Reviewer’s report

Title: Who can you trust? A review of free online sources of "trustworthy" information about treatment effects for patients and the public

Version: 0 Date: 19 Jul 2018

Reviewer: Frances Johnson

Reviewer’s report:

An interesting and worthwhile study. It is however lacking with respect to rigour in its method and in its significance (with respect to its contribution), but that said it should be of interest to readers and should be published. A major limitation is that the study is based entirely on the assessment carried out by the authors and for this to stand up more should be done to explain the evaluation criteria used and drawn from previous research on assessing information quality (perhaps credibility and trustworthiness). The recommendations for revision are based on more detailed literature review, rewriting the methods section and further explanation in the discussion, as follows:

The literature review needs to be developed. The review builds on that by Anita Peerson. Therefore more should be said about Peerson's review and how, in what way, this can be built upon. How does this study differ, what does it add to Peerson's?

In general although there is a reasonable body of literature referred to in this section, there is little detail given. 12 references are given to back up the single statement (that a large amount of information about treatment effects is not based on systematic reviews and is not trustworthy). If the word count allows, it would be interesting to see a more detailed analysis of previous findings. For example, what type of information may be found which is not based on systematic reviews, and on what basis did previous studies judge them not to be trustworthy? Likewise, more detail could be given with respect to the papers referring to the problem of find-ability of trustworthy information. This would set up a more detailed statement of the problem.

The Methods section on page 5-6 outlining the approach taken to search and select websites for the study is not well written for publication. It would read far better if written in the third person. I would try to find a more subtle way to explain that first author conducted the searches and selected the set of websites for inclusion, whilst the second author provided a second opinion on the judgements made with regards to the sites' meeting the inclusion criteria. This would avoid repetition of the expression 'one of us (AO) ....' And allow for academic writing in the third person when describing the process for website selection, e.g., rather than saying 'One of us (AO) searched for government websites..' turn this around to say 'To identify websites for inclusion in the study, the following searches were carried out on 29th January 2018 .... And then explain that the first 20 hits for each search were screened and the following information collected for each website that met the inclusion criteria ... Likewise the procedure used to assess the ease of finding information on the selected websites and based on a sample of eight test questions could be written up in the third person. (Eight questions were selected from a list
(25 Questions) returned in a Google search for "common health questions" …. The information reported on the websites about treatment effects was independently assessed for …

Paragraph 2 on page 6 (lines 4-8) appears out of place. Can you edit this into the final paragraph on Methods (lines 22-28, page 6). This would help clearly describe how the ease of finding the information was assessed, and how each relevant summary found was assessed.

The discussion section would also benefit from a more critical explanation of the evaluation criteria applied and could be strengthened considerably with reference back to previous studies. In particular, reference to studies on how people assess information and its trustworthiness might be useful to justify why the summaries were assessed for readability, style and consistency. Why mention moniker at this point? It makes me mistrust the research! However, if you could go into more detail on the advantages of Moniker for the general public use, perhaps for example illustrating how their use of consistent reporting is advantageous to the general public wishing to find evidence based information on treatments.

**Are the methods appropriate and well described?**
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

No

**Does the work include the necessary controls?**
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Unable to assess

**Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?**
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

Yes

**Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?**
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

Not relevant to this manuscript

**Quality of written English**
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

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