A TALE OF TWO VIRTUAL ADVISORS: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY INVESTIGATING THE EMPOWERMENT EFFECT OF MOBILE MENTAL-HEALTH ADVISORY SYSTEMS ON EMERGENCY RESCUERS

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Abstract

Virtual advisory services are very important tools for the psychological self-help domain. It is particularly valuable for emergency rescuers in relieving their psychological distress given the high-stress nature of their occupation. To investigate optimal design strategies for an effective virtual advisory service to empower emergency rescuers, this article explores how virtual advisor identity influences the empowerment effect of virtual mental-health advisory systems for emergency rescuers. Guided by empowerment theory and similarity theory, we developed and empirically tested our system artefact and design theory for our virtual advisory system MHAS. The results of our experiment, involving 120 emergency rescuers who have just finished their emergency tasks in Inner Mongolia, show that virtual advisor identity significantly impacts on a user’s cognitive and emotional aspects, which are significant empowering enablers leading to positive empowerment outcomes as measured by a sense of control and perceived power. Implications for research and practice are then discussed.

Keywords: Social impacts of health information systems, Human computer interaction, Empowerment theory, Similarity theory, Emergency rescuers, Mental-health advisory systems

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