

Towards Participatory Design of Ambient Persuasive Technology

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1. Design Problem and Method

At my institution, the EcoCampus committee is charged with developing approaches to promote sustainable behavior on campus, specifically behaviors that will reduce the campus's net carbon emissions. Approaches that provide new opportunities, such as coordinating a campus rummage sale to reduce end-of-year trash disposal and start-of-year purchases, have met with great success. More direct approaches to persuade individuals to change their behavior—for example, posting pleas against food waste and reminders to turn off lights—have had less clear results, and even engendered some resentment.

I aim to engage this committee and others in participatory design of new persuasive technology aimed at changing these types of behaviors in ways that are more demonstrably effective, and engaging rather than annoying. Participatory design (or PD) is a family of theories and methods related to end users as full participants in the design process. Many, but not all, PD researchers and practitioners are motivated in part by a belief in the value of democracy in the design setting [12]. Participatory design is well-suited to this design context because my institution has a culture of active stakeholder involvement in decision-making, and because there is a group of people already committed to environmental sustainability. I believe it is only right to include them in the design process. By making them full participants, I gain access to their special knowledge, perspectives, and creativity, as well as an enthusiastic group of supporters of the new approaches.

The design process will begin with a Future Workshop [9, 10] to guide EcoCampus committee members and other interested members of the community in generating visions for behavioral and cultural change on campus. A Future Workshop consists of three phases: a Critique phase to elicit problems with current practice, a Fantasy phase to envision an ideal world in which those problems were solved, and an Implementation phase in which the aim is to begin making plans for realistic changes. Whereas most Future Workshops in the PD literature have focused on work practices, the workshop concept originated in the context of community organizing around societal issues [9]; the topic of this workshop will be “Green Culture at Grinnell.” At the end of this workshop, I hope we will have identified a number of behaviors to target for change, as well as possible approaches—technological and non-technological—for changing them. I plan to continue working with a smaller group of stakeholders on one or more behaviors that seem appropriate to the development of persuasive technology

2. Ambient Persuasion

Designing technology to change behavior with respect to environmental sustainability, or to promote sustainable culture, clearly falls into B.J. Fogg's definition of persuasive technology: "interactive computing systems designed to change people's attitudes and behaviors" [4, p. 1]. Indeed, Fogg uses the example of paper recycling by an organization to illustrate his different perspectives on the roles of persuasive technology [3]. Several efforts have begun to explore persuasive technology in relation to environmental sustainability. For example, RideNow is a web- and email-based system that facilitates ad-hoc ride sharing [15]. The SmartTrip tool for mobile devices simplifies the task of combining multiple errands into a single trip, with the goal of reducing driving among those resistant to ride sharing or public transit [8]. GreenScanner is mobile application that shoppers can use at the store to read reviews of the environmental impacts of various products [14]. In these systems, the computer's functional role is that of a persuasive tool [3, 4]: The system makes suggestions, provides information, or makes the desired behavior easier to do. But, users must go to some effort to adopt these tools. As Fogg argues, persuasive technology for mobile devices are most effective when they help people to achieve the goals they have already decided upon [4, pp. 192–3].

An alternative is to embed persuasive tools in the built environment, particularly in public or semi-public places. The idea is to make suggestions at exactly the right time and place, without annoying those to be persuaded [4, 11, 7]. Recent work by Mathew and his students exploits this approach, which he calls *environmental persuasion* [11], in the context of promoting physical activity. In one design, an attractive glass staircase with embedded information displays entices commuters in a subway station to use the stairs rather than the escalator [11]. In another, information kiosks at bus stops suggest that walking will result in earlier arrival time at the destination than waiting for the bus, and will burn more calories [13]. Embedding persuasive technology in public spaces allows for *incremental persuasion*: "Persuasion is initiated by the persuasive elements, but the actual behavior change is a result of gradual but increasing awareness of the importance of that change" [11]. Such an approach can influence the behavior of those who are not initially committed to behavior change. This gradual approach also leaves room for discovery, playfulness, ambiguity, and subtlety, qualities that could make a persuasive device intriguing rather than annoying.

Some design efforts have already begun to explore environmental persuasion with respect to environmental sustainability. For example, WaterBot aims to reduce water consumption by tracking and displaying information about water use at the sink itself [1]. Although the design is aimed at the home or workplace, some ideas could be adapted to sinks in more public spaces. Intriguingly, Holstius et al. use live and robotic plants in an ambient display that shows the balance between trash and recycling in a dining area [5]. The goals of ambient displays—to provide awareness through the physical environment, without demanding attention [16]—seem particularly compatible with the idea of non-annoying, incremental persuasion. These initial efforts show this area, which one might call *ambient persuasive technology*, is ripe for further investigation.

3. Research Questions

I believe that applying participatory design to persuasive technology is a novel approach. Furthermore, as Hornecker et al. argue, the application of participatory design methods to the design space of pervasive computing is still largely unexplored [6]. A key question, then, is how (or whether) to incorporate known principles and guidelines for the design of persuasive technology and for persuasion

in general, such as Cialdini's six fundamental human tendencies [2], with the process of participatory design. A second question is how to incorporate concern for the ethics of persuasion into the process. Design participants are not the only ones who will interact with the persuasive technology, and they are not necessarily typical stakeholders as they almost certainly value environmental sustainability more highly than most community members. Fogg outlines a method to account for ethical concerns in the design of persuasive technology [4], with which participants might be engaged. Furthermore, although participatory design is not inherently problematic from the standpoint of environmental sustainability, can particular design themselves be made more sensitive to that goal?

WaterBot [1] and the "infotropism" display [5] not only make indirect suggestions, but also monitor and report on behavior in the surrounding environment. Because of the community context, such displays tread a fine line between self-monitoring, which seems generally positive and acceptable, and surveillance, which Fogg warns may cause public compliance without private acceptance [4, p. 49]. What design features are needed to avoid that undesirable outcome? What guidance can I draw from these examples? For example, where WaterBot aims to support social validation in a household context by tracking the water consumption of individuals, the infotropism display, designed for a more public context, does not connect the data it gathers with particular individuals.

Fogg argues that behavioral change is a more compelling metric than attitudinal change for measuring the success of persuasive technology: it is thought to be more difficult to achieve, it can be measured without relying on self-reports, and finally, it is a direct measure of real-world outcomes [3]. However, following the work of Holstius, et al. [5] and other work on ambient displays, and consistent with the goal of not annoying people, it will be important to assess users' attitudes towards and understanding of the persuasive technology itself. In the context of environmental sustainability, one should also ask about the net environmental impact of the persuasive technology. Unlike applications for mobile devices already in use, such as cell phones, ambient persuasive technology involves introducing new devices into the environment and thus involves some measurable consumption of resources—electricity to power the device and other resources for its manufacture. Can we demonstrate that the devices we build have an environmental impact that is lesser than that of the undesirable behavior they are intended to change? What techniques can we use to reduce the power consumption of ambient displays, both in the prototype phase and in deployment? At one extreme, we might eschew the "technology" aspect of persuasive technology altogether, and use Intille's approach of temporarily deploying sensor systems to measure the behavioral impacts of low-technology persuasive techniques [7].

4. Motivation for Attending the Workshop

I have been interested in environmental sustainability and ambient displays for several years; the theme of "Persuasive Pervasive Technology and Environmental Sustainability" lets me bring those interests together. At the workshop, I hope to meet other researchers interested in related areas and perhaps raise some different perspectives on design methodology. I hope also for feedback and new insights to guide my work, which is in its earliest phases.

5. Biography

Janet Davis is Assistant Professor of Computer Science at Grinnell College, a socially-conscious liberal arts college in central Iowa. She earned her B.S. in Computer Science at Harvey Mudd College, and her Ph.D. in Computer Science and Engineering at the University of Washington. Her dissertation

work involved the design of new user interfaces for a large-scale urban simulation system, with a particular attention to the values of democracy and freedom from bias. She is a member of the Sustainable CHI group. Her interests include Value Sensitive Design, Participatory Design, ambient displays, environmental sustainability, design for local impact, and alpacas.

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