

Cyberchondria

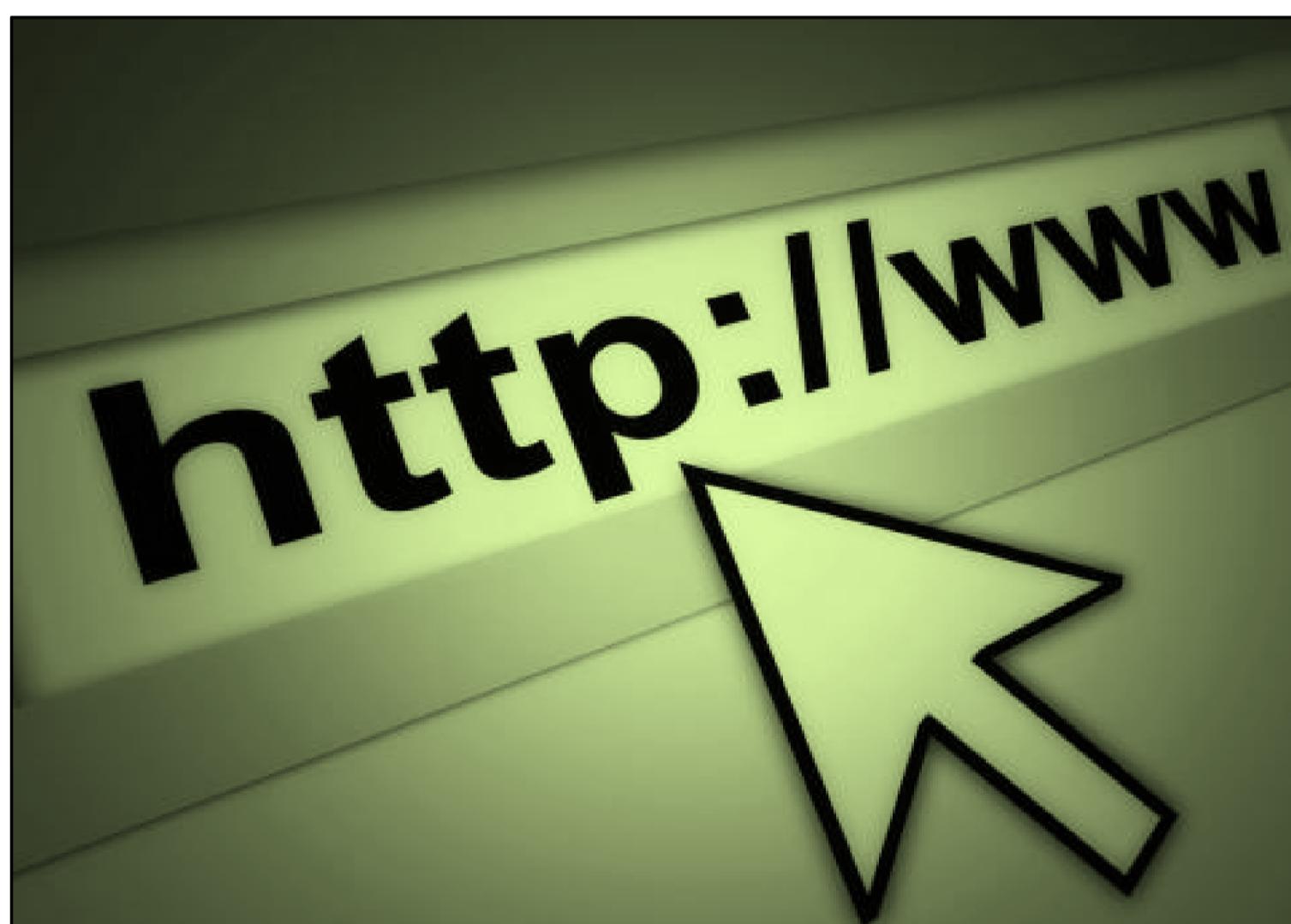
Online Health Information Seeking and Effects

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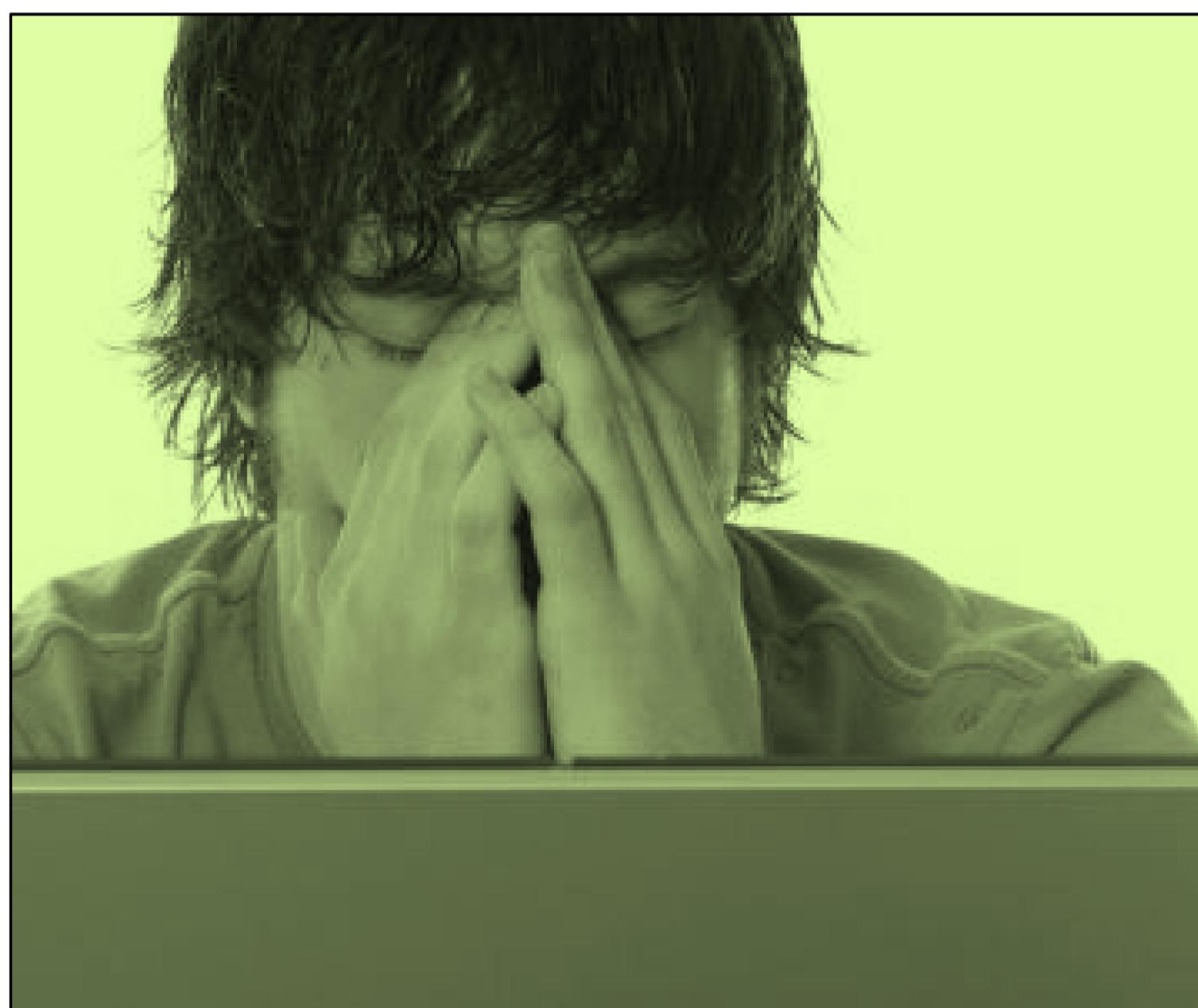
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The Internet

- Vast amounts of easily accessible health information
- Potentially overwhelming
- Catastrophic information overrepresented
- Sources differ in quality and trustworthiness



The Cyberchondriac

- Prevalent phenomenon
- Seeks online health information more frequently
- Feels more easily overwhelmed by health information
- Engages in "catastrophic" online searches
- Attends doctors more frequently as a "follow-up"



Our research

- Online survey studies → representative longitudinal study
- Experiments (and observations)
- Search strategies
- Information processing

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The Role of Health Anxiety in Online Health Information Search

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Abstract

This article is one of the first to empirically explore the relationship between health anxiety and online health information search. This study investigated how health anxious individuals use the internet for health information and how health anxious individuals respond to online health information. An exploratory survey study with 104 Dutch participants indicates that health anxiety is related to an increase in online health information search. Moreover, results suggest that health anxious individuals express more negative consequences from health information than nonhealth anxious individuals. Findings from this study show that online health information results in greater worries among health anxious individuals compared to nonhealth anxious individuals only if the information stems from a trustworthy governmental Web site. Information from a less trustworthy online forum does not lead to greater worries among health anxious individuals. In sum, the internet appears to play a pivotal role in the lives of health anxious individuals.

Health Anxiety and the Use of Online Health Information

Health anxiety refers to fears that arise from misinterpretations of bodily symptoms as indicating severe illnesses.^{1,2,3} To reduce their fears, health anxious individuals tend to perform safety behaviors.⁴ These behaviors are intended to reassure the individual of being healthy and include the re-

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