

HOW COMMUNICATIONS CAN HELP SENIORS TO STAY HEALTHY AND SELF-SUFFICIENT

ABSTRACT

The Dutch population is aging rapidly. This means an increase of health problems and higher risk of developing them among citizens above the age of 65, along with an upcoming niche in marketing; marketing to seniors. Both national and local policy is aimed at enabling seniors to remain self-sufficient for as long as possible. In order to remain self-sufficient, residents must contain physical exercise. Although national and local policies give seniors plenty of opportunities to exercise and participate in their social environment for free or at low cost, seniors do not tend to participate in these programs.

This study focused on finding explanations and solutions for the observation mentioned above, working with the hypothesis that the target group doesn't feel addressed to the offered programs. To assess the current situation, literature was reviewed as a first step using theories such as health promotion, social marketing and the CASI instrument. The second step involved taking interviews with health professionals and organizations who are committed to seniors in the city of Culemborg. The third step was gathering insights of the main target group: residents of Culemborg in the age of 65-76. All residents who were part of this target group received a questionnaire about keeping up with their physical and mental health.

Using three topics to segment the findings, namely "motivation for participation", "activities" and "communication", findings indicate the hypothesis was correct. In the end all national and local policies are working towards a positive, lasting change of behaviour. This behavioural change needs to be an result of intrinsic motivation in order to last. A concept was created combining elements of social marketing with the CASI instrument to suit the motivations of seniors and vulnerable citizens to participate; "Today is tomorrow". Having fun, raising awareness, education and working together are the key principles of the concept, covering all bases to a successful change in behaviour. Instead of promoting programs by focusing on improving health or offering programs exclusively for seniors, "Today is tomorrow" focuses at experiencing fun and pleasure when participating in a program designed for no particular age. Working with both professional influencers such as family doctors and physical therapists and influencers from the immediate social environment such as priests and neighbours, "Today is tomorrow" is effective to stimulate seniors and vulnerable citizens to keep moving. To support the extrinsic motivation a loyalty program is included, giving participants a nudge into trying new activities and engage in social interaction.

Since "Today is tomorrow" is solely based on findings exclusively collected in the city of Culemborg, further research needs to be conducted before the concept is applicable in other Dutch cities. This study could also be replicated for other countries in order to determine in what extend the concept could be effective in these cultures due to the global impact of aging.