NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE

School of Computing

PH.D DEFENCE - PUBLIC SEMINAR

Title: **Do Virtual Communities Matter for Patients? Understanding Patients' Behavior in Online Health Communities**

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Abstract

With the worldwide explosion of social media, the use of online communities in the healthcare landscape has grown dramatically in recent years. Online healthcare communities typically provide diverse health information facilitating patients in self-diagnosis and self-health management. The information obtained from healthcare-related searches can affect peoples' decisions about when to engage a physician for assistance in diagnosis or therapy, how to treat an acute illness or cope with a chronic condition, as well as their overall approach to maintain their health or the health of someone in their care. In this thesis we study how online communities could influence online health consumers' healthcare behaviors from two perspectives.

The first study focuses on investigating the influence of online healthcare communities on patients' acceptance of healthcare advice they receive online. Specifically, we seek to study the extent to which patients are actually willing to follow the health advice they receive from the online community. Through conducting a survey at a leading healthcare social network, we have empirically tested a model to understand 'how online health communities influence patients' acceptance and adherence to health management advice they receive online'.

In the second study we seek to investigate the influence of online communities on patients' self-regulated health management behaviors. The objective of this study is to explore and evaluate how online community participation could influence self-regulated healthcare goal setting. In particular, we explore the questions: 'How could Health 2.0 help individuals set and achieve their health management goals in developing self-regulated health behaviors?' and 'What are the dynamic relationships between goal setting, online social support and goal achievement?' We have obtained and analyzed data based on the patient-generated content of a popular online healthcare community to address identified research questions. This thesis provides several theoretical and practical implications in the areas of online communities, healthcare IS and self-regulatory healthcare behaviors.