

Inverting Expertise in User Experience Design

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As a field of study, User Experience (UX) represents a broad range of human interactions with interfaces and digital media technologies. As such, UX imposes no limit on the possible experiences that users can have when interacting with technology. Nevertheless, UX as a discipline tends towards delineating specific design principles, scientific models, and aesthetic canons that treat the practice of designing for users and their experiences as a matter of formal expertise.

In this Participatory Session, we investigated methods for analyzing and confronting this formulation of UX. Participants were prompted to annotate existing popular interfaces – Google, Facebook, Amazon, and Wikipedia – in order to identify the purposes, agents, and qualities of their user experiences. These annotations then served as a starting point for participants to design *inverted interfaces*, which expressed features and design values opposite to those that participants identified. As a result of the session, participants were able to reflect on the ways that UX design shapes user experiences according to a variety of design goals and criteria.

As the interfaces that we selected for our session involved multiple features that each reflected a number of interests, stakeholders, and automated processes, participants were prompted with specific aspects of interfaces to investigate. We categorized these aspects of interfaces into three groups: navigational cues, enunciative dimensions (Drucker, 2013), and transparency. Following an introduction to the field of UX and some fundamental design paradigms, participants were given print-outs of interfaces, and were then instructed to collaboratively annotate the interfaces with color-coded notes, according to each of the three aspects introduced.

Participants were then prompted to use their annotations to design their own interfaces, but with the assignment to create interface features and design values that were opposed to those exhibited by their annotations. The result of this process was a series of *inverted interfaces* that played off of the features of existing interfaces. For example, participants observed that interfaces deliver content to users that users are expected to consume. Accordingly, participants created an inverted interface that treated users clearly as content producers.

The session concluded with a group discussion about how the annotations and inverted interfaces revealed qualities of existing user experiences. Through sharing their inverted interfaces, participants expressed a sense that the designs of existing interfaces catered to goals other than their own, and that their own inverted interfaces helped to realign the functionalities of interfaces with their own interests. Participants remarked that the exercise encouraged them to ask *why* interfaces were designed in a certain way, and they expressed an interest in seeing the participatory session realized as a pedagogical tool.

Reference

Drucker, Johanna. "Performative Materiality and Theoretical Approaches to Interface." DHQ: Digital Humanities Quarterly 7, no. 1 (2013).