

Chapter 7

Obsessive–Compulsive Disorder and Mobile Technology: A Research for Establishing the Main Features of an App Intervention for OCD Anxiety

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ABSTRACT

Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) is characterized by the presence of persistent and unwanted obsessions, which take the form of intrusive thoughts. These lead to widespread anxiety and/or compulsions which take the form of repetitive acts to relieve anxiety. In 2020, for the author's master's degree final project, she decided to propose the creation of a mobile application for people with OCD, whose main purpose was to reduce the anxiety caused by it. Although mobile applications already exist for the treatment of OCD, it was necessary to fill some gaps and improve them. This chapter will examine the techniques that were applied on the investigation of the author's project—a competitor analysis and an exploratory qualitative research—and understand how they can help to retain some information that is beyond the literature review, and what needs to be retained from them to know which features and functionalities are most useful in an app that aims to support therapeutic intervention in individuals with OCD, as well as possible gaps that could be improved.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, a major technological advance has been observed, which goes beyond solving communication and accessibility needs. This has been evolving rapidly and comprehensively (Islam & Mazumder, 2010), managing to respond to various needs, various types of users, problems and obstacles that arise through its use.

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Apps are daily present in our lives and can become an auxiliary tool, of wide reach, availability, and possibility of monitoring in diseases that could have the support of technology in their treatment, even though little developed, as is the case of obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) (Roncero, 2019).

Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) is a serious disorder which, as its name implies, involves two phenomena - obsessions and compulsions. OCD is characterized by the presence of persistent and unwanted obsessions, which take the form of intrusive thoughts. These lead to widespread anxiety and/or compulsions which take the form of repetitive acts to relieve stress (American Psychiatric Association, 2014, cited in Sharma et al., 2018). An individual who carries it feels the urge to perform repetitive behaviors in response to an obsession. Associated with a reduced quality of life, as well as with high levels of social and professional prejudice, OCD brings with its thoughts and concerns that go beyond the rational.

A study conducted by Harvard University and organized by the World Health Organization, describes OCD as the tenth cause of disability in the developed world and it is estimated that about 2 to 3% of the world population suffers from this psychopathology (Abramowitz, 2008).

With the current context of the Covid-19 pandemic, the frequency of mental disorders is estimated to increase, however in OCD, the peculiarities of Covid-19 can directly impact the clinical course of these individuals. Topics of concern in OCD such as cleanliness, contamination, and the fear of contracting a disease now become a central topic in the news and media, which causes the exacerbation of this condition (Silva, 2020).

In 2020, for the author's master's degree final project, she proposed the creation of a mobile application for people with obsessive-compulsive disorder, whose main purpose was to reduce the anxiety caused by it.

It was intended that this mobile application could be used freely by users with OCD, but it could also be used as a complementary strategy in the therapy to be applied to this type of disorder, without, however, replacing existing therapies.

Based on the characteristics of obsessive-compulsive disorder, this app should focus on the anxiety, that is characteristic of this pathology, adding different functionalities compared to the ones of the existing apps. And, since OCD can be experienced differently by everyone, it was chosen to create a dynamic and versatile app that responds to the needs of each user.

In fact, the design and development of a multimedia project that addresses OCD was pertinent, since it is a mental disorder, little developed at the level of mobile applications, whose implementation could become very useful because it could be used at any time of the day, in the user's most anxious moments.

Although there are mobile applications whose goal is to support the patient with this type of disorder, these have some gaps that need to be improved and rethought, especially regarding the way they meet the different needs of these users, since OCD is experienced differently by them. The lack of some specific functionalities that could help the users to reduce anxiety was also a flaw in these mobile applications.

Regarding the structure of the chapter, this is composed of a brief approach to the topic of OCD and mobile applications for health, focusing on the concepts central to the work developed and the relevant relationships between concepts. After this, it is made an approach of the mobile applications for obsessive-compulsive disorder that already exist on the market.

The chapter continues with the supporting research where were employed two different methods – a competitive analysis and a qualitative exploratory research. It starts with the exploratory research, that involved in depth interviews with web and mobile designers and mental health experts, in order to better characterize this pathology and understand the forms of therapeutic intervention, as well as identify

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