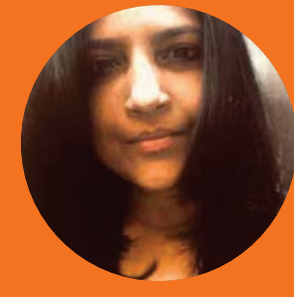


# Dystopias of Digital Memory

Technology helps us remember. But are we allowed to forget?

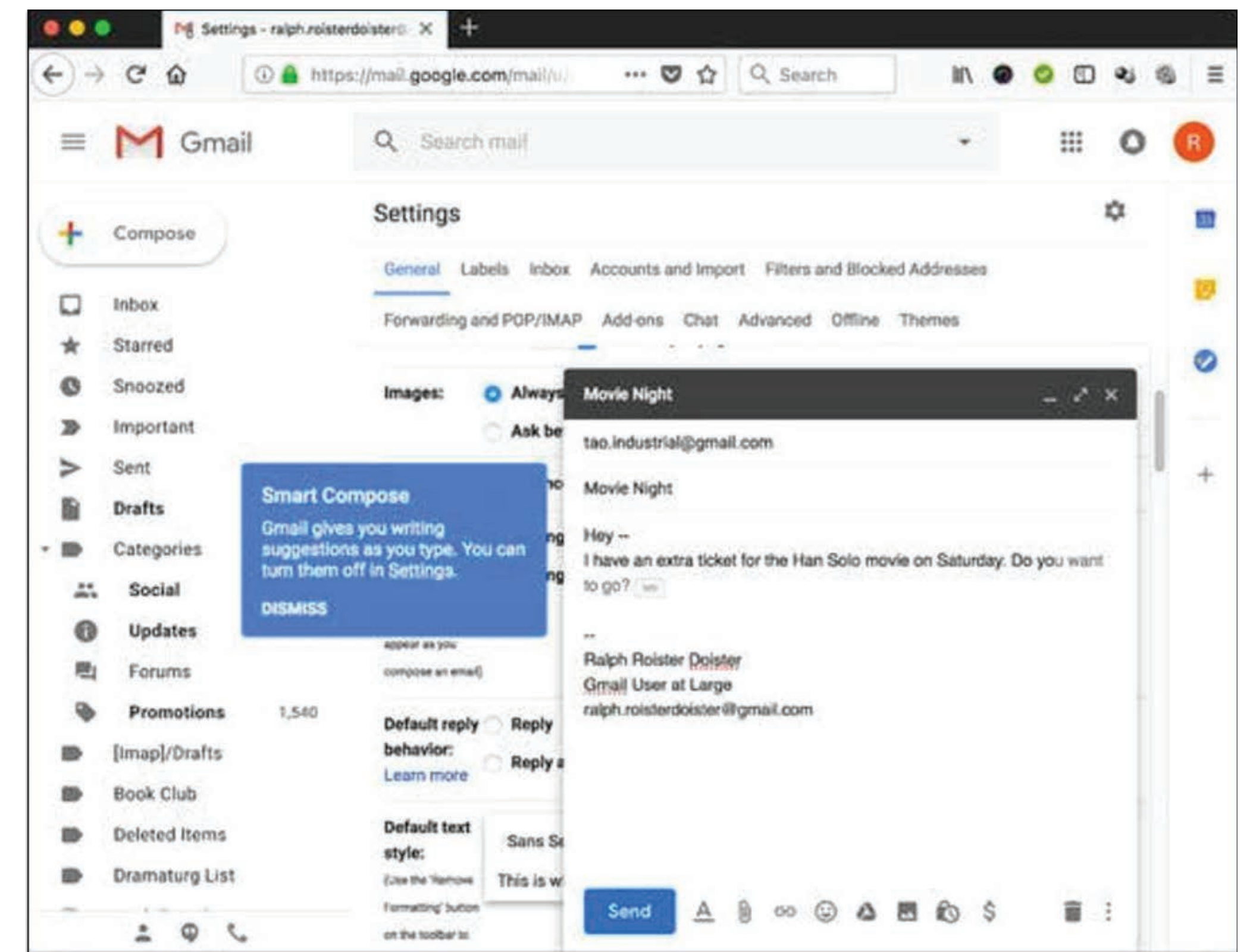
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## Overview

In our daily lives, we experience constant surveillance by tech giants who do the job of remembering for us. Our phone apps track our usage from food to fashion; Alexa and Siri are always listening, Google completes our sentences using Smart Compose, the internet does not let us forget the unfinished business of shopping! And Amazon remembers our previous choices so we don't have to. We are in essence outsourcing our memories to technology without a clue as to who owns the memory and the right to remember. And more importantly, whether we want to remember.



Gmail's Smart Compose feature finishes your sentences for you using Predictive Tech

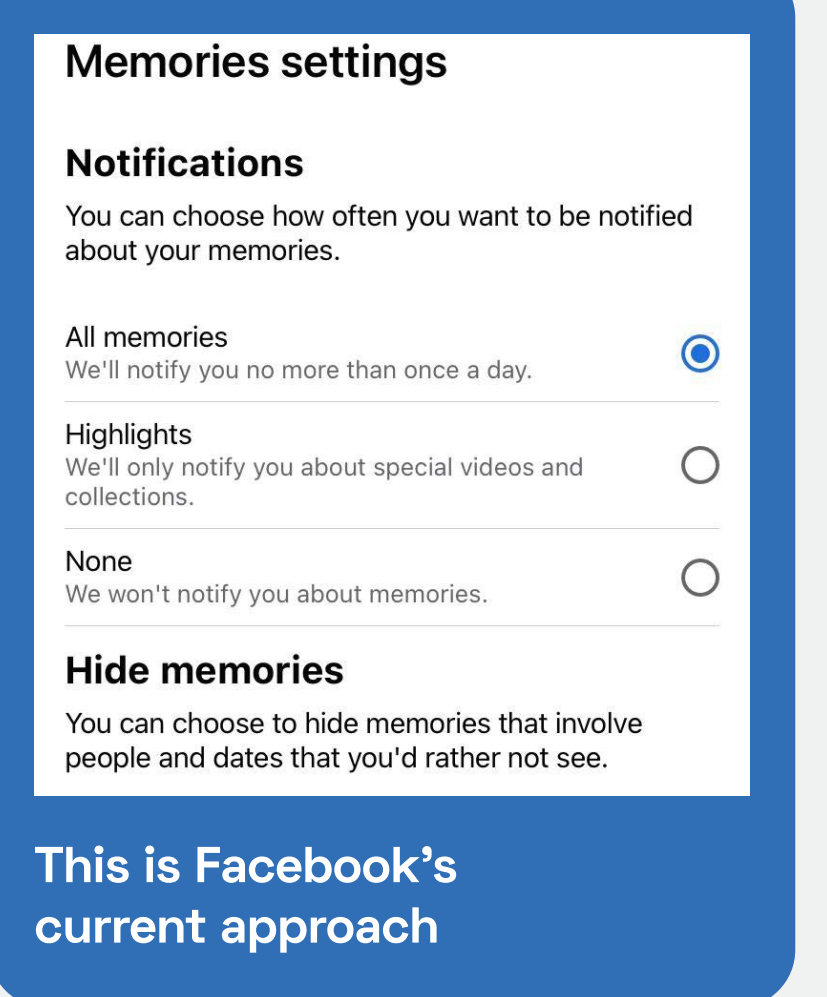
## 1. Objectives

- To critically examine the Facebook Memory feature titled "On this Day".
- To investigate the Utopias and Dystopias of this feature according to those who have shared Memories via this feature on Facebook.
- And to present a speculative Design mnemonic that could address a Human Centric Need gap pertaining to the problem of Memory Retrieval by Facebook without Human agency.

## 2. Approach

The approach involved the following process:

- Immersion in the Memory feature titled 'On this Day.'
- Reflection on how the memories made me feel as a User. I considered the Likes, Dislikes, Hopes and Fears for the same.
- Interview other Facebook users about their responses to the Memory feature and request permission to feature their Memories as a case study – either for, against or neutral.
- Research from Artie Conrad's insightful "Facebook Memories: the research behind the products that connect you with your past".
- Research Meta's current efforts at identifying painful memories and lending more agency to Users to make decisions about the Memory feature.
- Study how this feature can be amplified to address the nuances of memory and forgetting.



## 3. Utopias of the memory feature

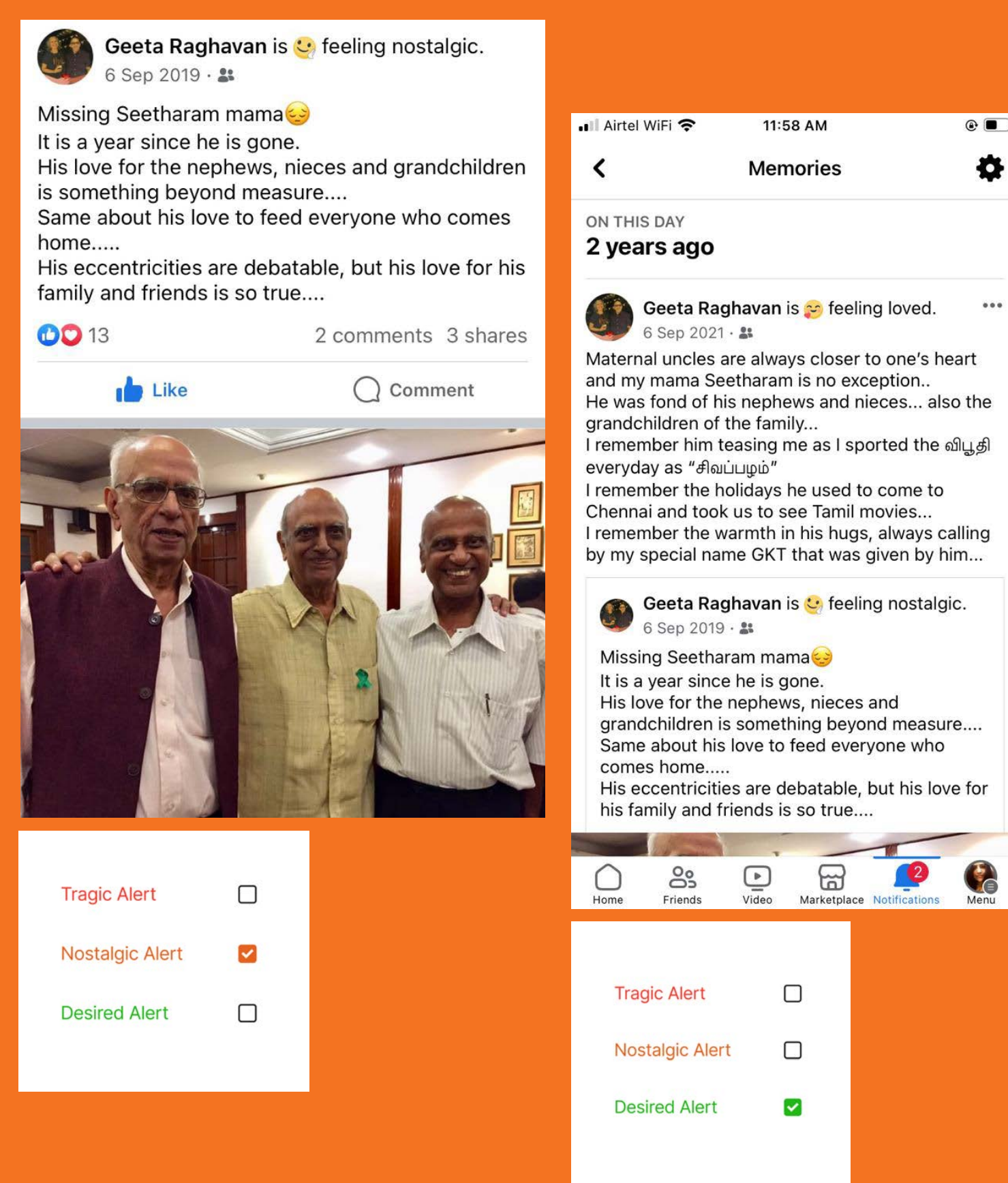


GEETA RAGHAVAN

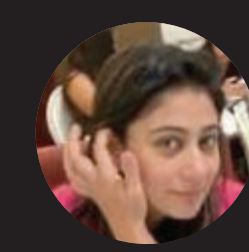
"Sadness and happiness are a part of life. That said, the response to a tragic event also changes with time..."

"Positive experiences can be remembered more negatively over time and negative experiences can be remembered more positively [ such as a new relationship that makes you feel better about an old breakup]. These contamination and redemption sequences respectively as well as attitudinal factors can influence how one remembers things." [ McAdams et al., 2001., Konrad et al., 2016.]"

-Artie Conrad, Meta Researcher, "Facebook Memories: the research behind the products that connect you with your past"



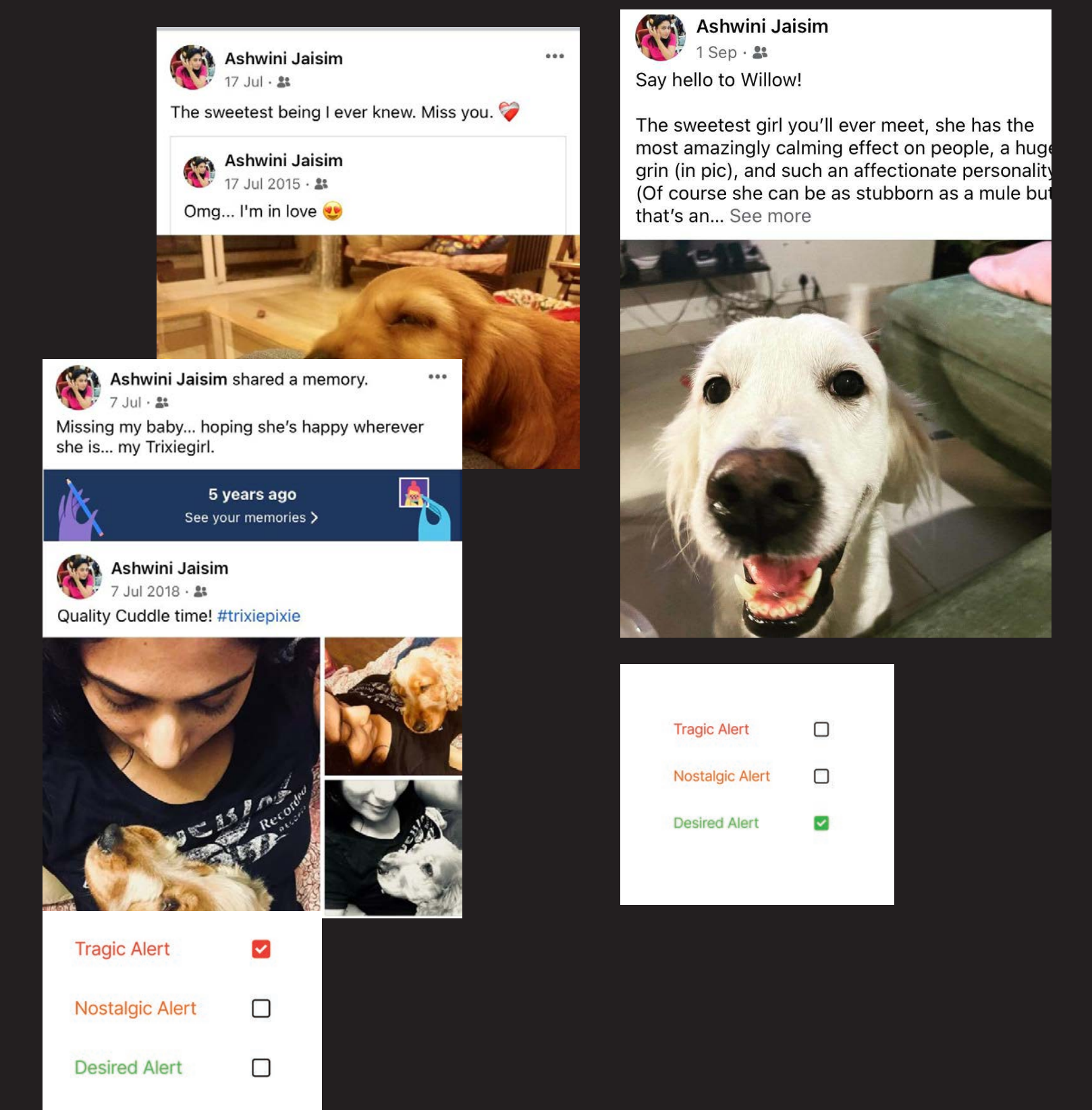
## 4. Dystopias of the memory feature



ASHWINI JAISMIM

This would qualify as a Red Flag category. But the arrival of a new Pup could replace the loss suffered by the User. Hence this Red Flag (Tragic) could be replaced Green (Happy) by the User if they wish to.

For example: Willow (right) has replaced the sad memory of Trixie's loss.



## 5. Observation

Memories are more nuanced than the above policies by Facebook are addressing.

People don't mind the Memory feature because there are happy memories too associated with the same people. Geeta misses her uncle and feels sad and yet wants to celebrate his life. She doesn't wish to dismiss the Memory feature entirely.

Persons interviewed have mentioned that the good and the bad are two sides of the same coin.

Ms M.S (lost her sister)

" Memories are not unwanted. Loss is undeniable if it's happened. So recall is fine."

Ms Andaleeb Wajid (lost her husband during Covid, 2021)

"Looking at my memories before 2021, I feel very sad at how clueless we all were of what was about to unfold in our lives...for all the hopes I had...I don't mind the facebook memory feature so much...because there's some funny stuff about my kids there as well."

## 7. Alert Feature

The user has an option to change the colour coding based on changing circumstances.. For instance, the end of a relationship that's been replaced by a better, happier one can move from Red or Orange to Green Similarly, the adoption of a new pet can replace the memories of Loss from Tragic Red to a Happier Green.

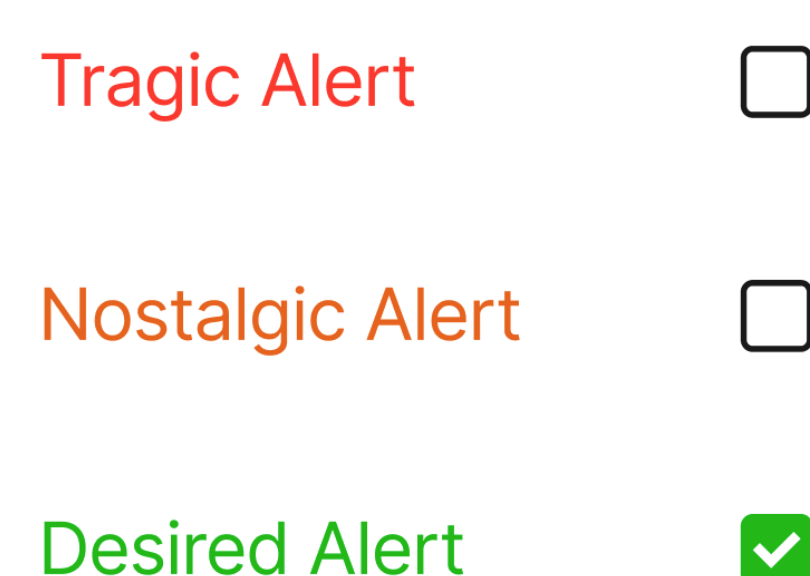
A semiotics radar mapped by colour and key emotion words. It could be designed as a radio selection or just an emotion + colour key

**Red: ( tragic alert): death, bereavement, loss, mourning, end of a marriage**

**Orange: (nostalgic alert) reminder of former friendships; end of a relationship, friends moving away; kids leaving home**

**Green: ( desired memories alert) happy memories; children's photos; family holidays etc.**

With the passage of time this colour coding can be dynamic.



## 6. Design intervention based on above insights

- How can design in that case, work towards human centric technology?
- Can algorithms and machine learning identify key words in posts that highlight high vulnerability with a red flag of sorts.
- Could a semiotics language palette be designed to work towards sensitized flagging of posts.
- Can user generated feedback on the Memory retrieval system and a mapping of resultant emotions - be studied by Social Media companies to inform and gauge the appropriateness of the Memories feature?

## 8. Conclusion

To conclude, without human centric design, we are as good as another episode on Black Mirror, living a dystopian reality in the here and now. The episodes of chips, implants, erasing of memory and multiple realities where human lives are but pawns in the hands of Big Brother tech aren't far away unless design intervenes to afford humans greater agency over their lives.

In the Netflix series Black Mirror, there is an episode titled Joan is Awful where there is no forgetting for the protagonist. After a nasty episode at work, Joan finds that her life is being streamed online in reality-tv mode, impersonating her with a well known actress, Salma Hayek. Try as she might, Joan is unable to forget because technology clearly has the upper hand.

And this is the point of the argument – is Joan really awful here – or is the signing away of our right to remember or forget - the real dystopia of our lives.

