Reviewer’s report

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

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Reviewer: Stephen Maloney

Reviewer’s report:

Thank you for the opportunity to review this paper in my field of interest. I state up front that with all of the papers I review, my comments are from the perspective of the reader, and for improving the impact of the authors work...not a judgement on the amount of hardwork that has obviously gone into the investigation and resulting manuscript.

The authors present a novel investigation into quality of information provided on generic medicines on the internet. The side points of interest are the degree of variation across countries, and to the informations readability.

I have no major compulsory revisions to suggest.

I have multiple minor revisions, listed below:

The article would have more 'punch' if it were more concise, with clear links between the arguments made, and its relevance. For example, on page four (second paragraph of the background), the authors include sentences on how previous studies have isolated their work to particular regions...however there is no point made as to why this is relevant. Likewise, the reference to the popularity of wikipedia as the 6th most accessed website, is made twice in the manuscript. Excessive words to describe how google uses its boolean operators. I'd respectfully suggest that the manuscript may have more impact if shortened by min. 500 words. Or perhaps considering alternate presentation of results i.e. tables or matrix chart?

Define SERP when first used in the text.

There is no clear segment on limitations of the study. I'm curious as to why the authors decided not to examine sites that included sales, as removing them creates an artificial list i.e. what evidence is there that searchers aren’t going to look at those sites also, particularly are so many site include a sales component to the information they share.

Why were the particular countries of interest chosen i.e. why those 5?

I am out of my depth in regards to commenting on the development of reliable and valid instruments, however I would have anticipated that although it is an important segment of the study, it requires greater testing than inter-rater consistency, to be suggesting its use for appraising sites on other medical related
topics...particularly when the questions appear so specific to generic medicines.

It appears that when you use the term accessibility, it needs to be explained that you're measuring readability. I wonder if it wouldn't be simpler to just use 'readability' in place of accessibility.

It's great to see more quantitative research methods coming into the arena of medical informatic and education. I hope that the suggestions above can strengthen the article and help get this information out there.

Regards,
Steve

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

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

Declaration of competing interests:

I have no competing interests at all in reviewing this paper.