Factors Affecting User Experience

In my original post, I discussed how first impressions of a user interface can be distorted by visual appeal, drawing on Gu, Tang and Xue's (2023) research on the halo effect. Their findings showed that users initially rate usability more positively if a product looks good, but this effect fades within a few days. I argued that delaying usability evaluations leads to more accurate feedback, since initial impressions are often based more on aesthetics than actual performance.

Edge (2025) reply pushed me to think more critically about how cognitive load influences that early impression. He introduced the distinction between Intrinsic and Extraneous Cognitive Load from Mărcuță and the MoldStud Research Team (2024), which helped me consider how perceived complexity might affect how users judge aesthetics. For example, if someone expects a task to be difficult, even a clean interface might feel overwhelming. I had not considered that users might be estimating their future cognitive effort when looking at a design for the first time.

Millward (2025) added a practical angle, pointing out that many modern devices replicate familiar interfaces to reduce friction, like smartwatch displays mimicking analogue faces. That raised an important question for me: are design choices based on actual usability, or just what feels mentally comfortable? Combined, both replies made me reconsider how much of user experience is shaped by learned patterns and expectations, not just interface quality. It is not just about delaying feedback, it is also about understanding what shapes user judgement in the first place.

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 Marcus, A. and Rosenzweig, A. (eds) *Design, User Experience, and Usability: UX Research and Design*. Cham: Springer, pp. 171–183.

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Edge, T. (2025) *Peer reply*. SEPM: Software Engineering Project Management. Forum post submitted to the University of Essex Online.

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