



Information journeys through online alcohol support groups

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Introduction

- Content: an overview of the journeys from finding to leaving in six non-12-step alcohol online support groups (AOSGs)
- Differences from Alcoholics Anonymous

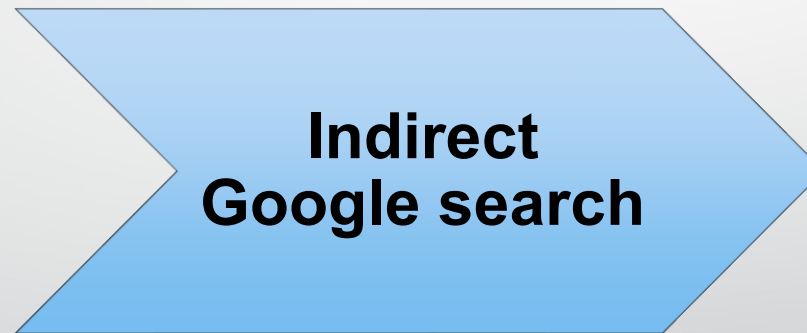
Groups involved:

Name	Brief description	Approach to recovery endorsed in information pages	Moderated?	Used for forum analyses & interviews
A	Medium size, 5-10k members, based in the UK	Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)	Y	Both
B	Very large, 75,000+ members, based in Continental Europe	None in particular, neutral approach to alcohol	Y	Forum post analyses only
C	Small, <5k members, based in North America	Medication based treatment	Y	Both
D	Small, <5k members, based in North America	Own harm reduction programme	N	Interviews only
E	Medium size, 5-10k members, based in North America	Own harm reduction programme	Y	Interviews only
F	Large, 10-75k members, based in the UK	No specific programme, promotes abstinence	Y	Interviews only

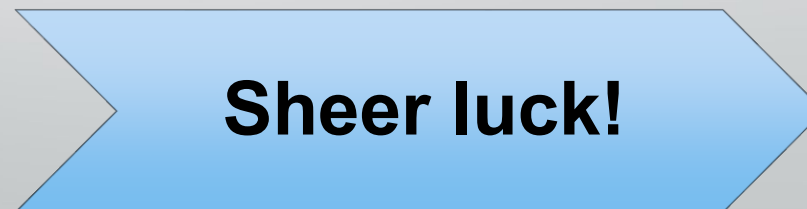
Starting the journey...



One person...



**'alcohol help',
'alternatives to
AA', 'alcohol
treatment'**



**Radio, magazines,
unrelated searches**

What does this suggest?

- Groups are not well known even to healthcare professionals...
- People may not know beforehand that groups are an option

Deciding to carry on...

- Main reason for choosing it: general approach to recovery
- Other reasons: information range and quality, size and functionality, the site's values e.g., tolerance
- Main reason for staying: social dynamics such as identification or wanting to hear others' experiences

Fluidity

Parts of site used

Types of searches

People coming and going

Using other groups

'Berry picking'

`Berry picking`



not linear searching



Looking for information: 'berrypicking'

- Multiple sources
- Varied search techniques
- Selection and evaluation of information

Information selection

- “I took in all the information, cos I like, I’ve read probably 100 books on alcohol use...and I’ve read all kinds of different pages online and everything I could get my hands on. I immersed myself in it, but then what I’d do is I sieved it...and I hold on to what connects to my reality, and so what I came up with is just my reality...I get all the information but then I make up my own mind.”
(Theresa, Group F)

Sharing information

- **Types of information:** facts, references, advice, opinion, and experiential information
- **Ways of sharing information:** asking and answering questions, telling stories and anecdotes, providing references and links, disagreements, advice-giving & instruction, role modelling, providing slogans & mantras

Ways of sharing information	Total number of interviewees	Groups found in
Asking and answering questions	25	A, B, C, D, E, F
Telling stories	25	A, B, C, D, E, F
Providing references & links	24	A, B, C, D, E, F
Telling anecdotes	22	A, B, C, D, E, F
Role modelling	21	A, B, C, D, E, F
Providing slogans & mantras	19	A, C, D, E, F
Disagreements	16	A, B, C, D, E, F
Advice giving & instruction	12 (but qualified by many e.g., 'if asked', 'on request', 'suggest')	B, C, D, E, F

Contrasts with AA

- Berrypicking
- Disagreements & 'cross-talk'
- Advice giving
- Scientific research, references, links
- Types of sayings or mantras

Leaving the groups

- Dislike of beliefs
- Other people
- Practicalities of using a site
- Life moving on...

.....and some come back

Conflicts of interest & funding source

- There were no conflicts of interest
- This research was funded through a scholarship from the University of Sheffield Social Sciences Faculty



Thank you!

Any questions?