Interaction in the Public: Aesthetics, Social Acceptability, and Social Context

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Even in moments considered private, others often witness how we interact with technology. A typical example is smartphone use at home, in the presence of family members. This of course becomes even more likely in public - on streets, in libraries, or in the supermarket, places full of other people. The social context brings challenges and opportunities. When designing interaction, we often primarily focus on what users experience, like, and accept. Less do we explicitly consider what present others may think or feel about this interaction, and how it relates to their own current activities. This requires a deeper understanding of social context and frugal but sufficiently rich context descriptions. In turn, considering present others allows us to learn about what types of interaction are acceptable or even aesthetic in what types of context. In this workshop, we want to collaboratively explore the largely untouched questions of positive interaction from the perspective of others, and to work out ways in which these could improve the design process.

CCS Concepts: • **Human-centered computing → HCI theory, concepts and models**.

Additional Key Words and Phrases: social context, social acceptability, interaction, aesthetics of interaction

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1 MOTIVATION

Not only physical, but especially social context shapes the way people experience and interact with technology. For example, imagine receiving a phone call. Certainly, libraries are not the most appropriate setting for an extended call with a dear friend, since it would likely disturb other people's reading. A tram may already be less problematic. While some may be annoyed, other passengers may enjoy eavesdropping into private conversation once in a while (e.g., [3]). Finally, being alone in a car seems like a situation that is ideal for a phone call. When contrasting these three settings, we can see that a similar occasion to interact may play out quite differently - from an at best hushed "call you later", to a public performance, and finally a largely unimpeded conversation. These are differences in what feels right to the users, which emerge from differences in social context.

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However, even this example primarily takes the perspective of the interactant. In this sense, a number of features of technology already support adaptation to different contexts, such as silent ringing, headsets, and many more. Technology is designed to be adapted to context based on what the users themselves imagine to be appropriate. Less is known about how others perceive and experience the interactions they happen to witness. While Human-Computer Interaction and Interaction Design (HCI&ID) may acknowledge the shaping role of social context, notions of experience, aesthetics, and acceptability are traditionally designed from the user's - not the observer's - perspective. This underplays a number of important aspects of interaction, such as the performative character of interaction per se, people's need to manage impression, and of course the many ways single interactions can hinder and facilitate each other [7]. As a consequence, HCI&ID should explicitly consider social context and the way others may experience an interaction already when designing technology.

Unfortunately, in HCI&ID social context is often seen primarily as a hurdle for technology transfer from the lab to the real world - and not so much as a resource for design. Accordingly, the social acceptability literature (e.g., [2, 6]) concerns itself with the question of "How can we create things that people actually use in the real world, without, for example, feeling ashamed?" The predominant approach, however, is to basically remove the interaction from the public by integrating it in inconspicuous accessories, or else by developing especially hidden or subtle forms of interaction [2, 5].

In this light, we believe that a more outgoing approach, which embraces the social as a resource, opens up a wider design space. While more expressive forms of interaction may cause friction in many social contexts, they can also be a necessary and desirable ingredient in the design of acceptable and aesthetic interactions with technology. Key to this is a reliable and generative, yet manageable concept of social context and a broader understanding of how different types of interaction (e.g., secretive, expressive) shape positivity in different situations. This also includes a meaningful understanding of different "categories" of others being present (e.g., passer-by, onlooker, or expectant).

2 GOALS

This workshop aims to bring together researchers and designers to jointly rethink how we conceptualize and use social context in interaction design. Extending the existing work on social acceptability, we seek to develop new approaches that understand social context not as a problem, but as a positive resource. While one goal is to develop a better general understanding of what makes interaction with technology positive from the perspective of both users and others, we also set out to make the outcomes of our workshop readily applicable for the specific contexts of the participants.

With this in mind, the workshop is going to be highly interactive. Participants will be provided with preparatory material ahead of the conference and asked to work through it with regards to their own context (think of cultural probes [1]). This will serve as the foundation for discussions during the workshop. At the conference, we start with an inspiring introductory impulse, but mainly work in small, interdisciplinary groups. If the outcomes of this collaboration are substantial enough, we plan to submit them to a conference or journal to be decided, together with interested participants.

3 CONTRIBUTIONS

We invite contributions that include an existing technology or design concept coupled with a certain target context. These can be part of an existing project or purely conceptual. We will provide a template to describe and characterize the technology and context, and ask for an additional motivational abstract. If the number of contributions exceeds our workshop capacity, we will select participants with maximized variation of contexts, form of interaction, purpose of the technology, and demographic groups in mind.

4 ORGANIZERS

Alarith Uhde is a doctoral student in the Ubiquitous Design / Experience & Interaction group of Prof. Marc Hassenzahl at Siegen University. His research interests include technology experiences in social contexts, technology-mediated social cooperation, and well-being-oriented design.

Stefan Tretter is a doctoral student in Economic and Organizational Psychology in the research group of Prof. Sarah Diefenbach at LMU Munich. His research interests include public user interactions, communication technologies, and social decision-making.

Pia von Terzi is a doctoral student in Economic and Organizational Psychology in the research group of Prof. Sarah Diefenbach at LMU Munich. Her research interests include the role of social context in Human-Computer Interaction, and technology experiences in public space.

Marion Koelle is a post-doctoral researcher in Human-Computer Interaction at Saarland University. She completed her PhD on 'Designing Socially Acceptable Body-worn Cameras' in 2019. More recently, she expanded her research focus towards the design and fabrication of on-skin interfaces and their wearability in diverse social contexts.

Sarah Diefenbach is professor for market and consumer psychology at the LMU Munich with a focus on the field of interactive technology. Her research group explores design factors and relevant psychological mechanisms in the context of technology usage in different fields, e.g., social media, digital collaboration, companion technologies, social robots...

Marc Hassenzahl is Professor for Ubiquitous Design / Experience & Interaction at Siegen University. With his group of designers and psychologists, he explores the theory and practice of designing pleasurable, meaningful, and transforming interactive technologies.

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