

Persuasion, Learning and Context Adaptation

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ABSTRACT

This paper further develops the notion of distinguishing between Persuasive Technology and Persuasive Design, and considering Persuasive Design a meta-perspective which may be applied to more established design traditions as an ethics and context-oriented perspective. The paper addresses a challenge often met when aiming to apply persuasive design principles to more established design fields, namely that the unique claim of persuasive design and the relevance of taking it into consideration is unclear. Furthermore, this paper aims to extend the argumentation and exemplify how this new understanding of Persuasive Design may potentially facilitate the more established field of technology enhanced learning.

Keywords: Context Adaptation, Context Awareness, Kairos, Learning, Persuasive Design, Persuasive Technology, Technology Enhanced Learning

INTRODUCTION

This paper extends and discusses how a more nuanced definition of Persuasive Design (PD) may be both beneficial and necessary when arguing towards a unique claim of this novel field. The majority of methodological research and development within the PD community is based upon the persuasive principles originally presented in BJ Fogg's *Functional Triad*, which was introduced in relation to his definition of computers as persuaders (Fogg, 2003). The principles have been the focal point of much attention within the PD community and are often referred to in the theoretical and methodological work, which followed Fogg's. However they

are not unique for PT, but were identified by Fogg, through analysing a wide range of already existing technologies. Subsequently, when aiming to apply PD to more established research areas, the PD approach is met with the critique that as the principles are already being applied, the field does not contribute with novel insights to the design process. As a result, researchers and developers are challenged when trying to argue towards the benefit of considering PD in different application areas. In an attempt to address this challenge, this paper argues that the claim of PD may be found in a wider and more context-oriented perspective, based on the rhetorical concept of Kairos.

DOI: 10.4018/ijcssa.2013070104

The methodological approach to this paper is primarily constituted by a literary study, but supported by findings from different areas where PD has been taken into consideration. The primary exemplification lies in the EU funded EuroPLOT project, where PD has been explored in relation to learning and learning technologies. Although the aim of this particular project was to enhance technology facilitated learning, it has become evident that the field of learning also has much to offer in terms of extending and nuancing the understanding of PD. A discussion of areas in which these two fields may reciprocally be of positive influence upon each other goes beyond the scope of this paper. However it is an area of future interest and as a result it is elaborated upon briefly in the conclusion of this paper.

Whilst the term Persuasive Technologies (PT) as defined by Fogg refers to technologies, which are designed with the intent to change attitudes, behaviours or both, PD is in this paper argued to be a meta-perspective that focuses on reflections concerning ethics and context adaptation. By taking a different approach when seeking to define the unique claim of PD, this paper aims to argue towards the potential of a PD perspective in different research areas, without levelling a critique at the results and understandings already achieved within the PD field.

The concept of persuasion in itself is a subject of much debate, both in terms of definition and in terms of whether or not it is possible to distinguish between persuasion and manipulation. Gerald Miller argues that persuasion refers to shaping, reinforcing or changing a persons attitude or behaviour (Miller, 2002). However although Miller provides important insight with regards to understanding persuasion, his definition of the concept can be argued to be too wide and include all types of strategic communication. As a result, the understanding of persuasion in this paper is based on Fogg's definition of the concept, as being focused solely on changing attitudes or behaviours. This paper aims to elaborate upon ways in which this

adjusted understanding of PD, may facilitate and potentially enhance the more established field of technology-enhanced learning (TEL).

Methodological and theoretical research within the field of PT has so far primarily focused on a further development and deeper understanding of a list of design principles argued to hold persuasive potential (Fogg, 1998). However, once applied within more established research fields such as TEL, Information Architecture (IA) and Digital Mediation of Cultural Heritage (DMCH), these design principles appear to be already widely applied. This lack of originality challenges the unique claim of PD, and gives reason to look beyond specific design principles in order to clarify the potential of PD in relation to existing HCI areas. This paper suggests that the claim of PD may more reasonably be based on a wider understanding of the rhetorical notion of Kairos (Hansen, 2009), and more specifically the acknowledgement that in order for any technology to hold persuasive potential, there must be an appropriate and adaptive balance between the technology and the context in which is applied.

PD is most often described in continuance of work originally presented by Stanford University researcher, BJ Fogg, who in 1998 introduced the notion of PT, and in 2003 published the first book on the subject. Approaching the notion of computers as persuaders from a social psychology perspective, Fogg suggests that computers hold a particularly strong potential to change the attitudes and behaviours of the users, but emphasizes that the designer cannot rely on coercion or deception when influencing the user. As such, Fogg defines a specific perspective on interactive computer technologies, which distinguishes itself from e.g. marketing technologies or technologies that somehow mislead the users. By this definition, Fogg not only highlights an important link between PT and classical rhetoric, he also emphasizes that ethical reflections must play a central role in relation to this particular type of interactive technology.

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