

Smartphone Ethnography/Ethnomethodology for Design

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ABSTRACT

Focussed ethnography and ethnomethodology constitute a mainstay of interaction design methods, as do other participatory design techniques such as cultural probes. Developments in smart phones and web-based storage and analysis now make it possible to conduct fieldwork for and during interaction design research. What the challenges and possibilities of these new applications for design are only now being tested and discussed. Together with a practical demonstration of two new smart phone applications, this workshop invites position papers and discussion around the place of ethnography in interaction design and the role of new technologies in enabling this.

Author Keywords

ethnography, ethnomethodology, smart-phone, interaction design

ACM Classification Keywords

J4. Social & Behavioural Sciences, K4 computers and society.

INTRODUCTION

For at least two decades interaction design (Crabtree & Grudin 1994) and design fields in general (Button 2000; Wasson 2000) have shown increasing interest in ethnography and ethnomethodology for studies of and in design. The quality of what passes for ethnography in (interaction) design has, however, been increasingly questioned (Crabtree et al., 2009). On the one hand, this is because, as Dourish (2006) notes, the approach has often been reduced to another method so that ‘the methodological view marginalizes or obscures the theoretical and analytic components of ethnographic analysis’ (p.543). On the other hand, ethnomethodology with its concern with situated action and technology (e.g. Suchman 1987) and not ethnography per se is the approach of relevance for research through interaction design (Zimmerman, Forlizzi, Evenson 2007), particularly where prototyping future interactions is concerned.

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Through joint conceiving and prototyping designers and users (Ackerman et al. 2008) aim to change existing circumstances; ethnographers typically focus on what is (Grudin & Grinter 1994). Among others, Crabtree (2004 and see Dourish & Button 1998) have suggested that ethnomethodology In the Lab or Studio settings individuals engage with prototypes and the results of these engagements can be studied using ethnomethodological (and ethnographic) approaches (Martin et al. 2004). It is likely that a combination of both approaches will continue to play a role in interaction design as suggested by recent work in this area (Randall et al. 2007)

The discussion of these issues has taken a new technological turn with the development of smart phone and web- based tools for conducting ethnographic and related fieldwork for design and related fields (e.g. Hein, O’Donohoe & Ryan. 2011). These tools introduce new efficiencies, possibilities and challenges to interaction design particularly in service, community and organizational settings. Two of these applications Service Fellow (<http://www.myservicefellow.com/>) and (principally) Ethosapp (<https://www.ethosapp.com/>) are demonstrated in this workshop.

DESCRIPTION AND GOALS

This workshop invites papers and discussion on the following topics. Three preliminary readings on design ethnography, ethnomethodology and digital ethnography in design will be made available on request to the author.

- The role of ethnography and ethnomethodology in (interaction) design
- The challenges and possibilities of smartphone ethnography

Through demonstration, discussion and position papers we will aim to address the theoretical and methodological questions noted above. Individuals enrolling for the workshop may present a position paper or take part in discussions. Future applications and directions will also be outlined. Submission Deadline for position papers to the author is 30 September.

PRELIMINARY SCHEDULE

The following is the proposed schedule of workshop

1. Short introduction to workshop focus
2. Introduction to new applications
3. Presentation of position papers on the topic
4. Discussion of presentations / position papers

5. Themes identified & collated with view to publication

It is hoped at the beginning of the workshop to be able to spend at least a half hour looking at the apps and conducting small exercises. The workshop leader will also introduce the topic focus on the basis of the readings and also recent experience in the area. Then position papers will follow with discussions per paper and notetaking of key issues. The round up will allow participants to look at the issues raised; discuss new developments and potential avenues of publication and research.

SUBMISSIONS AND PARTICIPANTS

We invite submissions that address the two topics and that are likely to stimulate discussion. A website for uploading papers and collecting pre-readings will be made available:

OUTCOMES

We hope to achieve the following:

- Further clarify the relative contributions of ethnography and ethnomethodology for interaction design
- Introduce new smart-phone applications and inspire new developments
- Create a network of interested researchers and practitioners in this area

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