

From Wellness to Worrisome: Mining Online Voices on the Dark Side of Wearable Health Technologies

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Abstract

As wellness technologies become increasingly embedded in consumers' everyday lives, wearable brands are positioning themselves as partners in health and self-improvement. Yet, user-generated discourse has revealed that digital feedback can also provoke feelings of anxiety, guilt, and distrust. This study examines the darker aspects of wellness tech by analysing 3,194 Reddit posts and 126,000 comments concerning leading health-tracking devices. Using an LLM-enhanced BERTopic pipeline, we identify fourteen detrimental topics, encompassing a spectrum of concerns ranging from data reliability frustration and sleep score obsession to privacy concerns and compulsive self-monitoring. Results show how technical frictions and feedback design choices can escalate into affective strain and negative word-of-mouth. By "listening to the crowd," this research introduces a scalable social-listening framework for detecting consumer well-being risks and emerging reputational threats. The findings highlight the importance of responsible feedback design and empathetic communication in digital marketing strategies for wearable and health-tech brands.

Track: Digital Marketing & Social Media