28 Days Later: Final Report

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Executive Summary

Not all women are the same. So many of us want or need to track information about our menstrual cycle and there are literally hundreds of applications to choose from. How could it be, then, that none of the existing apps deviate from the pink, flowery, girly, and "pretty" stereotype. 28 Days Later is a zombie-themed menstruation tracking mobile application. It obfuscates period symptoms by using horror-themed cartoon imagery instead of pink hearts and flowers. The intention is to create an easy-to-use and informative application that allows for privacy and is welcoming to women who identify anywhere on the gender spectrum.

Our final app predicts both symptoms, using zombie icons, and period start date, in the form of an apocalypse countdown. It allows users to log symptoms, share symptoms with friends, set alerts based on symptoms and period start date, and look at symptom history and predictions. Through user testing, we discovered that participants appreciated the theme and the graphics and that it was discreet enough to use in public.

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1 Major Changes

We originally intended to rely on pictorial representations rather than words, but user testing showed that some text communication was necessary. For example, we added text descriptions below each of the zombies representing symptoms. Instead of relying solely on the image, users could verify that a given zombie represented cravings, moodiness, pain, etc.

Additionally, we wanted to have a "diary" feature where users could add notes. In our research, we found that participants kept using the text box to search. We tried adding text to clarify the purpose of the box: Enter additional

notes or symptoms here This alteration helped, but users were still somewhat confused about the feature. Since a diary is not a major feature we planned to include, removing it would probably be prudent.

Since we designed the app, we expected users to find it very intuitive; however, users needed more cues than we expected to communicate functionality. For example, the slot machine feature needed labeling to define which symptom each image represented, and we added arrows above and below each image to indicate to users that it was an interactive feature. Originally, we planned to rely almost exclusively on swiping. To access the calendar, users swipe up; to change symptoms users swipe up or down; to see more symptoms, users swipe left, etc. This was hard to implement and was unclear in the paper prototype. We were unsure if users were not use to swiping, or if the paper prototype was too ambiguous, so we made it so users could make changes by pressing items rather than swiping. Users who were more tech savvy expected swiping in the mid-fidelity prototype, but since it responded slowly and did not respond to partial movements, they mostly relied on clicking.

Adding sharing was a major change we made. We did not expect users to be open to the idea of sharing symptoms, but our cultural probe participants had so much fun talking and laughing together about zombies and periods, we decided to add sharing. In the user testing, some users were turned off by the idea. If there were a more personalized way of expressing symptoms, users would likely be more interested in the idea. For example, users would probably be more excited to share personalized drawings depicting themselves as zombies on their periods than they were to share the built-in graphics.

2 Next Steps

We would like to have more art throughout the app; this would help support the theme and improve the usability. For example, having more fine gradations of symptom zombies would be helpful. We would also like to iterate on the designs we have to further improve readability.

We would also like to bring back the widget designs from the early days of testing. They proved difficult to convey in testing, but they would be almost essential for power users. It would also be nice to flesh out the sharing functionality more. Sharing was another area that tended to trap new users, but well-implemented sharing is part of the larger plan.

On the aesthetic front, we'd like to add more color and more themes to choose from. Several testers mentioned interest in related themes, such as "horror" or "sharks".

3 Lessons Learned

It's easy to say that people are unpredictable, but it's hard to grasp the range of their reactions without testing. Context mattered a lot — seemingly minor

things, like moving to a computer instead of a phone, or the slowness of the paper prototypes, drastically influenced people's behavior. Not to mention the wide variability between different people. Each person had a different concept of how to interact naturally with an application. Even gesture preferences varied widely, with some users preferring swipes, others taps, and still others hunting for arrows.

Across the board, users were very helpful. Unlike younger test subjects, they were unafraid to say exactly what they were experiencing, and what was difficult. Often, the difficulty came from limitations of the prototypes. We now know that speed is a critical aspect of paper prototypes. For digital prototypes, small details matter more, since they look more intentional.

4 Contribution Summary

Toni, Skatje, and Mia wrote the draft version of this report, which Janeen compiled into this pdf. Everyone worked on the script for the video.