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Dobin Yim
Fordham University, dyim@fordham.edu

Young Eun Lee
Fordham University, eyolee@fordham.edu

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ABSTRACT

Social infomediaries (online infomediaries that employ social technologies) have become an integral part of electronic commerce environments, in which consumers and service providers search and find each other, for improved market efficiency. We extend the role of social infomediaries in healthcare context, connecting patients and doctors. This study presents a new typology of visitor behaviors in healthcare social infomediaries. Our thereotical framework draws from online community and online shopping behaviors literature to explore and define different types of visitors. Using a cross-sectional data set from a social infomediary where patients and doctors discuss elective medical procedures and patients review doctors, we classify visitor behaviors in terms of the primary objective of participation, as either information or community seeking, and three increasing levels of purchase intention of elective medical procedures, creating a three-by-two matrix of visitor behaviors. For each type, we analyze user-generated content contribution in terms of activity type (consultation, question, review, and comment), level (high or low), and concentration of popular topics. The completed study will include a validation of our typology to estimate conversation rates and business values of each type to sustainability of social infomediaries.