Reviewer's report

Title: Generic medicines: an evaluation of the accuracy and accessibility of information available on the Internet

Version: 1 Date: 27 June 2013

Reviewer: Michaël Laurent

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Major Compulsory Revisions

1/ As is often the case in abstract I review, the importance of the topic is greatly overstated in the introduction ("awareness and knowledge transfer on this topic is a priority").

More importantly, the conclusion that "a website designed using the WQA tool developed in this study, is likely to rank highly in google.com SERPs" is likely wrong and totally speculative. This is based on only 24 examined websites (!) and not on a comparison between high and low ranked websites. It is likely that other characteristics e.g. general website popularity like with Wikipedia or the FDA is an important confounder. This is further supported by the significant but very moderate associations found in Table 4 (the latter should be further emphasized; a correlation of >0.3 is totally unimpressive to me).

Related to this issue, on the bottom of page 9, the correlation between WQA ranking and page rank should not be used to ascertain validity of the WQA tool.

2/ The results section contains a lot of Discussion elements. Results should neutrally present facts, which can later be analyzed/explained in the Discussion section.

3/ The WQA gives the impression in the abstract that it is a tool to evaluation website quality in general. However, it applies only to generic medicines. Therefore, it might be better to change the name of the tool to clearly note that it is for quality evaluation of websites on generic medicines.

4/ What software package was used for the statistics?

5/ In their methodology, did the authors consider sponsored links or YouTube results (or weren't these encountered)?

6/ Arbitrarily, an emphasis is put on differences between WQA scores of 15, 16 and 17, but we don't know the minimal important difference for this tool. This also wasn't defined a priori. It could also be argued that some missing information/erroneous information is more important than other missing information, although it might lead to the same scores. Therefore, I would carefully adjust the wording (e.g. "WQA scores of 15 were awarded to two other websites, indicating relatively good informationcontent" needs to be rephrased or
removed altogether).

7/ Importantly, related to this issue, what information source did the developer use to create the WQA tool? The first author must have used a handbook or course notes or something to ensure that she herself had a complete description of the essential information on generic drugs?

8/ Given the importance of Wikipedia in the results, I would suggest including some discussion of Wikipedia's reading levels with references from the literature.

Minor Essential Revisions

1/ The first sentence can be supported by better References than [1-4], i.e. more systematic studies on online health information quality.

2/ Instead of ref. [26], the authors might better cite:

3/ I don't think "SERP" is a credible or appropriate abbreviation, it hinders the paper's and abstract's readability. In some parts of the paper its use also isn't grammatically correct I think (e.g. SERP hits, SERP pages, ...)

4/ Instead of using scores from one observer (on page 9), it is customary I think to remediate between two disagreeing observers and to jointly agree on a score. This should either be repeated or acknowledged as a limitation.

Discretionary Revisions

1/ Instead of "in terms of both quality of information and accessibility (in terms of readability)." in the abstract, I would simplify to "in terms of both quality of information and readability" or "reading level" (avoiding repetition of "in terms of").

2/ On page 5, WQA should be explained the first time this abbreviation is used.

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.
Declaration of competing interests:

I was previously an active editor on Wikipedia. I have no competing financial interests.