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# Distraction, Self-Regulation, and ICT Use

## **Ulrik Lyngs**

University of Oxford  
[ulrik.lyngs@cs.ox.ac.uk](mailto:ulrik.lyngs@cs.ox.ac.uk)

## **Bio**

I am a PhD student at the Department of Computer Science, University of Oxford, supervised by Nigel Shadbolt.

My research focuses on ICTs and attention management, and what design insights can be learned from the rapidly emerging market for 'anti-distraction tools'.

I hold an MSc in Cognitive and Evolutionary Anthropology from the University of Oxford, and an MA in Psychology and the Cognitive Science of Religion from the University of Aarhus.

## **Position statement**

A majority of smartphone users report that they struggle with effective self-control over their device use. In response, HCI researchers have called for more research into intentional 'non-use' of ICTs, and an entire market niche has appeared for 'anti-distraction tools' - smartphone apps, desktop applications, browser plugins and other tools intended to help users self-regulate. For example, these operate by removing elements from user interfaces or blocking access to them (e.g. Freedom, Newsfeed Eradicator), tracking and visualising device use (e.g. RescueTime, Moment), or rewarding intended - or punishing unintended - device use (e.g. Forest, Obtract). Some tools have become widely disseminated, with installations of e.g. the mobile app Forest numbering in the millions.

In relation to computing and mental health, how to design powerful devices that give their users access to an extremely wide range of tasks anywhere, anytime, without simultaneously undermining effective self-regulation, is a crucial challenge. My research on this topic asks two primary questions: i) how can models of self-regulation from the cognitive neurosciences help us understand the design space for ICTs that support self-regulation, and ii) how do popular tools on the 'anti-distraction market' change user behaviour and subjective perceptions of successful self-control?