Qualitative Research Report

Brainbuild

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Introduction

This report will provide a detailed description of the findings of our qualitative research. We conducted one focus group comprised of four participants to research the target demographics' attitudes and feelings on advertisements and messaging of health and fitness apps. Our goal in this research was to develop solutions to the client's communications challenge of finding key publics and learning how to best target them; our specific focus is messaging and advertising with a public relations perspective on branding. All research thus far has shown the importance of developing a strong brand image to create brand awareness, and that messaging is vital to reaching a brand's target audience. The qualitative research we have conducted reinforced this sentiment and provided many insights into how Brainbuild can communicate with its key publics moving forward.

Focus Group Objectives

Secondary research done prior to the focus group centered around the effects of advertising on perceptions of and attitudes toward mobile health apps. We have been and are continually aiming to determine what advertising appeals to our target publics and what messages they want to hear. In conducting a focus group, we wanted to better understand our target public's attitudes and perceptions of health and fitness apps. We wanted to learn about their motivations behind downloading and using these apps and how these participants felt about certain aspects of advertising and messaging for health and fitness apps. Finally, we wanted to get a real-time understanding of how users perceive Brainbuild and what they think about the app, along with its messaging and brand image.

Demographics/Participants

Our group selected participants that fit into our secondary target audiences, which are both male and female UNC-Chapel Hill undergraduate students who have some knowledge of and interest in health and fitness apps. We did not interview our primary target public as females aged 25 to 35 years old were not accessible in our environment. The focus group participants included undergraduate students who have some degree of knowledge of health and fitness apps. Our focus group was comprised of four individuals, aged 19-22. Throughout the report, we will use false names to refer to the participants. The first participant, Timothy, is a 22 year-old male undergraduate student at UNC-CH. The next participant is Lacey, a 20 year-old female undergraduate. Lastly, Elaine and Lauren are 19 year-old female undergraduate students at UNC-CH.

Group Protocol Decisions

We created the focus group protocol based on our objectives and started by developing key questions regarding messaging in health and fitness advertisements. After developing the key questions, our group focused on how we could specify our probing questions to fit

Brainbuild's style of advertising messaging. We planned the questions starting with more simple and straightforward questions in order to create a comfortable environment for participants to express their opinions, then moved to open-ended questions to receive more authentic information. The focus group also included the use of three advertising stimulus, which were advertisements from other health and fitness apps such as Lose it!, MyFitnessPal and Lifesum, along with Brainbuild's website. We displayed these stimuli in order to get the participants' reactions and feelings in order to understand users' attitudes towards common advertisements and messaging of health and fitness apps, which can then be applied to Brainbuild and its messaging.

Interview Setting, Rules and Strategy

The focus group was conducted in a standard environment with one moderator, one assistant, and three observers in a backroom. The observers were behind a two-way mirror, unseen by respondents. The focus group lasted approximately one hour, including all introductions and closing remarks. The original protocol called for an hour and a half, but was altered due to unforeseen circumstances. Before discussion began, it was made clear that the focus group was being recorded, but that only first names would be used and no names would be used in any reports. Participants were reassured that should they feel uncomfortable they could leave at any time and any issues could be discussed with their contact from the research group. A precedent was set that all ideas were welcome and desired. All participants were encouraged to participate and be honest in their answers.

The Process

The interview began with the moderator building rapport by relating student experiences and then clarifying parameters and setting group standards. To encourage comfort and openness, everyone participated in a simple icebreaker, introducing themselves and describing their favorite health and fitness or other apps. The conversation developed with basic, personal experiences regarding health and fitness apps and how each individual came to use them. Discussion transitioned with the introduction of stimuli--health and fitness app advertisements. Word association was used to help interviewees simplify and focus their thoughts. All members were encouraged to share and explain their associations and reactions. The group dynamic was engaging and all participants seemed comfortable and willing to share their opinions. The focus group then focused on Brainbuild as participants downloaded and engaged with the app and website, again using word associations. Discussion was similarly open and informative. Participants were comfortable engaging with each other, often agreeing with or respectfully disputing different comments. The moderator's main focus was introducing new topics and asking questions. Participants regularly involved themselves in discussions without prompting, offering more authentic and collaborative responses to stimuli. The main problem was an

occasional short or unclear answer, requiring the moderator to ask probing questions and draw out more explanatory responses.

Findings and Insights

The focus group had mixed feelings towards Brainbuild's messaging and other health and fitness app advertisements. There were some themes that most of the respondents agreed upon, but we also noticed different responses coming from participants of different genders. The three major categories that came up several times during the focus group were: message consistency, tone and style of advertisement, and usability and user experience. The categories are arranged according to level of importance, relevance, and repetitive patterns.

Message Consistency

Message consistency was the most prominent category of discussion that came up in the focus group. Message consistency refers to the cohesiveness of the messages and communications that are relayed through the app, advertisements, the website, and other means of communication. We felt that the level of consistency between the website and the app was a reoccuring theme and that it was the most important aspect in determining how to proceed with Brainbuild. This category also refers to the helpfulness of the services that Brainbuild provides to consumer, such as reminders, recommendations, and goal setting orientations.

Theme 1. Cohesiveness

After holding the focus group, we have come to the conclusion that the Brainbuild app and website are two very different concepts. The messages displayed in the website are different than the content displayed in the app. This discrepancy between the two mediums was picked up on by viewers. When shown the website for Brainbuild, Elaine mentioned "my brain wouldn't initially think this is a website for the app," and that she would have thought she typed in something wrong or it was the wrong website, because the app and the website were so different. Lauren mentioned that the website reminded her of Google, "which didn't match the app at all. Because the app was very red, and it looks weird." Knowing that there is inconsistency between the website and the app itself, it is important to take these insights into account so consumers do not think they are on the wrong website or get confused by content that varies so significantly. It was also brought to our attention that the difference between the website and the app was based on information versus service. The website provides information about how to use the app and some of the science behind the app, while the app itself provides the services of helping the consumer with timing their meals throughout the day. Lacey described the website as scientific as she thought the website offered "a more detailed explanation." Elaine agreed with Lacey and thought that website was also informative in that "there were short excerpts of what the app does." This aspect of the relationship between the website and the app is important to take into account because it displays how consumers appreciate how informative the website is. The

wesbite tells them how to use the app and the science behind it, while the app itself is used to assist the consumer throughout the day. In regards to the variations between these two platforms, Timothy said that he thought "the tone of the website and app were different." These insights show that the communication methods of the app and the website are very different and thus could confuse consumers; nonetheless, each platform has a specific purpose for the consumer.

Theme 2. Helpfulness

The second theme of this category is the helpfulness of the app and its services. This includes the perception of reminders, recommendations, and goal orientations that may or may not be implemented in the app. Reminders that are sent to the consumer from the app are a feature that would be beneficial to the consumer. "I'd really like to have something to give me reminders," said Elaine, because she gets so busy with work and school and believes she would value that service. The reminder feature is important and very helpful, especially to our target market because they are busy individuals that need help scheduling meals in order to obtain optimal health. Brainbuild also offers recommendations, and according to Lacey, the app and website are handy and convenient to use, as a result of these suggestions and recommendations. These recommendations are the foundational service that Brainbuild provides, so it was crucial to understand how this feature was perceived by consumers. Brainbuild currently does not have any way to track progress or set goals for consumers to work towards. Lacey noted that it "doesn't seem to give you much motivation," a sentiment shared by Elaine who noted that she likes a fitness app that motivates you towards an end result. This is valuable information to Brainbuild moving forward as we want to make sure that consumers are staying motivated in their health and fitness journey and in turn continuing use of the app.

Tone and Style of Advertisement

While maintaining the messaging consistency in different channels, Brainbuild should also pay attention to the tone and style when delivering messages through advertisement. This category refers to appearance elements such as layout, color scheme and graphics that Brainbuild should consider while using advertisement appeals to target customers. It also refers to different tones that Brainbuild may consider adopting, such as friendly, informative and motivational.

Theme 1. Appearance

When we presented advertisements from several different fitness apps and asked for thoughts, the first thing the participants addressed was the overall appearance, such as layout simplicity, color schemes and graphics. In terms of perceptions of the same advertisements, we noted a potential discrepancy between males and females. The three female participants expressed a strong preference for advertisement from Lifesum, which has multiple bright colors and graphics of healthy food. Elaine described the advertisement by using the words "sleek " and "modern." "It looks very appealing, the colors, layout and fonts. Modern and cold-cut. It

appealed to people of our generation," said Elaine. Timothy, the only male in the focus group, expressed a different view: "I thought it was homogenous. That was one of my words, but not in a great way...I sort of don't want to look at each one and read it." The female participants showed concerns over the advertisement of MyFitnessPal. Lauren commented: "it just looked really busy...you have a lot going on." Elaine agreed: "I liked the colors but now that I'm thinking in terms of as an effective advertisement, it is a lot going on." Timothy, on the other hand, regarded this advertisement as the best one, noting: "you know exactly what app it is. And in front of the salad, it has the information. It's colorful and it got its point across in a good way." Those are valuable insights for Brainbuild to use in determining the appearance of advertisements when targeting different genders. As for graphics, some participants were confused by the chocolate donuts in the advertisement of Lose It!, which was expected to deliver healthiness. Lacey noted, "the characters in the bottom are so small, and the donut seems to draw all of my attention." These insights show that Brainbuild should be considerate about creating graphics that are contrary to general perception on health and fitness.

Theme 2. Tone

The second theme in this category is the tone of advertisement. When asked about the expected tone of voice of Brainbuild, the words "scientific" and "friendly" were mentioned the most frequently. Elaine described how it "felt scientific," but not "in an intimidating way," saying how it was very "user-friendly." Lauren agreed, calling it "dumbed-down but scientific," like Brainbuild was saying "'hey, we have this here to help you.'" Lacey emphasized friendliness, describing it as "friendly, but also convenient for people." Health and fitness apps were also related to tones such as "motivation" during the focus group. Some apps didn't seem to motivate people, as described by Lauren who said, "I feel like MyFitnessPal was cool for a time to keep track and see everything, but most of the time it wasn't in any way motivating." Some apps, however, did a good job of using their advertising to demonstrate its motivational effects on its users. Elaine shared her experience when she first heard about FitBit, saying: "I remember the advertisements were these super healthy, fit people who were running and wiping off their sweat, looking at it on their arm. I thought 'wow, maybe that will motivate me to actually keep track of things.'" These are all valuable insights to help Brainbuild determine its general tone and how it wants to communicate with and portray itself to customers. These participants voiced the importance that tone has in a user's perception of and attitude towards an app that all affect a user's experience, which are key aspects that influence continued use of the app.

Usability and User Experience

The last category gleaned from participants is the importance of usability and user experience, which go hand-in-hand with other aspects of the app such as its motivational qualities, tone, appearance and messaging. As with any mobile app, it is clear that a positive user experience is vital to the success of Brainbuild. Once advertising campaigns are effectively

positioned to draw in downloaders, it is extremely important that Brainbuild's promises are carried out in a manner that is showcased in the overall usability and user experience. Throughout the focus group, there were various instances of the respondents keying in on different aspects of these two areas. The primary themes that emerged were centered around ease of use and personalization.

Theme 1. Ease of use

Simplicity of use was one major theme throughout the focus group. During a conversation regarding the positives and negatives of other health and fitness apps, Elaine noted the tediousness of logging the food she had eaten in MyFitnessPal. "One thing I didn't like about [MyFitnessPal]... is trying to find the things that you've eaten… I know it's easy to go on your phone and log it, but having to go and find it there wasn't very easy." During the same conversation, Timothy echoed similar sentiments. He felt as though there were more efficient ways of tracking calories, rather than having to go directly through the app to learn about nutritional information. "Finding out how many calories is in everything is kind of tedious," he said. "It has a good search feature where you can find equivalent foods… but it's easier with the dining hall since they have official listings for things." There was a very clear consensus that one of the most popular elements of Brainbuild was its simplicity. Where the view of MyFitnessPal was not positive in this area, the users of Brainbuild thought simplicity is what made it appealing "It was very user-friendly," said Lauren. "It wasn't hard to find where things were and to figure it out." Immediately following Lauren's comment, Elaine commented: "I agree. I think the app design is really simple to use. It had the bottom and you just went from there. It's not like a trail that just leads off. It's very simple." Simplicity and ease of use are clearly important elements for potential users of the Brainbuild app; they are certainly significant areas to focus on in terms of advertising the product.

Theme 2. Tracking

The second theme that we recognized came in the form of tracking, which consistently emerged throughout the conversation. Despite comments about the tediousness of calorie-counting in MyFitnessPal, participants recognized that a health and fitness app should have a clear focus on this aspect of nutrition. Timothy recognized difficulties with MyFitnessPal's tracking of calories, but noted that it was clearly an element of the app that stood out. "The coolest thing to me about it was that you entered what you ate throughout the day," he said of MyFitnessPal. "You set a goal for weight loss… and if you exercised, it adds calories. So you can see exactly where you stand." Lauren expanded further on not just tracking calories, but exercise as well. Her past experience was with the FitBit app, an industry leader in workout tracking. She said of her initial experiences of learning about FitBit: "I'm really active and I want to have an actual snapshot of what I actually did instead of 'oh, I ran about this today', or 'I burned about this many calories today.'" Clearly, this theme of tracking is integral to the way

consumers view an app they could potentially download. For Brainbuild, this is an area that will be key in terms of building an effective advertising strategy. The app currently doesn't have certain areas of tracking that seem to be most appealing to potential downloaders. Using this information, Brainbuild will need to determine how to effectively reach audiences that to prioritize various forms of tracking.

Conclusion

After conducting the focus group, our group gained many insights into the target public's attitudes towards health and fitness apps and how they view the messaging of these apps. We were also able to gain an understanding of Brainbuild from a user's perspective and therefore have garnered an assessment of Brainbuild's communications challenges and recommendations for moving forward. The main insights we gathered from the participants in the focus group fit into categories of message consistency, tone and style of advertisements, and usability and user experience, including themes of cohesiveness, appearance and ease of use. Each participant offered valuable commentaries and opinions that we have taken into account when formulating solutions to Brainbuild's communications challenge.

The client's research problem has become much more clear following this focus group, wherein we discovered key insights about the target public and as such can provide Brainbuild with suggestions as to how best message to and target this demographic. Primarily, these participants wanted the website to match the app, demonstrating the importance to this demographic of cohesiveness across all aspects of the brand and its messaging. This cohesiveness in turn will contribute to higher brand awareness and brand affinity, two key aspects our group has previously researched in relation to Brainbuild. Another common point brought up by the participants was the importance of personalization, both in terms of being able to set a goal through the app but also with the app taking into account each person's body composition (such as height and weight) and giving personalized suggestions or recommendations. Messaging that is specific to each person and their goals would help to improve users' attitudes towards the brand and would encourage continued use. The participants offered many useful insights for Brainbuild to use in order to better develop messaging and branding strategies that will help to increase awareness and attitudes towards the brand.

Appendices

Joe Wedra: Usability and Under Experience (Ease of use and Personalization)

Katie Forbidussi: Introduction, Demographics/Participants, Focus Group Objectives, Conclusion, and editing

Kelly Hsu: Demographics/Participants, Group Protocol Decisions, intro paragraph of Findings and Insights

Laeral Knutson: Interview Setting /Rules /Strategy, the Process, and editing

Yujie Tao: Tone and Style of Advertisement (Appearance and Tone)

Elizabeth Pollard: Message Consistency (Comprehensiveness and helpfulness)