

Title: The walk-along method – a mobile method for studying information interaction

Organizer(s)

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Abstract

This session revolves around an innovative methodological approach for studying user experience *in situ*. In the walk-along method the researcher walks along with individuals or groups of participants in their 'natural' outings. A unique strength of the walk-along method is, that it enables the researcher to capture participants' immediate experiences, emotions and interpretations in the instant of experiencing. It enables the researcher to get detailed information on how users experience while touching, seeing, hearing, feeling and interacting with technology.

The purpose of this interactive session is to discuss and explore the walk-along method as a potential method for studying and evaluating mobile information interaction. In context of mobile information interaction, the walk-along method can be used to both gain insights to inform design and evaluate user experience with information technology.

As part of the session, participants will be guided to try out the walk-along method hands-on.

Description

Purpose and Intended Audience:

Understanding user experiences is critical when designing and evaluating interactive information technologies. However, gaining insight into the individual, subjective user experience poses methodological challenges. In a recent paper on information experience, Savolainen addresses how "...simply asking study participants to recall past information experiences may not be sufficient" (Savolainen, 2019, 9).

At the same time, the explosion in use of mobile devices 'on the go' calls for mobile methods enabling new forms of inquiry and explanation. The so-called mobilities turn emphasizes investigation of everyday (im)mobility (Büscher & Urry, 2009), including how multiple technologies and ways of communication are strongly interrelated with all social life.

This session revolves around an innovative methodological approach for studying user experience *in situ*. In the walk-along method the researcher walks along with individuals or groups of participants in "their 'natural' outings, and - through asking questions, listening and observing - actively explore their subjects' stream of experiences and practices as they move through, and interact with, their physical and social environment" (Kusenbach, 2003, p. 463). As such, the walk-along method can be seen as a hybrid between qualitative interview and participant observation (Kusenbach, 2003; 2018), and study insights are achieved through researcher's participation and engagement in the activities of study participants. A

unique strength of the walk-along method is, that it enables the researcher to capture participants' immediate experiences, emotions and interpretations in the instant of experiencing. It enables the researcher to get detailed information on how users experience while touching, seeing, hearing, feeling and interacting with technology.

The walk-along method was originally developed in urban geography and has been applied in different areas, such as studies of urban neighbourhoods (Kusenbach, 2003), health (Chang, 2017), visitors' experiences in science centres (Skov, Lykke & Jantzen, 2018) and sound art installations (Lykke & Jantzen, 2013; Lykke & Jantzen, 2016). The purpose of this interactive session is to discuss and explore the walk-along method as a potential method for studying and evaluating mobile information interaction. In context of mobile information interaction, the walk-along method can be used to both gain insights to inform design and evaluate user experience with information technology.

Proposed activities including agenda, ramp-up (development), and follow-through:
This highly interactive session will consist of three parts.

The first part will cover short presentations on what an experience is, introduction to the walk-along method and how the method can be applied in studies of mobile information interaction.

In the second part, participants will form groups and will be guided to try out the walk-along method nearby the conference venue.

Finally, in the third part, participants will return to the conference building and discuss their experience with the method and its potential to study mobile information interaction.

Relevance to the Conference/Significance to the Field:

The concept of experience has recently attracted significant attention in human-computer interaction and user experience design (e.g., Forlizzi & Battarbee, 2004; Hassenzahl & Tractinsky, 2006; McCarthy & Wright, 2004), and lately also in library and information studies (e.g., Bruce et al., 2014; Savolainen, 2019). The walk-along method has the potential to enrich our understanding of not only mobile information interaction but also everyday life information seeking, use of wearable technologies etc. Accordingly, this session aims to be relevant to many iConference participants interested in exploring and discussing the continuing development of novel methods.

The hands-on experience with the walk-along method will create a common ground for participants to reflect and discuss methodological pros and cons.

Duration

90-minute session.

Special requirements

The session would be suitable for 20-40 participants.

Literature

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