

Mood Tracker

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Researchers have argued that many apps lack scientific- and clinical-based evidence in the feature design, and also lack evidence of consumers' empirical usage

Self-tracking mood could facilitate gaining knowledge and awareness of one's mood patterns and thus help maintain emotional well-being.

For example, MobiMood allows users to register their mood by selecting colors, and Aurora supports self-tracking by allowing users to select photos that best represent their mood. CopeSmart users log their mood by selecting a corresponding value on a scale. Other mobile apps have elicited users' mood using emojis.

Aurora and MobiMood also encourage users to share self-tracked mood data in their social networks to seek emotional support.

Stages included in Mood-tracking apps

Stage	Feature	Description
preperation	instructions & explanation	information about how to conduct mood tracking
Collection	interface for collecting mood data reminders	- text, pictures, colors, emotions, etc - reminders for users to log mood
Reflection	visualizations	graphs, tables, lists
Action	recommendations sharing	- further actions based on data, e.g, how to improve mood - features for users to share or export data

For the Preparation Stage, we found that only a few (N=8) applications provided substantial information about how to track mood, or about how tracking mood can help manage and promote well-being. Other apps provided little or no such information. However, even for apps that do provide features for the Preparation stage, such information is often very limited, and usually only appears when users first launch the app. Often, this information is not shown again after the first time the app is launched.

For the Collection Stage, all apps allow users to record their mood. We have found a diverse set of tracking interfaces, including 1) pre-defined text, i.e., text provided by the app that the users can select, such as 'optimistic' or 'tired', 2) free text, i.e., text that users can type themselves, 3) colors, i.e., choosing a color to represent the current mood, 4) pictures, either taking a picture or choosing one on the app to illustrate the current mood, 5) recorded audio, 6) emojis, i. e., picking an emoji or similar image to represent the current mood, and 7) ratings, e.g., 21 apps allow users to select the intensity of a particular mood. For instance, MoodPanda users could rate their happiness on a scale from 0 to 10. A few apps also support users to add notes to their mood. Notes could include contextual information, or a more detailed description of the mood. As for reminders, about one third of the apps do not include features for reminding users to enter data. Figure 1 presents screenshots of apps with different tracking interfaces.

For the Action Stage, only 7 of the 32 apps we analyzed provide features to support future actions, including recommendations for handling depression, contact information for a support hotline, strategies to avoid triggers, handle stress, and improve mood, and social features which help users look for support. Further, 25 apps have sharing features that allow users to send their mood data to their social networks for additional support, or to export the data in free text or spreadsheet format.

Users reported that their goals for using mood tracking consist mainly of learning about their mood to find strategies to improve, cope with stress, and manage mental illnesses. For instance, users were often interested in finding patterns in

their mood data to understand influencing factors, and those with mental illnesses utilized mood tracking to monitor their symptoms.

Users opinions about several mood-tracking apps

“This app is great for keeping me in check and knowing what things contribute to my emotional state. It also makes me stop and think about my day and how I’ve felt! Which is a great factor in being able to turn a bad day around. [...]” (Diary - Mood Tracker, Android).

“I adopted this app as a core component of my self-quantification and improvement effort. It has proven incredibly valuable in helping me analyze patterns and manage my approach to stress and increasing happiness.” (Happiness, iOS).

“I have major depressive disorder and sometimes it is hard for me to keep track of how I feel one day to the next, especially when going to therapy. I actually heard about this app through some people on tumblr and I’m glad I tried it out. Wonderful app. [...]” (Diary - Mood Tracker, Android).

“As someone who suffers chronic physical and mental illnesses, this app is perfect to find trends in what is making me ill. [...]” (Diary - Mood Tracker, Android).

“[...] I have a mood disorder and the graphs make a great visual aid for sharing mood fluctuations with my doctor. [...]” (iMoodJournal, iOS).

“[...] [The app] was recommended by my therapist and I will recommend it to everyone I know. [...]” (iMoodJournal, iOS).

Through analyzing app reviews, we found that users seek to learn about their mood patterns and improve them, and to manage emotional distress and mental illnesses. Many users pursue these goals by collecting data frequently, registering contextual information through notes, and sharing their data with healthcare providers. Still, they wish for additional features, such as the ability to

personalize mood options, process their data for analysis, secure data to preserve privacy, and features specific for particular conditions.

Most apps did not provide appropriate features for supporting the Preparation stage.

▼ Sources

Caldeira, C., Chen, Y., Chan, L., Pham, V., Chen, Y., & Zheng, K. (2017). Mobile apps for mood tracking: an analysis of features and user reviews. *AMIA Annual Symposium Proceedings*, 2017, 495-504. <https://doi.org/https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5977660/>