

Keeping it real: understanding and changing health behavior in daily life

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Valorisation Addendum



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One area of the “MBO Raad” (the Netherlands Association of Vocational Education and Training Colleges) and the “Lifestyle Reality Check” foundation’s concern is the common and cumulating prevalence of overweight among secondary vocational education students in the Netherlands. Although the “Lifestyle Reality Check’s student tracking system” allows the foundation to monitor health-related behaviors among secondary vocational education students, extension of the current system to facilitate behavior change is desirable. As the findings of this dissertation “Keeping it real: Understanding and changing health behavior in daily life” provide meaningful insights into overweight-related behaviors among those students, these findings may be of great interest to the “MBO Raad” and the “Lifestyle Reality Check” foundation and, of course, students’ health in general.

As explained in Chapter 2, students are well targeted via mobile devices. They carry their smartphones around at all times, providing a 24/7 platform for real-time monitoring and intervention applications. Although mobile-based Ecological Momentary Assessment (mEMA) and Interventions (mEMI) are options for the “MBO Raad”, the “Lifestyle Reality Check” foundation, researchers and relevant industries to target health-related behaviors among students, they should keep in mind that their application should be tailored to the target populations’ needs and wants, optimizing overall use of the application and preventing interference with students’ overall wellbeing.

The outlined mEMA studies in Chapters 3 and 4 emphasize the complexity of students’ dietary intake and physical activity, in terms of determinants and how they change over time. The type of data derived from mEMA studies provide more accurate insights into health behaviors compared to self-reported cross-sectional data, as several biases (e.g., recall bias) are diminished by real-time, real-world monitoring. The “mEMA app” that has been developed may be of interest to other behavioral and health scientists to measure complex behaviors over time.

The “Balance It app” to change health-related behaviors in a gamified fashion may especially in the interest of the secondary vocational education students, the “MBO Raad” and the “Lifestyle Reality Check” foundation. The “Balance It app” is currently free of charge available in the Google and iOS appstores allowing students to play the game. However, the game may be more successful when embedded within an existing system, such as the “Lifestyle Reality Check system”. As an extension of the current “Lifestyle Reality Check system” is desirable to facilitate health behavior change,

a linkage between the system and “Balance It” may be of interest. TNO, the “MBO Raad” and the “Lifestyle Reality Check” foundation are already in dialogue about merging the two systems.

While the “mEMA app” and “Balance It app” are innovative in itself, applying Intervention Mapping (IM) to the development of an mHealth intervention and using a dual theoretical foundation in both health promotion and app use/gaming also enhances the innovative character of the present dissertation. To share our new knowledge with society, this dissertation will be made available online. Hardcopies will also be distributed among academics, the “MBO Raad” and the “Lifestyle Reality Check” foundation, contact persons at the participating secondary vocational education schools in the Netherlands, interested professional game developers, and everyone else who is interested in the research described in this dissertation: “Keeping it real: Understanding and changing health behavior in daily life”.