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The game of health search

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Abstract

Almost two of three Swedes use internet to search for health related information on diseases, treatments and care givers. Mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets are increasingly used to carry out these activities, and it raises the question on how a health information portal should behave to support the needs of today's and tomorrow's information seekers.

In this thesis we present an analysis of the use of the official health information portals 1177.se and vardguiden.se with a focus on describing the relations between seekers and portals, as expressed by the language of queries and answers. Of special interest is the role of the language as a means to establish and maintain the seekers' trust in a portal as a complement to doctor's visits and calls.

We present a number of principles of behaviour to which we believe a portal should adhere to be trustworthy in the eyes of the seekers. We also introduce a conceptual framework with a basis in game-theoretic models of rational behaviour, and the use of linguistic error analysis and stylistics, to provide a setting for analysis of information search.

KEYWORDS: Health information search, internet usage, vardguiden.se, 1177.se, trust, rationality, game theory, error analysis, stylistics, computational linguistics, language technology, natural language processing.

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