

Online community of users – Study of social comparison and tie-strength to support users of a fitness app

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Abstract

The objective of this research is to challenge the idea according to which most health apps positively contribute to behavioral change. Specifically, we question the role of the social support provided by an online community of users through two important mechanisms: social comparison (upward vs downward) and user's ties strength (strong vs weak). Are those mechanisms as favorable to the health app effectiveness as expected? With an experimental approach set in the context of fitness, we show that upward comparison negatively influences the effectiveness of the app, measured through perceived social support, users' self-efficacy, and related attitudes and behavioral intentions, while strong ties have a positive impact. We therefore contribute to theoretical knowledge about the role of social interaction (social comparison and ties-strength) and provide concrete guidance to health mobile application developers to improve the effectiveness of their applications.

Keywords: *Online community of users; Health apps; Social support*

Track: Transformative Consumer Research