Ethnographic Diary Studies
Value and Best-practices

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What is a diary study?

• Self-reported qualitative data over time (i.e., longitudinal)

• Versatile user research method
  1. Early-stage “ethnographic” studies
  2. Later-stage product usage studies
Recent example: Patients with IBD

- **Participants:** Patients with Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD)
- **Study length:** 2 weeks
- **Topics of interest:**
  - Symptom fluctuation
  - Impact on daily life
  - Treatment regimen
  - Living environment

Image source: https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/318627.php
Value of ethnographic diary studies
Value

Longitudinal data
Value

In-context responses

Acai bowl I have sometimes when I’m low energy. I feel it really does give me a boost.

By P10 CC

Task: 4. Diet

Tags: diet, healthy eating
Value

More thoughtful responses
Best-practices for conducting studies
Best-practices

Conduct pre- and post-study interviews

Pre
• Help setup diary platform
• Set expectations
• Form human connection

Post
• Follow-up on topics for in-depth info
• Collect “big-picture” insights

Image source: http://www.theburchellgroup.com/phone-interview
Best-practices

Keep prompts simple and open-ended

• Limit multi-part prompts
• Avoid soliciting one word answers
• Pilot test them with a friend

6. Weekend activities

Please capture photos of the activities you do this weekend. In the captions (or separate notes), describe any special considerations or preparations you make for these activities due to your medical condition.

Required responses: A minimum of 1 note AND 4 photos

Uploads: 0 0 0

7. Treatment regimen

Please take photos of any items involved in treating your symptoms. In each photo’s caption, please describe when, where, and how you use the item in your treatment regimen.
Best-practices

Consider the order of task topics

• Start light, get deeper as you go
Best-practices

Support participants through communication

- Provide encouragement early on
- Probe and remind throughout the study
Best-practices

Develop an effective coding system

• Think about findings format
• Start broad, narrow later
Conclusion

- Diary studies are a powerful ethnographic research method
- There are lots of tips and tricks for conducting them well
- Limitations: sometimes you need first-hand observations
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