
Evaluating Experience-Focused HCI

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Abstract

A growing trend in the field is the development of experience-focused HCI, which emphasizes the experience of using the technology, rather than the focus on the task that is characteristic of many other approaches HCI. A focus on experience also means that research concentrating on such technologies produces a different kind of knowledge than task-focused HCI, and that this knowledge must be validated in different ways. Importantly, this focus means that evaluation techniques designed for evaluating task-focused measures, such as classical notions of usability, are inadequate (although far from unnecessary) for the evaluation of experience. In this SIG, participants who are interested in designing, building or currently evaluating experience-focused projects will discuss ways to do so. This SIG is intended to appeal to a broad cross section of the CHI community, ranging from practitioners and developers to computer and social scientists.

Keywords

Experience, evaluation.

ACM Classification Keywords

H5.m. Information interfaces and presentation (e.g., HCI): Miscellaneous

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Introduction

HCI as a discipline has developed an extensive repertoire of tools for the evaluation of technology designed to help the user accomplish tasks. These include a wide variety of evaluation techniques for uncovering problems with technologies that get in the way of accomplishing tasks. A task-based approach has the advantage that there are various metrics that are comparatively easy to evaluate: time on task, productivity, etc. But what of technology not for accomplishing tasks but for having experiences, for expressing one's identity, for flirting and arguing and living? How can we evaluate technologies for blogging, for instant messaging, for massively multi-player gaming, for telling secrets to old friends and for making new ones? Many of these technologies may require careful testing and evaluation to eliminate usability problems, but to evaluate merely on usability is to miss the very point of these technologies.

HCI as a field has started to develop a notion of experience-focused (rather than task-focused) HCI, recognizing a widening of the sphere of HCI out of the workplace and into the world, and emphasizing the importance of culture, emotion, and lived experience [4][12][14]; similar work is also referred to as 'third-wave' or 'third paradigm' HCI [1][13]. The importance of experience also clearly extends well beyond academic approaches to HCI. [15] We believe strongly that the traditions of usability- and task-focused evaluation that have evolved over HCI's history are a necessary precursor to experience-focused evaluation, but, once again, are not sufficient.

Prior Work

This SIG has the opportunity to bring together a growing body of practitioners who have struggled with the problem of evaluating an experience-focused HCI project. Blythe et. al. hosted a workshop at CHI'05 on 'Theory and method for experience focused design', which with its emphasis on experience-focused HCI was inspirational in the development of this SIG. [2] Höök et. al. hosted a workshop as part of the HUMAINE program on evaluating affective computer systems, much of which was relevant to this workshop and confirmed for us the timeliness of the topic [6].

There has begun to be work in the field specifically on the evaluation of non-task-centered HCI. For example, Isbister et. al. have shown the potential for evocatively shaped ceramic objects to allow users to express emotions during interaction without reference to a standardized set of emotional categories. [7] Gaver and colleagues have shown the utility of cultural commentators from outside disciplines – filmmakers, journalists, ethnographers – for evaluating experience-focused systems [8][9], while Sundstrom et. al. had users' friends film them using an evocative technology [18]. Boehner et. al. have emphasized the role of 'dynamic feedback', where any information about user or system performance is not only collected for the evaluators' analysis but for the users' reflection, analysis and use as well. [4] Kaye et. al. have used cultural probes to gather thick descriptions of users' experiences with a technology [11].

There is also potentially a great deal to be learned from other disciplines with experience in evaluating experiences, such as film, literature, business management and art, not only from their methods for

evaluation but also from their very approaches to thinking about evaluation.

Aims: Evaluating Experience-focused HCI

We accept that there are technologies being researched, built and studied within HCI for which there is a dearth of appropriate evaluation methods – or, if appropriate evaluation methods exist, they are novel and often controversial. The nature of the topic means that there are perhaps more questions than answers, but we hope more of both may arise from concentrated discussion of the topic. We aim to ask several questions with this SIG, including:

- What do we mean by evaluation in experience-focused HCI? What are the goals of evaluation in experience-focused HCI?
 - What evaluation methods have been used to evaluate experience-focused HCI? What are the limitations of existing approaches to evaluating experience-focused HCI? How are these limitations being addressed?
 - What novel evaluation methods could we use for evaluating experience-focused HCI?
 - What disciplines and individuals (from inside and outside HCI) can contribute to the evaluation of experience-focused HCI? How do these alternate disciplines and perspectives provide new ways of thinking about evaluation?
 - What novel evaluation methods (from inside and outside HCI?) might we appropriate for evaluating experience-focused HCI?
 - What criteria might be useful for evaluating potential evaluation methods? What are characteristics of a good evaluation method?
- Are there different needs for experience design evaluation for a researcher vs. a designer?
 - How do we recognize the important difference between evaluating 'a designed experience' and evaluating 'the experience of a design', much as McCarthy & Wright differentiate between 'designing an experience' and 'designing for experience' [12], and account for both?

Audience

Our aim with this SIG is to bring together a wide and diverse audience. The need to evaluate experience-focused HCI in a wide variety of areas provides the opportunity to attract a particularly broad cross-section of the CHI community, including academics, industry researchers, designers, developers, social scientists, artists and those in the management community. We will directly invite established researchers in the area, but will particularly attempt to attract other CHI attendees who may contribute novel approaches or reconceptualizations of issues.

Schedule

We will start by introducing the schedule and summarizing the aims of the SIG for attendees. We will divide up into groups to discuss the questions listed above for forty minutes, with the exact questions being discussed being dependent on interest, and organizers taking notes on a shared Wiki, for both immediate and ongoing access. At the end of this discussion, we will join back together and discuss the conclusions of the different groups. This discussion will also be recorded on the Wiki. We will finish by discussing appropriate next steps: the organizers believe it likely that the findings of these discussions will serve as key inputs for

a workshop on the topic currently planned for CHI 2008.

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