Designing Looped in:

Using qualitative research in the development of an online tool to support interpersonal communication on HIV

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Background

People living with HIV are powerful advocates and educators in the fight against stigma. But telling this story can lead to experiences of ‘educators’ fatigue’ and is impacted by the nature of interactions and relationships involved. During summer 2018, we utilised a community-based research approach to explore the types of information sharing that people living with HIV would find most meaningful. From these insights, we developed a prototype for an online tool for people living with HIV to share information based on the key-relationship types discussed.

Methods

In November 2018, we conducted group-based activities in Manchester with people living with HIV to evaluate the Looped in concept and prototype. Nine participants were divided into two groups, alternately participating in two 30 minute activities: a guided usability test of a mobile prototype of the website and a group review of four use case storyboards. Both groups were then brought together for a 30 minute semi-structured discussion about the overall experience and the Looped in platform itself.

Storyboard

Participants commented that Looped in would allow them to control over what information was shared and the tone of the communication. As it was produced by NAT, participants felt that the information provided would be trusted as it was coming from a respected organisation (1). Participants also discussed the importance for information to be written in accessible and approachable language that encourages empathy (1,2). Lastly, participants highlighted the importance for the information selections within Looped in to be customisable. This feedback supported our initial concept for Looped in to have information sorted by key-relationship types.

Storyboards

The tool could be used in ways other than through text messaging, such as a support after an in-person conversation with a partner or through an online dating website's messaging system. Most participants felt they would wait to build a relationship with another person before sending them information about HIV, but Looped in would be useful when they did (3,2).

“IT’S COMPLICATED”

Participants that many HIV information sources were safeguarded by online accounts, requiring users to remember a login for each service/platform. This was viewed as a nusance and potential barrier to accessing a service.

Importance of Customisation

The ability to customise information to put together outputs unique to various relationships is important. In this way, the user has agency and is empowered by the selection of the information they choose to share.

Responsive Digital Design

The mobile-first but responsive design of the prototype so it can be accessed from various devices was highly valued by all participants.

“IT’S COMPLICATED”

Participants noted that a disclosure to a romantic and/or sexual partner was a very personal concern, requiring an approach specific to those involved (3,1). The tool could be used in ways other than through text messaging, such as a support after an in-person conversation with a partner or through an online dating website’s messaging system. Most participants felt they would wait to build a relationship with another person before sending them information about HIV, but Looped in would be useful when they did (3,2).

“I think it’s a complex people choice really. I wouldn’t do it if I say I’m quite traditional, I’d probably say not ’till I’m ready that I would use [Looped in] but again it’s just personal.”

“I would definitely send additional information through this tool... and that information would happen at some point in the relationship.”

Design Implications

UX testing and group discussions presented various design considerations. These should also be considered within the development of future online platforms serving users living with HIV and can be summarised as follows:

Avoid Logins

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Distribution Formats

The different output formats were seen as being valuable for different situations and audiences, mainly relating to how the recipient would prefer to access and read the information.

“I guess it depends on the person and how technology, how up to date with technology they are. So if my mother, say I was talking about it with my mother, I know she would want to read it from paper, so I’d then print it off, whereas my nephew would be, oh just send me the link and I’ll have a look at it, so really person-focused. But having that ability to print it off I think is key.”

Conclusion

Our study hopes to validate both our initial concept and prototype for Looped in, in order to understand that can work in real-world service environments. Participants felt that the tool would be useful and accessible in their own lives, and that it could be used to help educate others about HIV. Looped in has since been further developed and will be released as an online product in 2019.