

Bridging Values and Technology in God-Saeng (God生) Phenomenon: Designing AI for Self-Directed Well-being

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ABSTRACT

CCS CONCEPTS

• Human-centered computing → Empirical studies in HCI.

KEYWORDS

Well-being, Value, Personal Informatics, Gen-Z, Young Generation, Wellness, Behavior Change

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1 INTRODUCTION

Adopting healthy habits and prioritizing physical and mental health have become more popular recently, underscored by a rise in well-being interest [5]. This shift towards wellness emphasizes adopting behaviors that enhance overall health. Yet, the concept of wellness is undergoing a redefinition, becoming a catchall term with broad and often commercial interpretations, complicating its original focus on holistic health [2, 9]. Its meaning varies across cultures, posing challenges to a unified understanding [1, 8]. This diversification, while enriching, has also introduced challenges in achieving authentic well-being, especially when mediated by technology.

Technological advancements, especially Personal Informatics systems, play significant roles in this wellness pursuit, though often leading to an unhealthy obsession with metrics and self-centered practices. This research investigates South Korea's God-Saeng trend, the term blending English "God" and Chinese "Saeng (生)," signifying a life of hard work and productivity, offering insights into Gen Z's navigation of wellness amidst societal challenges. Using a

participatory design workshop, we explored how God-Saeng aligns with authentic values, revealing a gap between genuine desires and technology-driven practices, and suggesting a more meaningful, value-driven approach to wellness.

Our findings underscore the importance of integrating value awareness into the Personal Informatics (PI) process. Given the misalignment between technology-driven well-being practices and genuine personal values, we advocate for AI as a pivotal mediator in this context, not only understanding but also enhancing the personal value realization process within PI systems. This advocates for a more personalized, value-aware approach that acknowledges and incorporates individual values at the core of well-being practices, facilitated by AI's advanced capabilities in processing and interpreting complex human data. Through this, we aim to foster a more authentic and meaningful engagement with technology in the pursuit of well-being.

2 PROBE DESIGN

To explore Gen-Z's engagement with the God-Saeng trend in South Korea, we utilized a probing approach through a 10-day participatory design workshop (N=24), where participants were empowered to revisit their experiences and define God-Saeng on their own terms, acting as individual ethnographers. Targeting Z-generation participants primarily through social media and university outreach, 24 individuals formed groups to share and discuss their experiences comfortably. By engaging with the probe tools, we anticipated that participants could be encouraged not to view God-Saeng as a trend or movement to be unquestioningly followed but as a seam that prompts reconsideration of their genuine well-being aspirations against the backdrop of routine-making activities. We also wanted to provide participants with an opportunity to examine the alignment or conflict between God-Saeng practices and their authentic well-being desires, fostering a reflective space for deeper engagement with the concept. The workshop was structured into three main phases: a value discovery workshop, a 10-day 'bite-sized mission' challenge, and follow-up interviews.

During the value discovery workshop, participants were asked to examine their in-depth values and use photography as a tool for value exploration, identifying important aspects of their lives through visual cues. They also shared how each of them has been implementing God-Saeng, and the technologies used. Following the value discovery workshop, participants engaged in a 10-day

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'bite-sized mission' challenge individually. These 'bite-sized missions'—which we also describe as 'value-driven activities'—are aimed at aligning their daily activities with their core values. After completing the challenge, we conducted 60-minute follow-up interviews with all the participants to gather insights into their overall experience, the distinctions between value-driven activities and conventional God-Saeng activities, and their perceptions of God-Saeng.

3 FINDINGS

Through examining the God-Saeng phenomenon, we found significant misalignment between individuals' authentic values and the behavior changes influenced or reinforced by technology, and we could learn diverse and personalized strategies of participants utilizing bite-sized missions to implement personal value to their daily lives.

3.1 Misalignment between Well-being Practices and Genuine Aspirations

Our work, through examining the wellness trend of God-Saeng, found how critical misalignment can exist between individuals' authentic values and their wellness pursuits and practices. The underlying values of participants revealed a broader appreciation for social connections, environmental engagement, and contributing to others' well-being, while participants' perceptions and practices of God-Saeng emphasized self-improvement. The pursuit of God-Saeng through technology has fostered an ego-centric focus on self-improvement, productivity, and health, dominating the journey toward well-being. This pursuit, while benefiting self-optimization, such as *'Eat 20g of protein every meal'*, *'Deep focus at least 3hrs a day'* has occasionally led to an obsession with wellness metrics and external commitments, as participants engaged deeply with tracking tools, commitment devices, and social media. We revealed their deep-seated appreciation also lies in rather more intangible values such as relaxation, social connections, environmental engagement, and contributing to others' well-being—values they found themselves less aware of, overshadowed by wellness metrics fostered by technology and societal trends.

3.2 Implementing Values in Daily Life

During our 10-day participatory design workshop, participants were given to craft a bite-sized mission, a small value-based activity that would make it easy for them to achieve their values, recognized from the value-discovery workshop, in their daily lives. They shared the diverse and innovative ways they integrated their personal values into daily life, alongside the challenges they encountered. They actively utilized contextual resources, such as daily schedules, tasks, and interactions, as inspiration and resources for these missions. Some participants explained their strategy as seeking to enrich their daily schedule with additional significance by considering their to-dos and meetings for the day and pinpointing minor adjustments to align these engagements more closely with their personal values. Several participants expanded upon mere routine adjustments, leveraging their environment and everyday experiences as a foundation for inventively and creatively crafting tasks, such as *[Rest, Health] Blink and do neck stretching if I receive*

a message from a friend while I'm watching YouTube. While interpreting experiences through the lens of their values enabled true fulfillment, they faced challenges in crafting value-based activity, requiring some amount of creativity to utilize contextual resources to implement value.

4 AI FOR BRIDGING VALUE AND WELL-BEING TECHNOLOGY

The domain of personal informatics systems is heavily influenced by cognitive and behavioral theories, which emphasize reflection and rational thought as key drivers of behavioral transformation [11]. Rich in behavioral data, these systems often view the self as a collection of measurable actions, focusing on objective behavioral indicators for automated modification of behavior [15]. Recent works have been emphasizing the importance of understanding fundamental human needs and their satisfaction [6] such as sense-making [13] in the use of personal informatics systems. Based on our findings of the discrepancy between individuals' authentic value and their wellness practices, and that implementing personal values in daily lives involves very personalized resources and support, we argue for the importance of integrating value consciousness into the Personal Informatics process, and personalized support in this.

4.1 Empowering Self-directed Well-being

Based on the discrepancy we observed, often exacerbated by the technology use of young generations' God-Saeng practices, we emphasize the importance of self-directed and value-driven approaches to well-being. Our study advocates for embedding value awareness in the PI process, emphasizing the discovery and clarification of personal values as essential steps before initiating PI actions, and argues that AI can be an adequate mediator for the exploration and clarification of personal values.

There recently have been application-level approaches to embed conversational AI in Personal Informatics Systems [7] along with technical-level approaches in teaching AI agents to speak guided by its value like a human, such as with reinforcement learning and the rewards from the value model [12, 14]. As AI technologies, trying to achieve alignment with human values, evolve, it's crucial that individuals understand and prioritize their own values to effectively utilize these tools for personal well-being. This approach emphasizes not merely AI's capability but also empowering individuals with agency in their well-being journey. Selective personal records, such as photographs capturing meaningful moments, can serve as a potent source for capturing personal values. While diverse datasets offer vast potential, discerning which aspects of these records represent personal values requires careful consideration. For instance, a photograph's visual elements or the shared experience it represents could hold significant value. Thus, interpreting data points and aligning them with one's values necessitates individual involvement, underscoring the need for a human-in-the-loop approach in AI system design that captures personal values. The challenge in design centers around integrating human input effectively for value discernment, exploring which aspects and methods of input are most conducive to authentic value realization. This human-centered process must be thoughtfully designed to ensure engagement and meaningful interaction, posing open questions on the integration of

human insights in a way that enriches AI's capability for personal value realization.

4.2 Intangible Values into Tangible Actions

Our findings underscore the importance of incorporating personal values into daily activities for achieving daily fulfillment. This process necessitates personalized and context-aware support, often requiring a touch of creativity. We propose that AI, particularly when integrated with context-aware applications, can serve as an effective intermediary for embedding personal values into concrete well-being practices.

Mobile context-aware applications are progressively being designed to assist users in reflecting on their visited locations and potential activities. These applications can prompt users to participate in personal tasks or habits when they come across places of interest in their everyday routines [3]. While contextual resources significantly enhance the relevance of human behaviors within various scenarios [4], the challenge of translating complex and intangible human concepts into machine-understandable formats remains [10]. Advances in AI, particularly through generative models and language processing, offer novel ways to bridge this gap, transforming intangible human values into actionable insights and behaviors.

The catalytic role of AI extends beyond simply facilitating the representation of complex human values in a form that technology can interpret and act upon. By leveraging the generative capabilities of AI, it becomes possible to enrich the base of context-aware applications. This enrichment allows for the crafting of personalized suggestions for value-focused activities that individuals can integrate into their daily lives. Specifically, generative AI can synthesize context-specific resources and personal values to propose unique, actionable behaviors that align closely with an individual's values and current circumstances. This process not only overcomes the challenge of representing intangible values in a technological framework but also capitalizes on AI's ability to creatively and adaptively compound context resources in an individual's unique context and value. As a result, AI becomes a crucial player in suggesting and facilitating value-driven actions, effectively translating intangible values into tangible daily practices that enhance personal well-being.

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