

BOOK REVIEW OPEN ACCESS

Youth Digital Health and Online Platforms: Dialogue with Peers on Reddit

By M. Gliniecka, London and New York: Routledge, 2024. 192 pp. £135.00 (hardcover). ISBN 9781032819259

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Gliniecka's book examines an increasingly important question: how do young people turn to digital platforms for health-related conversations, particularly at a time when public health resources are stretched thin? The book positions Reddit as a promising space where early interventions and cost-cutting forms of self-management may take place. By exploring youth voices in such spaces, Gliniecka highlights how digital platforms can support peer-led health dialogue that is both creative and resourceful.

The book challenges adult-centred healthcare policy and research, advocating for a bottom-up and benefits-oriented approach to youth digital health. It argues that young people are too often portrayed as vulnerable or in need of surveillance, whereas an analysis of Reddit reveals them actively constructing their own dialogical health discourse. This discourse, enabled by Reddit's pseudonymous, antiauthoritarian and egalitarian affordances, is far more diverse and dynamic than current policy and research frameworks acknowledge.

Gliniecka opens the book with a broad overview of youth, health, and digital media before introducing dialogism as a lens for understanding how collective meaning is created online. It then examines how Reddit's affordances support these exchanges, followed by examples of the creative ways young people engage in myth-busting, help-seeking, educating and entertaining through online health discussions. A dedicated chapter highlights youth voices and the richness and diversity of their contributions, and the book concludes by advancing the notion of a *dialogical youth-led youth digital health discourse*, in which peer-led interactions and relationships deserve greater attention.

The study benefits greatly from the author's lived experience, which infuses the narrative with immediacy and authenticity. Her engagement with these communities is not only scholarly but also grounded in first-hand understanding, and this gives the book an enriched and contextualised quality. At the heart of the analysis lies a commitment to amplifying youth perspectives. The ways in which young people articulate their concerns, exchange advice and deploy creative digital practices reveal a maturity that deserves recognition. Gliniecka treats these voices with seriousness, refusing to dismiss them as trivial, and in doing so demonstrates the value of youth-led discourse in shaping contemporary understandings of digital health.

Equally striking is the careful ethical framework underpinning the research. Anonymity and safeguarding procedures are carefully described, ensuring that the online participants whose words shape the empirical chapters are protected from harm. In this respect, the book offers an exemplary model for researchers undertaking ethnographic as well as quantitative studies in online health communities, where the boundaries between private and public can be precarious.

The theoretical framework is built around dialogism, following Mikhail Bakhtin, which considers dialogue as a dynamic and multi-voiced exchange. Although this is an intriguing approach, the discussion of theory is not always easy to follow. At times, the distinction between dialogism and other theories of information exchange, particularly those more commonly applied to digital health communication such as social exchange theory (Yan et al. 2016), remains opaque. Readers unfamiliar with Bakhtin may find themselves questioning what exactly is gained

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by choosing dialogism, as a theory rooted in literary studies, over alternative frameworks such as peer support or social learning.

As someone trained in data science, I was left wanting a stronger sense of scale and representativeness in the findings. The study is ethnographic in nature, and the vignettes chosen are vivid, but without further descriptive context, such as the typical length of exchanges or the breadth of topics covered, it is difficult to know whether the examples presented are typical or exceptional. There is also a noticeable preference for longer more elaborate conversations on Reddit, which raises the possibility of selection bias. A fuller descriptive account of the dataset would not only strengthen the argument but also make the work more useful to readers coming from a quantitative background.

Moreover, the central promise of dialogism that posts and comments can be seen collectively as threads of multi-voiced discourse is a powerful idea worth testing empirically. However, the evidence provided to support this claim feels limited. Although individual cases are suggestive, more systematic attention to how dialogic patterns unfold across different conversations would have bolstered the book's claims.

Another limitation lies in the choice of subreddits under investigation. The study draws primarily on r/teenagers, r/askteengirls and r/askteenboys. These spaces certainly provide valuable insights into youth perspectives, but they are not primarily dedicated to health issues. Reddit hosts a wide range of communities devoted to illnesses and conditions (Jin and Zhu 2025), some of which are highly relevant to young people, such as r/depression, r/anxiety and r/ADHD. Including these more focused spaces might have revealed a different texture of conversation, possibly more clinically oriented or more deeply tied to health self-management.

Despite these limitations, Gliniecka's work makes an important and timely contribution. It reminds us that youth are not passive recipients of health information but active creators of knowledge and support systems in digital spaces. The book captures the creativity with which young people use Reddit to talk about their lives, their health and their struggles, and it does so with ethical sensitivity and a clear commitment to respecting their voices. For scholars of youth studies, digital ethnography and online health communities, this book will be a valuable resource. For practitioners and policymakers, it signals the importance of recognising youth-led digital communities as legitimate and vital spaces of health dialogue.

Yan, Z., T. Wang, Y. Chen, and H. Zhang. 2016. "Knowledge Sharing in Online Health Communities: A Social Exchange Theory Perspective." *Information & Management* 53, no. 5: 643–653. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.im.2016.02.001>.

Data Availability Statement

Data sharing not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

References

Jin, C., and Z. Zhu. 2025. "Multimorbidity Patterns and Early Signals of Diabetes in Online Communities." *JAMIA Open* 8, no. 3: ooaf049. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jamiaopen/ooaf049>.