

Breaking mental health stigma: the impact of online reviews on the adoption of e-mental health platforms

International
Journal of
Pharmaceutical
and Healthcare
Marketing

René Hubert Kerschbaumer

*Department Marketing and Sales, CAMPUS 02 University of Applied Sciences,
Graz, Austria*

Alice Danglmaier and Silvia Geier

Instahelp (Insta Communications GmbH), Graz, Austria, and

Clara Wawrina

*Department Marketing and Sales, CAMPUS 02 University of Applied Sciences,
Graz, Austria*

Received 11 April 2025
Revised 9 August 2025
Accepted 9 October 2025

Abstract

Purpose – Mental health stigma persists as a barrier to mental health service adoption. However, e-mental health platforms offer anonymous and convenient access to support. As potential users increasingly rely on user-generated content for health-related decisions, this study examines the role of online reviews for e-mental health platform adoption.

Design/methodology/approach – This study follows a quantitative approach applying structural equation modeling. Drawing on the Information Adoption Model, the authors examine how the perceived quality of online reviews on platform-based psychological counseling services and the credibility of their sources impact perceived information usefulness, information adoption and usage intention.

Findings – The results confirm that both argument quality and source credibility significantly enhance the perceived usefulness of online reviews. This, in turn, positively influences information adoption and usage intention considering e-mental health platforms. These findings highlight the potential of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) in mitigating stigma-related hesitations.

Social implications – By leveraging user-generated content, eWOM can serve as a digital anti-stigma tool, normalizing online mental health support and improving access for individuals reluctant to seek traditional therapy.

Originality/value – This study contributes to the literature by integrating service marketing perspectives with mental health service research, demonstrating the role of eWOM for usage intention. It provides empirical evidence on how online reviews can serve in e-mental health adoption.

Keywords E-mental health, Online platforms for mental health, Online psychological counseling, Online reviews, Information adoption model, Information acceptance model

Paper type Research paper



© René Hubert Kerschbaumer, Alice Danglmaier, Silvia Geier and Clara Wawrina. Published by Emerald Publishing Limited. This article is published under the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0) licence. Anyone may reproduce, distribute, translate and create derivative works of this article (for both commercial and non-commercial purposes), subject to full attribution to the original publication and authors. The full terms of this licence may be seen at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

International Journal of
Pharmaceutical and Healthcare
Marketing
Emerald Publishing Limited
1750-6123
DOI 10.1108/IJPHM-04-2025-0046

Introduction

The recent years brought forth a range of innovative services in the field of e-mental health. These services provide online support for psychological distress without the need for physical contact (Rees and MacLaine, 2015). A notable example of such innovation can be found with online psychological counseling (Mannan *et al.*, 2019): Users communicate with psychological professionals through video calls or chat (Wells *et al.*, 2007), which makes this form of intervention a suitable complement to traditional counseling or therapy (Mannan *et al.*, 2019). Moreover, e-mental health platforms have emerged as an accessible and convenient way to connect clients with professionals (Zhou and Wan, 2022).

A significant proportion of individuals with mental health problems do not receive treatment, largely due to limited access to in-person services. Online psychological interventions have the potential to bridge this gap; however, potential users may have limited awareness of available e-mental health services (Mannan *et al.*, 2019). Moreover, individuals might be concerned about data privacy, effectiveness or stigma (Chan *et al.*, 2016; Crisp and Griffiths, 2014; Phillips *et al.*, 2021). They might fear “mental health stigma” as a combination of ignorance, prejudice and discrimination against those affected (Corrigan *et al.*, 2005; Hazell *et al.*, 2022).

It follows that there is a need for investigating the factors influencing e-mental health acceptance and usage. Moreover, the question arises as to how awareness for such stigmatized services can be increased within target groups. We approach these questions from a service marketing perspective: We empirically explore the role of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) in the form of online reviews for usage intention regarding platform-based mental health services.

Background: E-mental health

Digitalization provides users with extensive access to health-related information and services. Both providers and users use digital technologies and platforms that enable distant health-care delivery. The growing number of health-care-related touchpoints has led to a generation of consumers who actively use digital information and care options to engage with health-related topics and make informed decisions. These engaged online users serve as a relevant value co-creation element within the service delivery process (Swan *et al.*, 2019).

E-health refers to using information and communication technologies to support health and health care (Hadwich *et al.*, 2010). Likewise, the definition of digital health by the World Medical Association (2022) describes the use of information and communication technologies for therapy and for providing information on health risks and well-being. E-health encompasses different approaches, such as digital patient portals, electronic health records, information portals, monitoring tools, wearables or telemedicine. These offerings have made both access to and exchange of health data more manageable for users. Data is no longer reserved exclusively for health-care providers (Swan *et al.*, 2019). With the rise of smartphones, mobile health (m-health) applications have become essential health-care tools. M-health applications play a key role in transforming daily routines, especially considering habit tracking, goal setting, reminders and health-related searches – which is especially important for users with limited access to traditional health services (Al-Jabali *et al.*, 2025).

A unique form of digitalized health care is the concept of telemedicine, which allows users and providers to interact directly via video, audio or text chat. Despite the advantages of low-threshold, location- and time-independent access, and the positive feedback from existing users, potential providers and users sometimes remain skeptical. Both sides might, for example, doubt the quality of services delivered through digital channels (Swan *et al.*, 2019). Moreover, professionals must rely more heavily on users’ self-reported information.

The physical absence thus might complicate assessing users' individual situation (Roettl *et al.*, 2016; Swan *et al.*, 2019).

Digitalization also led to the development of intervention forms for prevention, treatment and support of psychological distress (Rees and MacLaine, 2015). Literature discusses the provision of digital psychological services as e-mental health, which refers to using information and communication technologies to promote and improve mental health (Weitzel *et al.*, 2023). E-mental health services represent anonymous, low-threshold options to treatment for users reluctant to traditional face-to-face approaches (Apolinário-Hagen *et al.*, 2018b). This includes digital self-help treatments, psychoeducational information, relapse prevention and online psychological counseling via video, audio and text chat – among various other tools and services (Apolinário-Hagen *et al.*, 2018a). The effectiveness of such services was demonstrated in various studies, particularly concerning anxiety disorders, depression and post-traumatic stress (Weitzel *et al.*, 2023). Studies show that users report positive experiences, perceiving e-mental health services as both helpful and satisfactory (Rost *et al.*, 2017; Weitzel *et al.*, 2023). Society increasingly recognizes the importance of e-mental health – especially considering the social distancing and health-care access restrictions experienced during COVID-19 (Ellis *et al.*, 2021; Weitzel *et al.*, 2023).

Online platforms for mental health

An additional channel to connect clients with professionals was created by the emergence of mental health platforms. In several consumer categories, platform business models – such as Amazon, Uber and Airbnb – follow the goal of matching demand and supply while creating network effects (Parker *et al.*, 2016). Likewise, online platforms for mental health (OPMH) connect clients with professionals to facilitate the provision of e-mental health services (Zhou and Wan, 2022). Notable examples of OPMH include BetterHelp in the USA, Instahelp in Central Europe or YiXinLi in China (BetterHelp, 2025; Instahelp, 2025; YiXinLi, 2025).

However, the growth of mental health platforms is not as rapid as that of leading platforms in consumer industries. This can be attributed to the fact that health care is strongly regulated. Furthermore, health-care platforms require greater integration of and coordination with traditional offerings from their category (Holgersson *et al.*, 2024). Users generally choose between various counseling methods (audio, video and text chat) and payment models (Zhou and Wan, 2022).

Also referred to as digital mental health (DMH) platforms, these offerings provide a promising channel for the prevention, assessment and support of mental health-related issues (Balcombe and De Leo, 2022). Furthermore, the platform channel allows professionals to provide additional online services alongside their traditional offerings (Zhou and Wan, 2022), thus raising overall market supply.

Online psychological counseling

As a specific form of e-mental health services – and in contrast to automated software tools – online psychological counseling refers to providing a counseling service in which clients and trained professionals directly communicate with each other over the internet (Richards and Richardson, 2012). This form of intervention is especially relevant for clients who are reluctant to face-to-face treatments (Apolinário-Hagen *et al.*, 2018b). Moreover, the limited offer of face-to-face services might be insufficient to meet the high demand (Mannan *et al.*, 2019).

An early exploration of online psychological counseling comes from Manhal-Baugus (2001), who applies the term e-therapy, defined as mental health services provided by a

licensed professional via email, video, text chat, virtual reality or any combination of these. This definition emphasizes both the critical role of licensed professionals and the various forms of online communication. Online psychological counseling can serve as a primary form of intervention or as a complement to conventional counseling or therapy (Wells *et al.*, 2007).

Mental health stigma

Individuals affected by mental health issues often face stigma (Corrigan *et al.*, 2005). The perceived deviation from the norm can lead to stereotyping and discrimination and prevent affected individuals from seeking professional help (Aiyub *et al.*, 2023; Robinson *et al.*, 2018). The far-reaching consequences of mental health stigma, as a combination of ignorance, prejudice and discrimination, have brought forth several anti-stigma campaigns, such as “Time to Change” in the UK (Hazell *et al.*, 2022). The Australian “Act Belong Commit” campaign encourages people to protect and improve their mental health (Donovan *et al.*, 2024). The Austrian project “Healthy Employees – Healthy Company!” (Gesunde MitarbeiterInnen – Gesunder Betrieb!) covered measures to promote mental health in the workplace (Geier and Frech, 2019). Overall, Kemp, Davis *et al.* (2023) suggest promoting mental health awareness, facilitating access to relevant services and developing government programs and funding to combat stigma and increase motivation to seek help.

Given the stigma surrounding mental health, ensuring low-threshold and anonymous access to mental health services remains crucial. Mental health platforms leverage digital accessibility and anonymity and can help in reducing barriers to seeking help. However, questions remain about how potential users become aware of and develop trust in these emerging services.

Literature review

In comparison to an extensive body of literature on e-health and related domains (e.g., Chan and Zhuo, 2024; Hadwich *et al.*, 2010), the research landscape surrounding e-mental health appears relatively heterogeneous and fragmented. Several reviews have been published (e.g., Richards and Richardson, 2012; Taylor *et al.*, 2024; Torous *et al.*, 2025), each addressing distinct facets of digital mental health services. Other studies have examined specific aspects such as user attitudes (e.g. Nogueira-Leite *et al.*, 2024), adoption patterns (e.g. Crisp and Griffiths, 2014) or ethical considerations (e.g. Faissner *et al.*, 2024; Manhal-Baugus, 2001).

It is essential to recognize that the term e-mental health encompasses a broad spectrum of interventions, from automated self-care applications to online counseling delivered by licensed professionals. Within this narrower domain, the volume of scholarly literature is comparatively limited. Some authors include the topic within broader systematic reviews (e.g., Zhou *et al.*, 2021), while others address attitude and adoption (e.g. Mannan *et al.*, 2019; Phillips *et al.*, 2021). Notably, literature explicitly addressing online counseling in the context of mental health stigma remains strongly limited (e.g. Apolinário-Hagen *et al.*, 2018a; Withers *et al.*, 2021).

Furthermore, research on the use of transaction platforms for delivering mental health services, as discussed earlier in this paper, is particularly scarce. While some literature can be found on general health-care platforms (e.g. Hermes *et al.*, 2020; Holgersson *et al.*, 2024), only a small number of articles mention the provision of mental health services via such platforms (e.g. Balcombe and De Leo, 2022; Magid *et al.*, 2024; Olawade *et al.*, 2024; Zhou and Wan, 2022). See Table 1 for an overview of relevant articles addressing e-mental health, online counseling, transaction platforms or stigma.

Table 1. Literature on e-mental health services, counseling, platforms and stigma

Author(s)	Focus	E-mental health	Online counseling	Transaction platforms	Stigma
Manhal-Baugus (2001)	Practical, ethical and legal issues related to e-health services	X			
Corrigan <i>et al.</i> (2005)	Review on mental health stigma and strategies for reduction				X
Wells <i>et al.</i> (2007)	Concerns and considerations regarding online mental health treatment	X	X		
Richards and Richardson (2012)	Systematic review on computer-based psychological treatments	X			
Crisp and Griffiths (2014)	Adoption of e-mental health services	X			X
Rees and MacLaine (2015)	Videoconference-delivered psychological treatment	X	X		
Apolinário-Hagen <i>et al.</i> (2018b)	Attitudes toward guided internet-based therapies	X	X		
Apolinário-Hagen <i>et al.</i> (2018a)	Attitudes toward e-mental health services	X	X		
Robinson <i>et al.</i> (2018)	Investigation of stigma and trivialization via social media				X
Mannan <i>et al.</i> (2019)	Adoption of e-mental health services	X	X		
Hermes <i>et al.</i> (2020)	Platform ecosystems in health care			X	
Ellis <i>et al.</i> (2021)	Application of e-mental health in response to COVID-19	X			
Phillips <i>et al.</i> (2021)	Attitude toward e-mental health services	X	X		
Withers <i>et al.</i> (2021)	Stigma reduction and utilization of mental health services	X	X		X
X. Zhou <i>et al.</i> (2021)	Systematic review on e-mental health services	X	X		
Goh <i>et al.</i> (2021)	Systematic review on effects of stigma-reduction programs				X
Balcombe and De Leo (2022)	Review on use of e-mental health platforms	X		X	
J. Zhou and Wan (2022)	Network effects on mental health platforms	X		X	X
Hazell <i>et al.</i> (2022)	Effect of campaign wording for mental health stigma campaigns				X

(continued)

Table 1. Continued

Author(s)	Focus	E-mental health	Online counseling	Transaction platforms	Stigma
Weitzel <i>et al.</i> (2023)	Usage and experience of e-mental health services	X	X		
Kemp, Davis, <i>et al.</i> (2023)	Barriers to mental health engagement				X
Kemp, Porter, <i>et al.</i> (2023)	Role of stigma and spirituality on mental health help-seeking behavior				X
Y. Lee <i>et al.</i> (2023)	Reducing stigma and promoting mental health help-seeking behavior				X
Faissner <i>et al.</i> (2024)	Ethical aspects of self-tracking apps	X			
Magid <i>et al.</i> (2024)	Impact of e-mental health services on loneliness and mental health	X	X	X	
Nogueira-Leite <i>et al.</i> (2024)	Attitudes toward and adoption of e-mental health apps	X			X
Olawade <i>et al.</i> (2024)	Review on mental health and AI	X			
Taylor <i>et al.</i> (2024)	Systematic review on digital mental health (DMHI) for college students	X	X	X	
Donovan <i>et al.</i> (2024)	Impact of source credibility regarding mental health promotion				X
Griffith and Stein (2024)	Online interventions from peer influencers to reduce stigma				X
Holgerson <i>et al.</i> (2024)	Strategies for health-care platforms				
Coelho <i>et al.</i> (2025)	Review on promoting e-mental health services	X		X	X
Ho <i>et al.</i> (2025)	Systematic review on user engagement with e-mental health services	X			X
Lau <i>et al.</i> (2025)	User-generated content and engagement related to teen mental health on TikTok	X			X
Liverpool <i>et al.</i> (2025)	Systematic review on digital mental health for children and young people	X			X
Torous <i>et al.</i> (2025)	Review on e-mental health services	X			
Zhang <i>et al.</i> (2025)	Anti-stigma effects of public disclosure				X
This article	Adoption of online counseling services via mental health platforms	X	X	X	X
Source(s): Created by authors					

A remarkable number of publications mainly stem from medicine, psychology and related disciplines, representing a lack of insights from a consumer behavior or service marketing perspective. Although research in marketing increasingly addresses the broader e-health sector (e.g. [Calegari and Fettermann, 2022](#); [Cuomo et al., 2020](#); [Kovačić et al., 2022](#); [Singh and Ravi, 2022](#)), findings on e-mental health services remain limited. Here, a recent review on mobile health apps found an overwhelming focus on fitness. Mental health services are widely neglected, leading to missed opportunities for insights into adequate e-mental health provision ([Al-Jabali et al., 2025](#)).

To the best of our knowledge, literature gaps remain on the provision of online counseling services via platforms against the backdrop of mental health stigma, especially from an online service marketing perspective. We aim to fill these gaps by examining the role of online reviews in shaping users' intentions to engage with mental health platforms.

Information adoption

Digitization of daily life has profoundly changed the way potential users seek information. Digital access to health-care information has led to remarkable changes, including in the relationship between service providers and users ([Cuomo et al., 2020](#)).

Many individuals with mental health-related demands use digital tools to find information online. People search for mental health information as a self-management strategy to better understand their experiences, learn about diagnoses and explore coping strategies ([Bucci et al., 2019](#)). A unique role is played by user-generated content (UGC), which can serve as a source of experience for interested potential users ([Cuomo et al., 2020](#)). Notably, it has been found that certain users create UGC as a means to destigmatize their mental health treatment journeys, which, in turn, offers support for audiences experiencing similar journeys ([Yeh et al., 2025](#)). Such public disclosure can offer guidance, reduce stigma and increase mental health literacy ([Zhang et al., 2025](#)). Social media content can help reduce mental health stigma ([Griffith and Stein, 2024](#)), whereas TikTok is especially relevant to the mental health discourse for younger generations ([Lau et al., 2025](#)). A recent study addressed podcasting as a channel for sharing stories and identified improvements in attitudes and intentions of listeners ([Waldman et al., 2024](#)). In line with extant literature, we address another relevant form of user-generated content, which, in marketing, has been identified to provide a broad range of information and opinions, allowing readers a comprehensive comparison: online reviews ([Weitzl, 2017](#)).

Electronic word-of-mouth and online reviews

Across all categories, consumers are increasingly refraining from basing their purchase decisions solely on company-generated information ([Lee et al., 2008](#)). Against this backdrop, eWOM plays an increasing role in buying decision processes. eWOM refers to statements made by current or former users about a product or service that are made accessible to a broad audience via the internet ([Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004](#), p. 39). From a marketing perspective, positive word-of-mouth is considered a form of customer engagement behavior by satisfied users, extending beyond repurchase behavior ([Malhotra et al., 2022](#)). In contrast, poor customer experiences across cognitive, affective, social, situational or personal dimensions are key drivers of negative word-of-mouth ([Ribeiro and Kalro, 2023](#)). The impact of its electronic form (negative eWOM, NeWOM) has been amplified by the rise of social networks and Web 2, which enabled customers to instantly share and access peer reviews ([Verma et al., 2023](#)). NeWOM can result in lower purchase intentions, reduced trust or increased switching behavior ([Ribeiro and Kalro, 2023](#)).

A review in 2012 already found that eWOM offers several benefits compared to traditional media. Customers perceive it as more persuasive and trustworthy than traditional media, such as radio, TV or print advertising. Interestingly, eWOM is also seen as more effective than traditional word-of-mouth, because of its scalability, accessibility and measurability (Cheung and Thadani, 2012) – notions that are still echoed in more recent literature (Donthu *et al.*, 2021). Of special interest for the underlying paper, researchers are increasingly addressing the important role of positive and negative eWOM in the context of online health care (e.g. Jin and Ryu, 2024; Pauli *et al.*, 2023; Shan *et al.*, 2024).

Online reviews, in particular, are considered a widespread and widely accepted form of eWOM (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2004). In contrast to traditional advertising, online reviews reflect users' perspectives and include opinions, information and recommendations (Tsao and Hsieh, 2015). Online reviews are considered more trustworthy and objective than traditional advertising messages (Nieto *et al.*, 2014). According to Jiménez and Mendoza (2013), online reviews are the most influential form of eWOM. In the service sector, online reviews represent a critical determinant of users' willingness to engage with a service. This can be attributed, in part, to the intangibility of services, which amplifies perceived risk. As a result, potential users rely more on peer-generated experiences and evaluations to inform their decision-making process (Reza Jalilvand and Samiei, 2012).

Information adoption model

Sussman and Siegal (2003) addressed the question of knowledge transfer in computer-mediated communication and developed the Information Adoption Model (IAM). Specifically, their study addressed the acceptance of information transmitted via email in a professional context.

In essence, the Information Adoption Model posits that the perceived quality of an information and the credibility of the underlying source influence the perceived usefulness of that information. Subsequently, the perceived usefulness leads to information adoption (Sussman and Siegal, 2003), which describes the extent to which recipients evaluate content as meaningful or acceptable (Watts and Zhang, 2008).

The Information Adoption Model is widely recognized and frequently applied as an explanation for the influence of eWOM. It has been used in numerous studies on eWOM, such as in the contexts of hospitality (Cheung *et al.*, 2008), tourism (Leung, 2022; Tapanainen *et al.*, 2021), or e-commerce (Kumar *et al.*, 2023). It provides a solid explanation for the influences and relationships concerning information acceptance and decision-making in computer-mediated processes, of which eWOM is undoubtedly a part (Verma *et al.*, 2023).

Conceptual model

Barriers preventing potential users from using online psychological services include lack of awareness, lack of trust or fear of prejudice and stigma. In this context, social media plays a unique role, as younger cohorts spend a significant portion of their time on social media (Kemp, Davis, *et al.*, 2023). Social media users disseminate and consume health-related information through user-generated content (Cuomo *et al.*, 2020). However, a certain level of trust in the credibility of such online information is necessary for decision-making regarding online psychological services (Kemp, Davis, *et al.*, 2023). This notion aligns with Donovan *et al.* (2024), who highlight the relevance of the perceived credibility of the source of user-generated content.

Against this backdrop, we address the role of online reviews for the intention to use online psychological services by employing the Information Adoption Model. Figure 1 displays our conceptual model incorporating all relevant constructs and hypotheses.

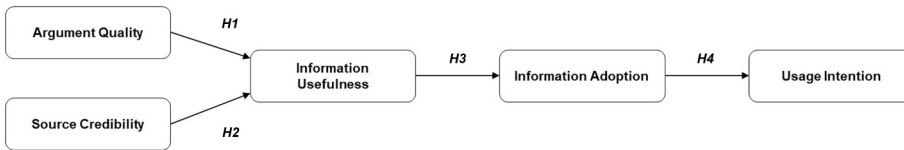


Figure 1. Conceptual model based on [Sussman and Siegal \(2003\)](#) and [Erkan and Evans \(2016\)](#)
Source(s): Created by the authors

Argument quality

Based on the Elaboration Likelihood Model ([Petty and Cacioppo, 1986](#)), the Information Adoption Model ([Sussman and Siegal, 2003](#)) posits that the quality of an argument influences whether a recipient is willing to engage cognitively with the information. Argument quality, therefore, refers to the persuasiveness of the arguments embedded within a message ([Bhattacharjee and Sanford, 2006](#)), and, thus, the extent to which recipients find the content convincing enough to perform a particular behavior.

Recipients can consider certain reviews of high quality, which leads to the information contained being perceived as useful ([Cheung et al., 2009](#)). This notion was also addressed by [Mannan and colleagues \(2019\)](#), who discuss the role of information quality in online mental health service adoption.

Following the Information Adoption Model, we propose that the perceived quality of an information delivered via online reviews influences the perceived usefulness of that information, which leads to *H1*:

- H1.* Perceived argument quality related to online reviews in the context of platform-based psychological counseling services positively influences perceived information usefulness.

Source credibility

Source credibility refers to a source's perceived motivation and ability to produce accurate and truthful information ([Li and Zhan, 2011](#)). It describes the extent to which the author of a review is considered credible ([Levy and Gvili, 2015](#)). Credible sources enable readers to attribute meaning to the information received ([Dedeoglu, 2019](#)). As a result, they are more likely to perceive the information as useful and adopt it. In contrast, sources perceived as noncredible increase users' perceived risk, which may discourage them from following a recommendation ([Cheung et al., 2009](#)). The fact that online reviews are often anonymous ([Cheung et al., 2009](#)) and can be manipulated by companies ([Filiari, 2015](#)), further amplifies the role of source credibility ([López and Sicilia, 2014](#)). Credibility is critical in the context of social topics, because these services typically have a greater impact on individual and societal well-being ([Donovan et al., 2024](#)). As consumers seek information about mental health services, their perceptions of the credibility of reviews play a crucial role in their decision-making process ([Mannan et al., 2019](#)). Against this backdrop, we formulate *H2*:

- H2.* Perceived source credibility related to online reviews in the context of platform-based psychological counseling services positively influences perceived information usefulness.

Information usefulness

Information usefulness refers to the extent to which an information received is perceived as useful and valuable. The Information Adoption Model includes information usefulness as a predictor of potential information adoption (Sussman and Siegal, 2003). This notion is supported by studies across various industries (Cheung *et al.*, 2008; Cheung, 2014; Verma *et al.*, 2023). If recipients consider an information embedded in online reviews as useful, they are more likely to develop the intention to adopt it and incorporate it into their decision-making processes (Cheung *et al.*, 2008). It follows *H3*:

- H3.* Perceived information usefulness related to online reviews in the context of platform-based psychological counseling services positively influences information adoption.

Information adoption and usage intention

Information adoption describes the act of actively engaging with and accepting an information provided (Cheung *et al.*, 2008). It is worth noticing that the Information Adoption Model has been criticized for focusing solely on explaining the adoption of information while neglecting subsequent user behavior (Erkan and Evans, 2016).

Building on this critique, Erkan and Evans (2016) expanded the model by developing the Information Acceptance Model (IACM). Among several additional constructs, such as information need or attitude toward information, the IACM discusses information acceptance (similar to information adoption in IAM) as a determinant of purchase intention (Erkan and Evans, 2016).

Empirical findings support the impact of information adoption or acceptance in various contexts. For example, information adoption considering eWOM has been shown to positively influence young travelers' booking behavior on travel platforms (Song *et al.*, 2021). Against this backdrop, we propose that information adoption (referred to as information acceptance in the IACM) has a positive impact on usage intention, which leads to *H4*:

- H4.* Information adoption related to online reviews in the context of platform-based psychological counseling services positively influences usage intention.

Empirical study

We assessed quantitative empirical data via a structured online questionnaire. The target population comprised German-speaking adults residing in the DACH region (Germany, Austria and Switzerland), selected primarily for linguistic and geographic accessibility. Participants were recruited using a convenience sampling approach, primarily via email invitations. Before completing the online questionnaire, participants were presented with the following overview of the concept of online psychological counseling:

This survey focuses on online psychological counseling. This refers to computer-assisted counseling that is mediated via the internet and takes place interactively between clients and psychological counselors (e.g., clinical psychologists, health psychologists, psychotherapists). Specific forms of communication used in online psychological counseling include, among others, counseling via video/audio or text chat. Terms such as "internet therapy" or "online therapy" are often used synonymously to describe online psychological counseling. Well-known providers of online psychological counseling include, for example, Instahelp or BetterHelp.

We included this information to minimize biases resulting from varying levels of prior knowledge. We further assessed familiarity with the topic and general willingness to use

online psychological counseling services. In the next step, all participants were exposed to the same five online reviews of an online psychological counseling service (see [Figure 2](#)). Notably, only positive reviews were presented to ensure that valence did not act as a confounding variable. The reviews originated from the OPMH Instahelp. However, participants were not informed about the reviews' origin, nor were any brand names disclosed in the reviews.

In the next step, participants were asked to rate argument quality ([Chong et al., 2018](#)), source credibility ([Song et al., 2021](#); [Sussman and Siegal, 2003](#)), information usefulness ([Cheung et al., 2008](#)), information adoption ([Cheung et al., 2009](#); [Erkan and Evans, 2018](#)) and usage intention ([Erkan and Evans, 2016](#); [Song et al., 2021](#)). All constructs were rated using five-point Likert-type scales (see [Table 2](#)). The final part of the structured survey consisted of questions regarding demographic characteristics and internet usage behavior. All items were translated to German and pre-tested with a small sample, which resulted in minor linguistic adjustments.

Results

After data cleaning, 280 completed questionnaires (71% female, aged 18–78, mean age 32.3 years) were retained for analysis. Our sample consisted of German-speaking participants

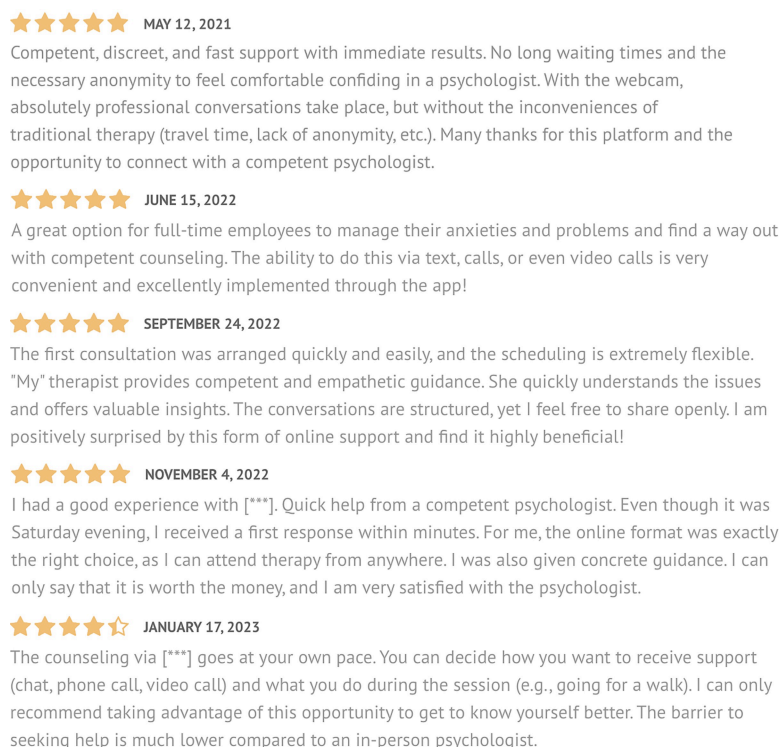


Figure 2. Translated screenshots of publicly available online reviews from [Instahelp \(2025\)](#) (originally in German)

Source(s): [Instahelp \(2025\)](#)

Table 2. Constructs and items (Likert-type scales ranging from 1, “totally agree” to 5, “absolutely don’t agree”)

Construct	Items	Mean	SD	Outer loadings	α
<i>Argument quality</i> Song et al. (2021) , Chong et al. (2018)	The reviews are ... relevant	1.936	0.781	0.809	0.758
	comprehensive	2.121	0.823	0.829	
	accurate	2.114	0.816	0.823	
<i>Source credibility</i> Song et al. (2021) , Sussman and Siegal (2003)	The reviews’ authors are ... credible	2.368	0.905	0.881	0.869
	reliable	2.632	0.843	0.875	
	trustworthy	2.546	0.897	0.873	
	sharing their actual usage experience(s)	2.129	0.827	0.757	
<i>Information usefulness</i> C. M. K. Cheung et al. (2008)	The reviews are ... valuable	2.225	0.847	0.890	0.856
	helpful	2.064	0.843	0.878	
	informative	2.014	0.774	0.774	
	applicable	2.264	0.829	0.799	
<i>Information adoption</i> M. Y. Cheung et al. (2009) , Erkan and Evans (2018)	The reviews ... make my purchase and usage decision easier	2.425	0.997	0.909	0.876
	enhance my effectiveness in making a purchase or usage decision	2.543	0.996	0.879	
	motivate me to make a purchase or usage decision	2.636	1.067	0.897	
<i>Usage intention</i> Erkan and Evans (2016) , Song et al. (2021)	Based on the reviews ... it is likely that I will use psychological online counseling	3.236	1.060	0.864	0.843
	I have a positive attitude towards using psychological online counseling	2.389	1.008	0.806	
	I intend to use psychological online counseling in the near future	3.507	1.066	0.806	
	I will recommend psychological online counseling	3.096	1.086	0.817	

Source(s): Created by authors

from Austria, Germany and Switzerland. In total, 67.9% of participants reported having prior awareness of the concept of online psychological counseling, and 64.6% could generally imagine using such a service if needed.

We applied Structural Equation modeling (SEM) with the software SmartPLS 4 ([Ringle et al., 2024](#)). Following the two-step procedure proposed by [Anderson and Gerbing \(1988\)](#), we started by assessing validity and reliability, which was particularly important as the validated English items had to be translated into German for this study.

Factor analysis led to the elimination of two items with factor loadings below the threshold of 0.7. Average variance extracted (AVE) values for all constructs were above 0.5, which further ensured convergent validity. Both Cronbach’s alpha and composite reliability exceeded the threshold of 0.7 ([Hair et al., 2016](#)). No square correlations were higher than the AVE, which met the Fornell–Larcker criterion of discriminant validity (see [Table 3](#)) ([Fornell and Larcker, 1981](#)).

Table 3. Reliability statistics (CR = composite reliability (rh_c), AVE = average variance extracted)

Construct	α	CR	AVE	AQ	IA	IU	SC	UI
Argument quality (AQ)	0.758	0.861	0.673	0.820				
Information adoption (IA)	0.876	0.924	0.801	0.479	0.895			
Information usefulness (IU)	0.856	0.903	0.700	0.744	0.590	0.837		
Source credibility (SC)	0.869	0.911	0.720	0.622	0.501	0.717	0.848	
Usage intention (UI)	0.843	0.894	0.678	0.468	0.595	0.513	0.504	0.824

Source(s): Created by authors

In the second step, we examined the predictive power of our conceptual model and the significance of each path coefficient. All R^2 values were above the threshold for weak effects of 0.25 (Information Usefulness: 0.659, Information Adoption: 0.348, Usage Intention: 0.354). The effect size f^2 for each path was above the threshold for medium effects of 0.15 ($H1$: 0.425, $H2$: 0.308, $H3$: 0.533, $H4$: 0.548) (Hair *et al.*, 2016).

All hypothesized relationships proved significant. Argument quality was found to positively influence information usefulness ($\beta = 0.486$, $t = 10.519$, $p < 0.01$), confirming $H1$. $H2$, which proposed a positive influence of source credibility on information usefulness, was found to be significant and confirmed ($\beta = 0.414$, $t = 8.670$, $p < 0.01$). $H3$, which described a positive influence of information usefulness on information adoption, was confirmed ($\beta = 0.590$, $t = 13.025$, $p < 0.01$). Finally, a positive significant influence of information adoption on usage intention was found ($\beta = 0.595$, $t = 13.125$, $p < 0.01$), thereby confirming $H4$ (see Table 4).

To account for potential gender-related differences due to the unequal gender distribution in our sample, we conducted a multi-group analysis (bootstrap MGA) in SmartPLS 4. The results revealed no statistically significant differences related to gender across all hypothesized paths (two-tailed p -values: $H1$: 0.352, $H2$: 0.658, $H3$: 0.956, $H4$: 0.348).

Although not hypothesized, SEM further allowed us to assess indirect relationships through serial mediation in our conceptual model. The analysis of specific indirect effects provided evidence for a mediated path from argument quality to usage intention ($\beta = 0.171$, $t = 5.761$, $p < 0.01$) and from source credibility to usage intention ($\beta = 0.145$, $t = 5.390$, $p < 0.01$).

Discussion and contribution

Misunderstanding and stigma highlight the importance of trust in service providers for potential users' motivation to adopt e-mental health services (Kemp, Davis, *et al.*, 2023). As interested individuals increasingly turn to user-generated content for health-related information (Cuomo *et al.*, 2020), online reviews can serve as a valuable source of information (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2004).

Table 4. Path coefficients

Path	β	t	p
$H1$ Argument quality $\rightarrow$ Information usefulness	0.486	10.519	< 0.001
$H2$ Source credibility $\rightarrow$ Information usefulness	0.414	8.670	< 0.001
$H3$ Information usefulness $\rightarrow$ Information adoption	0.590	13.025	< 0.001
$H4$ Information adoption $\rightarrow$ Usage intention	0.595	13.152	< 0.001

Source(s): Created by authors

It is crucial for recipients to perceive online reviews as high-quality to find the information useful (Cheung *et al.*, 2009). Perceived information quality has been identified to positively influence users' willingness to purchase in tourism (Tapanainen *et al.*, 2021), e-commerce (Kumar *et al.*, 2023), and, importantly, e-mental health (Mannan *et al.*, 2019). In line with prior work, our findings highlight the role of information quality and demonstrate its influence on information usefulness in the context of platform-based online counseling.

However, the usefulness of information found on the internet depends not only on its content but also on its author. More specifically, the credibility of a source of health-related information plays a critical role (Donovan *et al.*, 2024), especially in the context of e-mental health (Mannan *et al.*, 2019). Our findings align with this notion and statistically show the significant influence of source credibility on perceived information usefulness in the context of platform-based online counseling.

To adopt an information, recipients need to consider it useful and valuable (Sussman and Siegal, 2003). In line with findings across various industries (Cheung *et al.*, 2008; Cheung, 2014; Verma *et al.*, 2023), our study demonstrates the significant influence of information usefulness for information adoption in the context of e-mental-health platforms.

Information adoption (Sussman and Siegal, 2003) and information acceptance (Erkan and Evans, 2016) describe participants' acceptance and engagement with an information provided. Extant literature highlights the role of information adoption for behavioral intentions (Song *et al.*, 2021). Our findings extend prior findings by empirically demonstrating the significant influence of information adoption on usage intention in the context of e-mental health platforms.

Drawing on insights from various disciplines, our article highlights the role of previous users' reviews in shaping future users' intentions. To the best of our knowledge, this is one of the first academic publications addressing mental health platforms from a consumer behavior perspective. It complements the body of medical and psychological literature on e-mental health services (Weitzel *et al.*, 2023) with insights from marketing. Furthermore, it extends existing marketing research on the influence of eWOM (Kumar *et al.*, 2023; Tapanainen *et al.*, 2021) by applying it to a mental health platform context.

We recommend that service providers integrate eWOM and online reviews as a relevant component in their communication strategies. To counteract mental health stigma and to increase the motivation to seek support services, it is essential to implement awareness-raising measures and provide low-threshold access to these services (Kemp, Davis, *et al.*, 2023). Easily accessible and anonymous online services combined with targeted information via eWOM can play a crucial role in increasing the adoption of mental health services.

Conclusion

Mental health is often viewed as stigmatized and should be approached with the same awareness and commitment as other health and wellness topics. A key societal challenge is to enhance awareness, improve access to support services and promote targeted campaigns and programs (Kemp, Davis, *et al.*, 2023). In this context, online psychological services can serve as a valuable resource by providing low-threshold interventions and supplementary support options (Emmett *et al.*, 2025). However, lack of awareness, misunderstandings and stigma persist as barriers to adoption (Kemp, Davis, *et al.*, 2023). Potential users increasingly search for mental health-related topics online (Bucci *et al.*, 2019), where user-generated content serves as a relevant source of information (Cuomo *et al.*, 2020).

Against this backdrop, our study explores the role of online reviews for the intention to use platform-based psychological counseling services. Our findings demonstrate how credibility and quality impact the perceived usefulness of an online review, which in turn positively influences information adoption, and, subsequently, usage intention. By

strategically leveraging high-quality online reviews – for instance, by encouraging users to share their experiences – e-mental health platforms can not only enhance trust and adoption but also contribute to reducing mental health stigma and improving access to psychological support on a societal scale.

Limitations and avenues for future research

Future researchers are urged to compare the influence of reviews on e-mental health adoption with other communication tools. In addition, future studies could examine whether online reviews primarily influence help-seeking behavior or the choice of a specific service provider. It would also be valuable to investigate the impact of negative or mixed reviews on service adoption in this domain. Finally, future research could compare reviews of online and offline services to identify factors unique to e-mental health.

Ethics statement

This study was conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines and the principles of research integrity. Given the anonymous nature of surveys, no personally identifiable information was collected. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, with an emphasis on the voluntary nature of participation and adherence to General Data Protection Regulation guidelines. Participants were assured that their responses would be anonymized, and no attempt would be made to identify individuals based on their survey responses.

Notes

The authors disclose that two coauthors are affiliated with the e-mental health platform Instahelp. However, no financial or other conflicts of interest exist. A previous version of this article was published in German in the edited volume *Haas-Kotzegger (2025), Digital Economy: Die neuen Spielregeln für Unternehmen*.

References

- Aiyub, A., Jannah, S.R., Marthoenis, M., Abdullah, A. and Sofyan, H. (2023), “Peer stigma, consequences, and anti-stigma strategies in adolescents with mental disorders: a qualitative investigation”, *Journal of Public Mental Health*, Vol. 22 No. 2, pp. 60-72, doi: [10.1108/JPMH-09-2022-0095](https://doi.org/10.1108/JPMH-09-2022-0095).
- Al-Jabali, R.N., Ahmad, N. and Khatib, S.F.A. (2025), “Holistic framework for the adoption determinants of mobile health applications: a systematic literature review”, *International Journal of Pharmaceutical and Healthcare Marketing*, doi: [10.1108/IJPHM-08-2024-0081](https://doi.org/10.1108/IJPHM-08-2024-0081).
- Anderson, J.C. and Gerbing, D.W. (1988), “Structural equation modeling in practice: a review and recommended two-step approach”, *Psychological Bulletin*, Vol. 103 No. 3, pp. 411-423, doi: [10.1037/0033-2909.103.3.411](https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.103.3.411).
- Apolinário-Hagen, J., Fritsche, L., Bierhals, C. and Salewski, C. (2018a), “Improving attitudes toward e-mental health services in the general population via psychoeducational information material: a randomized controlled trial”, *Internet Interventions*, Vol. 12, pp. 141-149, doi: [10.1016/j.invent.2017.12.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.invent.2017.12.002).
- Apolinário-Hagen, J., Harrer, M., Kählke, F., Fritsche, L., Salewski, C. and Ebert, D.D. (2018b), “Public attitudes toward guided Internet-Based therapies: web-based survey study”, *JMIR Mental Health*, Vol. 5 No. 2, p. e10735, doi: [10.2196/10735](https://doi.org/10.2196/10735).
- Balcombe, L. and De Leo, D. (2022), “Evaluation of the use of digital mental health platforms and interventions: scoping review”, *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, Vol. 20 No. 1, p. 362, doi: [10.3390/ijerph20010362](https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20010362).

- BetterHelp (2025), "BetterHelp | professional therapy with a licensed therapist", available at: www.betterhelp.com (accessed 10 March 2025).
- Bhattacharjee, A. and Sanford, C. (2006), "Influence processes for information technology acceptance: an elaboration likelihood model", *MIS Quarterly*, Vol. 30 No. 4, pp. 805-825, doi: [10.2307/25148755](https://doi.org/10.2307/25148755).
- Bucci, S., Schwannauer, M. and Berry, N. (2019), "The digital revolution and its impact on mental health care", *Psychology and Psychotherapy: Theory, Research and Practice*, Vol. 92 No. 2, pp. 277-297, doi: [10.1111/papt.12222](https://doi.org/10.1111/papt.12222).
- Calegari, L.P. and Fettermann, D.C. (2022), "Analysis of barriers and benefits associated with e-health technology applications", *Journal of Technology Management and Innovation*, Vol. 17 No. 4, pp. 106-116, doi: [10.4067/s0718-27242022000400106](https://doi.org/10.4067/s0718-27242022000400106).
- Chan, K. and Zhuo, Y. (2024), "Developing and marketing mobile health applications for low-income working adults in Hong Kong", *International Journal of Pharmaceutical and Healthcare Marketing*, doi: [10.1108/IJPHM-08-2024-0086](https://doi.org/10.1108/IJPHM-08-2024-0086).
- Chan, J.K., Farrer, L.M., Gulliver, A., Bennett, K. and Griffiths, K.M. (2016), "University students' views on the perceived benefits and drawbacks of seeking help for mental health problems on the internet: a qualitative study", *JMIR Human Factors*, Vol. 3 No. 1, p. e3, doi: [10.2196/humanfactors.4765](https://doi.org/10.2196/humanfactors.4765).
- Cheung, R. (2014), "The influence of electronic word-of-mouth on information adoption in online customer communities", *Global Economic Review*, Vol. 43 No. 1, pp. 42-57, doi: [10.1080/1226508X.2014.884048](https://doi.org/10.1080/1226508X.2014.884048).
- Cheung, C.M.K. and Thadani, D.R. (2012), "The impact of electronic word-of-mouth communication: a literature analysis and integrative model", *Decision Support Systems*, Vol. 54 No. 1, pp. 461-470, doi: [10.1016/j.dss.2012.06.008](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dss.2012.06.008).
- Cheung, C.M.K., Lee, M.K.O. and Rabjohn, N. (2008), "The impact of electronic word-of-mouth: the adoption of online opinions in online customer communities", *Internet Research*, Vol. 18 No. 3, pp. 229-247, doi: [10.1108/10662240810883290](https://doi.org/10.1108/10662240810883290).
- Cheung, M.Y., Luo, C., Sia, C.L. and Chen, H. (2009), "Credibility of electronic word-of-mouth: informational and normative determinants of on-line consumer recommendations", *International Journal of Electronic Commerce*, Vol. 13 No. 4, pp. 9-38, doi: [10.2753/JEC1086-4415130402](https://doi.org/10.2753/JEC1086-4415130402).
- Chong, A.Y.L., Khong, K.W., Ma, T., McCabe, S. and Wang, Y. (2018), "Analyzing key influences of tourists' acceptance of online reviews in travel decisions", *Internet Research*, Vol. 28 No. 3, pp. 564-586, doi: [10.1108/IntR-05-2017-0212](https://doi.org/10.1108/IntR-05-2017-0212).
- Coelho, J., Pécune, F., Micoulaud-Franchi, J.-A., Bioulac, B. and Philip, P. (2025), "Promoting mental health in the age of new digital tools: balancing challenges and opportunities of social media, chatbots, and wearables", *Frontiers in Digital Health*, Vol. 7, doi: [10.3389/fdgth.2025.1560580](https://doi.org/10.3389/fdgth.2025.1560580).
- Corrigan, P.W., Kerr, A. and Knudsen, L. (2005), "The stigma of mental illness: explanatory models and methods for change", *Applied and Preventive Psychology*, Vol. 11 No. 3, pp. 179-190, doi: [10.1016/j.appsy.2005.07.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appsy.2005.07.001).
- Crisp, D.A. and Griffiths, K.M. (2014), "Participating in online mental health interventions: who is most likely to sign up and why?", *Depression Research and Treatment*, Vol. 2014, p. e790457, doi: [10.1155/2014/790457](https://doi.org/10.1155/2014/790457).
- Cuomo, M.T., Tortora, D., Giordano, A., Festa, G., Metallo, G. and Martinelli, E. (2020), "User-generated content in the era of digital well-being: a netnographic analysis in a healthcare marketing context", *Psychology and Marketing*, Vol. 37 No. 4, pp. 578-587, doi: [10.1002/mar.21327](https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.21327).
- Dedeoglu, B.B. (2019), "Are information quality and source credibility really important for shared content on social media? The moderating role of gender", *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, Vol. 31 No. 1, pp. 513-534, doi: [10.1108/IJCHM-10-2017-0691](https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCHM-10-2017-0691).

- Donovan, R.J., Jalleh, G. and Drane, C. (2024), "Impact of source credibility on behavioural responses to a mental health promotion social marketing campaign", *Journal of Social Marketing*, Vol. 14 No. 2, pp. 250-263, doi: [10.1108/JSOCM-07-2023-0159](https://doi.org/10.1108/JSOCM-07-2023-0159).
- Donthu, N., Kumar, S., Pandey, N., Pandey, N. and Mishra, A. (2021), "Mapping the electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) research: a systematic review and bibliometric analysis", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 135, pp. 758-773, doi: [10.1016/j.jbusres.2021.07.015](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2021.07.015).
- Ellis, L., Meulenbroeks, I., Churrua, K., Pomare, C., Hatem, S., Harrison, R., Zurynski, Y. and Braithwaite, J. (2021), "The application of e-mental health in response to COVID-19: scoping review and bibliometric analysis", *JMIR Mental Health*, Vol. 8 No. 12, doi: [10.2196/preprints.32948](https://doi.org/10.2196/preprints.32948).
- Emmett, L., Geier, S. and Stetina, B.U. (2025), "Equal Access for All – Möglichkeiten und Grenzen von E-Mental-Health-Angeboten am Beispiel von Instahelp, einer Plattform für Psychologische online-Beratung", in Saase, S., Namdiero-Walsh, A., Schlör, S. and Dücker, K. (Eds), *Intersektionalität in Therapie und Beratung: (Un)Möglichkeiten*, Nomos, Baden-Baden.
- Erkan, I. and Evans, C. (2016), "The influence of eWOM in social media on consumers' purchase intentions: an extended approach to information adoption", *Computers in Human Behavior*, Vol. 61, pp. 47-55, doi: [10.1016/j.chb.2016.03.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.03.003).
- Erkan, I. and Evans, C. (2018), "Social media or shopping websites? The influence of eWOM on consumers' online purchase intentions", *Journal of Marketing Communications*, Vol. 24 No. 6, pp. 617-632, doi: [10.1080/13527266.2016.1184706](https://doi.org/10.1080/13527266.2016.1184706).
- Faissner, M., Kuhn, E., Müller, R. and Laacke, S. (2024), "Detecting your depression with your smartphone? – An ethical analysis of epistemic injustice in passive self-tracking apps", *Ethics and Information Technology*, Vol. 26 No. 2, p. 28, doi: [10.1007/s10676-024-09765-7](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10676-024-09765-7).
- Filieri, R. (2015), "What makes online reviews helpful? A diagnosticity-adoption framework to explain informational and normative influences in e-WOM", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 68 No. 6, pp. 1261-1270, doi: [10.1016/j.jbusres.2014.11.006](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2014.11.006).
- Fornell, C. and Larcker, D.F. (1981), "Structural equation models with unobservable variables and measurement error: Algebra and statistics", *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. 18 No. 3, pp. 382-388, doi: [10.1177/002224378101800313](https://doi.org/10.1177/002224378101800313).
- Geier, S. and Frech, B. (2019), "Emotionen am Arbeitsplatz. Mentales Online-Coaching als Erfolgsformel für Unternehmen und Mitarbeitende", in Gollner, E. and Hauer, K. (Eds), *Sind resiliente Unternehmen erfolgreichere Unternehmen?*, Leykam, Graz, Vol. 18, pp. 87-98.
- Goh, Y.-S., Ow Yong, Q.Y.J. and Tam, W.-S.W. (2021), "Effects of online stigma-reduction programme for people experiencing mental health conditions: a systematic review and meta-analysis", *International Journal of Mental Health Nursing*, Vol. 30 No. 5, pp. 1040-1056, doi: [10.1111/inm.12893](https://doi.org/10.1111/inm.12893).
- Griffith, F.J. and Stein, C.H. (2024), "Online art-based interventions from peer influencers to reduce mental health stigma: a randomized-controlled trial", *Health Communication*, Vol. 40 No. 8, pp. 1-11, doi: [10.1080/10410236.2024.2403171](https://doi.org/10.1080/10410236.2024.2403171).
- Haas-Kotzegger, U. (Ed.) (2025), *Digital Economy: Die neuen Spielregeln für Unternehmen: Interdisziplinäre Einblicke und Praxisstrategien für Marketing, Sales und Management*, Springer Fachmedien, Wiesbaden, doi: [10.1007/978-3-658-47828-5](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-47828-5).
- Hadwich, K., Georgi, D., Tuzovic, S., Büttner, J. and Bruhn, M. (2010), "Perceived quality of e-health services", *International Journal of Pharmaceutical and Healthcare Marketing*, Vol. 4 No. 2, pp. 112-136, doi: [10.1108/17506121011059740](https://doi.org/10.1108/17506121011059740).
- Hair, J.F., Hult, G.T.M., Ringle, C.M. and Sarstedt, M. (2016), *A Primer on Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM)*, 2nd ed., Sage, Los Angeles.
- Hazell, C.M., Fixsen, A. and Berry, C. (2022), "Is it time to change the approach of mental health stigma campaigns? An experimental investigation of the effect of campaign wording on stigma and help-seeking intentions", *Plos One*, Vol. 17 No. 8, doi: [10.1371/journal.pone.0273254](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0273254).

- Hennig-Thurau, T., Gwinner, K.P., Walsh, G. and Gremler, D.D. (2004), "Electronic word-of-mouth via consumer-opinion platforms: what motivates consumers to articulate themselves on the internet?", *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, Vol. 18 No. 1, pp. 38-52, doi: [10.1002/dir.10073](https://doi.org/10.1002/dir.10073).
- Hermes, S., Riasanow, T., Clemons, E.K., Böhm, M. and Krcmar, H. (2020), "The digital transformation of the healthcare industry: exploring the rise of emerging platform ecosystems and their influence on the role of patients", *Business Research*, Vol. 13 No. 3, pp. 1033-1069, doi: [10.1007/s40685-020-00125-x](https://doi.org/10.1007/s40685-020-00125-x).
- Ho, T.Q.A., Le, L.K.-D., Engel, L., Le, N., Melvin, G., Le, H.N.D. and Mihalopoulos, C. (2025), "Barriers to and facilitators of user engagement with web-based mental health interventions in young people: a systematic review", *European Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, Vol. 34 No. 1, pp. 83-100, doi: [10.1007/s00787-024-02386-x](https://doi.org/10.1007/s00787-024-02386-x).
- Holgerson, M., Björkdahl, J., Essén, A. and Frishammar, J. (2024), "Health care platforms need a strategy overhaul", *MIT Sloan Management Review*, Vol. 65 No. 3.
- Instahelp (2025), "Psychological counselling & online therapy – start now!", Instahelp – Your Online Psychologist", available at: <https://instahelp.me/en/> (accessed 9 October 2025).
- Jiménez, F.R. and Mendoza, N.A. (2013), "Too popular to ignore: the influence of online reviews on purchase intentions of search and experience products", *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, Vol. 27 No. 3, pp. 226-235, doi: [10.1016/j.intmar.2013.04.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2013.04.004).
- Jin, J. and Ryu, M.H. (2024), "Sustainable healthcare in China: analysis of user satisfaction, reuse intention, and electronic word-of-mouth for online health service platforms", *Sustainability*, Vol. 16 No. 17, p. 7584, doi: [10.3390/su16177584](https://doi.org/10.3390/su16177584).
- Kemp, E., Davis, C.D. and Porter, M. (2023), "Addressing barriers to mental health wellness: prescriptions for marketing", *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing*, Vol. 42 No. 3, pp. 262-278, doi: [10.1177/07439156221140787](https://doi.org/10.1177/07439156221140787).
- Kemp, E., Porter, M., Cromartie, J.S. and Williams, K.M. (2023), "The role of stigma and spirituality on mental health help-seeking behavior: an experimental approach", *Journal of Communication in Healthcare*, Vol. 16 No. 2, pp. 197-204, doi: [10.1080/17538068.2022.2105109](https://doi.org/10.1080/17538068.2022.2105109).
- Kovačić, M., Mutavdžija, M. and Buntak, K. (2022), "e-health application, implementation and challenges: a literature review", *Business Systems Research Journal*, Vol. 13 No. 1, pp. 1-18, doi: [10.2478/bsrj-2022-0001](https://doi.org/10.2478/bsrj-2022-0001).
- Kumar, S., Prakash, G., Gupta, B. and Capiello, G. (2023), "How e-WOM influences consumers' purchase intention towards private label brands on e-commerce platforms: investigation through IAM (information adoption model) and ELM (elaboration likelihood model) models", *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, Vol. 187, p. 122199, doi: [10.1016/j.techfore.2022.122199](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2022.122199).
- Lau, N., Srinakaran, K., Aalfs, H., Zhao, X. and Palermo, T.M. (2025), "TikTok and teen mental health: an analysis of user-generated content and engagement", *Journal of Pediatric Psychology*, Vol. 50 No. 1, pp. 63-75, doi: [10.1093/jpepsy/jsae039](https://doi.org/10.1093/jpepsy/jsae039).
- Lee, J., Park, D.-H. and Han, I. (2008), "The effect of negative online consumer reviews on product attitude: an information processing view", *Electronic Commerce Research and Applications*, Vol. 7 No. 3, pp. 341-352, doi: [10.1016/j.elerap.2007.05.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.elerap.2007.05.004).
- Lee, Y., Yoon, H.J. and Joo, J. (2023), "Role of fresh start mindset framing in reducing stigma and promoting mental health help-seeking behavior", *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, Vol. 22 No. 3, pp. 701-720, doi: [10.1002/cb.2155](https://doi.org/10.1002/cb.2155).
- Leung, D. (2022), "The interplay of review valence and review platform on readers' perceptions and reactions toward online hotel reviews", *International Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Administration*, Vol. 23 No. 4, pp. 696-722, doi: [10.1080/15256480.2020.1842839](https://doi.org/10.1080/15256480.2020.1842839).
- Levy, S. and Gvili, Y. (2015), "How credible is E-Word of mouth across digital-marketing channels?: The roles of social capital, information richness, and interactivity", *Journal of Advertising Research*, Vol. 55 No. 1, pp. 95-109, doi: [10.2501/JAR-55-1-095-109](https://doi.org/10.2501/JAR-55-1-095-109).

- Li, J. and Zhan, L. (2011), "Online persuasion: how the written word drives WOM: evidence from consumer-generated product reviews", *Journal of Advertising Research*, Vol. 51 No. 1, pp. 239-257, doi: [10.2501/JAR-51-1-239-257](https://doi.org/10.2501/JAR-51-1-239-257).
- Liverpool, S., Mc Donagh, C., Feather, J., Uzond, C., Howarth, M., Bannerman, F., Kaehne, A., Foster, C. and Mateus, C. (2025), "Updates on digital mental health interventions for children and young people: systematic overview of reviews", *European Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, pp. 1-14, doi: [10.1007/s00787-025-02722-9](https://doi.org/10.1007/s00787-025-02722-9).
- López, M. and Sicilia, M. (2014), "Determinants of E-WOM influence: the role of consumers' internet experience", *Journal of Theoretical and Applied Electronic Commerce Research*, Vol. 9 No. 1, pp. 28-43, doi: [10.4067/S0718-18762014000100004](https://doi.org/10.4067/S0718-18762014000100004).
- Magid, K., Sagui-Henson, S.J., Sweet, C.C., Smith, B.J., Chamberlain, C.E.W. and Levens, S.M. (2024), "The impact of digital mental health services on loneliness and mental health: results from a prospective, observational study", *International Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, Vol. 31 No. 3, pp. 468-478, doi: [10.1007/s12529-023-10204-y](https://doi.org/10.1007/s12529-023-10204-y).
- Malhotra, N., Frech, B., Leeftang, P., Kim, Y.-A. and Higson, H. (2022), "Understanding how satisfactory service relationships can be mutually beneficial in the higher education context", *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 57 No. 2, pp. 562-598, doi: [10.1108/EJM-05-2021-0345](https://doi.org/10.1108/EJM-05-2021-0345).
- Manhal-Baugus, M. (2001), "E-Therapy: practical, ethical, and legal issues", *CyberPsychology and Behavior*, Vol. 4 No. 5, pp. 551-563, doi: [10.1089/109493101753235142](https://doi.org/10.1089/109493101753235142).
- Mannan, M., Ahamed, R. and Zaman, S.B. (2019), "Consumers' willingness to purchase online mental health services", *Journal of Services Marketing*, Vol. 33 No. 5, pp. 557-571, doi: [10.1108/JSM-05-2018-0163](https://doi.org/10.1108/JSM-05-2018-0163).
- Nieto, J., Hernández-Maestro, R.M. and Muñoz-Gallego, P.A. (2014), "Marketing decisions, customer reviews, and business performance: the use of the Toprural website by spanish rural lodging establishments", *Tourism Management*, Vol. 45, pp. 115-123, doi: [10.1016/j.tourman.2014.03.009](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2014.03.009).
- Nogueira-Leite, D., Marques-Cruz, M. and Cruz-Correia, R. (2024), "Individuals' attitudes toward digital mental health apps and implications for adoption in Portugal: web-based survey", *BMC Medical Informatics and Decision Making*, Vol. 24 No. 1, p. 99, doi: [10.1186/s12911-024-02488-1](https://doi.org/10.1186/s12911-024-02488-1).
- Olawade, D.B., Wada, O.Z., Odetayo, A., David-Olawade, A.C., Asaolu, F. and Eberhardt, J. (2024), "Enhancing mental health with artificial intelligence: current trends and future prospects", *Journal of Medicine, Surgery, and Public Health*, Vol. 3, p. 100099, doi: [10.1016/j.glmedi.2024.100099](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.glmedi.2024.100099).
- Parker, G., Van Alstyne, M. and Choudary, S.P. (2016), *Platform Revolution: How Networked Markets Are Transforming the Economy and How to Make Them Work for You*, W. W. Norton and Company, New York, NY.
- Pauli, G., Martin, S. and Greiling, D. (2023), "The current state of research of word-of-mouth in the health care sector", *International Review on Public and Nonprofit Marketing*, Vol. 20 No. 1, pp. 125-148, doi: [10.1007/s12208-022-00334-6](https://doi.org/10.1007/s12208-022-00334-6).
- Petty, R.E. and Cacioppo, J.T. (1986), *Communication and Persuasion*, Springer, New York, NY, doi: [10.1007/978-1-4612-4964-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4612-4964-1).
- Phillips, E.A., Himmler, S.F. and Schreyögg, J. (2021), "Preferences for e-mental health interventions in Germany: a discrete choice experiment", *Value in Health*, Vol. 24 No. 3, pp. 421-430, doi: [10.1016/j.jval.2020.09.018](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jval.2020.09.018).
- Rees, C.S. and MacLaine, E. (2015), "A systematic review of videoconference-delivered psychological treatment for anxiety disorders", *Australian Psychologist*, Vol. 50 No. 4, pp. 259-264, doi: [10.1111/ap.12122](https://doi.org/10.1111/ap.12122).
- Reza Jalilvand, M. and Samiei, N. (2012), "The impact of electronic word of mouth on a tourism destination choice : testing the theory of planned behavior (TPB)", *Internet Research*, Vol. 22 No. 5, pp. 591-612, doi: [10.1108/10662241211271563](https://doi.org/10.1108/10662241211271563).

- Ribeiro, D.A. and Kalro, A.D. (2023), "Four decades of negative word-of-mouth and negative electronic word-of-mouth: a morphological analysis", *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, Vol. 47 No. 6, pp. 2528-2552, doi: [10.1111/ijcs.12962](https://doi.org/10.1111/ijcs.12962).
- Richards, D. and Richardson, T. (2012), "Computer-based psychological treatments for depression: a systematic review and meta-analysis", *Clinical Psychology Review*, Vol. 32 No. 4, pp. 329-342, doi: [10.1016/j.cpr.2012.02.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2012.02.004).
- Ringle, C., Wende, S. and Becker, J.-M. (2024), "SmartPLS 4", SmartPLS GmbH, Bönningstedt.
- Robinson, P., Turk, D., Jilka, S. and Cella, M. (2018), "Measuring attitudes towards mental health using social media: investigating stigma and trivialisation", *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, Vol. 54 No. 1, pp. 51-58, doi: [10.1007/s00127-018-1571-5](https://doi.org/10.1007/s00127-018-1571-5).
- Roettl, J., Bidmon, S. and Terlutter, R. (2016), "What predicts patients' willingness to undergo online treatment and pay for online treatment? Results from a Web-Based survey to investigate the changing Patient-Physician relationship", *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, Vol. 18 No. 2, p. e32, doi: [10.2196/jmir.5244](https://doi.org/10.2196/jmir.5244).
- Rost, T., Stein, J., Löbner, M., Kersting, A., Luck-Sikorski, C. and Riedel-Heller, S.G. (2017), "User acceptance of computerized cognitive behavioral therapy for depression: systematic review", *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, Vol. 19 No. 9, p. e309, doi: [10.2196/jmir.7662](https://doi.org/10.2196/jmir.7662).
- Shan, W., Wang, J., Shi, X. and David Evans, R. (2024), "The impact of electronic word-of-mouth on patients' choices in online health communities: a cross-media perspective", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 173, p. 114404, doi: [10.1016/j.jbusres.2023.114404](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2023.114404).
- Singh, A. and Ravi, P. (2022), "Adoption of E-health platforms by medical practitioners: mediating effect of attitude on E-health platforms usage", *Health Marketing Quarterly*, Vol. 39 No. 1, pp. 61-73, doi: [10.1080/07359683.2021.1995637](https://doi.org/10.1080/07359683.2021.1995637).
- Song, B.L., Liew, C.Y., Sia, J.Y. and Gopal, K. (2021), "Electronic word-of-mouth in travel social networking sites and young consumers' purchase intentions: an extended information adoption model", *Young Consumers*, Vol. 22 No. 4, pp. 521-538, doi: [10.1108/YC-03-2021-1288](https://doi.org/10.1108/YC-03-2021-1288).
- Sussman, S.W. and Siegal, W.S. (2003), "Informational influence in organizations: an integrated approach to knowledge adoption", *Information Systems Research*, Vol. 14 No. 1, pp. 47-65, doi: [10.1287/isre.14.1.47.14767](https://doi.org/10.1287/isre.14.1.47.14767).
- Swan, E.L., Dahl, A.J. and Peltier, J.W. (2019), "Health-care marketing in an omni-channel environment: exploring telemedicine and other digital touchpoints", *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, Vol. 13 No. 4, pp. 602-618, doi: [10.1108/JRIM-03-2019-0039](https://doi.org/10.1108/JRIM-03-2019-0039).
- Tapanainen, T., Dao, T.K. and Nguyen, T.T.H. (2021), "Impacts of online word-of-mouth and personalities on intention to choose a destination", *Computers in Human Behavior*, Vol. 116, p. 106656, doi: [10.1016/j.chb.2020.106656](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2020.106656).
- Taylor, M.E., Liu, M., Abelson, S., Eisenberg, D., Lipson, S.K. and Schueller, S.M. (2024), "The reach, effectiveness, adoption, implementation, and maintenance of digital mental health interventions for college students: a systematic review", *Current Psychiatry Reports*, Vol. 26 No. 12, pp. 683-693, doi: [10.1007/s11920-024-01545-w](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11920-024-01545-w).
- Torous, J., Linardon, J., Goldberg, S.B., Sun, S., Bell, I., Nicholas, J., Hassan, L., Hua, Y., Milton, A. and Firth, J. (2025), "The evolving field of digital mental health: current evidence and implementation issues for smartphone apps, generative artificial intelligence, and virtual reality", *World Psychiatry*, Vol. 24 No. 2, pp. 156-174, doi: [10.1002/wps.21299](https://doi.org/10.1002/wps.21299).
- Tsao, W.-C. and Hsieh, M.-T. (2015), "eWOM persuasiveness: do eWOM platforms and product type matter?", *Electronic Commerce Research*, Vol. 15 No. 4, pp. 509-541, doi: [10.1007/s10660-015-9198-z](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10660-015-9198-z).

- Verma, D., Dewani, P.P., Behl, A. and Dwivedi, Y.K. (2023), "Understanding the impact of eWOM communication through the lens of information adoption model: a meta-analytic structural equation modeling perspective", *Computers in Human Behavior*, Vol. 143, p. 107710, doi: [10.1016/j.chb.2023.107710](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2023.107710).
- Waldman, E., Phillips, L. and Carrotte, E.R. (2024), "Listeners' perspectives of a co-designed podcast on mental illness stigma: a qualitative study", *Journal of Public Mental Health*, Vol. 23 No. 4, pp. 339-347, doi: [10.1108/JPMH-05-2024-0063](https://doi.org/10.1108/JPMH-05-2024-0063).
- Watts, S. and Zhang, W. (2008), "Capitalizing on content: information adoption in two online communities", *Journal of the Association for Information Systems*, Vol. 9 No. 2, doi: [10.17705/1jais.00149](https://doi.org/10.17705/1jais.00149).
- Weitzel, E.C., Schwenke, M., Schomerus, G., Schönknecht, P., Bleckwenn, M., Mehnert-Theuerkauf, A., Riedel-Heller, S.G. and Löbner, M. (2023), "E-mental health in Germany — what is the current use and what are experiences of different types of health care providers for patients with mental illnesses?", *Archives of Public Health*, Vol. 81 No. 1, p. 133, doi: [10.1186/s13690-023-01150-y](https://doi.org/10.1186/s13690-023-01150-y).
- Weitzl, W. (2017), *Measuring Electronic Word-of-Mouth Effectiveness*, Springer Fachmedien, Wiesbaden, doi: [10.1007/978-3-658-15889-7](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-15889-7).
- Wells, M., Mitchell, K.J., Finkelhor, D. and Becker-Blease, K.A. (2007), "Online mental health treatment: concerns and considerations", *CyberPsychology and Behavior*, Vol. 10 No. 3, pp. 453-459, doi: [10.1089/cpb.2006.9933](https://doi.org/10.1089/cpb.2006.9933).
- Withers, M., Jahangir, T., Kubasova, K. and Ran, M. (2021), "Reducing stigma associated with mental health problems among university students in the Asia-Pacific: a video content analysis of student-driven proposals", *International Journal of Social Psychiatry*, Vol. 68 No. 4, pp. 827-835, doi: [10.1177/00207640211007511](https://doi.org/10.1177/00207640211007511).
- World Medical Association (2022), "WMA statement on digital health", 22 December, available at: www.wma.net/policies-post/wma-statement-on-guiding-principles-for-the-use-of-telehealth-for-the-provision-of-health-care/ (accessed 12 August 2024).
- Yeh, M.A., Legocki, K.V., Walker, K.L. and Eilert, M. (2025), "From search to support: the role of UGC in stigmatized consumers' mental health treatment journeys", *Journal of Services Marketing*, Vol. 39 No. 3, pp. 165-179, doi: [10.1108/JSM-02-2024-0078](https://doi.org/10.1108/JSM-02-2024-0078).
- YiXinLi (2025), available at: www.xinli001.com/ (accessed 10 March 2025).
- Zhang, Z., Reavley, N., Armstrong, G. and Morgan, A. (2025), "Public disclosures of mental health problems on social media and audiences' self-reported anti-stigma effects", *Health Promotion International*, Vol. 40 No. 1, doi: [10.1093/heapro/daae204](https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/daae204).
- Zhou, J. and Wan, X. (2022), "How to build network effects on online platforms for mental health", *California Management Review*, Vol. 64 No. 4, pp. 20-46, doi: [10.1177/00081256221107421](https://doi.org/10.1177/00081256221107421).
- Zhou, X., Edirippulige, S., Bai, X. and Bambling, M. (2021), "Are online mental health interventions for youth effective? A systematic review", *Journal of Telemedicine and Telecare*, Vol. 27 No. 10, pp. 638-666, doi: [10.1177/1357633X211047285](https://doi.org/10.1177/1357633X211047285).

About the authors

René Hubert Kerschbaumer (ORCID 0000-0003-0023-9049) serves as researcher at the Department Marketing and Sales at CAMPUS 02 University of Applied Sciences, Graz, Austria. His research interests include digital marketing, platform commerce and subscription commerce. René Hubert Kerschbaumer is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: rene.kerschbaumer@campus02.at

Alice Danglmaier, BA MA (ORCID 0009-0001-0384-0043) is a graduate of CAMPUS 02 University of Applied Sciences. This study is based on her master's thesis. Since graduating, she has been working in the marketing department of the Graz-based e-mental health platform Instahelp.

Silvia Geier, BA MA (ORCID 0009-0006-0197-0852) is the COO and Head of Marketing at Instahelp. As a recognized expert in digital marketing, she teaches marketing and customer management at various universities and served as the supervisor for Alice Dangelmaier's master's thesis.

Clara Wawrina, BA MA (ORCID 0009-0008-5373-299X) is a research assistant at the Department Marketing and Sales at CAMPUS 02 University of Applied Sciences in Graz, Austria. Her research addresses consumer behavior in the context of digital platforms.