The Feasibility of Co-Designing a Digital Health Initiative to Encourage the Adoption of Healthier Lifestyles

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Background

The technology market is replete with digital interventions designed to encourage healthy behaviours. However, their uptake is not consistently reaching those most in need, and there is a challenge as to how their use can be more sustainable to result in enduring health behaviour change. In order to find out about how digital technology can be made more accessible, acceptable and result in more prolonged use for the target population, this project is engaging men to collaboratively design a digital health initiative in northern Scotland.

Elements of the male population have traditionally been accustomed to pathogenic health behaviours. For example, musicians and those who attend gigs have been previously recorded as having poor health status, and hence this group was identified as a suitable target audience.

Research Methodology

Males aged 25 – 45 attending music festivals are being approached to co-design a digital health initiative. The engagements are adopting action research methodology in order to elicit views.

The objective of the methodology and co-design approach is that the target group, rather than being the passive recipients of health services, will take on an active role as co-designers of a digital initiative. Co-design tools are being customised to establish meaningful lifestyle stories from the target group which will evolve with each engagement event. The creative process involves iterative cycles of identifying needs and concepts; proposing, testing, implementing and evaluating solutions. As such, the outcome of the project is an indeterminate type but will be digital in nature and will aim to engage men in healthy behaviour.

Audio-visuals and field notes are also part of the data being collected into a research repository, to be used for analysis purposes by the research team.

Results (initial observations)

Initial data collection was carried out using large interactive visual charts to explore behaviours and attitudes towards technology and health.

The initial event revealed a breadth of self-perceived health behaviours amongst music festival goers, from active physical lifestyles, moderate alcohol and healthy diets through to infrequent physical activity, smoking and high alcohol consumptions and diets which are high in fats and oversized portions.

For some there appeared to be a negative correlation between those who were engaged in healthy behaviour illustrating little or moderate satisfaction in current lifestyle, in opposition to those with less healthy lifestyles who were happier with their lifestyle behaviours. However, there were also a proportion of those who had high levels of satisfaction about their unhealthy behaviours.

Researchers began to detect a view that there might be a healthy lifestyle = boring perception

A second engagement illustrated that many felt they should be doing more physical activity and have a healthier diet, but were ambivalent about the way that technology fit into their lives. Interestingly, several participants posted an interest in doing more 'reading for leisure'.

Next Engagements: Preparations for the next engagement will draw on the results from the previous two iterations. Three concepts will be presented as starting points for discussion and will draw on health, reading, and digital technology. Using open dialogue and the sketching of ideas, discussions will build from one participant to the next to create an evolution of ideas thereby capturing both depth and breadth of data. The format used will create a visual history as well as a progressive development of dialogue and ideas – a type of brainstorming using individuals to develop creative ideas from a broad, and roughly largely homogenous population. The concepts will mine ideas about the direction of digital development, motivations to engage in healthy behaviour, and 'reading for leisure'.
This last engagement will result in data which can be used in a final prototype test engagement.

Conclusion: This project will be of substantial value to the digital health community through unveiling the beliefs and attitudes about engagement with interventions, with a target audience not usually associated with healthy behaviour or the design of health initiatives. The results from this study will help to inform a digital health initiative that can be rolled out and tested with a wider population.