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Linking young Canadians to parks and recreational resources using geo-targeted messaging in a smartphone application

My study aims to increase youth engagement with their parks and recreational resources via individually tailored geo-targeted messaging delivered through a smartphone application intervention. These messages will be sent on a daily basis or when the user is in close geographic proximity to a park or recreational facility. The desired outcomes from the study is to improve social connectedness, increase physical activity, and achieve higher rates of recreational activity participation across all sociocultural groups of youth. A key element of the project will be to identify opportunities for youth (ages 13-25) to engage with sport and recreational programs in their community. The proposed intervention would increase participation in sport and improve overall system performance for sports along two key pathways. First, the smartphone application collects detailed geographic and self-reported data that can be used to monitor and evaluate participant experiences in a park or other recreational setting. Participants will receive short surveys in real-time that capture their feelings, experiences, and feedback in the same place they are engaging with an activity. Second, the data gathered from this study could be used to develop more effective programming that better serves groups traditionally underrepresented in sports. The personalized nature of collecting feedback through a smartphone application could identify new sports programming options that other methods – surveying already engaged populations, interviewing sports and recreational staff, inventorying existing programs and facilities – may not capture from underrepresented populations, such as visible minorities and women. The app would also increase opportunities for people to engage spontaneously in sport and recreational programming, thus translating to an increase in the social capital of a community. The study is expected to further Canada-specific research about sports participation. The study is also a novel application of geospatial mobile technology to understand the space-time factors that influence participation in sport.

Keywords: Sport participation, Youth, Physical activity, Social capital, Geographic information science