CASE STUDY

MAPPING THE DUTCHS’ PERSPECTIVES ON HEALTHY AND SUSTAINABLE FOOD

This case shows how diverse private and governmental parties worked together in order to better understand the perspectives of Dutch people on health and sustainability of food.

ABOUT STBY

STBY is an agency specialized in design research for service innovation. In their creative research projects they aim to connect organizations with the lives and experiences of their customers. This helps their clients to innovate their service offering, and make it more valuable for both customers and businesses. The STBY team consists of senior researchers and consultants bringing together extensive experience with research, strategy, design and project management. STBY is a leading contributor to multi-disciplinary agile collaboration (hence their name, which is pronounced as 'standby').

FACTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goal of the project</td>
<td>Better understand how Dutch people perceive food in terms of health and sustainability, where they get their information about food, what they do with this information and what they think about new proteins derived from plants instead of animals</td>
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<tr>
<td>Project duration</td>
<td>February 2017 - April 2017</td>
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<td>Participant recruitment</td>
<td>By an agency</td>
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<td>Incentive</td>
<td>Gift cards of €40 each for the participation in the first workshop, the data collection process as well as the second workshop (in total €120 per participant)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of participants</td>
<td>32</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of touchpoints created</td>
<td>750 in total, on average 23 per participant, ranging from 8 to 40</td>
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Therefore, the governmental body commissioned the service design agency STBY to collaborate on the project and suggest ways to tackle this issue.

“We were aware that you can’t capture someone’s perceptions, beliefs and behavior around food in a single on-off interview. What people say at one point of time and what they actually do in the course of normal everyday life may be quite different. And an individual’s attitudes and behavior around food may also change depending on the circumstances – for instance, the choice for a weeknight dinner and the choice during a carnival are likely to differ.”

— Sophie Knight
Design Researcher at STBY

As traditional methods such as observations would require the researcher to be present during mealtimes and shopping, this method did not seem to fit the aim of the project. Hence, STBY decided to go for a mobile ethnography study. This method would allow to cover a longer time span and involve a much higher number of participants than they could have with traditional methods.
PROJECT SETUP

To get a good mix of participants from various areas and backgrounds, STBY enlisted a specialized recruiting agency. They selected a mix of 32 participants with an interest in health and sustainable food, but with different levels of education, income, types of households and age. Some of the government staff were also eager to become participants in the study, so they could better understand the methods of qualitative and iterative research. This was a useful way to involve key stakeholders in participating organizations.

The research project was divided into three stages: a mobile ethnography study as the core of the project aimed to collect experience reports on the go; additionally, two workshops before and after the study were held to further increase the depth of reports and elaborate on the findings.
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1. EXPLORATORY WORKSHOP
As a first step, an explorative food lab in the form of a group workshop was carried out, covering the topic of food in general. During this workshop STBY established a personal profile for each participant and their household, and prompted them to engage in joint conversations around food selection and consumption. For instance, what are their regular day to day food choices? What aspects of food are they most passionate or concerned about? What is their level of engagement with buying, preparing and eating? Do they actively look up information about the food they buy, prepare and consume? What do they discuss with their family and friends in relation to food? As not everyone’s the same in these respects, it was relevant to understand the social context and personality of research participants. This helped better understand the data gathered throughout the stages of the research.

In the workshop participants also received instructions on what kind of experiences to report in the mobile ethnography study and how. They were introduced to the mobile app and could test the app in order to prevent problems resulting from not being familiar with the technology. Finally, they also had the chance to meet the research team and thus get to know the contact person responsible during the four weeks of remote research. This was important to motivate participants to keep going during the mobile ethnography study.

2. MOBILE ETHNOGRAPHY
Second, participants were asked to use the mobile app to report on their purchase, preparation and consumption of food during a period of four weeks. They could decide on their own what experiences they wanted to report: whenever they found themselves in a relevant situation, they proactively created a report including text and pictures.

“Participants often shared personal photographs, such as of their family dinner time. As there is no researcher present or watching them, they also shared very personal emotions and thoughts in their touchpoint reports. I realized this was one of the main advantages of using this method.” — Sophie Knight

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EXPLORATIVE FOOD LAB

WEEKLY TASKS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Healthy food</th>
<th>Sustainable food</th>
<th>Information sources</th>
<th>New proteins</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Week 1</td>
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<td>Week 4</td>
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www.experiencefellow.com
Additionally to their ongoing reports, each week they had to fulfill a specific task. In week 1 and 2, participants were asked to evaluate what they ate, in terms of health and sustainability aspects. In week 3 and 4, the task was to focus on where participants got information on their food from. They also evaluated information on sustainable food, protein-rich plant-based food as a substitute for meat from Dutch newspapers and the government institutions itself.

“Perhaps as a result of a lively initial workshop, the participants were deeply motivated and involved throughout the auto-ethnography study. We received 750 messages in total over the month, an incredibly high number for just 32 participants.”

— Sophie Knight  
STBY

STBY could view and analyze the data in real time. This was crucial to the project’s success because it followed an iterative approach: the weekly tasks were not set at the beginning of the project, but depended on the data coming in and were collaboratively defined with the governmental institutions.

Two researchers at STBY analyzed the data by applying tags on various levels starting with the distinction between ‘sustainable’ and ‘unsustainable’ as well as ‘healthy’ and ‘unhealthy’. Underneath these umbrella tags, more detailed tags were used.
3. EXPLANATORY WORKSHOP

As a third step, an in-depth food lab followed, aiming to give participants and researchers the possibility to reflect on the insights gained through the mobile ethnography study.

“There was a feeling of fraternity, as everyone had been through the same experience over the previous month, albeit alone. As they came together again they were able to empathize with one another and delve much deeper into the themes than in the first workshop. In this group discussion, one person’s points provoked reflections and reactions from others. These discussions led to insights about trust, openness to new kinds of food, including new forms of protein, and new ways of thinking about it.”

— Sophie Knight
STBY

The workshop brought up rich discussions, also rooted in the participants’ very diverse backgrounds. The workshop resulted in deep insights into dilemmas that participants experienced with food. Also, people’s challenges for eating healthy and sustainably according to their life periods were uncovered, e.g. working parents versus someone retired.

FINDINGS

Through the mobile ethnography study the research team managed to gather rich data and personal insights into people’s behavior towards food and sustainability. While the institute had mainly focussed on quantitative data so far, advantages of both qualitative research as well as applying an innovative research method became obvious through this project.

“Participants used the app frequently, often writing deep, detailed accounts of their thoughts and behavior around food. We managed to accumulate a large quantity and quality of data through it, which provided deep insights into the participants thinking and feeling.”

— Sophie Knight
STBY

One of the main outcomes was that the research team became aware of the gap between knowledge and willingness. STBY illustrated this gap between the knowledge of Dutch people on healthy and sustainable food and their willingness to change their food consumption in a matrix. While some people have a deep knowledge and understanding of the topic and also behave accordingly (‘Fully engaged’), other people do not possess this knowledge and are also not willing to change (‘Other priorities’). However, there is also a group in the middle (‘Interested, but confused’). These people do have some knowledge and would be up for a change, but often they are confused and have difficulty finding the right information in order to change their eating habits.

Attitudes to sustainable food

![Matrix with 3 clusters](image)
CHALLENGES AND LEARNINGS
As in most complex research projects, also in this case there have been some tricky situations and moments of surprise. These moments have been challenging for the team, however, they resulted in valuable learnings that may also be relevant to other companies that conduct similar projects in the future.

MIXING METHODS FOR HIGH-QUALITY DATA
At the beginning it was a challenge for the research team to set up the project. As there were various parallel strands of research questions, coming from the different client organizations involved, the team was not immediately sure how to best address all these questions and not overwhelm participants. The mixed method sandwich proved to work very well.

“The initial workshop created the foundation for the research. Without it, participants would be more likely to misunderstand the goal of the study, to drop out, or to have technical problems with the app. The mobile ethnography then allowed the participants time to ponder the topic and share their ongoing observations and thoughts. The final workshop was important for the research team as it enabled them to reflect in-depth with the participants on the themes that emerged during the auto-ethnography, and to substantiate emerging insights. Without this final session, our understanding could have remained shallow, due to the fragmented nature of the data collected through the app.”

— Sophie Knight
STBY

PROPOSED TAGGING PROCESS FOR FUTURE PROJECTS

Recommended steps for tagging

1. RAW-DATA MODE
   - Vertical scanning (first impressions)
   - Clustering re-occurring topics with postits

2. PERSPECTIVE MODE
   - Noting down Content Tags (tagging hierarchy)
   - Tagging with Content and Practical Tags

3. CLUSTERING & STRUCTURING
   - Extract interesting excerpts into comment section
   - Filtering Moments with Content and Practical Tags
   - Merging or editing Content Tags
   - How do tagged Moments relate to Research Questions?

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New Insights? Don’t tag. Use text filter to find them later.

Use insights and extracted excerpts to build your report.

ONGOING: internal communication
Especially the second workshop was used to further dig into the data collected using mobile ethnography. For instance, very few participants reported anything related to sugar and healthy food, so it might seem that this topic was not so relevant for participants. However, once this topic was addressed in the second workshop, people did comment that it was rather important for them, but they felt that it was rather obvious so they did not feel the need to document it during the mobile ethnography study.

THE CRUCIAL QUESTION: TOP-DOWN OR BOTTOM-UP?

Having data coming in any moment is advantageous, but needs to be well managed. The research team did not define a tagging system before starting with their data analysis and was somewhat overwhelmed by the variety of data coming in.

“Tagging and filtering experiences proved to be extremely helpful in sorting through the large volume of reported touchpoints. However, it is not as easy as it might seem at the beginning. How to use this amount of data? How to best use tags? We were not prepared enough for the analysis and got stuck in the raw data. For instance, we did not limit the number of tags straight from the beginning and therefore ended up using more than 50 tags.”

— Sophie Knight
STBY

It always depends on the individual project, if a bottom-up or a top-down approach to tagging is the better path to go. In this case, the research team agreed that for research projects similar to this one, defining a tagging system beforehand would have helped to save time. It would have also helped the team respond to predefined research questions and answer hypotheses in a more goal-oriented way.

FOLLOWING A NEW APPROACH IS NOT EASY, BUT MAY OPEN DOORS

As the client in this case was a consortium of eight governmental bodies, the project organization and coordination of all activities was rather complex. Also, the governmental institutions wished to get a detailed research plan which would not change at all. STBY, however, suggested an open, co-creative and iterative approach. After being hesitant at the beginning, the client team soon understood and valued the flexible approach and was eager to learn from this project.

“At the beginning - as this iterative approach was new for them - they felt like they were losing control. In the end, however, they even invited us to demonstrate our approach during a workshop at an annual Government Innovation Parade, where we guided participants through a co-creative data analysis exercise to give them a feel for our approach.”

— Sophie Knight
STBY

INCENTIVES AND PERSONAL CONTACT FOR HIGH MOTIVATION

Participants had to create many reports and fulfill four different tasks during the period of four weeks. Thus, they completed a very time- and thought-intensive work and researchers wanted to motivate them during the run of the project.

All participants received a gift card for a local online store of a total amount of €120. This incentive contributed to the participants’ motivation. But also the personal contact turned out to be an important factor. Many of them got in contact with Sophie, who also sent reminders to people who had not completed a task within the planned week and motivated them to share their contributions.
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INCLUDING INTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS TO EMBRACE THE PROJECT

Another outcome was that the project resulted in organizational change as the internal staff members participating in the research project became very motivated. They could experience the gap between knowledge and behavior themselves and started to change their own mentality. Also they understood that information on a website and some press releases are not enough to cause behavioral change and started to think of new ideas.

Besides their personal experience, they also enjoyed the professional benefits gained by trying out a new method and creating a new kind of insights, and looked forward to applying the approach to upcoming projects.

“These people were really on board and super convinced. They now act as multipliers within their organization, get others aboard and try to spread this new user-centered approach.”
— Sophie Knight
STBY

CONCLUSION

Understanding the experiences of the everyday purchase, preparation and consumption of food was a big challenge for both the service design agency and the governmental institutions involved in this project. In this context, traditional methods would fail to capture the complex perceptions and thoughts of the participants. Through a mix of a mobile ethnography study to collect experiences in real time, and two workshops to dig deeper, researchers successfully collected a great amount of qualitative data. Throughout this project, they created insights into the underlying motivations towards healthy and sustainable food. They learned what information people prefer and why. Also they also got extensive feedback on their related media usage such as websites and other information materials. This enabled the project team to recommend future communication strategies and activities to the client organizations.