Comm Apps: An Alternative to Facebook for Helping People Stay in Touch With Close Family and Friends

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Abstract:
Today's social media focuses on creating ever larger networks of 'friends', many of whom have never met. I am interested in the opposite problem: how to better connect people who know each other very well. This talk describes a decade of participatory design research in which we created dedicated 'always on' communication channels for exclusive use between pairs or small groups of family and close friends. A key insight was to separate network management from the information communicated: Our goal was to create an interface simple enough for a 70-year old grandmother and her 7-year-old grandson to set up without help from Dad. We created *FamilyNet*, a simple, tangible interface for creating and maintaining communication channels. We then created a wide variety of *Comm Apps* that support both peripheral awareness and focused communication and range from serious objectives, such as helping the elderly to 'age in place', to more whimiscal goals, such providing novel forms of remote awareness for couples who miss each other. I will describe research findings from our 3-year EU InterLiving project, with over 70 participants from six multi-household families in France and Sweden, and our more recent work that is currently being transferred to two startups in France.

About the Speaker:
Wendy Mackay is a Research Director at INRIA Saclay – Île-de-France where she heads the In|Situ| research group in Human-Computer Interaction. She was Vice President of Research for the Computer Science Department at the University of Paris-Sud until 2010 and is now on sabbatical as a Visiting Professor at Stanford University. She received her Ph.D. from MIT and created a multidisciplinary research group at Digital Equipment that produced the world's first commercial interactive video system (IVIS), a pre-Hypercard multimedia authoring language and over 30 multimedia software products in the 1980s. She then created a research group at Xerox PARC's EuroPARC lab that was among the first to explore media spaces, tangible computing and mixed reality interfaces. She is a member of the ACM CHI Academy and has served as Chair of ACM/SIGCHI, among other executive positions. She has published over a hundred research articles in the area of human-computer interaction and has served as co-editor–in-chief of the journal IJHCS, on the editorial boards of CACM, ACM/TOCHI and RIHM, ACM SIGBoard and ACM Publications Board, as well as Program or Associate Chair of ACHI, UIST, CSCW, DIS and Multimedia ACM conferences. Her current research interests include multi-disciplinary, participatory design methods, tangible computing with a specialty in interactive paper, and situated interaction.