

THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS? – BRIDGING ONLINE AND OFFLINE COMMUNICATION IN HEALTH & CARE

Context

The internet offers a great potential for health & care services. Treatment (i.e. counseling) delivered via the internet has proven to be as effective as usual face-to-face treatment and therefore it can substitute or support usual treatments (e.g. for smoking cessation (Civljak, Sheikh, Stead, & Car, 2010), (Myung, McDonnell, Kazinets, Seo, & Moskowitz, 2009)). Looking at the differences between online and offline counseling on the one hand and the proven effectiveness of both on the other hand, two questions arise: 1) can we improve effectiveness by combining the strengths of both? 2) how should we combine both? Computer mediated communication as well as face to face communication offers distinct opportunities and limitations that may support each other. However, it is unclear which techniques within a counseling process are preferably offered online and which ones are to be offered face to face. How much live human contact is needed for an effective counseling (Newman, Szkodny, Llera, & Przeworski, 2011)? What is the optimal balance in relative weight? Should content be strictly divided, or is continuity between the two modalities more effective? To address such questions a Blended Smoking Cessation Treatment (BSCT) is developed and will be compared in a randomised controlled trial to a usual face-to-face treatment. BSCT is a new combination of a web-based and a face-to-face intervention, both based on proven effective methods (Christenhusz, Prenger, Pieterse, Seydel, & van der Palen, 2012). To the best of our knowledge this will be the first research exploring the effectiveness of a face-to-face addiction treatment compared to a blended version with equal counseling intensity.

It is put into practice based on a collaboration of the following Dutch institutions:

- [Smoking cessation outpatient clinic \(SRP\) at the department of pulmonary medicine of Medical Spectrum Twente \(MST\)](#)
- [Tactive, the department for online addiction care and prevention at Tactus Addiction Treatment \(http://www.rokendebaas.nl/\)](http://www.rokendebaas.nl/)
- [Department of Psychology, Health & Technology at University of Twente](#)
- [Research Centre for Technology, Health & Care at Saxion University of Applied Sciences](#)

Questions and methods

Questions that will be addressed in this research include effectiveness of the blended treatment regarding smoking cessation and costs, usability of and adherence to the treatment, client satisfaction, and psychological mechanisms underlying smoking cessation. To compare both treatments a two arms randomised controlled trial including 400 clients will be conducted. Furthermore there are phases with qualitative interviews, focus group interviews, and analyses of logdata to obtain data.

Progress

The project started in 2014 with the development of the blended treatment and the definition of outcome parameters and methods for data collection. The development of treatment and study protocol will be finalized and reviewed Summer 2014. A test run of the treatment and data collection will be done in Fall 2014. After ethical approval of the study protocol is obtained the main trial is planned to start in 2015 and supposed to end 2018.

Concerns and issues

Aside the usual issues of clinical trials (e.g. recruiting patients, defining clinical relevant parameters) there are issues related to the blending of online and offline communication that are especially relevant to discuss with the experts at IR15DC.

- Which components of the treatment are to be provided online preferably (and which face-to-face)?
- Is there an optimum for mixing online and face-to-face components in a blended treatment?
- Which communication theory can be applied most beneficially to explore blended treatment (e.g. media richness, media naturalness, media synchronicity)?

Why participate

The consortium conducting this research has broad expertise in health related research, but not much expertise in (blended) internet based interventions. Therefore connecting to AoIR by attending IR15DC would really make a difference for me as a PhD student as it offers a great possibility for networking and to learn more about the themes and actual developments in internet related research.

What to get out of it

I expect to learn from the hands on experience of the AoIR experts and to get feedback from them on (1) the preferred mix of online and face-to-face components and on (2) methodological aspects such as online and offline measurements and how to combine data from both sources. Furthermore I'm really looking forward to meet peers, to build a community around this subject and to foster internationalization. In a broader sense diving into the world of IR15 and attending the related DC will boost my PhD project as it will offer me various impressions that will expand my background knowledge on ideas, models and methods related to the intersection of online and online communication.

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