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COMM ST 351
HW 3: Contextual Inquiry
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GENERAL DESCRIPTION

My participant is a third-year at Northwestern studying Learning Sciences in SESP. Beyond her academic interests, she is particularly passionate about photography and has been pursuing it as her hobby since high school. As a result, the activity she performed for the contextual inquiry was using Adobe Lightroom and Photoshop to edit her photographs. Since she was a self-proclaimed novice with the applications, this performance was relevant to my area of focus because I was interested in how users interacted with technological systems, especially ones that were more new to them to see how they adapted the system to their needs.

Specifically, my participant was using Adobe Lightroom to edit the lighting and color in a photograph from her previous photoshoot. This entails engaging with the various settings and abilities within the application. After the initial touch ups on Lightroom, my participant would use Adobe Photoshop to add any further touches or extra manipulation (i.e. background replacement, subject selection) to finalize her photograph for her portfolio or photography Instagram account. Since she does not see herself as a formal photographer, her editing philosophy is to create something that she thinks looks good or interesting. As a result, her main goal was mostly to edit the photo to look more engaging and more up to par in her eyes.

My participant has been engaging with Lightroom for a little under a year so far and has recently picked up Photoshop last month (as a result, much of the CI consisted of her interaction with Lightroom to represent her real activity). Nonetheless, she engages in this activity at least twice a week to improve upon her skills with both interfaces.

To give a quick glimpse of my participant's process, she will be going through the various settings available on Lightroom in order to adjust color and lighting and more detailed spot treatments on a selected photograph. Once the process in Lightroom is completed, she will take the photograph into Photoshop for more detailed manipulation, which in this case was to select the subject out of the photograph and add a new background. When she is satisfied with her work, she will consider the edited photograph ready to be published.

PROCESS

At the simplest level, my participant's major goal was to edit a photograph with enhanced color, lighting, and treatment. Nonetheless, as the process went on, smaller goals seemed to become more apparent.

Before the CI started, my participant had already uploaded photographs onto her laptop and uploaded into the Lightroom application. She already selected a few portrait photos of her sister from the same photoshoot to be edited. After selecting one photo to focus on, her first step was to crop the phot to improve upon the photograph's composition. This entailed using the rule of thirds method, so her subject would be in the intersecting lines of the available frame. She pulled in the corners of the frame and rearranged the frame based on her liking. This completed her first minor goal of improving the composition of the photograph.

Then, she moved onto her next goal of improving the basic color and lighting of the photograph. On her Lightroom interface, the Basic menu is the first section of the larger Edit tab; as a result, she mentioned it was easy to know where to begin. She adjusted the various slider menus for each of the values, which includes “Exposure,” “Contrast,” and “Highlights” to name a few. There is no exact method when changing the values; my participant simply scrolls through the slider tabs and determines what is enough based on what changes are reflected in the photo on the display.

Next, my participant focused on more detailed color correction. The next section of the Edit menu provides various RGB hues and allows the user to increase or decrease the saturation of those hues in the photo. Since the photo she was editing was a portrait, she wanted to add more interest to the white background by adding color through this process. As mentioned before, she doesn’t have much of a formal way of going through her editing process, so she selected the hues one by one and increased/decreased the sliders as she went through each color. Based on how the changes affected the original photograph on the display, she would make adjustments if necessary until she felt satisfied with the result.

As this was a portrait, she moved on to her next goal of covering up blemishes on her subject’s face and skin. However, before this, she quickly scanned the remaining sections of the Edit menu and adjusted the “Sharpen” effect. Values like textures were disregarded since this was a portrait that required more detailed spot treatment with the brush feature. Following, she scrolled to the top of the Edit menu to begin the spot treatment process. The adjustment brush that she started the spot treatment process with requires the user to select a different part of the skin that you want to cover the area you initially selected. Due to this feature, there are two circles that show up after you press on an area of skin. Therefore, she had to take some time to adjust the second circles to ensure she could cover blemishes with an area of the skin that would make it seem most natural. In addition, she used the soft brush for blemishes particularly difficult to cover with the adjustment brush and softened the overall skin of her subject.

After looking at the before & after and evaluating the photo, my participant then determined the general photo was edited enough and could be moved to Photoshop for background manipulation. She sent the photo to Photoshop from Lightroom by selecting “Edit in Photoshop” in the “File” dropdown menu. Nonetheless, my participant isn’t too well-versed in Photoshop, so she only uses the software for changing the background, selecting the subject or adding text to the photograph.

For the contextual integrity, once the photograph was received by Photoshop, my participant selected the subject by choosing the “Subject” option in the “Select” menu. Then, she masked the subject’s selection by creating a layer mask to separate the subject with the original background of the photo. She added in a default pattern layer and matched the lighting settings with the available function. However, she realized she liked the photo without the background manipulation, so simply exported the photo with the edits from Lightroom and sent it over to her phone through Airdrop to get ready for upload on her Instagram.

INTENT: Choose picture to edit

TRIGGER: Upload photos from printouts to PC

Open Lightroom application from

Click "Upload" button

Choose preferences from PC to upload into Lightroom

Click "Upload" after selection to finish import

Select photo from downbar to begin editing

INTENT: Edit photo to improve basic color adjustments & lighting

Scroll editing menu to "Basic" section

Adjust sliders for each value based on your liking

INTENT: Edit photo for more detailed color correction

Scroll editing menu to "Color mixer" section

Select red hue & begin adjusting sliders

Repeat through all the hues

Optimize Check through subsequent effects but not for portraits

INTENT: Make photo extra sharper as per participant's personal style

Scroll to "Details" section

Adjust "Sharpening" slider

INTENT: Perform spot treatment on photograph's subject

Scroll "Edit" menu back to top to top bar of brushes

Select adjustment brush

Press on blemishes on skin

Coordinate second circle to area of skin to replace selected spot

Select healing brush

Press on blemishes

Shade through overall fix to creation

INTENT: Edit in Photoshop

Go up to topbar of laptop

Select "File"


Choose "Edit in Photoshop"

Choose "Make a copy" in pop up window

INTENT: Change background of photograph

Select "Select" in Photoshop's topbar

Choose "Subject"

Mark selection by pressing  icon

Add new fill layer > Pattern

Choose pattern of choice

INTENT: Make editing more natural

Match settings by clicking Image > Adjustments

Match color by choosing B&W in image dropdown

INTENT: Export photograph for upload

Press Command E for export

Save to Desktop

Transfer to phone

Ready for upload

OPPORTUNITIES

Based on the contextual inquiry, I was able to identify some areas of improvement for the design to better support my participant. First, I recognized that my participant often had trouble remembering which photograph she was working on when she switched over to different applications or stepped out of the editing window to look at other photos in her library. The Lightroom interface is designed so that the photos in the user's chosen album is organized at the bottom of the screen. This allows the user to choose which photo they want in their active display, but as exemplified by my participant's CI, the active display is reloaded when you click out of the display. When asked about this, my participant mentioned that she did not recognize this beforehand because she mainly sticks to the interface until she finishes her editing process. However, I think she was also unaware of how often she asked, "Which was the photo I was editing again?" Perhaps this could be alleviated by having a symbol that has the photo most previously edited more obvious with a pop-up effect, for instance that photo could be filled in with a different color in the bottom bar.

Furthermore, my participant mentioned that she used a phone application to do her photo editing before moving to Lightroom and Photoshop. When she mentioned that some of the adjustment features available on Lightroom were not relevant to portrait photos, I asked if she thought she could benefit if the application would ask if it was a portrait with a subject or landscape photo and adjust the features for the chosen option. That was when she confirmed she felt it would streamline the editing process because the phone application she used previously would ask her to specify what type of photo it was. By asking the user to specify what type of photo it is and adjusting the features in the Edit menu, it would decrease the text and icons in the menu, simplifying an already complicated interface as described by my participant.

Another point of confusion from my participant seemed to be the brush function. First, the brushes are organized to fill up only a single line of the menu and not a sub-menu of the "Entire" menu. Not only is the appearance of the brush menu different but the way to expand the menu is also different (compared to the carrot arrow of the other feature menus). In addition, to use another brush, you continuously have to select "New Brush" and "Edit Brush." If you press "Edit Brush," all the areas you went over with the initial brush will be transformed to reflect the strokes of the new brush. Just as it is difficult to convey in words, my participant confirmed that it was not intuitive for her to understand at first, especially since the (pointer) cursor also did not change to (a hand cursor) show that it was possible to click "New Brush." This issue can be resolved by rewriting "New Brush" to say "Change Brush," as the word new is commonly used in the context that you want to create a whole new brush from scratch. Another easy fix would be to have the cursor change and make it extremely clear that both options are clickable.

Surprises

During the second half of the CI when my participant worked with Photoshop, I thought my participant would want all the icons to be displayed on Photoshop's interface and be more detailed with text descriptions since she stated it was too difficult to know what did what.

Nonetheless, my participant said that she did not think that was necessary at all. She admitted that her confusion mostly derived from her lack of expertise in the application. She understood that there is just so much you can do in Photoshop that the way the interface is laid out right now was probably the best way to balance the possibilities with usability. That made me consider that no matter how much detail you add, it may backfire and not actually be useful for the user.

I also was surprised that even after using both Photoshop and Lightroom, my participant added finishing touches to her photograph with the phone application she had mentioned multiple times in the CI. The two applications are industry-grade and more functions are available compared to the phone application (as she went over with me). However, I think it demonstrates that people stick with the applications they feel the most comfortable with and most experience with. Perhaps if I were to pursue this, I would have to think about how to reflect the phone application when improving the design of the other two applications.

Impressions

Overall, I really enjoyed the contextual integrity process because it seemed very familiar with the interviews I've had to do for journalism. Nonetheless, I remember from the readings that the CI is supposed to be extremely detailed and dive really deep, so that feeling of familiarity made me contemplate if I was doing the CI correctly.

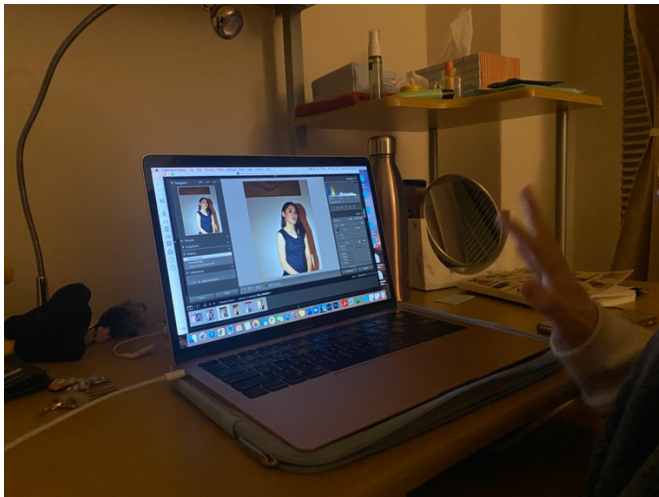
I also kept looking back on the readings and lecture to make sure I was following all the steps and using correct phrasing. This slowed down the interview process a bit, but I think that it because it was my first time and expect that it would get better with experience.

Other than this challenge of trying to make sure I was on track, I also found it difficult to constantly having to monitor my language but also the participant's language as well. I'm normally quite a fast talker, so I slowed down a lot in order to not sway my participant to agree with my observations. Also, I realized that my participant would use generalizations like "always" and "usually," so I had to figure out quickly how to get my participant to give counterexamples and stray away from these generalizations

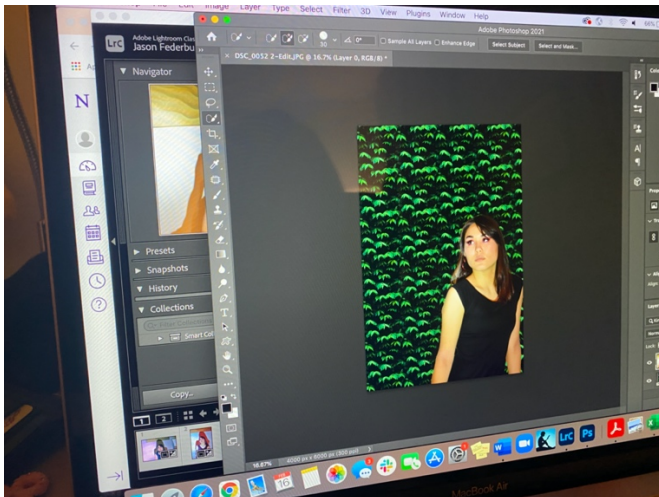
ARTIFACTS



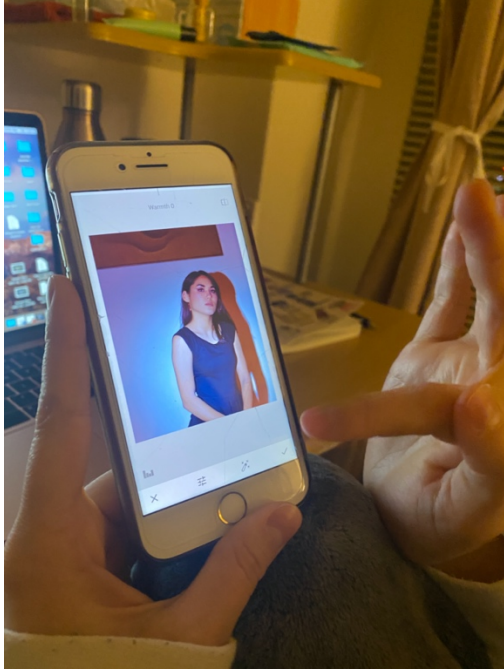
WORKSPACE



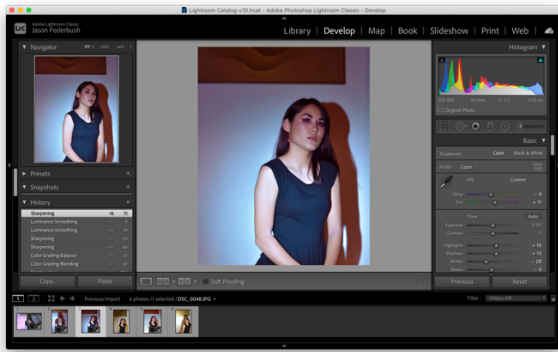
The photo being edited on Lightroom



Using Photoshop



Using the phone application for more edits



Before & After Screenshots