Expectations matter: examining factors that predict the acceptability and appropriateness of an online mental health intervention.

Joshua S. Steinberg (University of Pennsylvania) 
Emma H. Palermo (University of Pennsylvania) 
Akash R. Wasil (University of Pennsylvania) 
Robert J. DeRubeis (University of Pennsylvania)

Although digital mental health interventions (DMHIs) can expand access to support in low- and middle-income countries, little is known about their users’ attitudes and perceptions. The existing literature suggests that perceptions are relatively poor, leading to low engagement (Berry et al., 2016). One proposed explanation for poor user perceptions is low expectations of DMHIs (Musiat et al., 2014). Here, we examine predictors of the acceptability of a DMHI for Indian university students (N = 229). Data come from a randomized controlled trial of the Common Elements Toolbox (COMET), a single-session DMHI consisting of three modules: behavioral activation, cognitive restructuring, and gratitude, or a waitlist control condition. Participants provided overall ratings of acceptability (Acceptability of Intervention Measure; AIM; Weiner et al., 2017), appropriateness, and perceived utility (i.e., helpfulness, engagement, and practicality) after completing the intervention. At baseline, participants rated their agreement with statements regarding their motivations to use and expectations of DMHIs. We conducted linear models (LMs) to examine predictors of intervention acceptability, appropriateness, and perceived utility. LMs revealed that expectations of COMET were significantly associated with acceptability, appropriateness, and perceived utility (all ps < 0.001). Overall, these results suggest that participants’ expectations of DMHIs can affect their perceptions of these resources. Efforts to disseminate information about DMHIs and improve users’ expectations of them may improve engagement and uptake of DMHIs.