

Mobile Application Interventions in Positive Psychology: Current Status and Recommendations for Effective App Design

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Abstract : Positive psychology practices allow for its principles to be applied to all people, regardless of their current level of functioning. To increase the dissemination of these practices, interventions are being adapted for use with digital technology, such as mobile apps. However, the research regarding positive psychology mobile app interventions is still in its infancy. In an effort to facilitate progress in this important area, we 1) conducted a qualitative review to summarize the current state of the positive psychology mobile app literature and 2) developed research-supported recommendations for positive psychology app development to maximize behavior change. In our literature review, we found that while positive psychology apps varied widely in content and purpose, there was a near-complete lack of research supporting their effectiveness. Most apps provided no rationale for the behavioral change techniques (BCTs) they employed in their app, and most did not develop their app with specific theoretical frameworks or design models in mind. Given this problem, we recommended four steps for effective positive psychology app design. First, developers must establish their app in a research-supported theory of change. Second, researchers must select appropriate behavioral change techniques which are consistent with their app's goals. Third, researchers must leverage effective design principles. These steps will help mobile applications use data-driven methods for encouraging behavior change in their users. Lastly, we discuss directions for future research. In particular, researchers must investigate the effectiveness of various BCTs in positive psychology interventions. Although there is some research on this point, we do not yet clearly understand the mechanisms within the apps that lead to behavior change. Additionally, app developers must also provide data on the effectiveness of their mobile apps. As developers follow these steps for effective app development and as researchers continue to investigate what makes these apps most effective, we will provide millions of people in need with access to research-based mental health resources.

Keywords : behavioral change techniques, mobile app, mobile intervention, positive psychology

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