

Googling AAC: Availability and Scope of AAC Information Online

Presentation title
No author details

ABSTRACT

AAC is a complex and rapidly evolving field of practice. Parents of children who use AAC have described a need for easily accessible information about AAC services and products, as well as guidance for home practice (Anderson, Balandin & Stancliffe, 2013). SLPs in Australia and New Zealand have expressed similar information requirements (Iacono & Cameron, 2009; Sutherland, Gillon & Yoder, 2004). For both parents and SLPs, time is a major barrier to information access.

Providing background
information and
rationale

To help consumers keep pace with new developments, information about AAC is readily available in a range of online formats. *Synchronous formats* such as webinars, live question/answers sessions and online product demonstrations provide real-time training and support around a range of AAC-related topics. In contrast, *asynchronous formats* such as web-pages and discussion boards allow information seekers to access the resource in their own time and at their own pace. Finally, *social media* platforms such as Facebook and Twitter are used to disseminate both synchronous and asynchronous information sources, in addition to their peer networking purposes. Each of these formats offers a number of unique advantages to AAC knowledge seekers, depending on need and access requirements. While both social media and online training have enjoyed recent research attention, relatively little is known about the scope and quality of asynchronous information sources, or how these are used and accessed by parents and clinicians.

Aim

In this presentation, we aim to explore and clarify the following questions around asynchronous online AAC resources:

1. What range of asynchronous AAC resources is currently available online?
2. What are the benefits and drawbacks to this information format, according to parents and SLPs?
3. What are the practice implications around the development and marketing of current and future asynchronous resources?

Listing the research
aims / questions

Method

To sample the range of asynchronous AAC resources available, we conducted a targeted English-language search from an Australian location, using the popular search engine Google. A range of general search terms (e.g. "AAC") and technique-specific search terms (e.g. "PODD" or "mingspeak") were used. The first 50 results for each term were rated according to the following criteria: relevance to AAC, mode of information delivery (synchronous vs. asynchronous), and purpose(s) served by the resource. The findings were recorded in an Excel spreadsheet where they underwent descriptive statistical analysis.

Summarizing the
methodology

Results

Findings from the Google search revealed that a wide range of asynchronous AAC information sources are available. With regards to relevance, technique-specific search terms such as “PODD” produced a high number of relevant results within the top 50, while general terms such as “AAC” or “communication device” were more likely to raise a mixture of relevant and non-relevant pages. All searches produced results to suit a range of needs, including product and service information, implementation guidance, and to a lesser extent networking. These findings and their implications for online practice will be discussed in-depth in the presentation.

Outlining the results

Conclusion

This study shows that, while online asynchronous resources can help to build AAC knowledge and capacity for parents and SLPs, their current uptake may be limited. Issues concerning search specificity, visibility, and quality of information sources may also impact on the use of these resources at present.

Offering a conclusion

As with most exploratory studies, this paper raises more questions than it answers. One future research direction could involve a quality evaluation of online AAC information resources, particularly those with high visibility on general searches. Observations on how parents and AAC professionals search for, critique, and consume this form of information would also be valuable. Additional research could examine the efficacy of training to increase the identification and consumption of good quality online resources by these groups, and to identify ways in which online resources can make themselves more “visible”, based on the searching behaviours of parents/professionals. Finally, it may be valuable to examine how asynchronous AAC information forums are disseminated within social media forums and the features that increase the likelihood of a resource being shared.

References

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Including up to 6 references

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Abstract is less than 750 words

This abstract has been modified from its original format for the purpose of providing an example for the ISAAC 2020 conference.