases (n = 62). They use mobile devices to obtain health information due to the ease of use (n = 342), the ease of sharing health information (n = 281), portability (n = 215), timeliness (n = 162), and the ease of tracking/recording/monitoring health status (n = 147). Of those who have used mobile devices for health information, three-quarters (n = 261) use mobile devices to search health information, while 32.8% (n = 113) use applications and 31.7% (n = 109) browse information. Those who have used applications for health information (n = 113) consider the alert feature (n = 107) as the most useful, followed by the tracking/recording/monitoring feature (n = 92), the customized information feature (n = 86), the video feature (n = 58), and the sharing feature (n = 39). It is notable that although health applications have been actively developed and studied, a majority of the participants search for or browse information on mobile devices, instead of using applications. The researchers will discuss reasons that some of them did not use mobile devices to obtain health information, students' concerns about using health applications, and features that they wish to have in health applications.

Keywords : Croatia, health information, information seeking behaviors, mobile devices, youth

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