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Generational Split In British Attitudes To Digital Self-Care, PAGB Research Finds

by David Ridley

A survey by the UK's self-care industry association, PAGB, has found a marked difference in generational attitudes to digital health apps and devices in the UK, with two-thirds of 18 to 35 year olds in the country trusting such technology compared to only a quarter of 46 to 55 year olds.

Two-thirds of British people aged 18 to 35 years old trust digital health apps and devices, according to new research by the Proprietary Association of Great Britain.

However, this was in marked contrast to those aged 46 to 55 years old, only a quarter of whom felt the same way about digital health technologies, PAGB's research revealed. The so-called "baby boomer" generation – those aged 56 to 65 years old – were even less enthusiastic about digital, with only 19% trusting apps and devices with their health.

In consequence of its findings – which were based on a survey of 2,000 UK consumers conducted in June 2019 – PAGB called on the UK government to do more to help people in the country to use digital technologies to self-care.

“According to our research, younger people, in particular, want digital solutions in healthcare,” commented PAGB’s chief executive officer John Smith. “However, this positive sentiment and appetite for change is not yet matched by action – we believe more could be done to utilize technology specifically to support people to self-care.”

Each year in the UK there were 18m general practitioner (GP) appointments for self-treatable conditions, Smith pointed out, which did not need a doctor’s consultation. “This costs the National Health Service £810m (\$982m), money that could be reinvested elsewhere if more people were empowered to self-care.”

Existing Good Practice

PAGB's intervention came as it published a new report – '[Self-care and technology: Harnessing the potential of technology to transform self-care](#)' – which looked at the ways in which people worldwide were already turning to digital technology to help them self-care.

For example, there were 325,000 health apps on the global wellness market in 2017, PAGB explained. This was also a “growing industry,” the association added, with 78,000 new apps added in this year alone. Two-thirds of these apps related to healthy living, including fitness, lifestyle, stress, diet and nutrition, it noted.

“There is emerging evidence that these apps can have a positive impact on diet monitoring, physical activity, adherence to medication and management of long-term conditions,” PAGB commented. “By using behavior-change techniques such as promoting goal setting, reviewing progress and feeding back on performance, these apps have the potential to improve individuals' daily choices and lifestyle decisions, encouraging healthier living.”

PAGB pointed to [Johnson & Johnson](#) as a good example of a company leveraging the power of digital health to not only support the commercial success of its consumer health brands, but also to support consumers who rely on its products to manage their health.

J&J had invested in building a “digital ecosystem,” PAGB said, that offered advice and support beyond its Nicorette range of smoking cessation products to help smokers “quit for good.” (Also see "[J&J Wants To Inspire A Quitter Movement In The UK With Nicorette Campaign](#)" - HBW Insight, 3 Jun, 2019.)

“Given that up to 76% of quitters give up on their quit attempt after one week, the need for additional support along this difficult journey is clear and is proven to increase the likelihood of quitting by up to four times,” the association argued.

Alongside its new campaign to create a “quitter movement” in the UK using social media and its brand website – www.nicorette.co.uk – J&J had also launched a Nicorette app that helps quitters track their smoke-free days and how much money they have saved from not smoking, PAGB said. Drawing on the popular idea of “nudging,” the app also set challenges to motivate quitters and provides distractions to help when they experience cravings, it continued.

Online information and advice, online symptom checkers and digital triage systems and integrated health records are other digital health technologies PAGB analysed and drew lessons regarding digital health best practice from in its report.

PAGB Recommends

Following the analysis presented in the report, PAGB urged the NHS and its executive body, NHS England, to:

- develop a self-care section within the NHS app and on the NHS website that includes self-care fact sheets and “easy to understand videos” to improve people’s understanding of self-care;
- explore how existing apps and wearables could be used to support people to self-care;
- address barriers to the development of apps and wearables which safely promote self-care;
- include access to pharmacist advice within primary care IT systems, along with access to the OTC directory for GPs and other healthcare professionals;
- ensure “online triage systems” direct people based on their symptoms to local pharmacies for self-treatable conditions, rather than to GPs;
- give community pharmacists “write” access to patient health records.

“The NHS needs to make it easier for people to access health information, so that they know which health service is right for their needs,” commented GP Dr Sarah Jarvis. “I agree with PAGB’s recommendation that the NHS website and NHS app should include a section dedicated to self-care, with fact sheets and easy to understand videos.”

“Similarly, we would like to see online triage systems directing people based on their symptoms and sending them to pharmacy when appropriate for self-treatable conditions, rather than the GP,” she continued.

“Giving pharmacists ‘write’ access to people’s health records would help people to see pharmacists as part of the primary care team and help me, as a GP, to provide seamless care,” Dr Jarvis added, “as I will know what advice or treatments the pharmacist has recommended.”