Navigating the Digital Self-Care Ecosystem: Empowering Consumers to Take Control of Their Health and Well-Being

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Self-care is increasingly a matter of consumption, not solely a public health issue. Wearable trackers, wellness apps, and generative AI health advisors now shape how millions of people interpret symptoms, decide whether to see a clinician, and manage chronic conditions, in a market expected to reach $169 billion by 2029 (Forbes Technology Council, 2025). The World Health Organization defines self-care as the ability of individuals, families, and communities to promote their own health, prevent disease, and cope with illness (World Health Organization, 2026). What is new is that these tools no longer only deliver data. They deliver counsel. However, self-care was never meant to replace healthcare systems, only to complement them (Global Self-Care Federation, n.d.).

That distinction matters most for the people with the least. Healthcare systems worldwide face structural strain (Global Self-Care Federation, n.d.), and digital self-care is widely offered as part of the answer: a way to extend equitable access (World Health Organization, 2026) while remaining financially sustainable (Mishra & Jain, 2025). Yet the consumers who lean most on an app or an AI assistant are often those with no clinician to check its advice. Marketing research has only recently begun examining self-care as a consumer phenomenon (Rifkin & Wight, 2021), and still lacks a shared account of how consumers navigate it.

Regulators have started to react. In August 2026, Brazil's health agency warned consumers that smartwatch and smart ring data cannot replace clinical evaluation and should never be used to confirm a condition, define treatment, or change medication (Agência Nacional de Vigilância Sanitária [Anvisa], 2026). The risk runs both ways: an alert does not mean a person is ill, and a reassuring reading does not mean they are well. Because oversight follows what a product claims rather than how consumers use it, wellness-branded devices and AI advisors can offer confident guidance that consumers may mistake for clinical counsel.

This track assembles a team committed to addressing that. Through virtual sessions before the conference and our days together on site, we will conceptualize self-care for marketing, map the digital self-care ecosystem as consumer health infrastructure, and build a framework for consumer empowerment. The work aims to foster a transformative research agenda that yields impactful publications and engagement with non-academic stakeholders. The co-chairs have also submitted a seed-funding proposal for formative fieldwork, enabling the team to work from original material rather than starting cold.

Track Objectives

1. *Conceptualize self-care from a marketing perspective.* Self-care is invoked constantly and defined inconsistently, which limits the field's ability to build knowledge that can inform marketing practice and self-care interventions.
2. *Describe the digital self-care ecosystem and how it can transform access to health and well-being.* From accessibility features to digital equity, firms can pursue a social-profit approach that improves well-being while remaining economically sustainable. Mapping the ecosystem also means mapping its boundaries: what is regulated, what is not, and what consumers are left to interpret on their own.
3. *Develop a framework for empowering consumers within the digital self-care ecosystem.* Consumers are active decision-makers who need support at every step, from making healthy choices to monitoring symptoms. Empowerment means more than following good advice. It means retaining the capacity to reason about one's own health rather than delegating it.

Track Membership

We welcome diversity in method, discipline, career stage (we will, where possible, allocate at least one place to a junior scholar), and country. Comparative international perspectives are especially valuable. The track is also open to relevant external stakeholders.

Track Organization and Timeline

- *Pre-conference.* Once participants are confirmed, we will hold an alignment meeting, followed by virtual working sessions.
- *Conference Day 1.* Team building and collaborative conceptualization of self-care from a marketing perspective.
- *Conference Day 2.* Drafting the ecosystem map and the consumer empowerment framework.
- *Conference Day 3.* Manuscript structure, target journal, authorship, and the post-conference schedule.
- *Post-conference.* Regular team meetings to advance drafts, followed by submission to the target journal and continued follow-up through final revisions.

References

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