Digital health literacy and online information-seeking behaviour of Lebanese university students

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Background:
This cross-sectional study evaluates digital health literacy (DHL) and web-based information-seeking behaviour of Lebanese university students in light of the coronavirus pandemic and the ‘infodemic’.

Methods:
18 universities took part in the study. Ethical approval was sought from the ethics committees of the participating universities. Data collection was carried out in May-August 2020. The survey was discontinued due to the devastating explosion that shook Beirut early August.

Results:
A total of 602 students (60.1% females), 20.6 years (±4.3) took part in the study. 54% reported using the Internet to seek for COVID-19 information in the past month. Students in fields other than health and social sciences (HHS), and not using official sources, had limited DHL for information seeking (26.6%). Lebanese students, at undergraduate level, with a health impairment, and not using official sources and news portals had limited DHL for adding self-generated content (35.9%). Students at undergraduate level, who used social media for information, had limited DHL for evaluating reliability (42.7%). Non-HHS, with a health impairment, and not using official sources had limited DHL for determining relevance (32.0%). Graduate students had higher odds of having sufficient DHL for adding self-generated content (OR = 2.304; 95% CI = 1.076, 4.937) and evaluating reliability (OR = 2.440; 95% CI = 1.171, 5.087). Frequent users of official sources had higher odds (OR = 2.304; 95% CI = 1.065, 2.665) of having sufficient DHL for adding self-generated content. Those who regularly used social media for information had lower odds (OR = 0.577; 95% CI = 0.351, 0.946) regarding evaluating reliability.

Conclusions:
Health education programmes in Lebanon need to strengthen digital health literacy in university students, particularly in undergraduates, in fields other than health and social sciences, in those relying on social media, and those with a health impairment.