



Realizing Values in Hybrid Environments: A SIGCHI Perspective*

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ABSTRACT

In this panel, we follow up on conversations that have been happening around hybrid environments, conducted in open sessions by the ACM Special Interest Group on Computer-Human Interaction (SIGCHI) Executive Committee (EC), at SIGs at CHI 2022 and CHI 2023 and on twitter, facebook, medium and similar media. The COVID-19 pandemic led to a shift to virtual conferences. As we go back to in-person events, it is important to reflect on what we have learned about these configurations, the types of events we desire, and how hybrid intersects with SIGCHI values such as increased accessibility, sustainability and inclusion. With this panel, we expect to engage the CSCW community in the discussion of what lies beyond the current in-person format, the possibilities created by the hybrid and what other innovations might further these values.

CCS CONCEPTS

- Human-centered computing;

KEYWORDS

hybrid, conferences, sustainability

ACM Reference Format:

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1 INTRODUCTION

As the world moves out of the pandemic, we've been witnessing a steady return to in-person events and work. Most conference organizers recognize the value of in person interactions, and have been steadily returning to in-person configurations. Participants do so as well, as evidenced by the large attendance at this year's CHI, in Hamburg. However, many voices are now questioning current conference formats, and arguing that we should move past the in-person only experience, and draw on our online experiences to look for alternative configurations [5, 6].

Most of us have experienced different virtual formats, each with its own aspects and limitations. Even as we move back to in-person events, we should acknowledge the benefits of the virtual format (eg., accessibility, global inclusion, sustainability, etc.) Hybrid formats might allow us to keep some of what was gained by the move to virtual while reclaiming what was lost. There are however, many challenges to overcome. Hybrid is the in-person and the virtual but also (and most importantly), how they are brought together. Those of us doing CSCW research know that this is an example of a cyber-human infrastructure, where the configurations of the social and the technical are separately and together crucial for a seamless experience for all.

Researchers have been exploring hybrid configurations for many years now. Some have stated that the remote experience will never be equal to the in-person experience, but also that new experiences should be designed, taking advantage of technology [1]. More recently, workshops on hybridity have been held [2, 3], to discuss hybrid configurations both at work and at conferences. To further the discussion on the topic, we will invite organizers of recent workshops and conferences to join us for this panel. In addition to

hybrid, other suggestions for conferences have recently surfaced, such as separating publication from presentation [6], co-locating smaller conferences or having local satellites that extend a strong flagship [5].

We would like to engage the community in reflecting about hybrid experiences, given that these might become the default configuration in the near future. Each attendance type has its own pros and cons, permissions, restrictions, and long-term consequences. Each attendance type has groups it serves better, serves worse, and larger systemic factors at play. Remote participation might allow a better exchange of ideas between people from different geographies, reduce financial burdens on early-career scholars, allow disabled or at-risk contributors to participate and potentially address issues such as Visa requirements. However, it does increase uncertainty for conference organizers, who are left wondering how many participants will choose to attend onsite or virtually; increases demands on volunteers, who must now deal with both the online and the onsite sides of things; and has its own costs, as platforms and AV gear do not come free. Some point to the dangers of reducing opportunities for serendipitous exchange, and others to the difficulties of connectivity in certain parts of the world.

It is important to come together to serve our own community in the best possible way. Where there is relative unity around hybrid conferences being a better option, we are seeing tensions and concerns around “how” hybrid conferences could be done. In previous sessions, we have uncovered tensions around ways that hybrid conferences can increase some inequities while reducing others. We also intend to extend discussion to consider how hybrid models perform in relation to increasing expectations and requirements for more environmentally sustainable conferencing. Reduced carbon emissions is a much needed outcome for conferencing that involve less air travel in particular; however, online platforms are not without their own carbon costs [4]. We will invite panelists that will center the discussion on some of the issues that must be accounted for in modeling sustainability performance and the solutions that offer potential to address these.

This panel follows on ACM Special Interest Group on Computer-Human Interaction (SIGCHI) Executive Committee’s previous discussions on hybrid formats ¹, where concerns and priorities for the transition to hybrid were discussed. After almost two years of virtual experiences, there are new expectations, and it seems important to reflect on and discuss the challenges and opportunities, including accessibility, connectivity, time zone coordination, language, sustainability, networking and socializing, to name a few. Our goal, with this panel, is to engage the CSCW community in the discussion of this push beyond the in-person format, possibilities created by the hybrid format and how it intersects with SIGCHI values of increased access, sustainability and inclusion.

2 PROPOSED STRUCTURE AND FORMAT

2.1 Preparatory Activities

On the weeks leading up to the conference, the panel will be advertised on social media and mailing lists. Organizers will also solicit questions and provocations from our wider CSCW community, which will be curated and shared with panelists prior to the

¹<https://nehakumar.medium.com/6215365d9a4>

panel. Panelists will be encouraged to address these during their presentations, otherwise they’ll be brought up during discussion.

2.2 Panel Format

The panel will be hybrid to enable virtual engagement. It will include 5 panelists to engage with different aspects of hybrid environments, particularly:

- (1) Geographical inclusion;
- (2) Environmental sustainability;
- (3) Accessibility for people of different physical and cognitive abilities;
- (4) Ethical issues in online interactions;
- (5) Large and small conference planning.

The panel will be moderated by the organizers, who will facilitate both the in-person and virtual components. One of the moderators will open the panel with an introduction to the topic to be discussed and to the panelists (5 minutes). We will then have everyone first give a 3-minute introduction each on their position on hybrid, e.g. by addressing “why hybrid?” and “what’s holding us back?” and “would you, if you could?”, then pause for a moment, have people in the audience pair up and discuss for 10 minutes, and then share on the microphone for an engaged discussion. Both the in-person and virtual audience members will be encouraged to ask questions and comment on the viewpoints presented. The panel will close with each panelist providing a closing statement (1 minute each) reflecting on their vision for the future of hybrid environments. Participants will be encouraged to continue the discussion in another online channel (SIGCHI Discord.)

2.3 Post-panel Wrap-up

Organizers and panelists will write a summary of the panel discussions to be widely shared with the community, for instance, via a Medium post or Interactions article.

3 PANELIST BIOS

To be confirmed upon approval of the panel. The panel will be mediated by members of the SIGCHI Executive Committee.

Kagonya Awori is a senior Applied Scientist at Microsoft - the Microsoft Africa Research Institute in Kenya - leading research and strategy for the Future of Work in Africa. She has over 10 years’ experience leading technology research and design work/teams across the globe in Kenya, United Kingdom, and Australia, and a PhD in Human-Computer Interaction from University of Melbourne. Throughout her work, Kagonya is centered on creating knowledge on, for and with people and businesses in Africa, and building intelligent solutions for Africa that can be scaled globally. Outside work, she greatly enjoys traveling, open water swimming, archery, and mentoring the youth - especially women.

Kathrin Gerling is an Assistant Professor in Computer Science at KU Leuven, Belgium. Her work broadly falls into Human-Computer Interaction and Physical Computing: She is particularly interested in how interfaces can be made accessible for disabled people, and how interactive technologies including Digital Games and Virtual Reality can be leveraged to support well-being and contribute to more inclusive societies. She is an active member of the HCI and Games Research community, and acted as General Chair

for CHI PLAY 2022. She is also a member of the SIGCHI Hybrid Working Group.

Dhruv 'DJ' Jain is an Assistant Professor in Computer Science and Engineering at the University of Michigan, with an affiliate (courtesy) appointment in the School of Information. His research intersects human-computer interaction (HCI) and applied machine learning (ML), and focuses on sound accessibility. Specifically, he is interested in inventing novel sound sensing and visualization systems to support accessibility and healthcare applications for people who are deaf and hard of hearing. He completed his PhD from University of Washington, masters from MIT Media Lab, and has worked at Microsoft Research, Google, and Apple.

Andrew Kun is Professor of Electrical and Computer Engineering at the University of New Hampshire, and director of the UNH Human-Computer Interaction Lab. In his research he has primarily focused on the design and evaluation of speech interfaces and augmented-reality interfaces in vehicles, on exploring emerging trends in human-computer interaction for automated vehicles, and on the use of visual behavior and pupil diameter changes to model the relationships between user interface characteristics and user performance and satisfaction. He is also a recipient of a Fulbright Scholar award, having spent the spring of 2014 at the Budapest University of Technology and Economics. Currently, he serves as ACM SIGCHI Executive Vice President, Steering Committee member of the ACM AutomotiveUI conference series, as well as editorial board member of the IEEE Pervasive Computing magazine, the International Journal of Human-Computer Studies, and the Human-Computer Interaction journal. He is co-founder and 2021-2022 co-general chair of the CHIWORK symposium.

Naomi Yamashita is a distinguished researcher at NTT, Japan and a professor at Kyoto University. Her research goal is to design communication technologies to support collaborative work and life activities. She has been working on designing technologies for mental health and support for multilingual collaboration. She uses theories and methodologies from social science and psychology to research communication technologies that deepen connections between people, to uncover the essential needs of users and the nature of interaction through human observation, and then design

information technology based on this understanding. She serves as ACM SIGCHI Vice President for Membership, and will co-general chair CHI 2025.

4 TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

This panel will be run in hybrid mode, so we will need internet access and a typical hybrid setup: A/V support including a camera to stream the in-person panel members on Zoom as well as a projector to stream remote panel members and attendees into the physical room, a computer with a Zoom connection that can be put up on screen, plus microphones for speakers and audience. Cameras facing the audience and wide view from the back of the room. One or two student volunteers would be needed to pass the microphone around from in-person attendees and one or two student volunteers to help the virtual moderator facilitate the Zoom room.

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