

TRUST IN PHYSICIANS PREDICTS PATIENT ONLINE COMMUNITY USE IN WOMEN WITH ENDOMETRIOSIS

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Background

- Patient online communities (POCs) offer a variety of benefits to its users, including the provision of information.
- According to the Theory of Motivated Information Management (TMIM)¹, one factor that influences from whom individuals seek information is the degree to which they believe the person providing information is able to provide it (competence) and is honest in doing so (honesty).
- Competence and honesty are two of the five proposed domains of trust², and trust in one's physician is a frequent predictor of online health information seeking.
- Endometriosis patients often distrust physicians, either because they have often been met with skepticism or because physicians are often not well-educated in endometriosis.
- Women with endometriosis often evaluate the validity of physicians' statements by cross-checking them with other sources, including from women from POCs³.

Hypothesis: Less trust in physicians significantly predicts POC use.

Research question: Which of the four of five specific domains of trust (fidelity, competence, honesty, global) predict POC use?

Method

Participants

- 745 U.S. women 18 years or older who self-reported a surgically-confirmed diagnosis of endometriosis recruited to participate in an online research study between April 15 and August 31, 2017.

Method

Measurement

Trust in Physicians

- *Trust in Doctors Generally*²: 11-item self-report scale assessing patients' general trust in physicians ($\alpha = .92$), along with four specific domains of trust (fidelity, competence, honesty, global).

Patient Online Community Use

Do you use endometriosis patient online communities? (A patient online community can refer to any online social space in which you can meet and interact with other women with endometriosis.)

YES

NO

Statistical Analysis

- Independent samples t-tests were performed.

Results

General Trust

- POC users ($M = 27.72$, $SD = 7.35$) reported less trust in physicians compared to non-POC users ($M = 29.46$, $SD = 8.0$; $t = -2.81$, $p < .01$, eta squared = .011).

Domains of Trust

- POC users ($M = 4.95$, $SD = 1.56$) reported less fidelity compared to non-POC users ($M = 5.27$, $SD = 1.72$; $t = -2.34$, $p < .05$, eta squared = .007).
- POC users ($M = 4.66$, $SD = 1.35$) reported less competence compared to non-POC users ($M = 5.0$, $SD = 1.44$; $t = -2.94$, $p < .01$, eta squared = .012).
- POC users ($M = 4.76$, $SD = 1.66$) reported less honesty compared to non-POC users ($M = 5.17$, $SD = 1.71$; $t = -2.96$, $p < .01$, eta squared = .012).
- POC users ($M = 13.34$, $SD = 3.8$) reported less global trust compared to non-POC users ($M = 14.01$, $SD = 3.98$; $t = -2.14$, $p < .05$, eta squared = .006).

Discussion

- **Less general trust in physicians, as well as all four trust subscales, significantly predicted POC use.**
- **The honesty and competence domains of trust were the strongest predictors of POC use, followed by fidelity and then global.**
- This research confirms conclusions drawn from qualitative research that women with endometriosis who trust physicians less are more likely to use POCs and is also consistent with TMIM.
- One reason for small effect sizes may be that the search for information is only one benefit of POCs and a more specific measure tailored to information-seeking may yield greater effect sizes.
- These results provide the first quantitative evidence that less trust in physicians predicts POC use in women with endometriosis.

References

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- 3 Whelan, E. (2007). 'No one agrees except for those of us who have it': Endometriosis patients as an epistemological community. *Sociology of Health & Illness*, 29(7), 957–982.

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