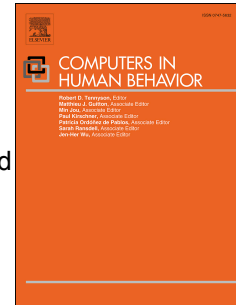


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Online Selection of a Physician by Patients: Empirical Study from Elaboration Likelihood Perspective

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Abstract: With the rapid development of Web 2.0 technologies, an increasing number of physicians are providing services through websites that enable patients to consult with them online. Patients can find a wealth of information about the healthcare community, but research has not explored how patients process this information, or how this processing might influence their decisions to consult a physician online. To fill this gap, we used the Elaboration Likelihood Model and the Service Quality theory to investigate patients' selection decisions. We considered service quality as the central route, and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) as the peripheral cue, and explored their importance. We also examined the moderating effects of disease risk and disease knowledge on patients' consulting intention. We developed an empirical econometric model to evaluate our hypotheses. Using data from an online healthcare site in China, our results revealed that service quality and eWOM both had positive effects on patients' selection decisions. Disease knowledge increased the importance of service quality on patients' choices. Furthermore, disease risk and disease knowledge decreased the influence of eWOM on patients' choices. We conclude that our research into the impact of information processing on how patients select their physicians has strong theoretical and practical implications.

Key words: disease type; Elaboration Likelihood Model; online healthcare community; Service Quality; electronic word-of-mouth

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