

Persona Driven Collaborative Storytelling (PDCS)

TOCHI'26, CHI'26 (in review)

Shweta K. Sisodiya
sksisodi@ucsc.edu | sksisodi.github.io

Say hello to our team !!



Shweta Sisodiya

Phd Candidate at UCSC

Project Lead

Designed and Conceptualize the study technique

Executed the study

Data Collection & Analysis



Shivam Shukla

HCI Master Student at UCSC

Executing Studies, Data Collection & Analysis



Saurabh Gotherwal

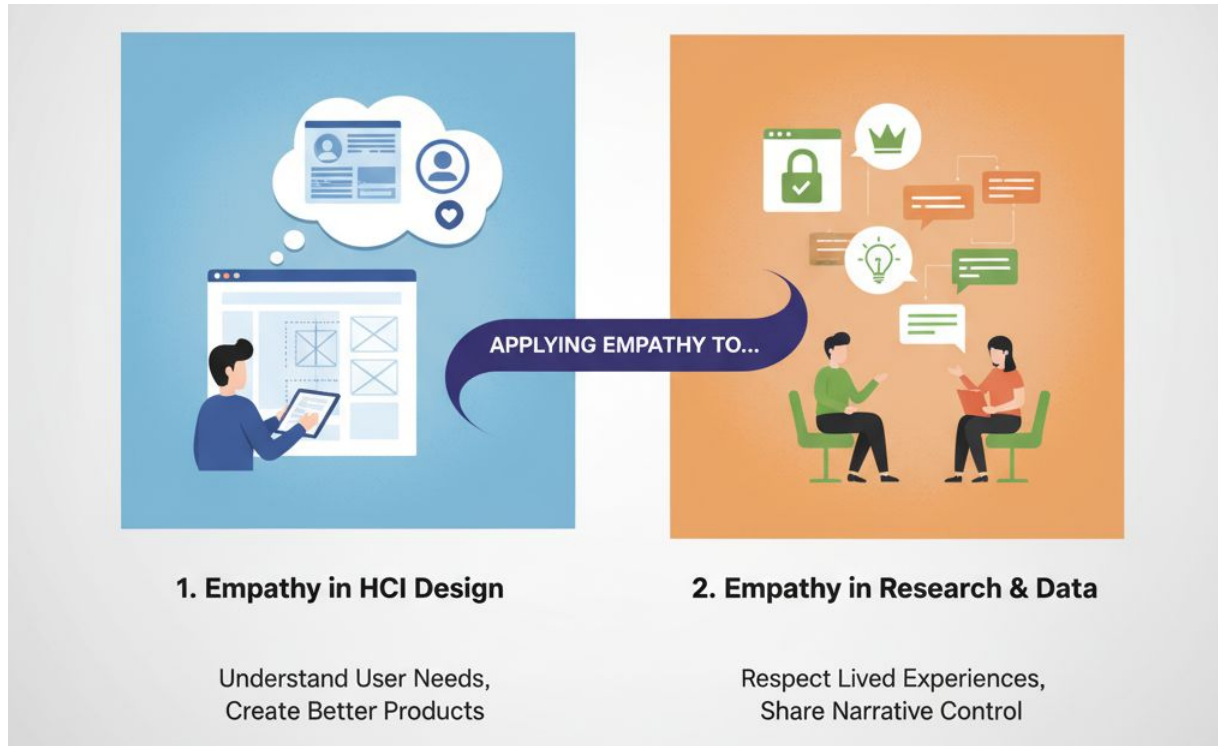
Software Developer II at Amazon
Study Planning & Data Analysis



Dr. Elin Carstensdottir

Asst. Professor at UCSC
Principle Investigator

Beyond Design: Empathy in Methodology



Imagine you're a researcher conducting interviews with international students to understand the challenges they face in the host country and the resulting negative consequences. In response to your questions, you might receive replies such as

Interview Respondent 2 (IR2):

“Language is a huge barrier for me. People sometimes make fun of my accent. I try my best to speak clearly, but I often feel self-conscious, especially when speaking in front of Americans, giving a presentation, or during an interview.”

Informal Conversation 2 (IC2) :

“Ever since I moved to the United States, I've felt that people don't always understand me. Back in India, no one ever questioned my English. I scored 322 on the GRE and 108 on the TOEFL, so I thought I was fully prepared. But here, it feels different. I struggle every day with small talk and casual greetings, and I often find myself second-guessing how much to share when to say 'how are you,' or how to end a conversation without sounding abrupt. It's as if speaking English in India is somehow different from speaking English in the United States. Also, I know I have a slight accent, but beyond that, there's so much I don't understand about how language is used socially here. I recently even failed miserably in an interview. I felt frustrated and a little defeated. Recently, I started experimenting with large language models by recording myself and using them for feedback. To my surprise, LLMs are really good at this. It (LLMs) even suggested phonetic exercises to help me improve specific sounds and simulated small talk so I could practice everyday conversations. I'm not sure yet how much it has helped, but I do sense some changes and feel more confident. I have a big presentation coming up, and I think that will show me whether it's really working or not.”

What are these slides about

Persona Driven Collaborative Storytelling a novel HCI user research method designed to create a supportive and playful environment that affords *safety*, *autonomy*, *authenticity*, and *authority* over meaning-making.

In the following slides:

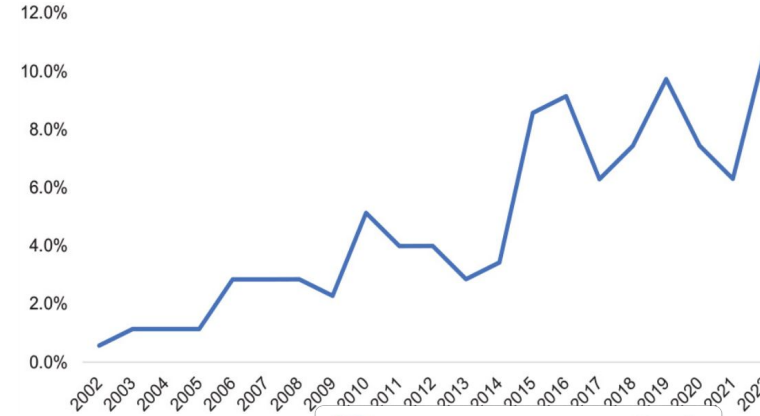
- Why this method was need?
- What is this method ?
- What problem is solve?
- Present two case studies as execution.

Lets being with the problem

Millions of students cross borders for education every year, yet their reality is a sharp contrast to the idealized image we portray.

Despite a surge in recent research and support efforts, the core challenges for international students remain essentially unchanged.

Increased attention has not translated into improved outcomes; we are studying a persistent problem without resolving it.



ie Institute of International Education... [Follow](#)
@IIEGlobal

By 2030, more than 10 million internationally mobile students will cross borders to pursue [#higherEd](#).

As top destination countries near capacity to host international students, the U.S. is well-positioned to take advantage of the increased demand.

More bit.ly/44nmQrd

In 2023, international students comprised just **6 percent** of all U.S. higher education enrollment.

UNITED STATES

International Students: **1,057,188**
Total # of Institutions: **3,834**



UNITED KINGDOM

International Students: **633,910**
Total # of Institutions: **169**



CANADA

International Students: **660,230**
Total # of Institutions: **249**



AUSTRALIA

International Students: **361,247**
Total # of Institutions: **190**



INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

International students in the United States contribute tens of billions of dollars to the U.S. economy every year and support a significant number of U.S. jobs through their tuition payments and day-to-day spending. Research has also found that increases in the number of international students at American universities boost innovation and patent creation.

1,126,690

Students at U.S. colleges and universities who are international students

\$43.8B

Economic contribution of international students

378,175

Jobs supported by international students



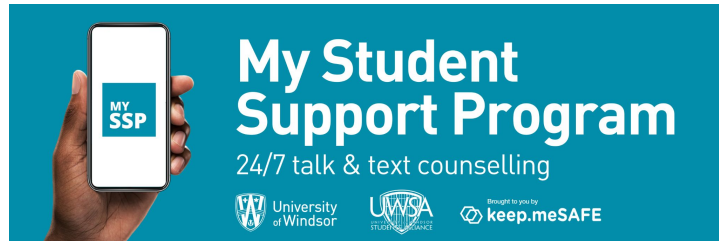
Marco Bouwer @marcobouwer · 2/16/25

As int'l **student** mobility grows to 10M+ by 2030, how will universities adapt to **international student** needs? With **Indian & Chinese students** leading the charge, what strategies should US institutions employ to ensure cultural, linguistic, & academic support? [#IntlEd](#) [#HigherEd](#)?

Writing Programs

Orientation Programs

Counseling Programs



My Student Support Program
24/7 talk & text counselling

University of Windsor UWSA
Brought to you by keep.meSAFE

A hand holding a smartphone with the "MY SSP" app icon is shown on the left. The background is a solid teal color.

Yet the core challenges seems to remain unchanged . Raises a critical question why are we failing here?

Been in the US as an international student for less than two months and I think I'm miserable here.

This time last year I was gearing up towards applying to all those universities and finishing my Master's thesis and the adrenaline of applications and admissions was just wonderful. I got accepted into 3/6 programs I applied to and celebrated and accepted an offer. I'm at one of the top 10 universities in the world, not just the US. Yet I am miserable.

I (29F) moved here all alone. I'm single. My cohort is made up of other international students, but most of them either moved here with partners or have partners at home who'll join them. I knew this would be lonely, but expecting things vs living them are two different things. My campus is HUGE yet disconnected from the outer world. I can't go anywhere without driving, and I can't drive yet bc I'm on an F-1 visa and I need to get an SSN before doing a lot of things here.

My first month was pretty awesome. I attended so many orientation events, met cool people, was super energetic and excited. Then my courses started and the INSANE workload knocked me down. I was already behind from week one. Somehow us in the Humanities at this university have the most number of required credits and it's an insane amount of reading. My institution has a buttload of money yet they are being extremely tight and it's pretty tough to ask for

- Misalignment between the design and lived realities
- Homogenization of students
- flattening cultural and individual differences
- homogenize diverse experiences
- embedding of dominant cultural norms
- invisibilization of labor in design processes

← r/PhD • 7 mo. ago
[deleted]

Do any other international students feel like if their behavior is out of the norm, it's attributed to them being international/not from the US?

Vent

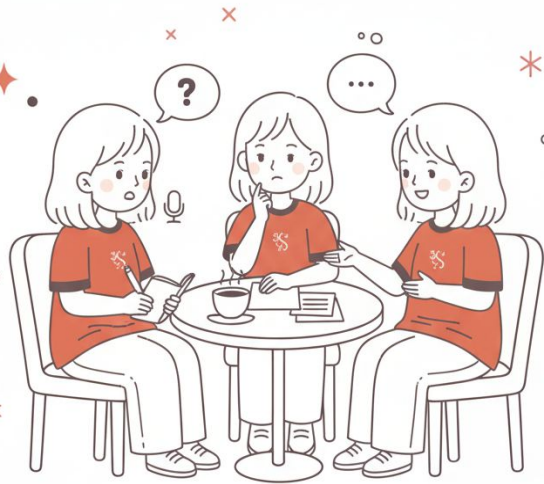
I've been living in the US for the past ~8 years, don't have an accent (had to work really hard at this) and follow social etiquette and norms. I've noticed a tendency in people to attribute any behavior that is out of the norm to my being international. While when other (domestic, white) students act out of the ordinary, I see no such assumptions. Anyone else feel the same way? Thanks!

33 16 Share

That presents a interesting case where we are arguing that technology needs to redesigned ..

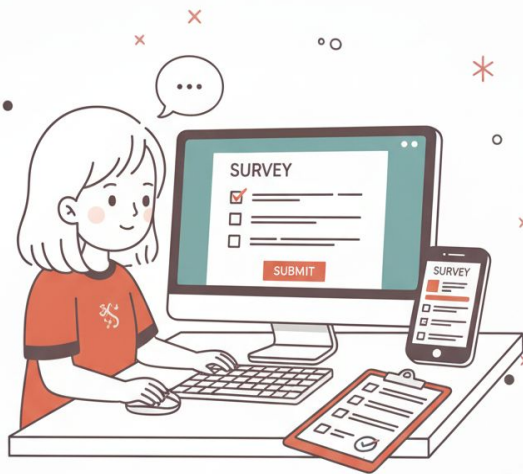
But where do we begin this is such complex space challenges are bound to exist because they are inherent to mobility.





FOCUS GROUP SESSION

ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDIES



SURVEYS

NARRATIVE INQUIRY



INTERVIEW SESSION

AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

So what are we missing then ?

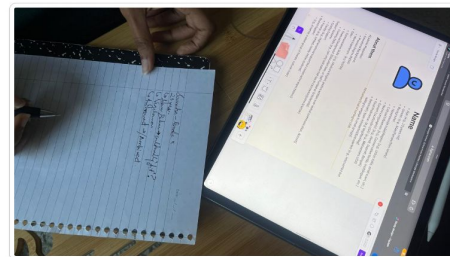
Autonomy

Authority

Authenticity



Hence, the Persona Driven Collaborative Storytelling....



(a)



(b)

Name

Age / Gender



Details

Age: e.g., 22 y.o.

Occupation: e.g., Graduate Student

Location: e.g., Silicon Valley

Personal Background

1. Hometown (in India)/Region: [e.g., Urban India, small town, etc.]
2. Cultural Influences: [e.g., Conservative family, multilingual, etc.]
3. Native Language(s): [e.g., Hindi, Gujarati, Bengali]
4. Personality type: Introverted/Extroverted: [e.g., Introverted but willing to engage in small groups]
5. Educational Background: [Previous Degree (INDIA)]
6. Work Experience: [e.g. Yes/No]
7. Communication Skills: [e.g., Mediocre English, prefers written over verbal communication, Accent]
8. Financial Background: [Education loan, or Self Funded or Scholarship]
9. Cooking Skills:
10. Existing Support:
11. Desired Support: [e.g., A mentor, A close group of friends, Cultural clubs]

(c)



Contributions

1. Designed, proposed and implemented a new experimental study HCI user research data collection techniques. Are calling it Persona Driven Collaborative Storytelling
2. Executed this techniques with 50+ Indian International Student across two case studies.
3. Resulted in Collection over 500+ structure personal narratives.

Case Studies

PDCS was executed for two separate studies with over 40 + Indian International Students.

Study1 :

Total participants : 15

Male : 7

Female : 8

Post Study Questionnaire: 6 LSQs

Objective: An open-ended investigation into broad challenges students face during their transition to the U.S.

Data Collection: Three sessions generated ~300 hours (about 5 hours) of audio recordings.

100 stories and 63 unique stories

Study2:

Total participants : 25

Male : 14

Female : 11

Post Study Questionnaire: 11 LSQs (Added some more question later on)

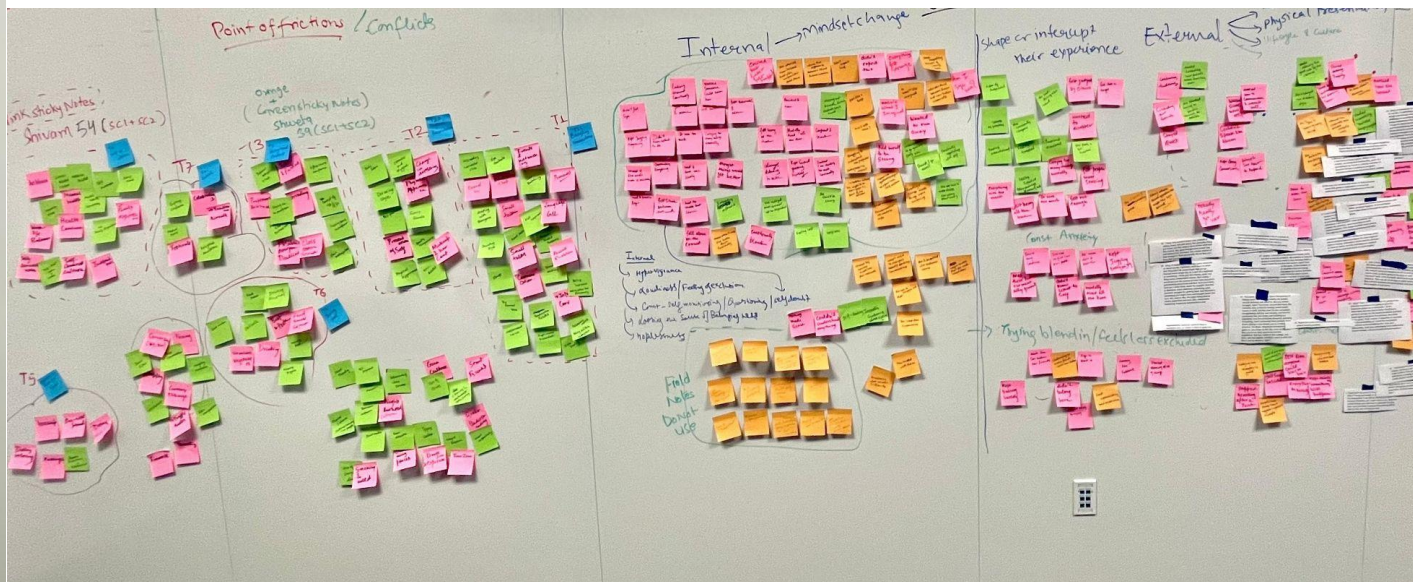
Objective: A focused investigation into how students repurpose technologies as coping strategies, particularly large language models (LLMs).

Data Collection: Five sessions yielded ~470 minutes (nearly 8 hours) of audio recordings.

258 stories and 123 unique stories

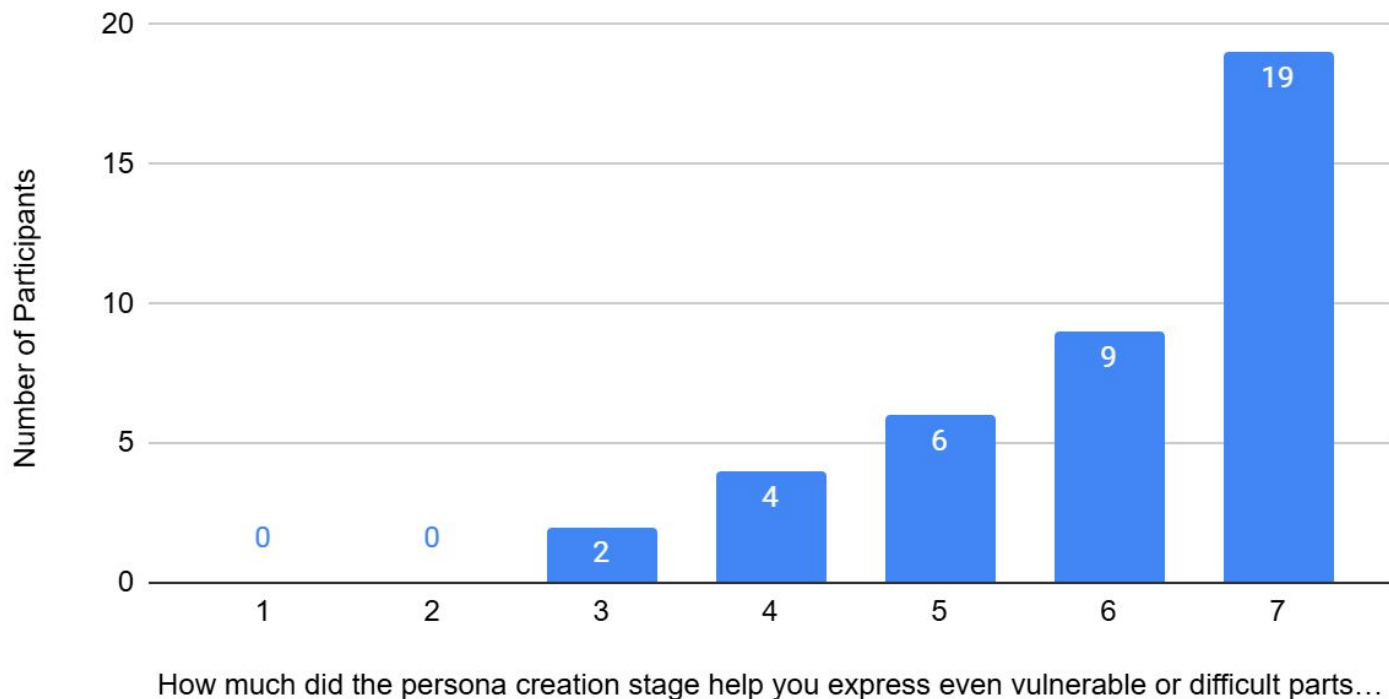
Shivam 54 (sc1+sc2)

Dating	Hobbies	Casual life	Random chat	Personal	Instagram
Family expectations	Time Zone	Drugs, Sex, experience	Unimpaired Vegetables	Jobs & Partners	Small Justice
Quarterly reading	Recent discussion	Pricing	Conversion (W/kin)	Street Food	Spending habits
Traveling	Language Groups	Currency exchange	Professors	Food, Small Super	Experiences in cities
Physical Appearance	Self-Confidence	Overrated items	Present action of self	Dating, Intercourse	Common Culture
Identity, money, career	Finance	Language	Festivals	Celebrations	Events, handmade things
Grading	Cover Culture	→ Nuptial	→ Tending	→ Informal	→ Small
hookups	One-night stand	→ Casual	→ Shopping	→ Best	→ Like
Marriage	→ Loveless	→ Self	→ Mental	→ Traffic	→ Health



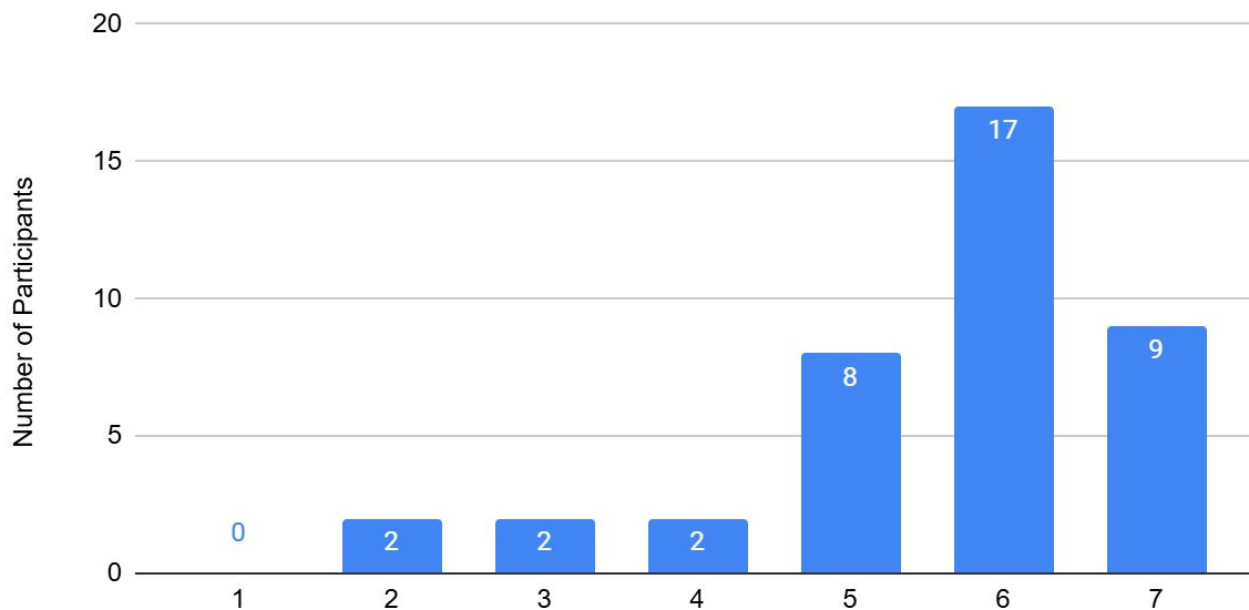
- 28 (70%) out of 40 participants rated it 6 or higher
- 34 (85%) out of 40 participants rated it 5 or higher

How much did the persona creation stage help you express even vulnerable or difficult parts of your experience?



- 26 (65%) out of 40 participants rated it 6 or higher
- 34 (85%) out of 40 participants rated it 5 or higher

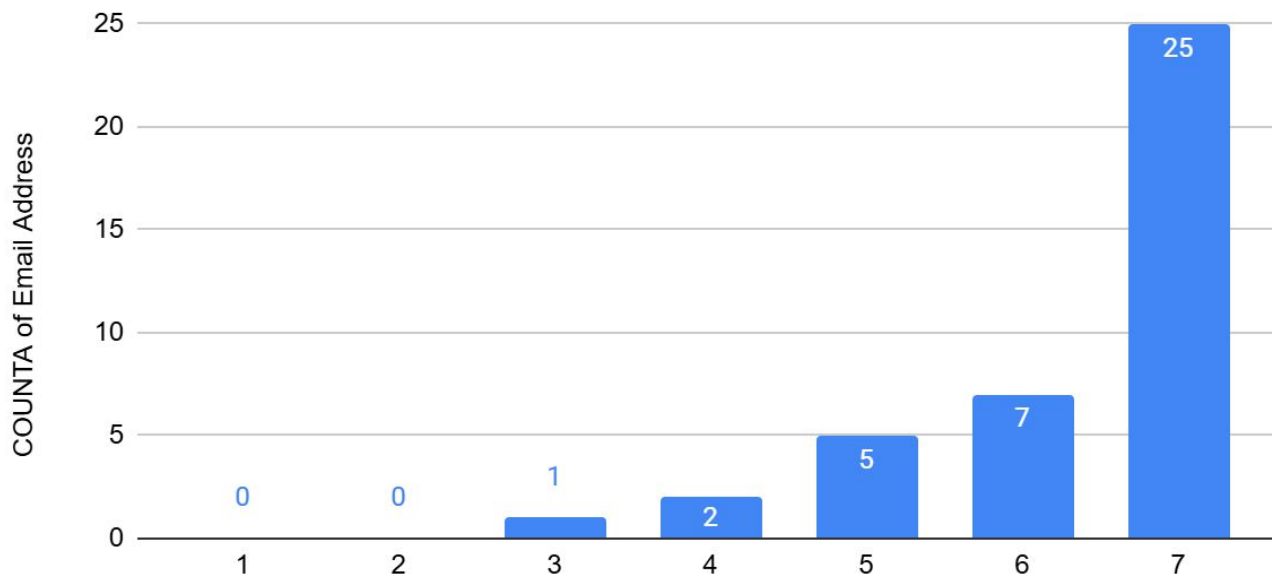
How much did you relate to the persona you created?



How much did you relate to the persona you created?

- 25 (62.5%) out of 40 participants rated it 7 or higher
- 32 (80%) out of 40 participants rated it 6 or higher
- 37 (92.5%) out of 40 participants rated it 5 or higher

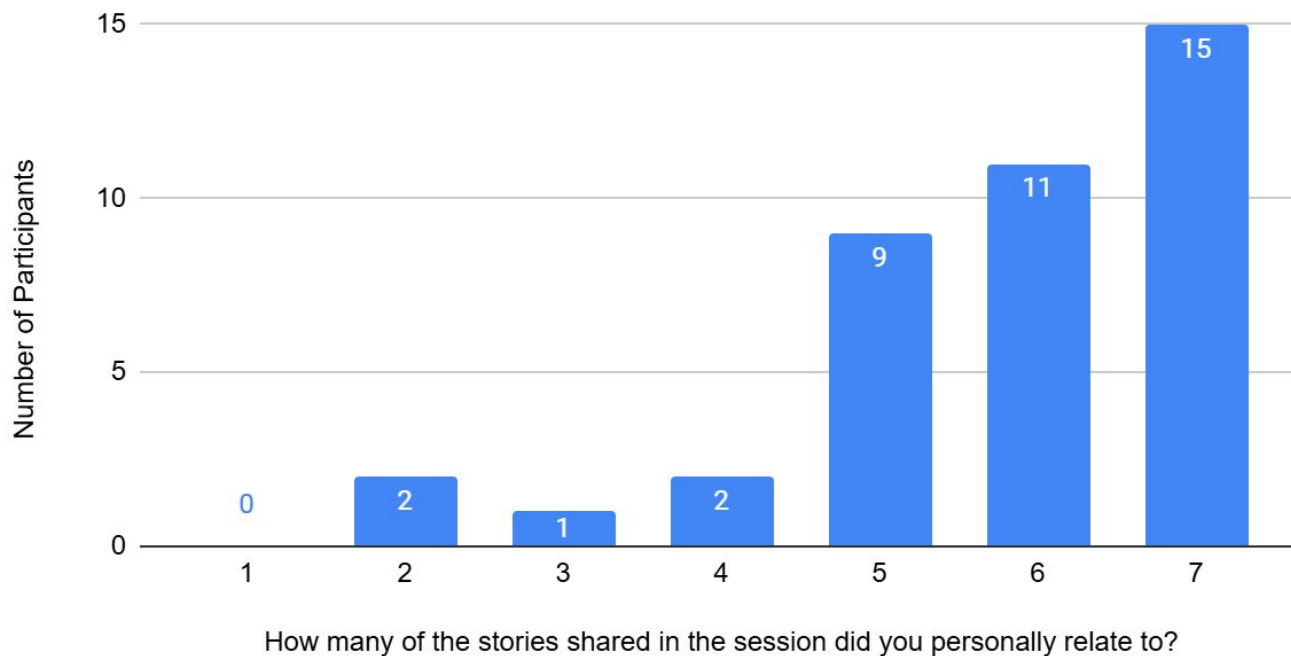
How much did creating a persona help you feel safe or comfortable in sharing your personal stories?



How much did creating a persona help you feel safe or comfortable in sharing your personal...

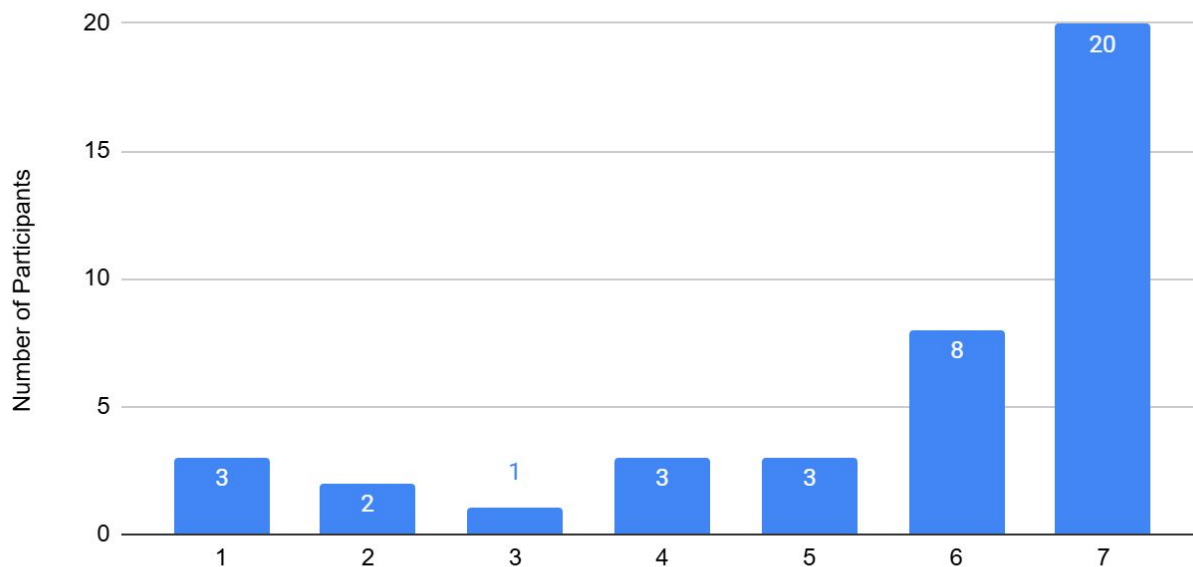
- 26(65%) out of 40 participants rated it 6 or higher
- 35(87.5%) out of 40 participants rated it 5 or higher

How much of the stories shared in the session did you personally relate to?



- 20 (50%) out of 40 participants rated it 7.
- 28 (70%) out of 40 participants rated it 6 or higher
- 31 (77.5%) out of 40 participants rated it 5 or higher

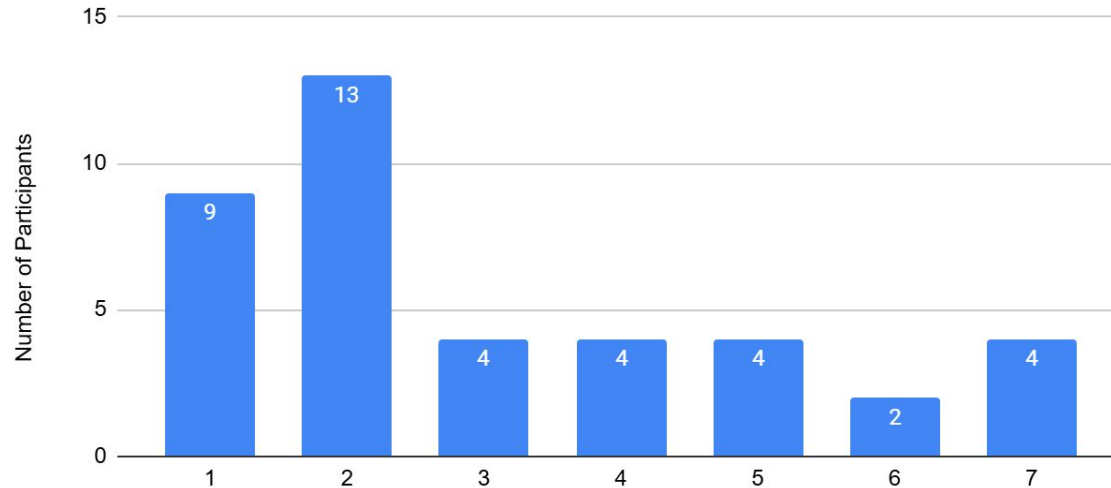
Please indicate how strongly you agree with the following statement: "I would have shared the same stories if I had to speak as myself instead of through a persona."



Please indicate how strongly you agree with the following statement:

- 22 (55%) out of 40 participants rated it 2 or lower
- 6 (15%) out of 40 participants rated it 6 or higher

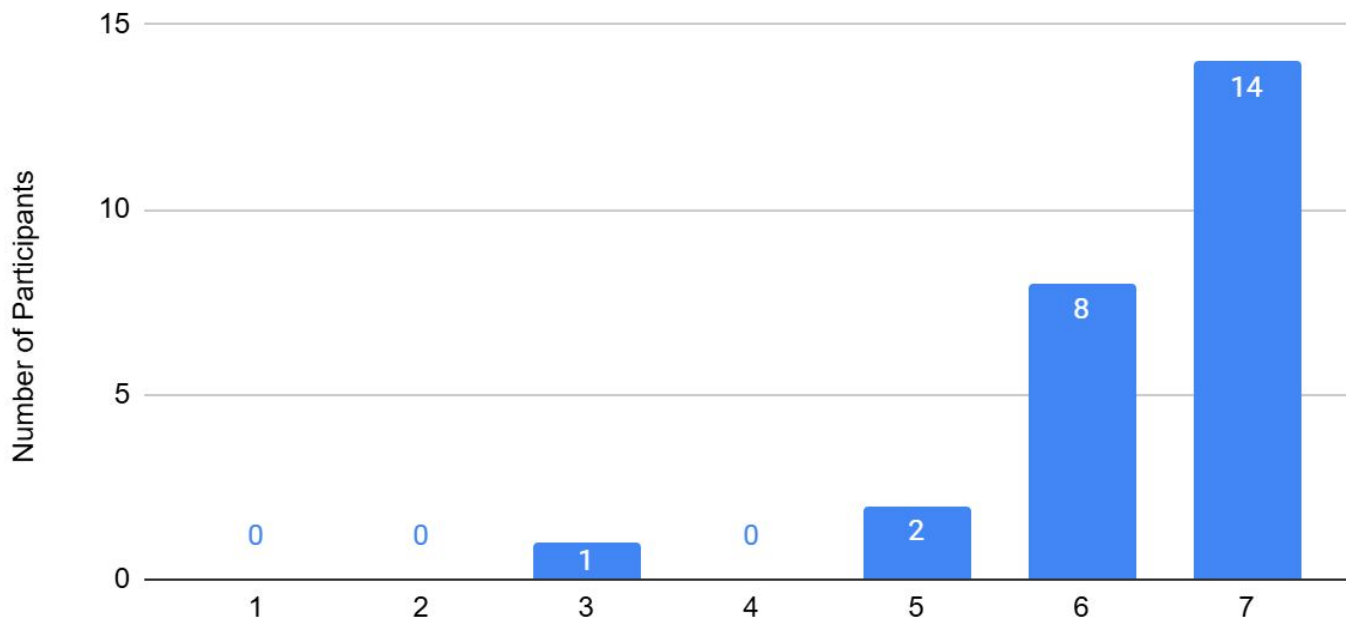
Please indicate how strongly you agree with the following statement: "At times, I still felt hesitant to share personal stories, even when using a persona."



Please indicate how strongly you agree with the following statement:

- 14 (56%) out of 25 participants rated it 7
- 22 (88%) out of 25 participants rated it 6 or higher
- 24 (96%) out of 25 participants rated it 5 or higher

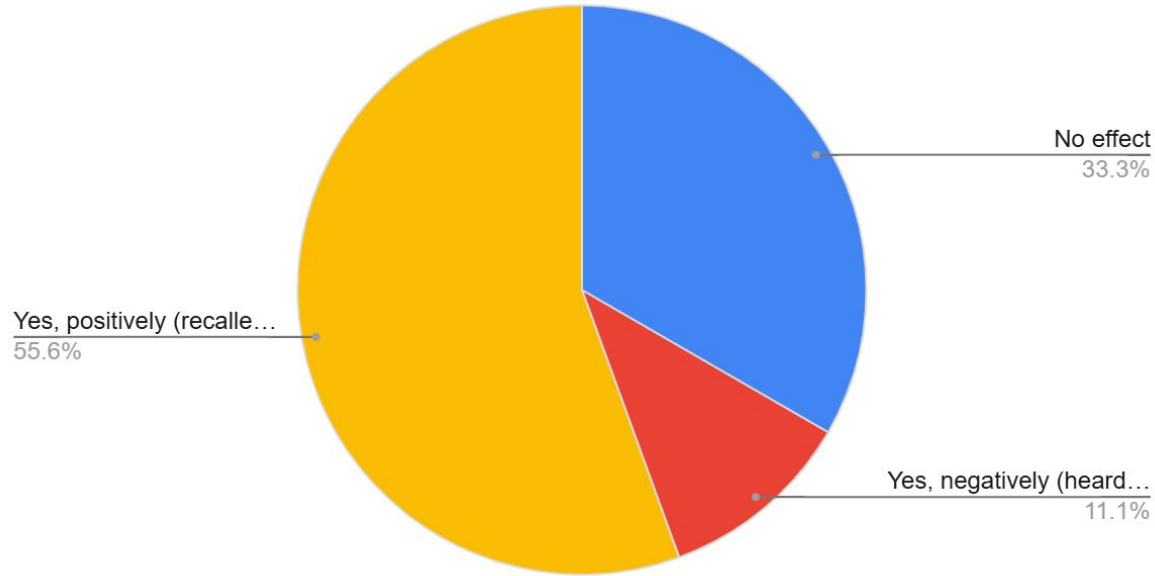
Compared to a surveys or interview, this session helped me recall more details about your experience as international student?



Compared to a surveys or interview, this session helped me recall more details about your ex...

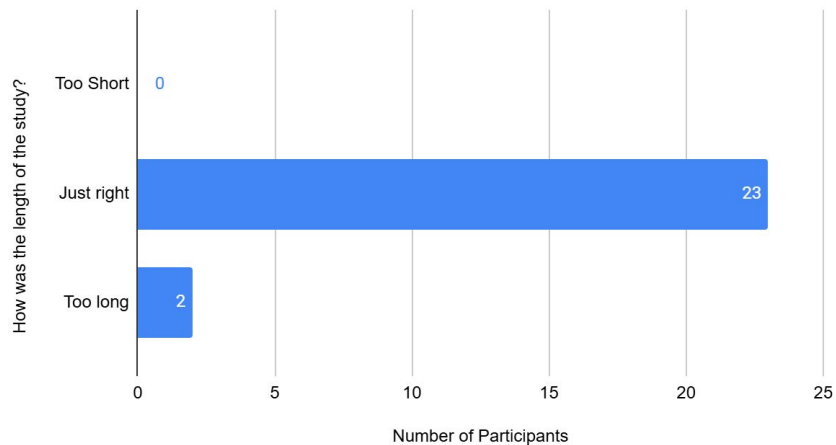
25 participants

Did hearing others' stories during the session influence your own responses?

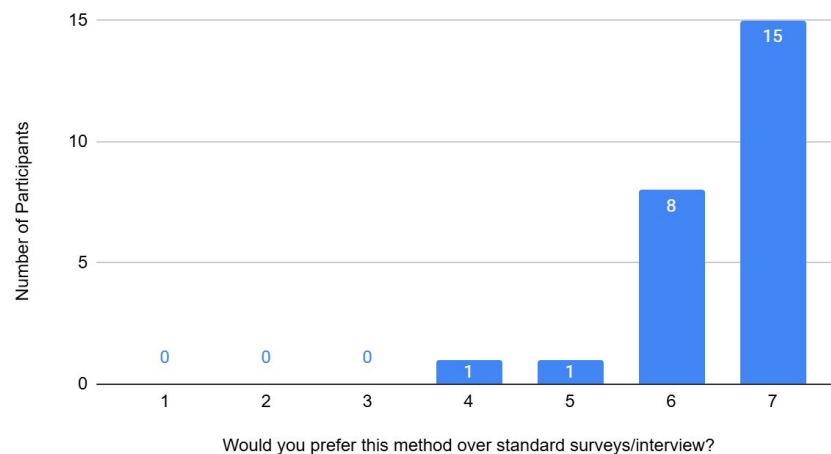


- 23 (92%) out of 25 participants felt the length of study was just right.
- 2 (<1%) out of 25 participants felt the length was too long
- 15 (60%) out of 25 participants rated it 7.
- 23(92%) out of 25 participants rated it 6 or higher

How was the length of the study?



Would you prefer this method over standard surveys/interview?





Scan For Portfolio

Shweta Sisodiya
Phd Candidate, UCSC
sksisodi@ucsc.edu



Scan For LinkedIn

