



LONDON
SCHOOL *of*
HYGIENE
& TROPICAL
MEDICINE



DESMOND TUTU
HEALTH FOUNDATION

YOUTH CODESIGN WORKSHOP

DIGITAL RESEARCH METHODS

OVERVEIW



This project explores how creative and participatory approaches can be used to co-design new digital research methods with young adults. As digital media increasingly shapes how young adults communicate, share experiences, and form social connections, research methods must evolve to reflect these changing forms of expression. Participatory and creative methods offer opportunities to engage young adults more meaningfully in research by enabling them to contribute ideas, shape research processes, and express their perspectives through visual and digital storytelling formats.

As part of this initiative, a two-day co-design workshop was held in Philippi Village, Cape Town, South Africa, on 5th and 6th of March 2026 with eight young adult co-designers.

The workshop explored how young adults use digital storytelling in their everyday lives and collaboratively prototyped new research methods that could be used to explore youth health and wellbeing. Through a series of interactive activities, co-designers reflected on how they create and share stories online, discussed topics important to young adults in their communities, and worked in groups to develop prototype ideas for creative digital research tools.

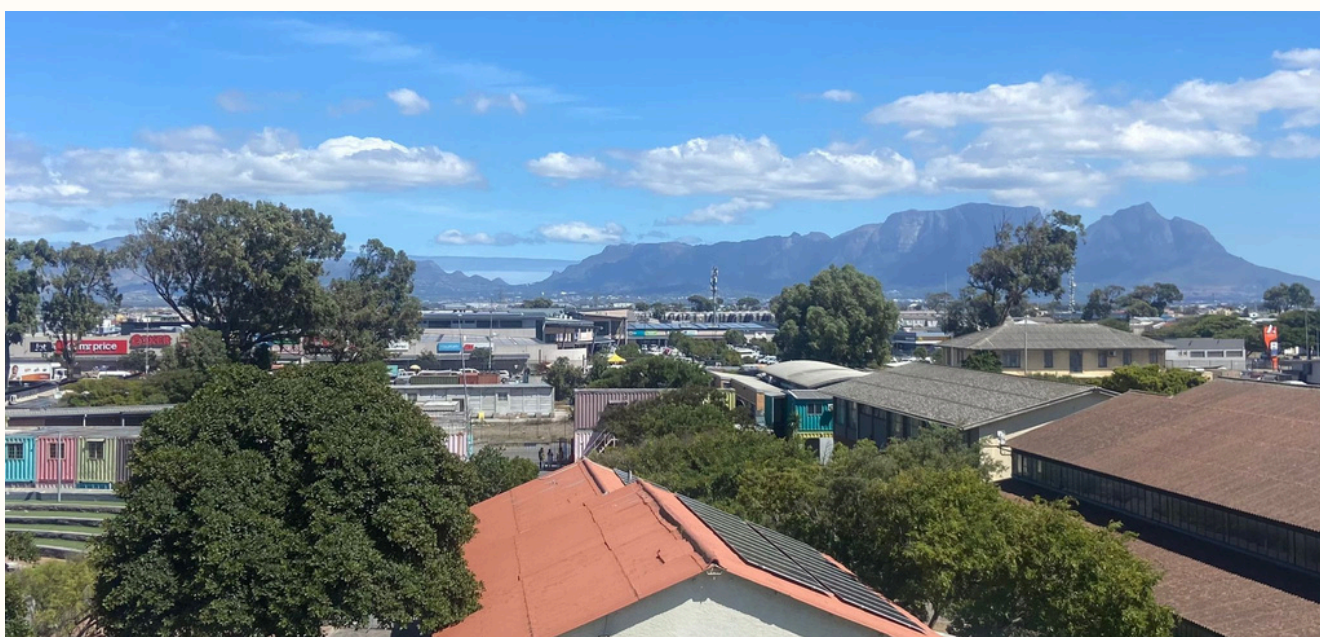
This report documents the workshop process, the prototype ideas generated during the co-design activities, and key reflections that may inform the development of future participatory research methods.

PARTNERSHIP

A collaboration between the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine and the Desmond Tutu Health Foundation

Designed and facilitated by Venetia Baker (Population Studies Group, LSHTM), the workshop formed part of a pump-priming project exploring the co-design of digital participatory research methods with young adults.

At DTHF, Dr Melissa Wallace, Adolescent Socio-Behavioural Project Lead, supported the project through overseeing ethics and study approvals, as well as workshop logistics. Pam Fuzile, Head of the Youth Reference Group, co-facilitated the session and supported recruitment. DTHF also provided the venue and logistical support for the workshop.



Youth Reference Group

The co-designers were members of the Youth Reference Group, a group of young adults from Philippi Village involved in the FastPrEP study, an implementation project using an innovative differentiated approach to support the rollout and scale-up of PrEP for adolescent girls and young women, their partners, and young men who have sex with men. The workshop included eight co-designers — four men and four women — aged 24 to 30 years.



WORKSHOP AIMS



THE WORKSHOP AIMED TO EXPLORE HOW CREATIVE DIGITAL APPROACHES COULD BE CO-DESIGNED WITH YOUNG ADULTS FOR USE IN PARTICIPATORY YOUTH RESEARCH.



Explore how young adults use digital media to communicate and share experiences



Generate and prototype ideas for creative digital research methods



Identify storytelling formats and platforms that felt relevant and engaging to co-designers



Reflect on the practical and ethical considerations involved in using these approaches in youth research

WORKSHOP ACTIVITIES

The workshop combined introductory learning, group discussion, and collaborative prototyping across two days. Co-designers were introduced to the principles of co-design and to the idea of using digital approaches in participatory research. Activities were designed to build understanding of qualitative and participatory research, explore how young adults engage with digital media in everyday life, and support the development of prototype research ideas.

Capacity Building

Co-designers were introduced to qualitative research and to examples of creative, participatory, and digital research methods. For most, this was their first introduction to qualitative research and research methods, making this an important capacity-strengthening component of the workshop.

Mapping Digital Lives

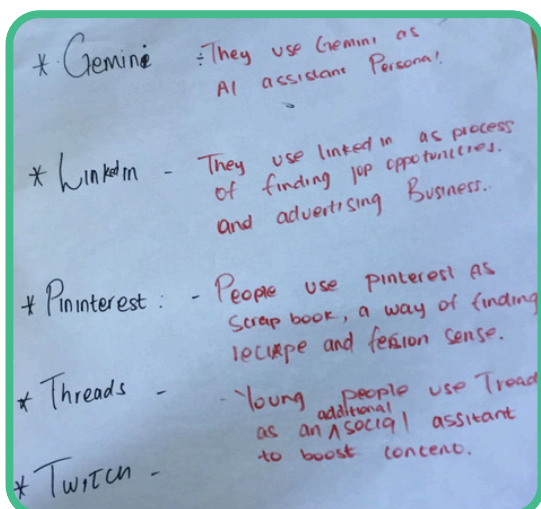
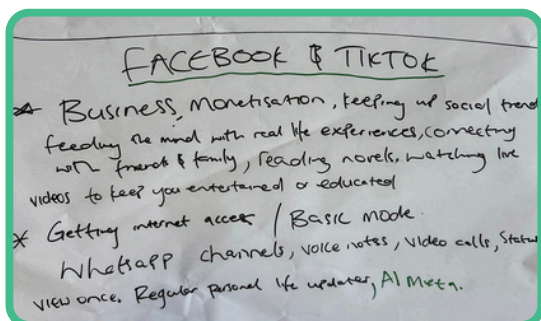
Co-designers reflected on the digital platforms, formats, and styles of storytelling that young adults use in everyday life, and discussed how these are used for information, entertainment, and social connection.

Platforms discussed included Facebook, TikTok, WhatsApp, Gemini, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Threads, Twitch, and Badoo. Co-designers described using these platforms for entertainment, business and monetisation, connecting with friends and family, keeping up with trends, accessing news, searching for information, and advertising businesses.

When discussing where young adults go for support and information, co-designers highlighted:

- **Health information:** YouTube, ChatGPT, and Google
- **Relationship advice:** Instagram reels, ChatGPT, and YouTube podcasts
- **Social connection:** TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp, and dating apps
- **Entertainment:** YouTube, TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, and podcasts

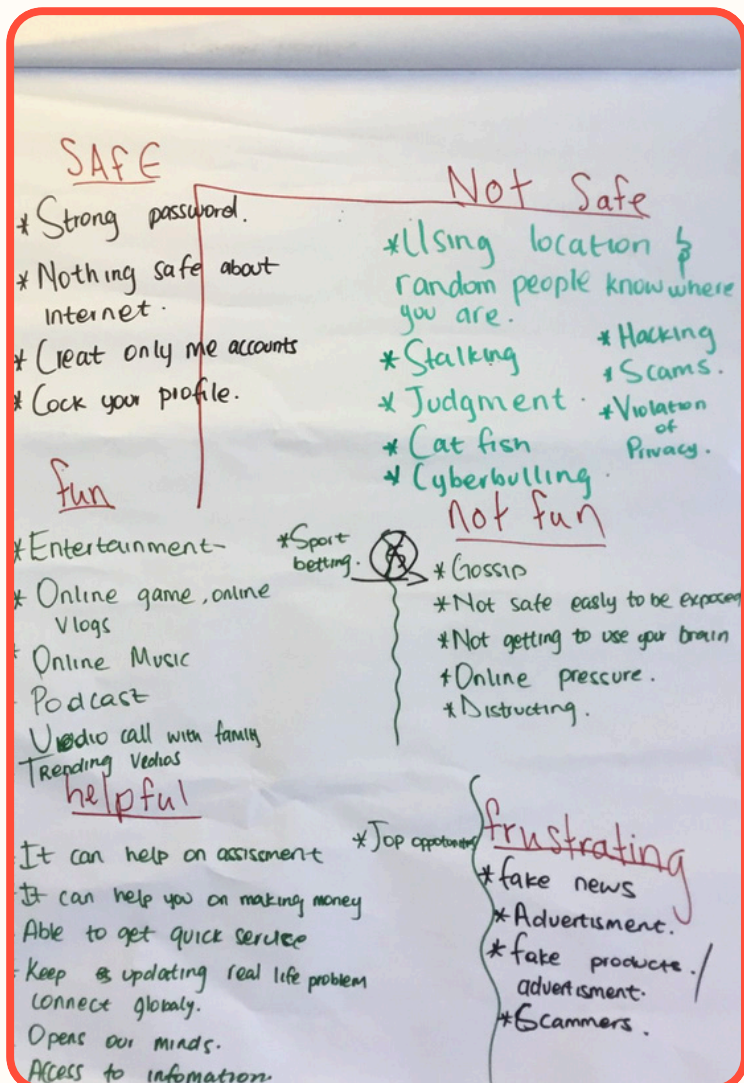
Co-designers emphasised that while in-person resources such as mobile clinics and community groups remain important, young adults are often likely to turn to digital spaces first. This reinforced the value of exploring digital approaches within youth health research.

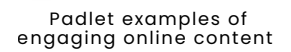


Digital Spaces Discussion



Co-designers reflected on what feels fun, helpful, frustrating, and unsafe about digital life. Digital spaces were described as important sources of entertainment, connection, information, and income generation. At the same time, co-designers identified frustrations including fake news, scams, misleading advertising, and the constant sense of being marketed to online. Safety was a major concern, with risks including cyberbullying, stalking, privacy violations, catfishing, scams, and location-sharing. Although some felt that “nothing is fully safe about the internet,” they also discussed ways of creating guardrails, such as stronger passwords, private accounts, and locked profiles.





Sharing engaging digital media inspiration

Using an online Padlet whiteboard, co-designers shared links, videos, memes, images, posts, and podcasts that they found engaging. As a group, they discussed what made this content stand out, often highlighting humour, inspiration, visual appeal, and trendiness. While their initial responses focused on the content itself – for example, whether they liked the influencer, related to the message, or found the video funny – the discussion then shifted to format. Together, we explored how these messages were communicated online, including the use of visuals, text, style, and platform-specific features, and reflected on which of these elements might be adapted into digital research methods.

<https://padlet.com/venetiabaker/media-inspiration-pv6k8uh99959zqxj>

Ethics and Safety

Co-designers had a short introduction to research ethics and then took part in group discussion and brainstorming on how to consider safety in the design of new digital research methods. Discussions focused on anonymity, privacy, resharing, and digital traces, building on concerns that had already emerged in the earlier discussion of online safety.



PROTOTYPING



Each co-designer was given a worksheet to help structure their ideas for a digital storytelling method. Six of the eight co-designers completed the worksheet. Co-designers then presented their ideas to the wider group, and the group discussed each one in turn, making iterative refinements to strengthen the methods and think through their possible challenges and advantages. The group voted to take forwards two of the ideas to the prototype phase.

PROTOTYPED DIGITAL METHODS

Video Compilation

This idea involved recruiting youth leads to invite friends, family members, or others in their social networks to create 1-2 minute clips on a shared topic. These clips would then be combined into a compilation video and discussed together in a focus group or shared social media group.

During prototyping, co-designers adapted the idea to work better in small, self-selected groups, producing three short clips rather than six individual clips for the final compilation. This reflected both practical and relational considerations: some co-designers had access to better-quality phones than others, so working in groups allowed them to share devices, while also creating a more comfortable and collaborative way of working. Co-designers also highlighted the importance of allowing enough time for editing and tailoring digital content, including adding music and refining presentation. They felt that creative control and sufficient production time would be important features of this method.



DESIGNING PROTOTYPING

Digital Mask Mirror

This method involved creating short videos using an app such as Canva or HeyGen to develop a digital mask, avatar, or anonymous visual identity. The idea was to allow contributors to speak anonymously about a health challenge using an avatar or altered voice, and then post the videos to a private shared board such as Padlet where others could respond using stickers, emojis, or written reflections.

Prototyping Phase: co-designers found that it was difficult to identify a free app that could provide both avatar creation and AI voice functions. As a result, the method was adapted: still images — either real, Google-sourced, or AI-generated — were combined with an AI voiceover and on-screen text. Canva was used for this adapted version. For this method to work, researcher need to provide support through subscriptions, and demonstrations for more technically demanding apps.

DIGITAL METHODS (NOT PROTOTYPED)

Photo Diaries

This idea involved sharing a series of photos and captions on a chosen topic over two to four weeks to document individual experiences and perspectives. Photos and captions could be posted anonymously to a shared platform such as Padlet, with other participants with prompts from researchers to encourage discussion and reflection to uncover social norms.

POV Videos

This proposed method is a “point of view” video on a chosen topic, using filming, voiceovers, music, and other editing features to communicate experiences. The method was seen as a way to capture participant perspectives and creative self-expression. It could be anonymous as the person can choose to be off camera.

Digital Community Sharing Platform

This idea involved creating a Facebook group to collect group experiences and perspectives on a topic. Researchers would ask questions through the group pages to encourage conversation and media sharing. The data collected would be photos, short-form videos, or group chats and comments. Co-designers suggested group and community pages would allow different perspectives to be brought together, compared, and shared.

Profile App

This idea drew inspiration from apps or branded platforms (like Humanz app) where people create profiles and provide private opinions or trial feedback in exchange for products or incentives. This idea remained at an early proposal stage but we talked about how this approach could be used in research.





SUMMARY

This workshop highlights the importance of co-design in developing digital research methods with young people. Young people's digital practices are fast-changing, context-specific, and shaped by local social realities, meaning that researchers cannot assume in advance which platforms matter, how they are used, or what kinds of digital participation will feel relevant and engaging. Without working closely with youth, researchers risk designing methods around outdated assumptions or platform norms drawn from other generations or settings.

The workshop also showed that digital platforms are not simply spaces for communication or entertainment. For these co-designers, digital spaces were woven into how they seek information, build social connection, promote themselves or their businesses, find inspiration, and imagine opportunities beyond the constraints of everyday life. At the same time, these spaces were also associated with risks and frustrations, including scams, online pressure, privacy concerns, and the feeling of constant exposure to marketing and surveillance. For digital research, this means that methods must do more than meet young people online: they must be designed in ways that are safe, respectful, and attentive to the tensions young people already navigate in digital life.

A further implication is that accessibility and creative support are central to good method design. Although co-designers were highly digitally aware and visually fluent, participation was shaped by unequal access to phones, data, internet connection, private space, and editing tools. Researchers therefore need to provide the time, resources, and technical support required for meaningful participation. This includes recognising that for many youth, how digital content looks and feels is an important part of how they communicate. In this workshop, creative control over images, video, voice, music, and presentation as important as the messages they were trying to communicate. Allowing enough time and space for young people to design, edit, and shape their outputs is therefore a key part of doing digital participatory research well.

Finally, the workshop suggests that the value of digital methods is not just in the content youth create, but in the responses that content is designed to generate. For most youth digital content is not produced for private reflection, but to be seen, reacted to, discussed, and affirmed by others. The co-designers' highlighted that if research wants to harness digital formats for research, it should recognise the value of the content created, and the the interaction, conversation, and shared interpretation that it can spark.

The workshop takeaways were that digital research methods with youth should be co-designed, context-sensitive, ethically grounded, creatively flexible, and adequately resourced.





MEET OUR YOUTH DESIGNERS



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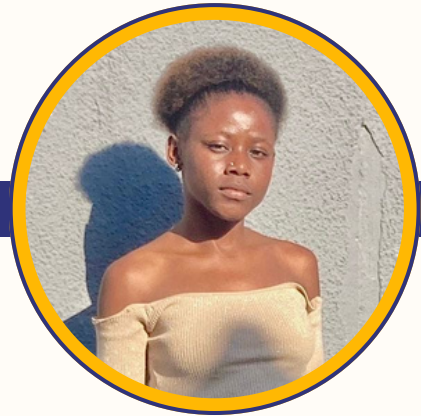
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THANK YOU

