

Suhaib Aslam

“I Keep Coming Back to My Phone”: An Ambient, Reflective and Tangible Approach Towards Digital Wellbeing

Uncontrolled, brief smartphone revisitations are a grave, prevalent issue. Much of typical smartphone usage is shown to consist of short, repetitive revisitation habits which can have dire consequences for mental health. Despite its prevalence, uncontrolled revisitation remains largely untapped in digital wellbeing interventions. To fill this gap, this project investigated how to support smartphone users in becoming more in control of their revisitation behaviors. To that end, it first explored how to design digital wellbeing artifacts that can help smartphone users take better control over their device usage. This led to five design principles that entailed designing for: revisitation feedback, lived experience, being reflective, being tangible and being ambient. These principles were then embedded in the “Revisitation Reflector”, a digital wellbeing artifact designed to help users become aware of and reflect on their smartphone revisitation patterns. Fully functioning prototypes of this artifact were subsequently deployed in the field to study the sensemaking associated with the device, and to study the role, design and impact of the device. Based on the field study, a number of findings were uncovered. Together, these findings provide guidelines and future opportunities on designing for digital wellbeing through employing the untapped, pertinent metric of revisitation; and through an ambient, reflective and tangible medium that has so far not been widely adopted for the digital wellbeing domain. The project sparks a new narrative on what it means to responsibly design for digital wellbeing and what it means to design for experiential human-data interaction.