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**“Digital Wellbeing is an intricate idea.
The way it is measured also reflects this”
Lisa Wiese, eye square**

UX looks at how well users can navigate an app or website. This fails to take into account that there can be long-term effects on well-being. The digital wellbeing movement addresses this gap. Lisa Wiese from eye square conducts research in this area and explains in an interview how digital wellbeing can be measured and integrated into UX research.



Why should a company address the concept of "digital wellbeing" in addition to the topic of UX? How do UX and digital wellbeing differ from each other?

Lisa Wiese: In a way, digital wellbeing represents an extension of the term user experience (UX). Here, the human experience and well-being are considered in a more holistic approach, as they are integrated in the development and testing of digital products and applications. For companies, this is of great interest as it allows their digital product to be tailored even more to the needs of the user. This, in turn, strengthens customer satisfaction and customer loyalty in the long term, and ensures the company's competitiveness.

The current approach to user experience research in practice is more in line with a hedonistic definition of human well-being, i.e., the desire to "feel good" and to experience positive emotions as often as possible and negative emotions as rarely as possible. Typical UX goals are thus a short-term maximization of positive emotions, usually limited to product interaction, for example through the aesthetic design of the user interface or the generation of positive emotions during product use, and a minimization of negative emotions, through the elimination of usability problems and usage barriers.

This is also reflected in standardized UX scales such as the AttrakDiff or the UEQ. In addition to pragmatic qualities of product use, i.e., the classic usability factors such as ease of use, efficiency, or usefulness, hedonic factors such as "stimulation" or "novelty" are also recorded, the optimization of which can enhance product interaction to make them "more pleasant," "more appealing," or "more fun. In practice, this hedonic aspect is often also referred to as "Joy of Use".

In this context, the product or the product interaction is usually understood as a direct source of positive or negative feelings that need to be increased or reduced, respectively (on-platform effects). Accordingly, common UX scales also ask for an evaluation of the product or the user interface itself.

This is also reflected in standardized UX scales such as the AttrakDiff or the ueQ. In addition to pragmatic qualities of product use, i.e., the classic usability.

Moreover, the focus of UX research is generally on short-term effects that become visible in direct product interaction and can be measured in lab or remote UX tests. Long-term effects that only occur with a time delay or through repeated interactions with the product or service (so-called digital habits) and that go beyond immediate use (off-platform effects), and that can possibly have an impact on a person's mental health, social behavior, or political orientation, are usually not recorded or even considered. This is also because such long-term, off-platform effects are more difficult to measure. However, negative long-term effects of using interactive technologies in many areas of life are now well researched.



Digital wellbeing integrates aspects of eudaimonic wellbeing, which describes how to live a "good life," into the design of digital products and services.

The focus has shifted to the fulfillment of deeper human needs, such as a self-determined life or close social relationships, the achievement of important life goals, success, self-acceptance, and personal development. To promote these aspects, the digital product tends to take on the role of a supporter or facilitator. For example, a product can facilitate meaningful experiences and activities or encourage people to define and achieve meaningful life goals. Typical examples include online calendars and travel websites.

Digital wellbeing also aims to design interactive technologies in such a way that they generate long-term added value for the lives of users that goes beyond the immediate context of use. This is called real-life value.

Many services already address eudaimonic well-being effects. For example, the self-professed goal of social networks such as Facebook or Instagram is to "bring the world closer together" and "foster community" - in other words, to support close social relationships in real life. LinkedIn wants to make business professionals "more successful" and "more productive," i.e., contribute to their professional success.

If companies really take these goals seriously in product development, simply measuring and optimizing hedonic product qualities is no longer sufficient. In summary, Digital Wellbeing expands the current term User Experience - in my view - in five essential areas (see Table 1).

Table 1: Digital Wellbeing expands the term "user experience" in five areas.

User Experience Digital Wellbeing	Human Experience
Hedonistic well-being ("feeling good")	Eudaimonic well-being ("living well")
Positive emotions Meaningfulness	Meaningfulness
Usability issues	Effects on individuals and society
Short-term effects	Long-term effects
On-platform effects, product interaction	Off-platform effects, real-life impact



For companies, digital wellbeing is a relevant concept as users of digital services are becoming increasingly aware of long-term negative impacts of technology use and want to minimize them by reducing usage time, for example, through "online diets," "digital detox," or the use of "screen time tools."

Furthermore, if companies, by over-prioritizing short-term attention and engagement metrics, fail to keep an eye on the actual long-term value that their digital product creates for the lives of its users, they risk losing out in competitive comparisons. For example, in February 2022, Facebook had to report declining daily usage rates to its investors for the first time in the company's history. In contrast, alternative social networks such as BeReal and Snapchat, which explicitly focus on eudaimonic factors such as authenticity, are enjoying growing popularity among younger user groups. Digital wellbeing can therefore represent a competitive advantage in a saturated market.

Great usability or even pleasure in product use are no longer the sole differentiating characteristics.

Sustainable well-being is supposedly determined more by our actions than by our possessions. This then probably also applies to "digital wellbeing". What does this assumption mean for the testing of products and digital applications? What are the consequences of this?

Lisa Wiese: Research results in Positive Psychology demonstrate that positive changes in our life circumstances, such as more wealth or the acquisition of material goods, only increase our well-being for a short time. This is related to the phenomenon of hedonistic adaptation. We become accustomed to positive changes. This has been observed, among other things, in people who won the lottery, who after a short time were on average no happier than other people.

In addition, our expectations increase. So, we want more and more. Ultimately, this leads us to try to accumulate more and more possessions to keep creating new, brief moments of happiness that unfortunately do not last. This is cost-intensive, harms the environment and is also not goal-oriented, i.e., it does not sustainably increase our well-being. We are trapped in a "hedonistic treadmill," so to speak.





Fortunately, however, psychological research also gives us clues as to how we can increase our well-being in the long term. The key to this lies in our daily actions. The decisive factor here is the type of activities we perform on a regular basis. There are certain activities, known as positive interventions, that are particularly beneficial to our well-being. These include, for example, cultivating social relationships, doing something good for others, thinking positively, recognizing the achievements of others, being grateful for what you have, but of course also taking care of your physical and mental health.

Moreover, hedonistic adaptation processes are less pronounced in activities than in the acquisition of material possessions. This is in part because these types of activities change our self-image positively and sustainably and we compare ourselves less strongly with others in terms of personal experiences and activities, which can be a source of dissatisfaction in the case of material possessions.

For the design and testing of digital products and services, this activity-centric view holds very great potential.

Unlike material goods, digital products are already more strongly geared to supporting activities and experiences and are also integrated into many areas of our everyday lives.

In this context, however, they are more "means-to-purpose" than a direct source of well-being, meaning that they can arouse interest in positive activities among users, motivate them to perform the activities, or facilitate the activities. Thus, the focus here is not on how strongly the product or interaction itself generates well-being, but on how effectively the product supports well-being-enhancing activities. Typical examples are fitness, meditation or nutrition apps.

But - and this is a very important point - even everyday consumer technologies such as email clients, messaging services, social networks or travel websites, whose main goal is not to optimize well-being, often contain features or user flows that can be designed to enhance well-being. For example, any form of social sharing over the Internet can be understood as a way to foster close and appreciative social relationships.

Reviews of restaurants, vendors, or giving "kudos" on LinkedIn and team collaboration tools like MS Teams are technology-enabled moments to express gratitude. The challenge for interface design now is how to (re)design these features in a way that actually creates gratitude on the part of the user and, ideally, also increases the well-being of the recipients of ratings or kudos.

For UX research, this means that the "success" of such a feature would have to be measured accordingly by how often or how effectively a product motivates its users to express gratitude. This is where I would encourage us as UX researchers. Optimizing "digital wellbeing" may sound complex, but it is already possible through small changes to the user interface at the feature or user flow level, which can also be addressed in agile software development processes.





How do you test whether a specific app or technology contributes to "digital wellbeing"? How does the setting for a usability test change if you also want to check whether the app contributes to "wellbeing"?

Lisa Wiese: In addition to short-term, hedonic aspects that are directly evident in product interaction, long-term, eudaimonic components of wellbeing and effects in users' real lives should also be measured.

A combination of different measurement methods (e.g., usability test, online survey, behavioral data, ethnographic approaches) that are used at different measurement times and capture different aspects of well-being are best suited for this purpose. In the usability test itself, it is still possible to measure primarily short-term effects at the interface level. As before, this includes hedonic aspects, but also short-term predictors of expected, long-term eudaimonic effects. So, for example, how strongly or effectively a product motivates or facilitates engagement in positive activities during product interaction.

Whether use of a product will then lead to long-term, positive well-being effects could be verified through ongoing UX tracking surveys and analytics metrics. This would include ensuring that there are no unintended negative effects such as technology dependency or persistent use.

Since digital wellbeing is more about the quality than the quantity of interaction with a product, pure behavioral tracking of user behavior based on engagement metrics ("what users do") is not sufficient and should be complemented by explicit user surveys ("what users want").

For these surveys - within the usability test or in the context of online surveys - existing UX scales would have to be expanded to include eudaimonic aspects. In this regard, scales from Positive Psychology could be adapted for the technology context. Which areas of eudaimonic well-being are relevant for a particular product depends greatly on the product category and the specific user flow or feature that is to be tested. For example, if a feature is being developed to promote close and appreciative social relationships, it might be measured how much users feel supported by their contacts, how close they feel to them, or how much the feature reduces feelings of loneliness.

So, there is no "one-size-fits-all" approach here. Well-being is a complex concept. Of course, that is reflected in how it is measured.

Lastly, I would recommend that UX tracking studies also include impacts on long-term business metrics such as Customer Satisfaction and Customer Loyalty to ensure that decision makers outside of the product or design team are aware of the added value of optimizing Digital Wellbeing.





In the second part of the interview, Lisa Wiese discusses the concept of digital wellbeing as a response to the negative effects of using digital services. A positive user experience (UX) is now seen as essential to the market success of a product or brand. Wiese sees a positive UX as a critical part of a positive CX, as users increasingly reflect on their technology use and actively seek to protect themselves from negative consequences.

"Digital wellbeing has emerged as a reaction to negative consequences from the use of digital services."

To achieve positive outcomes from product usage, such as improved UX, users must first become aware of the product. This requires synchronizing other CX touchpoints, such as brand communications and marketing, with the UX. It is important for marketing to understand these user needs. If a company is truly serious about digital wellbeing, this should be reflected throughout the customer journey.

Lisa Wiese's research explores how everyday technologies can promote respectful and friendly digital communication. This involves incorporating principles of positive psychology and developing design principles and measurement methods based on the literature. Many U.S. companies have already integrated "Time Well Spent" into their corporate metrics, but there is also potential for the German market.

Lisa Wiese
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Lisa Wiese is an expert in qualitative and quantitative user experience research and is involved in the development of innovative methods in the field of user experience and digital wellbeing at eye square. She holds a degree in psychology with a focus on statistics, human-computer interaction and neuroscience.

In addition to her work at eye square, Lisa Wiese conducts research at the [Institute for Positive Design](#) at the TU-Delft in the Netherlands. Her PhD thesis is about how everyday digital technologies, e.g. E-Mail and messaging services, social networks or online stores can be (re)designed to enhance our well-being. Lisa regularly publishes in HCI journals and speaks at conferences.

