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Prerequisites for nutrition apps to engage consumers in long-term usage

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Background

For many consumers a nutrition app might be a good tool to support the transition to a healthier diet. For a prolonged change in the dietary pattern, such an app should be used for a longer period of time. Next, it should meet the consumers' needs and desires.

Objective

The aim of this project was to identify from a user-perspective which prerequisities a nutrition app needs to meet, in order to support healthy eating behaviour.
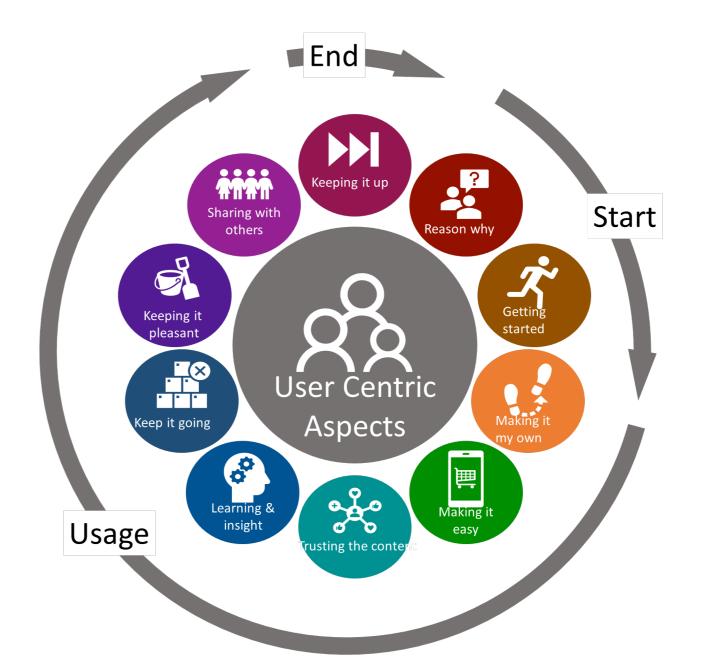
Methods

- Literature search
- Six focus group discussions with groups of 8 Dutch adults were organised in October 2019
- The participants of each focus group discussion used a different (for them new), specific healthy eating app for 3 weeks prior to the session

Results

- Based on the focus group discussions, three stages in the use of nutrition apps were defined: (1) start , (2) usage, (3) end/continuation
- Within these stages ten key user-centric aspects were identified,
- In each user centric aspect, several prerequisites for a nutrition app were identified (41 in total)

Conclusions

- **In the design and development of nutrition apps the 3 different phases (start, usage, end/continuation) should be taken into consideration, together with app functionalities in each of the user centric aspects**
- Personalisation is likely to be important in every stage of using a nutrition app
- An overload of functionalities in a nutrition app might lead to quitting early
- Further research is needed to identify which app functionalities are important for which consumer groups

10. Motivation & continuous usage
a. Achieving realistic and achievable goals
b. Able to set new, different (advanced) goals
c. Offer continuously new and personal relevant information
d. Adjust detail level of personal information
e. Able to make app dormant and set periodic reminders to start usage again

9. Social Media & Communication
a. Opt in for forums, social media, private groups, knowledgeable coach
b. Tips, ideas, recipes
c. Clear privacy statements

8. Feedback & Support
a. Positive feedback, complimenting when successful, supporting when failing to reach goal
b. Variation in feedback messages (topic & style)
c. Encouraging good food choices without pressure or playing on guilt
d. Personal saving / reward system (virtual or real)
e. Playfulness

7. Progress & Monitoring
a. Visual overview of progress: graphs, lines, statistics
b. Breakdown of progress on different variables (time, food/nutrient, meal, etc.)
c. Offer ideas, suggestions, recipes (on demand)
d. Friendly, adjustable, timely notifications to fill in daily intake

6. Education & Information
a. Provide food facts: calories, nutrients, ingredients
b. Offer healthier alternatives
c. Information that matches personal knowledge & behaviour level
d. Create awareness of own behaviour

5. Database
a. Clear definition of categories
b. Logical, user centric product categories
c. Complete without too much repetitive products
d. Correct, factual information on nutrients, calories, etc.
e. Scientific/credible endorser
f. Database with local NL products

1. Purpose
a. Clear Upfront Goal
b. Description of app's key functions
c. Breadth of functions (nutrition, exercise, sport, meditation, relaxation, etc.)

2. Introduction
a. Short Tutorial / Explanation
b. Intuitive initial usage

3. Personalisation
a. Able to set personal goals
b. Able to set knowledge level regarding nutrition
c. Able to fill in at own time (for past-present-future food intake)
d. Detailed personal information: physical, life style
e. Able to prioritize key functions
f. Able to create personal lists/meals
g. Set social media usage, notifications (opt-in/opt-out)

4. Userfriendly interface
a. Simplicity in navigation
b. Pleasant look & feel
c. Functional yet engaging animation and/or imaging
d. Easy entry
e. Quick entry
f. Integration with smart devices
g. One language, preferably Dutch
h. Choice in measuring units
i. Limited advertisements in free version