

Student perceptions of source credibility and health-related behavior: a case study

Grace Collura, Carlie Hagerman, Jordan Kitch, Claire Szpara, and Sheng Xiong
Martha Fay ❖ Communication and Journalism ❖ University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire



Abstract

Previous research has shown that college students' intentions to perform health-related behaviors vary based on students' perception of credibility of the source providing the message (Jones, Sinclair & Courneya, 2003). The most available source of health information for college students is on-campus health services, however, studies have also shown that even though students are knowledgeable about the health services offered on college campuses, awareness does not necessarily translate into use (Fletcher, Bryden, Schneider, Dawson & Vandermeer, 2007). This study examines the perceptions of source credibility and level of trust among college students when seeking information on particular health needs offered on one Midwestern college campus. Participants completed an online survey to examine their perceptions of various health message sources, and their perception of source credibility using Wheelless & Grotz' (1977) Individualized Trust Scale. The results illuminate student health information-seeking behavior relevant to perceived credibility of campus-offered services and suggest ways to improve source credibility.

Literature Review Highlights

- ✓ Uncertainty Reduction Theory (Berger and Calabrese, 1975) predicts and explains how uncertainty can be reduced within human interactions by using effective communication
- ✓ Paulsel, McCroskey and Richmond (2006) analyzed physician credibility and found that perceptions of caring and competence were important in pleasing patients.
- ✓ Schneider's (2006) findings indicate that different forms of communication distort message content and health information is learned from a variety of sources including family, friends, the Internet, brochures and physicians.
- ✓ Westerwick (2013) found that credibility depends on aspects of the message including information quality, accuracy, currency and language intensity.

Method

Participants

- ✓ 100 participants
- ✓ 21% Male, 79% Female

Procedure

- ✓ Online survey through Qualtrics
- ✓ Convenience sampling through email Facebook invitation
- ✓ Questions asked respondents about their level of knowledge of health services and perceived credibility of various information sources

Instruments

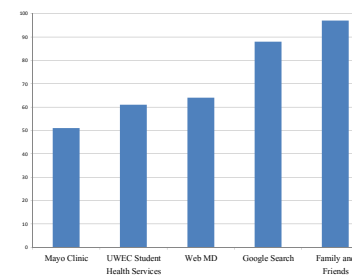
Individualized Trust Scale (Wheelless & Grotz, 1977). ($\alpha = .96$, $M = 31.64$, $SD = 40.08$)

- ✓ Evaluates the degree to which an individual's trust is affected by communication
 - Ex: Confidential-Divulging, scale of 1-7. 1 being Confidential and 7 being Divulging

Results

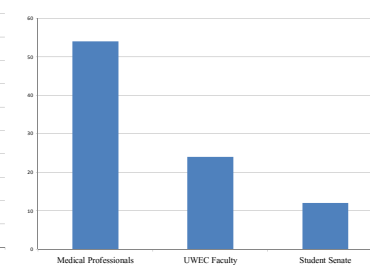
RQ1: Which source for health information do college students find most credible?

Table 1: Percent of Students Who Find Each Source Credible



RQ2: Who do students at UW-Eau Claire perceive to run Student Health Services

Table 2: Who Students Perceive to Run UWEC Health Services



RQ3: How do UWEC students characterize a credible health source compared to how they characterize UWEC Student Health Services?

Top characteristics of UWEC Student classified:

1. Helpful
2. Personable
3. Timeliness

Top characteristics of a credible health source:

1. Credentials
2. Sources
3. Reliability

Implications

- ✓ As shown in Table 1, the internet is a main source university students use to get health information as well as how they communicate. UWEC Student Health Services should make their website more engaging and user friendly to accommodate their target audience.
- ✓ Students correctly believe UWEC Student Health Services is a credible source run by health professionals and prefer it over Mayo Clinic (Table 1). Students identify a credible health source using factual based qualities whereas they define Student Health Services using affective qualities.
- ✓ Future studies should examine why there is a qualitative difference (affective vs. factual) in how students evaluate UWEC Student Health Services and other health providers, such as Mayo Clinic.