

Chapter 2.11

A Practitioner–Centred Assessment of a User–Experience Framework

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ABSTRACT

In this article we outline a relational approach to experience which we have used to develop a practitioner-oriented framework for analysing user experience. The framework depicts experience as compositional, emotional, spatio-temporal, and sensual, and as intimately bound up with a number of processes that allow us to make sense of experience. It was developed and assessed as part of a participative action research project involving interested practitioners. We report how these practitioners used the framework, what aspects of experience they felt that it missed, and how useful they found it as a tool for evaluating Internet shopping experiences. A thematic content analysis of participants' reflections on their use of the frame-

work to evaluate Internet shopping experiences revealed some strengths and some weaknesses. For example, certain features of the framework led participants to reflect on aspects of experience that they might not otherwise have considered, such as, the central role of anticipation in experience. The framework also captured aspects of experience that relate to both the sequential structure of the activity and its subjective aspects. However, it seemed to miss out on the intensity of some experiences, and participants sometimes found it difficult to distinguish between some of the sense-making processes, for example, interpreting and reflecting. These results have helped to refine our approach to deploying the framework and have inspired an ongoing programme of research on experience-centred design.

INTRODUCTION

As computers migrate from work to leisure and family life, new perspectives and conceptual tools are required to understand human activity and the participation of technologies in activity. Developments such as the World Wide Web, virtual reality, and cyberspace; the penetration of computers into homes, cars, and games; and the integration of information and communications technologies resulting in wireless, mobile, and ubiquitous computing suggest a revision of how we construe both people and technology. A person's attachment to the mobile phone is not just functional, it is also aesthetic (Katz & Aakhus, 2002; Taylor & Harper, 2002), and their use of the Internet is as much an expression of their sociality as it is a mark of their productivity (Markham, 1998; Turkle, 1995). Interacting with computers is now as much about play, fun, entertainment, community, and personal identity as it is about goals, tasks, and work. It is as much about children playing with cyberpets, teenagers gender swapping, and elderly people socialising on the Net, as it is about the middle-aged executive managing knowledge assets (Jordan, 2000; Blythe, Monk, Overbeeke, & Wright, 2003; Norman, 2004). As Kuutti (2001) characterised it, the user, who started out in the 1970s as a cog in a rational machine and became a social actor in the 1990s, is now a consumer.

The transition that Kuutti described points to the fact that people need to be able to *live* with emerging technologies, not just *use* them. Therefore the focus for designers has to move beyond usability to *experience*. The general impact of an emphasis on experience with technology can be seen in the popularity of works such as Turkle's (1995) analysis of "life on the Internet," in which she explored the social meaning of computers, the cultures of computing, and the impact of the Internet on our sense of self. The specific impact can be seen in attempts to understand and act

on the concept of *user experience* in consumer arenas such as electronic commerce (for example, see Pu & Faltings, 2000; Lee, Kim, & Moon, 2000). However, while the notion of designing for 'user experience' is gaining currency (Garrett, 2002; Laurel, 1991; Shedroff, 2001), conceptual development of user experience is only beginning (Dourish, 2001; McCarthy & Wright, 2004).

Our contribution to the conceptual development of user experience in this article is to report an action research assessment of the use of a framework for analysing user experience (Wright & McCarthy, 2003). The aim of the assessment is to explore whether the practitioners who collaborated with us in this research can make use of the framework and, if so, to identify what they gain from its use. It is hoped that their experience with the framework will inform and refine our understanding of user experience and of the framework. Before we report the assessment, we will first outline our general approach to experience and then briefly describe the framework.

CONCEPTUALISING EXPERIENCE

Although it is clear that the turn to experience in technology design reflects an attempt to engage with the experience of people using technology, the concept 'experience' is elusive and difficult to specify. In dictionaries (see the *Oxford English Dictionary*, for example) and in social scientific discourse, experience has often been defined and used in ways that reduce it to subjective feelings, behaviour, or knowledge (Dewey, 1925, 1934; Bruner & Turner, 1986). In contrast, Dewey's (1925, 1934) pragmatist philosophy was geared towards a clarification that would end the tendency to reduce experience. He argued that experience is the irreducible totality of people acting, sensing, thinking, feeling, and meaning-making in a setting, including their perception and sensation of their own actions. Experience, he wrote:

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