

Due: February 22, 2023 (midpoint on Feb 8)

1 Evaluating Social Mechanisms

What type of social application do you think should exist? One of the challenges of sociotechnical systems, where peoples' behavior affect the workings of a system, is that it is hard to predict what will happen until they're tested. To test it with people involved, the system often needs to be developed substantially and attract users to the concept. One way to prototype the experience without much development is piggybacking on an existing social platform, which takes care of some of the essential functionality of account management, sharing, and communication protocols. In this assignment, you will evaluate your own online social communication system by prototyping it on top of an existing social tool. Additionally, you will have a set of test users comprising students in the seminar, for whom you can set additional social rules without implementing it in code, going beyond the functionality of configuring an existing tool (i.e. the piggybacked prototype approach). Together, as a class we will discover what are the effects of various constraints, behavioral rules, and communication mediums, on the social experience.

Your considerations for the social prototype should include:

- consideration of what existing social tool is more compatible with the communication medium you want to test, for example, Google Sheets may be particular suitable for designing a social app based on posting text and links, with a sheet that aggregates and filters the text or links from every user posting on their own tab.
- “mechanism” or rules, that do not exist in an existing popular social app, such as rules about posting frequencies, content limitations, requiring synchronous vs asynchronous communication. Think about factors like anonymity, permissions, group vs individual messaging, push messaging vs feeds, private vs public posts. Consider features such as streaks, reactions (like a react in Slack), hourly “fun” prompts, points, or time limits. Choose a mechanism that can be fully tested in a single day.
- what is the task that people on the social prototype should be doing: share the funniest memes, solve a problem together or brainstorm an idea, plan a trip to New York, debate or decide a policy, etc.
- what are the measures or data you will be looking at to understand behavior in your new social application; for example, enjoyment, trust, productivity, presence, or communication richness.

CSCI 2300 – Evaluating Social Mechanisms (v1.1)

- your hypothesis about how that will affect behavior—what do you think will happen, and why? Review some of the literature for social theories about communication and behavior, especially articles published in the CSCW conference.

Examples of existing tools you can use include: a private subreddit, google sheets (perhaps using Excel-like formulas to do aggregation), github commits, discord or slack channel using typing indicators or bots as part of it, google photos or twitter with location sharing, google docs or wikis. Besides the readings from class, consider the examples in the original Piggyback Prototyping article by Grevet and Gilbert. Note that they do not have the benefit of making social rules or norms, without having to code them, so your social application can be more flexible. Make sure you clearly describe to the users (the other students in class) what the rules are, like if you only want them to post once a day at most, or their text should be limited to the word “yo”.

Bring your plan to class on February 8, where we will get into three groups of about 7 students each. Each group will then use each social prototype exclusively for one day of the upcoming week (February 9–15). If anything goes wrong, you may ask your group if they can retry the social prototype after February 15. The student whose social prototype is being used should Slack their group with how they should access the social application, and the rules or norms that are not already configured in the piggybacked prototype. *Finally, think about what measures you will want to capture from each user, and conduct a small survey at the end of the day.*

Write at most 3,000 words (about four dense pages) plus references about the social prototype you designed, and the considerations above. Summarize what you did, what happened, and whether it was what you hypothesized. This should be similar to the Methods section in a paper. Relate the social prototype you designed to existing HCI research papers investigating similar designs, and any social theories that may apply.

Grading

Grading will be based on: the choice of existing social platform to match the intended novel mechanism, how precisely the social prototype can test the hypothesis, how well exploring the hypothesis contributes to social HCI research, and the ability for the social prototype to surface behavior that is hard to determine from existing popular social applications.