

Persistent Conversation: The Conversation Persists

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Abstract

A significant consequence of communication technologies is that conversations are no longer ephemeral and volatile. Most conversations mediated by technology leave a persistent record and become persistent conversations. This persistence transforms the essence of conversation, and it is the focus of extensive academic and applied research. The persistent conversation mini-track is the home of this research at HICSS.

1. Introduction

Persistent conversations are being created using text, audio, images, and video, and they are a part of every aspect of life: From David Weinberger's Cluetrain Manifesto's "markets are conversations", through Robin Dunbar's conversations as devices for social grooming, conversations are at the heart of every human activity. Accordingly, this mini-track discusses research on persistent conversation from a variety of disciplinary perspectives including communication, management, education, computer science, sociology, political science, psychology, linguistics, law, and the like.

As noted by Tom Erickson and Susan Herring, who established the Persistent Conversation mini-track in 1999, the persistent trace frees conversations from the lock-step synchrony of face-to-face talk. It allows to dramatically scale the number of participants within a single discussion and to distribute an interaction over geographies, time zones, and cultures. Human and machine access to those digital traces enables a wide set of prisms and analyses, leading to novel insights into the numerous forms of human activity.

At the same time, the persistence of human communication imposes a new set of challenges. For example, what mechanisms perform the role of the ephemeral social cues of face-to-face conversation? What are the ethical consequences of the creation of

potentially permanent records in terms of privacy, accountability, and the right to be forgotten? In addition, claims have been made about the loss of intimacy, depth, and quality of human communication when it is carried out digitally, especially in the case of massive open communication.

The aim of this mini-track is to bring together researchers and innovators to explore digitally persistent conversation and its implications for learning, commercial transactions, entertainment, news, politics, and other forms of human interaction; to raise new socio-technical, ethical, pedagogical, linguistic and social questions; and to suggest new methods, perspectives, and design approaches.

2. History of the mini-track

Established in 1999 by Tom Erickson and Susan Herring, The Persistent Conversation mini-track is a persistent micro-cosmos of the evolution of internet interaction (see http://www.tomeri.org/HICSS_PC_History.html for a complete list of papers for each year).

The mini-track originated from the understanding that some forms of digital communication create a persistent record and are substantially different from ephemeral forms of face-to-face communication, and thus they deserve their own conceptualization and study. A careful inspection of research topics and terminology used in the mini-track throughout the years reveals a dynamic process. In its early years, the mini-track reflects a perception of online communication as socially cumbersome and opaque, lacking social presence cues, limited and experimental, but nevertheless promising. Seventeen years later, the current research reflects communication activities that are an integral part of the daily life of a majority of humankind, persistent conversations that take place in big networks of intertwined online and face-to-face interactions, consisting of large interconnected crowds.

The set of platforms used to carry digital conversation began with email, news groups and bulletin board systems, and soon evolved into the worlds of 3D virtual environments, audio ‘documents’, document annotation systems and USENET groups. Later, social network services took center stage, as well as blogs, instant messaging, wikis, video and image sharing platforms, and the advent of mobile phones added billions of contributors to the ongoing global persistent conversation.

As social media became an un-detachable construct in our day to day reality, ethical implications (in terms of responsibility, accountability and liability) involving the creation of digital permanent records, and concepts like information overload, minorities' representation in digital spheres, deliberation and other concepts were introduced to the core discussion, and added new design issues.

We expect to see this trend continuing in the coming years, with topics such as asynchronous yet ephemeral conversations such as those mediated by Snapchat, digital memory in general, participation of bots in online conversations and more.

3. This year's papers

After a five years pause, the persistent conversation mini-track has returned. For this 12th mini-track on Persistent Conversation at HICSS we received a wide variety of papers reflecting an assortment of research domains and technologies.

In the first paper, *Politician's Strategic Impression Management on Instagram* by Younbo Jung, Ashley Tay, Terence Hong, Judith Ho and Yan Hui Goh,

Instagram is used as a testbed of politicians' impression management strategies. An experiment compares the influence of more public versus more personal images, and of more or less interactive picture captions, on the impressions formed by the voters, as well as on their voting intention.

Meetings as Persistent Conversations that use ICTs and Face-to-Face to Build Social Capital by Keri Stephens, Ignacio Cruz, Eric Waters and Yaguang Zhu views the processes of social capital formation during meetings and between them as a continuous multi-component conversation involving face-to-face interaction along with a mix of communication technology based interactions.

Is Aggression Contagious Online? A Case of Swearing on Donald Trump's Campaign Videos on YouTube by K. Hazel Kwon and Anatoliy Gruzd analyzes the contagious nature of aggressiveness in political online discourse and suggests that the persistence of the discourse has a central role in this contagion.

Last, *“Nice Picture Comment!” Graphicons in Facebook Comment Threads* by Susan Herring and Ashley Dainas analyzes the pragmatic functions of emoticons, emoji, stickers, images and videos within Facebook's ecology of visual communication and provides design implications.