User Experience Theory And Practice - phase I portfolio

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INTRODUCTION

Aim and purpose of the portfolio

In this portfolio, I will reflect and describe how phase I of the course User Experience Theory and Practice has influenced my personal vision and development as a designer. I have compared several definitions by leading figures in the user experience and design field to reflect on my previous view on user experience and to create an improved, personal definition of the term user experience. I will also look back on previous projects and link these projects to the theory that was offered and discussed in the first phase of the course. Finally, I will express how I want to utilize the new knowledge in my future work as a user experience designer.

Personal point of view and positioning

My prior knowledge and personal view on user experience design emanates from my bachelor study ICT and Media Design. Especially the internships in which I worked as a user experience designer have influenced my view on UX and design. All of the work I did during my bachelor studies evolved around digital design instead of product design. The research that I did during this period and for these projects were mainly to test and improve the usability rather than the entire user experience. During the pre-master and the start of the master, I have gained a clearer understanding of the difference between these two and I have started to gravitate more towards designing for the entire experience of the user.

My personal view on user experience involves more than design. I believe that the entire concurrence of the human himself, the surrounding, communication, technical functioning and the design of the product contribute to the final experience of the user. Most of these can be taken into account during the design process, while some factors lie beyond the control of the designer making it impossible to create a perfect user experience.

By re-evaluating my personal view on user experience and defining my professional identity and vision, I have found that I have a special interest in '*Calm UX*'. Here I refer to the design of products but also to the context in which it is placed and the marketing around it. I believe that people today get a lot of incentives and input both online and offline, which results in distraction that keeps people from living up to their true potential.

UX DEFINITIONS AND DESCRIPTIONS

In the first phase of this course, I took a step back and searched for definitions of user experience, in order to adjust and redefine my own definition if necessary. I will discuss four definitions in this portfolio after which I will discuss how this influenced my personal point of view towards user experience.

1. "User experience" encompasses all aspects of the end-user's interaction with the company, its services, and its products. [3]

2. User experience (UX) focuses on having a deep understanding of users, what they need, what they value, their abilities, and also their limitations. It also takes into account the business goals and objectives of the group managing the project. UX best practices promote improving the quality of the user's interaction with and perceptions of your product and any related services. [4]

3. All the aspects of how people use an interactive product: the way it feels in their hands, how well they understand how it works, how they feel about it while they're using it, how well it serves their purposes, and how well it fits into the entire context in which they are using it. [1]

4. UX is a consequence of a user's internal state (predispositions, expectations, needs, motivation, mood, etc.), the characteristics of the designed

system (e.g. complexity, purpose, usability, functionality, etc.) and the context (or the environment) within which the interaction occurs (e.g. organisational/social setting, meaningfulness of the activity, voluntariness of use, etc.). [2]

Comparison of the definitions

All of the definitions speak of '*interaction*' as an important part of user experience. Nielsen and Norman give a short description without explaining all aspects that have an impact on the user experience. The other definitions like the one from Hassenzahl and Tractinsky go into this deeper by defining what kind of aspects they believe contribute to the entire user experience. The definitions are mostly cohesive in the sense that they speak of user experience as something that goes beyond the use of a product. Only Alben's definition focuses solely on the interaction with a product and how the user feels about this.

Redefining my personal definition of user experience

My personal definition of user experience matches the description given by the four quoted sources. I agree with the statement that there are many factors that go beyond the design of the product, to consider when it comes to creating a good user experience. One of the definitions even states that business goals and objectives are part of the user experience, which in my opinion, although subordinate to other facets, indeed influences the overall user experience.

WEEKLY LOGBOOK / ACTIVITIES
User experience, needs, paradigms, value based design

The theory of the first week confirmed much of the knowledge I already had about the subject. I think I have a good understanding of user experience, but I do sometimes find it difficult to put my personal point of view into words or to describe the definition of user experience briefly and concisely. By going back to basics and reading how others define user experience, I was able to gain a good and concrete understanding of what user experience actually is and evaluate my own definition of the subject. At the time of reading the literature, it did feel like a repetition of knowledge I already had, but going back to the basis of user experience was necessary to study the in-depth literature that was going to be discussed in the following weeks.

Empathy, design thinking and UX evaluation

To me, understanding viewpoints from others goes very natural, even though I don't always share the same thought or opinion. I think empathy is an important aspect of both my personal and my professional identity. However, I take this into account so naturally that I have never thought of empathy as consciously as when I was reading the literature on this topic. The methods that Wina Smeenk explained in her publication and during the lecture have made me more aware of using empathy as a tool when designing a good user experience.

Behaviour, attention, decision making, social awareness and everyday life

I found the literature of this week the most challenging to read and understand. I was especially struggling with the theory on behaviour, which I do believe can be very helpful in understanding the user's actions. Reading the theory about the topic decision making was very clarifying to me. Before, I didn't know much about how decision making works, even though we constantly make choices.

SELECTION AND MOTIVATION OF RELEVANT KEY ASPECTS

After reading the literature and following the lectures, I chose the key aspects empathy, attention, decision making and innovation. Up until this point, I mostly used surveys and interviews to review the user experience. I believe that we shouldn't take the input literally, but instead need to have a deeper understanding of the meaning behind the comments and activities addressed by the participants. A designer's job is to translate all of the thoughts, actions, needs and wishes of the target group into something valuable for the user.

I think this deeper understanding of the users can be achieved by empathising with the target group and by gaining knowledge on topics like decision making and other internal processes that most often happen unconsciously. When looking back at all of the literature, I am most interested in the topic 'attention' since that connects very well to my vision of designing products that appear at the right moment in the right context, without adding incentives to our already busy life.

The last key aspect I chose is innovation, because I have a different opinion on how innovation is part of design than other designers I know have. To define my personal point of view I have combined the literature from this course and knowledge I gained by following the pre-master course 'Economics of Innovation'. In my opinion, design does not always have to be the most innovative to be successful. Most of the designers I meet have the tendency to aim for a very new and innovative product while there might be a very logical solution at hand that is more obvious and faster to realise. I find that, if the design meets the goals of the user and the company, it is most likely a good product, even though it may not seem super innovative. I also experience that this is how it works in companies I work for. I run my own company, in which I have experienced that the balance between budget, time and revenue is crucial.

USER EXPERIENCE IN PREVIOUS WORK
Remeha

During my first internship, I did a project for a company called Remeha. Remeha produces and distributes international heating, hot water systems and related services. My assignment was to create a product that increased the customer loyalty of Remeha, which was needed because Remeha found that their users have the tendency to have a negative association with the brand. This happens because the boiler generally works in the background, without needing the attention from the owner. The owner only looks at the boiler if there are problems and the boiler does not work. This means that if the owner sees the brand name, it is most likely because there are problems with the boiler, creating a negative feeling about the brand.

The situation mentioned above fits with the topic attention since it is something that happens unconsciously. The boiler is in the periphery of the attention when it works but moves to the focus of the attention when malfunctioning occurs. Within my project, we tried to bridge this gap by giving feedback to the user before the boiler stops working. We did this by creating an app that besides offering everything needed to control the boiler, sent push notifications when sensors noticed that the boiler needed maintenance. It could be that a technician was needed, but in most cases the owner could solve the problem himself with help and guidance provided by the app. By being proactive, we were preventing the boiler from breaking down, saving the user a negative experience and therefore negative association with the brand Remeha.

Figure 1: A mock-up of the 'My Remeha' app

Within the project, we mainly focused on defining the problem and creating a usable app that helped users. During my internship, I didn't have the theoretical knowledge I now have because of the course. With the new knowledge however, I can look back and retroactively see that the project involved aspects of designing for *attention*. If I had known that at the time, I would have gone more in depth on deliberately designing for the different stages of attention, creating a product that purposely shifts between the different phases.
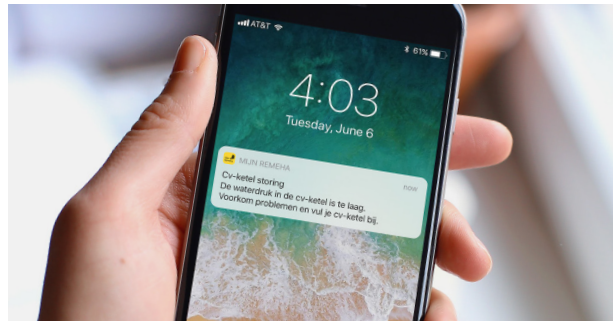

Figure 2: A mock-up of a pro-active notification sent by the 'My Remeha' app

The Indoor WorkWalk

In order to be able to participate in the Master's in Industrial Design, I had to follow the pre-master of the eponymous study. During this pre-master I worked on a project that elaborated on the concept of the WorkWalk, an outdoor walking route created to facilitate active meetings. This service design is meant to stimulate walking meetings during the workday, without making the activity the goal for the user. Instead, increasing the activity of office workers is intended as a means to stimulate creativity and efficiency and to apply variety in the workday.

Within our project, we designed an artifact called 'The Hub' that utilizes the benefits of the Workwalk and solves disadvantages that came to light during the user research. Being physically active, adding variety to the

work day and better social dynamics are some of the important benefits of the WorkWalk. Disadvantages of the Workwalk consider changing weather conditions and the lack of possibilities to make notes or give a presentation. By focusing on an indoor version of the Workwalk, intended to give office workers an alternative to an outdoor walking meeting, and by adding The Hub we tried to solve the issues, without taking away the advantages of the WorkWalk.

Figure 4: A picture taken during a user-test of the Indoor WorkWalk

In retrospect, we have made extensive use of the theory regarding empathy in our design process. As a team, we often went on a WorkWalk ourself, allowing us to experience the benefits and disadvantages. Because we ourselves fit into the target group of the WorkWalk, we were able to use our own experiences in our research and when evaluating our design. This enabled us to develop a lot of empathy for the intended users and therefore helped us to create a good design that fit the target group's needs and wishes.

At the time of the project, I knew that the first person action research was really important to get a good idea of the experience our intended users were going to have. However, we didn't really use it as a design method and more as part of our process. I believe that in this project

we have unconsciously designed a lot based on empathy. We have experienced the product ourselves, but we have also taken a step back and talked to the target group, which means that we have used both the first, second and third perspectives. As a result, I have experienced how powerful empathy can be in the design process and the outcome thereof.

Figure 5: A visual of 'The Hub'

USER EXPERIENCE IN FUTURE WORK

One of the most important reasons to start following the Industrial Design master's degree at the university was to improve myself as a user experience designer. I already had a lot of practical knowledge, in particular in conducting surveys and interviews and designing interfaces according to the results of these surveys and interviews. However, I had been searching for more depth in the theory, whereby I mainly wanted to know more about human psychology. I already knew that you only had a certain depth in your results if you used interviews and surveys as the main research methods and this is only confirmed in the first phase of this course.

I am very intrigued by the underlying thoughts, needs, motivations, etcetera of users because I think that this can make a big difference in the quality of designs. Especially when it comes to 'Calm UX', which is a special interest of mine, it is important to have a deeper understanding of the people you are designing for. Mainly because so many of the processes take place unconsciously, it is important to be aware of this as a designer, so that you can include them in the design process. Personally, as a designer I don't want to focus specifically on one target group, subject or context. My interest lies with the way in which designs take their place in society, how they are part of the life of users and how we can support these people, without adding unnecessary incentives to our world which, as it is today, already demands so much from people's cognitive abilities.

Besides the theoretical side I had been looking for since starting studying at the University, I have learned that having knowledge on a variety of different research methods, that go beyond surveys and interviews, is very important when creating designs that offer a good user experience. I am only now getting familiar with terms like 'research through design' and 'data enabled design', which are methods I believe will help me become a better designer for not only the usability of a product, but the entire user experience.

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