

2c: Contextual Inquiry Check-In

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Who did you interview:

Psuedo name: Jane We interviewed a current graduate and international student. She is originally from China, earned a B.A. in Business Administration and Information Systems in the US, and is currently a graduate student in the MHCI+D program at UW. We interviewed her in the Paul Allen Research Commons.

What did you learn:

We are interested in gaining insights from politically inactive individuals who we defined as people who do not expend a large amount of energy following politics-related news. We had assumed that international students would conform to this notion of political inactivity because they are not eligible to vote in U.S. elections, but learned that this assumption did not hold true for our participant, and therefore may not hold true for other international students. Although ineligible to vote in U.S. elections, she still participates in U.S. politics by making a committed effort to stay informed. Her impetus for being well-versed on certain topics is due to the influence of her friends, who she described as being highly invested in politics. Following the news is personal for her, and focuses on issues she feels are relevant to her own life and experiences. She uses Facebook and Twitter's "newsfeed" features as literal news-feeds. Rather than going directly to a particular news-outlet, she chooses to follow links on Facebook and Twitter to third party websites like The New York Times, NPR, Vox, and the like. These links can come from trending topics surfaced by Facebook and Twitter, but they also originate from articles her friends share online. She also listens to podcasts because they allowed her to multi-task; she frequently uses Hourly News, an app that "plays the most recent news updates from multiple sources with just one tap," in the mornings when she's getting ready for the day.

What tasks, problems, or opportunities did you uncover?

We went into our contextual inquiry thinking that we'd be creating some sort of product that would allow a user to track their political inclinations, that is, whether they are left or right leaning on particular issues, but we emerged realizing that people may not have a desire for a product like this. Our participant was more interested in tracking news stories and policies that she deemed relevant to her own life, and seeing how they evolve over time. She also mentioned that she wouldn't necessarily want a stand alone product to help follow the news that she and her friends were interested in, and that a product that acted as an extension of the tools she's already very competent with - i.e., Facebook, Twitter, and podcasts - would be more beneficial. If we were to create a stand alone product, she stressed the importance of it being "light weight," meaning not bogged down with multiple functionalities.

Did you encounter any difficulties establishing rapport or getting the information you need?

Because this participant is a member of the same MHCI+D cohort as Kim and Kiyana, a relationship already existed between interviewers and interviewee. It was not difficult to speak to her, and because she knew we were interviewing her in order to gain insights into potential design solutions, she gave us honest feedback when we tried to propose said solutions to her. However, what we did find difficult was confirming whether or not we understood what she was trying to articulate without inadvertently asking a leading question. We tried to mitigate this risk by stating several times that if we said something contrary to her actual beliefs or desires, that she should correct us (which she did on a couple of occasions).

What are your plans for the remaining inquiries?

Over the course of these next few days, we will be talking to: the president of Young Democrats of UW, a member of ASUW, and around 2-3 undergraduate students from a variety of backgrounds. These interviews will follow a similar protocol to the first one, with a few slight changes.

How do you plan to change your protocol based on what you learned in your first inquiry?

We found that our list of interview questions was a good starting point for a conversation, however, it's also helpful to adapt to what the participant is saying and change or ask new questions throughout the interview based on their responses. The strategy of asking retrospective account questions worked well when paired with a simulation, so we will continue using those.