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ABSTRAKTI

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The case of web based information environment in web based weight management services

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The purpose of this paper is to present a new concept of web based information environment and to elaborate the concept and reason its use in studying information and information behaviour in web based weight management services. The objective of the paper is to map and compare the information sources of two Finnish weight management sites and to discuss them in relation to weight maintenance information.

The emergent phenomenon of web based services includes a multitude of information sources and communication options. Their influence on users' information behaviour, especially in self-developmental or otherwise non-recreational contexts in everyday life, requires new means for studying them. The concept of web based information environments refers to a defined set of web based information sources in a web site, service or community in distinguishable context, as well as their use and perceptions by individuals (cf. Askola, Toshimori & Huotari 2010), and thus provides a potential viewpoint to examine information content and also related information behaviour. It may be considered a digital extension of information horizons (Sonnenwald 1999).

Web based weight management services are a promising research arena for studying web based information environments. Readily available web based weight management services may have potential to facilitate weight maintenance. They provide a simple way to access weight maintenance information and tools in one place, thus reducing anxiety and difficulties in finding the reliable and suitable information from the web (Marshall et al. 2009). They may also include several elements enhancing the success of long-term weight maintenance. These include tools providing personalized prompts by self-monitoring and tailored feedback (Stevens et al. 2008) and interactive features and social applications, such as blogs and discussion forums (Lehto & Oinas-Kukkonen 2010).

Two Finnish readily available weight management services were selected for the study to fulfill the following criteria: The service may be used for weight maintenance purposes, is free to use, and provides factual information as well as interactive features. The services Kalorilaskuri.fi (http:// kalorilaskuri.fi) [CaloryCounter.fi] (KL) and Kiloklubi.fi (http://kiloklubi.fi) [KiloClub.fi] (KK) were selected. They resemble different rationales in weight management services: KL is aimed at weight management for slimmers and also for

other groups needing to monitor some special diet or exercise plan (such as athletes), whereas KK is aimed primarily at weight management. Thus they are assumed to vary in their information content and available tools.

The comparative analysis of the services was conducted in January and February 2011.The mapping of the services' web based information environments was conducted first. The services were examined qualitatively, a single web page at a time. The analysis consisted of main pages, i.e. separate sub-pages of, for example, articles or recipes were excluded. On each page all the information sources were identified and listed with information on their function. The pages were examined systemically in order, and to increase validity and avoid bias, the analysis was first conducted by two researchers separately and then together. The mapped information environment served as a basis for the second part of the study reported elsewhere (Askola, Känsäkoski, Huotari, in review).

The analysis revealed a multidimensional web based information environment in both services studied. According to the analysis, the concept of web based information environment proved to be a fruitful means to analyse the information content of the selected web based services. It provided detailed insight to information sources in the services and described differences between the two services examined. For example, the services studied were different regarding their information sources, which is explained by their different rationales: KK is aimed mainly at weight management, KL also for special diets, for example, for athletes. The differences in the tools providing feedback and social interaction were remarkable when comparing the potential of the information content of the services to aid weight maintenance.

However, despite the concept's suitability for mapping the information content theoretically for comparison of services, more testing is needed to gather information on the comprehensions of the users. In the area of weight maintenance the most important issue would be elaborating the use of social networking tools and the related information behavior of the users regarding their weight maintenance processes. For example, in these services discussion boards and blogs function as arenas for discussion, asking and answering questions and proactive provision of information, or as an opportunity to acquire this information without one's own participation. Furthermore, in KK there are professional experts participating in discussions in addition to lay users. Sonnenwald (1999) notes that information horizons both constrain and enable information seeking behaviour, and therefore one interesting issue is the positioning of web based information environments with other information environments.

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