

Listening to the quit smoking stories of quitters to gain insights into effective quitting strategies and health promotion

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Certificate of original authorship

I, Mayanne Lafontaine declare that this thesis; is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Technology Sydney.

This thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. In addition; I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis

This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

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Abstract

Smoking continues to be the leading cause of preventable death and illness in the world. In Australia, the Federal and New South Wales state Governments have implemented a comprehensive program of tobacco control initiatives over several decades that has led to declines in smoking prevalence. Digital interventions have shown promise in supporting smokers in quitting smoking. But evidence of their effectiveness and long-term impact remains low. iCanQuit.com.au is an Australian (New South Wales) quit smoking website that provides a forum for quitters to share their personal stories and experiences of quitting smoking.

This research involved studying the publicly available posts shared by users on the iCanQuit forum to identify the strategies that they employed and the extent to which these were successful in supporting quitters to remain smokefree. A two-stage quantitative and qualitative study of quitters who used the iCanQuit forum during their quit attempt was undertaken. The first stage examined a large sample of 372 quitters who posted on the forum in 2012 and 2017. The second stage examined the posts of fifteen quitters from 1 January 2011 to 31 May 2018, who reached smokefree status and were named 'changemakers'. Four subgroups of users were identified on the forum: 'newbies' (quit for 0-3 months), 'resisters' (quit for 3-6 months), 'successful quitters' (quit for 6-12 months) and 'long-time quitters' (quit for more than 12 months).

The study found that the iCanQuit forum did indeed support long-term behaviour change. The quit success of 'changemakers' was linked to higher rates of participation, front-loading activity and sustained membership of at least one year. Through the behaviours of reading and writing posts, the role of the forum in habit reversal was revealed, as 'changemakers' returned years later in response to a craving. A Framework of Insights was designed to encapsulate the value of peer-led online communities which include tangible support, connection, social support, and self-awareness. This Framework affords voice to the users of the iCanQuit forum by articulating the transformative process experienced by users of the forum and the perceived impact the iCanQuit forum has had on quit smoking success.