When story-telling makes a difference: Online health forum participation and its effects on patients’ wellbeing

**GOALS of this project**
1. Extend our current knowledge about interactions in health forums and its effects
2. Create a tool to analyze online health-related content
3. Share research findings with the patient association De Amazones

**DATA COLLECTION** in collaboration with the Amazones:
3 waves of panel data + online content
- 1st wave: 120 breast cancer patients filled out the survey
- we ‘scraped’ the content of the online forum which resulted in a database that will be used for further analysis
- 67 patients provided their nickname: to link survey data with content

**DATA ANALYSIS: quantitative**
- Analyzing 3 waves of panel data
- online content

**DATA ANALYSIS: qualitative**
- Exploring the contents of the Amazones forum and getting a feel for the differences between the sub-forums
- Looking for recurrent patterns in the openings posts in the ‘Vraag maar Raak’ forum (what do members do with their writings to the group?) and patterns in how they are responded to
- Building a collection study of 20 opening posts to refine/redescribe the interactional patterns that are identified
- Go through a process of line by line analysis of the forum messages to identify the social actions that are accomplished by them
- Reporting on the pattern found (narrative detail, reported speech, question design) in a line-by-line analysis of 10 posts and replies

**Our CURRENT activities**
- We are analysing data from the first wave (survey)
- We are collecting data for the 2nd wave with the follow-up survey
- We are writing a first draft of a paper focused on moderating variables (such as emotional approach coping styles, social comparisons etc.) and try to connect these to the findings from the qualitative study
- We are conducting additional qualitative analyses of opening posts written by respondents who took part in the survey and try to connect this to the finding of the quantitative study (e.g. complementing them; exploring how emotion words are employed in posts)

**RESULTS: Quantitative study**

**RESULTS: Qualitative study (“Vraag maar Raak” forum)**
- Opening posts often start with a detailed introduction with narrative details (time of detection, history of tests and check-ups)
- Narratives include discrepancies or uncertainties about tests and results (‘expressing doubts’)
- Reported speech is used to draw upon doctor’s words that are used to demonstrate contrasts or discrepancies
- Group is asked for advice in a way that already includes a preference for an answer (in line with the doubts expressed)
- After the question to the group is formulated, participants often add an after-thought that is formulated to ‘steer the preferred response in the same direction as the question design that precedes it

What we are PLANNING to do:
- Analyze data using all 3 waves to see if there are any changes overtime (goal 1)
- Write a descriptive paper on the use of the online forum (goal 1)
- Write at least two papers about the moderating effects of social comparison and emotional approach coping strategies, combined with automatic text analyses (goal 1 and 2)
- Write a conversation analytic paper about story telling in opening posts in a breast cancer forum
- Integrate the qualitative and quantitative findings into one paper to extend current knowledge about interactions in health forums (goal 1 and 2)

What still NEEDS to be done:
Goal 2: creating a new tool is much more complicated than we expected. We are still in the phase of combining our findings and methods to deal with the current data. The first step was to extend current knowledge by combining our different expertise within this field. We believe that the current data analyses and results will be the first step to create such a new tool. Therefore, we maintain our collaboration in the future.

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