EVALUATING CONTRACEPTIVE METHODS USING PEER SUPPORT FROM REDDIT

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Background: Social media platforms, such as Reddit, have become popular channels for accessing and sharing information about sexual and reproductive health. As discussions on these platforms often take place without explicit medical expertise, and given that these discussions may influence users' adoption of different contraceptive options, there is often an assumption that this will compete with biomedical advice. Accordingly, there is value in examining the language users employ to describe their contraceptive experiences and the attendant negotiation of values regarding contraception online.

Methods: Reddit is the sixth most popular website in Australia. Data in the form of 1,000 comments in the subreddit r/birthcontrol were collected in May 2018. This study made use of Corpus Linguistic tools and Systemic Functional Linguistics to illuminate both macro and micro discourse patterns around contraception.

Results: The salient themes included side effects, pain, duration, effectiveness, hormones, and impact on menstruation. Contrary to popular representations of online platforms, discussions did not counter biomedical advice; rather, the authority of medical professionals and the importance of seeking medical advice were heavily reinforced. However, users discussed negative experiences with doctors in order to gain social support and compare the advice they had received with that of other users. In negotiating contraception values, users aligned by sharing personal stories, forming agreements about contraceptive choices and avoiding conflict, underscoring the power of forums as cooperative spaces for discussing reproductive health.

Conclusion: Our analysis suggests that interaction on online platforms has the potential to complement traditional forms of health expertise by providing peer-based social and emotional support for patients, while reinforcing the need for biomedical oversight. In the digital age, health practitioners can use these findings to guide open clinical consultations that incorporate common contraceptive experiences and concerns, and position dominant biomedical knowledge in relation to other sources of information.