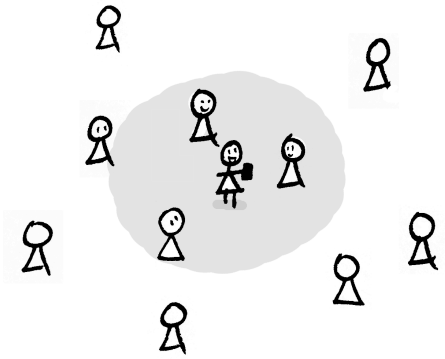
The Changing Nature of Participation in Design:



A practice-based study of social technologies in early design research

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Certificate of Authorship/Originality

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Candidate

_____

Acknowledgements

This thesis was produced on the land of the Cadigal people of the Eora Nation. The Cadigal people are the traditional custodians of this land and I would like to acknowledge the living culture and pay my respect to elders past and present.

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Abstract

Social technologies put a new emphasis on participation. This thesis investigates the impact of social technologies on how we enable, conceive and manage participation in early design. The research questions in this thesis address how, and in what ways, using social technologies as *design tools* can support participation in the early stages of design, and how using such tools creates new opportunities for participation in early design when social technologies themselves are the *subject of design*. It develops and presents concepts and strategies that account for the sharable, social and participatory nature of social technologies and encourages designers to reconsider how notions of participation are currently embedded and framed within existing design methods and models.

The questions are explored through a practice-based investigation into the use of social technologies as self-reporting tools. Over the course of two field studies a self-reporting method, Mobile Diaries, was iteratively designed, evaluated and implemented in a specific commercial design context. The analysis demonstrated that using social technologies as *design tools* enhances the capacity for self-reporting to enable participants to contribute to design from the context of their own lives. This greater integration between the activities of research and everyday life blurs some traditional design research boundaries, with ethical and methodological implications for which we are only beginning to account. In addition, when social technologies are the *subject* of design, using social technologies as design tools creates an experiential connection between the activities of researching, designing and using. This creates new opportunities for participation *through use* early in the design process that blur traditional boundaries between the activities of research, design and use. Barriers to embracing these opportunities in commercial contexts include the assumption that the activities of design and use progress consecutively and the value of early participation in design is largely embodied in the tangible outputs of design research.

This research extends existing knowledge about the nature of participation in design, and how participation can be supported, through three main contributions:

1. The development of Mobile Diaries, a specific self-reporting method beneficial to early design research and suited to commercial use

2. Conceptual tools that reflect the impact of social technologies on self-reporting and draw attention to the new ethical and methodological implications they introduce
3. Strategies to articulate and support experiences and outcomes important to the early design of social technologies in community settings, through the use of social technologies themselves.

This thesis also makes a fourth contribution that is methodological:

4. It is an example of how practice-based design research can be conducted in a commercial context in ways valuable to both practice and research domains.