Initial Post

Initial Post

by Ben Blakemore - Wednesday, 26 November 2025, 5:49 PM

Gu et al. (2023) demonstrate that users' first impressions of a product have the potential to be inaccurate in comparison to how they feel after becoming more familiar with the tool. They showed that over the course of time, the difference in visual and usability ratings between two products grew as users began to understand the limitations of those that were more poorly designed.

This phenomenon, termed the "halo effect", can help improve the accuracy of subjective evaluation by informing us of the potential for bias in collecting immediate feedback. As shown in their results, users should be given ample time to become familiar with the tool and allow for the novelty to wear off before their feedback is taken, otherwise any results have the potential to suffer from the halo effect.

A study by Sonderegger et al. (2012) that utilised a similar methodology, only with mobile phones and over a longer time period of 3 weeks, found similar results. The influence of perceived aesthetics and usability had all but vanished after the third week, supporting the conclusions drawn by Gu et al. (2023).

There is however one major limitation I believe both Gu et al. (2023) and Sonderegger et al. (2012) suffer from. With a sample size of only 20 and 60 respectively, I'm hesitant to apply findings from such a small group of people to the general population.

However, I think these studies are ones that many of us can relate to personally. How many of us have bought something and felt enamoured by it, only to over time discover minor frustrations in its user experience and grow to no longer enjoy it? I would be interested to hear others' experiences with this and if this is something they can relate to.

References:

Gu, Q., Tang, W. and Xue, C. (2023) 'The Effect of Time Lapse on the Halo Effect in the Subjective Evaluation of Digital Interfaces', *Design, User Experience, and Usability*, pp. 171–183.

Sonderegger, A., Zbinden G., Uebelbacher, A. and Sauer, J. (2012) 'The influence of product aesthetics and usability over the course of time: a longitudinal field experiment', *Ergonomics*, 55(7), pp.713-730. Available at: https://www-tandfonline-com.uniessexlib.idm.oclc.org/doi/full/10.1080/00140139.2012.672658 (Accessed: 26 November 2025).

Permalink Reply

Re: Initial Post

by Ruben Marques - Monday, 8 December 2025, 7:02 PM

I agree with your analysis. You have captured pretty well the paper from Gu et al. (2023, in the sense that while a product's "halo" (aesthetics) might be a main driving factor for the user initially, that influence inevitably decays, leaving functionality as the primary driver of user satisfaction over time.

And as you also wrote, the "novelty" wears off, and the user's priority shifts from "how does it look?" to "does it actually wor which definetely shows us that aesthetics can be valuable, yet they hold lower long-term weight thar

To add a layer to your point about the "halo" being a source of bias: research by Lindgaard et al. (20 ow fast that bias forms, since users judge visual appeal in as little as 50 milliseconds. For me, this suggests that aesthetics act as the gatekeeper (getting the user to engage), whereas functionality acts as the anchor (getting the user to stay).

So, while we definitely need the time to measure true usability, perhaps we should also view the initial aesthetic phase not just as being inaccurate, but simply as a different, shorter-lived stage of the lifecycle?

Do you think companies these days may sometimes prioritize that initial "50-millisecond" aesthetic impact over long-term functionality simply because it is easier to sell, even if it hurts the user experience later on? In your personal experience, have you ever chosen one system instead of another that may have had the exact same functionality, yet different aesthetic?

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Gu, Q., Tang, W. and Xue, C. (2023) 'The Effect of Time Lapse on the Halo Effect in the Subjective Evaluation of Digital Interfaces', Design, User Experience, and Usability, pp. 171–183.

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Sonderegger, A., Zbinden G., Uebelbacher, A. and Sauer, J. (2012) 'The influence of product aesthetics and usability over the course of time: a longitudinal field experiment', Ergonomics, 55(7), pp. 713-730.

Re: Initial Post

by Victor Angelier - Tuesday, 9 December 2025, 5:40 PM

Peer Response – Ben Blakemore

Hi Ben,

Thank you for your clear and relatable post. I fully agree that Gu et al. (2023) demonstrate how early aesthetic appeal can inflate perceived usability, with product differences only becoming apparent once the initial novelty fades. Your reference to Sonderegger et al. (2012) reinforces this nicely, their three-week field experiment shows the same waning of the halo effect with sustained use.

Your recommendation to delay feedback collection until users are familiar with the product is practical and addresses a major risk in UX evaluation: capturing novelty-driven emotional responses rather than stable, task-oriented judgements. This is especially relevant in software projects, where early demos or MVPs often generate overly positive responses that do not reflect long-term satisfaction, a point closely linked to the ‘Emotional reactions’ component in the CUE model (Van der Linden et al., 2019).

Like you, I share concerns about generalisability given the small, homogenous samples in both studies. Larger and more diverse participant groups would better reflect the range of user characteristics and contexts that influence emotional responses.

I completely relate to your personal example; I once fell in love with a beautifully designed project-management tool only to abandon it weeks later due to hidden workflow frustrations. To mitigate such halo-driven bias in practice, incorporating at least two evaluation sessions (initial + after one week of real use) within agile sprints could significantly improve the accuracy of subjective feedback while remaining feasible under commercial constraints.

Great post – it really highlights why timing matters in UX evaluation.

References

Gu, Q., Tang, W. and Xue, C. (2023) ‘The effect of time lapse on the halo effect in the subjective evaluation of digital interfaces’, in Design, User Experience, and Usability (Lecture Notes in Computer Science, vol. 14032). Cham: Springer, pp. 171–183. Available at: https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-031-35702-2_12 (Accessed: 6 December 2025).

Sonderegger, A. et al. (2012) ‘The influence of product aesthetics and usability over the course of time: a longitudinal field experiment’, Ergonomics, 55(7), pp. 713–730. Available at: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00140139.2012.672658 (Accessed: 7 December 2025).

Van der Linden, J. et al. (2019) ‘User experience and social influence: a new perspective for UX theory’, in A. Marcus and W. Wang (eds) Design, User Experience, and Usability. Design Philosophy and Theory (Lecture Notes in Computer Science, vol.

11583). Cham: Springer, pp. 98–112. Available at: https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-23570-3_9 (Accessed: 29 November 2025).

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Re: Initial Post

by Doug Millward - Friday, 12 December 2025, 6:42 PM

Hi All
I think this is an excellent discussion. I'd just like to throw into the mix the fact that the "halo effect" is only one of a host of conscious and unconscious biases that may affect our evaluation and user experience of a product. There seem to be several studies (for example Pereira (2021) and O'Reilly (2025)) that investigate the effect of these phenomena - but which of the implicit biases do you think are the most influential in affecting our experience of a new product?

References
Pereira, N. (2021). IMPLICIT BIAS IN UX RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES.
O'Reilly, K. (2025). Mitigating unconscious bias in information systems design: a design science research approach.

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Re: Initial Post

by Lauren Pechey - Tuesday, 16 December 2025, 6:20 PM

HI Ben,

Thank you for your contribution!

Your post offers a clear and well-balanced interpretation of Gu et al.'s (2023) findings, particularly in highlighting how first impressions can misrepresent longer-term usability. I agree that the halo effect usefully explains why early feedback—often driven by visual appeal—can bias subjective evaluations. Your comparison with Sonderegger et al. (2012) strengthens this argument, as the longitudinal nature of their study demonstrates how aesthetic influence diminishes as users gain experience.

You raise an important limitation regarding sample size. While small samples do restrict generalisability, this issue is common in controlled UX studies where depth of insight is often prioritised over scale. One way to mitigate this, as suggested in UX research, is to combine small-sample qualitative studies with repeated measures or triangulate findings across multiple studies and methods (Hassenzahl, 2023; Tullis & Albert, 2023). This can improve confidence in observed patterns, even when participant numbers are limited.

I also found your personal reflection particularly effective. It reinforces the ecological validity of these findings, as many users experience a gradual shift from initial enthusiasm to more critical evaluation over time. Overall, your post clearly demonstrates why time-aware evaluation methods are essential for improving the accuracy of subjective user feedback and informing better design decisions.

References:

Gu, Q., Tang, W. and Xue, C. (2023) The effect of time lapse on the halo effect in the subjective evaluation of digital interfaces. Design, User Experience, and Usability, pp. 171–183.

Hassenzahl, M. (2023) User Experience and Experience Design. 2nd edn. Cham: Springer.

Sonderegger, A., Zbinden, G., Uebelbacher, A. and Sauer, J. (2012) 'The influence of product aesthetics and usability over the course of time', Ergonomics, 55(7), pp. 713–730.

Tullis, T. and Albert, B. (2023) Measuring the User Experience. 3rd edn. Amsterdam: Elsevier.

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