By Chris McNamara

Since their release in 2013 the Fitbit and other smartwatch equivalents have become wildly popular consumer commodities. After sales peaked in early 2016, wearers of the technology have adopted a myriad of uses ranging from fitness and health tracking, to music and entertainment organization.

Students at the University of Minnesota are among the many users of technology.

The devices are capable of monitoring users heart rates, sleep patterns, dietary intake, and analyze daily, monthly, and even yearly results to track progress and suggest lifestyle changes. But not everyone uses fitness trackers for the health-oriented features.

Chemistry student Tatu Tatiilila said he prefers the music applications on his Apple watch; a watch he says was a hand-me down gift from his father. He said his device was mostly for managing his smartphone notifications and sifting through his music.

“Fitbits were pretty cool a couple of years ago and then people got tired of it.” He said.

Fitbit sales of its primary devices have declined in recent years dropping a minor $3 million dollars from 2016-2017; the company’s industry total sales totaled $573.8 million. However, this decline could be symptomatic of change in how consumers are using wearable fitness trackers or even turning to other methods of health management.

Recreation Center personal fitness manager Kevin Widmer said he does not use a fitness tracker and trains without the aid of technology.

“I prefer to work out normally and keep track of my progress with a written schedule.” He said. “I hold myself accountable to training by training with friends and we push each other.”

Rachel Evavold, an athletic trainer under Widmer’s administration, loves her Fitbit but admits she doesn’t always use it in the most constructive ways.

“Yes, I do workout with it and check my sleep patterns, but I mostly find it really fun to see what ups my heart rate and play with some of the apps.” She said.

In contrast, Wai Kit Vong, Recreation Center staff member at the University of Minnesota doesn’t own a Fitbit or smartwatch, but wishes he could afford one, and that he would use more of the less health-oriented features of the technology like the step counter and entertainment applications.

Many who work in the fitness world seem to like the use of wearable fitness trackers, but those who work in health have a different perspective.

Graduate student in the medical program, Athena Metaxis, religiously uses her Fitbit to track the details of her fitness regimen. An avid rock climber, Metaxis said she and her friends really enjoy using the technology together and very deliberately uses it to push herself.

Thomas Perry, a medical undergraduate student echoed this sentiment saying that his fitness tracker helps structure his health practices despite a hectic schedule. “I’m pretty active to start with but I get lazy and slack off you know? So, I wear it to remind myself I need to get to the gym and take care of that part of my day,” he said.

However, even in the health science community not everyone feels that fitness trackers are necessary.

Raven Ahrens, a senior studying exercise physiology, says his Applewatch is little more than a nice gift he received that makes for an overhyped timepiece.

“I honestly wouldn’t use it if it wasn’t a gift. Sure, there are all the cool features and you can use it to enhance your workouts and all that, but it just isn’t that great.” Ahrens said.

The popularity of fitness trackers is obvious as students all over campus are using them. What is less certain is whether the technology is here to stay. With such a range of uses and satisfaction levels behind the products, Fitbits and smartwatches could continue their omnipresence on campus or fade into a half-hearted commodity used casually.

Sources

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