



Mediating Technology: How Teenage Boys Use Generative AI Tools for Health-Related Information

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Abstract

Background: The rapid growth of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools has transformed how young people access information, including health-related knowledge. Within school contexts, AI-enabled platforms such as chatbots are increasingly available to adolescents, offering immediate access to advice on topics that may otherwise feel stigmatized or difficult to discuss. Teenage boys may be particularly drawn to these tools due to gender norms that often discourage help-seeking, emotional openness, and engagement with formal support systems. Despite increasing concern regarding adolescents' use of AI technologies, little research has examined how teenage boys specifically use generative AI for health-related purposes and how these tools may shape their understandings of health, masculinity, and help-seeking. This study seeks to address this gap by exploring how teenage boys aged 13–18 engage with AI-based tools for health-related information and support.

Methods: Guided by Constructivist Grounded Theory, Technology-Mediated Theory, and Cultural-Historical Activity Theory, this study conceptualizes AI not as a neutral source of information, but as an active mediator influencing how knowledge is accessed, interpreted, and acted upon within broader social and cultural contexts. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with approximately 20–30 secondary school students recruited from public and private schools. Interviews will explore participants' experiences using AI for health-related information, perceptions of trust and privacy, and whether AI use reinforces or challenges dominant masculine norms. Data will be analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis to identify patterns of meaning across participants' responses.

Results & Conclusions: Anticipated findings are expected to provide insight into how AI functions as both an opportunity and a risk in adolescent health learning, particularly for boys who may be less likely to seek support through interpersonal channels. Findings may illuminate how generative AI shapes health information-seeking behaviours, perceptions of trustworthiness, and understandings of masculinity among adolescent boys. This study contributes to emerging scholarship on youth, AI, digital health literacy, and masculinity, while offering implications for educators, schools, and policymakers seeking more inclusive and responsive approaches to health education in increasingly AI-mediated environments.

Keywords: Generative artificial intelligence; AI; adolescent boys; health information-seeking; digital health literacy; masculinity; health education