

An Internet of Soft Things Futurescan 3: Intersecting Identities

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Abstract

This paper will report on the first two phases of an ongoing inter-disciplinary, EPSRC funded research project, 'The Internet of Soft Things' which seeks to bring soft surfaces, smart textiles and wearable technologies to part of the Internet of Things debate. The project involves researchers from academic disciplines: design, computing and mental health in collaboration with a project partner, the mental health charity Nottinghamshire MIND Network. This paper will reflect upon the research project and specifically the development of a co-design methodology using relational approaches to mental wellbeing. This was conducted through a number of practical workshop activities with MIND client based user groups with varying mental health challenges. The workshops focused upon the creation of personalized textile objects with soft switches and various output and also recorded the clients' descriptions of their sense of ownership awareness of their own and others' emotions and behaviour. The workshops included the researchers' reflections and observations to enable further understanding of how this community invests meaning in material things and modes of expressive output. The paper will also discuss the second phase of the project through which an augmented smart flat with textile interfaces, developed by commissioned textile practitioners, created a domestic living lab environment which the clients used to explore experiences of living alone and with other people. This environment enabled us to explore networks of support and meaning making that are made possible through the smart textile things in the living lab and the clients to work through options for keeping in touch, managing their own spaces, and being heard or seen by others. The aim of the research project is to use textile craft practice and smart materials alongside therapeutic approaches to contribute to the development of a wellbeing and mental health toolkit to support future client work for MIND.