Happy Planet

Smartphone Application of Positive Psychology

By Yuen Shung Chit (1155004430)

2013/1/3

Introduction:

"The greatest discovery of my generation is that human beings can alter their lives by altering their attitudes of mind."
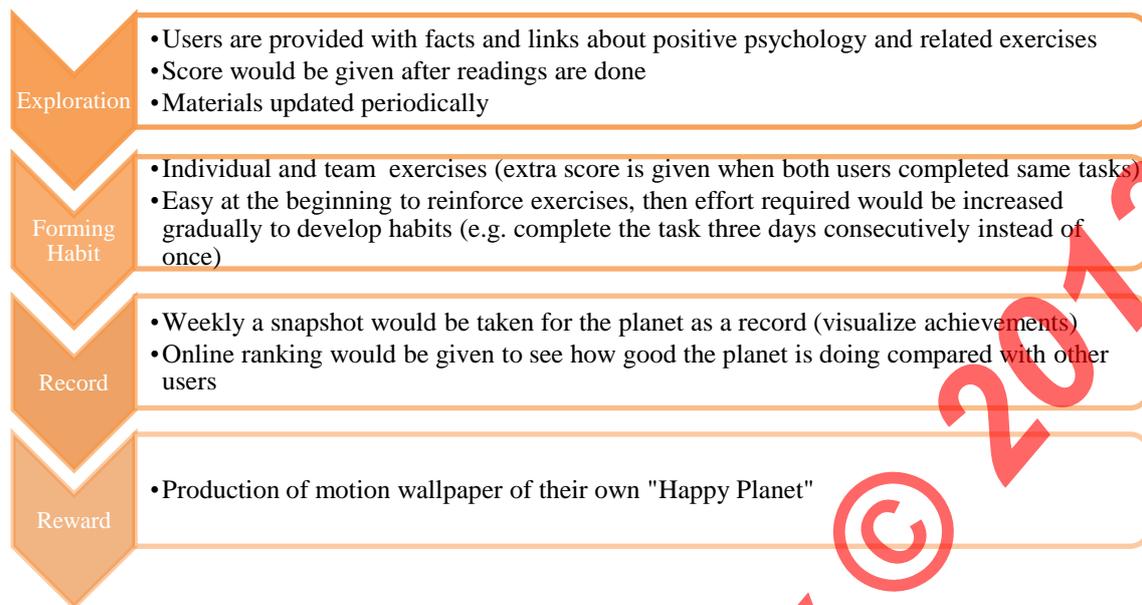
William James

Positive psychology has widely been studied in recent years; influential psychologists such as Martin Seligman and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi have established scientific understandings on how to achieve a fulfilling life. However, channels for conveying these findings to the general public are still limited. There is a need to create a more convenient way for the public to get access to these beneficial findings on how to live a better life. With the increasing popularity of smartphones, smartphone application provides the channel we need for the promoting positive psychology. Smartphone application has three unique characteristics: 1) Availability 2) Social Networking 3) Habit development. Best example to illustrate these characteristics would be Whatsapp, people could use it to communicate with friends anytime, anywhere as part of their daily habits.

That is the origin of the concept of "Happy Planet". It is a novel smartphone application that aimed to create a platform to promote positive psychology through 1) Knowledge transfer, 2) Habits development and 3) Interpersonal encouragements.

Smartphone application - Happy Planet

The "Happy Planet" is a game that allows users to own and cultivate a virtual planet. It starts with a plane planet without any buildings or animals. Through accomplishing different positive psychological exercises, they would be able to earn scores called "Smiles". "Smiles" are tokens to develop their planets such as building farm. As a reward for the game play, user would be able to use their "Happy Planet" as motion wallpapers for their smartphones. Network community, "Happy Universe", allows users to visit each other's "Happy Planet" and join team exercises. Ranks would be given according to the degree of development. The flow of the game could be summarized as follow:

2

Exploration	• Users are provided with facts and links about positive psychology and related exercises • Score would be given after readings are done • Materials updated periodically
Forming Habit	• Individual and team exercises (extra score is given when both users completed same tasks) • Easy at the beginning to reinforce exercises, then effort required would be increased gradually to develop habits (e.g. complete the task three days consecutively instead of once)
Record	• Weekly a snapshot would be taken for the planet as a record (visualize achievements) • Online ranking would be given to see how good the planet is doing compared with other users
Reward	• Production of motion wallpaper of their own "Happy Planet"

Positive Psychological Exercises

Current project adopted three domains from the frame work of good life proposed by positive psychologist Martin Seligman in 2011 – PERMA, which includes positive emotion, engagement, relationship, meaning and achievement. Domains are chosen according to effectiveness of evidence-based exercises, simplicity, and transferability to game play. Here is a summary of the execises:

Positive emotion	Relationship	Meaning
• Three good things • Aerobic exercise	• Caring and quality time	• Gratitude • Altruism

1. **Three good things:** It is a revised version of positive psychological exercise designed by Martin Seligman[1]. It is proved to be effective of improving positive mood and decrease the risk of depression. The tasks required users to recall three things that went well on that day as well as the causal explanation for the good things before they sleep. Higher scores are given for higher frequency of exercise per week.

2. **Aerobic exercise**: Studies have been done on the positive effect of habitual aerobic exercise on emotion,[2] exercise sports regular could result in less negative affect and less stressful. This task required users to exercise for 30

---

[1] Seligman, M. E. P., Steen, T. A., Park, N., & Peterson, C. (2005). Positive psychology progress: Empirical validation of interventions. American Psychologist, 60, 410–421

[2] Aganoff, J. A., Boyle, G.J. (1994).Aerobic exercise, mood states and menstrual cycle symptoms. Journal of Psychosomatic Research, 38(3), 183-192.

minutes in order to accomplish the tasks, a timer would be triggered once the user press start and 30 minutes would be counted. Higher scores are given for higher frequency of exercise per week.

3. **Caring and quality time:** Simple exercises would be given for demonstration of care towards family and friends, examples would be "Give a hug to you family members", "Show your care towards one of your friends", "Spare 15 minutes of quality time with your family members".

4. **Gratitude:** It is a revised version of gratitude diary[3]. Emmons has proved that conscious focus on gratitude could make ones perception of life as more fulfilling and meaningful. This tasks required user to think of someone that one would like to thank and send him a message to show one's gratitude.

5. **Altruism:** Helping others could increase sense of self-worth and bring happiness.[4] This tasks required users to observe the needs of people around them and give a hand to them. Users would check the box once they have completed the helping behavior. Higher scores would be given to encourage more helping acts.

Expected Outcome

Users are expected to learn more about positive psychology, actively engage in positive acts and develop attitude in awareness of positive behaviors and thinking. Lastly, it is expected that users would play and share ideas with peers about the positive psychological elements in this game and encourage others to think and act positively.

Practical issue

It can be programmed with commonly assessable software including VBA. For publishing and budgeting, there are two major application markets available nowadays including apple store and android market. The current project would choose to publish through the android market as the publication is free of charge and the registration and administration process is much simpler than apple store. Also, there are more brands adopting android system so the coverage of the application would be wider.

---

[3] Emmons R (2007). Thanks!: How the New Science of Gratitude Can Make You Happier. Houghton Mifflin

[4] Post S, Neimark J (2007). Why Good Things Happen to Good People. Broadway