

Mobile Device Control, on the Skin

Written by Marco Attard
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Scientists at the Max Planck Institute and Saarland University reveal a means to turn the human body into a mobile device controller-- the iSkin, a sensor one can put on different body parts, such as fingers, forearms and even behind the ears.



The iSkin consists of biocompatible silicone rubber (specifically polydimethylsiloxane, aka PDMS) and conductive carbon black powder. It carries multiple pressure-sensitive sensors and is flexible enough to detect input pressure even when stretched by up to 30% or bent at a radius of 0.5cm.

So far the team has built prototypes in multiple shapes and sizes handling tasks such as answering calls, playing music and volume control. Another take on the technology involves a roll-up keyboard for smartwatch use.

"[The] technology is initially coming from robotics where it's used to give robots kind of a feeling similar to the human body, to human skin," co-developer Martin Weigel tells Reuters. "However, we are the first to look into how we can use it on the body to control mobile devices-- so as a kind of second-skin which nicely conforms to your body."

Current prototypes require wired connection to a PC, although the technology might evolve to use integrated microchips and energy-harvesting systems. The team is not looking into developing the concept further, but hopes to inspire further research on the topic.

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